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**Fifth Regional Steering Committee Meeting (Virtual) for the
GEF Pacific International Waters Ridge to Reef Project entitled:**

*Ridge to Reef – Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest &
Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon,
Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries*

Suva, Fiji 06th- 07th October 2020

Pacific International Waters R2R and National STAR R2R Project

Information Session Report

SESSION 1 – INFORMATION: OUTCOMES & DECISIONS

Having discussed and deliberated on the critical issues¹ of the GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef Program and its 15-child projects that need focused discussion at the RSTC and RSC meetings, the participants resolved and agreed to the following decisions: -

1. That the Project design may be overly ambitious and poorly designed and bearing little consideration to explore and address the risks and assumptions thereby enabling timely and progressive project implementation. Participants recognise the STAR and IW projects have different goals and objectives and in most participating countries, the PMUs are housed in different agencies making communication and sharing of data and working together challenging. For instance, in some countries, collaboration is only seen during annual RSC meetings and dissipates on return to country level project implementation.
2. That the project design may have little consideration on the importance of domestic governance structures and existing processes both in government and the community levels. Equally, the lack of flexibility in-countries to adapt and accept the benefits of a programmatic approach through streamlined processes and governance structures contributing to successful implementation of R2R projects.
3. That the project design and agreement were based on the priorities and commitments made at that time and may have changed and evolved over time. Notwithstanding, the project can be successfully implemented if there is mutual understanding, trust, coordination, collaboration and working together to prevent repetition and allow for easier implementation and integration of lessons learned and best practices.
4. That the implementation of the STAR and IW R2R projects in Palau showcase a successful model for the programmatic approach. Both projects report to different implementing agencies but housed in the same ministry making it easier to collaborate, plan and share towards achieving contributions to focal areas and stress reduction targets. The joint Board for STAR/IW projects provide the oversight and chaired by the Honourable Minister responsible for the environment. The R2R project implementation provides the opportunity to set up a new unit responsible for the environment and can also serves provide direct coordination and secretariat roles for all environmental related projects.
5. That the COVID-19 pandemic bears direct significant impact on project implementation resulting in costly delays and deferments. The hiring of local consultants under current COVID-19 environment remains challenging.
6. That the domestic procurement policies and processes are different between participating countries however shared common challenge of being time consuming & lengthy process from start to finish. For instance, the recruitment and commencement of technical assessments by local experts or consultants in several countries take several months.
7. That more time is needed to deliver and ensure quality of project outputs and outcomes. As the project winds down, it is challenging to engage local consultants due to limited available time to carry out technical assessments and limited funds allocated for regional activities.

¹ Annex 1 provides full details of the outcomes of discussion for Session 1 - Information

8. That leveraging has proven important factor to achieve project objectives and outcomes and progress implementation, particularly relevant for IW R2R projects where country allocations levelled at only USD200, 000 each. For instance, successful efforts supporting communities in project sites, leveraging R2R resources to prepare and submit proposal targeting GEF Small Grants. There are now additional resources from GEF Small Grants supporting community projects on replanting/ revegetation, and bio-gas type projects. The outcomes of which compliments IW R2R project to deliver on the same objectives and outcomes – e.g. reduction of municipal waste pollution.
9. That local capacity may be limited in several countries to implement technical assessments and implement the R2R science to policy strategic framework. It is also possible that there may be capacity in the country however, the local consultants are unable to do perform their work due to restrictions in movements to and from demonstration sites.
10. That the programmatic approach may be universally considered best practice, however, remain challenging and practically difficult to apply in PICs. The STAR and IW projects are subject to different GEF focal areas, overall budgets and timelines, objectives and outcomes, sites, assessment methods and sampling protocols, governance structure, reporting and monitoring. Is it possible to integrate the child projects through common grounds? For example, focus on demonstrating the programmatic approach through the IW/ STAR R2R projects reports, publications, field assessment notes and other design strategy which could be used as manuals, lessons learned and best practices.
11. That while the projects are at different level of implementation-some just started and others closing, the integration and entry points can be anywhere in the science to policy theory of change. This includes the sharing of the lessons learned, data and analyses, methods and measures, guidelines, knowledge products, innovations, established networks, reformed governance, policies and legislations, towards upscaling and replication in future R2R investments and development planning.

ANNEX 1:

RECORD OF DISCUSSION – SESSION 1 ON INFORMATION

(A) DAY 1 – SEPARATE IW & STAR PROJECTS DISCUSSION

Opening & Prayer

1. The virtual Information session of the RSTC for the GEF Pacific IW R2R & STAR project was hosted at the EQAP conference (SPC building, Suva) on the 6th of October 2020. Twenty three (23) participants representing the national STAR (Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, Solomon Islands) and IW R2R projects (Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, RMI, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), James Cook University (JCU), United Nation Development Programme (Suva, UNDP office) and members of the R2R Regional Science and Technical Committee (RSTC) attended the session. The list of participants will be appended as Annex 1.

2. The overall moderator, Dr. Fononga Mangisi-Mafileo, welcomed all participants to the informal virtual session. She briefly guided the meeting with few housekeeping and guidance of virtual meeting rules and instructions. This includes the use of chat box to raise questions if unable to raise it due to connectivity issues.

3. R2R-RPCU staff, Mr. John Carreon offered an opening prayer for the virtual information session.

Overview

4. The Regional Programme Coordinator, Mr. Samasoni Sauni, offered his brief opening remarks, and proceeded to introducing and facilitating Session 1. The session was set up to gauge the progress and difficulties faced by the country managers of both STAR R2R and IW R2R projects in implementing.

5. *Participants were given the opportunity to raise questions guided by the question of- What do you consider critical issues of the project needing focussed discussion at the RSTC and the RSC meetings?*

IW R2R Project Discussion

6. The Solomon Islands IW R2R Project Manager, Mr Sammy Airahui shared experiences dealing with project implementation particularly regionally led activities that are implemented nationally. The key issues relate to the impact of COVID-19 restricting movements of people and the lengthy procurement processes to recruit local consultants for the work. It took several months of processing recruitment and commencement of technical assessments

7. Mr Airahui explained that the project finds it difficult to commission a consultant that would undertake the consultancy due to limited available time to carry out the tasks, and also the limited funds allocated for the regional activities. The advertisement for a consultant to conduct the IDA attracted only few applications suggesting that there is capacity in the country but showing limited interest because of time constraints to carry out the tasks and limited funds to finance the activity. Adding to the issue in the procurement of consultants is the Covid-19 pandemic.

8. Mr. Airahui inquired if the RPSC would be lenient on this – meaning allowing more time to carry out the activity and allocating additional funds. The RPCU reiterated that regional activities (e.g. RapCA, IDA) are planned to be implemented nationally relying on local experts and support from the national project management unit (PMU) on the ground to help implement those activities. It has been decided as the implementation modality for the regionally initiated activities specially during this pandemic situation where restricted local mobility of staff and consultants to support implementation.

STAR Project Discussion

9. Ms. Jennifer Debrum of RMI STAR raised the topic on Programmatic approach. The RMI STAR project was one of the child projects under the GEF Pacific R2R program which started recently. Ms. Debrum shared her management experience in ensuring effective collaboration and complementation IW R2R project under the Programmatic approach. Noting that the RMI STAR project was designed almost independently with the IW R2R project and cognizant of the fact that the latter will be ending on December 31, 2020.

10. UNDP representative opined that both STAR and IW projects would find a common ground for them to work together.

11. The RPCU acknowledged this fact and referred then to the Programme Framework Document (PFD) as basis for the Programmatic Approach. Session 2 – GEF FA reporting and sharing on experience in programmatic implementation, provides an opportunity for the child projects under the GEF R2R Program to report on their experience using the template provided. The RPCU also presented and explained the reporting template to be used for Session 2.

12. The points raised are useful to guide further discussion in other sessions particularly relating to supporting all child projects deliver on GEF focal areas and commitments.

Summary

13. Dr Fononga thanked everyone for the participation reiterating that presentations and record copy of the session will be shared with participants. There will be another opportunity the next day for further discussion for those who may need time to go through the papers. There are key highlights emerging from each IW and STAR projects discussion and these will be the basis for follow up discussion and decision the next day.

14. Mr Sauni offered closing remarks and closed the session.

(B) DAY 2 – JOINT IW/STAR PROJECTS DISCUSSION

Welcome & Prayer

1. The combined virtual Information session for the GEF Pacific IW R2R & STAR projects commenced on the 7th October 2020. Twenty five (25) participants participated and representing the national STAR (Kiribati, Nauru and RMI) and IW R2R projects (Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, RMI, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), James Cook University (JCU), United Nation Development Programme (Suva, UNDP Office) and others. The list of participants is appended as Annex 1.
2. The overall moderator, Dr. Fononga Mangisi-Mafileo, welcomed all participants to the Information virtual session. She briefly guided the meeting with few housekeeping and guidance of virtual meeting rules and instructions. This includes the use of chat box to raise questions if unable to raise it due to connectivity issues. Dr Mangisi-Mafileo encourage participants who did not participate in the sessions yesterday to share their experiences and issues on the basis of the guiding question.
3. R2R-RPCU staff, Mr. John Carreon offered an opening prayer for the virtual information session.

Recap

4. Mr Sauni offered brief opening remarks followed by a recap on yesterday discussion particularly focusing on the key outcomes of discussion. These outcomes are set out on the summary table below each for IW and STAR projects.

Session 1: IW R2R PROJECT (Key Outcomes)	Session 1: STAR R2R Project (Key Outcomes)
Project design overly ambitious	GEF Pacific R2R Program and 15 child projects (14 STAR & 1 Regional IW) way too ambitious and poorly designed
COVID-19 pandemic direct impact on implementation	Programmatic approach may be universally considered best practice, however, remain challenging and practically difficult to apply in PICs. What are the common grounds?
Procurement processes are time consuming & lengthy thereby impact in implementation	Projects are at different level of implementation-some just started and others closing
Need more time- national & regional activities	What exactly is expected from STAR R2R projects- particularly from the Regional IW R2R Project?
Need more funds- regional activities	
Local capacity to implement technical assessments and related work of science-policy	

Discussion

5. Mr. Senson Mark of PNG IW R2R did not participate in the discussion yesterday but agreed with the key outcomes as presented. In sharing PNG experience from, Mr Mark confirmed that there

was no collaboration between the IW R2R and STAR projects, recognising opportunities to collaborate may exist but the 'marriage' failed. This may be influenced by having different sites and the projects objectives and focal areas. There is a need for extra support from the RPCU to see the PNG project through to successful completion.

6. Ms Faith Siba of FSM IW R2R project supported the request for RPCU to assist project implementation. She raised the same issue of different sites between the IW and STAR projects as a contributing factor to the success of collaboration. The FSM has a federal system spread across four (4) States and governance structure rests on the federal and state governments. The FSM IW R2R is focused only on one catchment in Kosrae State and the host agency is an NGO, while the STAR R2R project covers all the States of FSM and hosted by a Federal Government agency. Moreover, it is difficult to find local consultants in Kosrae State but there is capacity in the country of FSM to support work in Kosrae. The materials need to construct demonstration DLT piggery not available and shipping of cargoes from outside not easy on the island.

7. Ms Siba further explained that there are real and practical challenges as outline above plus the COVID-19 pandemic impacting on project implementation. These experiences must be factored in exploring options particularly need for more time and ongoing support from RPCU and partners to deliver on stress reduction targets.

8. Ms Gwen Sisor of Palau IW R2R underlined the importance of coordination and working together to prevent repetition and allow for easier implementation and integration of lessons learned and best practices. The case R2R projects implementation in Palau is slightly different having both IW and STAR projects housed in the same ministry making it easier to collaborate, plan and share towards achieving contributions to focal areas and stress reduction targets

9. Ms Sisor does not believe the project design is ambitious rather requires commitment, collaboration and working together supporting implementation of projects. She notes differences in the IW and STAR R2R projects from their objectives and outcomes, timelines and available resources to support delivery of project outcomes. The meeting also notes that the Palau IW R2R is support by UNDP and STAR R2R project by UNE in which there was struggle at the start of implementation but manage to align properly over time. The Palau IW R2R project has closed and the lessons learned, and products generated will simply be used by STAR R2R project in its implementation over the next 12 months.

10. The UNDP Samoa Office representative, Mr Floyd Robinson, supports the discussion surrounding the programmatic approach and the experiences shared demonstrating that it remains a problem in most countries and not in others. He reiterates the importance of finding common grounds focusing on IW R2R & STAR projects reports, publications, field assessment notes and other design strategy which could be used as manuals, lessons learned and best practices, as a possible common ground that demonstrate the programmatic approach.

11. Ms Silia Leger of Tonga IW shared the same experiences with other countries. Both IW and STAR R2R projects in the Kingdom are housed in different government agencies and oversight by different UN implementing agencies. The meeting noted that communication and collaboration was difficult possibly driven by priorities and respective project goals and focal areas being different. The two R2R projects appear to be collaborating only during annual RSC meetings but went on their own ways with project implementation thereafter.

12. Ms Leger also states that there are numerous opportunities of projects externally funded or available funds which can be targeted by communities or government. Given the numerous choices and opportunities prompts competition among agencies and government, who often choose projects that can or willing to support their own priorities. These actions give rise to the inadequate support of responsible government agencies towards the IW R2R project implementation.

13. The Tonga IW R2R project has leveraged its implementation with GEF small grants supporting communities to prepare proposals targeting such grants. There has been success through GEF small grants supporting replanting and bio-gas type projects, which compliments IW R2R project as well to deliver on the same objectives and outcomes – e.g. reduction of municipal waste pollution.

14. Ms Jennifer Debrum of RMI STAR R2R project queried on the exit strategy of IW R2R projects currently phasing out or terminating soon with respect to project products, tools, lessons, data, knowledge products, sampling protocols etc. Can these be integrated into the STAR R2R projects which are continually implementing?

15. Mr Sauni of the RPCU responded that the Regional IW R2R project (including its national demonstration projects) knowledge products, reports, manuals, guidelines, data, database and other online tools will be available online the R2R re-developed website and also in country pages and secured portal and PMIS related tools. For country demonstration projects, the information, data and other knowledge products will be also publicly available in the host agency repository database or website.

16. Mr Jose Antonio of RPCU emphasized the importance for both IW R2R & STAR project managers not wait for the project to finish before they look for programmatic approach but to get together now, plan and work out ways in which they can move forward together.

17. Dr Fononga thanked everyone for the participation reiterating that presentations and record copy of the session will be shared with participants. Mr Sauni offered closing remarks and closed the session.

Annex 1: List of Participants

Country	Affiliation	Name
Cook Is	IW R2R Project	Mr Paul Maoate
FSM	IW R2R Project	Ms Faith Siba
RMI	STAR R2R Project	Ms Jennifer Debrum
RMI	OEPPC Director GEF Operational Focal Point	Mr. Clarence Samuel
RMI	OEPPC Deputy Director	Mr. Warrick Harris
Fiji	IW R2R Project	Ms Tavenisa Luisa
Fiji	IW R2R Project	Mr Nikheel Sharma
Kiribati	IW R2R Project	Mr Teema Beko
Kiribati	STAR R2R Project	Mr David Yeeting
Nauru	IW R2R Project	Ms Evayne Gaubidi
Nauru	STAR R2R Project	Ms Phaedora Harris
PNG	IW R2R Project	Mr Senson Mark
Palau	STAR R2R Project	Ms Gwen Sisor
Palau	IW R2R Project	Ms Leena Mesebeluu
Tonga	IW R2R Project	Ms Silia Leger
Tonga	IW R2R Project	Mr Taaniela Kula
Tonga	Director of Environment/GEF Operational Focal Point	Ms Lupe Matoto
Australia	James Cook University/ RSTC	Professor Marcus Sheaves
Fiji	UNDP – Suva Office	Mr Floyd Robinson
Fiji	UNDP – Suva Office	Mr Josua Turaganivalu
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Mr Samasoni Sauni
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Dr Fononga Mangisi-Mafileo
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Mr Jose Antonio
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Ms Vere Bakani
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Ms Swastika Devi
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Mr Navneet Lal
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Mr John Carreon
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Ratu George Naboutuiloma