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Second Series Technical Consultation of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee for the GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef Programme

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Session 5 – Modified R2R Science-Policy Framework

Country status and challenges in R2R project implementation and delivering on results

Summary:

In delivering on the Regional IW R2R project outcomes 1.1, 1.2 and 3.1, the modified science-policy technological interface or framework sets out clear steps from R2R mainstreaming and scoping to effective ministerial approval of strategic action plans or framework and legislations. These include collection of baselines and data collection through rapid assessments, preparation and conduct of diagnostic analysis, state of the coast and strategic action plans and policy frameworks.

This paper presents on the current project countries and their status in implementing the modified science to policy deliverables within the remaining project timeline and the best way forward in meeting these deliverables through assessing available in-country capacity within the science-policy workplan noting the 6-month extension period.

Recommendations:

The R2R Technical Consultation is invited to discuss the paper and, in consideration of the challenges and status of project countries presented, provide suggestions and scenarios on the methods of delivery of the modified science-policy framework. Apart from challenges presented, the Technical Consultation is also invited to provide additional possibilities and issues that may arise that have not been outlined in this paper. Once suggestions and scenarios have been provided, if need be, the discussion to focus on taking each scenario into account and the implications these have on project results and whether measures to streamline these processes are necessary.

Country Status & Challenges in R2R Project Implementation and Delivering on Results

Purpose & Intent

1. The modified science-policy framework provides the basis for mainstreaming R2R in-country recognizing that the difficulties to progress vary from one country to the next. The framework advocates for strategic steps progressing along the science to policy theory of change, which is largely premised on evidence and science-based approaches.
2. This paper presents a summary of country progress in rolling out the science to policy framework and delivering on specific outputs required under each step. The challenges experienced in this process are also highlighted in the paper, which is useful in prioritizing relevant work that can be realistically carried and completed within the remaining life of the project.

Rationale

3. The GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef (R2R) Program Initiative is working with projects' countries in the Pacific region to test and mainstream innovative solutions, integrated and climate resilient approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity, and coastal resource management. The R2R approach requires commitments and support at the subnational and national levels because people and resource users play a central role in ensuring that the provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural functions and roles of ecosystem goods and services are maintained and enhanced.
4. Generally, the science-policy framework consists of scientific and technical processes which also corresponds to deliverables set out in the Regional IW R2R Project Outcomes 1.1., 1.2 and 3.1, covering:
 - i. Rapid Assessment of Priority Coastal Areas (RapCA)
 - ii. Island Diagnostic Analysis (IDA)
 - iii. State of the Coast Report (SoC)
 - iv. Strategic Action Framework and Planning (SAF, SAP)
5. In order to achieve the outcomes above, it is imperative that Participants reflect on the following considerations:
 - i. In-country capacity readily available to carry out quality work.
 - ii. Implications of the six-month extension on national procurement processes for consultants to carry out the work.
 - iii. Strict deadlines for consultants in-country to adhere to in cooperation with the national IW R2R Project manager and lead agency.

Country status in R2R implementation

6. Currently there is poor progress, and the project is far from meeting the targets delivering on IDAs, SoCs and SAFs. We have baselines and RapCA field work done and reports completed for Samoa, PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and recently Tonga and Cook Islands. Three draft IDAs are available for Palau, Cook Islands, PNG and Palau, and there are no SoCs and SAFs. Current recruitment for local consultants to lead these technical works in-country is currently underway in Tonga, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and FSM.

7. Moreover, the status of each project country along the science-policy framework, once determined, will give a clear indication of what can be realistically achieved within the remaining project timelines. This information is gathered through close consultation with the R2R Regional Programme Coordination Unit (RPCU) by the national IW R2R Project Managers regarding the available in-country capacity. This was done by providing the national IW R2R Project Managers with forms (Table 1) to be filled that would indicate available in-country capacity to carry out the scientific and technical processes mentioned above.

8. Last year the RPCU proposed a 12 month no-cost extension in the 6th Regional Science Technical Committee held last year which was approved by the member countries. This proposed timeline (see details in WP. 16) would allow for the project to complete all the remaining task in the work-plan. However, the proposal was turned down by UNDP who stated that only 6 months is allowed for the project to complete their work.

9. The science workplan under a 6 months no-cost extension is provided in WP.16. Looking at the number of activities that is yet to be completed by the IW R2R project countries, the project cannot deliver on all the project deliverables. Therefore, it is imperative that proper planning is carried out to ensure that the project can at least deliver on some of the activities.

Overcoming Challenges

Covid-19 Travel Restrictions

10. Covid-19 travel restrictions affected planned country visits and face-to-face mentoring and consultations. The RPCU considered travel restrictions the new normal and, as a remedial measure, the RPCU provided administrative support of national projects through emails and teleconferencing (Zoom and Skype) as well as the use of other social media platforms. However, the RSC considered that virtual communication is considered time consuming, repetitive, and less effective due to limited and poor internet connectivity in most participating countries in the Pacific.

11. Following discussion and decisions at the last RSTC/ RSC meetings, the RPCU is now planning quickly working with participating PICs to collect information on available local expertise that can be utilized as local consultants. The aim is to hire local experts to conduct technical assessments to produce quality deliverables and outputs that stand to public and technical scrutiny and accepted as best evidence or science based informing policy and decision making, noting that the RPCU provides the final technical review and perform quality assurance in the finalization of reports and technical studies.

12. While initial restrictions impacting implementation of national demonstration projects, the eventual ease of restrictions allow the continuation of project implementation (as in the case of Kosrae State in FSM).

National IW R2R Project Documentations

13. Delayed submission of national IW R2R progress, financial reports, workplans and acquittals continue to lead to delays in fund transfers and ultimately implementation of activities. A significant number of reports received from the national project managers would benefit from regular and open discussions with the RPCU and has been done through virtual coaching. However, this is a time-consuming, iterative mentoring process, but is effective for those project managers who have aptitude for improving their performance.

14. There are genuine reasons for delayed submissions and acquittals such as close of government accounts, general elections, deaths in the family and other legitimate reasons. The RPCU is continually providing virtual sessions to support project work in-country and with follow up exchanges of e-circulars and follow up phone calls if required. With UNDP audit approaching fast this month, RPCU continues to work with countries on their acquittals and outstanding reporting.

Implementation of Modified R2R Science to Policy Continuum

15. Participating countries indicated their preference to undertaking only segments and not the full Science to Policy continuum which is a departure for the established Theory of Change. Despite this change, the RPCU moved to have a more realistic modified guidelines to implement Science to Policy continuum which was endorsed by the RSTC and the RSC.

16. The modified Science to Policy framework is expected to generate interests and renewed participation, increase leverage on securing funding support for upscaling future R2R investments, ICM planning, and ultimately mainstream R2R in either planning and/or policy. The RPCU is currently working with six priority countries to roll out implementation of the framework in accordance with decisions of the RSC to use local capacity and expertise through domestic procurement processes.

Programmatic approach

17. As envisioned by the R2R program design, both STAR and IW are expected to be working jointly towards delivering results and in mainstreaming R2R at the national level. The poor uptake of the programmatic approach will affect harmonized results reporting and puts national upscaling of R2R at risk.

18. On several occasions, STAR PSCs have questioned the existence of the Pacific R2R Programme and particularly the value that might arise through establishing joint PSCs for STAR and IW projects. The most effective approach to ensure achievement of the GEF Pacific programme outcomes is for the GEF implementing agencies to follow up on the submission of the data required for HRR and establishment of joint steering committees, noting the fact that the RPCU has no authority over the child projects under the R2R Programme.

19. The RPCU continues to advocate collective efforts of the child projects to collaborate and share their reports and data as part of their commitments under the project. This includes RSC decision supporting programmatic actions to share data and information with the Regional Programme Coordination Unit (RPCU) housed at SPC to enable reporting against the R2R Project Document Framework (PDF) through the GEF M&E Harmonized Results Reporting process.

No-Cost Extension

20. As agreed during the virtual RSC meeting in October 2020, a request of a 12-month no-cost extension was submitted by SPC. SPC is cognizant of the current UNDP policy under COVID-19 to grant projects a maximum of 6-months. However, SPC/RPCU articulates the importance of the 12-month extension to produce quality results, deliver the planned outputs and achieve the intended project outcomes. The complete documentation for this request was submitted by SPC on December 17th, 2020.

Staff Turnover & National Capacity

21. The RPCU has faced high staff turnover:
- The Science Officer position became vacant on 5th February 2020
 - Regional Program Coordinator became vacant in May 2020 in which the position was filled as of June 1st, 2020.
 - Science and National Project Team Leader was filled as of June 22nd, 2020 and became vacant on September 16th, 2020. This position has not been filled since.
22. The IW R2R National also faced staff turnover:
- IW R2R Fiji Project Manager resigned on 14th October 2020 due to personal and professional reasons.
 - IW R2R Samoa Project Manager also resigned with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment providing a temporary replacement.
23. In addition, while border closures and adopting to the “new normal” means seeking in-country capacity to implement Science to Policy scientific and technical work. Due to time constraints, seeking consultants that can carry out more than one deliverable (i.e., same consultant for RapCA and IDA), it is important to note that the delivery of the quality of products must be the utmost priority when procuring in-country consultants.

Conclusion

24. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the RPCU has had to find strategic and alternative ways on fulfilling the deliverables of the project. The COVID pandemic and border closures have led to management and operational challenges with project participating countries finding it very difficult to progress and deliver on their environmental stress reduction milestone targets. Considering that few have successfully advanced in project implementation, it is important that adaptive management and proper precise planning of timelines to be determined at the earliest opportunity.

25. The Science to Policy expertise checklist (Table 1) will be populated as the information is readily available and accessible. The checklist allows for national IW R2R Project Managers to inform the RPCU of available expertise/consultants to carry out the scientific and technical tasks along the science-policy framework, whether it is an individual or firm/company, the number of individuals who can provide the scientific and technical expertise, whether the consultant(s) is/are able to provide services relating to one or more tasks in the science-policy framework and the possibility to engage at short notice.

26. The information gathered provides an immediate and detailed information of each IW R2R project countries’ status along the science-policy framework. This would inform the RPCU on precise management actions and decisions to undertake in an efficient manner, noting the exact availability of in-country capacity before any initial procurement processes are carried out.

27. The process is further streamlined by using the information from Table 1 above to finally determine which of the science-policy framework deliverables are realistically achievable within the science-policy workplan (also see WP.16).

Table 1: Science-Policy Ridge-to-Reef expertise inventory matrix.

Specific consultancy services to do the following	Expertise Checklist					Additional Information (Provide any information deemed useful for procurement of the consultant)
	Expertise/consultants available If yes, fill in the next columns.	Individual or Firm/Company Is it individual consultants or company?	How many who can do this task?	Consultants specialization Is the consultant able to do only the specific tasks (in first column) or combination of assessment, planning and policy?	Available to engage at short notice (i.e. 1-month)	
Baseline & Data collection (RapCA) and measurement of stress reduction target						
Site & national Diagnostic Analysis report						
Spatial Prioritisation						
SoC/SoE report						
Strategic Action Plan/Framework						
Policy & Legislation formulation						

