

Date: 14th October 2020
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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 13th October 2020

**Pre-Regional Steering Committee Session 3
Project Closure Terminal Evaluation**

SESSION 3 – 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 composition of the Terminal Evaluation Consultants extends and includes local consultants in six (6) participating PICs. Participants recognise that during the mid-term review, the consultants visited 6 participating countries representative of sub regions, advanced and poorly performing countries and related criteria. These lessons are useful in planning for the terminal evaluation.
2. That the fixed amount of US\$50,000 earmarked for the terminal evaluation be revised given change of strategy to include local consultants. Participants noted that savings from travels would be utilised to support local consultants.
3. That UNDP will prepare the TOR with consideration of the outcome of discussions particularly specific to its application and treatment of international and local consultants. Participants noted the independence of the consultancy team to avoid bias and that the team leader plays an important role in this regard.
4. That the proposal for up to 12-months no-cost extension is discussed and agreed at the RSC as precursor to confirming dates, timelines, and related details of the terminal evaluation. Participants recognise the current challenges and changing circumstances in project implementation as influenced by COVID-19 and related challenges justifies need for more time to deliver on milestone targets but also ensure quality of products.
5. That the extension proposal is subject to UNDP policies and must correspond with change in strategy that include more streamlined process of delivering the 'modified' science to policy theory of change on countries that are committed and demonstrably active to mainstreaming R2R in domestic policies, planning and enabling governance reforms.

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

ANNEX 1:

RECORD OF DISCUSSION – SESSION 3 ON PROJECT CLOSURE & TERMINAL EVALUATION

Opening & Prayer

1. The virtual Pre-RSC Panel/Breakout Session 3 was hosted at the EQAP conference (SPC building, Suva) on 13th October 2020. Twenty-five participants representing the national STAR and IW R2R projects, partners and observers attended the session. The list of participants is appended as **Annex 1**.
2. The overall moderator, Dr. Fononga Vainga Mangisi-Mafileo, welcomed all participants and briefly guided the meeting with housekeeping and 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, facilitated the session and invited Mr Floyd Robinson from UNDP Suva Office for his presentation.
5. Mr Floyd Robinson presented on the terminal evaluation, briefly covering background of the project, purpose of the terminal evaluation, criteria to be assessed (which is dependent on evidence-based project reports), the role of UNDP as leading the review, and determining composition of the terminal evaluation team , which requires the RSC to make a decision.
6. The participants noted that the that the terminal evaluation is independent (those that have not been involved in supporting R2R projects) and promotes accountability and transparency. Mr Robinson explained that due to the “new normal”, there is consideration to use national consultants to complete the terminal evaluation.
7. Mr Robinson stated that these are decisions for the RSC in terms of composition of consultants (i.e. various roles for the purpose of the consultation), the decision to involve national consultants, how many days are to be assigned to national and international consultants and what the timeline of these tasks are.

Discussion

8. Mr Sauni thanked the Mr Robinson and reiterated the importance of the Regional IW R2R project terminal evaluation that closely links to project closure. Based on the presentation, Mr Sauni invited discussions guided by specific questions on the composition of Terminal Evaluation Consultants, and proposal to include local consultants in the team and related details therein including fixed budget of US\$50K, and the associated timelines.
9. Dr Joe Padilla from UNDP Bangkok requested that the question of possible no-cost extension be discussed and decided first because any changes to project closure would also impact on terminal

evaluation. Dr Padilla underlined the importance of the proposal given current COVID-19 circumstances and that UNDP policies possibly allowing for 6-months extension. Given that termination date is still some time yet into September 2021, and the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, could revisit the issue perhaps through a special RSC 6-months before termination in September 2021. The terminal evaluation timelines will then be adjusted accordingly.

10. Mr Sauni referred participants to two relevant RSC papers to guide their thinking on the proposal for another no-cost extension (RSC5-WP 8 & 13). The papers were framed around two specific questions namely, the next phase post R2R and the no cost extension. Briefly, the project is currently off track and unable to deliver on specific project outputs of the RSC-approved MYCWP for the last financial year June 2019 to July 2020. Before COVID-19, progress of project implementation and the corresponding expenditures closely matched that of the approved workplan and budget. These positive trends slowed down February 2020 to current however remain committed to implementation using alternative modalities, including use of virtual platforms and local capacity.

11. Furthermore, Mr Sauni explained that given the current rate of implementation and delivery against milestone targets, SPC Regional Programme Coordination Unit (RPCU) is already planning for an intensive year 2021 (est. indicative budget US\$2.5 – 2.8 million), which includes delayed project outputs/activities from 2020. The proposal of another no-cost extension simply allows a bit more time for the project to space out and appropriately schedule project implementation, and follow a strategy using a more 'streamlined' science-policy theory of change, focusing primarily on countries that are active and show commitments.

12. Mr Senson stated that COVID-19 had affected outputs in the project. Regarding terminal evaluation for projects he supported the extension to be able to properly deliver outputs.

13. Dr. Padilla recommended that 12 months maximum be tabled at RSC, recognising inability to confirm that 6 months will be increased but that this could be a possibility depending on the COVID-19 situation. The extension request will be submitted 6 months prior to project closure, which is currently in September 2021. It is expected that the request will be endorsed by RSC happening this month. Participants noted that in normal circumstances requests for extension are accompanied by a supporting document outlining the activities. With travel restrictions in place in most Pacific countries, SPC should examine how projects are to be implemented. Dr Padilla stated that SPC had been doing a good job with virtual mentoring and guiding the project implementation, however it is recognised that there are a lot of unused funds in terms of travel and other operational costs during this time. Any unspent money goes to GEF and not UNDP. It is preferred that countries benefit from these funds rather than being returned to GEF.

14. Moreover, Dr Padilla advised that when asking for extension, to consider using national consultants more than international consultants, and, if needed, consider the possibility of shifting funds to national activities. In particular, adding more funds to countries that are demonstrably active in project implementation. Dr Padilla further suggested that if the RPCU is not able to spend money it will be good to realign these to the National IW projects and for this topic to be discussed in the RSC.

15. Mr Sauni referred participants to meeting papers RSC5/WP.08 & 13 on details to points raised by UNDP. These papers will be discussed in Session 5 on Thursday and Session 6 on Friday this week. With restrictions of movements, national capacity will be utilised extensively to support technical assessments and related works. Around 70 local consultants are expected to deliver on targets for 14 participating countries, or about 30 consultants for more streamlined focus on six countries. Participants noted that every month of COVID-19 corresponds to 1–2 months of lost time to the project. This suggests that the proposal for a 12-month no-cost extension will make up for about 7

months of COVID-19. Mr Sauni also explained that SPC financial system of budgeting and forecasting is 12-months, hence the proposal duration of extension to 12-months.

16. Dr Padilla stated that there should be some flexibility with the US\$50K terminal evaluation budget and it is good to focus on the possibility of revising the composition of the terminal evaluation fee. It would be 12 months from now so might have to revisit this again and may go back to original implementation design of the terminal evaluation if things go back to normal.

17. Mr Sauni stated that during the MTR last year, the consultants visited 6 countries which were selected based on several criteria, including representation across the subregions, and include those who were doing very well as well as poorly performing countries. It was also stated that the next possible step to consider is having international consultants to engage on virtual platforms to engage stakeholders in-countries, and if normalcy is restored, visit the countries.

18. Mr Sauni addressed Dr. Isoa's question in the chat box regarding whether a national consultant can be an entity based locally with available experts. Mr Sauni stated that it will be a UNDP commissioned consultancy and UNDP may choose to draft one or separate TORs for international and local consultants. As previously done, an expression of interest will be sent out to the market and anyone anywhere can respond and apply.

19. Dr. Padilla reconfirmed that they will be preparing TORs for different members of the team. He stated the lessons learned will be considered from terminal evaluations that are currently are ongoing where international consultants are supported by national consultants. He stated that he will also use the comments in the chat box as guidance in preparing TORs for this work.

20. Mr. Sauni stated that the fixed US\$50K earmarked for this work is in accordance to the Project Document, however as explained by UNDP it will now be flexible given the involvement of local consultants in the team for the terminal evaluation. There are also savings from travel that can be used to support local consultants. On the question of when will the EOI go out, it was explained UNDP will announce details on this. It normally happens well in advance of commencement date agreed for the terminal evaluation.

21. Dr Mangisi-Mafileo provided relevant links in the chat box for Session 4 before closing the session with a group photo.

Annex 1: List of Participants

Country	Affiliation	Name
FSM	IW R2R Project	Ms Faith Siba
PNG	IW R2R Project	Mr Senson Mark
Samoa	IW R2R Project	Mr Malaki Iakopo
Sol Is	IW R2R Project	Mr Sammy Airahui
Sol Is	IW R2R Project	Ms Debra Kereseka
Fiji	STAR R2R Project	Ms Beverly Sadole
Fiji	STAR R2R Project	Mr Noa Vakacegu
Kiribati	STAR R2R Project	Mr David Yeeting
Nauru	STAR R2R Project	Ms Phaedora Harris
RMI	STAR R2R Project	Ms Jennifer Debrum
RMI	UNDP	Mr Francis Wele
Tuvalu	STAR R2R Project	Ms Ivy Tumua
	CTA Fiji STAR R2R Project	Mr Cenon Padolina
	FAO	Ms Jessica Sanders
	PIFS	Dr Salome Taufa
	UNDP	Dr Jose Padilla
	USP	Dr Isoa Korovulavula
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	Mr John Carreon
Fiji	RPCU-SPC	Ratu George Naboutuiloma