



Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

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Resilient Islands, Resilient Communities Kiribati

Final Report

MTR conducted in October 2022

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Acknowledgements

The MTR team comprised an independent international consultant, Ms. Dima Reda as the lead consultant covering integrated coastal management, ecosystem-based adaptation, and project evaluation, and a national consultant(s), including Mr. Tianeti loane, who covered protected area management, and community livelihood. Mr. loane coordinated the MTR process in Kiribati, leading in-country information and data collection, including at project site level.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BH	Budget holder
CO	Country Office
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
EOI	Expression of interest
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FLO	Funding liaison officer
FAO-GEF CU	FAO-GEF Coordination Unit
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ISLCM	Integrated Sustainable Land and Coastal Management
LTO	Lead technical officer
LTU	Lead technical unit
MELAD	Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development
MFMRD	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MTR	Mid-term review
NPD	National Project Director
NTE	Not to exceed (project completion date)
PMU	Project management unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTF	Project Task Force
RM	Mid-term review manager
R2R	Ridge to Reef
RO	Regional Office
SO	FAO Strategic Objective
SRO	Sub-regional Office

Executive summary

Introduction

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) is initiated by the FAO as the Implementation Agency as well as the financial and operational executing agency for this project and it aims to provide managers (at the Project Implementation Unit) with strategies and recommendations for more effectively and efficiently achieving the project's expected results and for replicating the results. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for managers and stakeholders. The official start date of the project was 16 April 2018 however the project start was delayed a year and a half and did not actually commence until late July 2019. The MTR covers a period of four years, spanning from the beginning of project execution through 31 July 2022.

The main objective of this evaluation as stated in the project document: "To review the progress and effectiveness of implementation in terms of achieving project objectives, outcomes and outputs. The findings and recommendations of this review will be instrumental for improving the overall project design and execution strategy for the remaining period of the project's term if necessary."

The decision makers and implementers will be the main users of the MTR report and will specifically benefit from the evaluation findings and recommendations on how to further refine the project design (re-examining outputs/indicators/targets) and the implementation of activities. Aside from contributing to organizational learning and informed planning, the MTR will also serve a purpose of establishing accountability of the project custodians (FAO and MFMRD and MELAD) to the GEF and to Kiribati.

The MTR set-up a collaborative and participatory approach in order to ensure close commitment with the Project Team, FAO, FAO-GEF CU, government counterparts, beneficiaries, and other key stakeholders. The MTR utilized a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative input focusing on four primary methodological elements:

- 1) Desk review of project documentation, and development of the inception report;
- 2) Meetings with key stakeholders, including a visit to one of the four project field sites. The original proposal was to visit 2 of the 4 sites, including a visit to North Tarawa Island, by ferry boat. The remaining three islands require flights and there is currently only one flight per week to any of the islands. Given time constraints, the MTR team proposed that only one additional island be visited for this MTR. The suggested second site was Butaritari Island, where the most progress on project outputs has been achieved to date. The visit to Butaritari Island was successfully conducted, however the visit to North Tarawa did not happen due to a delay in disbursements for travel from FAO to the national consultant.
- 3) Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at the national and local levels, including: the project's LTO, BH, FLO and CTA, the Funding Liaison Officer, Project Management Unit (PMU), the Project Steering Committee (PSC), and project partners (see Appendix 4 for the set of review questions); and
- 4) The MTR also involved structured interviews with beneficiaries on Butaritari island (Appendix 2 includes the questionnaire utilized for the site visit);

Once the above were completed a draft MTR was prepared for circulation to MTR participants for additional feedback and input, as appropriate. The MTR was finalized integrating input received and provided to the project team and stakeholders.

Due to the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, this MTR's International Consultant was not able to travel for the MTR. In this context, the general approach was that the International lead consultant worked remotely from her home-office doing a desk review of project documents supported by remote semi-structured interviews using communication tools such as email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and other convenient electronic tools. The National consultant was able to conduct interviews face-to-face as well as by using communication tools as well such as phone, Skype, Zoom or other means, following guidelines that are in place locally to minimize epidemiologic risks.

All collected data (including photos/videos) were remotely shared with the lead consultant. Where relevant and where technically possible, the National consultant tried to organize field video-calls from project sites to help the lead consultant directly observe relevant project outputs and activities.

Main findings

Relevance

Overall, the project was found to be highly relevant. The project is aligned closely with the key government strategies and policies specifically those seeking to increase water and food security with integrated and sector-specific approaches and promoting healthy and resilient ecosystems. Further, activities and outputs are consistent with the project's overarching objective to improve biodiversity conservation and landscape level management to enhance socio-ecological resilience to climate variability and change. Selected project partners and other implementing stakeholders are also deemed relevant for the attainment of project results.

The project's goal, objectives and execution strategy are consistent with national, regional and global priorities. The attainment of project outcomes not only addresses Kiribati's needs for improved ecosystem-based sustainable use and conservation of island resources, but it also fits well as part of the GEF's umbrella R2R Pacific Islands programme, GEFs GEF-5 focal areas and strategic objectives: BD-1, LD-3, IW-3, SFM-1 and FAO's programmatic goals for reduction of food insecurity and strengthened capacity for environmental management and resilience systems.

The project as designed was also realistic to achieve its goals within the 5-year time period and not overly ambitious. The original ProDoc included the provision of activities across three atolls and while the ProDoc opened the door to include a fourth site, the operational and cost aspects of including this fourth site was not taken into account at the design phase. The site was agreed upon during the inception meeting however, provisions for how to integrate a fourth site were not fully integrated into the project implementation.

Overall relevance rating - Highly Satisfactory

Effectiveness

The project has produced some good outputs as of the MTR point, particularly through the development of three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) completed in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea (output 2.1.1); the establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation now being enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari (output 1.1.1); and the establishment of MPA sites (output 2.1.3)

While many of the processes and ground work for implementation of concrete activities have been completed, field work especially related to agriculture production, agroforestry, and SFM needs to begin. It will be important for the project team and implementing partners to prioritize moving toward completing activities on the ground.

There is however not a systematic tracking of indicators as per those agreed at CEO Endorsement (unless there has been an approved change to the logframe). For some of the outputs (i.e. output 1.1.1 and 2.1.1) in the 2022 PIR the same indicator is used to demonstrate progress against different outputs. There is also no evidence that an M&E system has been put in place to support the PMU in tracking and reporting on project results.

Although there was an agreement by the PSC to add Kiritimati island as a fourth site to the project – no activities have been completed for the fourth site. Moreover, baseline data has not been collected, baseline tracking tools have not been completed, and overall there is a lack of integration across implementation for a fourth site.

Overall Effectiveness Rating: MS

Efficiency

The project has had significant delays, due both to initial start-up delays and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should also be noted that Kiribati along with other countries in the Pacific have only recently lifted many of the travel restrictions associated with the global pandemic. At the time of the MTR, flight frequency, which is already limited, had not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Co-finance materialization has however been quite strong for the project and has contributed to the efficiency of the project allowing activities to proceed even when there were delays in disbursements. The bulk of co-finance has come from the in-kind contribution of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource (MFMRD), which utilized their own personnel as well as project staff to undertake the R2R project activities early on while disbursements were delayed from FAO's side. While co-finance materialization has been strong, overall project disbursement is quite low and unless there is a considerable project extension will likely not improve significantly.

Overall Efficiency rating: MS

Sustainability

The excellent alignment of the project with country and beneficiary priorities provides a strong basis for the sustainability of results that come out of the R2R project. There is also evidence that

communities engaged by the R2R project have proactively designated marine protected areas (MPAs). It is important for the project to strategize with the Island Councils as to how to sustain community committees and commitment after project close.

Knowledge management, including codifying lessons learned and disseminating information on project results is a key avenue for securing longer term project impacts. The project team should ensure that all documentation and data collection undertaken by the project be easily accessible to government officials at all levels. Moreover, key messages should be translated into i-Kiribati and disseminated in a user friendly manner to community groups.

The MTR team considers that there are moderate risks to sustainability. This mostly related to only partially completed project outcomes by project closure. However, this is mitigated in part because of the evidence of high commitment from project partners which are likely to continue into a foreseeable future. Therefore, the MTR team rates the **overall likelihood of risks to sustainability as moderately likely (ML)**.

Factors affecting performance

The project has built strong partnerships and the PMU is well respected and communicates well with the PSC as well as other project stakeholders. FAO support has also improved over the last year of implementation however, prior support was intermittent and slow procurement added to the delays in project activities.

All partners interviewed expressed frustration with FAO's procurement processes and delays stemming from the FAO-SAP & RAP offices, in particular with requests for disbursement advances for travel. This should be improved with the addition of a procurement officer based in the FAO-SAP office in Samoa.

Monitoring, tracking, and reporting on indicators is one of the weaker aspects of the project implementation. The team does not have a consistent system for tracking progress and that then lays too much burden on the National Project Coordinator (NPC).

The project through its executing partners has built awareness and a strong relationship with local communities however, visibility of FAO as the implementing partner agency has been missing.

Cross-cutting dimensions

The project has developed a Comprehensive Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector that is comprehensive but how it will be used for the project is not yet apparent. The project needs to do a better job of tracking the number of women trained, engaged, etc. with project activities. It is also not clear if there has been any Island level gender-sensitive resilience indicators developed or made available for target islands.

The initial Environmental and Social (E&S) safeguard rating was moderate and has continued to be moderate throughout implementation. Risks have been well documented through the PIR. At the time of the MTR the vast majority of activities undertaken have been related to capacity development, planning, and developing plans/regulations. Any risks will take place once livelihood initiatives are in

place, idle lands are utilized for productive purposes, and the protected areas have been established. The rating for **E&S safeguards** is an **S**.

Conclusions

Taking into consideration the main findings related to the questions and criteria in the MTR reached the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1 (Criterion: Relevance): It was found that the implementation and design of the components, outcomes and outputs of the project are closely aligned with and relevant to the participating institutions and the beneficiaries of the project. Investment is rooted in communities, their capacity development and participation in management and decision making processes through involvement in government programmes and activities aimed at improving sustainable use, conservation and management of marine and land resources, and increasing community resilience to climate change. As a result of this scenario, the **project relevance is rated as highly satisfactory** and, given the relevance, the activities undertaken by mid-term foster the active participation of those beneficiaries who have been engaged in the field.

Conclusion 2 (Criterion: Effectiveness): The degree of progress towards the outputs laid out in the project logframe has several significant lags. The **project's effectiveness is therefore considered moderately satisfactory** for each of the components and for most of the outputs of the project. The project has produced some good outputs as of the MTR point, particularly through the development of three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) completed in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea (output 2.1.1); the establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation is being enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari (output 1.1.1); and the establishment of MPA sites (output 2.1.3). Many of the processes and ground work for implementation of concrete activities have been completed however, field work especially related to agriculture production, agroforestry, and SFM needs to begin. The issue of land tenure has also caused some delays in determining idle land sites and will need to be resolved in order for the project to realize its full impact potential.

Conclusion 3. (Criterion: Effectiveness/Efficiency): Although there was an agreement by the PSC to add Kiritimati island as a fourth site to the project (during the project inception) – no activities, other than some planning, have been completed for the fourth site. Moreover, baseline data has not been collected, baseline tracking tools have not been completed, and overall there is a lack of integration across implementation for a fourth site. Given the remaining time left in the project (even with an extension) focus on the three sites where activities have already started will provide a more effective and efficient use of the remaining project resources (both time and monetary).

Conclusion 4 (Criterion: Efficiency – co-finance): The materialization of close to 50% of the co-finance committed at CEO Endorsement has been has contributed to the efficiency of the project allowing activities to proceed even when there were delays in disbursements. The majority of the co-finance has come from the MFMR through in-kind contribution, which included utilizing the time of MFMR staff and personnel from other funded projects and building on synergies with other projects including the UNDP/GEF project 5414: "Enhancing national food security in the context of global climate change implemented." For this part of the efficiency the project is considered highly satisfactory.

Conclusion 5 (Criterion: Efficiency): As of the 30 September 2022, the project had utilized only 25.6% of the total budget in part due to significant delays, due both to initial start-up delays and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall **efficiency of the project is therefore considered moderately satisfactory.**

Conclusion 6 (Criterion: Sustainability): The MTR team considers that there are minor risks to sustainability as there is a high probability that key outcomes will be achieved by the project closure (if project is granted an extension) and will continue into the foreseeable future. Therefore, the MTR team conditionally rates **project sustainability as moderately likely (ML)**. The excellent alignment of the project with country and beneficiary priorities provides a strong basis for the sustainability of results along with strong support from Island Councils in the field. It is important for the project to strategize with stakeholders at the local level as to how to sustain commitment after project close.

Conclusion 7 (Criterion: Factors Affecting Performance): The MTR team has determined several administrative and project coordination factors that are affecting project implementation these include: (i) cumbersome procurement procedures and processes for disbursing funds, which have contributed to delays; (ii) non-responsiveness of the FAO-SAP team in Samoa at the beginning of project implementation (this has improved in the past 6-12 months); and (iii) weaknesses in measuring project indicators in a timely and accurate manner. These issues are important to address what can be improved without having to restructure or add a great deal of resources (see Recommendation 1 and 3 below).

Conclusion 8 (Criterion: Factors Affecting Performance): The project has faced many set-backs, initially with a 15-month delay putting in place a PMU and with no CTA on board until recently coupled with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the major challenges faced by the project and shortened timeframe available, the project has made some good progress. A 24 month extension would be necessary for the project to complete many of the activities for the project and to make strong progress in areas that have progressed slowly to date.

Conclusion 9 (Criterion: Cross-cutting issues, Gender): The project has made some progress with regards to gender, in particular through a Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector for Kiribati completed as well as proactively engaging women as beneficiaries and staff. This is however an area where the team could do a better job in tracking participation of women and capturing the project's gender responsive measures. It would also be helpful to document how the gender assessment will be used and disseminated in-country.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the report the following recommendations are posed by the MTR team:

Recommendation 1. (PMU, PSC, FAO-SAP): Develop an overall work plan identifying remaining activities, with agreed realistic timeframes for completion, and including an outline of a procurement plan for the remaining project timeframe. While AWP's have recently been completed and agreed at the latest PSC meeting (September 2022) – the project would benefit from the

development of an overarching work plan for the remaining activities to be completed. Delivery rates have overall been low for the project so it will be important for the team to ensure commitments and disbursement rates pick-up. By laying out a clear procurement plan and working with the FAO-SAP procurement officer to determine key milestones, the project can avoid long delays.

Recommendation 2. (PSC, FAO-HQ, FAO-SAP): Project Extension by 24 months. The MTR notes that the status of the project timeframe will mean the remaining activities and the project outcomes will not be achieved. A recommendation of an additional 24-month extension of the project to complete the remaining activities due to the advent of the global pandemic and its effects on Kiribati. As noted in the MTR, Kiribati along with other countries in the Pacific have only recently lifted many of the travel restrictions associated with the global pandemic. At the time of the MTR, flight frequency, which is already limited, had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Ground implementation of attaining the project's objects have started to pick up; recently approved LoAs have provisions for local personnel which once hired will increase the probability for achieving satisfactory results across the three components.

In order to facilitate this extension, the major costs will be related to the PMU and administration of which finances can be sourced from the savings arising from delays in staff recruitment. The remaining activities of the project have residual budget that are sufficiently to cover the necessary costs.

Recommendation 3. (PSC, FAO-PFT, PMU): Increase frequency of PSC meetings and set-up Regular Meetings of FAO-Project Task Force (PTF). Since project inception in 2019 the PSC has met only three times (including a meeting held in October 2022). To ensure adherence to work plans and to have a more efficient decision making process it is recommended that the PSC meet formally twice per year. In addition, the Project Task Force has yet to meet formally, including a regularly scheduled meeting will improve coordination and communication with FAO-SAP and will allow for additional support be provided to the PMU. It is also recommended that the new procurement officer based in FAO-SAP be included at least initially in the PTF strategize and plan for a smoother procurement process.

Recommendation 4. (PMU, PSC, FAO-HQ FAO-SAP): Consider dropping fourth site on Kiritimati Island. The fourth site was added during the inception meeting (Oct 2019) at the time of CEO Endorsement the logframe did not include any indicators related to Kiritimati Island and baseline data has not been collected (no indication of site in tracking tools or within the logframe). Across the 2022 PIR Kiritimati Island is only mentioned twice. Once by the Budget Holder and once in the E&S section on the need for "Consultation workshop with landowners to discuss further final selection of idle land sites in Kiritimati island and North Tabiteuea and North Tarawa." Given the difficulty to travel to the island (high costs, infrequent and unreliable flight schedules), the fact that the addition of the site has not been well integrated into the logframe, description or overall activity descriptions, and that there has not been any work completed on the island to date – it is recommended that the PSC consider dropping the fourth site and focus the remaining time, budget and effort on completing the remaining activities in the three sites originally selected and where some progress has already been made. The issue would need to be brought up and raised with the PSC.

Recommendation 5. (PMU, FAO-SAP): Establish a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan and system for the project (Outcome 3). It is recommended that an M&E Expert, as is indicated in the ProDoc, is hired to develop and advise the PMU in the design and establishment of an M&E system to obtain information on progress in meeting targets, evaluating results and facilitating the systematization of experiences. Currently, the system is haphazard and difficult to track. It is not entirely clear what the entire scope of activities are that need to be completed along with what has been completed. It is also not easy to track what is included in the LoAs and how those relate back to the project outputs and outcomes. The PMU would benefit from support to establish a clear guideline for tracking and linking the different pieces of information into a coherent overarching system.

Recommendation 6. (PSC, PMU, FAO-SAP FAO-HQ): Adjust indicators and targets in the logical framework. The main indicator that will need adjustment is under Output 1.1.4 – target: “At least 2 I-Kiribati nationals applied for/enrolled in R2R Sustainable Development Post Graduate Programme (James Cook University) by project end.” Since the master’s program is no longer open to applicants, this activity will need to be adjusted and the indicator/target changed. A budget revision will be necessary as well. The PSC may consider other types of capacity support or technical training which may include: (i) targeted training of MELD staff in ecosystem and community-based conservation; (ii) develop community training and involvement plans to aid in local engagement involving local youth and women; (iii) sponsor and/or organize community-based restoration programs at target sites that involve youth; and/or (iv) engage youth and children in the monitoring, training and awareness raising efforts on all islands.

GEF rating table

Table A11.3 MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ¹	Summary comments ²
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Aligns strategically with country goals & contributes to GEBs
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	Directly aligns with GEF & FAO strategic priorities
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly relevant to national and beneficiary needs
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	S	Strong complementarity with existing interventions
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Due to project delays, COVID-19, and natural disasters overall project is behind on several results and associated targets
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	Several outputs have only recently begun or need to start

¹ See rating scheme at the end of the document.

² Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ³ and project objectives	MS	
- Outcome 1	MS	The establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation is being enforced but more work is needed across other outputs
- Outcome 2	MS	3 ICBMPs have been completed as well as the establishment of MPA sites. Other areas need more work
- Outcome 3	MS	Reporting and some KIM – more work on M&E system needed
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	MS	Level of outcomes achieved include moderate shortcomings
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁴	MS	Level of project disbursement not adequate to achieve project results by end of project however co-finance has helped mitigate impact.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	Moderate risks to sustainability mostly related to potential shortcomings to project outcomes by the project closure
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Financial risks are moderate but could be reduced through increased disbursements and completion of activities
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	L	High degree of relevance and alignment with government and beneficiaries
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Frameworks structures and/or processes that will create mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and technical knowledge transfer after the project's closure are still in early stages
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	Project is tracking E&S risks well
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	To ensure catalysis & replication it will be important for project to strengthen KM mechanism
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁵	MU	Early stages of implementation were weak with many delays
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	PMU is responsive and has built strong partnerships
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MU	Through the first stages of implementation support from FAO was weak – this has strengthened in the last year of implementation

³ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

⁴ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

⁵ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	MU	Oversight could be strengthened through more frequent communication and meetings
E3. Quality of project execution	MS	Activities in the field have been well executed with strong collaboration with Island Councils and beneficiaries
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	Execution of project was stalled during the pandemic but appears to have now picked up with increased inter-island travel and planned LoAs.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MS	Co-financing is strong however disbursements are low
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Project partners are engaged and stakeholder engagement strong
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	More emphasis on disseminating information and developing KM products will be needed moving forward
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	GEF tracking tools need to be completed, all indicators should be tracked and reported on;
E7.1 M&E design	MU	The M&E design would benefit from providing funding for an M&E expert to design system
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MU	Need to dedicate additional resources to properly implement plan
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	Several of the weaknesses for performance can be addressed through better planning and greater support of the FAO-SAP. In remaining phases of implementation, this can be improved without requiring any major restructuring
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MS	Gender indicators should be better tracked and how the project will integrate the Gender Assessment needs to be detailed
F2. Human rights issues	S	No issues were found related to human rights
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	E&S risks have been proactively handled
Overall project rating	MS	

1. Introduction

1.1. *Purpose and scope of the MTR*

- (1) This Mid-Term Review (MTR) is initiated by the FAO as the Implementation Agency as well as the financial and operational executing agency for this project and it aims to provide managers (at the Project Implementation Unit) with strategies recommendations for more effectively and efficiently achieving the project's expected results and for replicating the results. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for managers and stakeholders. The official start date of the project was 16 April 2018 however the project start was delayed a year and a half and did not actually commence until late July 2019. The MTR covers the period of four years, spanning from the beginning of project execution through 30 September 2022.

1.2. *Objective of the MTR*

- (2) The main objective of this evaluation is stated in the project document: "To review the progress and effectiveness of implementation in terms of achieving project objectives, outcomes and outputs. The findings and recommendations of this review will be instrumental for improving the overall project design and execution strategy for the remaining period of the project's term if necessary."
- (3) In particular, the review aims to achieve the following specific objectives:
 - I. To assess the relevance of the intervention in relation to the needs and expectations of the beneficiaries (participating islands and communities), the Country Development Objectives and FAO Strategic Objective 2 (SO2): Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner. As well as the following GEF strategic objectives and programs:
 - a. Biodiversity (BD-1): Improve Sustainability of Protected Area Systems;
 - b. Land Degradation (LD-3): Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape
 - c. International Waters (IW-3): Support Foundational Capacity Building, Portfolio Learning, and Targeted Research Needs for Ecosystem-based, Joint Management of Transboundary Water Systems
 - d. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM-1): Reduce pressures on forest resources and generate sustainable flows of forest ecosystem services
 - II. To evaluate the progress made by the project in four years of execution, particularly the degree to which it has contributed to reaching the project objectives. In doing so, the evaluation will assess the progress made and gaps in compliance vis-à-vis the expected targets.
 - III. To assess the progress towards achieving project sustainability and its potential long-term impact, if any.
 - IV. To identify lessons learned and corrective measures in relation to project design, implementation and management.

- (4) The review assessed the progress made thus far toward the expected outcomes and overall objectives, and will assist in ensuring the project is on track to achieve the maximum possible results by the time of project closure. The MTR was carried out as a collaborative and participatory exercise, and has drawn from lessons and experiences from the GEF portfolio, in particular projects that were part of the regional R2R program, more widely to provide relevant recommendations for the remaining implementation period.
- (5) The list of main review questions are listed in Box 1. These are further elaborated in *Appendix 4. MTR matrix (review questions and sub-questions)*.

Box 1: Main review questions

Evaluation Criteria: Relevance

- Does the project's objective fit within the priorities of the local government and local communities?
- Did the project concept originate from local or national stakeholders, and/or were relevant stakeholders sufficiently involved in project development?

Evaluation Criteria: Efficiency

- Is the project cost-effective?
- Are expenditures in line with international standards and norms for development projects?
- Are management and implementation arrangements efficient in delivering the outputs necessary to achieve outcomes?
- Was the project implementation delayed? If so, did that affect cost-effectiveness?
- What is the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation?
- To what extent is the project leveraging additional resources?

Evaluation Criteria: Effectiveness

- Is the project objective likely to be met? To what extent and in what timeframe?
- What are the key factors contributing to project success or underachievement?
- What are the key risks and priorities for the remainder of the implementation period?
- Is adaptive management being applied to ensure effectiveness?
- Is monitoring and evaluation used to ensure effective decision-making?

Evaluation Criteria: Sustainability

- To what extent are project results likely to be dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that any required financial resources will be available to sustain the project results once the GEF assistance ends?
- Do relevant stakeholders have or are likely to achieve an adequate level of "ownership" of results, to have the interest in ensuring that project benefits are maintained?
- Do relevant stakeholders have the necessary technical capacity to ensure that project benefits are maintained?
- To what extent are the project results dependent on socio-political factors?
- To what extent are the project results dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance?
- Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of project impacts?

Factors Affective Performance

- (Project Design) Is the project design, including the indicators and targets of the Results Framework, appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Are the project's logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components, clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe?
- (Project execution) To what extent did FAO effectively discharged its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project? How well have risks been identified and managed? What changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project?
- (Project Management and administration) What was the role of the BH to manage and administer the project, considering the proper use of funds, and the acquisition and contracting of goods and services?
- (Financial management and Co-financing) What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project? To what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered, and has there been any additional leveraged co-financing provided since implementation began? How has any short fall in co-financing or materialization of greater than expected co-financing affected project results?
- (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO PTF (BH, LTO, CTA and GCU FLO) delivered on its project oversight and supervision?
- (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, indigenous populations, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and the private sector, been involved in project formulation and implementation? What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?
- (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience? How can this be improved?
- (M&E design & implementation) Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient? Does the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability? How can the M&E system be improved?

Cross-Cutting Dimensions

- (Gender and minority groups) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits? Was a gender analysis undertaken? To what extent were the vulnerable groups (women, youth and disable) involved in the project activities? Has the project made specific contributions to the wellbeing of vulnerable groups (empowerment, reduced vulnerability)? What were the results achieved or likely to be achieved (sex aggregated socioeconomic co-benefits data)? Are there any lessons learned in terms of gender that could be used for similar future interventions (design, implementation, M&E)?

- (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were E&S concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? What was the ESS category at project endorsement? Is that category confirmed at mid-term? Any mitigation plan?

1.3. *Intended users*

- (6) The decision makers and implementers will be the main users of the MTR report and will specifically benefit from the evaluation findings and recommendations on how to further refine the project design (re-examining outputs/indicators/targets) and the implementation of activities.
- (7) Aside from contributing to organizational learning and informed planning, the MTR will also serve a purpose of establishing accountability of the project custodians (FAO and MFMRD & MELAD) to the GEF and to the Government of Kiribati.

1.4. *Methodology*

- (8) The MTR set-up a collaborative and participatory approach in order to ensure close commitment with the Project Team, FAO, FAO-GEF CU, government counterparts, beneficiaries, and other key stakeholders. The MTR utilized a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative input focusing on four primary methodological elements:
 - Desk review of project documentation, and development of the inception report;
 - Meetings with key stakeholders, including a visit to one of the four project field sites. The original proposal was to visit 2 of the 4 sites, including a visit to North Tarawa Island, by ferry boat. The remaining three islands require flights and there is currently only one flight per week to any of the islands. Given time constraints, the MTR team proposed that only one additional island be visited for this MTR. The suggested second site was Butaritari Island, where the most progress on project outputs has been achieved to date. The visit to Butaritari Island was successfully conducted, however the visit to North Tarawa did not happen due to a delay in disbursements for travel from FAO to the national consultant.
 - Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at the national and local levels, including: the project's LTO, BH, FLO and CTA, the Funding Liaison Officer, Project Management Unit (PMU), the Project Steering Committee (PSC), and project partners (see Appendix 4 for the set of review questions); and
 - The MTR also involved structured interviews with beneficiaries on Butaritari island (Appendix 2 includes the questionnaire utilized for the site visit);
- (9) Once the above were completed a draft MTR was prepared for circulation to MTR participants for additional feedback and input, as appropriate. The MTR was finalized integrating input received and provided to the project team and stakeholders.
- (10) Due to the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, this MTR's International Consultant was not able to travel for the MTR. In this context, the general approach was that the International lead

consultant worked remotely from her home-office doing a desk review of project documents supported by remote semi-structured interviews using communication tools such as email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and other convenient electronic tools. The National consultant was able to conduct interviews face-to-face as well as by using communication tools as well such as phone, Skype, Zoom or other means, following guidelines that are in place locally to minimize epidemiologic risks.

(11) All collected data (including photos/videos) were remotely shared with the lead consultant. Where relevant and where technically possible, the National consultant tried to organize field video-calls from project sites to help the lead consultant directly observe relevant project outputs and activities.

(12) Three main sources of primary data and information will be examined:

- As per FAO's *Guide for planning and conducting mid-term reviews of FAO-GEF projects and programmes* a wide variety of documents covering project design, implementation progress, monitoring, will be reviewed:
 - a. GEF PIF with technical clearance
 - b. Comments from the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and
 - c. GEF Council members on project design, plus FAO responses
 - d. FAO concept note and FAO Project Review Committee report
 - e. Request for GEF CEO endorsement
 - f. FAO-GEF project preparation grant document
 - g. GEF-approved project document and any updated approved document following the inception workshop, with latest budgets showing budget revisions
 - h. Project inception report
 - i. Six-monthly FAO PPRs
 - j. Annual workplans and budgets (including budget revisions)
 - k. All annual GEF PIR reports
 - l. All other monitoring reports prepared by the project
 - m. Documentation detailing any changes to the project framework or components, such as changes to originally designed outcomes and outputs
 - n. List of stakeholders
 - o. List of project sites and site location maps (for planning mission itineraries and fieldwork)
 - p. Execution agreements under OPIM and letters of agreement
 - q. Technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports, including back-to-the-office reports by project and FAO staff, including any reports on technical support provided by FAO headquarters or regional office staff
 - r. Minutes of the meetings of the PSC, FAO PTF and other groups
 - s. Any ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and online records on FPMIS
 - t. Any awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project, such as brochures,
 - u. leaflets, presentations for meetings, project web address, etc.

- v. FAO policy documents in relation to topics such as FAO Strategic Objectives and gender
 - w. Finalized GEF focal-area tracking tools at CEO endorsement, as well as updated tracking tools at mid-term for GEF-5 projects (and for GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects with Biodiversity (BD) Focal Area
 - x. Financial management information, including an up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project's financial management and expenditures to date, a summary of any financial revisions made to the project and their purpose, and copies of any completed audits for comment and co-financing letters submitted at endorsement stage
 - y. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c), or the most recent versions of these policies.
- One-on-one consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, using "semi-structured interviews" with a key set of questions in a conversational format (see Appendix 2). The questions asked aimed to provide answers to the points described in the following section. Triangulation of results, i.e. comparing information from different sources, such as documentation and interviews, or interviews on the same subject with different stakeholders, will be used to corroborate or check the reliability of evidence.
 - Direct observations of project results and activities at one of four field sites⁶ covered by the project: Butaritari Island .

(13) Stakeholders interviewed either in-person through the National consultant or via video-conference (Zoom, Skype) included amongst others (please see Appendix 3 for a complete list of stakeholders consulted/interviewed):

- Members of the Project team including the project supervision team;
- Members of the Project Steering Committee;
- Participatory partners and executing partners of the project;
- Local communities using resources at Butaritari island; and
- Stakeholders on Butaritari island who have benefited directly.

(14) MTR findings were assessed against the primary GEF evaluation criteria:

- 1) *Relevance* – the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organizational policies, including changes over time.
- 2) *Effectiveness* – the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
- 3) *Efficiency* – the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
- 4) *Results/impacts* – the positive and negative, and foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects produced by a development intervention. In GEF terms, results include direct project outputs, short-to medium term outcomes, and longer-term impact including global environmental benefits, replication effects and other, local effects.

⁶ Given the ongoing global pandemic, the National consultant undertook the field visit on behalf of the consultant team

- 5) *Sustainability*– the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.
- 6) *Factors affecting the performance and delivery of the project results* - focused on quality of project oversight, execution and management, including financial management and materialization of co-financing, project design, partnerships and stakeholder engagement, communications and knowledge management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), with specific attention to M&E Design, and M&E Plan Implementation.
- 7) *Cross-cutting dimensions*- including gender, indigenous-peoples and minority-group concerns and equity concerns, Environmental and Social Safeguards.

(15) Ratings are provided on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and results and factors affecting performance based on a six-point ratings scale (below).

- **Highly satisfactory (HS):** The project had no shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency
- **Satisfactory (S):** The project had minor shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency
- **Moderately satisfactory (MS):** The project had moderate shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency
- **Moderately unsatisfactory (MU):** The project had significant shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency
- **Unsatisfactory (U):** The project had major shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency
- **Highly unsatisfactory (HU):** The project had severe shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives in terms of relevance, effectiveness, or efficiency

➤ **Ratings for sustainability** will be based on a four-point scale: Unlikely (U), moderately unlikely (MU), moderately likely (ML), and likely (L).

(16) Composition of the MTR team: The MTR team consisted of the lead international consultant Ms. Dima Reda and a national consultant Mr. Tianti Ioane. Ms. Reda has 20 years of experience working in the international development field focusing on results and knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and institutional capacity building. Much of her work in these areas has been centered on engaging and working with vulnerable communities to support climate change adaptation efforts. Ms. Reda has recently been working to develop GCF projects utilizing community-based adaptation tools and models to enhance the adaptive capacity and build climate resilience of small-holder farmers and coastal communities. Previously, she led the development and implementation of the Global Environment Facilities' (GEF) results management system. Mr. Ioane has a Master in Agriculture and served as a national consultant for COVID-19 UN-Emergency food programme in Kiribati. He has extensive contacts and experience working with communities and government officials in Kiribati having served as a Member of Parliament (2016) and as the Deputy Director of Agriculture (2015).

1.5. *Limitations*

- (17) Due to the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, this MTR was largely undertaken remotely to minimize epidemiologic risks. In this context, the general approach was to have the International lead consultant work remotely from her home-office doing a desk review of project documents supported by remote semi-structured interviews using communication tools such as email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and other convenient electronic tools. The National consultant was responsible to conduct interviews face-to-face or by using communication tools as well such as phone, Skype, Zoom or other means, following guidelines that are in place locally to minimize epidemiologic risks. The National consultant undertook the field visit.
- (18) Other limitations included (i) the lack of availability of data for the mid-term tracking tool (TT) results. These should be completed as soon as possible and verified at the time of the final evaluation along with the final TT results; (ii) availability of Project Steering Committee (PSC) members (the MTR team was able to interview 3 out of the 7 PSC members as many were not available or not responsive to emails and calls); (iii) limited opportunity to travel to all project sites (given the difficulty of travel, time constraints for the MTR, and delays in receipt of fares and DSA from FAO), the National Consultant was only able to visit 1 out of the 4 project sites.

2. **Project background and context**

- (19) Kiribati is home to some of the world's most significant coastal and marine biodiversity. The country has more than 1500 documented species and 22 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Though Kiribati's terrestrial biodiversity is limited and the country has very limited land and agriculture resources with soils shallow, alkaline and very low in organic matter, many of indigenous crop species form the basis of sustenance on the islands. These include coconuts ('Te ni' – *Cocos nucifera*); pandanus, ('Te kaina' – *Pandanus tectorius*); breadfruit ('Te mai' – *Artocarpus altilis*); and giant swamp taro ('Te bwabwai' – *Cyrtosperma merkusii*). Kiribati's near shore fisheries in the country's lagoons and coastal areas provide food, livelihood, nutrition, income and employment benefits. Fisheries play a critical role in local food security in Kiribati where the per capita consumption seafood is one of the highest in the world.
- (20) The Kiribati Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) project is part of the broader Pacific R2R Program: "Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods". The regional R2R program's goal is "to maintain and enhance Pacific Island countries' ecosystem goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural) through integrated approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity and coastal resource management that contributes to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience."
- (21) The Kiribati R2R project objective is to improve the resilience of Kiribati to the impacts of climate variability and change through biodiversity conservation, land and seascape management and community participation in decision making. The long-term solution requires the establishment of models for integrated conservation of coastal ecosystems

applying a R2R or whole-island approach that are commensurate with sustainable utilization. There are two main barriers standing between the existing situation and the project objective and long-term solution:

- The first barrier stems from Kiribati's limited experience with the creation and operationalization of coastal zone protected areas and balancing conservation with sustainable utilization practices. The nation has established through a single regulation the massive Phoenix Island Protected Area (PIPA). However, under the baseline, there is no formal protected area system and supporting regulatory and/or institutional framework to secure ecosystem integrity on inhabited islands.
- The second barrier stems from the island nation's limited experience with effective R2R community based conservation planning and management. The Government of Kiribati (GoK) has some experience with land use planning, but ecosystem and community based planning and management using a "whole island" or R2R approach has yet to be realized. Strategic and informed management regimes required to support sustainable natural resource use do not exist in Kiribati. Nearly all natural resources operate under an "open access" regime which without adequate checks and balances represents a major threat to sustainability. Strategic, informed and coordinated community based management and decision making that recognizes a balance between conservation and sustainable use is generally not practiced. The GoK deems this unsustainable in light of emerging threats.

(22)The project will apply three interrelated components to systematically address the two barriers standing between the existing situation and achievement of the project objective. The project's three components will generate and demonstrate ecosystem and community-based approaches. The project's first component will assist Kiribati to operationalize a national system of coastal zone protected areas to help secure global environmental benefits. The project's second component will set in place and operationalize a regulatory and co-management framework for strategic, island-based ecosystem conservation and sustainable management of its natural resources. With GEF support, island communities and island-based regulatory bodies will have the capacity to generate and apply ecosystem and community-based conservation and sustainable use management strategies.

(23)The GoK at the project proposal stage identified three unique pilot site islands in the Gilberts. These include the following:

Island Site One: North Tarawa



Source: Project Document

(24) North Tarawa is located in the Gilbert Island chain. South Tarawa is densely populated (63,092 live on a land just 16 sq. km). North Tarawa is sparsely populated (7,018 lived on a land of 15 sq. km). The lagoon and reef resources shared by these two island areas provide habitat for critical species such as Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Big Eye Tuna (*Thunnus obsesus*), Humphead Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*), and Giant Clam (*Tridacna gigas*).

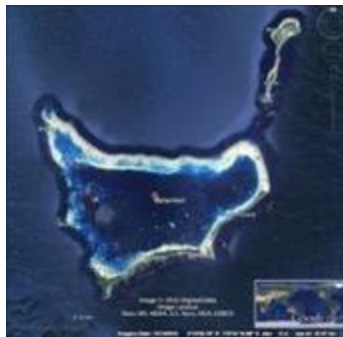
Island Site Two: North Tabiteuea



Source: Project Document

(25) Tabiteuea is located in the southern Gilbert Island chain and has a population of 4,181 with a total land mass of 26 sq. km. The island is administratively divided between "Tab-North" and "Tab-South". These administrative units share the same resources, including the extensive lagoon and reef fisheries. Tabiteuea offers critical habitat for species such as Giant grouper (*Epinephelu lanceolata*) and Humphead Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*). The map included above is for North Tabiteuea and is where the project is directly implementing activities. There are no direct project activities in South Tabiteuea but the project does have partners at fisheries (CBFM – Anchors Pathways project) that implement activities there.

Island Site Three: Butaritari Island



Source: Project Document

(26) Butaritari Island is located in the northern Gilbert Island chain with a total population of 3,250 and a total land mass of 14 sq. km. Butaritari has a wet climate compared with the central and southern islands. Butaritari has rich biodiversity that is reflected in having 4 species of mangrove found at Ukiangang mangrove forest. Butaritari has a host of globally significant species including: Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Humphead Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*),

Polkadot Cod (*Plectropomus areolatus*), Blacksaddled Coral grouper (*Plectropomus laevis*), and Giant clam (*Tridacna gigas*).

Island Site Four: Kiritimati Island



Source: Project Manager

(27) Kiritimati has the greatest land area of any atoll in the world, about 388 square kilometers, with a growing population of 7,369⁷; its lagoon is roughly the same size. The atoll is about 150 km in perimeter, while the lagoon shoreline extends for over 48 km. Unlike the other three sites (North Tarawa, Tab- North and Butaritari), Kiritimati is a state owned land and the people who live there are paying land rent to the Government. Those who wish to do any development on Kiritimati must obtain approval from the Government before they start their business. During the project inception phase 31 October-01 November 2019 – stakeholders discussed including a fourth island site to the project. As such, the inclusion of Kiritimati Island as the fourth project site was approved by the Project Steering Committee (PSC).

3. Theory of change

(28) The project did not have an explicit theory of change (ToC) as designed, as such the MTR team has reconstructed a “post-facto” ToC as part of the inception report, based on the project's logframe, review of project documents, and discussion with stakeholders. The ToC was discussed and reviewed during stakeholder interviews and sent separately via email to solicit feedback. The MTR team did not receive any written comments on the ToC and during the interviews there seemed to be a general consensus that the ToC outlined below was adequate.

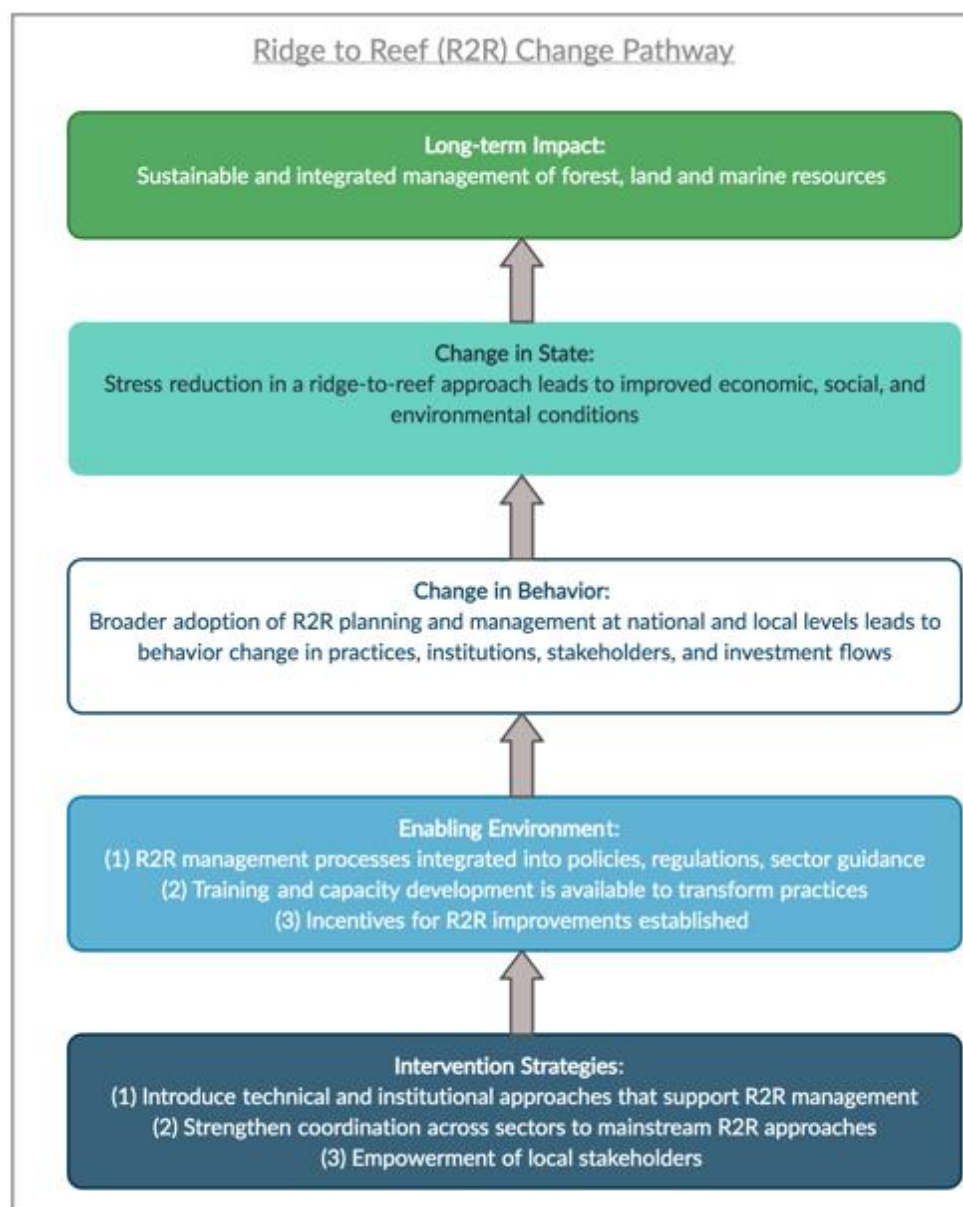
(29) The project's implicit ToC can be derived from the descriptions in the Project Document (PRODOC) as well as the results framework included. Based on the initial desk review the MTR team proposes the following basic ToC for the Project:

- i. *The existing condition or baseline* is that there is a lack of operationalization of coastal zone protected areas as well as limited experience with effective R2R community based conservation planning and management. This has led to sub-optimal outcomes in terms of sustainable development (including its social, economic and environmental pillars);
- ii. *The underlying assumption* of the project is that fragmented sector and national policies contributes to a lack of holistic planning and management of natural resources across the

⁷https://web.archive.org/web/20180830210238/http://archive.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/WI_DIR-Oceania_1993.pdf

- country. The theory then is that by improving these policies and coordination mechanisms the overall condition will improve;
- iii. *The change that is required* is to make positive changes to the baseline condition by achieving improved efficiency in natural resources use, leading to improved sustainable development outcomes;
 - iv. *The interventions to achieve the change or drivers of the change* are to move policy, guidance and investment towards an integrated approach across sectors and landscapes by providing interventions as listed in detail in the PRODOC that include: building national and local capacity to manage natural resources in an integrated fashion; developing and applying tools to support integrated management across landscapes and seascapes (R2R); strengthening governance coordination mechanisms for integrated management; and building experience with, and using tools for, integrated management and communicating and sharing the lessons learned (see figure 2)

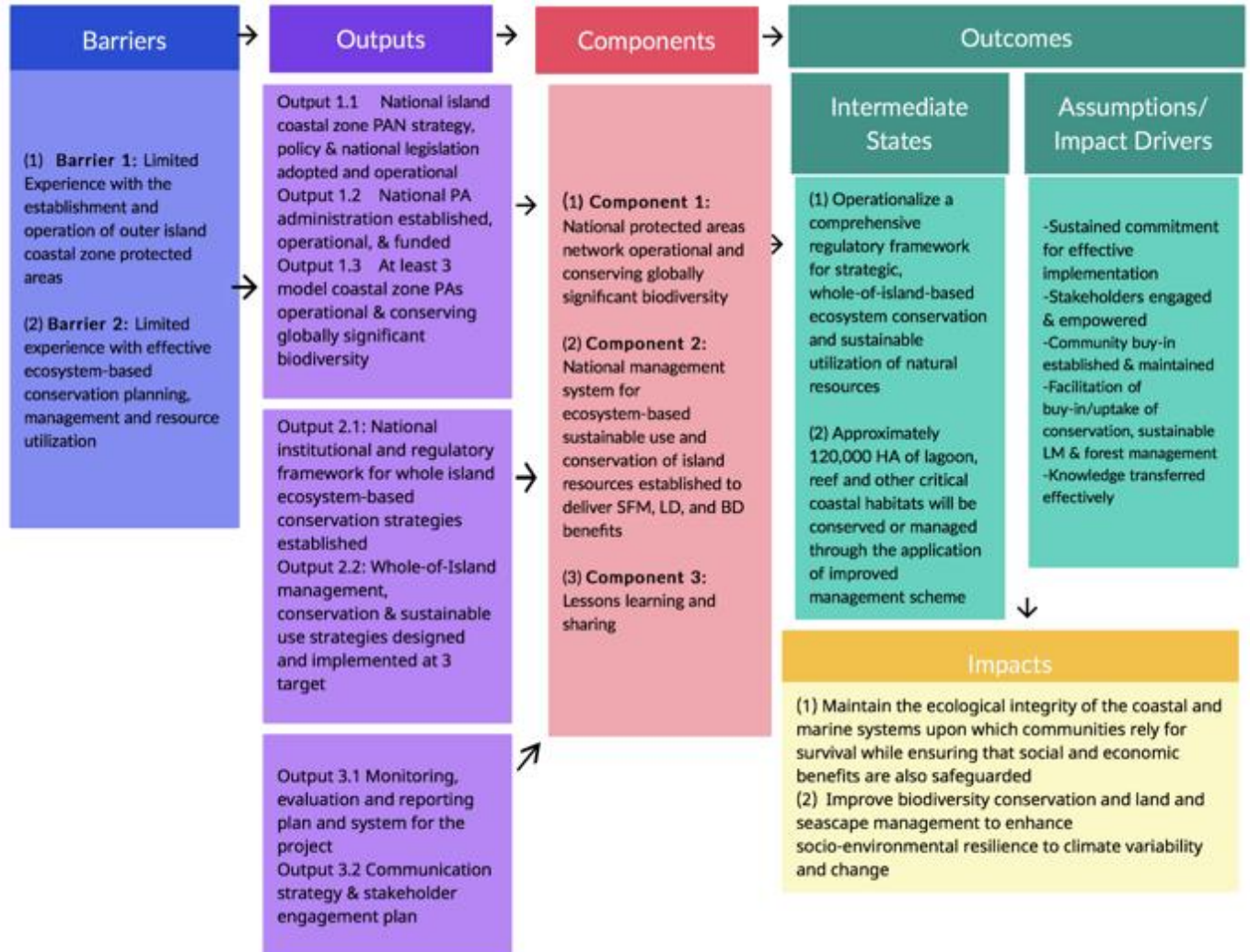
Figure 1: Suggested Pathway of Change⁸



(30) It is important to note that, as the PRODOC describes, the required improvements in the governance (institutional and policy) landscape are a means to achieve the desired change in sustainable development outcomes, and are not an end in themselves. The critical assumption in the above TOC is that the interventions undertaken actually deliver the required change: *improved biodiversity conservation, land, and seascape management to enhance socio-environmental resilience to climate variability and change*. By improving integrated natural resources management and planning the Government of Kiribati can better support sustainable development outcomes (see figure 3 below).

⁸ Adapted from Mathews, R. E., Tengberg, A., Sjödin, J., & Liss-Lymer, B. (2019). Implementing the source-to-sea approach: A guide for practitioners. SIWI, Stockholm.

Figure 2: Suggested Theory of Change



4. Key findings and MTR questions

4.1.1. *Relevance*

Alignment with regional, sub-regional and national environmental and development priorities

(31)**Alignment with country priorities:** The project is consistent with a range of national policies, goals and plans. Those goals and policies that are the most relevant are listed below.

Alignment with Country Policies and Strategies				
	Description	Aligned Outcomes		
		1.1	2.1	3.1
Kiribati Development Plan (KDP) 2020-2023	The second KDP was approved after the approval of this project however, the overarching national development plan detailing national priorities (GoK 2012cThe KDP has the same six broad key policy areas (KPAs) from the previous plan. The project is aligned with KPA 2 on economic growth and poverty reduction and KPA 4 on environment which also incorporates climate change.	X	X	
Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2014-2023 (KJIP).	The project is in specific alignment with a number of key strategies in the KJIP such as strengthening good governance, policies, strategies and legislation (1), increasing water and food security with integrated and sector-specific approaches and promoting healthy and resilient ecosystems (4), and delivering appropriate education, training and awareness programmes (7). The KJIP identifies the "Whole Island Approach" as a national priority; e.g., Develop and implement a program for community-based integrated vulnerability assessment, climate change	X	X	X

	adaptation and disaster risk management such as the Whole of Island Approach (WOI).			
Kiribati's National Adaptation Programme of Action (January 2007)	This project will directly support priorities identified by the NAPA, including: Coral Reef Restoration, Monitoring and Stock; Agricultural Food Crops Development; and Coastal Zone Management and Resilience Enhancement for Adaptation. The NAPA notes that both marine and terrestrial sources of food security are important. The people of Kiribati depend very significantly upon marine resources for their household level food security while agriculture helps provide important food diversity.	X	X	
National Fisheries Policy (2013 – 2025).	The project is closely aligned with several platforms set forth in the policy. It particularly supports the achievement of goals 2 – 5: 2. Protect and secure food security and sustainable livelihoods; 3. Ensure long-term conservation of fisheries and marine ecosystems; 4. Strengthen good governance with a particular focus on building the capacity of MFMRD to implement and support fisheries management, development, and monitoring, control and surveillance; and 5. Build climate change resilience for fisheries and marine resources.	X	X	X
Kiribati Integrated Environmental Policy 2012-2022 (KIEP),	The project directly addresses a number of key targets laid out in the KIEP, including integration of conservation in public education curriculum, customary rights and tenure integrated into protected area management plans, and increase the number of protected areas and protected species under effective management.	X	X	X

Consistency with GEF focal area and GEF projects

(32) The project is part of the programme “R2R Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods” (R2R Programme).

(33) The project’s alignment with the corresponding GEF focal areas is explained in table below:

Focal Area Objective	Alignment
BD Objective 1	The project aims to establish three new PAs covering key ecosystems on three islands, creating a national PA network. Community-level consensus, ownership and capacities will be generated to ensure effective management of the created PAs. Policy and institutional environment relevant to PAs management will be strengthened as well.
IW Objective 3	<p>The project is implementing on-the-ground integrated actions in fisheries and coastal habitats, and is directly linked to the Regional R2R programme.</p> <p>The project aims to contribute to achieving the GEF International Waters focal area objective 3 “Support Foundational Capacity Building, Portfolio Learning, and Targeted Research Needs for Ecosystem-based, Joint Management of Transboundary Water Systems.” Integrated coastal planning and management activities will assist to rebuild coastal fish stocks and protect and rejuvenate mangrove forests by reducing pressure on these resources. Project activities serve to demonstrate the value of an integrated approach to coastal management in atoll island systems. The project is also assisting in enhancing local and national capacities.</p>
LD Objective 3	The project is building the groundwork and take actions to prepare and implement three integrated land and marine management plans. The plans cover coastal lagoon and reef area, agricultural and forest area in the targeted islands. The integrated approach aims to systematically reduce pressure on competing land uses in the island ecosystems.
SFM Objective 1	The project is working on mangrove and natural woodland restoration and improved management. This includes assisted natural regeneration, forest protection and planting.

UNDP/GEF project 5414: “Enhancing national food security in the context of global climate change.”

(34) The project is working in full cooperation and coordination with the UNDP/GEF project: “Enhancing national food security in the context of global climate change.” The five-year LDCF project is fully approved and is in its final stages. The total project budget is approximately US\$ 4.5 million with an additional US\$ 7 million in co-financing. The objective is to build the adaptive capacity of vulnerable Kiribati communities to ensure food security under conditions of climate change. Under Component One, the project is assisting Kiribati to address urgent institutional capacity building needs primarily at the national level. This has included helping to set in place an improved regulatory environment,

strengthened institutional planning and policy frameworks, and generation of data required to support informed decision-making. Under Component Two, the project is assisting Kiribati to address climate change vulnerabilities by implementing and demonstrating community-based adaptation measures.

(35) By aligning these projects, the Government of Kiribati hopes to build conservation momentum and synergy across at least seven pilot sites (3 with the R2R project and 4 under the UNDP/LDCF project). The UNDP/LDCF project is targeting the following pilot islands: South Tarawa, Abemama, Nonouti, and Maiana. The UNDP/LDCF and this project are designed to generate synergies, stay within the project absorptive capacity of Kiribati, and to spread benefits/impacts across a wider selection of outer islands. The coordinated approach has been working well to date and is supported by the Government Kiribati.

Consistency with FAO's Strategic Framework and Objectives

(36) The project aligns well with the Strategic Objective 2 (SO2), 'Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner'. Mainly, two Organizational Outcomes of SO2 below will be supported by the present project:

- Producers and natural resource managers adopt practices that increase and improve the provision of goods and services in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner;
- Stakeholders in member countries strengthen governance –laws, policies and institutions needed to support in transitioning to sustainable agricultural systems.

(37) The project is also aligned with the FAO Country Programme Framework (CPF), specifically the following outcomes:

- Strengthened national capacity for evidence-based policies and strategies to enhance food and nutrition security
- Increased availability, access and utilization of local food
- Strengthened capacity for environmental management and resilience

Changes to Project Scope

(38) During the inception meeting which took place from 31 Oct-01 November 2019 a fourth site Kiritimati Island was added to the project. As per the ProDoc p. 12 "During the inception phase, Kiritimati will be considered, as an additional site." Kiritimati has the greatest land area of any atoll in the world, about 388 square kilometers, with a growing population and valuable biodiversity it is a strong fit to be included. The addition of the island as a fourth site fits into the overall project strategy and provides room for achieving additional HA of critical coastal habitats being conserved or with improved management as well as reaching a greater number of beneficiaries.

(39) The overall project design was not overly ambitious and would have likely accommodated the addition of a fourth site had it not been for the following: (i) 15 month delay in project start; (ii) impossibility for field visits due to COVID-19 restrictions and abolished flight schedules; (iii) lack of inception of work at fourth site at the time of the MTR; and (iv) lack of integration of the Kiritimati site across implementation documents including the

logframe, mention within the PIRs and upon examination of AWP and LoAs. Given the circumstances, significant delays across project activities and outputs, and the fact that effort has not been made to truly integrate a fourth site across implementation measures, and ongoing problematic travel logistics the addition of Kiritimati is risky and unlikely to contribute meaningfully to the overall objective of the project.

MTR question 1 – Relevance

Finding 1. Overall, the project was found to be highly relevant. The project is aligned closely with the key government strategies and policies specifically those seeking to increase water and food security with integrated and sector-specific approaches and promoting healthy and resilient ecosystems. Further, activities and outputs are consistent with the project's overarching objective to improve biodiversity conservation and landscape level management to enhance socio-ecological resilience to climate variability and change. Selected project partners and other implementing stakeholders are also deemed relevant for the attainment of project results.

Finding 2. The project's goal, objectives and execution strategy are consistent with national, regional and global priorities. The attainment of project outcomes not only addresses Kiribati's needs for improved ecosystem-based sustainable use and conservation of island resources, but it also fits well as part of within the GEF's umbrella R2R Pacific Islands programme, GEFs GEF-5 focal areas and strategic objectives: BD-1, LD-3, IW-3, SFM-1 and FAO's programmatic goals for reduction of food insecurity and strengthened capacity for environmental management and resilience systems.

Finding 3. The project as designed was realistic to achieve within the 5-year time period and not overly ambitious. The original ProDoc included the provision of activities across three atolls and while the ProDoc opened the door to include a fourth site, the operational and cost aspects of including this fourth site was not taking into account at the design phase. The site was agreed upon during the inception meeting however, provisions for how to integrate a fourth site was not fully integrated into the project implementation.

Overall relevance rating - Highly Satisfactory

4.1.2. Effectiveness

Component 1: Enabling environment for R2R conservation and sustainable use

(40) At the time of the MTR, outputs and activities under component 1 had mixed results with some ground work laid out and a few key achievements however, the project needs to shift completely from a planning phase to achieving key results. Component 1 was designed with one outcome and four outputs:

- a. Under Output 1.1.1 *R2R concept mainstreamed into sectoral development priorities, legal framework and policies with an emphasis on protecting and developing livelihoods*. The major achievement under this output has been the establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation that is being enforced in North Tarawa, North

Tabiteuea and Butaritari. It should be noted that the development of three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) (see below Output 2.1.1) – is being included in the 2022 PIR as an achievement under output 1.1.1 – this needs to be corrected and tracked accurately. As per the ProDoc existing sectoral planning documents, legal frameworks, priorities and policies should be reviewed to identify entry points for mainstreaming an R2R approach for mainstreaming in at least in three **policies, priorities or frameworks**. There is no evidence that such a process has taken place and other than the fisheries regulation it is not clear what other policies, legal frameworks or sectoral planning documents will be targeted.

- b. Under Output 1.1.2: National level coordination mechanism developed for cross-sectoral decision-making (including on PAs): There has been some cross-coordination in terms of the Development of Agricultural production on idle lands where in the project islands there was incorporation of participation and decision making of local elders, chiefs and women. Currently the PSC is serving as the coordination mechanism for the project, however, the project team needs to work toward the end target which requires “Cross sectoral coordination and decision making mechanism (including at least MFMRD, MELAD, MWYSA and MIA) with clear ToRs and linkages with island councils and relevant NGOs/CSOs established, and formally.” At this stage there does not seem to be movement in this directly.
- c. Under Output 1.1.3: Resilience and socio-ecological planning for national to island-level coordination mechanism on whole-of-Island based R2R conservation and sustainable-use strategies: Island level consultation with land owners on the selection of idle land sites for agricultural productivity has been conducted through an assessment that incorporated sensitive social-cultural considerations in the project islands. The project has been successful in incorporating and involving local beneficiaries through the Island Councils and directly with beneficiaries. A formal process does not seem however to have been developed and the measurement against the end targets is not being properly monitored. As an example, one of the targets is “Community participation/stakeholder engagement model including measures to ensure women and youth participation developed.” While action is being taken, the project needs to develop a formal model that can be replicated and sustained in the long-term.
- d. Under Output 1.1.4: National and island level environmental education, outreach and extension program developed. A school curriculum in the R2R approach has been developed. Six extension officers have been recruited and undertook training to support implementation of LoA activities in the field for the offices of Environment and Fisheries however the target is for at least 25 officers to be trained on selected R2R topics emphasizing gender equity. From the field visit undertaken by the national consultant there has been training conducted in at least three communities however, this is not being monitored or recorded formally. The target is also to reach at least 30 communities (including women and youth members) under the outreach programme in target islands.

Table 1: Midterm Rating and Justification for Component 1

Component rating	Rating Justification
Component 1 Satisfactory	At the stage of the MTR - Implementing partners have developed workplans with an inclusive cross-sectorial approach, utilizing mechanisms for delivering a whole island approach. This has been done through an extensive consultative process with island councils, elders and

	<p>villages, and executed missions to the three project islands sites to engage local level participation in decision making using a bottom up approach for the management of land resources and sustainable production of agriculture. Key achievements to date include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation that is being enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari.2. Extensive Island level consultations with land owners on the selection of idle land sites for agricultural productivity <p>Areas that will still need work include identifying additional policies/strategies to integrate R2R concepts, formalizing the national coordination mechanism beyond the current PSC to ensure sustainability of such a mechanism, documenting the model used for community participation and stakeholder engagement, cataloguing island level gender-sensitive resilience indicators to make available for target islands, and undertaking additional training. All of these are feasible over the course of the next 24 months.</p> <p>The target of having 2-master’s student complete a course at James Cook University is not feasible due to the course closing. A revision of the master’s program target as well as budget adjustment will need be undertaken in logframe (see recommendation section).</p>	
Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved	Red = Not on target to be achieved

Component 2: Implementation of R2R conservation and sustainable use strategies

(41) At the time of the MTR, outputs and activities under component 2 have similar to component 1 been mixed with several activities on a strong track and others lagging behind. Component 2 was designed with one outcome and four outputs:

- Under Output 2.1.1: R2R conservation and sustainable use strategies initiated in three islands in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems: The project has progressed well under this output with three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) developed in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea and the establishment of newly endorsed fisheries regulation have been enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari.
- During the national consultant's field visit members of the Beneficiary Communities (Ukiangang, Keuea nd Tabonuea) from Butaritari described their involvement in the developing of their ICBMP together with their Council Representative and some elders (both men and women).
- Under Output 2.1.2: *Expanded and complementary livelihoods developed as a part of the plans developed under Output 2.1.1*: Several idle lands have been identified in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea and consultations were undertaken towards their development for agricultural productivity and sustainability (see maps below for a sample of the sites selected). There has also been some distribution of seedlings and agricultural trainings were conducted in the communities. The pandemic however, caused a major setback for the implementation of the LoA activities for ALD and activities were not able to be completed by the expiry date such that the entire LoA had to be closed prior to completion of activities. Part of the delay was also attributable to the selection of idle land sites in North Tabiteuea which were

delayed and followed several consultations with the local communities as landownership matters are sensitive. A new LoA has recently been issued for ALD, which if completed as planned should put this output back on track.



Figure 2. *Idle Land Site* – Butaritari (Ukiangang Village); Source: Project Manager



Figure 3. *Idle Land Site* – North Tabiteuea (Tauma); Source: Project Manager

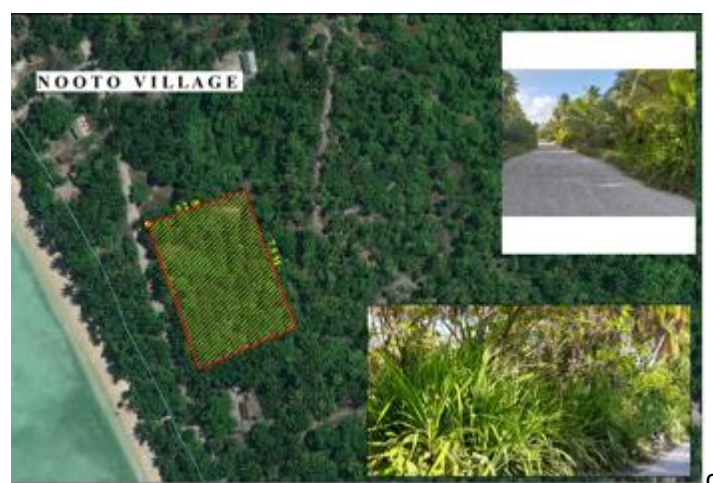


Figure 4. *Idle Land Site* – North Tarawa (Nooto Village); Source: Project Manager

(42) Under Output 2.1.3: *R2R conservation and use strategies across land and sea implemented at three target islands* (through the integrated plans): This output is primarily to implement the resource management techniques identified and agreed under Output 2.1.1. Now that the plans have been developed and approved, the next step for the project will be to undertake implementation. Currently, -24 acres of idle lands sites was agreed by the project islands to be selected for agriculture production. However, activities to meet the following targets will need to be implemented through the remainder for the project: (i) 828 ha under agroforestry; (ii) 232 hectares under SFM; and (iii) 22, 417 hectares of marine area under co-management. The breakdown of the 22,417 ha includes of marine area in Butaritari (4,612 ha), North Tarawa (9,090 ha), and Tabituea (8,715 ha) with community-based spatial management practices applied by project end. As part of the national consultant's field visit, the Mayor and Clerk of Butaritari Island Council noted that their MPAs have increased to five (from one) active on Butaritari and managed protected areas and that these are directed by the elected communities and the council as a whole. The beneficiaries and executive members were aware of the one within their village of which they are managing and policing. The project's reporting does not however provide any information on the set-up of the MPA nor track the number of hectare's the MPA's cover.



Figure 5. Interview with Mayor and Clerk Buataritari Island Council (L); Ukiangang MPA (Chairman and Committee members) (R); Source: Mr. Tianeti Ioane

- (43) Under Output 2.1.4: *At least three PAs established (where identified in Outputs 2.1.1):* - Discussions have been undertaken between Fisheries FAO-SAP technical officer, and potential consultants were identified to be engaged to establish a national system for the selection of PA in Kiribati. ToRs have also been discussed and developed however there have been considerable delays with the identification of a potential national consultant to carry out this work as most of the candidates did not meet the experience requirements for this consultancy. There may be a need for the project to hire an international consultant to carry out this work.

Table 2: Midterm Rating and Justification for Component 2

Component rating	Rating Justification
Component 2 Satisfactory	<p>At the stage of the MTR, output 2.1.1 is complete with the ICMB's developed. For output 2.1.2 idle land sites have now been selected however there is a need to provide expanded and complementary livelihood opportunities/activities for men and women.</p> <p>Outputs 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 are however well behind schedule and will need significant effort devoted to ensure activities are undertaken and targets met.</p> <p>It will be important for the project to properly track and monitor progress as outlined in the initial logframe (with any adjustments as agreed by the PSC and FAO) .</p> <p>It is important to note as well that to date there has been no work done for an ICBMP on Kiritimati Island.</p>
Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved
	Red = Not on target to be achieved

Component 3: Lessons learning and sharing

- (44) At the time of the MTR, under component 3 there have been a few activities undertaken around knowledge capture and awareness raising however the monitoring, evaluation and reporting system is not fully in place and will be vital to have to ensure results are fully captured. The component was designed with one outcome and two outputs.
- (45) Under Output 3.1.1 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan and system for the project established and operational: The project has produced annual project implementation reports (PIRs) and there has been a significant improvement for the 2022 PIR from the last report. There is not however a clear plan for M&E that has been detailed and budgeted. As per the PRODOC "the project will hire a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System Expert to advise the Project Management Unit (PMU) in the design and establishment of an M&E system to obtain information on progress in meeting targets, evaluating results and facilitating the systematization of experiences." There is no evidence that an explicit system has been established to ensure proper tracking of project results. Currently, it appears to be undertaken on an ad hoc basis with little support provided to the PMU on how best to capture, collect, and report data. Moreover, in the PIR, the targets tracked do not always

align with what was agreed to at CEO Endorsement or the same achievements are utilized for different outputs.

(46) Under Output 3.1.2. Project related 'knowledge' captured and shared: The project initially produced awareness materials which were translated into the country language (I-Kiribati) in consultation with the relevant project implementing partners to ensure a common understanding as related to the project. These have been widely disseminated during national events in Kiribati by the implementing partners as well as at the project sites during the inception phase of the project. The project has also contributed to the Pacific R2R website (<https://www.pacific-r2r.org/index.php/partners/member-countries/kiribati?pid=125>); has been involved in a virtual training conducted by SPC on how to use the website and a production of video clips was done in a collaborative effort between the project and its partners which provides the opportunity to still share the awareness and information about the project activities and synergies on the web despite the complications with Covid19.

(47) The project does have a communication strategy that was drafted at the end of May 2020 by the FAO-SAP communications specialist and requires feedback from the PMU. The challenge has been with the engagement of a local communications specialist which has been requested by the implementing partners as there are different understandings between GoK and FAO as to its scope as per the ToR for such post, this will need to be discussed and finalized for next steps forward.

Table 3: Midterm Rating and Justification for Component 3

Component rating	Rating Justification
Component 3 Satisfactory	<p>At the stage of the MTR, it is imperative that the M&E system be put in place and that appropriate tracking of indicators and targets are undertaken. The project team should also ensure that the tracking tools are updated to reflect mid-term progress and then complete a final update prior to the final evaluation.</p> <p>Some overall reporting is being undertaken and there has been steady improvement in the PIR reporting however, a system for M&E needs to be put in place as outlined in the PRODOC (output 3.1.1). There should also be additional engagement around communication, especially at the field-site level.</p>
Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved
	Red = Not on target to be achieved

MTR question 2 – Effectiveness

Finding 1. The project has produced some good outputs as of the MTR point, particularly through the development of three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) completed in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea (output 2.1.1); the establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation is being enforced in North Tarawa,

North Tabiteuea and Butaritari (output 1.1.1); and the establishment of MPA sites (output 2.1.3)

Finding 2. Many of the processes and ground work for implementation of concrete activities have been completed however, field work especially related to agriculture production, agroforestry, and SFM needs to begin. It will be important for the project team and implementing partners to prioritize moving toward completing activities on the ground.

Finding 3. There is not a systematic tracking of indicators as per those agreed at CEO Endorsement (unless there has been an approved change to the logframe). For some of the outputs (i.e. output 1.1.1 and 2.1.1) in the 2022 PIR the same indicator is used to demonstrate progress against different outputs.

Finding 4. There is no evidence that an M&E system has been put in place to support the PMU in tracking and reporting on project results.

Finding 5. Although there was an agreement by the PSC to add Kiritimati island as a fourth site to the project – no activities have been completed for the fourth site. Moreover, baseline data has not been collected, baseline tracking tools have not been completed, and overall there is a lack of integration across implementation for a fourth site.

Overall Effectiveness Rating: MS

4.1.3. Efficiency

(48)As of 30 September 2022, the estimated total budget expenditure for the project totaled USD 1,208,467—which comprises only 25.6% of the total GEF grant amount. Please see table and figures by component below.

Table 4: Estimated total budget expenditure (as of 30 September 2022)

	Expended	Available	Budgeted	Delivery (percent)
Component 1	599,025	124,475	723,500	83%
Component 2	302,095	2,993,327	3,295,422	9%
Component 3	133,157	342,188	476,345	28%
Project Management	174,189	50,574	224,763	77%
Total	1,208,467	3,510,564	4,720,030	

(49)Broken-down by FAO expense category, 94% of the budgeted amount for consultants has been committed or spent whereas the two budget categories “contracts” and “salaries” are underspent, with only 18% of the contract budget committed or spent and less than 1% of the salaries budget committed or spent. Under the “training” budget category only 3% has been committed or spent. The under expenditure in these categories can be attributed in part to COVID-19 pandemic as well as the accomplishments of the project to date being geared toward planning and process (mostly under component 1). In the next phase of the

project, focus on the establishment of PAs as well as establishing agroforestry sites and restoring forests should allow for increased expenditures, particularly under component 2.

Co-finance

(50) The materialization of co-finance has been a major accomplishment of the project to date. Close to 50% of the committed co-finance at CEO Endorsement has materialized (USD 6.54 M – see Appendix 4 for the detailed breakdown). In an interview with the Director of the fisheries department, she was able to confirm that her division utilized a significant amount of co-financing to complete activities early on during implementation. The co-finance utilized included in-kind contributions from the Department through MFMRD staff as well as utilizing project personnel from other ongoing projects being executed by MFMRD, including the UNDP/GEF project 5414: “Enhancing national food security in the context of global climate change implemented.” This led to the advancement of activities in the fisheries sector above that which was accomplished by other divisions.

Project Delays

(51) In terms of project implementation, the official start date of the project was 16 April 2018 however the project start was delayed a year and a half and did not actually commence until late July 2019 with the inception meeting not taking place until the end of October 2019. The initial 15 month delay was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

(52) The initial 15 month delay has been a typical one for projects in the Pacific with similar problems that are faced by other projects in the region – mostly difficulty in recruiting both qualified national personnel as well as international consultants. Delays during COVID were inevitable, particularly as they related to the need to visit project sites and local communities. In spite of these delays, the project has managed to make some progress at the field level however, the addition of a fourth site, while at the time of Inception would have been quite possible and have increased the cost-effectiveness of the project (i.e. reaching additional beneficiaries and protecting a larger hectareage of habitat) however, given the extensive delays and challenges of traveling during COVID – the project may be best positioned to focus on the sites where work has already commenced.

(53) There were areas of the project that could have progressed even with the COVID restrictions but would have needed additional support from FAO-SAP – this includes setting up a proper M&E system, supporting the development of additional policies/legal frameworks by securing technical support (in addition to the fisheries regulation), and documenting the cross-sectoral coordination mechanism.

MTR question 3 – Efficiency

Finding 1. The project has had significant delays, due both to initial start-up delays and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should also be noted that Kiribati along with other countries in the Pacific have only recently lifted many of the travel restrictions associated with the global pandemic. At the time of the MTR, flight frequency, which is already limited, had not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Finding 2, Co-finance materialization has been quite strong for the project and has contributed to the efficiency of the project allowing activities to proceed even when there were delays in disbursements.

Finding 3. The project disbursement is quite low and unless there is a significant project extension will likely not improve significantly.

Overall Efficiency rating: MS

4.1.4. Sustainability

(54)The sustainability of the project is defined as the continuation of benefits from an intervention after development assistance has been completed. The important aspect here is the sustainability of results, not necessarily the sustainability of activities that produced the results. Assessment of sustainability requires the evaluation of risks that may affect the continuation of the project outcomes. The commitment of the Government of Kiribati to sustain results of the current project is judged by examining the existence of relevant legislative framework, enforcement of the legal provisions and prospect of financial resources' availability for future conservation sites. The following aspects were assessed in this mid-term review:

4.1.4.1 Socio-economic

(55)The representatives of the beneficiaries interviewed from the one project site visited indicated that local communities have developed strong ownership of the project activities as they believe in the project's ability to enhance their lives and ensure the sustainable use of the ecosystems. The perspective of the strong local ownership is based on the fact that socio-economic consequences of the project will, in general, be positive as the outcomes will ensure improvements in quality of life of population in large part due to enhance alternative livelihood.

(56)The project has no major socio-economic risks that might affect the sustainability of the project outcomes. The project has not however, managed to document lessons learned on a continual basis. Thus, project's challenges, risks, issues and project's successful aspects are not being systematically collected, are not recorded in the PIRs, and are not disseminated for potential future beneficiaries or stakeholders to learn from the project and potentially replicate or scale-up any good practice lessons in the future.

(57)Based on the above-mentioned **Socio-economic Risk, risks are negligible and thus the sustainability is rated as likely (L).**

4.1.4.2 Institutional framework and governance risks to sustainability

(58)Implementing partners have developed workplans with an inclusive cross-sectorial approach, utilizing mechanisms for delivering a whole island approach. This has been done through an extensive consultative process with island councils, elders and villages, and executed missions to the three project islands sites to engage local level participation in decision making using a bottom up approach for the management of land resources and sustainable production of agriculture. The overall process laid out is conducive to ensuring

institutional sustainability however, formalizing the national coordination mechanism beyond the current PSC to ensure sustainability of such a mechanism will be critical to ensure the R2R approach continues after project closure.

(59) In addition, the project's achievements and data should be codified and made available in-country and discussions as to how to sustain the work of the Island Councils after project closure should be undertaken prior to project close. The project also does not have a sustainability plan nor an exit strategy that has been written out.

(60) The Institutional framework and governance risks are medium, and the **Institutional framework and governance risk to sustainability is rated as moderately likely (ML)**. The presence of a sustainability plan and a comprehensive exit strategy will lower the institutional and governance risk to sustainability.

4.1.4.3 Environmental risks to sustainability

(61) The review did not find any environmental risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. The project is being implemented in areas under threat of degradation which also constitute an important component of improving food security through providing vital island ecosystem services. The project is working to intensify efforts to manage these areas sustainably ensuring the continued flow of ecosystem services. Sustainable use practices, restoration and development of good management practices will all lead to environmental gains by project end and beyond. Overall, the project outputs and outcomes should have a medium and long-term positive environmental impact for natural resources in the target areas. **Environmental risks to sustainability is rated likely (L)**

4.1.4.5 Financial Risks

(62) The project has secured a considerable amount of co-finance in the form of staffing, office space, electricity bills, internet, fuel, transport, telephone bills, and printing (USD 6.54 M, close to 50% of the amount committed at CEO endorsement). The co-finance has directly contributed to project outcomes, particularly in the fisheries sector and has allowed for activities to proceed even with some delays in disbursements from FAO's side. Given the strong alignment of the project with national and sector priorities the government budget does appear to currently support the R2R work. However, if the outputs and activities committed to by the project are not achieved, it will put sustainability of these achievements at risk. Slow implementation, low disbursements rates, and not completing promised activities to beneficiaries can undermine the sustainability of the project.

(63) Based on the above discussion, the financial risks are moderate but could be reduced through completion of activities and accelerating results in the field. Sustainability under **Financial risks is rated as moderately likely (ML)**.

(64) It follows from the above analysis that the key risks for sustainability are: (i) slow implementation that can undermine the trust of the government and beneficiaries; (ii) a failure to capture, codify, and catalogue the results of the project; and (iii) a lack of systematic measurement of indicators and capturing lessons learned. Efforts to complete the outputs in particular those under Component 2 will greatly increase the probability of sustaining the project results.

MTR question 4 – Sustainability

Finding 1. The excellent alignment of the project with country and beneficiary priorities provides a strong basis for the sustainability of results that come out of the R2R project.

Finding 2. There is evidence that communities engaged by the R2R project have proactively designated marine protected areas (MPAs). It is important for the project to strategize with the Island Councils as to how to sustain community committees and commitment after project close.

Finding 3. Knowledge management, including codifying lessons learned and disseminating information on project results is a key avenue for securing project results. The project team should ensure that all documentation and data collection undertaken by the project be easily accessible to government officials at all levels. Moreover, key messages should be translated into i-Kiribati and disseminated in a user friendly manner to community groups.

The MTR team considers that there are moderate risks to sustainability mostly related to potential shortcomings arising from incomplete project outcomes at project closure, this is mitigated in part because of the evidence of high commitment from project partners which are likely to continue into a foreseeable future. Therefore, **the MTR team rates the overall likelihood of risks to sustainability as moderately likely (ML).**

4.1.4.6 Factors affecting performance

Project design and readiness⁹

(65) Overall, the project's objectives and components were clear, practical and feasible within an implementation phase of five years. However, given the difficulty of securing a qualified project team, not only in Kiribati but in the Pacific region more generally, it would be beneficial if at the project design stage, delays for start-up are integrated and a one-year buffer is programed to avoid the need for inevitable project extensions

(66) The project was also highly tied to country priorities and designed in close collaboration with the national and local government as well as potential beneficiaries. A review of the documentation and interviews with key stakeholders in the review process confirmed that the design and implementation of the project outcomes were highly relevant to Kiribati's national strategies as well as providing support to the government to meet its obligations under several international agreements.

(67) As this was a GEF-5 project, a ToC was not developed, however, the project strategy included: a clear definition of the problem to be addressed, its root causes, desired outcomes, an analysis of barriers to and enablers for achieving outcomes, consideration of how to address barriers. The project's implicit ToC was derived by the MTR team from the

⁹ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

descriptions in the PRODOC as well as the results framework included. The descriptions and logic of the outputs and outcomes were sufficient to construct a coherent ToC.

(68)The 15 month delay in project start was caused by a number of factors which included a tough recruitment process for the PMU as well as long delays in recruiting a CTA. Confusion in understanding FAO procedures for project implementation also contributed to delays in starting implementation. After the recruitment of a National Project Coordinator in July 2019. An inception workshop and a first project steering committee meeting were conducted on 31st October to 1st November 2019, which helped a common understanding on the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders and sectors that will be supporting the project in the country.

(69)An initial field-level inception meeting was conducted in North Tarawa on 6th February 2020 in consultation with the Mayor, Island Clerk and members of the island council. 7 staff representing MFMRD, MELAD and MIA took part in the trip and presented planned activities to implement in North Tarawa under the project. Mini inception in Butaritari and North Tabiteuea will take place in late July – August 2020. This was important to lay the ground work for the support from the communities.

(70)As per interviews with the ALD, there were challenges with the way the first LoA of the project was structured. The first LoA included funds only for travel and no funds for planting materials. During the development of the LoA, the ALD emphasized the need that the funds for the two activities be combined together because if the training was done without the planting materials then the beneficiaries will again request for another round of training when planting is to be done. The new LoA now combines all the remaining activities for better efficiency in completing the activities. Flexibility from FAO in terms of how best to structure LoAs should be considered.

(71)Given these types of issues are quite common for projects in the Pacific (i.e. slow project start, difficulty recruiting, challenges with Ministries not as used to FAO systems), it would be expected that FAO could manage these risks upfront.

(72)Based on the start-up delays the **rating for project design and readiness is an MU.**

Quality of project execution and management arrangements (including assessment of risks)

(73)Overall, all interviewees were pleased with the PMU, their responsiveness to requests and open communication channels. The main issue with the early execution of the project is that the burden fell heavily on the national Project Coordinator (PC) and the Project Assistant both of whom are quite capable and technically sound but should be provided additional support.

(74)In terms of the executing partners, the chart below summarizes some of the key issues:

Executing Partners	Project execution
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development (MELAD)	<p>MELAD is responsible for National Environment, Lands and Agriculture and through the Environment and Conservation Division (ECD) is the political Focal Point of the GEF through the Secretary and the Director of ECD is the Operational Focal Point.</p> <p>ECD has responsibilities in the project mainly with "Output 1.1.1 R2R concept mainstreamed into sectoral development priorities, legal framework and policies with an emphasis on protecting and developing livelihoods" and "Output 1.1.4 National and island level environmental education, outreach and extension program developed."</p> <p>There has been some progress made but with project delays and difficulty with disbursements on the initial LoA a new/extension of the LoA has been granted.</p> <p>The Livelihood and Agriculture Division (ALD) has activities to executing under "Component 1: Enabling environment for R2R conservation and sustainable use" under "Outcome 1.1 Enabling environment improved for ecosystem-based sustainable use and conservation of island resources": Idle lands policy. The ALD has been able to select idle land sites but were delayed significantly with their initial LoA. A new LoA has been agreed to in October 2022.</p>
Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD)	<p>MFMRD is responsible for National Marine and Fisheries policies development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation and is tasked to promote sustainable management of fisheries.</p> <p>MFMRD has been a key executing partner responsible for much for the success of project activities to date having completed the following: At the National level(i) Review national fisheries frameworks and laws; (ii) Consultations on the newly endorsed regulation; (iii) Review of island bye-laws (fisheries); (iv) Development of national system for decision making on selection of PA at the national level; and (v) Development of resolution to support MSPs to address fisheries management and conflict in resource use. At the local level: (i) Institutionalization and operational support at island level to foster community participation in community based fisheries management interventions; (ii) Development of appropriate tools and mechanisms which integrate social and culture considerations relevant to fisheries sector; and (iii) Rolling out activities on fisheries education programmes.</p>
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)	<p>The MIA is responsible for Local Government and outer island development and manages the Local Government Act that governs the Island Councils functions and operations. MIA provides link between Government and other organizations with the Island Councils through its Local Government Division and its staff including the Island Council Clerk, Island Project Officer and the Treasurer serving the Island Councils.</p>

Executing Partners	Project execution
	The Local Government Division of the MIA provided technical assistance on the Island Councils in formulating the ISP and were successful in supporting the drafting of three ISPs

Based on delays across several key activities the **Quality of execution arrangements and management is rated as MS.**

Project oversight by FAO as the GEF Agency and national partners

(75)Project oversight by FAO has been mixed with a lack of strong support early on in the project (2018-2020). The initial BH and LTO did not seem to have provided sufficient support to the project team. The former FLO, provided useful quality assurance on the 2019 and 2020 PIR, however, seemed to have too many projects to manage to be able to devote enough time to fully back-stop the project. With a new team in FAO-SAP, a newly recruited and dedicated procurement officer based in FAO-SAP, a new FLO and LTO in place, the quality assurance mechanism has already improved and is expected to continue to improve

(76)Project oversight: there has been no evidence provided that an FAO-Project Task Force (PTF) was ever deployed for the project. The GEF-CU has been responsive and helpful to the in-country team, however, there has been minimal active oversight, supervision or backstopping by the former BH and former LTO.

(77)The initial rating for the first two years of project implementation fell closer to a rating of MU but significant improvements have been made, particularly over the last six months. The Project Oversight is therefore given a rating of MS.

Financial management and co-financing

(78)The rating for financial management is given an MS for the low disbursement rating however the co-finance has been a tremendous support and materialized nearly 50% of the amount committed to at CEO endorsement, for co-financing a rating of HS can be given.

(79)Overall however, the disbursement rate of 25.6% in year 4 is so low that the overall rating for Financial management and co-finance is an MS.

Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement

(80)This is one of the strengths of the project with strong project partnerships (as evidenced as well by strong co-financing). The project team and executing partners have done a very good job engaging with stakeholders and beneficiaries (as interviewed through the national consultant's field visit). All PSC members mentioned that the project was developed with full stakeholder engagement and that there was strong communication with the PMU throughout implementation. From the field visit the Mayor and Clerk of stated that "Whole community (engagement and support was a great success."

(81)Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement is rated as S.

Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products

(82)Overall, there has been strong communication across the project, including at selected project sites where during the national consultant's interview, beneficiaries and Island Council members mentioned having an understanding of the R2R approach, something they were not aware of prior to the start of the project. The same interviewees were not however aware that FAO was implementing the project. The field visit by the MTR national consultant helped to bring awareness to the fact that FAO was implementing the project but It will be important to ensure that for the remaining time of the project implementation that the FAO and GEF logos are included on any awareness and communication materials.

(83)The project has produced 1-2 knowledge products but should put more effort into undertaking knowledge management for the project. There was also a communications strategy that was developed during the early part of the project but it is not clear that this strategy is being utilized.

(84)The overall rating for **Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products** is **MS**.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including M&E design, implementation and budget

(85)Overall the M&E system for the project should be strengthened. The M&E design in the PRODOC was standard and conformed to the GEF standards as well as those of FAO however the M&E system has not been implemented as designed. As detailed above, the M&E specialist to be hired as part of output 3.1.1 has not been hired and much of the M&E work is falling to the national project coordinator to undertake. Based on the PIRs reviewed (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) as well as the PPR reports, the project should undertake more consistent reporting and ensure that indicators in the logframe are updated

(86)The project's M&E system is not following the outlined plan contained in the ProDoc which includes the need for regular reporting and tracking of project indicators. Overall, the planned M&E system could have been better designed with more specific indicators however, it is adequate. There is a need to ensure indicators within the logframe are updated and reported on through the PIR and FAO's PPR.

(87)The overall rating for the **Monitoring and Evaluation** is **MS**.

MTR question 5 – Factors affecting performance

Finding 1. The project has built strong partnerships and the PMU is well respected and communicates well with the PSC as well as other stakeholders

Finding 2, FAO support has improved over the last year of implementation however, prior support was intermittent and slow procurement added to the delays in project activities.

Finding 3. All partners interviewed expressed frustration with FAO's procurement processes and delays stemming from the FAO-SAP offices, in particular with requests for disbursement advances for travel. This should be improved with the addition of a procurement officer based in the FAO-SAP offices in Samoa.

Finding 4. Monitoring, tracking, and reporting on indicators is one of the weaker aspects of the project implementation. The team does not have a consistent system in place and that lays too much burden on the National Project Coordinator (NPC).

Finding 5. The project through its executing partners has built awareness and a strong relationships with local communities however, visibility of FAO as the implementing partner has been missing.

4.1.4.7 Cross-cutting dimensions

(88)The project's Comprehensive Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector for Kiribati completed and report finalized. The assessment detailed the state of gender (in)equality and rural women's empowerment in agriculture and rural development. In the project sites. It is however not clear how this assessment is being used and whether it has been disseminated widely.

(89)Participation of women is also being promoted in the community groups supported and established by the project, through ensuring that women make up at least 30% of the members. Women have also been hired as Fisheries Officer and Agriculture Assistant at Butaritari Island. It would be helpful however for the project team to systematically track numbers of women trained and included in meetings and in other project activities.

(90)Overall, while there has been some interesting and useful gender commitments and activities, gender issues could be better tracked and mainstreamed into the project. The rating for Gender Dimensions is an MS.

(91)Environmental and Social (E&S) safeguards, risks have been well documented through the PIR. The current classification is moderate and remains valid. The rating for **E&S safeguards is an S.**

MTR question 6 – Cross-cutting dimensions

Finding 1. The project has developed Comprehensive Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector that is comprehensive but how it will be used for the project is not yet apparent.

Finding 2. The project could do a better job of tracking the number of women trained, engaged, etc. with project activities. It is also not clear if there has been any Island level gender-sensitive resilience indicators developed or made available for target islands.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

(92)Taking into consideration the main findings related to the questions and criteria in the MTR reached the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1 (Criterion: Relevance): It was found that the implementation and design of the components, outcomes and outputs of the project are closely aligned with and relevant to the

participating institutions and the beneficiaries of the project. Investment is rooted in communities, their capacity development and participation in management and decision making processes through involvement in government programmes and activities aimed at improving sustainable use, conservation and management of marine and land resources, and increasing community resilience to climate change. As a result of this scenario, the **project relevance is rated as highly satisfactory** and, given the relevance, the activities undertaken by mid-term foster the active participation of those beneficiaries who have been engaged in the field.

Conclusion 2 (Criterion: Effectiveness): The degree of progress towards the outputs laid out in the project logframe has several significant lags. The **project's effectiveness is therefore considered moderately satisfactory** for each of the components and for most of the outputs of the project. The project has produced some good outputs as of the MTR point, particularly through the development of three Integrated community based mangrove managed plans (ICBMP) completed in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea (output 2.1.1); the establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation is being enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari (output 1.1.1); and the establishment of MPA sites (output 2.1.3). Many of the processes and ground work for implementation of concrete activities have been completed however, field work especially related to agriculture production, agroforestry, and SFM needs to begin. The issue of land tenure has also caused some delays in determining idle land sites and will need to be resolved in order for the project to realize its full impact potential.

Conclusion 3. (Criterion: Effectiveness/Efficiency): Although there was an agreement by the PSC to add Kiritimati island as a fourth site to the project (during the project inception) – no activities, other than some planning, have been completed for the fourth site. Moreover, baseline data has not been collected, baseline tracking tools have not been completed, and overall there is a lack of integration across implementation for a fourth site. Given the remaining time left in the project (even with an extension) focus on the three sites where activities have already started will provide a more effective and efficient use of the remaining project resources (both time and monetary).

Conclusion 4 (Criterion: Efficiency – co-finance): The materialization of close to 50% of the co-finance committed at CEO Endorsement has been has contributed to the efficiency of the project allowing activities to proceed even when there were delays in disbursements. The majority of the co-finance has come from the MFMR through in-kind contribution, which included utilizing the time of MFMR staff and personnel from other funded projects and building on synergies with other projects including the UNDP/GEF project 5414: "Enhancing national food security in the context of global climate change implemented." For this part of the efficiency the project is considered highly satisfactory.

Conclusion 5 (Criterion: Efficiency): As of the 30 September 2022, the project had utilized only 25.6% of the total budget in part due to significant delays, due both to initial start-up delays and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall **efficiency of the project is therefore considered moderately satisfactory**.

Conclusion 6 (Criterion: Sustainability): The MTR team considers that there are minor risks to sustainability as there is a high probability that key outcomes will be achieved by the project closure (if project is granted an extension) and will continue into the foreseeable future. Therefore, the MTR team conditionally rates **project sustainability as moderately likely (ML)**. The excellent alignment of the project with country and beneficiary priorities provides a strong basis for the sustainability of results along with strong support from Island Councils in the field. It is important

for the project to strategize with stakeholders at the local level as to how to sustain commitment after project close.

Conclusion 7 (Criterion: Factors Affecting Performance): The MTR team has determined several administrative and project coordination factors that are affecting project implementation these include: (i) cumbersome procurement procedures and processes for disbursing funds, which have contributed to delays; (ii) non-responsiveness of the FAO-SAP team in Samoa at the beginning of project implementation (this has improved in the past 6-12 months); and (iii) weaknesses in measuring project indicators in a timely and accurate manner. These issues are important to address what can be improved without having to restructure or add a great deal of resources (see Recommendation 1 and 3 below).

Conclusion 8 (Criterion: Factors Affecting Performance): The project has faced many set-backs, initially with a 15-month delay putting in place a PMU and with no CTA on board until recently coupled with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the major challenges faced by the project and shortened timeframe available, the project has made some good progress. A 24 month extension would be necessary for the project to complete many of the activities for the project and to make strong progress in areas that have progressed slowly to date.

Conclusion 9 (Criterion: Cross-cutting issues, Gender): The project has made some progress with regards to gender, in particular through a Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector for Kiribati completed as well as proactively engaging women as beneficiaries and staff. This is however an area where the team could do a better job in tracking participation of women and capturing the project's gender responsive measures. It would also be helpful to document how the gender assessment will be used and disseminated in-country.

5.2. Recommendations

(93)Based on the findings and conclusions of the report the following recommendations are posed by the MTR team:

Recommendation 1. (PMU, PSC, FAO-SAP): Develop an overall work plan identifying remaining activities, with agreed realistic timeframes for completion, and including an outline of a procurement plan for the remaining project timeframe. While AWP's have recently been completed and agreed at the latest PSC meeting (September 2022) – the project would benefit from the development of an overarching work plan for the remaining activities to be completed. Delivery rates have overall been low for the project so it will be important for the team to ensure commitments and disbursement rates pick-up. By laying out a clear procurement plan and working with the FAO-SAP procurement officer to determine key milestones, the project can avoid long delays.

Recommendation 2. (PSC, FAO-HQ, FAO-SAP): Project Extension by 24 months. The MTR notes that the status of the project timeframe will mean the remaining activities and the project outcomes will not be achieved. A recommendation of an additional 24-month extension of the project to complete the remaining activities due to the advent of the global pandemic and its effects on Kiribati. As noted in the MTR, Kiribati along with other countries in the Pacific have only recently lifted many of the travel restrictions associated with the global pandemic. At the time of the MTR, flight frequency, which is already limited, had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Ground implementation of attaining the project's objects have started to pick up; recently approved LoAs

have provisions for local personnel which once hired will increase the probability for achieving satisfactory results across the three components.

In order to facilitate this extension, the major costs will be related to the PMU and administration of which finances can be sourced from the savings arising from delays in staff recruitment. The remaining activities of the project have residual budget that are sufficiently to cover the necessary costs.

Recommendation 3. (PSC, FAO-PFT, PMU): Increase frequency of PSC meetings and set-up Regular Meetings of FAO-Project Task Force (PTF). Since project inception in 2019 the PSC has met only three times (including a meeting held in October 2022). To ensure adherence to work plans and to have a more efficient decision making process it is recommended that the PSC meet formally twice per year. In addition, the Project Task Force has yet to meet formally, including a regularly scheduled meeting will improve coordination and communication with FAO-SAP and will allow for additional support be provided to the PMU. It is also recommended that the new procurement officer based in FAO-SAP be included at least initially in the PTF strategize and plan for a smoother procurement process.

Recommendation 4. (PMU, PSC, FAO-HQ FAO-SAP): Consider dropping fourth site on Kiritimati Island. The fourth site was added during the inception meeting (Oct 2019) at the time of CEO Endorsement the logframe did not include any indicators related to Kiritimati Island and baseline data has not been collected (no indication of site in tracking tools or within the logframe). Across the 2022 PIR Kiritimati Island is only mentioned twice. Once by the Budget Holder and once in the E&S section on the need for "Consultation workshop with landowners to discuss further final selection of idle land sites in Kiritimati island and North Tabiteuea and North Tarawa." Given the difficulty to travel to the island (high costs, infrequent and unreliable flight schedules), the fact that the addition of the site has not been well integrated into the logframe, description or overall activity descriptions, and that there has not been any work completed on the island to date – it is recommended that the PSC consider dropping the fourth site and focus the remaining time, budget and effort on completing the remaining activities in the three sites originally selected and where some progress has already been made. The issue would need to be brought up and raised with the PSC.

Recommendation 5. (PMU, FAO-SAP): Establish a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan and system for the project (Outcome 3). It is recommended that an M&E Expert, as is indicated in the ProDoc, is hired to develop and advise the PMU in the design and establishment of an M&E system to obtain information on progress in meeting targets, evaluating results and facilitating the systematization of experiences. Currently, the system is haphazard and difficult to track. It is not entirely clear what the entire scope of activities are that need to be completed along with what has been completed. It is also not easy to track what is included in the LoAs and how those relate back to the project outputs and outcomes. The PMU would benefit from support to establish a clear guideline for tracking and linking the different pieces of information into a coherent overarching system.

Recommendation 6. (PSC, PMU, FAO-SAP FAO-HQ): Adjust indicators and targets in the logical framework. The main indicator that will need adjustment is under Output 1.1.4 – target: "At least 2 I-Kiribati nationals applied for/enrolled in R2R Sustainable Development Post Graduate Programme (James Cook University) by project end." Since the master's program is no longer open to applicants, this activity will need to be adjusted and the indicator/target changed. A budget

revision will be necessary as well. The PSC may consider other types of capacity support or technical training which may include: (i) targeted training of MELD staff in ecosystem and community-based conservation; (ii) develop community training and involvement plans to aid in local engagement involving local youth and women; (iii) sponsor and/or organize community-based restoration programs at target sites that involve youth; and/or (iv) engage youth and children in the monitoring, training and awareness raising efforts on all islands.

Table A11.1 Recommendations table

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing/dates for actions
Strategic relevance				
None				
Effectiveness				
B.1	Output 1.1.4 – target: “At least 2 I-Kiribati nationals applied for/enrolled in R2R Sustainable Development Post Graduate Programme (James Cook University) by project end.” Since the master’s program is no longer open to applicants – activity will need to be changed	Recommendation 6: Determine new output for 1.1.4, provide adjust indicators and targets in the logical framework.	PMU/PSC/FAO-SAP	31 December 2022
B.2	Given the major delays in implementation, the difficulty to travel to the island, the fact that the addition of the site has not been well integrated into the logframe, description or overall activity descriptions, and that there has not been any work completed on the island to date. Focus on the remaining activities in the three sites originally selected and where some progress has already been made would be a more effective use of resources.	Recommendation 4: Consider dropping 4th site on Kiritimati Island.	PMU/PSC/FAO-SAP	31 December 2022
Efficiency				
C.1	To complete the remaining activities and increase probability of completing key outputs and securing results. effects on Kiribati.	Recommendation 2: Project extension by 18-24 months	PSC/FAO-HQ, FAO-SAP	31 December 2022
Sustainability and catalysis/replication				
D.1	None			
Factors affecting performance				

E.1	Delivery rates have overall been low for the project so it will be important for the team to ensure commitments and disbursement rates pick-up. By laying out a clear procurement plan and working with the FAO-SAP procurement officer to determine key milestones, the project can avoid long delays.	Recommendation 1: Develop overall work plan to determine remaining activities, agree to realistic timeframes for completion, and outline a procurement plan for the remaining project timeframe	PMU/PSC/FAO-SAP	15 December 2022
E.2	Currently, the M&E system is haphazard and difficult to track. The PMU would benefit from support to establish a clear guideline for tracking and linking the different pieces of information into a coherent overarching system.	Recommendation 5: Establish a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan and system for the project	PMU/FAO-SAP	For remaining implementation period
E.3.	To ensure adherence to work plans and to have a more efficient decision making process it is recommended that the PSC meet formally twice per year. In addition, the Project Task Force has yet to meet formally, including a regularly scheduled meeting will improve coordination and communication with FAO-SAP and will allow for additional support be provided to the PMU. It is also recommended that the new procurement officer based in FAO-SAP be included at least initially in the PTF strategize and plan for a smoother procurement process.	Recommendation 3: Increase frequency of PSC and set-up Regular Meetings of FAO-Project Task Force (PTF)	PSC, FAO-PFT, PMU	For remaining implementation period
Cross-cutting dimensions				
F.1	None			

6. Lessons learned

Lesson 1. Utilization of Co-finance as Bridge for Implementation. This project provides a good example of how co-finance can be used to ensure activities can move forward even while negotiations on an LoA or delays in disbursements at the start of implementation occur. In particular, if there are synergies with ongoing projects, project staff from these projects can be recruited to support discrete activities to help jump-start implementation.

Lesson 2. Build-in Start-up Delays into Design and Budget. Projects particularly in the Pacific should be designed for a minimum for 6 years. Almost every project approved under the GEF R2R programme has had 12-18 month delays in starting up and have needed a project extension (not only FAO projects but those implemented by other agencies as well). These delays all began prior to the onset of the global pandemic. Given capacity constraints in the region, recruiting a complete project team can take a full year, this situation should be incorporated into the initial design of projects. More broadly, there is an added degree of difficulty in implementing projects in the Pacific that is unique to the region and should be incorporated proactively into project design. This includes the need for a longer lead-in time prior to intervention for recruitment of qualified project personnel.

Lesson 3. Develop On-boarding Manual for Pacific. It would be useful for FAO-SAP to have a clear on-boarding manual that can be deployed at the start of any project. The deployment of the

manual should include basic training on FAO's procurement system, the LOA process (if that is the modality to be used), how to access and utilize any IT systems (including email and shared drives), etc. If an operations manual does not exist one should be designed or adopted for the Pacific context.

Lesson 4. Budget at Design Phase for Travel to Outer Islands – This is a challenge across the Pacific and is particularly acute in Kiribati. The high costs of flights coupled with their infrequency of flights to some outer islands makes field work and monitoring of project sites difficult. Thought should be given during project design and budgeting discussed with the GEF Secretariat for potentially chartering flights or boats as well as combining missions internally as well as potentially with other projects to maximize efficiency of travel. While the upfront cost might increase, the overall effectiveness of projects is likely to increase and help to reduce consistent project delays.

Lesson 5. Early Support at Start-up. For this project active support for the project has come in the second half of implementation. It would be helpful if FAO could focus more support at start-up and in particular to set-up a proper M&E system to capture baseline indicators and ensure accurate reporting. Having a strong M&E system in place will also help the PMU better understand what the key milestones are and what they are working to achieve in terms of results. The early support is likely to also prevent delays in the longer-term.

7. Appendices

See Appendices 1-7 included below.

Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR



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KIR-009-GFF.docx

Appendix 2. MTR itinerary, including field missions (agenda)



Local Consultant
Report edited

Appendix 3. Stakeholders interviewed/consulted during the MTR

	First name	Last name	Position	Organization/location
1	Xiangjun	Yao	Budget Holder	FAO-SAP
2	Lianchawii	Chhakchhuak;	FLO	FAO-SAP
3	Florence	Poulain	LTO	FAO
4	Lex	Thomson	CTA	FAO
5	Raushan	Kumar	GEF Programme Officer	FAO-SAP
6	Jessica	Sanders	Former LTO	FAO
7	Regina	Rotitaake	SUMO	Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)
8	Toreka	Temari	Director	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD)
9	Kinaai	Kairo	Director	ALD
10	Kautia	Tabuaka	Agriculture Assistant on Butaritari	R2R Project
11	Tikuntetaake	Raakobu	Fisheries officer on Buaritari	R2R Project
12	Ikauea	Riare	Chairman	Keuea Community,
13	Tebobora		Chairman	Ukiangnag Community
14	Burantemanoku	Timon	Mayor	Butaritari Island Council
15	Tebobora	Taeanibeia	Clerk	Butaritari Island Council

Appendix 4. MTR matrix (review questions and sub-questions)

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Evaluation Criteria: Relevance</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project's objective fit within the priorities of the local government and local communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between project objective and stated priorities of local stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local government stakeholders Local community stakeholders Local private sector stakeholders Relevant regional and local planning documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local level field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project concept originate from local or national stakeholders, and/or were relevant stakeholders sufficiently involved in project development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of involvement of local and national stakeholders in project origination and development as indicated by number of planning meetings held, representation of stakeholders in planning meetings, and level of incorporation of stakeholder feedback in project planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project staff Local and national stakeholders Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<i>Evaluation Criteria: Efficiency</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project cost-effective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality and comprehensiveness of financial management procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are expenditures in line with international standards and norms for development projects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of project inputs and outputs relative to norms and standards for donor projects in the country or region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents (budget files, audit, etc.) Project staff National stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are management and implementation arrangements efficient in delivering the outputs necessary to achieve outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriateness of structure of management arrangements Extent of necessary partnership arrangements Level of participation of relevant stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Local, regional and national stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff Field visit interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the project implementation delayed? If so, did that affect cost-effectiveness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project milestones in time Required project adaptive management measures related to delays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of cash and in-kind co-financing relative to expected level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is the project leveraging additional resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of resources leveraged relative to project budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with project staff

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Evaluation Criteria: Effectiveness</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project objective likely to be met? To what extent and in what timeframe? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of progress toward project indicator targets relative to expected level at current point of implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key factors contributing to project success or underachievement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of documentation of and preparation for project risks, assumptions and impact drivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key risks and priorities for the remainder of the implementation period? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presence, assessment of, and preparation for expected risks, assumptions and impact drivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is adaptive management being applied to ensure effectiveness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified modifications to project plans, as necessary in response to changing assumptions or conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is monitoring and evaluation used to ensure effective decision-making? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of M&E plan in terms of meeting minimum standards, conforming to best practices, and adequate budgeting Consistency of implementation of M&E compared to plan, quality of M&E products Use of M&E products in project management and implementation decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<i>Evaluation Criteria: Results</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the planned outputs being produced? Are they likely to contribute to the expected project outcomes and objective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of project implementation progress relative to expected level at current stage of implementation Existence of logical linkages between project outputs and outcomes/impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the anticipated outcomes likely to be achieved? Are the outcomes likely to contribute to the achievement of the project objective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of logical linkages between project outcomes and impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Evaluation Criteria: Sustainability</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are project results likely to be dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that any required financial resources will be available to sustain the project results once the GEF assistance ends? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial requirements for maintenance of project benefits Level of expected financial resources available to support maintenance of project benefits Potential for additional financial resources to support maintenance of project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do relevant stakeholders have or are likely to achieve an adequate level of “ownership” of results, to have the interest in ensuring that project benefits are maintained? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of initiative and engagement of relevant stakeholders in project activities and results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do relevant stakeholders have the necessary technical capacity to ensure that project benefits are maintained? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of technical capacity of relevant stakeholders relative to level required to sustain project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the project results dependent on socio-political factors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of socio-political risks to project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the project results dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of institutional and governance risks to project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of project impacts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of environmental risks to project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<i>Factors Affecting Performance</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Project Design) Is the project design, including the indicators and targets of the Results Framework, appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Are the project’s logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project’s objectives and components, clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of progress toward project indicator targets relative to expected level at current point of implementation Level of project implementation progress relative to expected level at current stage of implementation Existence of logical linkages between project outputs and outcomes/impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Project execution) To what extent did FAO effectively discharged its role and responsibilities related to the management and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified modifications to project plans, as necessary in response to changing assumptions or conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project? How well have risks been identified and managed? What changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence, assessment of, and preparation for expected risks, assumptions and impact drivers 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Project Management and administration) What was the role of the BH to manage and administer the project, considering the proper use of funds, and the acquisition and contracting of goods and services? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and comprehensiveness of financial management procedures • Cost of project inputs and outputs relative to norms and standards for donor projects in the country or region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents ((budget files, audit, etc.) • Project staff • Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews • Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Financial management and Co-financing) What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project? To what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered, and has there been any additional leveraged co-financing provided since implementation began? How has any short fall in co-financing or materialization of greater than expected co-financing affected project results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of cash and in-kind co-financing relative to expected level • Amount of resources leveraged relative to project budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Project staff • Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews • Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO PTF (BH, LTO, CTA and GCU FLO) delivered on its project oversight and supervision? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriateness of structure of management arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Project staff • Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews • Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, indigenous populations, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and the private sector, been involved in project formulation and implementation? What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of participation of relevant stakeholders • Level of initiative and engagement of relevant stakeholders in project activities and results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Project staff • Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews • Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of communication materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication materials • Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews • Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience? How can this be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of key messages by partners and stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project stakeholders 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (M&E design & implementation) Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient? Does the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability? How can the M&E system be improved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of M&E plan in terms of meeting minimum standards, conforming to best practices, and adequate budgeting Consistency of implementation of M&E compared to plan, quality of M&E products Use of M&E products in project management and implementation decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<i>Cross-cutting dimensions</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Gender and minority groups) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits? Was a gender analysis undertaken? To what extent were the vulnerable groups (women, youth and disable) involved in the project activities? Has the project made specific contributions to the wellbeing of vulnerable groups (empowerment, reduced vulnerability)? What were the results achieved or likely to be achieved (sex aggregated socioeconomic co-benefits data)? Are there any lessons learned in terms of gender that could be used for similar future interventions (design, implementation, M&E)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of gender and minority group participation in project activities Results achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were E&S concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? What was the ESS category at project endorsement? Is that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of environmental risks to project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Document Project staff Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
category confirmed at mid-term? Any mitigation plan?			

Appendix 5. List of documents consulted ("Reference list")

1. GEF PIF with technical clearance
2. Comments from the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and GEF Council members on project design, plus FAO responses
3. FAO concept note and FAO Project Review Committee report
4. Request for GEF CEO endorsement
6. GEF-approved project document
7. Project inception report
8. Annual workplans and budgets (including budget revisions)
9. All annual GEF PIR reports (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)
10. List of stakeholders
11. Project sites and site location maps
12. Technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports, including back-to-the-office reports by relevant project and FAO staff, including any reports on technical support provided by FAO headquarters or regional office staff
13. ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and online records on FPMIS
14. FAO policy documents in relation to topics such as FAO Strategic Objectives and gender
15. Finalized GEF focal-area tracking tools at CEO endorsement (none completed for mid-term)
16. Financial management information, up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project's financial management and expenditures to date
17. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c)
18. Kiribati Country Gender Assessment
19. Draft M&E Plan -GCP.KIR.009.GFF (excel)
20. GEF 5 - Resilient Islands Resilient Communities - PSC ToR_DRAFT_rev_031022.doc
21. Draft-LoA-2022 - MELAD ALD_Idle lands
22. R2R ALD AWP2022-2023 (excel)
23. CFD Original and Amended LoAs and AWP 2022
24. ECD Original LoA and Amended LoA and AWP 2022
25. Amendment to LoA_MELAD ECD_PO7975921
26. ECD R2R 2022-2023 AWP and budget-target included (excel)
27. NFF_NCE LoA_MELAD ECD_DY Signed
28. Signed page by Government counterparts - Amendment to LoA_MELAD ECD
29. SRC signed_LoA 2021-01 Revised MELAD ECD Signed FAO

Appendix 6. Results matrix showing achievements at mid-term and MTR observations

As part of the assessment of the delivery of project outcomes and outputs, the MTR should assess progress made towards the mid-term project targets using the matrix in Table A11.2. Where mid-term targets are not given in the project logframe, assessment can be made against end-of-project targets. Assessment of progress should be colour-coded using a “traffic-light system”, with a rating assigned to progress on each outcome (but not outputs) using the standard GEF six-point rating scale. Recommendations should be made for those areas marked as “not on target to be achieved” (red).

Table A11.2 Progress-towards-results matrix showing the degree of achievement of project outcomes and outputs (against mid-term targets)*

Results Chain	Indicators	End of Project Target	Progress at MTR	Progress rating	Mid-term level & assessment (color-coded)
Component 1: Enabling environment for R2R conservation and sustainable use					
Outcome 1.1 Enabling environment improved for ecosystem-based sustainable use and conservation of island resources					
Output 1.1.1 R2R concept mainstreamed into sectoral development priorities, legal framework and policies with an emphasis on protecting and developing livelihoods	Integration of cross sectoral and ecosystem considerations in sectoral priorities	R2R concept integrated or mainstreamed into at least three sectoral priorities/policies / legal framework	(i) Establishment of newly endorsed fisheries regulation enforced in North Tarawa, North Tabiteuea and Butaritari (ii) Implementing partners have developed workplans with inclusive cross-sectorial approach, including effective mechanisms for whole island approach through extensive consultative process with island councils, elders and villages, and executed missions to the project islands to engage local level participation in decision making using a bottom up approach for the management of land resources and sustainable production of agriculture.	MS	On-target
Output 1.1.2 National level coordination mechanism developed for cross-sectoral decision-making (including on Protected Areas)	Cross sectoral coordination and decision making mechanism present	Cross sectoral coordination mechanism established and functional	PSC and PMU have strengthened the cross-sectoral consultation linked to the project outcomes and implementing partners understand better the benefits of common outcomes and missions for the activities	MS	On-target

Output 1.1.3 Resilience and socio-ecological planning for national to island-level coordination mechanism on whole-of-Island based R2R conservation and sustainable-use strategies streamlined across national and islands levels	Incorporation of resilience and socio-cultural considerations into the coordination mechanism	Coordination mechanism incorporates resilience and socio-cultural considerations	Island level consultation with land owners on the selection of idle land sites for agricultural productivity has recognized an assessment that incorporated sensitive social-cultural considerations in the project islands. Island level gender-sensitive resilience indicators have not yet been developed and made available for target islands No evidence that R2R conservation and sustainable use strategies emphasizing gender equity have been developed and submitted for adoption by island council in each target island.	MU	Not on target
Output 1.1.4 National and island level environmental education, outreach and extension program developed	Number of individuals in R2R Master's Program Number of extension agents/staff trained Number of schools/communities under the outreach programme	At least two persons enrolled in R2R Master's program 25 extension agents/staff trained Nine schools and 30 communities under the outreach programme	-Development of school curricula in R2R approach is considered by certain implementing partners and to be developed through their AWP for outcome 1. The decision was endorsed by the PSC members in March 2021 consultations with relevant Ministry of Education and the curriculum unit have been conducted. -6 extension officers have been trained	MS	On target but need to drop Master's program
Component 2: Implementation of R2R conservation and sustainable use strategies					
Outcome 2.1 National management system for ecosystem-based sustainable use and conservation of island resources established to deliver SFM, LD, and BD benefits					
Output 2.1.1 R2R conservation and sustainable use strategies initiated in three islands in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems	Number of integrated land and marine management plans	Three completed island level R2R management plans	Development of Integrated community based mangrove managed plans in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea.	S	Achieved

Output 2.1.2 Expanded and complementary livelihoods developed as a part of the plans developed under Output 2.1.1	Number of new or complementary subsistence or livelihood activities developed Number of households with expanded livelihood opportunities	At least 350 households adopt engage in expanded/complementary livelihoods	-Several idle lands have been identified in Butaritari, North Tarawa and North Tabiteuea and consultations were undertaken towards its development for agricultural productivity and sustainability. However, need to start work in full gear to ensure results by end of project - Distribution of seedlings and agricultural trainings were conducted in the communities	MU	Not on target
Output 2.1.3 R2R conservation and use strategies across land and sea implemented at three target islands (through the integrated plans)	Number of hectares of agroforestry sites established Number of hectares of forests restored Number of hectares of marine area under co-management	828 ha under agroforestry 232 hectares under SFM 22,417 hectares of marine area under co-management	- 24 acres of idle lands sites was agreed by the project islands to be selected for agriculture production. -MPAs established in Butaritari but need to be tracked and Ha recorded -Ha covered well below mid-term targets	U	Not on target
Output 2.1.4 At least three PAs established (where identified in Outputs 2.1.1)	Number of new PAs	3	-at least 1 MPA established in Butaritari	MS	On target
Component 3: Lessons learning and sharing					
Outcome 3.1 Project implementation based on results based management and application and sharing of project findings and lessons learned					
Output 3.1.1 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan and system for the project established and operational	Set project targets and milestones achieved according to the work plans	Set project targets achieved	The M&E system needs to be put in place as soon as possible. Currently, the project is not accurately reporting on progress to date.	U	Not on target

Output 3.1.2 Project related 'knowledge' captured and shared	Knowledge and communication products Number of regional R2R events participated in and contributed to	A project publication (in a format relevant to local stakeholders) with the results and lessons documented	The project initially produced awareness materials which were translated into the country language (I-Kiribati) in consultation with the relevant project implementing partners to achieve the right vocabulary. These were widely disseminated during national events in Kiribati by the implementing partners and as well as in the project sites at the inception phase of the project. The project has also contributed to the Pacific R2R website and has been involved in a virtual training conducted by SPC on how to use the website and finally a production of video clips was done in a collaborative effort between the project and its partners.	MS	On target
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Indicator assessment key

Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved	Red = Not on target to be achieved
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* As presented in the results framework in the original project document or subsequently updated by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) at project inception

Appendix 7. Co-financing table

Sources of Co-financing ¹⁰	Name of Co-financer	Type of Co-financing	Amount Confirmed at CEO endorsement / approval	Actual Amount Materialized at 30 June 2022	Actual Amount Materialized at Midterm or closure (confirmed by the review/evaluation team)
Recipient Country Government	MELAD	In-kind	5,500,000.00	2,500,000	2,500,000
Recipient Country Government	MELAD	Grant	500,000.00	300,000	300,000
Recipient Country Government	MFMRD	In-kind	6,000,000.00	3,000,000	3,000,000
Recipient Country Government	University of Wollongong	Grant	378,000.00	378,000	378,000
Bilateral	SPC	In-kind	152,000.00	152,000	152,000
Bilateral	SPC	Grant	10,000.00	10,000	10,000
GEF Agency	FAO	In-kind	250,000.00	100,000	100,000
Bilateral	FAO TCPs	Grant	550,000.00	100,000	100,000
		TOTAL	13,340,000.00	6,540,000	6,540,000

¹⁰ Sources of Co-financing may include: Bilateral Aid Agency(ies), Foundation, GEF Agency, Local Government, National Government, Civil Society Organization, Other Multi-lateral Agency(ies), Private Sector, Beneficiaries, Other.

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

Table A11.3 MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ¹¹	Summary comments ¹²
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Aligns strategically with country goals & contributes to GEBs
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	Directly aligns with GEF & FAO strategic priorities
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly relevant to national and beneficiary needs
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	S	Strong complementarity with existing interventions
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Due to project delays, COVID-19, and natural disasters overall project is behind on several results and associated targets
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	Several outputs have only recently begun or need to start
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ¹³ and project objectives	MS	
- Outcome 1	MS	The establishment of a newly endorsed fisheries regulation is being enforced but more work is needed across other outputs
- Outcome 2	MS	3 ICBMPs have been completed as well as the establishment of MPA sites. Other areas need more work
- Outcome 3	MS	Reporting and some KIM – more work on M&E system needed
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	MS	Level of outcomes achieved include moderate shortcomings
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ¹⁴	MS	Level of project disbursement not adequate to achieve project results by end of project however co-finance has helped mitigate impact.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	Moderate risks to sustainability mostly related to potential shortcomings to project outcomes by the project closure
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Financial risks are moderate but could be reduced through

¹¹ See rating scheme at the end of the document.¹² Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.¹³ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.¹⁴ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

		increased disbursements and completion of activities
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	L	High degree of relevance and alignment with government and beneficiaries
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Frameworks structures and/or processes that will create mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and technical knowledge transfer after the project's closure are still in early stages
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	Project is tracking E&S risks well
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	To ensure catalysis & replication it will be important for project to strengthen KM mechanism
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ¹⁵	MU	Early stages of implementation were weak with many delays
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	PMU is responsive and has built strong partnerships
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MU	Through the first stages of implementation support from FAO was weak – this has strengthened in the last year of implementation
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	MU	Oversight could be strengthened through more frequent communication and meetings
E3. Quality of project execution	MS	Activities in the field have been well executed with strong collaboration with Island Councils and beneficiaries
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	Execution of project was stalled during the pandemic but appears to have now picked up with increased inter-island travel and planned LoAs.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MS	Co-financing is strong however disbursements are low
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Project partners are engaged and stakeholder engagement strong
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	More emphasis on disseminating information and developing KM products will be needed moving forward
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	GEF tracking tools need to be completed, all indicators should be tracked and reported on;
E7.1 M&E design	MU	The M&E design would benefit from providing funding for an M&E expert to design system
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MU	Need to dedicate additional resources to properly implement plan
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	Several of the weaknesses for performance can be addressed through better planning and greater support of the FAO-

¹⁵ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		SAP. In remaining phases of implementation, this can be improved without requiring any major restructuring
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MS	Gender indicators should be better tracked and how the project will integrate the Gender Assessment needs to be detailed
F2. Human rights issues	S	No issues were found related to human rights
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	E&S risks have been proactively handled
Overall project rating		MS

Overall outcome ratings

MTRs should use mid-term targets per the project's logframe to assess outcome delivery. If no mid-term indicator targets are available, the MTR should base outcome ratings on an assessment of the delivery of results to date against milestones in workplans and delivery compared with end-of-project targets.

Table A11.4 How to assess ratings for specific criteria

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor shortcomings</i>
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings</i>
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings</i>
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings</i>
Unable to assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements</i>

Source: GEF (2017c)

In line with similar guidance on the assessment of ratings for GEF terminal evaluations (GEF, 2017c), the overall rating of the outcomes of the project should be based on performance on the criteria of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. The calculation of the overall outcome rating will consider all three criteria, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. The relevance rating will determine whether the overall outcome rating is in the unsatisfactory range (MU to HU = unsatisfactory range). If the relevance rating is unsatisfactory, the overall outcome will be unsatisfactory as well. However, where the relevance rating is satisfactory (HS to MS), the overall outcome rating could, depending on its effectiveness and efficiency rating, be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Table A11.5 Factors affecting performance *(assess each element separately; M&E is treated differently)*

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	There were no shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results exceeded expectations.
Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results meet expectations.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results more or less meet expectations.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results were somewhat lower than expected.
Unsatisfactory (U)	There were major shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results were substantially lower than expected.
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	There were severe shortcomings in quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management.
Unable to assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management.

Table A11.6 Monitoring and evaluation design or implementation ratings *(Overall M&E design, design and implementation assessed separately)*

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	There were no shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation exceeded expectations.
Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation meets expectations.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation more or less meets expectations.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation somewhat lower than expected.

Unsatisfactory (U)	There were major shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation substantially lower than expected.
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	There were severe shortcomings in M&E design or M&E implementation.
Unable to assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design or M&E implementation.

Table A11.7 Sustainability

Rating	Description
Likely (L)	There is little or no risk to sustainability.
Moderately likely (ML)	There are moderate risks to sustainability.
Moderately unlikely (MU)	There are significant risks to sustainability.
Unlikely (U)	There are severe risks to sustainability.
Unable to assess (UA)	Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.