



GEF IW R2R/ RSTC.6/ WP.7

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Sixth Meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee for the GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef Programme

Suva, Fiji 19th & 20th October 2020

WHAT'S NEXT COVID19 AND POST-R2R

Summary:

As the GEF Pacific regional IW R2R project winds down implementation towards closure it remains unclear if there is support and interest to explore possibility for a next phase. There have been opportunities in the past where stakeholders have deliberated briefly on this subject. In this vein, it is important to engage further in strategic discussion of what lies ahead post R2R and COVID-19. The starting point is reflecting on progress delivering on targets and commitments across GEF focal areas, particularly transboundary issues covering international waters, and evaluating impacts of GEF investments in strategic areas, particularly responding to environmental threats. This includes lessons and best practices emerging, as well as the tested approaches of the Regional IW R2R project.

Recommendations:

The Committee is invited to: -

- (i) Consider and reflect on key points in the paper relative to progressing project implementation within the current Programme scope and the supporting role of the RSTC in the remaining life of the project ending in September 30th, 2021;
- (ii) Discuss and agree on a broader vision and strategic directions post R2R, whether or not there is interest among the participating countries for a follow up R2R phase; and if yes, what would be the priority focal areas – continuing testing innovative technologies, research & development, capacity building, and replicating innovative development measures that will eventually be upscaled (nationally, sub-regionally, or regionally) that secures ecosystems goods and services following the R2R-climate resilient approach and inclusive green economic pathway;
- (iii) Consider and endorse a preferred option for supporting a next phase of future upscaling R2R investments and ICM planning relative to post-R2R and COVID-19; and
- (iv) Consider and endorse a further no cost extension of up to 12-months from September 30th 2021

subject to UNDP policies to deliver on the project outcomes, and use the opportunity to explore further concept note for phasing in strategy to be considered at the next meetings of the RSTC & RSC in 2021.

CONCEPT NOTE ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS POST-R2R & COVID-19

Introduction:

1. At the outset, it is important to reiterate the essential goal and objective of the GEF Pacific R2R Programme that provides clear strategic directions for project implementation:-

“ . . . maintain and enhance Pacific Island countries ecosystems goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural) through integrated approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity and coastal resource management that contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.”

2. There are fifteen (15) child projects of the GEF Pacific R2R Programme and the Regional IW R2R Project being one of the child projects. There are certainly lessons and highlights across GEF focal areas including the international waters R2R project worth considering for upscaling thereby supporting sustainable resource governance.

3. The focus in the remaining period of the Regional IW R2R project is to implement the RSC-approved Science to Policy (S2P) continuum or Theory of Change (ToC) process based on the needs and context of the participating countries. Aligning the application of the S2P continuum to the country needs, the corresponding MYCWP has been established with fundamental considerations on implementing the MTR recommendations, particularly on:

- (i) Heightened support of 14 national projects and stakeholders for the R2R approach;
- (ii) Safeguard linkages with other national activities and processes through Results-based science to policy action;
- (iii) Pursue ecosystem goods and services as a foundation to scientific and technical approach; and
- (iv) Improved technical information sharing and reporting based on agreed R2R knowledge products framework and communication strategy.

4. The paper provides a brief background and basis for considering future directions post-R2R & COVID-19. The critical question relates to, whether or not, there are support and interest to progress further into the next phase of R2R investments centered on climate-sensitive and inclusive ICM planning.

Key Issues:

A Follow-up Project?

5. Despite past discussion and deliberations, there were no clear decision and directions for a follow up next phase of the project on R2R investments and ICM planning. At the RSC-3 meeting, it was suggested that the proposed TDA/SAP for the Pacific International Waters Project could provide the basis for a successor regional project/program to R2R that will include national-level concerns. However, the meeting noted that the proposal could be duplication of effort and, several countries have already committed to activities for GEF7 and unable to support the proposal.

6. In February 2020, the RSTC Technical Consultation, discussed extensively this subject and signaled support for a more streamlined R2R program and provided specific priority areas of focus. These points are detailed further in sections of the paper below.

No-Cost Extension

7. Generally, the Regional IW R2R project suffers numerous challenges – foremost the weak project design, and management and operational challenges including the most recent impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Project participating countries are finding it difficult to progress and deliver on their environmental stress reduction milestone targets recognizing few have successfully advanced in the project implementation. Several countries requested and granted a further no-cost extension, and at this stage Palau, and Tuvalu will be closed-down at the end of September 2020. Several other countries' requests still pending until more strategic discussion and decision is reached. Future progress is constrained by limited time and resources, and the remaining duration of the project is certainly not sufficient to realize high level imperatives – and certainly endangering the quality of outputs.

Efficacy of R2R Regional Programme Governance Platforms

8. The project cooperation landscape is strategically divided into three levels: RSC, RSTC and the RPCU together with the participating countries. At the strategic level, RSC is expected to provide strategic focus not only for the Regional IW R2R project but also for the child projects under the GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef Program. At the core of the scientific and technical level, the RSTC shall provide scientific and technical guidance ensuring robustness basis for decisions. And lastly, the RPCU together with the national participating governments will ensure management and implementation ensuring effective and efficient delivery of outputs.

9. At the last RSTC meeting, it was clear that more work is needed to progress R2R implementation and that RSTC is not seen to be doing enough to support progress. The Committee considered that the work of the RSTC should stay engaged and active supporting practical action and results-oriented activities, for example, the first series of R2R technical consultation. The RSTC has historically been side-lined, process focused and failed to deliver on its TOR efficiently. The meeting recommended support for opportunities for more active and relevant action-oriented efforts. It also advocated maintaining high quality science to inform scientific and technical advice given to RSC and, more broadly, inform policy discussion and decision making.

10. The Regional Programme Steering Committee (RSC) role as a platform to steer the GEF Pacific R2R Programme has been limited and needs clarity and enhancement. The last RSC meeting has already identified that the RSC is the steering platform for the Regional IW R2R project. It is uncertain what steers the GEF Pacific R2R Programme. According to the Regional R2R IW project document, the coordination and governance of the Regional Programme Framework of the National R2R Projects and the Regional IW R2R Project will be undertaken by the Programme Coordination Group (PCG). There is little evidence of this happening.

Future Opportunities & Directions:

11. There is a need for forward looking and to identify prospects beyond the current life of the Regional IW R2R project and national IW funded R2R projects. This future looking assessment should focus on the outcomes and lessons learned from national R2R demonstrations and testing the following concepts for future upscaling and replication: -

- (i) Technical and innovative technologies and related measures or solutions that mainstream and integrate R2R concept across water, land, forest and coastal areas of 14 PICs; and
- (ii) Resource governance dimensions in mainstreaming R2R aligned with the community to cabinet approach in planning and policy decision-making processes.

12. In this connection, there are probably adequate reasons to justify the need of GEF (or possibly other donors) investments for a follow up R2R project. At the technical consultation in February 2020, there was general support to change the focus and adopt priority actions agreed and documented following preparing of national strategic action plans (SAPs) and one regional strategic action framework (SAF).

13. As currently reflected in the MYCWP the Island Diagnostic Analyses (IDAs) would support preparations of national SAPs and the regional SAF. The IDA/SAP/SAF process and formulations would assist to access the GEF funding (targeting GEF-8 or other donors perhaps) for the IW program integrating national and regional priorities with global environmental concerns building on previous consultations, frameworks and policies. These efforts compliment the SPREP's SAP in 1997.

14. Some of these strategic areas may include, but not limited to the following: -

- (i) R2R teaching program – support for the continuation of the R2R courses with James Cook University (JCU) formally introducing the courses as their own. There remain opportunities to reassess the details of the teaching program to respond to changing needs such as mainstreaming ecosystem goods and services responsive to national needs, priorities and circumstances. The relevance and practical application of certain aspects of the program can be revisited or improved given changing situations and priorities in PICs. This paper encourages research topics that are relevant to addressing R2R challenges in the islands.
- (ii) Research and development – understanding ecological systems and relationships between species and their habitats throughout the continuum from reef or source to reef and beyond continues to be relevant for policy and future R2R investments and planning. Similarly, research into innovative technologies stretching understanding of why issues on waste, pollution, resource/ habitat degradation and others associated with water and sanitation continue to be prevalent and priority in this region. Deliver on project outcomes and published science emerging from R2R.

Post R2R program 'conversation' needs to consider leveraging funding support in order to realise intended long-term impacts from delivering on domestic aspirations and priorities but also compliance on regional and international commitments and obligations.

- (iii) Monitoring and Evaluation – the current R2R projects have established several plans and protocols that allow tracking of indicators and targets through environmental monitoring into the future, at least in several watershed catchments and demonstration sites. This requires further investments to enable that resources are adequate to continue participatory environmental monitoring on water quality, revegetation & habitat restorations, eco-sanitation and innovative technologies, and others.

15. Below are some of the points emerged from the technical consultation in support of a follow up phase of R2R investments and ICM planning.

- (i) Each PIC has unique ways where communities and people interact/ connect with the ecosystems including through conventional/ traditional best management practices. This is an important area worth considering in future upscaling R2R investments and ICM planning.
- (ii) People in leadership positions are not effectively contributing to the project and not targeted. The contributions and engagement of people with influential and leadership positions like CEOs of government and ministries and civil societies appear lacking and therefore contributed to delays

and failure to deliver on targets. These are the people that can convince governments on what we do.

- (iii) Support for a balanced view of science, social science, and traditional ecological knowledge, while considering the dynamics in society from community to cabinet, in the next phase of R2R. Also there needs to be consideration to increase countries allocations and project staffs in-countries, in a follow up R2R project. The communities are encouraged to be engaged from the start to the end and experts in governments and civil societies targeted and involved.
- (iv) Support for community engagement at all levels of society and project implementation for good chance of 'buy in' and successfully achieving project objectives and milestone targets. This is linked to traditional ecological and archaeological knowledge, which are becoming priority considerations in community resource management.
- (v) Support for climate-sensitive spatial planning and food security as priority areas for progressing implementation and future upscaling R2R investments and ICM planning. These areas appear lacking in-countries but useful to inform national infrastructure development and food security. The results of resource assessments and inventories can help inform this process in the next phase of R2R investments and ICM planning.
- (vi) Support for more technical consultation but with wider participation pool and government agencies. There are important natural resource sectors (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and mining) that need to be involved in future technical consultations. In most PICs, the agriculture departments of governments deploy their officers in rural and remote communities, and they might have a few inputs of what is happening. The technical consultation advances capacity building of national scientists and more importantly provide the opportunity to critically assess the quality, relevance and practical application of research methods and findings feeding into decision-making and, possibly upscaling.
- (vii) Support for a proper phase out of the implementation of the current Regional IW R2R project, which includes, further no cost extension to allow proper delivery of project results. In parallel, start working on a phasing in strategy guided by a small group and to present the strategy in the next meetings of the RSTC and RSC.

Suggested Way Forward

16. There are at least four options that can be considered moving forward with R2R investments and ICM planning, targeting GEF-8 or other interested donors. If there is support for a next phase, then such decision provides the basis to develop the concepts further. A draft concept is appended as **Annex 1**. Further development of the concept will draw on the outcome of discussion relating to the specific areas of focus as outline in earlier sections of this paper. The IDA/SAF/SAF outcomes should also provide inputs into the preparation of a next project.

Options 1 – Support for a next phase of R2R investments centered on climate-sensitive and inclusive ICM planning implemented regionally

This option is similar to the current project where the regional IW R2R project is implemented nationally through agreements between the executing agency and participating countries.

Option 2 – Support for next phase of R2R investments centered on climate-sensitive and inclusive ICM planning implemented sub-regionally

This option is more streamlined and focused and the R2R program will be developed but implemented in groups of countries that share similar characteristics in land-seascapes, environmental threats, and possibly management approaches addressing such threats.

There is the option to focus only on PICs that shows commitment for mainstreaming R2R using the tools developed under the current project. The focus would be on building on proven tested approaches of the Regional IW R2R project.

Options 3 – Support for next phase of R2R Investments centered on climate-sensitive and inclusive ICM planning implemented nationally only

This option is similar to the STAR R2R project where the countries use their GEF STAR allocations to implement projects nationally that link to GEF focal areas.

Option 4 - No support for a next phase of R2R investments centered on climate-sensitive and inclusive ICM planning

This option assumes no support for a next phase and there will be no follow up R2R investments and ICM planning.

16. With the current challenges of COVID-19 it is imperative that support is given to current efforts to progress implementation and deliver on project outcomes, outputs and targets. As part of the phasing out strategy, the remaining project resources can be best used to finance the activities that will generate the much-desired outputs and contribute to the achievement of the project outcomes. Therefore, this entails additional time of up to 12-months from current termination date of September 30th 2021, using current funds (further no cost extension) of the Regional IW R2R project. This no-cost extension proposal is subject to UNDP policies.

Recommendations:

17. The Committee is invited to: -

- (i) Consider and reflect on key points in the paper relative to progressing project implementation within the current Programme scope the supporting role of the RSTC in the remaining life of the project ending in September 30th, 2021.
- (ii) Discuss and agree on a broader vision and strategic directions post R2R, whether or not there is interest for a follow up R2R; and if yes, what would be the priority focal areas – continuing testing innovative technologies or not, research & development, capacity building, and replicating innovative measures that will eventually be upscaled (nationally, sub-regionally or regionally) that secures ecosystems goods and services following the R2R-climate-sensitive approach and inclusive green economic pathway;
- (iii) Consider and endorse a preferred option for supporting a next phase of future upscaling R2R investments and ICM planning relative to post-R2R and COVID-19; and
- (iv) Consider and endorse a further no cost extension of up to 12-months from September 30th 2021 subject to UNDP policies to deliver on the project outcomes, and use the opportunity to explore further concept note for phasing in strategy to be considered at the next meetings of the RSTC & RSC in 2021.

ANNEX 1: PROJECT CONCEPT PAPER

INTERNATIONAL WATERS

- 1. Project Title:** Upscaling Ridge to Reef Investments and Integrated Coastal Management Planning
- 2. Implementing entities & partners:** SPC jointly JCU, USP, and 14 PICs (or 7 depending on commitments mainstreaming R2R)

3. Background

The GEF Pacific Regional International Waters Ridge to Reef project will be terminating in September 2021, and combating and eradicating transboundary issues of water, sanitation, municipal waste pollution, catchment/ habitat protection remains principle priorities of Pacific Island countries and the international community.

Recently, in cooperation with partners and stakeholders, RPCU has conducted a technical consultation with the following objectives: -

- (i) Encourage broad inclusive participation, frank and informal discussion on non-selected topics, support for the development of active and action-oriented efforts, and clear advice on what needs to be done next;
- (ii) Encourage voluntary participation of national scientists and experts, along with partners in development agencies, regional research institutions and civil societies, in frank and open scientific and technical discussion on matters relevant to the work of the RSTC and provide advice to RSC.

Some of the key findings of this workshop include the: -

- (i) Continuation of the R2R teaching program to Masters and PhD or post-doc levels with James Cook University;
- (ii) Continuation of research and development to improve understanding ecological systems and relationships between species and their habitats throughout the continuum from reef or source to reef and beyond.
- (iii) Continuation of monitoring and evaluation relative to tracking of indicators and targets through environmental monitoring into the future, at least in several watershed catchments and demonstration sites – e.g. water quality, revegetation & habitat restorations, eco-sanitation and innovative technologies, and others.

4. Relationship to the GEF Pacific R2R Programme Declarations 2016-2021, the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Aichi Targets, Samoa Pathways

All SDGs, Aichi Targets, Samoa Pathways Targets

5. Objectives

The project seeks to achieve the following principle objectives: -

- (i) To strengthen GEF focal areas in support of member countries efforts to address transboundary issues nationally and sub-nationally, and to enhance the contribution of R2R investments and ICM planning in restoring safe and non-contaminated underground and surface water, protect watershed catchments and minimize downstream impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems;
- (ii) To strengthen GEF focal area in support of continued testing and developing innovative technologies and if appropriate upscaling nationally and sub-nationally;
- (iii) To increase awareness on transboundary issues relative to water, sanitation, pollution and resource/ habitat degradation.
- (iv) Maximizing the value of PIC mangroves for multiple benefits (ecosystems, fisheries, livelihood, blue carbon, coastal protection); and
- (v) Explore the project to product concept that uses R2R program diversity of data to enable cross-cutting and emerged information to be fully developed, upscaling R2R investments and transformation changes, etc.

6. Expected Outputs & Accomplishments

The four immediate outputs expected from the project are: -

- (i) As part of GEF's funded guideline series, technical guidelines on the contribution of national demonstration or upscaling projects;
- (ii) As part of GEF's technical paper series, a technical paper on upscaling R2R investments and ICM planning, with specific reference to lessons and best practices;
- (iii) Mainstreaming R2R leading to replenishing degraded watershed catchments and coastal area wetlands (i.e. mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs); and
- (iv) Technical consultations and seminars on relevant topics and to exchange experience and raise awareness within PICs.
- (v) Improved systems and processes and sustained resources and commitments that ensures conservation and sustainably use of ecosystem goods and services

7. Indicators of Achievements

- (i) Increased volume of data and information on selected indicators generated from ongoing monitoring and research, which are useful for tracking progress towards countries commitments and targets under range of international instruments and regional frameworks.
- (ii) Increased number of coastal and marine areas under rights-based and integrated management or closures or strictly controlled and managed under integrated catchment and coastal management plans.
- (iii) Increased number of stakeholders, researchers and institutions using common methodologies and innovative technologies
- (iv) Increased awareness, participation and engagement from community to cabinets along with science or evidence-based approaches providing indicators of improvement of quality for policy-oriented research and analysis

8. Inputs & Workplan

The project will draw widely on expertise and experience of R2R related work in PICs especially targeted communities in project sites and including broader studies in remote rural areas. Special attention will be given to the work undertaken within the framework of R2R Science to Policy theory of change and the spatial prioritization procedures.

The project will be implemented in close collaboration between the partners especially the executing agency and participating countries and partners. The contribution of SPC, and national governments will include in-kind contributions as previously done before. The total project period will be 5 years. The envisaged outputs are expected to be produced during the development of the regional strategic action framework. This includes specific activities and timelines set out below: -

Project progress will be reviewed and assessed as part of the joint annual reviews and mid-term review of the RSC.

9. Funding Sources & Budget

The current Regional IW R2R project can leverage project outputs/ outcomes and lessons learned to develop the next phase R2R project targeting traditional donors like GEF, GCF, EU, Australia/ NZ, etc.

An estimated budget of USDxx million spread over five (5) years.

Detailed Description of each budget line

Tbc