

**Mid-Term Review of the UNEP Project
Enhancing National Development through
Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)”
GEF Project ID: 9688
2020-2024**



**UNEP ECOSYSTEMS DIVISION/ GEF Biodiversity
and Land Degradation Unit**

April 2024



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Front cover: Maldives islands from the air

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(GEF Project ID: 9688)
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The reviewer would like to express her gratitude to all persons met and who contributed to this review, as listed in Annex II.

The reviewer would like to thank the project team and in particular Dr. Kavita Sharma UNEP Task Manager, Mr. Peerayot Sidonrusmee UNEP programme assistant, Ms. Lisama Sabry MECCT National Project Director, Ms. Mariyam Fazna ENDhERI project manager and all the ENDhERI staff in the project management and project implementation units for their contribution and collaboration throughout the review process. The evaluator(s) would also like to thank the Ministry of Climate Change Environment and Energy (former MECCT) and the Laamu Atoll Council for their support during this review.

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The review consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this MTR will contribute to the successful finalisation of the current project, formulation of future potential phases and projects in the Maldives, and to the continuous improvement of similar projects in other countries and regions.

BRIEF EXTERNAL CONSULTANT(S) BIOGRAPHY

Anouska Kinahan holds a PhD and 18 years' practical experience in terrestrial and marine biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management, with a special focus on protected areas. Prior to working as an independent consultant, she spent 12 years as a technical advisor for an international NGO, residing for extended periods in developing countries providing technical guidance to biodiversity-related governments across Africa, and South America/Caribbean. She has developed, reviewed, and supported projects, including GEF projects, across four continents and has significant experience working in SIDS. She is highly experienced in all aspects of project cycle management including results-based monitoring and evaluation methods. She has developed and implemented monitoring and evaluation frameworks for projects and programmes using SMART indicators and has conducted evaluations of biodiversity management plans and PA management effectiveness as well as GEF projects. She guided the strategic direction and the day-to-day management of a newly established Planning, Projects and Monitoring and Evaluation Department for a protected areas government agency and has developed numerous site, national, institutional, and regional strategies for biodiversity conservation in across marine, coastal, and terrestrial ecosystems. She is an experienced reviewer of policies, programs, projects, plans, publications, institutional systems and processes, and grant applications. Adopting an ecosystem-based approach to conservation by ensuring communities and land and sea use management surrounding protected areas are integrated into biodiversity governance and management, has been a central focus of her work.

Review Team

Anouska Kinahan – Principal Evaluator

ABOUT THE REVIEW

Joint Review: No

Report Language(s): English.

Review Type: Mid-term Review

Brief Description: This report is a management-led Mid Term Review of a UNEP/GEF-6 Full-sized project implemented between 2020 and 2024. The project's overall development objective is to *“enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating natural capital accounting into development planning”* The review sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The review has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

Key words: Marine and coastal ecosystems; Reef resilience; Atolls; Sustainable Island development; Biosphere Reserve, Green Growth; Natural Capital; Natural Capital Accounting; Biodiversity conservation; Ecosystem management; Climate Change; Governance.

Primary data collection period: October – December 2023

Field mission dates: 26 November – 7 December 2023

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|---|
| BR | Biosphere Reserve |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| EA | Executing Agency |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| EPA | Environment Protection Agency |
| ESA | Environmentally Sensitive Area |
| FMO | Fund Management Officer |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GOM | Government of Maldives |
| IA | Implementing Agency |
| ICZM | Integrated Coastal Zone Management |
| LECRdD | Low Emission Climate Resilient Development Project (One UN) |
| LGA | Local Government Authority |
| MACI | Maldives Association of Construction Industries |
| MATI | Maldives Association of Tourism |
| MBS | Maldives Bureau of Statistics |
| MECCT | Ministry of Environment Climate change and Technology |
| MFMRA | Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture |
| MF | Ministry of Finance |
| MMA | Marine Managed Area |
| MNPHI | Ministry of National Planning Housing and Infrastructure |
| MNU | Maldives National University |
| MoT | Ministry of Tourism |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MPA | Marine Protected Area |
| MRC | Marine Research Centre |
| MTR | Mid-term Review |
| NBSAP | National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan |
| NC | Natural Capital |
| NCA | Natural Capital Accounting |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NPD | National Project Director |
| PA | Protected Area |
| PIF | Project Identification Form |
| PIR | Project Implementation Review |
| PIU | Project Implementation Unit |
| PM | Project Manager |
| PMU | Project Management Unit |
| PoW | Programme of Work |
| PPG | Project Preparation Grant |
| ProDoc | Project Document |
| PSC | Project Steering Committee |
| QER | Quarterly Expenditure Report |
| SEEA | System of Environmental-Economic Accounting |

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| SIDS | Small Island Developing State |
| TM | Task Manager |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| TOR | Terms of Reference |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| WDC | Women's Development Committee |

Institutional name changes under new administration

Reviewers Note: A new Government was inaugurated in November 2023 and during the time of mission travel and this review several of the Government departments/Ministries were undergoing name changes. Here, some of those name changes are presented, but for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, this report will use the terms at the time of the review's inception, and remote part of the review.

| Former name (used in this report) | New name |
|--|---|
| MECTT Ministry of Environment Climate Change and Technology | MCCEE -Ministry Climate change Environment and Energy |
| MFMRA Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture | MFOR -Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources MAAW- Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Welfare |
| MNPHI Ministry of National Planning Housing and Infrastructure | MHLUD- Minister of Housing, Land and Urban Development |
| LGA Local Government Authority | MCLGPW- Minister of Cities, Local Government and Public Works |

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

Table 1. Project Summary

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Project Title: | Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)" | GEF project ID: | 9688 |
| Executing Agency: | Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, (previously Ministry of Environment and Energy; currently Ministry of climate change, environment and energy) | | |
| Project partners: | Housing Development Corporation (name changed to Urbano); Blue Marine Foundation; Six Senses Laamu; Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture; Maldives Bureau of Statistics | | |
| Participating Countries: | Maldives | | |
| Focal Area(s): | Biodiversity | IMIS number | UN Environment Project ID: GFL-11207-14AC0003-SB-015714-2000004313 |
| GEF Strategic Priority/Objective: | BD3 – Program 6: Ridge to Reef+: Maintaining Integrity and Function of Globally Significant Coral Reef Ecosystems; BD4 – Programme 10: Integration of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services into Development and Finance Planning | GEF approval date: | 23 June 2020 |
| UNEP approval date: | 23 June 2020 | Date of first disbursement | 8 July 2020 |
| Actual start date: | 24 December 2020 | Planned duration: | 60 months |
| Intended completion date*: | 30th September 2024 (technical completion as in PCA); and 21 October 2025 (PCA validity) | Actual or Expected completion date: | 30 September 2025 |
| Project Type: | Full-sized Project | GEF Allocation: | USD \$3,532,968 |
| Expected MSP/FSP Co-financing*: | USD \$22,934,073 | Total Cost: | USD \$26,467,041 |
| Mid-term Review/eval. (planned date): | May 2023 | Terminal Evaluation (planned date): | July 2024 |
| Mid-term Review/eval. Actual date | October 2023 | No. of revisions: | N/A |
| Date of last Steering Committee meeting: | 15 June 2023 | Date of last Revision*: | N/A |
| Disbursement as of October 2023 [] *: | US\$ 897,462 | Date of planned financial closure*: | 21 October 26 |
| Total co-financing realized as of October [2023] | USD \$22,780,531 | Actual expenditures reported as of October 2023 | USD \$ 562,156.03 |
| | | Actual expenditures entered in IMIS/Umoja as of 03 October 2022 | USD \$341,372.71 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

1. The Maldives is a coral island nation consisting of 26 natural atolls and an estimated 1,192 islands spread over 859,000 km² in the Indian Ocean. The Maldives atolls are globally important as they cover a total reef area of 4,513 km² and are the largest group of coral reefs in the Indian Ocean and the seventh largest in the world. Tourism and fisheries are the two largest economic sectors for the country, both of which are highly dependent on the country's marine natural capital. Pristine coral reef experiences are vital to sustaining the tourism industry of the Maldives and the country's significant tuna industry is highly dependent on a sustainable supply of bait fish caught in the shallow inner-waters of the atoll lagoons.
2. Despite this dependency on marine natural capital and the country's efforts to protect its coral reefs over the years, marine biodiversity remains under significant pressure from a range of stressors such as an increase in tourism, as well as rapid economic development over recent years. Unsustainable development, overexploitation of resources, land-based pollution, invasive species, and coral bleaching from climate change, are the main threats to the atolls in Maldives.
3. Through enhanced capacity of atoll governance and the scaling up of best practices, this project intends to strengthen the protection of its marine and coastal resources by addressing stressors to marine natural capital via green growth practices, and by increasing awareness and understanding in stakeholders of the values and socio-economic importance of its natural capital. The project has an overall objective *"to enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating natural capital accounting into development planning."*
4. The project "Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)" was approved in June 2020 and officially commenced in December 2020. The PCA was signed with a technical completion period of 48 months, with the expected end date in September 2024, and operational end date in September 2025. However, the CEO endorsement approved a project duration of 60 months. This MTR therefore is occurring slightly over mid-way through the project. A total budget of USD 26,467,041 comprising a GEF allocated amount of USD 3,532,968 and a co-financing amount of USD 22,934,073 (cash and in-kind) is available for this project. There have been no major revisions to this project since its inception.

This Review

5. This report presents findings from the mid-term review (MTR) of the project that took place between October 2023 and December 2023. This review aimed to assess the project's progress against the seven criteria as per UNEP evaluation guidelines as well as understanding the underlying factors for the project's successes and its challenges. It identifies any corrective actions for the project in the remaining time and provides lessons learnt and recommendations that may be also useful for future UNEP projects and for the country. As such, this report is targeted at institutions, organizations and individuals with implementation and oversight roles in the project but may also be of interest to stakeholders who depend on the Maldives marine and coastal natural capital. The review included a two-week mission trip to the Maldives where several key partners, implementors and beneficiaries were interviewed, and project sites visited.

Key Findings

6. The project has shown excellent alignment with UNEP, donor, and country priorities, and this is reflected in the level of ownership and country driven-ness apparent in the government stakeholders consulted. The project is well-executed and well-managed with all financial and administrative requirements being met in a timely fashion. Several baseline indicator data have been collected and the project is making efforts to monitor the project's progress and effectiveness by recording and collecting the relevant data including sex disaggregated data. There is excellent horizontal and vertical supervision, teamwork, and communication across the implementing agency, executing agency and project management team. A key strength of the project is its management structure and a diligent project management team. Further, an

independent project management and implementation unit based in the Ministry and the pilot site (Laamu) Atoll Council offices, has meant that the team can focus on project implementation 100%, but still benefit from day-to-day bi-directional communication and critical progress updates, and the team can obtain support and advice as necessary for problem solving.

7. Good progress has been made towards some outcomes, however for others it is clear that the project will not be able to achieve them to the level fully intended, for reasons outside the control of the project itself. The project will support the Ministry with critical criteria required for Biosphere Reserve nomination and will create an enabling environment through the development of plans, capacity building, and awareness for effective core zone management. It is unlikely however, that it will achieve the intended Biosphere Status, increase, and scale up the sustainability of marine and coastal resource management under a green growth strategy or reduce stressors in any practical manner, within the remaining timeframe. Similarly, the project will pilot the establishment of three Natural Capital Accounts for Laamu, build national awareness in this area, and through the establishment of a multi-sectoral NCA technical committee, the development of a roadmap for national integration, and building technical and equipment capacity for National Capital Accounting, the country will be well placed to continue its quest for mainstreaming across other sectors and for the private sector to integrate biodiversity targets and natural capital considerations into its operations and reporting, as originally intended. A theory of change presented in this document, was reconstructed, with minor amendments, in the review's inception phase and revised with further minimal amendments during the review.
8. There are several contributing factors as to why some outcomes are unlikely to be achieved in the remaining timeframe and these reasons are also the main challenges the project faced, all of which are outside the control of the project. Although the intervention logic was valid, the initial project design was extremely ambitious and complex for the given time-frame in the first instance, it included a large number of different technical focus areas and outputs outside the control of the executing agency, and the time between project design and project implementation meant that there were some significant changes in context, status and priorities by the time the project started e.g. code of conducts and protected areas already established. While it is necessary for the project to adhere to national processes, especially as they relate to procurement and required administrative and financial procedures, the overall efficiency of the project was reduced in terms of time, costs, and human resources as well as delaying the implementation of some activities by up to 18 months in some cases (almost half the time of the project's lifespan). As a result, the project faced significant delays, communicated in reports and project steering committee meetings, in nearly all key areas of intervention from protected area management planning, all activities related to reducing stressors to Laamu's reefs, and the onset of Natural Capital Accounting. This has inevitable consequences on the effectiveness of the project and its ability to meet all intended outputs and outcomes in the remaining timeframe. Where it was within its control, the project team did try to adapt, problem-solve, and remain flexible in efforts to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the project. The team should also be commended on the progress made in the face of these external challenges.
9. There is good engagement of stakeholders particularly at the government level and overall, there is good buy-in and interest in the project. The project has made efforts to ensure gender representation by holding separate meetings for females and targeting some activities such as small grants to Women Development Committees, and at a Male and Atoll level for the most part gender balance in meetings is achieved. An environment and social safeguard framework, gender action and stakeholder engagement plan, and communication and outreach plan, have been developed by the project. Project outputs are readily available on the Ministries website, some have been summarised, translated into the local language, and disseminated at the Atoll level and various social media handles including at communication task force established at the Atoll level. As identified by the environment and social framework, any work on protected areas due to potential resource use restrictions, such as management planning, will require extensive local engagement. In addition, the review did find some frustrations and confusions at the Atoll and island level with the project as a result of the prolonged delays (see above) in procurement which also resulted in extended absences by the project at the island and community level. Although many of these delays have now been resolved and activities underway which will lead to increased engagement of island councils and communities, the project is encouraged to seek

out further opportunities to increase levels of engagement to these groups even beyond intended.

10. It is highly likely the Ministry of Environment and Maldives Bureau of Statistics will pursue and champion the objectives of the project beyond its time frame. However, a new Government administration was inaugurated in 2023, and whether Biosphere Reserve status, reef protection, protected areas and natural capital accounting will be high on their priorities and will be supported remains to be seen. Evidence suggests their support for project outcomes, could go either way. In addition, although there is enabling legislation (Decentralization Act) and interest, at the Atoll level whether project outputs and outcomes CAN be supported and taken up at the Atoll level given their limited human, technical and financial capacity, as well as many other basic needs of island populations needing to be prioritised, is also of concern. The project, through sensitization, awareness raising and capacity building activities, subgrants and the development of frameworks and plans, is at least creating an enabling environment for the Atoll to take up outcomes if additional and the required level of support comes from the national government.

Conclusions

11. Although faced with significant challenges leading to the unlikelihood of all outcomes being achieved as intended, given the quality of execution, demonstrated efforts by the project team to increase effectiveness and efficiency thus far, this project has been rated “Satisfactory” for this mid-term review.
 12. The review found that there is strong interest and support at the Ministry and National Bureau of Statics to fully integrate Natural Capital Accounting into its policies and plans, with a good general understanding occurring across national government and the construction and tourism networks of the link between a health marine environment and local development. At the Atoll level, there was also an understanding of the importance of Natural Capital but the link from local development activities on its flows and values is perhaps less well understood.
 13. The project is on track to establish a strong foundation and to create an enabling environment that will allow the country to continue forward with the integration of Natural Capital Accounting at a national level beyond the project’s timeframe. It has already established a Natural Capital Accounting committee which will continue beyond the project’s life span, and the project is also building up good social capital through its training of schoolteachers and the development of courses to be included in Maldives National University curricula.
14. Overall, the project has demonstrated strong project management and execution for areas it has control over. The project would benefit greatly from, and its impact and sustainability enhanced by making minor revisions of the framework, deliverables and indicators and strengthening island and community level engagement in the remaining timeframe of the project.

Lessons Learned

15. Lesson 1: Less can be more. A narrower project scope will likely result in more impactful and longer-lasting outcomes compared to projects with a wider scope.
16. Lesson 2: Relevant administrative and financial policies and procedures for project implementation should be fully understood and considered in project risk analyses with mitigation actions provided for where needed.
17. Lesson 3: Alignment with national priorities, some flexibility, and a strong project team with pilot site presence are core elements for successful project implementation and in fostering good relations between project teams and implementing partners.
18. Lesson 4: Seek out opportunities for low- hanging fruit, i.e. small, tangible benefits, and increased visibility during periods of inactivity, to maintain community interest, in particular where project delays occur.

Recommendations

19. Recommendation 1: Review and revise project outputs/activities (minor revisions) to maximise impact and sustainability of the remaining project interventions.
20. Recommendation 2: Increase efforts in Island, community, and private sector engagement to further enhance the sustainability of project outcomes.
21. Recommendation 3: Ensure synergy among consultants to avoid stakeholder fatigue, to better streamline engagement and to maximise sustainability of outcomes.
22. Recommendation 4: Additional sensitization work should be carried out with the new administration in particular around NCA and the importance of PAs to the economy. Synergies with the new manifesto and project objectives should be identified, understood, and highlighted by the project.
23. Recommendation 5: Capitalize on UNEP TM experience and establish more formal meetings quarterly to check in with team and support NCA aspects.
24. Recommendation 6: PMU, MECCT, EPA and MoF to discuss potential avenues for increasing the efficiency of project implementation for the remaining time given current administration and financial policy requirements, and for future donor projects that may occur.

I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

25. The project **Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)** was approved in June 2020 and officially commenced in December 2020 for a period of 48 months, with the expected end date in September 2024 (operational end date September 2025). Due to early delays as a result of the COVID pandemic, the project has had one minor informal budget revision in July 2021 where US\$64,500 (approx. 1.8% of budget) was redistributed across the budget components, with personnel, training, and miscellaneous components reduced and corresponding increases in sub-contractors, along with equipment and premises components. The workplan was also revised slightly to reflect these delays. However, the overall project budget and scope have not changed.
26. This document presents findings from the mid-term review (MTR) of the project that took place between October 2023 and December 2023. The document is specifically targeted at institutions, organizations and individuals with implementation and oversight roles in the project, in particular UNEP and the Ministry of Climate Change Environment and Energy (MCCEE- former MECCT), other government agencies of the Maldives and project partners. The report, however, may also be of interest to a number of stakeholders not directly involved in project implementation or oversight but who depend on a healthy marine ecosystems and coral reefs for their livelihoods, for example tourism service providers or local communities.
27. The project is working in Laamu Atoll as well as with national governments and the private sector and aims to mainstream National Capital Accounting (NCA) and to be a model for scaling up and replicating Atoll Green Growth initiatives across the whole of Maldives. A total budget of USD 26,467,041 comprising a GEF allocated amount of USD 3,532,968 and a co-financing amount of USD 22,934,073 (cash and in-kind) is available for this project. There have been no major changes in the project since its inception.

Project context and objectives

28. The Maldives is a coral island nation consisting of 26 natural atolls and an estimated 1,192 islands spread over 859,000 km² in the Indian Ocean. Tourism and fisheries are the two largest economic sectors for the country, both of which are highly dependent on the country's marine natural capital (NC). The country's marine biodiversity however is under significant pressure from a range of stressors driven by population and tourist visitation increases, rapid economic development and climate change. Unsustainable development, overexploitation of resources, land-based pollution, invasive species, and coral bleaching are the main threats to the atolls in Maldives. These anthropomorphic threats to the marine ecosystem and coral reefs in particular, are further exacerbated by climate change impacts. Through the enhanced capacity of atoll governance, the project intends to strengthen marine and coastal resource management and address stressors impacting marine natural capital through a green growth approach. Further, by increasing awareness and understanding in stakeholders of the values and socio-economic importance of marine NC to the country and its citizens, the project aims to catalyse changes in current unsustainable behavioural practices. The project focuses on Laamu Atoll but has an in-built design for scaling up throughout the Maldives.
29. The project aims to mobilize the national adoption of Green Growth atoll development with an overall objective *"to enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating natural capital accounting into development planning."* To achieve this, the project has identified four main components, each with an outcome or outcomes, and a number of corresponding outputs (Table 1).

Table 2: Project’s Logical Framework

| |
|--|
| Objective: To enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating natural capital accounting into development planning |
| Component 1: Green growth development for Laamu Atoll in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors |
| Outcome 1.1: Increased sustainability of marine and coastal resource management under a Green Growth Strategy for Laamu Atoll |
| Output 1.1.1: Green Growth Strategy, Marine Managed Area/Biosphere Reserve and Sustainable Development Plans for Laamu Atoll and selected islands implementation advanced through capacity development, participatory planning and operational support. Output 1.1.2: Three SEEA-EEA based Natural Capital (NC) Accounts established and operationalized for Laamu Atoll (freshwater; marine & coastal ecosystems; key marine species) |
| Outcome 1.2: Reduction in stressors impacting Laamu Atoll reefs (through implementation of Green Growth and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) practices in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors) |
| Output 1.2.1: Targeted island communities sensitized and increasingly apply eco-technologies for sustainable food production and disposal of domestic waste Output 1.2.2: Adoption of sustainable tuna bait and demersal reef fisheries in conformity with the draft Maldives Fisheries Master Plan Output 1.2.3: Partnership, policy and implementation standards for Green Growth established with the Atoll Council, national construction firms and tourism operators on Laamu Atoll, and registered nationally |
| Component 2. Building social capital for a green economy |
| Outcome 2.1: Increased understanding of the values and dependencies on marine natural capital and biodiversity supports improved livelihoods and sustainable development on Laamu Atoll and nationally |
| Output 2.1.1: Biodiversity conservation and Green Growth in Laamu Atoll and nationally supported by increased awareness among targeted groups and a National Biodiversity Knowledge Centre Output 2.1.2: Increased capacity for cross-curricular delivery of coastal and marine ecology and natural capital subjects in national schools, and incorporation of natural capital accounting in natural sciences and environmental management curricula at MNU |
| Component 3. Mainstreaming natural capital accounting (NCA) into fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors |
| Outcome 3.1: Increased institutional capacity, clarified mandates and integration of NCA in marine biodiversity conservation policy and programmes |
| Output 3.1.1: Institutionalized capacity programme implemented and national methodology on NCA established – based on the SEEA-EEA framework, for national NC-responsive statistics, policies, plans and budgeting Output 3.1.2: NC objectives integrated into government finance, development planning and policy informed by datasets and valuation of development scenarios through the NC Accounts |
| Outcome 3.2: Enhanced protection of coral reefs and other marine NC through actions by the corporate fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors |
| Output 3.2.1: NC flows and values, footprint analysis, and biodiversity protection targets established and reported on for three sector businesses or operational plans |
| Outcome 3.3: Strengthened inter-sectoral coordination and spatial planning that incorporates NCA support sustainable development in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors |
| Outputs for Outcome 3.3: Output 3.3.1: NC-based spatial planning governance framework established including a technical inter-ministerial spatial planning mechanism and modalities for full stakeholder involvement |
| Component 4: Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation |
| Outcome 4.1: Improved knowledge management and sharing of lessons learned on Green Growth between local and national levels |
| Output 4.1.1: Project lessons captured and disseminated to project stakeholders and to other GEF and non-GEF projects and partners |
| Outcome 4.2: Project monitoring system operates, systematically provides information on progress, and informs adaptive management to ensure results |
| Output 4.2.1: Capacity established for participatory and efficient monitoring and evaluation and adaptive management |

Institutional overview

- UNEP is the Implementing Agency (IA) for the project. UNEP’s Ecosystems Division, GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit is responsible for providing day-to-day supervision

and coordinating its monitoring and evaluation aspects, including project reviews, approving implementation work plans and budget revisions, and monitoring project progress. The Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology (MECCT), the main government institution with overarching responsibility for environmental policy, environmental protection, and management in the Maldives, is the Executing Agency (EA) for this project. There is a designated National Project Director (NPD) from the EA who is responsible for overall administration and supervision of the Project Management Unit (PMU), has overall fiduciary responsibility for the project and is responsible for forming, leading, and supporting the Project Steering Committee (PSC), which has met annually since the project's inception. PMU implementation is supported and guided by national technical working groups involving members from key stakeholder organizations.

31. Under Article 151 of the Decentralization Act 2010, Atoll and Island Councils have a mandate over local level implementation and management of their natural resources and power to formulate regulations governing use of the reefs, lagoons, and other natural resources within the island boundaries. Local activity implementation therefore is coordinated by a Laamu Atoll Project Implementation Unit (PIU) to ensure activities are aligned and integrated with local government operations and to support knowledge sharing among local stakeholders. The PIU was intended to be supported by the Laamu MMA/BR - Green Growth Stakeholder Platform and local task forces, however these have not been established and are unlikely to be prior to project end, however a communication task force has been established at Laamu. Figure 1 presents a diagram of the current implementation structure of the project.

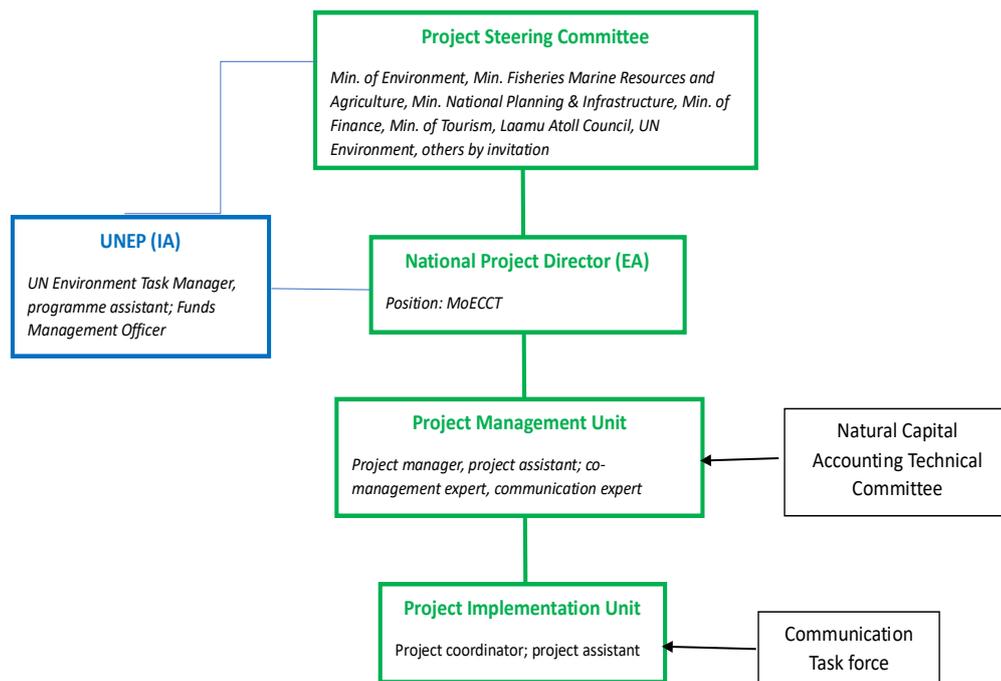


Figure 1: Implementation structure

Stakeholders

32. A number of diverse and relevant stakeholder groups have been identified by the project and include national and local government, academic institutions, national NGOs, the private sector, associations, communities and local community groups, and international agencies. A stakeholder engagement plan for the project was also presented (ProDoc Appendix 9). A stakeholder interest-influence analysis was carried out based on identified current roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and their potential role in the project (ProDoc Figure 2.5.2, Appendix 25).

Project Challenges and Changes

33. This project was initially designed in 2017/2018 but by the time approved it was 2020 with implementation really commencing in 2021. During this period and as a result of government administrative changes from design and during project implementation, there are several elements of the project where the context, progress, status and priorities have changed. Significant changes are highlighted throughout the report and are indicated in Annex IV, where suggested project framework revisions to reflect these changes are provided. Further, a new government is in place since November 2023, as such it remains unclear the specific environmental priorities and their place relative to other national priorities of the new administration and the likely impact on the project. However, initial discussions suggest that project activities will not be significantly impacted by this change and priorities appear aligned, but there may be concerns regarding the impact on project outcome sustainability (see review section). There have been several changes to the government structure and Ministries' names as a result of the new administration, again not impacting the project per se, but it does mean some re-sensitization of the project and Natural Capital Accounting will need to occur. Ministry name changes are indicated in the acronym list but to avoid confusion, throughout the document, the previous names used in the inception report and project document will be used.
34. A major challenge the project has faced to date are some of the required national administrative and financial policies and procedures that do not lend themselves to the needs of the project or local implementation. In particular procurement and EIA procedures. While necessary and it is understood that the project must work within these, they have significantly impacted the project causing major delays, reduced the time and resource (human and financial) efficiency of the project, and as a result will affect the ability of the project to meet some of its intended outcomes. Specific examples, and more discussion on this issue is presented throughout this review document in particular in the review section.
35. Many intervention areas i.e. management planning, reducing stressors, NCA and the knowledge centre have experienced substantial delays outside the control of the project, resulting in a significantly reduced timeframe for their implementation compared to as planned. However, interventions in these areas are now ongoing or are about to commence.
36. Lastly, inconsistencies between the PCA and the CEO endorsement document has meant that the project has been working on a slightly different time frame-to the PCA. The PCA identifies the project as a 48-month duration project with an indicative closure date September 2025. However, the CEO endorsement document identifies the project as 60 months in duration, which would have a technical completion date of September 2025 and hence a project close date of September 2026. In light of these discrepancies, it is recommended that UNEP and the project team explore the option of a no cost extension for this project up to 1 year to match the CEO endorsement document, and to ensure completion of project activities. It should be noted however, that even with a no cost extension, the project will still face similar challenges, such as procurement, but the minor amendments and recommendations presented in this review document would still remain valid even under conditions of a granted no cost extension.

Financials

37. Although it is to be expected that expenditure will be lower than 50% at a projects mid-term, the expenditure at the time of this review is significantly lower (16%) than expected if the total budget were to be spent by project end. This low expenditure can be explained by the various delays in the project (see section on project challenges). However, since the last expenditure report (QER 3 2023), a number of consultants/consultancies have been procured namely the NCA consultants, management planning and agricultural consultants, with several more planned before year end (e.g. sustainable development

consultant). Therefore, this will increase expenditure significantly to be more in line what would be expected based on intended interventions by mid-way points, and to keep the project on track for budget expenditure by project end.

38. Approximately 16% of co-financing has been secured. However, a significant part of the planned co-financing is from a partner where there are some delays, specifically around the knowledge centre (see section on project challenges), excluding this, around 50% of the co-financing has been secured. The project has however, secured additional co-financing namely from the Laamu Atoll council who is providing office and meeting space and other support to the PIU team in Laamu, a report on this additional co-financing secured is currently being prepared.

Table 3a: Planned versus actual expenditure by component as of October 2023

| Components | | Planned | Expenditure (October 2023) | % planned v expenditure |
|--|---|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 10 PERSONNEL COMPONENT | | 1,161,088 | 317,511.28 | 27 |
| 1100 | Project personnel | 328,000 | 146,929.50 | 45 |
| 1200 | Consultants | 586,088 | 103,989.34 | 18 |
| 1300 | Project-administrative support | 60,000 | 16,992.11 | 28 |
| 1600 | Project travel (official) | 187,000 | 49,600.33 | 27 |
| 20 SUB-CONTRACT COMPONENT | | 1,456,000 | 196,848.03 | 14 |
| 2100 | Sub-contract (co-operating agencies and government) | 551,000 | 94,815.45 | 17 |
| 2200 | Sub-contract (commercial service providers) | 905,000 | 102,032.58 | 11 |
| 30 TRAINING COMPONENT | | 454,500 | 30,546.00 | 7 |
| 3200 | Group training | 164,000 | 9,112.19 | 6 |
| 3300 | Meetings/conferences | 290,500 | 21,433.81 | 7 |
| 40 EQUIPMENT AND PREMISES COMPONENT | | 184,130 | 12,157.66 | 7 |
| 50 MISCELLANEOUS COMPONENT | | 277,250 | 5,093.06 | 2 |
| TOTAL (ALL COMPONENTS) | | 3,532,968 | 562,156.03 | 16 |

Table 3b: Planned versus actual co-financing as of October 2023

| Co-financing Source | Planned | | Actual |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Cash | In-kind | Cash |
| UN Environment | - | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| Ministry of Environment | 4,000,000 | 1,000,000 | 2,583,300 |
| MFMR | - | 823,326 | |
| HDC/urbano | 16,500,000 | - | 342,614.90 |
| Six Senses Laamu | 162,200 | - | 153,542 |
| BMF | 80,000 | - | 339,606 |
| NBS | - | 218,547 | 12,992 |
| Total | 20,742,200 | 2,191,873 | 3,432,055 |
| Total co-financing | 22,934,073 | | |

II. REVIEW METHODS

39. This review was carried out in accordance with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and GEF requirements. The review aimed to carry out an assessment of the project's performance and results, and to identify challenges and any required corrective actions to be made for the remaining project lifespan. The Evaluation Team consisted of one international consultant reviewer under the guidance of the Implementing Agency - UNEP. The Evaluation and the methodological tools and formats provided by the UNEP Evaluation Office and the ToRs (Annex VII) provided a comprehensive framework for the review and the structure of this report. Accordingly, the project was reviewed against seven key criteria: Strategic Relevance, Effectiveness, Financial Management, Efficiency, Monitoring and Reporting, Sustainability, Factors Affecting Project Performance, and Cross-Cutting Factors, and rated on a six-point scale ranging from Highly Unsatisfactory (HU) to Highly Satisfactory (HS). The review was carried out between October and December 2023, both remotely and in-country through a 2-week mission trip to the Maldives (Male and Laamu Atoll) between the 26 Nov-7 Dec.
40. The review consisted of three main phases: 1) an Inception phase which reviewed project design quality, reconstructed a Theory of Change, and identified several key questions and indicators for reviewing each of the seven criteria. 2) A desk review of key documents and 3) stakeholder consultations.
41. **Documents:** A thorough desk-review of all available project documentation and outputs was carried out. This included the CEO Endorsement Request and amendments, PIRs, work plans, project budget and financial reports (available but not necessarily accurate or approved), other reports, meeting minutes, technical reports, email threads, and baseline surveys. Project documents were sourced by the reviewer through the MECCT website or through requests by the reviewer to UNEP or the project management team. A full list of documents reviewed is provided in Annex III.
42. **Interviews:** A list of stakeholders and an indication of those that would like to be consulted was provided to the project manager for review and input during the inception phase. Out of the proposed stakeholders, all were requested for a meeting by the project team and there was 100% response rate with the reviewer being able to meet with all stakeholders requested. In total the reviewer met with 87 individuals, across 25 stakeholder groups with balanced gender representation (55.5% F; 49.5% M). Stakeholders met represented project implementors, partners, supporters, and beneficiaries. A full list of stakeholders interviewed is provided in Annex II.
43. Preliminary one-to-one consultations were held with individual members of the project management team prior to engagement with other stakeholders and the mission trip. The purpose of this was to clarify any questions the reviewer may have on project progress or context and to allow individuals to express any concerns in private. Tailored semi-structured interview questionnaires were developed for each stakeholder which were met either remotely or in person (Male and at the pilot site Laamu Atoll) depending on feasibility and availability. Each consultation typically lasted approximately 1 -1 ½ hours. In Male the consultant met with each stakeholder group independently without a member of the PMU present as this allowed the stakeholders to speak freely. At the pilot site, in Laamu Atoll, a member of the PMU and PIU were present during meetings to support translation into the local language when required and to facilitate the logistics of travel within and across the islands.
44. A summary of the sample of respondents is provided in table 3. Several meetings and email exchanges were held with the task manager and programme assistant and project management team throughout the process. In addition, during mission travel, the reviewer worked closely with the project team before, during and after to discuss the reviewer's preliminary findings. At the end of the trip a final presentation of preliminary review findings was given to invited stakeholders that were consulted as part of this review, and MECCT staff including the new Deputy Minister.

Table 4 Respondents' Sample

| | | # people involved (M/F) | # people contacted (M/F) | # respondent (M/F) | % respondent |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Project team (those with management responsibilities e.g. PMU) | Implementing agency | 7 (2M:5F) | 7 (2M:5F) | 7 (2M:5F) | 100 |
| | Executing agency/ies | 3 (1M:2F) | 3 (1M:2F) | 3 (1M:2F) | 100 |
| | # entities involved | # entities contacted | # people contacted (M/F) | # respondent (M/F) | % respondent |
| Project (implementing/ executing) partners. (receiving funds from the project) | 7 | 7 | 1 per organization | 7M/9F | 100 |
| Project (collaborating/contributing ¹) partners. (not receiving funds from the project) | 10 | 10 | 1 per organization | 14M/19F | 100 |
| Beneficiaries: <u>Examples:</u> Duty bearers Gate keepers Direct beneficiaries Indirect beneficiaries Civil society representatives | 18 (incl. 11 island councils) | 10 | 1 per organization | 20M/12F | 100 |

45. **Analysis:** The most updated PIR was used primarily as a basis for this review, both the activity progress and the results framework. Where possible, the reviewer tried to source project outputs online or requested specific documents from the project or stakeholders. The status of activities and outputs identified in the PIRs were verified through the stakeholders/implementors consulted along with site visits and physical outputs. In addition, based on compiled information from deliverables, reports, and interviews, data were assessed against project indicators and mid-term targets. However, this proved challenging due to changes in context since projects design and as such comparisons were found to be not necessarily a fair assessment or project progress (see paragraph 61). Any outstanding queries were addressed via email communication with the project team. Lessons learnt and recommendations were based on a qualitative analyses of interview responses and an assessment of the projects progress, successes and shortcomings and taking into consideration the changes in context from project design to implementation.
46. **Limitations:** The reviewer does not feel there were any significant limitations to this review, all requested documents were received including meeting minutes, all requested stakeholders were met including intended beneficiaries. Perhaps, a meeting with one of the island councils where one of the new protected areas are located would have been ideal, however, the reviewer did not explicitly ask for this in the planning phase, and during the time of the review it was not feasible to arrange. Despite this the reviewer does not see this as a significant limitation of the review or likely to alter any of the findings presented.

47. **Ethics and human rights:** At the beginning of each interview individuals were informed that discussions would be reflected in the report but would be confidential and not relatable to any particular individual. There was relatively equal gender representation across stakeholders interviewed and island community members were also interviewed. All stakeholders were given an opportunity to ask questions, make comments or provide additional information as they saw fit during the interviews.

III. THEORY OF CHANGE

Theory of Change at Review

48. A Theory of Change (ToC) has been developed for the project along with a brief narrative on intervention logic as well as a table of assumptions for each outcome and a risk analysis. Given the concerns presented in the inception report regarding the Log frame not capturing the important role Laamu Atoll plays in piloting sustainable management initiatives for national replication, a reconstructed ToC was presented in the inception report that better reflected these issues and showed the drivers, inter-connectedness and inter-dependency of outcomes and outputs. Further, since the completion of the review and reflecting some changes to the context in which the project is now operating compared to its context at design, a further modified ToC, reviewed by the project management team, is presented in this report. Aligned with the proposed suggested minor modifications and intervention logic at design (Annex IV), the reconstructed ToC shows the intervention logic centred around three interconnected causal pathways depicted in the ToC diagram figure 2.
49. The Decentralization Act (Act on Decentralization of the Administrative Divisions of the Maldives, Law No. 7/2010), mandates Atoll and Island Councils over local level implementation and management of their natural resources and power to formulate regulations governing use of the reefs, lagoons, and other natural resources within the island boundaries. Laamu Atoll will pilot implementation of best practices for the sustainable management of marine natural capital under a Green Growth Approach and will pilot Natural Capital Accounts to support the mainstreaming of NC into national level development and planning. The national replication of Green Growth atoll development assumes that the national government will provide appropriate support and resources to the Atolls to implement these best practices and depends on a strong foundation and enabling environment to be created. The valuation of Atoll's NC and scenario development along with national outreach to build the appropriate understanding and know-how for biodiversity conservation and Green Growth atoll development, will mobilize behavioural change across national stakeholders, and for fishing, agricultural, tourism and construction sectors in particular, to incorporate NC considerations and targets into their operations. This assumes that stakeholders and the relevant sectors have both the will and capacity to adopt these behavioural changes. The national scaling up of sustainable atoll management, NCA integration and initiatives reducing land-based pollution, will strengthen the resilience and recovery of the Maldives reef ecosystems and facilitate the country's transition to Green Growth Atoll Development.

Causal Pathway 1: Piloting Green Growth Atoll development best practices in Laamu Atoll

50. The valuation and protection of Laamu Atoll's Natural Capital will facilitate Green Growth development. The participatory development of management plans for the newly established protected areas will enable best practices to be identified to ensure impacts from the fishing, agricultural, tourism and construction sectors are reduced while at the same time recognising their importance for atoll economic development. The biodiversity, ecosystem and socio-economic surveys, and consultations carried out for management plan development, will provide the conditions required for the establishment and management of a Biosphere reserve and green growth development of the atoll. The future implementation of the management plans and the management of the potential core zones of a Biosphere Reserve will be supported through building institutional, technical, and financial capacity and the development and adoption of best practices for reducing negative impacts to reefs by the various sectors, while at the same time supporting their sustainable economic growth. Natural capital accounts and scenario developments along with increased awareness at a national level (Pathway 2), will support the mainstreaming of NCA and best practices for green growth atoll development (Pathway 3) nationwide. This pathway assumes (A1-ToC diagram) that stakeholders will support biodiversity conservation and green growth and will utilize knowledge gained to mobilize behaviour change towards sustainable practices and that the decentralized governance receives the necessary political and resource support.

Causal Pathway 2: Increasing understanding and know-how for biodiversity conservation and Green Growth Atoll development at a national level.

51. Through the development and delivery of an outreach and communication plan that includes the targeted dissemination of tools and best practices as well as increasing of awareness across national stakeholders, will increase understanding and know-how for biodiversity and Green Growth Atoll development. This will be further supported by the establishment and operationalization of a national biodiversity knowledge centre. National capacity will be improved in the future by targeting increased awareness in school children and the incorporation of NC and Green growth principles in university curricula. This pathway assumes (A2. ToC diagram) that an increased understanding and know-how will lead to a greater national support for biodiversity conservation and Green Growth development and as a consequence the adoption of best practices by stakeholders. It assumes that the university is willing to integrate NC aspects into its curricula and that through the country's youth, individual behavioural change will be mobilized, and social capital built for future government and relevant sector actors.

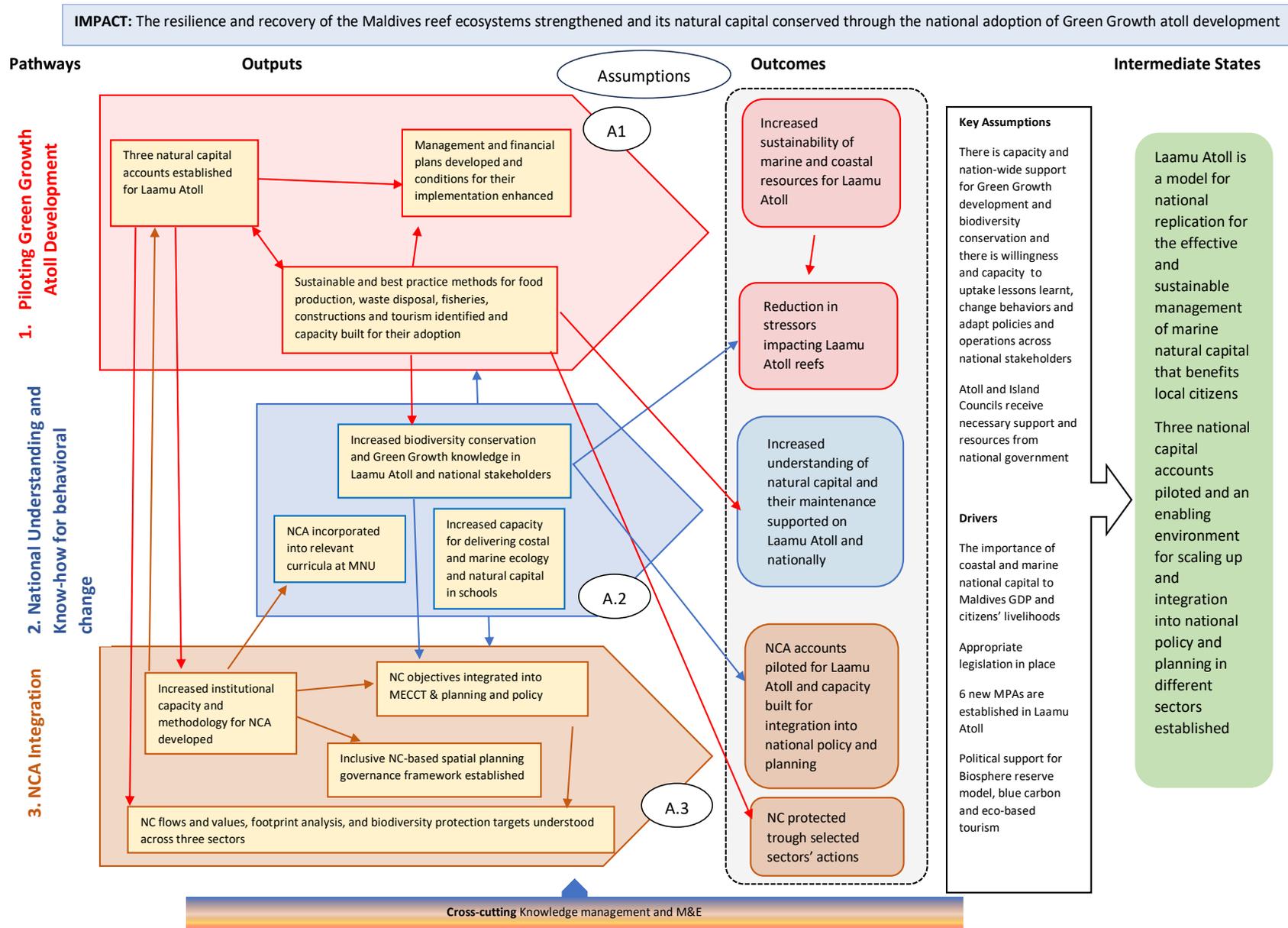
Causal Pathway 3: Integrating NCA into national development and planning and selected sectors' operations.

52. Piloting three NCAs in Laamu Atoll will help establish the foundation and enabling environment for mainstreaming NCA across multiple sectors nationally. Increasing institutional capacity for the development of a national capital accounting methodology will enable the lessons learnt from Laamu Atoll to be incorporated into NCA mainstreaming interventions. Applying NCA in marine policies and plans and building capacity across sectors will showcase how NC objectives can be included into national finance, development, and planning, including spatial planning, as well as selected sectors businesses and operations. Ensuring the Maldives Bureau of Statistics (MBS) include NC into their programmes and agendas will be critical for the transition to Green Growth development in the Maldives. This pathway assumes (A3. ToC diagram) that staff trained will remain long enough in their positions to transfer knowledge, the current institutional set up will remain under the new government, and sectors are willing to cooperate, abolish harmful incentives and subsidies and there will be timely reporting and accounting of NCA to inform policy and planning.

Cross-cutting: Improved knowledge management and monitoring and evaluations

53. The sharing of lessons learnt with local and national actors, as well as to a wider audience, will support the sustainability and replication of the project's interventions, nationally and beyond. Appropriate capacity in project staff for monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes will enable the adaptive management of the project which will support the effective achievement of intended project outcomes.

Figure 2: ToC Diagram



IV. REVIEW FINDINGS

A. Strategic Relevance

Alignment to UNEP's, Donors, and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) Strategic Priorities

54. The project is aligned with UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Nature action Sub-program: Living in Harmony with Nature, and its associated PoWs 2022 – 2025, outcomes 2.3; 2.7 and 2.8: Specifically, it will contribute to Indicator (i) *Number of regional regulatory and policy instruments on biodiversity and ecosystems conservation developed/updated and implemented*, which is a core focus of component 1. It will also contribute to Indicator (iii) *Number of countries and national, regional, and subnational authorities and entities that incorporate, with UNEP support, biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches into development and sectoral plans, policies, and processes for the sustainable management and/or restoration of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine areas*, through its mainstreaming of Natural Capital Accounting in the Maldives (component 3).
55. The project is also aligned with GEF-6 Biodiversity Focus Area: BD4 – Programme 10: *Integration of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services into Development and Finance Planning* and BD3 – Program 6: Ridge to Reef+: Maintaining Integrity and Function of Globally Significant Coral Reef Ecosystems and contributes to GEF 7 core indicators 2.2, 5, and 11. In addition, by reducing threats to atoll ecosystems and especially marine biodiversity, the project will contribute to a number of SDGs in particular to SDG 14-life below water.
56. The previous government of Maldives has pledged to bring 1 island, 1 reef and 1 mangrove under a protected area regime and committed to establish better management regimes for these areas. The project is aligned with and supports the implementation of this national pledge and in achieving relevant National Resiliency and Recovery Plan targets. Through its activities the project will also support the implementation of the Decentralization Act, contribute to the country's NBSAP 2016-2025 targets and it is aligned with and support's the strategic goals of the country's Fifth Tourism Master Plan 2023-2027. Since November 2023, a new government has been instated and identifying areas of alignment between these new priorities and the project are ongoing. Overall, the project will contribute the Maldives transition into Green Growth and the countries vision to establish more Biosphere Reserves.

Complementarity/Coherence with Existing Interventions

57. The project document provides a list and description of key GEF and non-GEF projects, past and present, on which the project will seek synergies with, capitalize on developed tools and lessons learnt, and build on and compliment the outcomes of these initiatives. For example, the project is seeking opportunities to collaborate with the World Bank funded Maldives Clean Environment Project (MCEP) to avoid duplication of effort and maximize joint outcomes. A number of other new initiatives and projects have started since the development of the project document. The project is fully aware of these new projects and are engaging with them to identify synergies and collaborations.

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

B. Quality & Revision of Project Design

58. The quality of project design was analysed in the inception report. The overall intervention logic of the project from output, outcomes to objectives is valid and provides a holistic set of activities necessary for protecting Natural Capital and mainstreaming NCA in the Maldives. However, the review revalidates initial findings as well as the identified project risk in the ProDoc, that for a four-year donor funded project, the scope is too wide and varied, and as a result perhaps too complex and over ambitious for effective and efficient achievement of intended outcomes within the projects timeframe and budget. Further,

there are a number of outputs/outcomes which are outside the control of the project and even the Ministry mandates which depends on full engagement or complete involvement of other entities beyond the executing agency for their achievement. For example, fish management plans, adoption of standards by construction sector and the development of a knowledge centre, etc. Some indicators identified are also out of the control of the project and therefore should not be indicators against project performance, for example SDG 14 indicators.

59. A further oversight of the project design was perhaps not fully identifying/understanding or considering the potential challenges that national administrative and financial policies and procedures may have on the project. For example, the national bidding procurement procedure and its lengthy process, does not appear to be considered in the design especially when it depends on outsourcing the majority of its activities to consultants. This has resulted in numerous delays, causing further time-limitations for implementation in an already time-stressed project.
60. On the other hand, there are many strengths of the project's design which include the overarching intervention logic for its long-term vision, the significant engagement of stakeholders during project design phase, its gender and safeguard considerations, and the implementation structure for project execution with an independent Project manager sitting in the Environment Ministry's office and the allocation of a project implementation unit- with locally recruited staff, based in the pilot site.
61. An inception workshop was held with stakeholders; the project however would have benefited from a greater focus on and some revision off project interventions to ensure that changes in context and priorities could be incorporated into the project and partners work programmes, and to revise the framework accordingly. Some stakeholders did mention that their comments at the inception workshop were not considered by the project, however while not formally included in the framework since they were received after the allocated time for feedback, they have been taken into account in its implementation.
62. Annex IV provides a table of suggested minor revisions to the project's framework to support more focused and feasible outcomes and to help strengthen the sustainability of interventions, in the remaining timeframe of the project.

Rating for Quality & Revision of Design: Moderately Satisfactory

C. Effectiveness

Theory of Change

63. A theory of change was developed in the ProDoc, this was reconstructed during the MTR inception phase to better reflect the scaling up aspect of the project and to show the inter-connectedness and assumptions. As a result of the review findings, the ToC was further modified to reflect the current overall ambitions and feasibility of project interventions and thus impacts given changing contexts (see section I.)

Availability of Outputs

64. Project outputs were easily available for the review and are accessible for most stakeholders. Given some changes in the project context since design phase and the major delays the project has faced, comparing against planned deliverables and mid-term framework targets was challenging and did not provide a true reflection of the projects significant relevant work carried out, their good project execution and the many important project output and deliverables to date. Out of the 35 deliverables originally planned by YR3-Q3 (this MTR) in the ProDoc, 14 or 40% are no longer applicable or viable within the remaining time. For example, the moratorium on lagoon reclamation, or a Green Growth Strategy completed and approved. Of the deliverables that are still relevant, the project has achieved or is in progress for over 50%. Given this situation, it is recommended to

revise deliverables and targets according to any agreed minor revisions to the projects framework as recommended (Annex IV) by this MTR (recommendation 1) and as agreed by the PMU, MECCT and UNEP. In light of some of the administrative and financial procedural challenges faced by the project (see section on efficiency), the project team should be commended on their adaptability and problem solving to ensure that the project is achieving outputs and progressing in spite of these challenges. The project has made a number of advancements towards outputs to date. Several stakeholders did mention they would like to have more frequent updates of the projects progress. It is suggested that a brief bullet point email to the PSC with key highlights from the project is sent monthly. Further, even though the project has translated and summarised some outputs and made the available locally, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of outputs, the project could make printed copies available to the Atoll so they can easily access them into the future and to showcase them to other projects working in the Atoll which could help avoid duplication of efforts. Key highlights of the project progress and outputs thus far include significant awareness and sensitization workshops, provision of small grants-along with training in grant writing- to various entities on the islands in the Atoll, an experience sharing trip to other islands' mangroves and wetlands for members from the island councils and WDC, numerous baseline surveys- KAPs, agriculture, fisheries, waste, NCA scoping study and NC extent and condition survey, the establishment of an NCA technical committee and the development of an Atoll certificate course for potential rangers.

Progress Towards Project Outcomes

65. It is clear at this mid-term review stage that progress towards some outcomes will not be as advanced as intended during the project design stage. In particular, the national registration of codes of conducts in the sectors identified, the adoption and implementation of a green growth strategy, the establishment of a Biosphere Reserve, and the integration of NCA in other sectors outside the environment. As a result of changes in contexts since design, project delays, some indicators not within the project scope and some not viable in the remaining time frame, as for deliverables, several outcome indicators identified (10 out of 19 indicators) and the low attainment of mid-term targets (6 out of 19 partially achieved) do not accurately reflect either the situation on the ground or the efforts to date on project execution. For example, the establishment of a Green Fund has been completed before the project commenced and the Laamu Atoll Conservation Fund only once BR status achieved (not within likelihood of this project), internationally agreed indicators showing progress towards SDG 14 Life Below Water targets, is beyond the project scope, the number students participating in field studies after teachers are trained does not measure the success of teacher training, and it is no longer anticipated that there is sufficient time remaining that would see the necessary actions completed for businesses or company operational plans to integrate NC values and accounting into their operations or reporting by project end. It is further recommended therefore, to revise indicators along with any framework revisions as a result of the MTR (Annex IV). However, despite the apparent slow progress towards outcomes, there is progress being made towards these outcomes and the project will create a strong foundation for the MECTT and country to meet the vision of achieving Biosphere Reserve status, adopting a Green Growth approach at Laamu Atoll, and to fully integrate NCA nationally across sectors. It will do this by creating an enabling environment through the collection of essential data and information, the development of necessary frameworks and capacity built for their implementation, building relationships with, and sensitizing local and national government and non-governments, establishing institutional structures such as a NCA technical committee and securing longer-term support for NCA beyond the project's life span. The implementation schedule has been identified as a substantial risk in the PIRs as well the ambition of the project as a moderate risk to co-financing, partnerships, and coordination with other initiatives as well as vulnerable to delays in its project risk analysis.
66. As a result of the wide ambitious focus in the timeframe and long delays incurred, the project runs the risk of becoming what many stakeholders have referred to as "unsustainable projects", in that once the project is over there are no long-lasting impacts.

The fact that there are so many projects occurring in Maldives and on the Atolls in particular, there is a clear sense of frustration among stakeholders that projects are not appropriately considering their sustainability beyond the project's timeframe and several examples of previous projects were provided. An example is the coral reef training where community members were trained in diving and coral reef monitoring but once completed there is no equipment or monitoring programme in place in Laamu- for this to be taken up or maintained. There also appears to be some differing opinions, with government suggesting local stakeholders are proud to have Laamu considered a pilot but some local stakeholders being frustrated and want to see more sustainable outcomes as so many projects are piloted in Laamu with no long-lasting benefit been seen for the Atoll or communities once the project is complete. This has the potential to be of a similar concern given the volume of activities to be undertaken in the remaining timeframe IF all planned activities are attempted rather than scaling down and focusing on achieving long-lasting outcomes for fewer focus areas than originally intended. However, with a strong project team, MTR recommendations and MECTT/UNEP support, the reviewer is confident that although some outcomes will not be met fully, there will be long-lasting positive outcomes of the project across all outcomes specifically in creating an enabling environment for advancing Biosphere Reserve nomination for Laamu Atoll, strengthening the effective management of the Atoll's PAs and sequent BR core zones, and the scaling up and integration of NCAs nationally across different sectors.

Likelihood of Impact

67. The Maldives saw a new government inaugurated in November 2023, as such the true likelihood of Impact is difficult to say given this very recent change in government. Although there are some clear environment-orientated priorities e.g. blue carbon, eco-tourism, and nature parks, it is not clear where these priorities lie in comparison to other areas identified in the Manifesto. It is however concerning that discussions are ongoing nationally regarding the potential de-gazettement of one of the PAs declared the end of 2022 in Laamu Atoll, which is the top turtle nesting beach in the Maldives, in favour of the construction of a harbour. The outcome of these discussions should be followed closely by the project and will provide more insight as to the likelihood of impact for some of the project's interventions. In addition, a second concern for impact likelihood at the Atoll level, is that the effective management of the remaining PAs and for BR status, will require buy-in and support at the local level. There still seems to be room for much more engagement around these topics, what they are, what is allowed or not, the benefits and so on. Further to awareness, the capacity and financial sustainability of the Atoll to be able to implement PA management plans, or ensure the Atoll is not just a Biosphere Reserve in name but in action, is also of concern, and for this reason, likelihood of impact at the Laamu Atoll level is considered "moderately likely". On the other hand, at a national level, there is much support for NCA across the different stakeholders, the project has established a NCA committee which is intended to remain beyond the projects lifespan and discussions have commenced with the current consultants for their engagement with Maldives beyond the project lifespan to further support the integration and operationalization of NCA at a national level. As such, at the national level for NCA, the project interventions are considered "likely" for likelihood of impact.

Adaptive Management.

68. The project has demonstrated several instances of adaptive management and has continuously shown this in response the various challenges faced throughout its implementation. A number of stakeholders and consultants also reported and commended the willingness of the project team to listen to feedback and to adapt accordingly.

Rating for Effectiveness: **Satisfactory**

D. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's/Donor Financial Policies and Procedures

69. All UNEP financial policies and procedures have been adhered to in a timely manner and no issues have occurred or are outstanding. The audit report highlighted one issue with regard to reconciling bank records with the project. The project fully adheres to national processes, and this means that under the Ministry bank account the bank does not report separately on individual projects. The project management team investigated how this issue could be resolved but feedback suggests that this cannot be resolved under the current operation of the project and therefore is outside the projects control.

Completeness of Financial Information

70. All cash advance requests, disbursement reports and quarterly expenditure reports are up-to-date and accurate. Co-financing reports have been received regularly by partners and expenditure and upcoming expenditure is monitored continuously.
71. Annex V provides a rating table for financial management.

Table 5: Financial Tables

| Total Cash Advance Requests as of October 2023 | Total Disbursement as of October 2023 | Expenditure as of October 2023 |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| \$897,462 | \$897,462 | \$562,156 |

Rating for Financial Management: Highly Satisfactory

E. Efficiency

72. The project team have taken measures to maximise efficiency by engaging with other relevant projects to seek out synergies and avoid duplication, it has secured co-financing beyond that which was identified in the project document though a partnership with the Atoll council who have provided office and meeting space to the PIU. Where feasible, to avoid costs and time from complex and costly travel logistics presented by the geographic context of the Maldives, the team has used remote meeting platforms where possible. Lastly, the project has continuously sought out ways in which to minimize time, cost and effectiveness impacts imposed by policies and procedures where possible.
73. However, this project is not operating at an efficient level for reasons outside the control of the project management team. As a government executed project, the project must adhere to national policies, procedures, and processes. At times these processes are not conducive or flexible to project or local contexts and this has significantly and negatively impacted the project in several ways and have been arguably the biggest challenges the project has faced. While adhering to national policies is of course essential in project implementation and not feasible for a project to expect them to change, these do need to be fully understood and considered at the project design stage to seek out ways to mitigate their potential impacts on project implementation. As a result of one size fits all policies and procedures, the project has suffered significant delays and at times it can be considered there is inefficient use of project staff time and financial resources. This has meant that there will be some negative effects in achieving some project outcomes. Further, while these are factors outside the control of the project, they do need to be highlighted as part of the MTR given the significant impact, they have had on the projects progress to date and expected impacts on achieving outcomes by project end. Specifically:

74. **Time- efficiency:** This is a project with significant outsourcing for technical expertise/ consultants to implement project activities. The national bidding procurement process for securing, for example a management plan consultant, is the same as for commercial procurement. This means that a) a firm can only apply, and b) criteria and conditions can exclude more appropriate or local candidates for example, either individuals or internationally registered but locally based NGOs, in favour of a commercial consulting businesses. The process is lengthy and goes through several procedures, and as a result of a number of reasons, the securing of several key consultancies has taken significant time (over a year) causing major delays in project activities which in turn affect the full suite of activities that can be completed by project end. For example, the NCA consultancy had to be advertised twice (Jan 2022, Nov 2022) since it must be advertised first locally and then open internationally, even though it was clear no national expertise existed. It would save time if one procurement process could be carried out with preference for local entities to avoid delays and time wasted by project administration to review and compile applicant information. Once advertised the entire procurement process required almost a further year before finally contracted (June 2023). This has been found for nearly all consultancies -e.g. the management plan consultancy was also advertised twice (Feb 2022; March 2022) and only contracted in Sept 2023, same for agricultural, fisheries and sustainable development consultants. In a 4-year project where 90% of its work is outsourced, a process that can take almost 18 months to hire a consultant is not feasible and will have a significant impact on achieving project outcomes. That said, it does appear that through good communication and collaboration between the Ministry's procurement office and the project team, while still very lengthy, it has somewhat improved. While some action can be taken such as advertising well in advance of expected implementation, or ensuring any criteria e.g. ToR requirements etc. are adhered to properly in the first instance, the process itself is designed more for commercial vendors and not technical consultants per se. The Ministry however recognizes this, and their procurement have placed a recommendation to address this issue to Ministry of Finance but is still waiting feedback. These time constraints should be identified at the project design stage and mitigation measures such as less ambition and less implementation time being considered when developing the work plan and annual budgets.
75. The procurement process also requires that three quotations are required for expenditures above approx. US\$130. The unique spatial distribution of the Maldives and its islands mean that transport is critical to be able to engage properly with stakeholders. Typically for one speed boat ride to an island it costs US\$200, this means that for every trip the project wants to make to visit or meet with the island council, 3 quotations and a lot of paperwork is needed. Since the Ministry of Finance does not accept online paperwork, it also means that further delays are incurred since paperwork needs to be then sent on a plane to Male from Laamu for signing and approval. Again, this is a lengthy process for a small value, for a critical activity, and a significant burden on the project's administration. Further, in small islands, to organise catering or venues etc. for workshops (where there are limited options) there are not 3 vendors to receive quotes, while this is still possible under procurement it does require further administrative process to justify why 3 quotations cannot be obtained. Ultimately, this can affect the level of engagement of stakeholders and thus project outcomes. There are also many other examples of other smaller policies and procedures that also lend themselves to inefficiency to which the project must adhere that are delaying other areas of the project.
76. **Cost-efficiency:** Having to use a national consulting firm instead of being able to hire an individual consultant for technical expertise or more local based CSOs/NGOs (if available/existing) that cannot meet the criteria required for commercial vendors, will inevitably mean that higher prices are being paid than is necessary, both in terms of fees and costs such as transportation. Unless the consultants are allocated the entire budget thereby circumventing national procurement processes and increasing time-efficiency there seems little benefit for hiring national firms, IF individual or local expertise is available. Further, this can also mean that higher costs are being paid for perhaps less expertise, with strict procurement standards perhaps favouring other criteria over technical competency.

77. **Outcome-effectiveness:** All these procurement-related delays have meant that in the remaining time several activities will have to be scaled back and will not be able to be met within the remaining timeframe. In addition to procurement, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes designed for large infrastructure projects are also being applied at a local level. The project has provided small grants to the WDCs on the islands of Laamu. Some of these subgrantees are now facing issues in implementation due to EIA procedures. The grants provided are 200,000 MVR for a period of 6 months. Two grantees met shared frustrations that once received and in progress there is now a requirement for an Environment Management Plan (EMP) as per EIA screening results. Another example of one size not fitting all, with small local environment projects being subjected to the same procedures as for large infrastructure projects. In order to get this EMP, the project must secure a nationally registered consultant on the EPA list for EMPs and pay for them with their grant- likely to cost between 50,000-150,000 (no-one could confirm exact costs) and which would take some months to complete. For example, this has been a requirement for a project to build a wooden bench and small wooden walkway as part of a mangrove restoration project in a small area and required for planning corals a coral garden for school education purposes, on one of the islands. These requirements will likely mean that IF the projects do get an EMP, there will be little to no money left for activities and they will be unlikely to be completed in the 6 months' time frame- therefore the objectives of the sub-grantees and as a result the project, will likely not be met. Since the project has a phase 2 for grants, the project team are using lessons learnt to improve and find solutions to this problem to avoid such issues again, such as recognising at grant application stage those that will require EMP, increasing the grant to include ear marked EMP costs or extending timeframes to allow for consultant procurement and the development of the EMP
78. For all of the reasons identified above, the reviewer would generally consider and rate the overall efficiency of the project as moderately unsatisfactory. However, since these issues are outside the control of the project and there are clear and commendable efforts of the Ministry and the project to overcome these challenges, as well as efforts where possible to increase their efficiency, the reviewer has instead allocated moderately satisfactory to this criterion.

Rating for Efficiency: Moderately Satisfactory

F. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring of Project Implementation

79. Project monitoring is ongoing by the team and good progress is being made to track progress and adequate budget is available. The project continuously monitors project outputs, efforts, and deliverables, with an MTR review occurring at an appropriate time. There is excellent record of meetings and workshop outputs along with sex disaggregated data being collected. A number of baseline indicator data has been collected such as KAP surveys or baseline agricultural practices. Some baseline data collection such as water quality data, although now on track, has been delayed, despite efforts by the project to engage numerous actors to collect the data. Some indicators at project design were not necessarily reflective of the project's efforts and their achievement, beyond the control of the project. In addition, given the change in contexts since project design and minor amendments due to delays, some indicators (suggestions in Annex IV) may need revision.
80. The project appears to report on the establishment of the six protected areas and their coverage against indicators 1 and 2 of project objectives. This is somewhat misleading as the protected areas were declared outside activities of the project and therefore cannot be considered an accurate indicator of the projects progress or success.

Project Reporting

81. All UNEP and Donor reporting is up to date and of high quality. There are no gaps or inconsistencies in reporting observed.

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Satisfactory

G. Exit Strategy & Sustainability

Exit Strategy

82. There is no exit strategy developed yet. This was discussed during the MTR and suggested that it should start sooner rather than later to adapt and maximize the project's efforts in the remaining time. The project would benefit from collaboration with the LGA to support the scaling up of project outcomes specifically, green growth atoll development, as part of its exit strategy.

Socio-political Sustainability

83. In November 2023 Maldives obtained a new government administration. With this comes potentially new priorities for the country. How the new administration will affect the project, or its environmental priorities is not yet fully clear but there are clear synergies with the new manifesto. For example, blue carbon and NCAs as well as eco-tourism, nature parks and MPAs. Further, several overarching visions seem to remain the same for example Biosphere Reserve status. However, there is no overarching national plan for Maldives, making changes under each administration likely and several stakeholders aired their concerns that the Baa Atoll BR is on paper only with little effective conservation management occurring in reality. Of one major concern to highlight for UNEP, and donors is the current discussion to degazette a PA which was just established in 2022 by the previous administration, in favour of a large harbour for construction. The lack of a national plan for the country and the current potential de-gazettement of a PA less than one year after gazettement, causes some concern for the socio-political sustainability of project outcomes which are strongly linked to the effective management of the PAs in Laamu Atoll, e.g. protecting natural capital, effectively managed core zones of a Biosphere Reserve and green growth development. However, its likely given the priority for blue carbon under the new administration, NCA will be supported moving forward.

Financial Sustainability

84. Several new projects are underway under MECTT, for example the World Bank's project to establish a national conservation fund and 3rd party interest in enhanced coral reef and marine NC resilience remains strong. Discussions have been held between the Ministry/project team and the NCA consultants regarding the potential for the consultancy firm to provide continued financial and technical support after the project end, which is looking likely. The Ministry has made several efforts to increase the sustainable funding, for example seeking ways to more effectively allocate funds for conservation from the Green Fund, which recently involve ensuring a proportion is earmarked specifically for conservation actions. A sustainable financing plan will be developed by the project, and this will provide a framework for the island councils, assuming support in place, to develop financing mechanisms to support PA management. Further, should the vision of becoming a BR come to fruition, there are plans to establish an Atoll Fund for BR management.

Institutional Sustainability

85. Under the new administration, some restructuring of departments and Ministries is underway and as a result new political appointees will be in place and will require the project to conduct re-sensitization activities. However, technical staff will remain as well. Currently there is a strong desire from MECCT to use Laamu as pilot for replication, and there is internal capacity to support BR nomination. There is some concern that at the Atoll institutional level, since there are no allocated environment council members or

officers, and limited funds available, environmental priorities may take second place in favour of other more basic and urgent needs of the islands where they are already operating on limited resources. Further, as council members change, the support, capacity, and interest in managing PAs or pursuing green growth or BR status may wane. Institutional sustainability would be greatly increased if an environment officer was allocated to the Atoll/island councils and if, as requested for two years, the MBS were allocated an environmental statistician who could champion the NCA agenda internally as well as being a focal point for significant capacity building in NCA.

Rating for Sustainability: Moderately Likely -Likely

H. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Project Inception

86. An online inception meeting was held with stakeholders and no comments received after this time. Some stakeholders mentioned that comments were made after the meeting but were not considered by the project. However, comments were received after a closing timeframe by the project and although not formally altered in the framework have been considered during implementation. The project would have benefited from a greater focus during the inception meeting on the feasibility of the project design, the role of stakeholders in project implementation given changes in context and status from original design stage, and to relook at potential risks to project implementation and outcomes. At project inception stage, many of the findings by the review e.g. outdated contexts, changes in status and priorities of project partners, would have been identified and amendments to the log frame could have been made at this stage. During this period also, it should have been identified and made clear to project management that UNEP was no longer going to provide the necessary NCA technical support that was intended and included and detailed in the project document and CEO endorsement. Instead, the project manager was only made aware of these changes in August 2021, this withdrawal of technical support committed and lack of communication about this led to further delays on the NCA component (as the project had to adapt to this), which was then further exasperated by lengthy procurement process as described in the efficiency section. Thus, the appropriate review and revision of the projects framework at inception phase could have improved effectiveness of project implementation and enhanced progress towards outcomes in some areas.

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

87. *UNEP/Implementing Agency:* During the project's lifetime thus far, two Task managers have been engaged with this project. The transition period did not take long with only two months occurring between TMs. Both TMs have carried out trips to the Maldives and the current TM and programme assistant have good relations with the project manager and team and *vice versa*. Although no formal progress meetings are held between the TM and PM, there are continuous and open lines of communication between the UNEP and the project management team. For the most part all required reports are up to date. There were some absences of half yearly reports when the new TM commenced, this has since been resolved and there are no current outstanding reports or issues needing addressed.

88. *Partners/Executing Agency:* This project is managed by a highly capable and competent team. Financial and activity reporting requirements are generally completed in a timely fashion and are of good quality. There is good team spirit among the project management team and the Male based PMU have continuous and open communication channels with the PIU in Laamu supporting the team in their activities. This team is supervised and supported by a national project director (NPD) seconded from the MECTT and who acts as chair to the PSC. Although some staff turnover has occurred e.g. the PIU is now on its third project coordinator, and a new NPD, the project has not been impacted negatively as a result and the new NPD is highly familiar with the project as a result of their involvement in the project development phase. A project steering committee has been

established and have met three times since the onset of the project and meeting minutes are available.

89. Overall, the project appears to be managed very well, with good horizontal and vertical relationships, communication and support occurring across the board, with no major issues reported from a project management/supervision aspect.

Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

90. Generally, the project is engaging well and has good relations with project stakeholders. There is good representation at meetings at a national level in particular, and good cooperation from the Atoll council. Many stakeholders expressed an interest in becoming more actively involved in the project activities with some concerns about using external consultants for implementation and not locally available expertise (if available), that cannot meet the stringent procurement criteria for commercial vendors, which would increase the project's long-term impacts and sustainability. The long delays in securing consultants for work on Laamu e.g. sustainable development and management planning, has meant that at a local level there has been frustrations from stakeholders with the lack of action and engagement by the project in the Atoll. Some awareness has occurred, but it has been limited especially over the past year plus. The review found that at a local level there is lack of support for PAs in some islands, a general lack of awareness on the benefits of PAs and what BRs are, and some confusion and lack of awareness about the project, even if they were direct beneficiaries. Although some vandalization of signage established by the project occurred, it is not likely nor concluded that it was a directly targeting or as a result of conflict with the project per se, but rather like as a result of multiple frustrations some islands have with government, PA establishment and/or other issues. The project team have engaged with the relevant island council and police on this issue and are seeking ways to prevent this happening again.
91. Despite this limited engagement in recent times of the project, it is duly acknowledged that significant activities are about to commence, and this will result in a greater stakeholder engagement at island council and local community level. In doing so, the project should also continuously seek out ways to more actively engage (rather than passive i.e. meeting attendees being provided information) local stakeholders. This is particularly important for management plan development, as it will be critical for the success of the PA that there is island and community buy-in which can only be achieved through proper consultation. The required engagement level for PA management planning should not be sacrificed at the sake of achieving the output of management plans by project end. It is recommended therefore, that if consultations are for whatever reasons, not able to be carried out to the full extent of what would be considered appropriate levels, the project should be prepared to accept the output as a draft and the MECCT continue with the appropriate engagement as necessary beyond the project. This is crucial and a necessary safeguard since the plan will likely identify resource use restrictions as well as governance and management structures.

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

92. The Maldives is still a patriarchal society in particular across the Atolls. The project has made efforts at the Atoll level to ensure gender representation and developed gender action plan in its ProDoc. They have held separate meetings for women, focused grants on the WDC and have female project staff. From participant lists of meeting minutes the project has achieved good gender representation. At the national level females are typically 50% or more represented. To be expected, this is slightly lower at the local level, but still close to 50%.

Environmental and Social Safeguards

93. A UNEP Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note (ESERN) was carried out for this project, which rated the project as moderate risk, highlighting mostly the potential impacts on protected areas establishment and management on resource use restrictions, with FPIC and extensive community consultations identified as a critical mitigation

measure. This was further emphasised in the environment and social management framework developed by the project. Management planning has commenced for the six protected areas; however, it is not evident where FPIC principles have been applied in this regard, and whether sufficient and appropriate engagement of local stakeholders into management planning is/will/can (in the time and scope of the consultancy) occur has yet to be seen. The project must ensure that necessary safeguards are in place that actively engage communities and that they are part of the decision-making process for identifying management plan objectives and actions, especially around resource use. A stakeholder workshop on the projects grievance redress mechanism was held and one complaint regarding lack of information on the project was obtained. The project responded well to this and stepped up their communication effort (paragraph 93).

94. The project has taken some measures to reduce their environmental footprint for example not using SUPs during meetings, having a PIU team to avoid excess travel, and holding remote meetings where possible.

Country Ownership and Driven-ness

95. There is strong country ownership and driven-ness of the project’s objectives, in particular from the MECCT and MBS. The project is highly aligned with national and atoll objectives for healthy reefs, as demonstrated by additional co-financing support observed from the Laamu Atoll council, co-financing sub-grantees by some island councils where grant funds were delayed, and, the wide group of stakeholders representing government, non-government, implementors and beneficiaries that made themselves available and giving their time to meet with the reviewer on this MTR to express their interest and support for the long term vision of the project. It is highly likely that with continued technical and financial support, the MECTT, MBS would continue to champion NCA to mainstream it across the country and across sectors.

Communication and Public Awareness

96. MECTT has dedicated pages on its website for its projects. On the ENDhERI page, project activity updates as well as project outputs such as workshop reports or technical reports are easily available for download. Some of these deliverables have been summarised and translated into the local language to share at the atoll level. The project has developed a communication and outreach plan and has dedicated social media handles on the most commonly used social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Viber. A communication task force as well as a viber public groups and island council groups have been created for Laamu atoll. Project information is further disseminated in new articles, media webpages and other medium. A video is currently in the process of being made which will support further public outreach.

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross Cutting Issues: Satisfactory

Table 6: UNEP and GEF review questions

| UNEP Questions |
|---|
| <p>What evidence is available that the project activities are contributing to an uptake in green growth and integrated Coastal Zone Management practices in key sectors in Laamu Atoll?</p> <p>At this point in the project, evidence is limited however some work is in progress, NCA work has commenced for Laamu Atoll, with some baseline extent and conditions surveyed and the management planning for PAs. There is strong interest and support at the Ministry and</p> |

| |
|--|
| <p>MBS to fully integrate NCA into its policies and plans. ICZM specifically is no longer on the agenda of the project, although through PAs and BR, this will be supported.</p> |
| <p>What evidence is available to suggest that the project has increased awareness and understanding of impacts and dependencies of local development on marine natural capital?</p> <p>As part of the review, discussions were held with the construction and tourism network representatives' part of the NCA technical committee and who appeared to fully understand the link between a health marine environment and local development. This was also evident across national government and stakeholders. While at the Atoll level there is an understanding of the importance of NC, it is perhaps less evident the understanding of the link from local development activities on its flows and values. At this point in the project, there has not been uptake observed yet as work in this regard is ongoing.</p> |
| <p>To what extent and in what ways is the project contributing to natural capital mainstreaming in fisheries, agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors?</p> <p>The project has already established a NCA committee which will continue beyond the project's life span. Through various workshops, meetings and training, there is good awareness across the different sectors as to what NC with some introductory knowledge on NCA. Using three NCA piloted for Laamu Atoll, the project will develop a national roadmap for NCA integration into national policies and plans and identify institutional capacity needs for its national uptake. The project is also building up social capital through training schoolteachers and the development of courses to be included in MNU curricula. Due to delays outside the projects control it is unlikely that mainstreaming will be observed or achieved by project end, however the project is expected to, and appears to be on track to, establish a strong foundation and to create an enabling environment that will allow the country to continue forward with the integration of NCA at a national level beyond the project's timeframe.</p> |
| <p>GEF Questions</p> |
| <p>What is the performance at the project's mid-point against Core Indicator Targets?</p> <p>The project originally aligned with core indicator 2.1- the creation of MPAs, at the Project development stage, however since then, 6 PAs, have been established at Laamu Atoll but outside the project and therefore while the country is has met core indicator 2.1 it cannot be attributed to the project. The project however will contribute to Core Indicator 5 Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity through its baseline surveys, awareness and capacity building and management planning activities, which will contribute to the nomination of Laamu Atoll as a Biosphere Reserve through strengthening the protection of its core zones.</p> |
| <p>What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program?</p> <p>There has been good stakeholder representation at the Male level and while there has been engagement at the Atoll level, long gaps as a result of project delays have meant that for about a year there have been very limited engagement at the island level. Island level engagement will increase as new activities are about to commence, but still remain more challenging than for Male. This is likely due to the geographic and spatial distribution of the Maldives, making it challenging for island representatives and community members to travel to one central place therefore requiring the project to go to each individual island for meaningful engagement, which can be logistically difficult, costly and time consuming. Since the project has recently commenced PA management planning, it is critical that there is sufficient engagement in this regard.</p> |
| <p>What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding gender-responsive measures and any intermediate gender result areas?</p> |

The Maldives is still a patriarchal society in particular across the Atolls. The project has made efforts at the Atoll level to ensure gender representation and developed gender action plan in its ProDoc. They have held sperate meetings for women, focused grants on the WDC and have female project staff. From participant lists of meeting minutes the project has achieved good gender representation. At the national level females are typically 50% or more represented. To be expected, this is slightly lower at the local level, but still close to 50%.

What has been the experience at the project's mid-point against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and any measures taken to address identified risks assessed.

As identified in the safeguards plan no negative environmental impacts were anticipated for the project, rather the project will incur positive environmental benefits. The ESMF determined a moderate risk for the project, and this was largely based around the establishment and subsequent management of project areas and the potential of resource use restrictions. The protected areas however were established outside the project since the development of the Safeguards plan. The project is commencing management planning for these protected areas, and it is critical that the appropriate levels of consultations are held with the relevant island councils and communities.

The implementation schedule has been identified as a substantial risk in the PIRs as well as the ambition of the project identified as a moderate risk for delays and to co-financing, partnerships, and coordination with other initiatives. It is evident at the MTR point that this highly ambitious project along with other external factors are at risk in being able to attain all of the project outcomes to their fullest extent as intended. Some minor revision of the framework is required to maximize the sustainable impacts of feasible interventions within the time remaining.

What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding the implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables?

The project has held a number of sensitization and awareness workshops. Project documents are readily available on the Ministries website, some have been translated into the local language and disseminated to Laamu Atoll stakeholders. In addition, there has been social media handles created and media exposure. An exit strategy has not yet been developed and this will identify key knowledge and learning deliverables and the channels for which to disseminate them to ensure the scaling up and replication of the project outcomes.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

97. Overall, this project has been rated “**Satisfactory**”. The project demonstrates good alignment with donor and national priorities and is driven by the country’s (in particular MECCT) priorities. It is a well-managed and executed project with good supervision, teamwork and communication across the IA, EA, and project team (Paragraphs 84-85). All required administrative and financial procedures and reporting has been adhered to. The project has established several baselines for indicators and is making efforts for their monitoring, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data (section IV C &F). A representative PSC has been established and are meeting annually, with three meetings held so far. In addition, the establishment of a PIU in Laamu Atoll co-financed (office space, meeting room use etc.) by the Atoll council, has meant that there is good awareness and relationships between the council and the project. Being located at the MECCT offices has also meant that the PMU is highly familiar with relevant ongoing or new initiatives in the country and makes efforts to identify areas for collaboration. There is good integration with MECCT and technical staff which allows for appropriate advice for the project team and enhances problem solving.
98. One of the biggest strengths of the project, in addition to the strong executing team and excellent horizontal and vertical communication and relationships, is its allocation of a project manager and team independent of the Ministry (EA), as this means that the PMU can be 100% focussed on project activities without being distracted by other duties- often seen in projects where Ministry staff are seconded to the project for management (Lesson Learned #3).
99. The project has however faced many challenges and while good progress is being/will be made, it is unlikely to achieve fully all of its intended outcomes in the remaining time, hence some minor revision is required (Recommendation 1). It is important to highlight however that the MTR review finds that this is not attributed to the project and its execution, but rather external factors/challenges outside its control. The first challenge comes from the complex and over ambitious project design with too wide a focus for the project’s timeframe (paragraph 55). It would have benefited from being separate into two phases- 1) creating an enabling environment, and 2) scaling up and mainstreaming as well as ensuring all planned outputs are within the mandate of the executing agency. The project will achieve this phase one, by setting the scene and creating a strong foundation and enabling environment providing some revisions are made and a greater focus on outcomes that are achievable in the remaining time that will help to move the project to the next level (paragraphs 63). Secondly, the project largely centres around NCA, which was intended to have UNEP support given the lack of technical capacity in-country. Once these circumstances changed there was mis- or lack of communication with the project team until the project was being implemented and support was requested. This meant that the project needed to adapt and secure external consultants, which through a long process meant further delays and instead of four years to implement NCA components, there is now only two years, as such, it cannot achieve all of its intended outcomes around scaling up and mainstreaming. Thirdly, the project is beholden to national administrative and financing procedures and while necessary, these have resulted in a number of unintended negative impacts on project implementation and have meant that several activities have been delayed for over a year (Section IV E). This gap has severely limited the time remaining to complete the wide and varied large volume of planned activities and the project could potentially run the risk of trying to spread itself too thin and ultimately jeopardising the sustainability or effectiveness of some actions to ensure it can touch on at least all aspects of the framework (paragraphs 70-76). Lastly, the time between project design (2017/2018) to project implementation (December 2020) has resulted in some elements of the project being outdated with several intended outputs (e.g. fish management plans, protected areas establishment) already progressing outside the project, in turn this has made it challenging to review the project against intended deliverables and outcomes as they do not necessarily reflect the ongoing efforts of the project. In spite of these challenges the project has tried to adapt and move forward with

interventions when possible and have already delivered significant outputs and are on track to ensure there is an enabling environment created for the projects overall intended objective.

100. Regarding the protection of Natural Capital (NC) in Laamu Atoll and the establishment of a Biosphere Reserve (BR), the project has carried out a number of baseline surveys which will support the development of three NCAs for Laamu, the identification of the three zones as well as government and co-management models for the Biosphere Reserve. The project will not deliver a Green Growth Strategy, nor island development plans during the project’s timeframe, but it will generate awareness among stakeholders of NC importance and values, and best practices for sustainable development and data that can be integrated and considered for the strategy and island development plan development beyond the project. The six Protected Areas established will form the core zone for the BR and the project is currently carrying out consultations to develop PA management plans for these core zones as per requirement for BR nomination. Due to the delays in activities related to management planning and sustainable development training and best practice activities, engagement at the Atoll and island level has been lacking over the past year. This has resulted in some frustration by the Atoll stakeholders. It is imperative, as per best practices and identified in the stakeholder plan, island and community engagement is stepped up and there are appropriate levels of meaningful and inclusive participation of island communities in management plan development (Recommendation 2).
101. The project through the secondment of expert consultants have commenced its work on NCA. Good progress has occurred so far with stakeholders being introduced and sensitized to NCA, the technical scope identified for Laamu, some baseline condition and extent surveys carried out and a national NCA technical committee established which has had two meeting thus far. The significant delays mean that there is little time remaining to mainstream NCA into other sectors however, through the project’s capacity building and the provision of a roadmap, the country will be better placed to continue and pursue this after the projects lifespan (paragraph 62).
102. It is likely that the momentum for NCA mainstreaming driven by the government will continue moving forward, as discussions are already being held for further technical and financial support from the current consulting organization once the project is finished. At the Atoll level, while the Decentralization Act provides a framework for the Atoll and its islands to manage its own resources, without the appropriate human, technical and financial support, it is a concern whether relevant project outcomes will be sustained given the many other basic needs and priorities they have with already strengthened resources (paragraphs 81 & 82).
103. In summary, the project is making good progress but unlikely to fully achieve its intended impacts as per project design, through no fault of the executing team. Some minor revisions are required to the framework outputs and activities, deliverables, and indicators to more accurately reflect the current context and status of the project. In the face of several challenges the team have adapted and maximized their efforts and the project team and executing agency are commended for the many successes achieved to date.

Table 7: Project Performance Ratings

| Criterion | Summary assessment | Rating |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Strategic Relevance | | HS |

| Criterion | Summary assessment | Rating |
|--|---|-----------|
| 1. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors, and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) Strategic Priorities | The project is aligned with UNEP's PoW 2022 – 2025: (Sub-program) Living in Harmony with Nature; GEF's focal areas BD3 – Program 6: Ridge to Reef+ and BD4 – Programme 10: Integration of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services into Development and Finance Planning. It is also aligned with national and subnational policies, with the countries transition to green growth and their vision of being a Biosphere Reserve and supports the NBSAP and implementation of the Decentralization Act. | HS |
| 2. Complementarity with existing interventions/ Coherence | Several projects are being implemented by MECCT, being located in the MECCT offices the PMU is fully aware and engaging with projects to identify possible synergies as well as seeking out ways to scale up opportunities to work with locally led interventions on the Laamu Atoll through its partnerships. | HS |
| Quality of Project Design & Revision of Design | Although good stakeholder engagement, gender and safeguard considerations, the project is too ambitious and too wide in scope to be effectively implemented within the given timeframe. A narrower focus would result in more impactful and sustainable outcomes. The project would have benefited from a greater review and revision of the framework during the inception meeting which would have also captured the changes in contexts and priorities since project design stage to adapt activities accordingly. | MS |
| Effectiveness | | S |
| 1. Theory of Change | Revised at inception and remodified at review | S |
| 2. Availability of outputs | Given changes in context from project design and some delays in the project, some deliverables and mid-term targets are not reflective of current efforts by the project or have not been met yet. However, outputs achieved are many and are available and accessible to stakeholders with some room for improvement to be a bit more proactive at the local level in sharing outputs. | S |
| 3. Progress towards project outcomes | Due to delays in some activities, the project is unlikely to meet some outcomes as fully as intended, including the integration of NCA at a national level across other sectors. However, the project will create an enabling environment so that with further support the country can continue to pursue this. | MS |

| Criterion | Summary assessment | Rating |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| 4. Likelihood of impact | There is likely uptake of NCA at a national level and to pursuing Biosphere Reserve status. Concerns for PA support outside the project exist at a national and local level due to limited human, technical and financial resources for PA management at an Atoll level, and national discussions ongoing about possibly on degazetting a very new PA, protecting a nationally important turtle breeding site, in favour of a harbour. | Moderately likely-likely |
| 5. Adaptive management | The project has demonstrated several instances of adaptive management. A number of stakeholders and consultants also reported and commended the willingness of the project team to listen to feedback and to adapt accordingly. | S |
| Financial Management | There are no gaps in financial reporting, and all are up to date. There is timely disbursement and reporting including co-financing reporting by partners. No financial issues have occurred or are outstanding. | HS |
| Efficiency | Due to factors (e.g. procurement processes, EIA screening among others) that have impacted the time- cost- and outcome-efficiency of the project, generally the overall efficiency of the project could be considered moderately unsatisfactory. However, given that these are issues outside the control of the project, and efforts have been demonstrated by the project to increase efficiency where possible, the project is rated moderately satisfactory for this criterion. | MS |
| Monitoring and Reporting | | S |
| 1. Monitoring of project implementation | Most baseline data have been collected, outputs are being monitored and sex disaggregated data collected. MTR timely. However, some revision of indicators is required | S |
| 2. Project reporting | All reports are up to date, no gaps, no inconsistencies | S |
| Exit Strategy and Sustainability | No exit strategy has been developed to date. A new administration is only since November 2023, therefore the placement of environment priorities on the national agenda is as of yet not fully clear. Some outcomes seem more likely to be sustainable than others, in particular NCA integration at the national level. However, with recent discussions on degazetting PAs, limited human, technical and financial capacity at the Atoll/island level for PA management, the sustainability atoll level biodiversity/reef protection outputs, and outcomes, seem less likely despite institutional technical capacity and finances available at the Ministry level. | ML -L |
| Factors Affecting Performance | | S |

| Criterion | Summary assessment | Rating |
|---|---|--------|
| 1. Project inception | An inception meeting was held but some suggested revisions of this review could have been captured at the inception phase to improve efficiency. Ineffective communication between UNEP and project management regarding withdrawal of committed support by UNEP for NCA lead to further delays in this area. Potential limiting policies and procedures as well as changes in context and SH priorities should have been addressed/discussed in more detail and resolved during the inception stage | MS |
| 2. Quality of project management and supervision | A very well managed project with excellent horizontal and vertical communication and supervision. 3 PSC meetings held to-date | HS |
| 2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency: | Good open relationships and communication, the project team would benefit however from more structured and regular meetings and technical support for NCA consultancy outputs oversight | S |
| 2.2 Partners/Executing Agency: | Day to day engagement with Ministry staff and good relationships with all project partners | HS |
| 3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation | Good at government level, could be improved at island and local community level, as evident by the lack of support for PAs in some islands, the lack of awareness on the benefits of PAs and what BRs are, as well as some lack of awareness about the project. However, it is acknowledged that island and community engagement will be stepped up moving forward due to the recent engagement of consultants and the work about to be carried out. | MS |
| 4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality | Despite a largely patriarchal nation, the project has made good efforts to increase gender representation which is reaching around 50%, higher or lower depending on if it's at a national workshop or local meeting. And there is good representation in the NCA technical committee. | S |
| 5. Environmental and social safeguards | An ESERN and ESMF have been conducted for the project. There are no environment risks identified for the project, but it does identify the potential risks as a result of PA establishment. It identifies FPIC and extensive consultation with communities as a mitigation strategy. There is a need for the project to ensure for management planning actions (currently ongoing at time of this review) these mitigation measures are carefully applied and monitored. A grievance redress mechanism has been established by the project and shared with stakeholders. The project has taken some measures to reduce their environmental footprint. | S |
| 6. Country ownership and driven-ness | The is strong country ownership and driven-ness of the project's outcomes in particularly across MECTT and MBS | S |

| Criterion | Summary assessment | Rating |
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| 7. Communication and public awareness | A communication and outreach plan has been developed for the project and its implementation is ongoing. Websites, social media, media, and face-to-face sessions are all channels that are used by the project | S |
| Overall Project Performance Rating at Mid-Point | <i>Overall, a well-executed project however attainment of planned outcomes will be challenged by its ambition at project design, changes in context and status of planned actions, and lengthy delays incurred, all factors outside the control of the project.</i> | S |

B. Lessons learned.

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| Lesson Learned #1: | Less can be more. A narrower project scope will likely result in more impactful and longer-lasting outcomes compared to projects with a wider scope. |
| Context/comment: | <p>A strong outcome orientated (as opposed to output orientated) project design is required if project objectives are to be sustained. A narrower scope does not imply less activities planned per se, but rather a more comprehensive set of activities towards more specific focal areas. This project dealt with a wide range of focus areas: agriculture, tourism fisheries, NCA, protected areas, waste management, island development plans and Green Growth for example, and highly ambitious levels of outcomes with a large number of outputs within a limited time period, for example, information and criteria met, BR nomination submission, BR status achieved, BR management and sustainable financing plans and structures in place and at the same time, NCA awareness increased nationally, all relevant data obtained and NC monitoring systems in place, NCA established and operational at a pilot site, capacity built across institutions, and NCA scaled up and integrated at a national level into fiscal policy as well as other policies and private sector operations and targets. As a consequence, the project depended on a number of agencies responsible for effective implementation, as well as a significant number of external consultants to cover the extremely wide technical focus areas of the project. When so much of a project is dependent on external actors outside the control of the executing agency or the project team, it runs the risk of having varying degrees of effort being applied, which can affect the achievement of project outcomes.</p> <p>While outputs may be achieved, multi-focus projects, where the scale, complexity and ambition of the project seem challenging within the given budget and timeframe, also run the risk of implementation becoming unmanageable, overwhelming, and unfocused with a high probability of the fragmented achievement of intended outputs and outcomes. Staff tend to spread themselves too thin, there is often unbalanced effort across components, and projects are often unable to complete all components effectively due to the dependency of the project on entities outside the executing agency for physical implementation of activities.</p> |

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| | <p>Projects with too wide a scope can inevitably end up sacrificing sustainability to ensure that all outputs are met by project end, or that at least a few activities have occurred across all areas by project end.</p> <p>It is recommended therefore that in order to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of project outcomes, future project designs should consider a narrower, more focused scope, and a more outcome-orientated approach should be applied.</p> |
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| Lesson Learned #2: | Relevant administrative and financial policies and procedures for project implementation should be fully understood and considered in project risk analyses with mitigation actions provided for where needed. |
| Context/comment: | <p>This project has clearly shown the impact that administrative and financial procedures and policies can have on a project's effectiveness and efficiency. At project design stage mandatory administrative and financial policies and procedures should be fully understood, and their potential impacts on project implementation clearly identified.</p> <p>Not typically considered in project risk analyses, administrative and financial procedures should be considered in future projects so that appropriate mitigation actions can be built into project design and planning as needed. For example, if it is known that the process of procuring consultants is a lengthy one, then most of the procurement should be carried out in year 1. The implementation of associated activities, or activities that depend on building block activities related to procurement, should then more accurately be considered, for example, as having 2-3 years or less for implementation not 4 as perhaps designed.</p> <p>Whether these processes are significant, or in some cases minor, all can have an impact on the project.</p> <p>Understanding the administrative and financial context in which the project is working, and adapting at the project design stage, would significantly improve the overall efficiency of project implementation even though it is likely some challenges will still remain.</p> |

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| Lesson Learned #3: | Alignment with national priorities, some flexibility, and a strong project team with pilot site presence are core elements for successful project implementation and in fostering good relations between project teams and implementing partners. |
| Context/comment: | <p>Despite some challenges, the project's multiple successes to date can be largely attributed to the project's management structure; the flexibility, adaptive management and problem-solving ability of the executing agency and project team; and the excellent relationship between the project team, the executing agency, and key partners.</p> <p>Although this is a Ministry-executed project, an outside Project Manager and PMU were hired for implementation. In other government-executed projects, often Ministry staff are seconded to manage donor projects,</p> |

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| | <p>and more often than not these staff members are still expected to continue with some or all of their normal duties. It is not uncommon therefore that at times project activities can sometimes take a back seat when Ministry duties are prioritized. This project clearly showed the benefit of having an independent project unit being 100% focused on project implementation, but still placed within the Ministry. As a result of this structure, there was daily communication with the Ministry allowing for good relationships to be built, fast problem solving and adaptation to challenges presented. Given the many delays and challenges the project faced, the project team remained flexible and continuously sought out ways in which to maximise their efforts and were open to adapting to suggestions by consultants to increase effectiveness. As a result of activities experienced already, for example from the first sub-grantees, the project is using lessons learnt to improve outcomes for the upcoming second phase of grants.</p> <p>In addition to an independent project team, having a local team <i>in situ</i> at pilot sites has shown to be a strength of the project. This has allowed for relationships to be built and continuous communication with key partners to be maintained. Further, it is an additional way for the project itself to provide benefits through employment, build capacity through on-the-job training, and to ensure local contexts and perspectives are considered.</p> |
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| Lesson Learned #4: | Seek out opportunities for low-hanging fruit, i.e. small, tangible benefits, and increased visibility during periods of inactivity, to maintain community interest, in particular where project delays occur. |
| Context/comment: | <p>As a result of prolonged delays, local stakeholders can become frustrated with a perceived lack of progress. It is important therefore that long gaps, or absences in visibility, are avoided to maintain community engagement, interest, and support in projects. In such instances, where possible, opportunities to generate small tangible benefits should be identified, or at the very least visibility maintained, by providing regular updates etc.</p> <p>Such an approach has multiple benefits including helping to build relationships further, keeping communities engaged and aware, and mitigating any potential frustrations and conflict as a result of long delays in implementation.</p> |

C. Recommendations

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| Recommendation #1: | Review and revise project outputs/activities (minor revisions) to maximise impact and sustainability of project interventions. |
| Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation: | The project's results framework while logical, is too complex and ambitious for the timeframe and budget. It includes some activities which are beyond the mandate of the executing agency and given the long GEF application process, the time between project design and project implementation spans several years. This means that some areas are no |

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| | <p>longer relevant as they have already been achieved outside the project (e.g. PA establishment) or priorities have changed (e.g. green growth strategy) or are not aligned with the project's timeframe (e.g. revision of island development plans (due 2025).</p> <p>Further, the wide scope of the project means that significant outputs need to be met, this can detract from ensuring the sustainability of outcomes in favour of deliverables. Laamu in particular has seen several projects over the years, and many of these, according to several stakeholders, have failed to leave any meaningful long-term impact and have not been sustainable. With such a broad scope this project also faces a risk in this regard. For example, the project conducted excellent coral reef monitoring training, but no provisions for how participants can continue to use this diving/monitoring training once the training was completed has been made. Thus, the output/deliverable has been completed but with no possibility of impact or sustainability beyond the training.</p> <p>There is a need therefore to review the framework to make its successful implementation more feasible within the timeframe, relevant to the changed contexts and country progress, and to enhance the sustainability of interventions. Some indicators will also need to be updated to reflect any changes, and to ensure that achieving them is within the control of the project.</p> <p>Along with this revision, the project should commence the development of its exit strategy. This will create opportunities for thinking about the potential long-term impact of any revised activities, where likely barriers for uptake may occur, and will enable the incorporation of mitigation activities to enhance sustainability, while reviewing and revising the project's log frame, as recommended.</p> <p>Reviewing and carrying out minor revisions to planned outputs and activities will allow the project to focus activities on increasing sustainability and will reflect more accurately the situation prior to the terminal evaluation. Suggested revisions have been made by the consultant, in consultation with the project team, which may require some movement across budget lines, and which are presented in Annex IV of the MTR report. Suggested revisions do not change the overall scope of the project, its outcomes or overall budget, and should therefore be considered minor revisions only, to be agreed at the discretion of the EZ and IA.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Critical recommendation |
| Type of Recommendation | Project |
| Responsibility: | Project Manager, MECCT NPD, UNEP TM |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | Immediate |

104. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV [Quality & Revision of Project Design](#)
- Section IV [Effectiveness](#)
- Section IV [Project Inception](#)

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| <p>Recommendation #2:</p> | <p>Increase efforts in Island, community, and private sector engagement to further enhance the sustainability of project outcomes.</p> |
| <p>Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:</p> | <p>As a result of the long delays in hiring consultants for component 1 Laamu Atoll activities, there has been a significant time-gap in engagement by the project at the island and local community level, as well as with the private sector. This has contributed to stakeholder frustration, some conflict (signs vandalised- however not directly aimed at the project,) around the establishment of PAs, and lack of awareness around the project and its objectives.</p> <p>Although the project is now about to commence several activities in Laamu as a number of consultants are hired, the project should make sure that quality of activities is not sacrificed for quantity. The reviewer recommends caution and due diligence when proceeding with management planning activities in particular, as obtaining buy-in from local communities, and a sense of contribution into PA objectives and activities, will be essential for the successful implementation of any PA management plan. Developing protected area management plans requires significant stakeholder consultations from the very beginning. Meetings should be conducted in-person on the islands, and communities should have input into the design of plans, and not merely the opportunity to review an already-drafted plan - doing this will require several meetings. There is also a concern that both the planned time-frame for the consultancy, and the wide scope of its remit (PA management planning, willingness to pay surveys, financial planning and training needs etc.) runs the risk of management plans being developed with inappropriate levels of consultation, and as a result plans that are not supported at council or community level and remain simply gathering dust on a shelf.</p> <p>It was further evident, from stakeholder interviews during this review, that awareness relating to what PAs are, what is allowed or not allowed in PAs, the benefits of PAs, and what Biosphere Reserves are, is limited. In addition, and as a result of so many projects being implemented in Laamu, stakeholders are sometimes unclear which activities are attributed to the ENDhERI project. This lack of awareness, particularly related to the values of PAs, and the lack of visible benefits thus far from projects generally, is likely to be a contributing factor to the apparent support for the de-gazettement of a PA, in favour of a harbour, by some national and local stakeholders.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that island and community engagement can be logistically challenging and that plans are in place to step up engagement at this level by the project moving forward, however it cannot be emphasised strongly enough that there can never be too much engagement at this level, especially around PAs, and the project should, where possible, maximise engagement with island councils and communities until the end of the project. Further, if it is felt that insufficient engagement for the development of management plans has occurred, the project team could continue with engagement by freeing up time and resources from a reallocation of efforts and movement between budget lines to allow for this. If necessary, the project's outputs could be viewed as draft plans, with the Ministry continuing consultations beyond the project.</p> <p>Due to time limitations, and the wide scope of design, it is unlikely that the project can truly engage the private sector in any meaningful way that will</p> |

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| | <p>result in them integrating NC by project end. As such, private sector engagement and planned activities such as registering national standard's and so on should be significantly scaled back. However, the project can still play a vital role in increasing awareness in the private sector and setting the scene for future NCA work within these sectors. The project should seek out ways to do this with minimum effort and project resources, for example, by using existing platforms such as MATI and MNACI to act as multipliers (reducing time), and potentially being part of their AGM (reducing finances) to get key messages across to their network of operators. Time and cost savings from reducing private sector elements of the project (see areas in suggested revisions) could then be utilized in a more effective way e.g. scaling up island engagement to improve the sustainability of key project outcomes.</p> <p>The Knowledge Centre has also changed from a permanent to a temporary building and the heritage island where it is planned to “be based”, intends to be leased to a private company to run, which will include the lessee hiring their own specimen curators. As such, providing significant training for a number of individuals unlikely to be involved in specimen curating for the centre could be inefficient. I Rather, selecting key people from MMI and URBANCO to participate in an exchange trip to see how to prepare and store specimens would likely be more cost-effective than hiring a consulted to train an unnecessarily large number of people. This would then free up significant budget that could be used more effectively by stepping up local engagement.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Opportunity for improvement: |
| Type of Recommendation | Project |
| Responsibility: | Project management, consultants, MECTT |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | Now until project end |

105. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV **Quality & Revision of Project Design**
- Section IV **Effectiveness**
- Section IV **Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation**
- Section IV **Environmental and Social Safeguards**

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| Recommendation #3: | Ensure synergy among consultants to avoid stakeholder fatigue, to better streamline engagement and to maximise sustainability of outcomes. |
| Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation: | <p>This project outsources much of its activities to national consultancy firms. As a result of significant delays in procurement, component 1 outcome 1.2. currently has, or soon will have four concurrent consultancies: agriculture, waste management, fisheries, and sustainable development.</p> <p>Several of these consultants will require the same individuals (e.g. Atoll/island councils) to be part of corresponding training events and</p> |

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| | <p>consultations, across different thematic areas, simultaneously or sequentially over a short period of time. This is true for a number of different stakeholders. As identified in the MTR inception report, this raises a concern regarding stakeholder confusion (by being engaged in a number of potentially new topics simultaneously or within a short timeframe) and fatigue, and the ability to commit the required time, at all stakeholder levels, throughout and by the end of the project. Further, given the delays, and thus the remaining time to complete activities, for example in component 1 - 1 1/2 years to complete what was originally planned for 4 years, there is a risk once again that as a result of the sheer volume of activities outputs and deliverable quantity will favoured over outcomes and sustainability.</p> <p>The project team is, commendably, already coordinating and putting consultants in contact with each other, however more structured and regular coordination meetings with all the consultants together is recommended. This will help to ensure alignment of activities/stakeholder engagement. For example, if all consultants need to meet with the island council, all could go together as part of one meeting (if feasible), or if two consultants need to visit an island they could go together in the same trip/boat. This will help to increase cost- and administration-efficiency. Together with the consultants, where possible and feasible the project should review activities and prioritise reducing the number of deliverables and stepping up activities and efforts likely to result in more long-lasting impacts, as well as ensuring that all required deliverables are feasible within the contract timeframe.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Opportunity for improvement: |
| Type of Recommendation | Project |
| Responsibility: | Project manager, consultants |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | Now until project end |

106. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV **Effectiveness**
- Section IV **Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation**
- Section IV **Sustainability**

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| Recommendation #4: | Additional sensitization work should be carried out with the new administration in particular around NCA and the importance of PAs to the economy. Synergies with the new manifesto and project objectives should be identified, understood, and highlighted by the project. |
| Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation: | A new Administration commenced in Nov 2023. This means that there has been and will continue to be some institutional restructuring and new political appointees in key decision-making positions. There is a need therefore for the project to sensitize this new administration to the project's objectives, activities, progress, and challenges. Increased and solid political will and support for the activities of the project, and commitment to the continued support of project outcomes, in particular |

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| | <p>those requiring up-taking beyond the project lifespan, will be essential for any successful long-term impacts of the project.</p> <p>A key focus area in this sensitization will be to ensure critical entry points and areas of alignment between the projects objectives and the new administration are identified, understand by all parties, and highlighted by the project. Based on MTR stakeholder consultations, blue carbon, nature parks, and eco-tourism are some of the areas where priorities can be aligned.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Critical Recommendation |
| Type of Recommendation | Project and Partners |
| Responsibility: | Project management and MECCT |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | As soon as possible |

107. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV **Socio-political Sustainability**

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| Recommendation #5: | Capitalize on UNEP TM experience and establish more formal meetings quarterly to check in with team and support NCA aspects. |
| Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation: | <p>There is excellent and open communication between UNEP Task Manager and Project management, and it is acknowledged that the openness of the TM for communication has not been proactively utilized fully thus far by the project. As identified by the team, it would perhaps make it easier for the project management team if, in the remaining time of the project, and in addition to the current ad hoc communications that have taken place up to now, more structured and regular meetings are held with the TM, This would not only support the project management team more, but also allow the TM to be fully aware of some the immediate challenges the project may be facing.</p> <p>In addition, the project, partners, and stakeholders expressed concerns that due to limited technical capacity they cannot truly provide oversight, review, and provide input into the NCA consultant's outputs. Since the TM has expertise in NCA, these more regular meetings between the TM and project team could also act as a tool for the TM to provide much needed additional NCA technical support and oversight on ongoing NCA activities and the implementing consultants.</p> <p>It is recommended that quarterly meetings are established between the project management team (or even just the project manager if only available at times) and the TM. These meetings may take various forms, from simple updates and situation reports, to more in-depth NCA technical support/problem solving.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Important Recommendation |
| Type of Recommendation | Project and Partner |

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| Responsibility: | Project manager and UNEP TM |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | As soon as possible until project end |

108. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV **Project management and supervision**

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| Recommendation #6: | PMU, MECCT, EPA and MoF to discuss potential avenues for increasing the efficiency of project implementation for the remaining time given current administration and financial policy requirements, and for future donor projects that may occur. |
| Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation: | <p>Easily the largest challenge that the project is facing, and that has an impact on project implementation, effectiveness, and efficiency. While recognized and appreciated that there are nationwide policies and procedures that the project MUST work within and projects cannot change, it needs to be highlighted how they can negatively affect the project if not incorporated into project design. These issues should be brought to the table, to see if there is any scope for flexibility within the procedures or how the project could reduce any impacts they might have on project implementation in the remaining time.</p> <p>It is evident that many of these policies, processes and procedures are a one-size-fits-all approach and as such are at times not conducive for a project or at a local level.</p> <p>For example, to procure technical expertise to support activities such as management planning, the process appears to be same as it would be if it were a large commercial procurement. This is a lengthy process, at times over a year (a quarter of a 4-year project). In addition, the technical expert must come from a nationally registered firm – therefore potentially excluding more experienced and appropriate individuals or locally operating (including HR) but internationally registered NGOs, as well as incurring potentially unnecessary high costs of national consulting firms. The time spent and the repeated need to readvertise, and consequently having a procurement process that often takes over a year and a half, can cause unnecessary use of project administration resources, reduce the time available for implementing the associated activities, and often causing a deleterious knock-on effect. Further the costs of hiring a national firm instead of an individual expert for example (if expertise is available, will be significantly more costly for the project.</p> <p>The low threshold for 3 quotations, i.e. approx. \$130 is not conducive to work outside Male in Atolls. Since Atolls are made up of islands, any work project-based or otherwise will require travel between islands. A standard speed boat typically costs \$200 meaning that for every trip to one of the islands 3 quotations and significant paperwork to be sent by plane to Male is required. Further, many of these islands do not have 3 hotels or caterers for example if they want to hold a meeting. The need for this requirement for the most basic of needs when working in the Atolls can create a large and inefficient administrative burden on projects or other initiatives. The fact that all paperwork must be in hard copy and cannot be submitted online and therefore must be physically sent (for each element that</p> |

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| | <p>requires 3 quotations) as well as additional burden, delays implementation even further. Processes such as these make it very difficult for projects to function to the best of their ability and effectiveness when such time-consuming financial administration is needed.</p> <p>Lastly, another major process that can affecting small local projects is EIA screening requirements, where small sustainable infrastructure is planned within the project e.g. benches, small wooden walkways, appear to be subjected to a similar screening process as large commercial infrastructure project. An environment management plan developed by an EIA nationally registered consultant is required in the above example to be completed prior to implementation. This is neither cost- or time efficient for a small local project with limited time and finances already and runs the risk of being a barrier for many local small initiatives moving forward.</p> <p>The are many other minor nuances that also create unnecessary administrative burden, time-delays and ultimately can affect the effectiveness of projects.</p> <p>Roundtable discussions should be held to identify and discuss these particular areas mentioned as well as to identify other potential processes that may impact the effectiveness and efficiency this project or future donor funded projects. Policies and procedures could be reviewed to identify opportunities for some flexibility from a one size fits all approach for example, EIA procedures and requirements slightly different depending on the size and type of the project or agreed higher thresholds for donor funded projects for quotations, different procurement procedures for large commercial projects compared to technical consultants and so on. Such provisions could be discussed and stipulated at project agreement stages or if no such provisions could be made at the very least projects are designed with these in mind so that some of the potential impacts can be mitigated.</p> |
| Priority Level: | Opportunity for improvement: |
| Type of Recommendation | Partners |
| Responsibility: | MECTT, PMU, EPA and MoF, GEF |
| Proposed implementation timeframe: | As soon as possible |

109. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

- Section IV **Efficiency**
- Section I **Project Challenges and Changes**

110.

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Table 7: Response to stakeholder comments received but not (fully) accepted by the reviewers, where appropriate

| Page Ref | Stakeholder comment | Reviewer Response |
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ANNEX II. PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE REVIEW

Table 8: People consulted during the Review.

| Organization | Name | Position | Gender |
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| UNEP | Kavita Sharma | Task Manager | F |
| | Peerayot Sidonrusmee | Programme assistant | M |
| | Sereh Shaiya | FMO | F |
| PMU | Mariyam Fazna | Project manager | F |
| MoECCT/NPD | Lisama Sabry | Head of Biodiversity Unit/National Project Director / NCA technical committee chair | F |
| MoECCT/ Protected areas and biodiversity Unit | Muhusina Abdul Rahman | Director of Protected Areas | F |
| PMU | Samu Wafir | Project Assistant | F |
| | Ali Nizar | Communication Specialist | M |
| | Mariyam Rifga | Community co-management consultant | F |
| PIU | Mohamed Najih Waleedh | Laamu project Coordinator | M |
| | Aminath Nazeela | Laamu Administrative Support | F |
| UNSW | Jordan Gacutan | Consultant | M |
| Water Solutions pvt | Ahmed Jameel | Managing Director | M |
| | Mizna Mohamed | Management Plan Consultant | F |
| | Faruhath Jameel | GIS Specialist | M |
| | Ibrahim Faiz | Environmental Consultant | M |
| | Aishath Basma | Junior Environmental Consultant | F |
| | Aishath Zara Athif | Research Assistant | F |
| EPA | Yoosuf Rilwan | Director Environment research centre/NCA technical committee member | M |
| Ministry of Fisheries and Ocen resources (former MFMRA) | Munshidha Ibrahim | Director Fisheries management | F |
| | Shafiya Naeem | Director General MMRI | F |
| Procurement department MECCT | Abdulla Aiham Mohamed | Head of Procurement | M |
| | Hawwa Enath Adam | Procurement officer | F |
| MNU | Waheed | | F |

| Organization | Name | Position | Gender |
|---|--|---|--------|
| Urbanco | Abdulla firag | Assistant Director Landscape design planning and development | M |
| | Fathmath Ushwa | Senior Landscape Architect- Planning and Development | F |
| | Aminath Firusha | Landscape Architect- Planning and Development | F |
| Local Government Authority | Hawwa Izwath | Director policy, planning and international relations | F |
| | Khadheeja Abbas | Assistant Director | F |
| | Ibrahim Sharaf Thaufeeq | Senior Planning Officer | M |
| | Vdhuma Abdhulla Inayath | Planning Officer | F |
| Ministry of Tourism | Aishath Ali | Director General | F |
| | Fathimath Zaina Shareef | Senior Environment Officer | F |
| | Mohamed Sinan | Environment Officer | M |
| MNACI | Adnan Haleem | Secretary General/ NCA committee Member | M |
| | | Legal Advisor | M |
| MNPFI | Aishath Saadh | Deputy Director General/Steering Committee Member | F |
| | Anwar Ali | Deputy Director General | M |
| | Fathimath Nazeera | Spatial Planning Analyst | F |
| | Aman Khaleel | Senior Planning Analyst | M |
| | Samaha Ali | Senior Planning Analyst | F |
| MBS | Aishath Hassan | Chief Statistician | F |
| | Sajida Ahmed | Statistician | F |
| | Ashiyath Shazna | Statistician | F |
| MATI | Rafi Mohammed | Executive Director/NCA Committee | M |
| Local community/training participants | Abdulla Naseem Adam Latheef Ahmed Rameez Ali Shafeeu Aslam Mukhthaar | Coral reef monitoring training participants | 6M |
| Blue Marine Foundation | Aminath Shaha Hashim | Maldives Programme Manager | F |
| | Hassan Moosa | Education and Outreach Officer | M |
| | Mufliha | Researcher | F |

| Organization | Name | Position | Gender |
|--|---|---|--------|
| Six senses | Lawrence Menz | Director of Sustainability and Conservation | M |
| Six senses -MUI | Greg Holder | Base Leader and Guest Education Coordinator | M |
| | Jess Hodge | Research Coordinator | F |
| | Maahil (Coco) | Research Assistant (Coral Tank Technician) | M |
| | Mariyam Rafha Abdulla | MUI Intern | F |
| | Miriam Staiger (Matra Trust) | Project Manager | F |
| | Zakwan Zameer (mantra trust) | Assistant Project Manager | M |
| | Julian Gervolino (Olive Ridley Project) | Sea Turtle Biologist and Guest Educator | M |
| | Mohamed Ziyaan (Olive Ridley Project) | Sea Turtle Biologist Intern | M |
| | Jenny Baker (BMF) | Laamu Project Manager | F |
| | Afaaz Zahid (BMF) | Resort Research and Fisheries Officer | M |
| Maamendhoo Island Council | Hassan Rameez | Council President | M |
| | Ibrahim Rameez | Councilor | M |
| | Aishath Azma | Councilor | F |
| | Mariyam Natasha | Councilor | F |
| | Aboobakr Yamin | Secretary General | M |
| Laamu Farmers Association (LAFA) | Abdulla Shareef | LAFA Representative | M |
| Maamendhoo School – Sub grantee | Naila | Leading Teacher, Nature Club President | F |
| | Aminath Alia | Primary teacher, Nature Club member | F |
| Fonadhoo Island Council | Mohamed Faiq | Secretary General | M |
| | Ahmed Mamdhoo | Council Vice President | M |
| Maavah Island council and WDC - sub grantees | Fathimath Shehenaz | WDC president | F |
| | Ahmed Moosa | Council President | M |
| | Salman Abdulraheem | Councilor | M |
| | Mariyam Maleeha | Council Secretary General | F |
| | Ukaashath Mohamed | Councilor | M |
| | Aminath Ansoodha | Councilor | F |
| Laamu Atoll Council | Ismail Ali | Atoll council president | M |
| | Yoosuf Amir | Secretary General | M |
| | Hussain Habeeb | Council Executive | M |

| Organization | Name | Position | Gender |
|--------------|-------------------|---|--------|
| | Athifa Zahir | HR head /NCA technical Committee member | F |
| | Hussain Rafyu | Council | M |
| | Mohamed Zahir | Council | M |
| | Ahmed Shiyaz | Council | M |
| | Aishath Ilmunissa | Council | F |

ANNEX III. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project planning and reporting documents

- MTR Consultant's Terms of reference /UNEP MTR tools
- Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) PIF
- CEO Endorsement Request
- UNEP Project Document: Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) plus Appendices 1-24:
- GEF and STAP Reviews
- Draft project supervision plan
- UNEP Financial and Admin templates
- ENDhERI Environment and Social Safeguards Management Framework
- Cash advance request
- Quarterly expenditure reports Q2-2021 -Q2-2023
- PIR's 2021-2022; 2022-2023
- Co-finance report 2021-2023
- Inventory of non-expendable equipment
- Management planning ToRs

Project outputs – Overall

- Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Ecosystem Conservation and Management in Laamu Atoll
- Environmental and Social Management Framework – ENDhERI
- Laamu Atoll PPA Zonation Report
- Baseline Report – Waste Management in Laamu Atoll
- Laamu Environmental KAP Survey Report
- Baseline Report on Agricultural Practices in Laamu Atoll
- mangrove-wetland-tour-report
- technical-scope-report-consultancy-service-for-development-of-natural-capital-accounting
- Scoping Report on Ecosystem Extent and Condition in Laamu Atoll
- endheri-project-sensitization-report-year-1
- Preliminary Assessment and Mapping of Maavah Mangrove
- ENDhERI Communications and Outreach Plan
- Small Grant RFP/submissions/evaluation report
- GZJ progress verification form
- Mundoo progress verification form
- Maamendhoo school project budget and workplan
- NCA consultancy agreement
- Fisheries Practices in Laamu Atoll- Baseline Draft Report
- NCA technical committee meeting minutes (1st &2nd)
- NCA Stakeholder meeting
- UNSW meeting minutes (x

ANNEX IV. SUGGESTED RESULTS FRAMEWORK REVISIONS

I. Suggested revisions all components

| Original | Suggested revisions | Justifications | Activities for consideration |
|---|--|--|---|
| Component 1: Green growth development for Laamu Atoll in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors | | | |
| Outcome 1.1: Increased sustainability of marine and coastal resource management under a Green Growth Strategy for Laamu Atoll | | Since project inception the Ministry has declared six PAs in Laamu and have prioritised the vision to form a Biosphere reserve. These six areas will form the core zone of the biosphere reserve. | Strengthen communication engagement and awareness of PAs and benefits; BRs etc; Emphasise tourism link; Training capacity building follow up with relevant equipment where possible; -any equipment purchased for PA support; seek out opportunities for increasing capacity and involving local NGOs and other potential local actors in the Atoll |
| Indicator (s) for output 1.1: Area (ha) of Marine Managed Area (MMA)/ Biosphere Reserve delineated with agreed incentive-based co-management mechanisms | <i>Percentage Increase in proposed BR core zone (baseline 6 PAs areas target- increased through ESAs or other)</i> | The project will contribute to the nomination of BR by ensuring the relevant information and criteria are met for nomination such as management plans for the PAs etc- Island development plans are revised every 5 years. | |
| <i>Indicator 1.1.2: Number of island communities with agreed roles in NC-based planning for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and actively participating in the co-management of a new MMA/BR</i> | <i>No. of PAs with management and financial plans that incorporate natural capital considerations - target 6</i> | The current plans 2022-2026, were revised in 2021/2022 at the beginning of the project execution. The project was designed in 2017 and approved/commenced implementation in 2020/2021. The lengthy time between project design and approval/implementation meant that that the timeframe had shifted as to where the project would be when development plan revisions were due. Since the new island development plans are up for revision in 2025/2026 – the projects timeframe is no longer aligned with the development of these plans, which may affect island community agreements. However, island communities’ agreements for ICZM and sustainable practices will be attained through the PA management planning process and BR consultations and management. | |
| <i>Indicator 1.1.3: Number of island community agreements with modified land-based production processes and sustainable fisheries for reduced impacts to reefs</i> | | | |
| Output 1.1.1: Green Growth Strategy, Marine Managed Area/Biosphere Reserve and Sustainable Development Plans for Laamu Atoll and selected islands implementation advanced through capacity development, participatory planning, and operational support. | | | |
| Output 1.1.2: Three SEEA-EEA based Natural Capital (NC) Accounts established and operationalized for Laamu Atoll (freshwater; marine & coastal ecosystems; key marine species) | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Outcome 1.2: Reduction in stressors impacting Laamu Atoll reefs (through implementation of Green Growth and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) practices in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors)</p> | | <p>To reflect feasible scope of project given changes and delays</p> | |
| <p><i>Indicators for Outcome 2.1: Indicator 1.2.1: %age of annual solid waste load in targeted communities that is collected for recycling and sanitary disposal</i></p> | | | |
| <p><i>Indicator 1.2.2: %age reduction in organic water pollution load at targeted sites (BOD/COD, Total N, Total P, conductivity)</i></p> | | | |
| <p><i>Indicator 1.2.3: Percentage of households in targeted communities that have adopted codes of conduct for sustainable bait, reef, and grouper fishing methods as a result of project activities;</i></p> | | | |
| <p><i>Indicator 1.2.4: Number of businesses adopting codes of conduct for sustainable practices in targeted sites and communities as a result of project activities:</i></p> | <p>Number of businesses committed to adopting codes of conduct for sustainable practices in targeted sites and communities as a result of project activities</p> | <p>Verifying whether business adopt code of conducts will require evidence from business operations/reports. The timeframe for creating awareness, identifying best practices, and building capacity in business for sustainable practices and business incorporating and implementing these into their operations may be beyond the project’s timeframe realistically. Therefore, it is recommended to rather assess the number of businesses committed to adopting codes of conduct determined by for e.g. signed declarations of their commitment etc.</p> | |
| <p>Output 1.2.1: Targeted island communities sensitized and increasingly apply eco-technologies for sustainable food production and disposal of domestic waste</p> | | | <p>Seek out opportunities for meeting gaps that the MCEP project is not meeting to make waste disposal outputs more sustainable e.g. HH awareness</p> |
| <p>Output 1.2.2: Adoption of sustainable tuna bait and demersal reef fisheries in conformity with the draft Maldives Fisheries Master Plan</p> | <p>Capacity built for engaging in sustainable fisheries</p> | <p>Sustainable tuna bait and demersal reef fisheries practices and a finalised Maldives Fisheries Master Plan was developed by the Ministry of fisheries prior to project commencement. Therefore, the project has adapted to changing circumstances and is therefore working to build capacity in island communities for sustainable fisheries</p> | <p>training in eco-tourism practices- tangible benefit for communities/council; seek to develop voluntary commitments to support sustainable practices by council; seek out ways to address EIA issues in small grants e.g. more funds and time for EMP development; discussions with EPA to waiver if infrastructure development is minimal and</p> |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Output 1.2.3: Partnership, policy and implementation standards for Green Growth established with the Atoll Council, national construction firms and tourism operators on Laamu Atoll, and registered nationally</p> | <p>Partnership, policy, and implementation standards for Green Growth established with the Atoll Council, national construction firms and tourism operators on Laamu Atoll, and if possible registered nationally</p> | <p>In 2023, a new government administration was inaugurated. At the time of the MTR the full extent of the new government’s commitment to all intended outcomes and outputs of the project are not clear. There does however appear to be a high priority for infrastructure development even if at the expense of key biodiversity areas (e.g. see paragraph 83). As such it is recommended to place “if possible” as a caveat as there may be a shift in priorities from previous administrations at a national level with regard to infrastructure development.</p> | <p>has negligible potential impacts; utilize LGA knowledge platform opportunities</p> |
| <p>Component 2. Building social capital for a green economy</p> | | | |
| <p>Outcome 2.1: Increased understanding of the values and dependencies on marine natural capital and biodiversity supports improved livelihoods and sustainable development on Laamu Atoll and nationally</p> | | | |
| <p>Indicators for Outcome 2.1: Indicator 2.1.1: Increased knowledge and awareness levels of targeted sector industries, civil society and government on coastal and marine NC values and dependencies</p> | | | |
| <p>Indicator 2.1.2: Number of Laamu school students participating in field studies each year after teachers are trained by the project in delivery of coastal and marine biodiversity conservation</p> | | | |
| <p>Output 2.1.1: Biodiversity conservation and Green Growth in Laamu Atoll and nationally supported by increased awareness among targeted groups and a National Biodiversity Knowledge Centre</p> | <p>Biodiversity conservation and Green Growth in Laamu Atoll and nationally supported by increased awareness among targeted groups</p> | <p>Urbanco a project co-financing partner has faced several delays in the development of knowledge centre. Firstly, there has been numerous changes to the main Farukolhufushi Master Plan by Urbanco, which includes the Knowledge Centre (KC) development, budget for the civil works regarding the KC has also been delayed and currently therefore Urbanco is seeking a private investor. As a result, since works have not commenced at all on the island, the construction of the KC will not be completed and questionable if even commenced, within the project’s timeframe even with the NCE. The project and Urbanco have adapted to this by looking at existing infrastructure for use temporarily. These delays have been outside the</p> | <p>The knowledge centre is no longer possible within the project time-frame due to issues outside the control of the project however interpretative material will be still developed for a temporary centre and relate activities continue. Strongly consider budget allocation from knowledge centre to other activities (e.g. increased local SH engagement). The KC will be leased to private sector, and they will hire their own curators as such, suggest that project MMI and URBANCO individuals for exchange to learn about specimen creating and building requirements for storage rather than planned training. This will likely leave budget remaining to be moved- to be discussed with</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | | projects control and the project maintains regular communication with Urbanco for developments. | UNEP and Ministry. Other activities to consider use MACI and MATI AGMs as platforms to increase awareness in private sector; Strengthen engagement with island councils and communities; use university open day as awareness of opportunities in environment filed to try attracting more students to this field |
| Output 2.1.2: Increased capacity for cross-curricular delivery of coastal and marine ecology and natural capital subjects in national schools, and incorporation of natural capital accounting in natural sciences and environmental management curricula at MNU | | | |
| Component 3. Mainstreaming natural capital accounting (NCA) into fisheries and agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors | | | |
| Outcome 3.1: Increased institutional capacity, clarified mandates and integration of NCA in marine biodiversity conservation policy and programmes | | | Focus on building awareness of NC value in private sector and other govt agencies, building solid foundation for scaling up by focus capacity efforts on MECCT, MoF MNPPI and MBS; create a buzz around Natural capital to PR; establish a technical working group to meet more frequently and to ID consistent focal points at least 2 in each organization (to avoid knowledge loss from staff turnover); MBS should be actively engaged from data collection to analysis stage... |
| Indicators for Outcome 3.1: Indicator 3.1.1: Enhanced national government institutional capacity and coordination for NCA as measured by: Number of government staff trained by the project with new NCA-related responsibilities (disaggregated by agency / unit) | | | |
| Indicator 3.1.2: Number of national government policies and/or sector programmes adopted or modified to include NC considerations and targets based on NC Accounts | | | |
| Indicator 3.1.3: Number of new fiscal mechanisms benefiting marine/coastal NC, or reduction in disincentives related to NC | | | |
| Indicator 3.1.4: Extent to which annual reporting for national (economic accounts by the National Bureau of Statistics with support from ME and other agencies integrates NC Accounting | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Output 3.1.1: Institutionalized capacity programme implemented and national methodology on NCA established – based on the SEEA-EEA framework, for national NC-responsive statistics, policies, plans, and budgeting</p> | | | |
| <p>Output 3.1.2: NC objectives integrated into government finance, development planning and policy informed by datasets and valuation of development scenarios through the NC Accounts</p> | | | |
| <p>Outcome 3.2: Enhanced protection of coral reefs and other marine NC through actions by the corporate fisheries and agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors</p> | | | |
| <p>Indicators for Outcome 3.2: Indicator 3.2.1: No. of internationally agreed indicators showing progress towards SDG 14 Life Below Water targets</p> | | | |
| <p>Indicator 3.2.2: Number of company businesses or operational plans that integrate NC values and accounting, with direct benefit to Laamu Atoll proposed MMA reefs</p> | | | |
| <p>Output 3.2.1: NC flows and values, footprint analysis, and biodiversity protection targets established and reported on for three sector businesses or operational plans</p> | | | |
| <p>Outcome 3.3: Strengthened inter-sectoral coordination and spatial planning that incorporates NCA support sustainable development in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors</p> | | | |
| <p>Indicators for Outcome 3.3: Percentage increase in the area of spatially delineated Marine Management Area (MMA)* nationally for the sustainable management and protection of reefs and other NC through sector development</p> | <p>Percentage increase in the area-based conservation measures nationally for the sustainable management and protection of reefs and other NC through sector development</p> | <p>Since the declaration of 6 PAs outside the project’s activities and the government’s prioritisation of a Biosphere reserve over an MMA. It is recommended to change the wording to area-based conservation to allow for advances in PAs, BR zonation and ecological sensitive areas or other areas where sustainable management measure may be applied.</p> | |
| <p>No. of national technical inter-sectoral bodies leading the integration of an agreed SEEA-based methodology in spatial planning</p> | | | |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|--|--|
| <p>Output 3.3.1: NC-based spatial planning governance framework established including a technical inter-ministerial spatial planning mechanism and modalities for full stakeholder involvement</p> | | | |
| <p>Component 4: Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation</p> | | | |
| <p>Component 4: Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation</p> | <p>No changes</p> | | <p>Use existing national and local platforms e.g. MATI, MACI, LAFA, LAFA etc. to multiply dissemination lessons learnt and best practices; month bullet point emails to PSC and island council Viber group of project progress and updates; print hard copies of reports and provide for Atoll council</p> |

ANNEX V. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Table 8: Financial Management

| Financial management components: | | Rating | Evidence/ Comments |
|--|---|--------------|--|
| 1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures: | | HS:HU | HS |
| Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence ² to UNEP or donor policies, procedures, or rules | | NO | Although there were some absences in the past ½ yearly progress reports these are all up to date |
| 2. Completeness of project financial information³: | | | |
| Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below) | | HS:HU | HS |
| A. | Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines) | Yes | Provided in ProDoc and during review |
| B. | Revisions to the budget | Yes | Informal revision to original budget below the threshold for formal revision |
| C. | All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA) | Yes | PCA received |
| D. | Proof of fund transfers | No | Not requested as no issues reported |
| E. | Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind) | Yes | Co-financing reports by partners and verification in stakeholder interviews |
| F. | A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level) | Yes | All quarterly financial reports received up to 2023 Q3. Two minor errors in reports were identified by auditor and reviewer not FMO. If these were caught by FMO it was not relayed to the project team. |
| G. | Copies of any completed audits and management responses (<i>where applicable</i>) | No | An audit has been carried out, with one notation where financial reports need to be reconciled with bank statements, upon review, it has been indicated that this cannot be resolved under the current way in which MECCT bank reports on projects i.e. it does not report on individual projects- as such no further action to be taken by the project. |
| H. | Any other financial information that was required for this project (list): | N/A | No other financial information was requested |
| 3. Communication between finance and project management staff | | HS:HU | S |
| Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status. | | HS | There is good communication between project manager and task |

² If the review raises concerns over adherence with policies or standard procedures, a recommendation maybe given to cover the topic in an upcoming audit, or similar financial oversight exercise.

³ See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference

| | | |
|--|-----|--|
| | | manager and financial reports submitted |
| Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done. | S | QERs updated and submitted to FMO in timely manner- knowledge of project budget and expenditure |
| Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager. | N/A | No issues have been reported |
| Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports. | MS | There has been no communication between project management and FMO and minimum as needed between FMO and TM- however there have been no major issues needing attention. |
| Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the review process | HS | All requests were responded to and addressed in a timely manner |
| Overall rating | HS | The project has demonstrated good practice with regard to adhering to financial management requirements. There has been minimal communication between FMO and project, but no issues suggest more would have been needed up to this point. |

ANNEX VI. BRIEF CV OF THE REVIEWER

Name Anouska Kinahan

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Profession | Independent Consultant |
| Nationality | Irish |
| Country experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe: Mediterranean Sea (21 countries +EU), Albania, Cyprus, Macedonia, Ireland, UK • Africa: South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Tanzania • Americas, Peru, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Antigua & Barbuda; Dominica; Caribbean region • Asia: Indonesia, southeast Asia • Oceania: Papua New Guinea, Palau |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD ecology Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, 2001 • BSc (hons) Zoology, Glasgow University Scotland, 1998 |

Short Biography

Dr. Anouska Kinahan is an independent consultant (www.akconservaitonconsulting.com). A multidisciplinary background, Anouska merges 17 years' practical experience in protected areas, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management, business and sustainable financing, climate mitigation and adaption, and community conservation, with 20 years research across five continents. Prior to working as an independent consultant, she spent 12 years as a technical advisor for an international NGO, residing for extended periods in developing countries providing technical guidance to governments across Africa, and South America/Caribbean. She is experienced in all aspects of project cycle management, evaluation methods and adaptive management, as well as in grant writing, securing funding, implementing, and co-managing large bilateral projects including leading the development of their monitoring and evaluation programs. She is an experienced reviewer of policies, programs, projects, plans, publications, institutional systems and processes, and grant applications. Her experience in bilateral project development and practical implementation means that she has a keen eye for detail while critically assessing the overall picture with conservation impact and outcomes in mind. She has significant experience in building capacity in, and supporting the development of, biodiversity-related institutions and governments staffs' technical skills and behavioural competencies in monitoring and evaluation methods. She established, managed, and guided the strategic direction of a Planning, Projects and Monitoring and Evaluation Department for a newly established government agency responsible for the country's Protected Areas System. Contracted under a number of UN agency-GEF financed projects, she is highly familiar with UN, and GEF values, goals and modalities. Her wide range of biodiversity and ecosystem management technical skills, coupled with her diverse practical and sustainable financing experience, enables her to understand how to maximize project efficiency without jeopardising project effectiveness, which she applies to all her reviews ensuring that conservation strategies and projects are relevant, measurable, inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable.

Key specialties and capabilities cover:

- Institutional strengthening for effective biodiversity management
- Strategic planning for conservation organizations & PA systems
- Project/ programme design, management, monitoring & evaluation
- Protected area design, management, monitoring, and evaluation
- Business and sustainable finance planning for PA's
- Workshop methodology & Facilitation
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Applied Research & ecological monitoring

Selected assignments and experiences

Independent reviews/evaluations:

- Mid-term review GEF project N. Macedonia

- Mid-term review GEF project Palau
- Mid-term review of Shell Beach Management Plan
- Mid-term review of Kanuku Mountains Management Plan
 - End review Guyana's National Protected Areas Strategy
 - IUCN BIOPAMA grant reviewer
- Article reviewer of several peer-reviewed scientific journals

Other selected assignments

- GEF PIF development and Prodoc backstopping support
- Post 2020 Strategy for Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean -adopted (21 countries +EU) by Barcelona Convention during COP 22.
- A National Protected Areas System Plan for the Commonwealth of Dominica 2021-2031.
- Shekerley Mountains Management Area Management Plan 2020-2025
- Guyana's National Protected Areas System Strategic Plan 2019-2025
- Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission Strategic Plan 2018-2028
- Protected Areas Commission Strategic Plan 2016-2020
- National Level Financing Strategies for Antigua and Barbuda's Protected Areas System 2020-2030
- A Business and Sustainable Financing Plan for Bale Mountains National Park.
- National level indicators and standards for Antigua and Barbuda's protected areas system plan
- Prefeasibility assessment of taxes levies and fees from the extractive industry and tourism sector to finance PNGs PAs
- Communication Strategy and Action Plan Development
- Integrating the environment into One Health in Southeast Asia

ANNEX VII. REVIEW TORS (WITHOUT ANNEXES)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Mid-Term Review of the UNEP/GEF project

“Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)”, GEF ID 9668

Section 1: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

(This section describes what is to be reviewed. Key parameters are: project timeframe, funding envelope, results framework and geographic scope)

1. Project General Information

Table 1. Project Summary

(This is a generic table to summarise a project. Integrate the information below with the standard ‘project summary’ table of the relevant donor e.g. Adaptation Fund, GCF, GEF).

| | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| UNEP Sub-programme: | Ecosystems Management | UNEP Division/Branch: | Ecosystems Division / Biodiversity and Land Branch / GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit |
| Expected Accomplishment(s): | Natural assets are valued, monitored and sustainably managed. | Programme of Work Output(s): | Living in harmony with nature |
| SDG(s) and indicator(s) | The project is primarily targeting at Goal 14 (life below water) through reducing threats to atoll ecosystems and especially marine biodiversity, it will contribute towards many of the SGDs, including 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 15 (life on land) and 17 (partnerships to achieve the goals). | | |
| GEF Core Indicator Targets (identify these for projects approved prior to GEF-7 ⁴) | <p>Indicator 0.1: Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (ha, excluding PAs) [GEF Core Indicator 5]</p> <p>Indicator 0.2: Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) [GEF Core Indicator 2.1]</p> | | |

⁴This does not apply to Enabling Activities

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| | Indicator 0.3: Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment [GEF Core Indicator 11] | | |
| Dates of previous project phases: | - | Status of future project phases: | - |

FROM THE PROJECT'S PIR REPORT (use latest version) :

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Project Title: | Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) |
|-----------------------|--|

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Executing Agency: | Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, Maldives |
|--------------------------|--|

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Project partners: | Housing Development Corporation Blue Marine Foundation Six Senses Laamu Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture National Bureau of Statistics |
|--------------------------|---|

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Geographical Scope: | Asia |
|----------------------------|------|

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Participating Countries: | Maldives |
|---------------------------------|----------|

| | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|--|
| GEF project ID: | 9668 | IMIS number*⁵: | UN Environment Project ID: GFL-11207-14AC0003-SB- 015714 |
| Focal Area(s): | Biodiversity | GEF OP #: | |

⁵ Fields with an * sign (in yellow) should be filled by the Fund Management Officer

| | | | |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| GEF Strategic Priority/Objective: | BD4-10, BD3-6 | GEF approval date*: | 23 June 2020 |
| UNEP approval date: | 23 June 2020 | Date of first disbursement*: | 08 July 2020 |
| Actual start date⁶: | 24 December 2020 | Planned duration: | 60 months |
| Intended completion date*: | 30th September 2024 (as in PCA); yet actually 21 October 2025 (60 months duration) | Actual or Expected completion date: | October 2025 |
| Project Type: | Full Size Project | GEF Allocation*: | US\$3,532,968 |
| PPG GEF cost*: | US\$120,000 | PPG co-financing*: | |
| Expected MSP/FSP Co-financing*: | US\$22,934,073 | Total Cost*: | US\$26,467,041 |
| Mid-term Review (planned date): | May 2023 | Terminal Evaluation/Review (planned date): | July 2024 |
| Mid-term Review (actual date): | June 2023 | No. of revisions*: | N/A |
| Date of last Steering Committee meeting: | 08/08/22 | Date of last Revision*: | N/A |
| Disbursement as of 30 June [2022]*: | US\$500,000 | Date of planned financial closure*: | 21 October 2026 |
| Date of planned completion⁷*: | 30th September 2024 (as in PCA); yet actually 21 October 2025 (60 months duration) | Actual expenditures reported as of 30 June [year]⁸: | US\$159,786.96 |
| Total co-financing realized as of 31 December [year] | 22,780,531 | Actual expenditures entered in IMIS as of 31 December 2022 [year]*: | USD 70,520.37 |
| Leveraged financing:⁹ | | | |

⁶ Only if different from first disbursement date, e.g., in cases where a long time elapsed between first disbursement and recruitment of project manager.

⁷ If there was a "Completion Revision" please use the date of the revision.

⁸ Information to be provided by Executing Agency/Project Manager

⁹ See above note on co-financing

2. Project Rationale

The Maldives society and economy, including its two largest economic sectors – tourism and fisheries – are highly dependent on marine natural capital and particularly the diverse values provided by its coral reefs and pelagic fish stocks. Overall, Maldives natural capital (NC) including biological diversity is estimated to contribute 71% to employment, 89% to GDP and 98% to exports. A pristine coral reef experience is vital to sustaining the tourism industry of the Maldives, which accounted for total revenue of about USD 375 million (or 40% of total national revenue) in 2014 from over 1.2 million visitors. Tuna catches in 2014 were 122,000 Mt, representing 95% of the recorded national fish landings with an export value of over US\$40 million. The ability to sustain the tuna industry depends on a sustainable supply of bait fish caught in the shallow inner-waters of the Atoll lagoons, but pressure on the bait fishery has increased dramatically and is estimated at between 35,000 and 80,000t per year. There also is a strong growth in the demersal reef fishery to meet demand from international visitors and an international reef fish market. This industry concentrates on trevally, sea perch and sea bass with some cod, especially the coral trout. Reported heavy declines in the reef fishery, the bait fishery and the beche-de-mer fishery have led to these being targeted in the National Fisheries Management Plan, presently under preparation. Additionally, the Government of Maldives (GoM) is very serious about waste management on the islands, and funds through government budget on components related to waste management in the islands on a request basis where urgencies arise. The proposed Project will add practical activities at the Atoll and Island level geared specifically towards reducing negative impacts on reef and other marine NC, sustaining the local economy and its potential for growth, including building communities and sector capacities to assess the impacts and to explore eco-friendly options for remediation.

This project aims to assist the GoM in its implementation of new environmental policies and transition towards national adoption of Green Growth atoll development that will sustain marine NC and strengthen the resilience and recovery of reef ecosystems. This will be informed by learning from atoll-wide integrated coastal zone management within a Managed Marine Area / Biosphere Reserve framework, and the application of innovative sustainability practices and standards in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and construction sectors as the basis for transforming the human ecological footprint in Laamu Atoll and taking this up to national level through sector transformation, spatial planning and improved governance based on NC accounting.

The intermediate objective of this transformation is to minimize the flows of pollutants from land-based activities into the adjacent marine environment and reduce marine-based drivers of reef degradation including baitfish and reef fisheries. Overall, the project seeks to enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating NC accounting into national planning.

Overall, the project will lead to enhanced conservation and sustainable management of the coral reef-atoll seascapes throughout the Maldives through an in-built design for scaling up from local experience to national change across its three components. Integration of the NC concept and approaches into business models, risk analyses and decision-making processes within government, private sector and financial institutions is expected to align national and local governance with the enhanced planning needs outlined in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. There are four components to this project.

Component 1: Green Growth development for Laamu Atoll in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors. Increase the sustainability of marine and coastal resource management under a Green Growth Strategy for Laamu Atoll and achieve a reduction in stressors impacting Laamu Atoll reefs through increased Green Growth and Integrated Coastal Zone Management practices in key sectors.

Component 2: Building social capital for a green economy. Will result in increased understanding of the values and dependencies on marine NC and biodiversity and ecosystem services that supports improved livelihoods and sustainable development on Laamu and among key national stakeholders.

Component 3: Mainstreaming natural capital accounting into fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors. Aim to achieve increased institutional capacity, clarified mandates and integration of NC accounting in marine biodiversity conservation policy and programs; enhanced protection of coral reefs and other marine NC through actions by corporate sectors; and strengthened inter-sectoral coordination and spatial planning that incorporates NCA support sustainable development in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors.

Component 4: Knowledge management and M&E. Support the implementation of Components 1-3 ensuring that information and lessons learned are shared between the different Components and stakeholders and that results-based management is informed by adequate M&E procedures.

3. Project Results Framework

[Present the project objective(s), components, outputs, outcomes and long-lasting impacts as per the Project Document (i.e. the results framework). Include the Theory of Change diagram, where available. Use tables as appropriate.]

| Objective, Outcomes | SMART Indicators | | | | Means of Verification | Risks and Assumptions |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Objectively Verifiable Indicators | Baseline | Mid-Term Target | End of Project Target | | |
| Objective: To enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating natural capital accounting into development planning | | | | | | |
| Component 1: Green growth development for Laamu Atoll in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors | | | | | | |
| Outcome 1.1: Increased sustainability of marine and coastal resource management under a Green Growth Strategy for Laamu Atoll | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 1.1: | | | | | | |
| Output 1.1.1: Green Growth Strategy, Marine Managed Area/Biosphere Reserve and Sustainable Development Plans for Laamu Atoll and selected islands implementation advanced through capacity development, participatory planning and operational support. | | | | | | |
| Output 1.1.2: Three SEEA-EEA based Natural Capital (NC) Accounts established and operationalized for Laamu Atoll (freshwater; marine & coastal ecosystems; key marine species) | | | | | | |
| Outcome 1.2: Reduction in stressors impacting Laamu Atoll reefs (through implementation of Green Growth and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) practices in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors) | | | | | | |

| Objective, Outcomes | SMART Indicators | | | | Means of Verification | Risks and Assumptions |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Objectively Verifiable Indicators | Baseline | Mid-Term Target | End of Project Target | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 1.2: | | | | | | |
| Output 1.2.1: Targeted island communities sensitized and increasingly apply eco-technologies for sustainable food production and disposal of domestic waste | | | | | | |
| Output 1.2.2: Adoption of sustainable tuna bait and demersal reef fisheries in conformity with the draft Maldives Fisheries Master Plan | | | | | | |
| Output 1.2.3: Partnership, policy and implementation standards for Green Growth established with the Atoll Council, national construction firms and tourism operators on Laamu Atoll, and registered nationally | | | | | | |
| Component 2. Building social capital for a green economy | | | | | | |
| Outcome 2.1: Increased understanding of the values and dependencies on marine natural capital and biodiversity supports improved livelihoods and sustainable development on Laamu Atoll and nationally | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 2.1: | | | | | | |
| Output 2.1.1: Biodiversity conservation and Green Growth in Laamu Atoll and nationally supported by increased awareness among targeted groups and a National Biodiversity Knowledge Centre | | | | | | |
| Output 2.1.2: Increased capacity for cross-curricular delivery of coastal and marine ecology and natural capital subjects in national schools, and incorporation of natural capital accounting in natural sciences and environmental management curricula at MNU | | | | | | |
| Component 3. Mainstreaming natural capital accounting (NCA) into fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors | | | | | | |
| Outcome 3.1: Increased institutional capacity, clarified mandates and integration of NCA in marine biodiversity conservation policy and programmes | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 3.1: | | | | | | |
| Output 3.1.1: Institutionalized capacity programme implemented and national methodology on NCA established – based on the SEEA-EEA framework, for national NC-responsive statistics, policies, plans and budgeting | | | | | | |
| Output 3.1.2: NC objectives integrated into government finance, development planning and policy informed by datasets and valuation of development scenarios through the NC Accounts | | | | | | |
| Outcome 3.2: Enhanced protection of coral reefs and other marine NC through actions by the corporate fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 3.2: | | | | | | |
| Output 3.2.1: NC flows and values, footprint analysis, and biodiversity protection targets established and reported on for three sector businesses or operational plans | | | | | | |
| Outcome 3.3: Strengthened inter-sectoral coordination and spatial planning that incorporates NCA support sustainable development in the fisheries and agriculture, tourism and construction sectors | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 3.3: | | | | | | |
| Output 3.3.1: NC-based spatial planning governance framework established including a technical inter-ministerial spatial planning mechanism and modalities for full stakeholder involvement | | | | | | |
| Component 4: Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation | | | | | | |

| Objective, Outcomes | SMART Indicators | | | | Means of Verification | Risks and Assumptions |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Objectively Verifiable Indicators | Baseline | Mid-Term Target | End of Project Target | | |
| Outcome 4.1: Improved knowledge management and sharing of lessons learned on Green Growth between local and national levels | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 4.1: | | | | | | |
| Output 4.1.1: Project lessons captured and disseminated to project stakeholders and to other GEF and non-GEF projects and partners | | | | | | |
| Outcome 4.2: Project monitoring system operates, systematically provides information on progress, and informs adaptive management to ensure results | | | | | | |
| Outputs for Outcome 4.2: | | | | | | |
| Output 4.2.1: Capacity established for participatory and efficient monitoring and evaluation and adaptive management | | | | | | |

4. Executing Arrangements

[Specify UNEP Branch and Unit responsible for project implementation and project execution partners. Briefly describe role and composition of management and supervision structures of the project, including formal revisions since approval. Use table or diagram as appropriate. NOTE: For GEF-funded projects highlight internally executed projects, providing details on reporting lines for implementation and execution.]

UNEP, as the GEF Implementing Agency is implementing the project through its Ecosystems Division with delegated authority for day-to-day supervision by a Task Manager based at the Asia and the Pacific Office in Bangkok, Thailand, and is responsible for overall project supervision to ensure consistency with GEF and UNEP policies and procedures and for providing guidance on linkages with related UNEP and GEF-funded activities. UNEP is also responsible for monitoring implementation of the activities undertaken during the execution of the project and provides the overall coordination and ensures that the project is in line with UNEP Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) and its Program of Work (PoW).

The Ministry of Environment is the Executing Agency for this project. A National Project Director (NPD) is charged with the responsibility of overall administration and supervision of the Project Management Unit (PMU). The NPD has the overall fiduciary responsibility of the project as well as forming, leading, and supporting the Project Steering Committee (PSC).

There are **three tiers** in the management structure of the project (**Figure 1**). The first tier is the **Project Steering Committee** with policy decision stakeholder members; the second tier includes the **Project Management Unit (PMU)**, which coordinates and is supported by **National Project Technical Working Groups** involving members from key stakeholder organizations engaged in partnering project activities for providing technical support and guidance; and a third tier at the atoll / island level where the **Laamu Atoll Project Implementation Unit (PIU)** coordinates the implementation of local activities, supported by **the proposed Laamu MMA/BR - Green Growth Stakeholder Platform**. This Platform is led by the Atoll Council with representation from the Island Councils, community stakeholders, Civil Society/NGO groups and private sector to coordinate and guide implementation of project activities and support monitoring and integration of the project into local planning and operations. This is supported by Local Task Forces (for example, on Marine Management Area (MMA) proposal development, sustainable agriculture, habitat management and

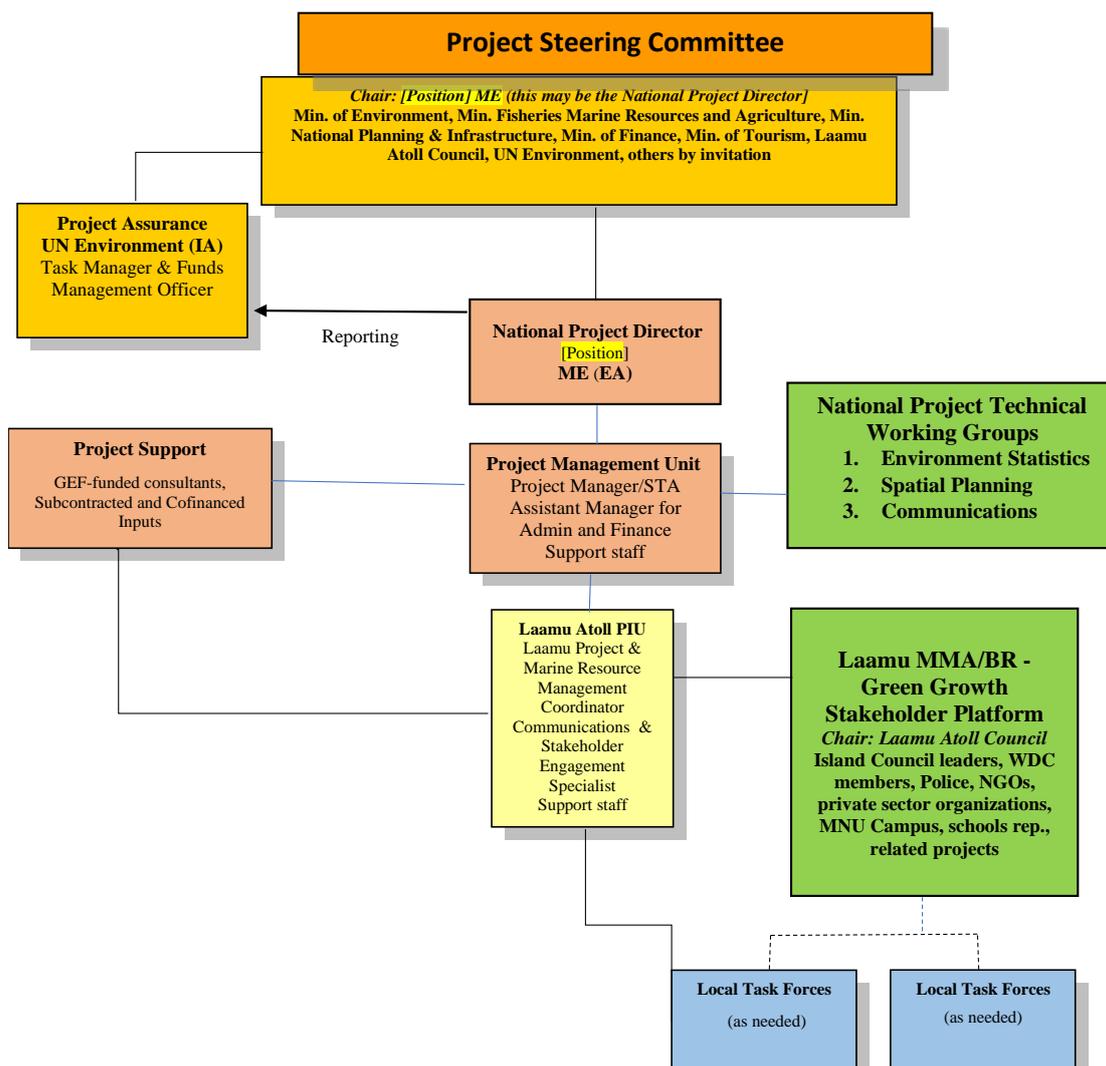
restoration, monitoring, and data management) to lead the implementation of specific work streams.

The **Project Steering Committee** meets not less than twice each year to approve the annual workplans, budgets, review project progress and address significant implementation issues.

The **National Project Technical Working Groups** was convened by ME/PMU as required and meets on demand according to the related project work streams. However, WGs on Natural Capital Accounting, Spatial Planning and Communications form an integral part of the project operational structure. They provide guidance to implementation of the relevant work streams, facilitate mainstreaming of project objectives into sector programmes and inter-sectoral coordination, and the sharing of knowledge and project results among sectoral agencies and related projects.

The **Laamu MMA/BR and Green Growth Stakeholder Platform** is located in Laamu Atoll and meets at least every 3 months and on demand when technical inputs are required. It will coordinate the implementation of local project activities, ensure they are aligned and integrated with local government operations and coordinate knowledge sharing among local stakeholders and related projects. Local Task Forces may be established by the LPCC to provide oversight, guidance, and inputs in support of specific project work streams.

Figure 1- Project implementation structure



5. Project Cost and Financing

[Present total project budget at design, broken down per component and per funding source. Use tables as appropriate. Present most recent figures on disbursement.]

| UNEP Budget line | | Expenditure by calendar year (US\$) | | | | | TOTAL |
|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| | | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | |
| 1999 | PERSONNEL COMPONENT | 245000 | 324904 | 289684 | 153100 | 148400 | 1161088 |
| 2999 | SUB-CONTRACT COMPONENT | 15000 | 420500 | 522500 | 300000 | 70000 | 1456000 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 3999 | TRAINING COMPONENT | 69500 | 169000 | 135500 | 44500 | 36000 | 454500 |
| 4999 | EQUIPMENT AND PREMISES COMPONENT | 33200 | 90500 | 33000 | 13000 | 14430 | 184130 |
| 5999 | MISCELLANEOUS COMPONENT | 13400 | 25400 | 99150 | 46400 | 92900 | 277250 |
| TOTAL (ALL COMPONENTS) | | 376100 | 1030304 | 1079834 | 557000 | 361730 | 3532968 |

6. Implementation Issues

[Record any issues that have arisen in the initial implementation period including: significant delays, changes in partners, implementing countries and/or results statements. Note the dates when such changes have been approved.]

The project is progressing well except on the following sub-components: marine management area planning, as well as the natural capital accounting in support of its applications such as spatial planning, valuation of marine and coastal resources etc. The project has achieved several of its targeted results including possible establishment of new MPAs; yet due to not yet having established the data and analysis as basis to do so properly, including on socio-economic interests and concerns, identification of hotspots for conservation, restoration as well as sustainable practices with the targeted sectors (tourism, fisheries and building infrastructure), the project would need to retrofit its already established MPAs and optimal marine management practices at a more regional/Atoll level.

Section 2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW

(This section is standard and does not need to be revised for each TOR)

7. Objective of the Review

In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy¹⁰ and the UNEP Programme Manual¹¹, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) is undertaken approximately half-way through project implementation to analyse whether the project is on-track, what problems or challenges the project is encountering, and what corrective actions are required.

8. Key Review Principles

Mid-Term review findings and judgements will be based on **sound evidence and analysis**, clearly documented in the Review Report. Information will be triangulated (i.e. verified from different sources) as far as possible, and when verification is not possible, the single source will be mentioned (whilst

¹⁰ <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/policies-and-strategies>

¹¹ <https://wecollaborate.unep.org>

anonymity is still protected). Analysis leading to evaluative judgements should always be clearly spelled out.

Possible questions to be considered include:

- Does the TOC properly reflect the project's intended change process?
- Is the stakeholder analysis still appropriate and adequate to support the project's ambitions?
- Are results statements in keeping with UNEP definitions (e.g. outcomes are expressed as the uptake or use of outputs)?
- Are roles and responsibilities commonly understood and playing out effectively?
- Is there an effective monitoring mechanism for the project's implementation (this is separate from, and supports, reporting)?
- Is the rate of expenditure appropriate for the mid-point?
- Have plans for inclusivity, equality and/or equity been implemented as planned, or does more need to be done?
- Are safeguard identification and mitigation plans being monitored and steps taken to minimize negative effects?
- Is there an exit strategy in place and are the elements needed for the project's benefits to be sustained after the project end, being incorporated in the project implementation?
- (Where relevant) Have recommendations from previous learning exercises/performance assessments been appropriately addressed?
- (Where relevant) What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect the project's performance?

A Mid-Term Review is a *formative assessment*, which requires that the consultant(s) go beyond the assessment of "what" the project performance is and make a serious effort to provide a deeper understanding of "why" the performance is as it is.

Attribution, Contribution and Credible Association: In order to *attribute* any outcomes and impacts to a project intervention, one needs to consider the difference between what has happened with, and what would have happened without, the project (i.e. take account of changes over time and between contexts in order to isolate the effects of an intervention). This requires appropriate baseline data and the identification of a relevant counterfactual, both of which are frequently not available for reviews. Establishing the *contribution* made by a project in a complex change process relies heavily on prior intentionality (e.g. approved project design documentation, logical framework) and the articulation of causality (e.g. narrative and/or illustration of the Theory of Change). Robust evidence that a project was delivered as designed and that the expected causal pathways developed supports claims of contribution and this is strengthened where an alternative theory of change can be excluded. A *credible association* between the implementation of a project and observed positive effects can be made where a strong causal narrative, although not explicitly articulated, can be inferred by the chronological sequence of events, active involvement of key actors and engagement in critical processes.

Partners and Key Project Stakeholders. A key aim of the Mid-Term Review is to encourage reflection and learning by UNEP staff, the implementing partners and key project stakeholders. The Review Consultant should consider how reflection and learning can be promoted, both through the review process and in the communication of review findings and key lessons.

9. Key Strategic Questions

In addition to the review criteria outlined in Section 10 below, the Review will address the **strategic questions**¹² listed below (no more than 3 questions are recommended). These are questions of interest to UNEP and to which the project is believed to be able to make a substantive contribution. Also included are five questions that are required when reporting in the GEF Portal and these must be addressed in the MTR.

¹² The strategic questions should not duplicate questions that will be addressed under the standard review criteria described in section 10.

Q1: What evidence is available that the project activities are contributing to an uptake in green growth and integrated Coastal Zone Management practices in key sectors in Laamu Atoll?

Q2: What evidence is available to suggest that the project has increased awareness and understanding of impacts and dependencies of local development on marine natural capital?

Q3: To what extent and in what ways is the project contributing to natural capital mainstreaming in fisheries, agriculture, tourism, and construction sectors?

Address the questions required for the GEF Portal in the appropriate parts of the report and provide a **summary of the findings in the Conclusions section of the report:**

- a) Under Monitoring and Reporting/Monitoring of Project Implementation:
What is the performance at the project's mid-point against Core Indicator Targets? *(For projects approved prior to GEF-7, these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided¹³).*
- b) Under Factors Affecting Performance/Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation:
What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program? *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*
- c) Under Factors Affecting Performance/Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality:
What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding gender-responsive measures and any intermediate gender result areas? *(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)*
- d) Under Factors Affecting Performance/Environmental and Social Safeguards:
What has been the experience at the project's mid-point against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and any measures taken to address identified risks assessed. *(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)*
- e) Under Factors Affecting Performance/Communication and Public Awareness:
What has been the progress, challenges, and outcomes regarding the implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions. *(This should be based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

10. Review Criteria

¹³ This does not apply to Enabling Activities

All review criteria will be rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory¹⁴ (HS = 6); Satisfactory (S = 5); Moderately Satisfactory (MS = 4); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU = 3); Unsatisfactory (U = 2); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU = 1). A Criteria Ratings Matrix is available, within the suite of tools, to support a common interpretation of points on the scale for each review criterion. The Overall Performance Rating is calculated as a simple average of the ratings for each criterion (A-H). **Any criterion assessed as being in the 'Unsatisfactory' range should trigger corrective action in the Management Response.**

Where UNEP funding partners have areas of specific interest, these are noted, below.

A. Strategic Relevance

The Mid Term Review (MTR) will assess the extent to which the activity is suited to the priorities and policies of UNEP, the donors, implementing regions/countries and target beneficiaries and is operating in a way that is complementary to other ongoing interventions.

The MTR will assess whether there have been any changes in priorities since the project was designed and whether the project has/should adapt to address the changing policy/strategy context.

This criterion comprises two elements:

i. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors, and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) strategic priorities

The Review should assess the project's alignment with the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS) and Programme of Work (POW) under which the project was approved and include, in its narrative, reflections on the scale and scope of any contributions made to the planned results reflected in the relevant MTS and POW. UNEP strategic priorities include the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building¹⁵ (BSP) and South-South Cooperation (S-SC). The MTR will assess the extent to which the project is suited to, or responding to, donor priorities as well as alignment of the project with global priorities such as the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The extent to which the project is suited, or responding to, the stated environmental concerns and needs of the countries, sub-regions, or regions where it is being implemented will also be considered. Examples may include UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (Cooperation Framework) or, national or sub-national development plans, poverty reduction strategies or Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) plans or regional agreements etc. Within this section consideration will be given to whether the needs of all beneficiary groups are being met and reflects the current policy priority to leave no-one behind.

ii. Complementarity/Coherence¹⁶ with Relevant Existing Interventions

An assessment will be made of how well the project is taking account of ongoing and planned initiatives (under the same sub-programme, other UNEP sub-programmes, or being implemented by other agencies within the same country, sector, or institution) that address similar needs of the same target groups.

¹⁴ Sustainability is similarly rated on a six-point scale but labelled from Highly **Likely** (HL) down to Highly **Unlikely** (HU).

¹⁵ <http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction/about/bsp.htm>

¹⁶ This sub-category is consistent with the new criterion of 'Coherence' introduced by the OECD-DAC in 2019.

The MTR will consider if the project team, in collaboration with all partners, is fulfilling any commitments to collaborate made at project design and is working to ensure their own intervention is complementary to other interventions. Examples may include work within Cooperation Frameworks or One UN programming. Linkages with other interventions should be described and instances where UNEP’s comparative advantage has been particularly well applied should be highlighted.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Adaptation Fund | To encourage utilization, each evaluation should optimize <u>relevance</u> by ensuring (i) that the primary intended users of the evaluation and their intended uses are clearly identified and engaged at the beginning of the evaluation process; (ii) that “intended users” include funding, implementing, and beneficiary stakeholders; and (iii) that evaluators ensure these intended users contribute to decisions about the evaluation process. |
| Green Climate Fund | <u>Coherence</u> in climate finance delivery with other multilateral entities. |

B. Quality & Revision of Project Design

The MTR should provide a brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the project design and assess whether all elements of the project design have been initiated and/or are still planned for. Based on a review of the project design document, regular reports and meeting minutes, the Review Consultant will confirm whether any amendments¹⁷ have been made to the activities and/or results of the project. This includes changes to the formulation of results statements as well as changes in results indicators and/or project targets and the associated budget. Where revisions have been made the Consultant should confirm that formal documentation for these amendments is available and that UNEP/donor policies for revisions have been followed. In the absence of such formalisation the Review Consultant will make appropriate recommendations.

C. Effectiveness

The Review will assess effectiveness across three dimensions: availability of outputs, progress towards project outcomes and adaptive management. The Review Consultant will confirm that all results statements conform to UNEP’s definitions¹⁸ and make recommendations for adjustments where necessary. At the project’s mid-point emphasis is placed on the timeliness, quality, and ownership of outputs and whether the project is adopting approaches or delivering activities to support the uptake of outputs (i.e. outcome level results).

i. Theory of Change

The Review will assess whether the Theory of Change/Results Framework represents a coherent and realistic change process from a cause-and-effect perspective. Considerations will be given to whether the causal pathways are effectively shown/articulated and supported by a full set of contributing

¹⁷ The conditions and processes for amendments should abide by the terms of the funding agreement. For example, the GEF has specific requirements for the approval/reporting of ‘minor’ and ‘major’ amendments. This includes the provision that any minor and major (approved) amendments should be reflected in the PIR report of the same year.

¹⁸ UNEP, 2019, Glossary of Results Definitions

conditions ((‘drivers’ are external factors largely under the influence of the project; ‘assumptions’ are external factors largely outside the influence of the project). The TOC should also reflect¹⁹ UNEP’s commitment to increasing equality in line with the UN’s commitment to human rights. If adjustments are needed, they should be clearly presented and justified during the MTR process and a recommendation made on how any revisions could be formally approved.

ii. Availability of Outputs²⁰

The Review will assess the project’s success in producing the planned outputs and making them available to the intended beneficiaries as well as its success in achieving milestones as per the project design document or any formal revisions. The availability of outputs will be assessed in terms of both quantity and quality, and the assessment will consider their ownership by, and usefulness to, intended beneficiaries and the timeliness of their provision. It is noted that emphasis is placed on the performance of those outputs that are most important to achieve outcomes. The Review will briefly explain the reasons behind the success or shortcomings of the project in delivering its planned outputs and recommend corrective action as appropriate.

iii. Progress towards Project Outcomes²¹

At the project mid-point, the Review Consultant will focus on the links between the provision of outputs and their adoption at the outcome level. The MTR will explore whether the assumptions and drivers that need to be in place to support the uptake of outputs are evident/emerging and consider whether sufficient effort and attention is being directed towards reaching outcome levels.

The Review Consultant will review the project Theory of Change (TOC) and confirm that it properly reflects all levels (outputs, outcomes, intermediate states, and long-lasting impact) of results included in the project design. Where necessary, the TOC should be reconstructed, in discussion with the project team, to better guide and strengthen project implementation.

iv. Likelihood of Impact

Based on the articulation of long-lasting effects in the reconstructed TOC (i.e. from project outcomes, via intermediate states, to impact), the Review will assess the likelihood of the intended, positive impacts becoming a reality.

The Review will consider the extent to which the project has played a catalytic role²² or has promoted scaling up and/or replication as part of its Theory of Change (either explicitly as in a project with a

¹⁹ This can be as a driver or assumption if there is no specific equality results statement.

²⁰ Outputs are the availability (for intended beneficiaries/users) of new products and services and/or gains in knowledge, abilities, and awareness of individuals or within institutions (UNEP, 2019)

²¹ Outcomes are the use (i.e. uptake, adoption, application) of an output by intended beneficiaries, observed as changes in institutions or behaviour, attitude or condition (UNEP, 2019)

²² The terms catalytic effect, scaling up and replication are inter-related and generally refer to extending the coverage or magnitude of the effects of a project. Catalytic effect is associated with triggering additional actions that are not directly funded by the project – these effects can be both concrete or less tangible, can be intentionally caused by the project or implied in the design and reflected in the TOC drivers, or can be unintentional and can rely on funding from another source or have no financial requirements. Scaling up and Replication require more intentionality for projects, or individual components and approaches, to be reproduced in other similar contexts. Scaling up suggests a substantive increase in the number of new beneficiaries reached/involved and may require adapted delivery mechanisms while Replication suggests the repetition of an approach or component at a similar scale but among different beneficiaries. Even with highly technical work, where scaling up or replication

demonstration component or implicitly as expressed in the drivers required to move to outcome levels) and as factors that are likely to contribute to greater or long-lasting impact.

v. Adaptive Management

The Review will assess whether any adaptive management²³ is evident, possibly reflected in annual reports or reports from field missions etc. The Review Consultant will consider the project's performance to-date from a risk perspective considering a) the likelihood of any non/late delivery of the project's workplan; b) likelihood of any negative effects, including reputational risks and safeguard issues and c) factors undermining the endurance of project achievements.

During the MTR, forward plans should be reviewed, and adaptive management strategies discussed such that the project's effectiveness and efficiency are maximized. Actions for adaptive management should be reflected in the MTR recommendations, which may include recommendations on governance structures, implementation arrangements, project design elements, monitoring and/or exit strategies etc.

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| Adaptation Fund | The Review should consider, under Effectiveness, the extent to which the evaluand is reaching Strategic Results Framework indicator targets. |
| Adaptation Fund | The Review should consider, under Effectiveness, the extent to which the intervention demonstrates that Climate Change Adaptation can be increased or replicated at a broader scale, as well as in other contexts. |
| Green Climate Fund | The Review should consider, under Effectiveness, the project's <u>Innovativeness</u> in result areas – the extent to which interventions may lead to paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways. |
| Global Environment Facility | The Review should consider, under Effectiveness, the extent to which the evaluand is reaching Core Indicator targets (from GEF-6 onwards). |
| Global Environment Facility | The Review will determine, under Effectiveness, the project's <u>additionality</u> by comparing the benefits of GEF support to a scenario without GEF support. It will identify specific areas where GEF support has contributed additional results and what these additional results were. It will provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the findings. |

D. Financial Management

Under financial management the Mid-Term Review will assess a) whether the rate of spend is consistent with the project's length of implementation to-date, the agreed workplan and the delivery of outputs and b) whether financial reporting and/or auditing requirements are being met consistently and

involves working with a new community, some consideration of the new context should take place and adjustments made as necessary.

²³ Adaptive management is an **iterative process** in which practitioners test hypotheses and adjust behavior, decisions, and actions based on experience and actual changes (Stankey et al., 2005).

to adequate standards by all parties. Any financial management issues that are affecting the timely delivery of the project or the quality of its performance will be highlighted. Expenditure should be reported, where possible, at output/component level and will be compared with the approved budget.

Ratings should be provided for two sub-categories (*adherence to policies and completeness of financial information*), as assessed at the mid-point: i) the Review will verify the application of proper financial management standards and adherence to UNEP's financial management policies; ii) the Review will record where standard financial documentation is missing, inaccurate, incomplete, or unavailable in a timely manner. The Review may comment on the level of communication between the Task Manager and the Fund Management Officer as it relates to the effective delivery of the planned project and the needs of a responsive, adaptive management approach.

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| Global Environment Facility | The Review will determine, under Financial Management, i) time from CEO endorsement (FSP) / CEO approval (MSP) to first disbursement; ii) disbursement balance; iii) whether the project has secured co-financing higher than 35% and iv) time between CEO Endorsement and (likely) end of MTR. |
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E. Efficiency

Under the efficiency criterion, the Review will assess the extent to which the project delivered maximum results from the given resources. The Review will assess the *cost-effectiveness and timeliness* of project execution.

Focusing on the translation of inputs into outputs, *cost-effectiveness* is the extent to which an intervention has achieved, or is expected to achieve, its results at the lowest possible cost. *Timeliness* refers to whether planned activities have been/are being delivered according to expected timeframes as well as whether events are being sequenced efficiently. The Review will give special attention to efforts being made by the project teams during project implementation to make use of/build upon pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies, and complementarities²⁴ with other initiatives, programmes, and projects etc. to increase project efficiency.

The Review will also assess ways in which potential project extensions can be avoided through stronger project management.

F. Monitoring and Reporting

The Review will assess monitoring and reporting across two sub-categories: monitoring of project implementation and project reporting.

i. Monitoring of Project Implementation

Each project should be supported by a sound monitoring plan that is designed to track progress against SMART²⁵ results towards the achievement of the project's outputs and outcomes, including at a level disaggregated by gender, marginalisation, or vulnerability, including those living with disabilities. In particular, the Review will assess the relevance and appropriateness of the project indicators as well as the methods used for tracking progress against them as part of conscious results-based management.

²⁴ Complementarity with other interventions during project design, inception or mobilization is considered under Strategic Relevance above.

²⁵ SMART refers to results that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time oriented. Indicators help to make results measurable.

The Review will assess whether the monitoring system is operational and facilitates the timely tracking of results and progress towards project milestones and targets throughout the project implementation period. This assessment will include consideration of whether the project gathered relevant and good quality baseline data that is accurately and appropriately documented. This should include monitoring the representation and participation of disaggregated groups, including gendered, marginalised, or vulnerable groups, such as those living with disabilities, in project activities. It will also consider how quality monitoring data are being used to adapt and improve project execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability. The Review should confirm that funds allocated for monitoring are being used to support this activity.

ii. Project Reporting

UNEP has a centralised information management system²⁶ in which project managers upload six-monthly progress reports against agreed project milestones. This information will be provided to the Review Consultant by the Task Manager. Donors may have specific reporting requirements and copies of reports will be made available by the Task Manager. The Review will assess the extent to which both UNEP and Donor reporting commitments have been fulfilled. This should include confirmation that meeting, and field mission reports are being written and centrally stored.

Where the need for any corrective action has been indicated in any project reports (e.g. as an identified risk), the Review Consultant will record whether this action has been taken. This may include responses made during the COVID-19 pandemic or other unpredictable external events of a disruptive or crisis nature. The Review Consultant will also confirm whether formal reports have been appropriately authorised by both the author and the relevant supervisor.

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| Global Environment Facility | For internally executed projects the Review Consultant should review the quality of regular reports and confirm they have been submitted on a timely basis. |
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G. Exit Strategy & Sustainability (for Adaptation Fund, read Human and Ecological Sustainability and Security)

Sustainability²⁷ is understood as the probability of the benefits derived from the achievement of the project outcomes being maintained and developed after the close of the intervention. It may be considered from the perspectives of socio-political, institutional and/or financial sustainability. The Review will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that *are likely* to undermine or contribute to the endurance of benefits at the outcome level. Some factors of sustainability may be embedded in the project design and implementation approaches while others may be contextual circumstances or conditions that evolve over the life of the intervention. It is assumed that environmental sustainability is central to any UNEP project design but where applicable an assessment of bio-physical factors that may affect the sustainability of project outcomes may also be included.

The Review will ascertain that the project has put in place *an appropriate exit strategy* and measures to mitigate risks to sustainability. The Review Consultant will consider a) the level of ownership, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders to take the project achievements

²⁶ Project Information Management System (PIMS) or, from 2022, Integrated Planning Monitoring and Reporting (IPMR)

²⁷ As used here, ‘sustainability’ means the long-term maintenance of outcomes and consequent impacts, whether environmental or not. This is distinct from the concept of sustainability in the terms ‘environmental sustainability’ or ‘sustainable development’, which imply ‘not living beyond our means’ or ‘not diminishing global environmental benefits’ (GEF STAP Paper, 2019, Achieving More Enduring Outcomes from GEF Investment)

forwards; b) the extent to which the sustainability of project outcomes is dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance and c) the extent to which project outcomes are dependent on future funding for the benefits they bring to be sustained. It will consider whether institutional achievements such as governance structures and processes, policies, sub-regional agreements, legal and accountability frameworks etc. are robust enough to continue delivering the benefits associated with the project outcomes after project closure.

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| Adaptation Fund | The Review should consider, under <u>Human and ecological sustainability and security</u> – the extent to which the intervention is likely to generate continued positive or negative, intended, and unintended impacts beyond its lifetime, taking into consideration, social, institutional, economic, and environmental systems. Is the intervention sensitive to conflict and fragility, i.e., to what extent does it consider the political context and the sharing of natural resources? Is it contributing towards targeted communities’ livelihoods and to the health or well-being of the ecosystems on which they depend? |
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H. Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

i. Project Inception

This criterion focuses on the inception or mobilisation stage of the project. The Review will assess whether appropriate measures were taken to either address weaknesses in the project design, fill information gaps or respond to changes that took place between project approval, the securing of funds and project mobilisation. In particular, the Review will consider the nature and quality of engagement with stakeholder groups by the project team, the confirmation of partner capacity²⁸ and development of partnership agreements as well as initial staffing and financing arrangements. The Review Consultant will confirm whether appropriate inception meetings were held and whether an inception report is available on file.

ii. Quality of Project Management and Supervision

During the MTR the consultant will review the planned implementation structure and the roles and responsibilities assigned to each partner or party. Where roles are not being played as planned, an appropriate recommendation to formalise correction action and/or a change in the implementation structure, should be made.

In some cases, ‘project management and supervision’ may refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to partners and national governments while in others it may refer to the project management performance of an implementing partner and the technical backstopping and supervision provided by UNEP. The performance of parties playing different roles should be discussed and a rating provided for both types of supervision (UNEP/Implementing Agency; Partner/Executing Agency) and the overall rating for this sub-category is established as a simple average of the two.

The Review will assess the effectiveness of project management to-date with regard to providing leadership towards achieving the planned outcomes; managing team structures; maintaining productive partner relationships (including Steering Groups etc.); maintaining project relevance within changing external and strategic contexts; communication and collaboration with UNEP colleagues;

²⁸ During 2023 UNEP is reviewing its Partnership Policy and Procedures and a future version is expected to include a requirement for risk mitigation against weak performance among partners.

risk management; use of problem-solving; project adaptation and overall project execution. Evidence of adaptive project management should be highlighted.

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| Adaptation Fund | The Review should consider the extent to which the evaluand is being adapted in response to lessons and reflections during implementation; and the extent to which the intervention supports the use, development, or diffusion of innovative practices, tools, or technologies to improve or accelerate Climate Change Adaptation. |
| Global Environment Facility | For internally executed projects the Review Consultant should review whether the segregation of responsibilities meets the GEF requirements ²⁹ (the GEF Agency must separate its project implementation and execution duties and establish each of the following: (a) A satisfactory institutional arrangement for the separation of implementation and executing functions in different departments of the GEF Agency; and (b) Clear lines of responsibility, reporting and accountability within the GEF Agency between the project implementation and execution functions. |

iii. Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation

Here the term ‘stakeholder’ should be considered in a broad sense, encompassing all project partners; duty bearers with a role in delivering project outputs; target users of project outputs and any other collaborating agents external to UNEP and the implementing partner(s). The assessment will consider the quality and effectiveness of all forms of communication and consultation with stakeholders throughout the project life to-date and the support given to maximise collaboration and coherence between various stakeholders, including sharing plans, pooling resources, and exchanging learning and expertise. The inclusion and participation of all differentiated groups, including gender groups, should be considered.

iv. Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality (for Adaptation Fund, read ‘Equity’; for GCF, read ‘Gender Equity’)

The Review will ascertain to what extent the project has applied the UN Common Understanding on the human rights-based approach (HRBA) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Within this human rights context the Review will assess to what extent the intervention adheres to UNEP’s Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment³⁰.

The report should present the extent to which the intervention, following an adequate gender analysis at design stage, has implemented the identified actions and/or applied adaptive management to ensure that Gender Equality and Human Rights are adequately taken into account. In particular, the Review will consider the extent to which project implementation has taken into consideration: (i) possible gender inequalities in access to, and the control over, natural resources; (ii) specific

²⁹ GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards: Separation of Implementation and Execution Functions in GEF Partner Agencies (2019).

³⁰The Evaluation Office notes that Gender Equality was first introduced in the UNEP Project Review Committee Checklist in 2010 and, therefore, provides a criterion rating on gender for projects approved from 2010 onwards. Equally, it is noted that policy documents, operational guidelines and other capacity building efforts have only been developed since then and have evolved over time. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7655/-Gender_equality_and_the_environment_Policy_and_strategy-2015Gender_equality_and_the_environment_policy_and_strategy.pdf.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups (especially women, youth and children and those living with disabilities) to environmental degradation or disasters; (iii) the role of women in mitigating or adapting to environmental changes and engaging in environmental protection and rehabilitation.

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| Adaptation Fund | The Review should consider the extent to which the project’s design and implementation includes input of the designated authority (DA) and vulnerable groups such as women, youth, persons with disability, Indigenous Peoples, minorities, and other potentially marginalized groups or locations. It also encompasses the degree to which the intervention reduced or perpetuated inequalities, and how equitably benefits were accrued to vulnerable groups. |
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v. Environmental and Social Safeguards (for Adaptation Fund, read Human and ecological sustainability and security)

UNEP projects address environmental and social safeguards primarily through the process of environmental and social screening, risk assessment and management (avoidance or mitigation) of potential environmental and social risks and impacts associated with project and programme activities. The Review will confirm whether UNEP requirements³¹ were met to: screen proposed projects for any safeguarding issues; conduct sound environmental and social risk assessments; identify and avoid, or where avoidance is not possible, mitigate, environmental, social, and economic risks; apply appropriate environmental and social measures to minimize any potential risks and harm to intended beneficiaries and report on the implementation of safeguard management measures taken.

The Review will also consider the extent to which the management of the project is minimising UNEP’s environmental footprint.

vi. Country Ownership and Driven-ness

The Review will assess the quality and degree of engagement of government / public sector agencies in the project to-date. While there is some overlap between Country Ownership and Institutional Sustainability, this criterion focuses primarily on the forward momentum of the intended projects results, i.e. either: a) moving forwards from outputs to project outcomes or b) moving forward from project outcomes towards intermediate states. The Review will consider the involvement not only of those directly involved in project execution and those participating in technical or leadership groups, but also those official representatives whose cooperation is needed for change to be embedded in their respective institutions and offices (e.g. representatives from multiple sectors or relevant ministries beyond Ministry of Environment). This factor is concerned with the level of ownership generated by the project over outputs and outcomes and that is necessary for long term impact to be realised. This ownership should adequately represent the needs and interests of all gender and marginalised groups.

vii. Communication and Public Awareness

The Review will assess the effectiveness of: a) communication of learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups arising from the project during its life and b) public awareness activities that were undertaken during the implementation of the project to influence

³¹ For the review of project concepts and proposals, the Safeguard Risk Identification Form (SRIF) was introduced in 2019 and replaced the Environmental, Social and Economic Review note (ESERN), which had been in place since 2016. In GEF projects safeguards have been considered in project designs since 2011.

attitudes or shape behaviour among wider communities and civil society at large. The Review should consider whether existing communication channels and networks were used effectively, including meeting the differentiated needs of gender or marginalised groups, and whether any feedback channels were established. Where knowledge sharing platforms have been established under a project the Review will comment on the plans to sustain, handover or decommission the communication channel at the end of the project.

Section 3. REVIEW APPROACH, METHODS AND DELIVERABLES

(This section has both standard text and parts that are specific to the project, to be filled in)

The Mid-Term Review will use a participatory approach whereby key stakeholders are kept informed and consulted throughout the review process. Both quantitative and qualitative review methods will be used as appropriate to determine project achievements against the expected outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It is highly recommended that the Review Consultant maintains close communication with the project team and promotes information exchange throughout the review implementation phase in order to increase their (and other stakeholder) ownership of the review findings.

The findings of the Review will be based on the following: [This section should be edited for each review]

- (a) A **desk review** of:
 - Relevant background documentation, inter alia: *[add items]*
 - Project Document and Appendices
 - Project design documents (including minutes of the project design review meeting at approval); Annual Work Plans and Budgets or equivalent, revisions to the project (Project Document Supplement), the logical framework and its budget.
 - Project reports such as six-monthly progress and financial reports, progress reports from collaborating partners, meeting minutes, relevant correspondence etc.
 - Evaluations/Reviews of similar projects.

- (b) **Interviews** (individual or in group) with:
 - Task Manager and team members; *[add people as appropriate]*
 - Representatives of Implementing Agencies and National Governments etc; *[add people as appropriate]*
 - UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO).
 - Representatives from civil society and specialist groups (such as women's, farmers, and trade associations etc).

- (c) **Field visits:** *at least one*
- (d) **Other data collection tools:** If needed, to be decided by the Review Consultant at the inception phase

11. Review Deliverables and Review Procedures

The Review Consultant will prepare:

- **Inception Report:** (see Annex 2 for guidance on structure and content) containing confirmation of the results framework and Theory of Change of the project, project stakeholder analysis, review framework and a tentative review schedule.
- **Preliminary Findings Note:** typically, in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, the sharing of preliminary findings is intended to support the participation of the project team, act as a means to ensure all information sources have been accessed and provide an opportunity to verify emerging findings.

- **Draft and Final Review Reports:** (see Annex 3 for guidance on structure and content) containing an Executive Summary that can act as a stand-alone document; detailed analysis of the review findings organised by review criteria and supported with evidence; lessons learned and recommendations and an annotated ratings table.

Review of the draft Review Report. The Review Consultant will submit a draft report to the Task Manager and revise the draft in response to their comments and suggestions. Once a draft of adequate quality has been peer-reviewed and accepted, the Project Manager will share the cleared draft report with key project stakeholders for their review and comments. Stakeholders may provide feedback on any errors of fact and may highlight the significance of such errors in any conclusions as well as providing feedback on the proposed recommendations and lessons. Any comments or responses to draft reports will be sent to the Project Manager for consolidation. The Project Manager will provide all comments to the Review Consultant for consideration in preparing the final report, along with guidance on areas of contradiction or issues requiring an institutional response.

At the end of the review process and based on the findings in the Review Report, the Task Manager will prepare a **Recommendations Implementation Plan** in the format of a table, to be completed and updated at regular intervals, and circulate **Lessons Learned**.

12. The Review Consultant

The Review Consultant who will work under the overall responsibility of the Task Manager, Kavita Sharma, in consultation with the O.I.C. Portfolio Manager, Ersin Esen, Fund Management Officer. The consultant will liaise with the Project Manager on any procedural and methodological matters related to the Review. It is, however, the consultant's individual responsibility (where applicable) to arrange for their travel, visa, obtain documentary evidence, plan meetings with stakeholders (with assistance from the Partners), organize online surveys, and any other logistical matters related to the assignment. The Project Manager and project team will, where possible, provide logistical support (introductions, meetings etc.) allowing the Review Consultants to conduct the review as efficiently and independently as possible.

The Review Consultant will be hired over a period of 5 months, **from 1 Oct 2023 to 29 February 2024**, and should have the following: a university degree in environmental sciences, international development or other relevant political or social sciences area is required and an advanced degree in the same areas is desirable; a minimum of 8 years of technical / evaluation experience is required, preferably including evaluating large, regional or global programmes and using a Theory of Change approach; is desired. English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. For this consultancy, fluency in oral and written English is a requirement. Working knowledge of the UN system and specifically the work of UNEP is an added advantage. The work will be home-based with possible field visits.

The Review Consultant will be responsible, in close consultation with the Task Manager, for overall management of the Review and timely delivery of its outputs, described above in Section 10 Review Deliverables, above. The Review Consultant will ensure that all review criteria and questions are adequately covered.

13. Schedule of the Review

The table below presents the tentative schedule for the Review.

Table 3. Tentative schedule for the Review

| Milestone | Tentative Dates |
|---|------------------------|
| Inception Report | 10 October 2023 |
| Review Mission | TBD |
| E-based and onsite interviews, surveys etc. | October- November 2023 |

| | |
|---|------------------|
| PowerPoint/presentation on preliminary findings and recommendations | 5 December 2023 |
| Draft Report to Task Manager | 20 December 2023 |
| Draft Report shared with the wider group of stakeholders | Mid-January 2024 |
| Final Main Review Report | 5 February 2024 |
| Final Main Review Report shared with all respondents | 29 February 2024 |

14. Contractual Arrangements

The Review Consultant will be selected and recruited by the Task Manager under an individual Special Service Agreement (SSA) on a “fees only” basis (see below). By signing the service contract with UNEP/UNON, the consultant certifies that they have not been associated with the design and implementation of the project in any way which may jeopardize their independence and impartiality towards project achievements and project partner performance. Consultants who carry out a Mid-Term Review may not be contracted for a Terminal Review of the same evaluand. All consultants are required to sign the Code of Conduct Agreement Form.

Fees will be paid on an instalment basis, paid on acceptance by the Task Manager of expected key deliverables. The schedule of payment is as follows:

Schedule of Payment for the Consultant:

| Deliverable | Percentage Payment |
|---|--------------------|
| Approved Inception Report (<i>as per Guidance Note</i>) | 20% |
| Approved Draft Main Review Report (<i>as per Guidance Note</i>) | 30% |
| Approved Final Main Review Report (<i>as per Report Template</i>) | 50% |

Fees only contracts: Where applicable, air tickets will be purchased by UNEP and 75% of the Daily Subsistence Allowance for each authorised travel mission will be paid up front. Local in-country travel will only be reimbursed where agreed in advance with the Task Manager and on the production of acceptable receipts. Terminal expenses and residual DSA entitlements (25%) will be paid after mission completion.

The consultants may be provided with access to UNEP’s information management systems (e.g. PIMS, IPMR, Anubis, SharePoint etc) and if such access is granted, the consultants agree not to disclose information from that system to third parties beyond information required for, and included in, the Review Report.

In case the consultant is not able to provide the deliverables in accordance with these guidelines, and in line with the expected quality standards by the Task Manager, payment may be withheld at the discretion of the Head of Branch/Unit until the consultants have improved the deliverables to meet UNEP’s quality standards.

If the consultant fails to submit a satisfactory final product to the Task Manager in a timely manner, i.e. before the end date of their contract, UNEP reserves the right to employ additional human resources to finalize the report, and to reduce the consultants’ fees by an amount equal to the additional costs borne by the project team to bring the report up to standard or completion.