GEF/E/C.68/02
November 16, 2024

68th GEF Council Meeting
December 16-19, 2024
Virtual Meeting

Agenda Item 09

EVALUATION OF GEF PROGRAMS IN PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

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1. The Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face unique environmental and developmental challenges. These nations are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and natural disasters while grappling with limited institutional capacity and geographic isolation. From 1991 to 2023, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has invested significantly in Pacific SIDS, channeling $528 million into 140 projects. Recognizing the need for a more integrated approach, the GEF shifted its focus in 2008 from standalone projects to programmatic strategies, aiming to address the complex, interlinked vulnerabilities these states face more holistically and sustainably.

2. This evaluation examined three major GEF programs in Pacific SIDS and their corresponding 19 child projects (13 completed and 6 ongoing): the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R), Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP), and Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) programs. The evaluation assessed the evolution of GEF integrated programming in the region, analyzed factors influencing program performance, and identified lessons learned to inform future GEF interventions in SIDS. This builds on previous IEO evaluations of SIDS and programmatic approaches, with a particular focus on understanding how program design and implementation can be improved to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.

Key findings and conclusions

3. **Significant progress has been observed in the GEF's programmatic approaches since the last SIDS evaluation, with some challenges still to be addressed.** The evolution from standalone projects to multifocal programs, and further to integrated programs, has led to better alignment with national priorities and enhanced environmental outcomes. This approach has produced more inclusive and informed interventions. However, persistent obstacles remain, including project delays, limited institutional capacity, and difficulties in achieving long-term sustainability. The programmatic approach has demonstrated both benefits and drawbacks in the unique and challenging context of Pacific SIDS.

4. **GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are strategically aligned with regional priorities, advancing key environmental and development goals.** These initiatives effectively support the objectives outlined in the SAMOA Pathway, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and various multilateral environmental agreements. The R2R program, for example, advances ecosystem-based management by promoting ridge-to-reef approaches critical for safeguarding these fragile environments. Similarly, the ISLANDS program addresses pressing issues in chemical and waste management, essential for regions with limited waste disposal infrastructure. However, gaps remain in incorporating broader socio-economic dimensions into environmental programming, as limited capacity within many SIDS constrains the multi-sectoral management required for fully integrated approaches.

5. **GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are aligned with child projects but face significant operational hurdles.** While the objectives and activities of child projects generally align well

with program theories of change and other development initiatives, practical challenges emerge in day-to-day execution of programs. Key obstacles include limited technical capacity within implementing agencies, difficulties in maintaining consistent stakeholder engagement, and complications in coordinating donor activities. Program fragmentation often occurs at operational interfaces, resulting in duplicated efforts and resource inefficiencies. Institutional barriers persist in establishing unified monitoring systems, maintaining regular inter-agency communication channels, and synchronizing project timelines across different implementing bodies. Additionally, staff turnover in key positions and varying levels of governmental commitment across different jurisdictions impact program continuity and effectiveness.

6. **The effectiveness of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS showed considerable variation across interventions and programs.** The R2R program demonstrated significant outcomes, particularly in protected area management, coastal and marine resource management, and water catchment activities. However, 73 percent of its child projects fell short of one or more key targets. The CPDP program achieved notable infrastructure and disaster response outcomes, exemplified by its Vanuatu project which improved flood management efficiency by reducing pipeline requirements from 30 km to 7 km. The ISLANDS program has struggled in its early implementation phase, as evidenced by its regional child project where only 7.2 percent of the allocated budget has been spent despite 40 percent of the scheduled time having elapsed.

7. **The evaluation revealed systemic weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation frameworks that significantly impact program assessment and adaptive management**. Results frameworks show critical gaps in three main areas: First, there is persistent misalignment between program-level and child project indicators. For example, in the R2R program, child projects in Fiji and Kiribati employed indicators that failed to capture broader program conservation goals or environmental outcomes. Second, indicator quality and measurement approaches are inconsistent, characterized by: (a) predominant focus on basic outputs like "number of management plans developed" or "workshops conducted" rather than measuring meaningful environmental and social changes, (b) lack of standardized baseline data collection protocols across related projects, (c) absence of early warning mechanisms for implementation challenges, and (d) incompatible metrics that prevent effective aggregation of results across projects. Third, the frameworks lack robust outcome measurement systems—while projects can demonstrate activity completion, they struggle to quantify actual environmental improvements or long-term impact on biodiversity, water quality, or community resilience. These framework deficiencies have direct implications: they limit the ability to demonstrate program impact, hinder adaptive management responses, and complicate efforts to aggregate and compare results across the portfolio. The situation is particularly challenging in Pacific SIDS, where limited institutional capacity further constrains the collection and analysis of complex environmental and social indicators.

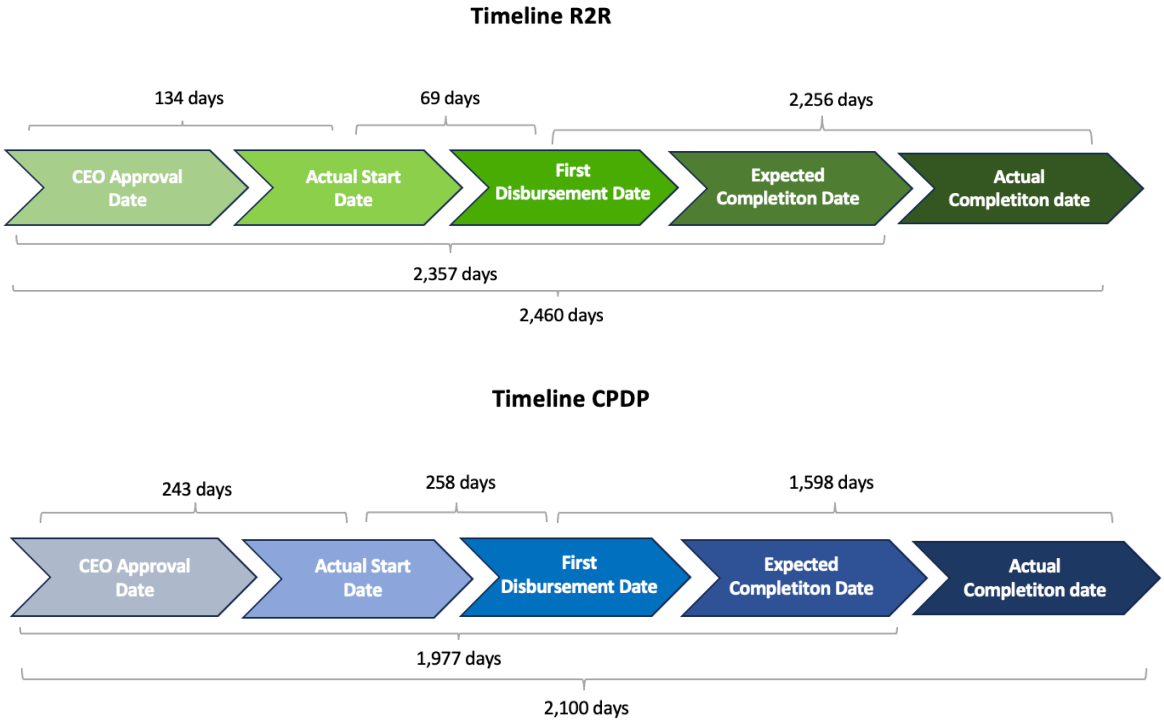
8. **Knowledge management, innovation and socio-economic co-benefits contributed to program effectiveness.** Knowledge management proved to be a particular strength, especially in the R2R program where ten child projects established successful knowledge transfer

mechanisms. While the programs demonstrated innovative approaches—such as the CPDP's infiltration galleries for flood management and R2R's integrated watershed management—limited institutional capacity often prevented full realization of these innovations. Social and economic benefits were achieved in about half of the projects, particularly through livelihood diversification and infrastructure improvements, though quantifying these impacts proved challenging in numerous cases.

9. **GEF programs in Pacific SIDS demonstrated meaningful additionality compared to standalone projects, though this advantage came with inherent trade-offs in implementation.** Key benefits included enhanced knowledge sharing and capacity building across countries, improved regional coordination, greater operational flexibility, and increased ability to attract diverse stakeholders. For example, the ISLANDS program's global coordination component facilitated cross-regional learning, while the R2R program enabled coordinated action across 14 countries. Programs also proved effective at leveraging resources and engaging the private sector, as demonstrated by the ISLANDS regional child project's partnerships with the private sector. The programmatic approach particularly benefited smaller countries with limited institutional capacity by providing crucial technical support and enabling South-South knowledge transfer. However, these advantages were accompanied by significant operational challenges. Programs faced increased complexity in management, exemplified by the coordination demands across multiple countries in the Pacific R2R program. Implementation timeframes often extended beyond original plans, as seen in the ISLANDS program's 1.5-year extension. Administrative burdens increased due to program-level coordination and reporting requirements. These challenges were particularly acute in the Pacific SIDS context, where limited human resource capacity, geographic isolation, high travel costs, and technical constraints already posed significant hurdles to project implementation.

10. **All three GEF programs in Pacific SIDS experienced significant implementation delays, with completion timelines generally exceeding GEF portfolio averages.** The R2R program's child projects averaged 6.7 years (2,460 days) to complete, surpassing the 6-year threshold met by 89 percent of GEF projects. These systemic delays stemmed from multiple factors, with inadequate planning and low institutional capacity being primary contributors. For comparison, in the broader GEF portfolio, 78 percent of full-size projects achieved their first disbursement within 549 days of CEO approval, and 57 percent completed their midterm review in less than 1,461 days—benchmarks that Pacific SIDS programs consistently struggled to meet. The overestimation of national capacity in program design led to unrealistic timelines and expectations. Administrative and financial bottlenecks, particularly in staff recruitment and fund transfers, impeded project initiation and management of ongoing operations. The situation was further complicated by coordination challenges among multiple stakeholders and external shocks like COVID-19, which triggered lockdowns of varying duration across Pacific SIDS between 2020 and 2022.

Figure A: Average timeline of R2R and CPDP program in Pacific SIDS



Source: GEF Portal.

11. The sustainability of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS faces significant challenges, rooted in low institutional capacity, limited financial mechanisms and country context. Program ratings reflect these concerns, with none of the rated projects achieving a "likely" sustainability rating—four were rated as "moderately likely," four as "moderately unlikely," and one as "unlikely." Institutional sustainability emerged as a primary concern, with limited public sector capacity and high staff turnover, including labor migration to Australia and New Zealand, affecting most Pacific Island countries. While some projects showed promise in institutional strengthening, such as Tonga's integration of watershed ecological health monitoring into sectoral plans, financial sustainability remained problematic. Many projects struggled to establish adequate financial mechanisms for long-term maintenance of their achievements. The complex context of Pacific SIDS as fragile states—including geographic isolation, limited economic diversification, exposure to natural disasters, and institutional capacity constraints—added multiple layers of vulnerability, though some projects demonstrated resilience through effective community engagement and alignment with local governance structures. Technical sustainability presented fewer challenges, particularly in infrastructure projects designed for minimal maintenance requirements and climate change resilience. Projects that effectively combined traditional knowledge systems with modern approaches, such as engaging village chiefs in Vanuatu's decentralized management approach, demonstrated stronger prospects for sustained outcomes.

12. **There is room for improvement in coordination and collaboration across GEF Agencies and other development partners.** The experience of GEF programs in the Pacific region has highlighted the critical role of sector coordination in enhancing development impact. While some positive examples of coordination between national governments and international agencies have been observed, the full potential for collaboration remains largely untapped. The landscape of development agencies active in the Pacific, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), European Union (EU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australian Aid (AusAid), and New Zealand Aid, presents a complex web of actors with shared goals but often disparate approaches. The current state of coordination, both among GEF Agencies and with other development partners, has shown significant room for improvement. This gap in collaboration has implications for resource utilization efficiency, potential duplication of efforts, and the overall effectiveness of development initiatives in the region.

13. **The evaluation highlights opportunities to strengthen institutional capacity in Pacific SIDS through careful consideration of Agency partnerships.** While the current GEF Agencies bring valuable expertise and resources, the experience with national agencies in other regions suggests that expanding Agency partnerships to include qualified Pacific regional organizations could help build sustained institutional capacity and enhance country ownership. However, any expansion would need to be balanced against the increased complexity of managing an expanded partnership and ensuring new Agencies can meet GEF standards and requirements.

14. **Stakeholder involvement is uneven, with notable progress in gender mainstreaming but gaps in other areas.** While gender inclusion has improved, particularly in the design of the ISLANDS program, which includes updated gender guidelines, participation of other key local stakeholder groups remains limited. With a few exceptions, youth and the private sector are often underrepresented in project activities and decision-making processes. This imbalance in stakeholder engagement restricts the potential for comprehensive, inclusive development outcomes. Furthermore, there is a lack of South-South learning opportunities focused on integrating women, youth, indigenous peoples, and the private sector in income-generating activities. This gap hampers the sharing of good practices and innovative approaches to inclusive economic development across the region.

Recommendations

15. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the IEO developed the following three recommendations.

16. **Recommendation 1: Enhance coordination and collaboration to maximize development impact and resource efficiency.** While existing coordination between governments and international agencies shows promise, there remains significant untapped potential to enhance donor alignment and government engagement for improved project outcomes. Key opportunities exist to strengthen external coherence through expanded partnerships among GEF Agencies and other development partners working in the Pacific. By implementing proven coordination mechanisms and fostering deeper collaboration, organizations can achieve more efficient resource allocation, minimize redundant efforts, and

reduce transaction costs for governments. This coordinated approach would ultimately lead to more sustainable and impactful development initiatives that better serve the region's needs while optimizing the GEF's strategic influence through harmonized support systems.

17. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen program effectiveness by further improving the alignment and operational delivery between Pacific SIDS parent programs and their associated child projects.** It is crucial that parent and child projects maintain strong internal coherence while addressing persistent implementation delays that hinder overall program performance. A more streamlined M&E framework at the program level will enable better tracking of outcomes, facilitate adaptive management, and support strategic decision making across the portfolio. By enhancing internal coherence and operational efficiency, while maintaining robust yet simplified oversight mechanisms, programs can achieve more consistent and impactful results. These actions should be strategically designed to foster a culture of adaptive management, ensuring that M&E findings are regularly used to inform decision making and refine implementation strategies.

18. **Recommendation 3: Prioritize robust institutional capacity development to ensure program success and enduring impact.** Given implementation constraints in Pacific SIDS, programs must establish realistic objectives aligned with local institutional capabilities. This requires focused capacity building in project management, environmental governance, and technical skills, supported by systematic performance monitoring. Effective capacity development should leverage existing governance structures, traditional knowledge, and community engagement to ensure sustained project benefits. Programs should emphasize practical training that addresses immediate implementation needs while building long-term institutional resilience. This balanced approach will support both timely project delivery and sustainable outcomes beyond project completion. Additionally, to strengthen institutional capacity in Pacific SIDS, the GEF should explore opportunities to accredit regional organizations thereby increasing the pool of qualified GEF Agencies working in the region. Any expansion would need to be balanced against the increased complexity of managing an expanded partnership and ensuring new Agencies can meet GEF standards and requirements.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Small island developing states (SIDS)[1] are a distinct group of countries that share similar sustainable development challenges such as small economies, remoteness, and vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters.[2] Economically, SIDS grapple with high production costs and a lack of economies of scale, as well as remoteness, which increases import and export costs. Their small market size often results in higher per-unit costs for goods and services, making it challenging for their industries to compete globally. Furthermore, the absence of economies of scale hinders their ability to benefit from efficiencies gained through mass production (UNCTAD 2022). In terms of environmental factors, SIDS contribute only minimally to overall greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, most SIDS confront the threats posed by climate-induced consequences, including rising sea levels; increased vulnerability to climate change, natural disasters, and invasive species; challenges arising from unsustainable land and water use impacting vital sectors; and dilemmas related to natural resource management (IPCC 2019).

2. Given the importance of the continued support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for SIDS' environmental efforts, their unique vulnerabilities, and the growing GEF portfolio of programs, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) is conducting an evaluation with a special focus on the Pacific Islands. Around 2008, the GEF broadened its approach in SIDS by incorporating programmatic approaches alongside individual projects. This expansion was primarily motivated by the need to safeguard STAR allocations for Pacific SIDS in GEF-5. While programmatic approaches offered additional opportunities to address interconnected environmental challenges and vulnerabilities, individual projects remained an important part of GEF's support to SIDS. The combination of both approaches allowed the GEF to provide flexible support that could integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The evaluation builds on previous IEO evaluations of SIDS (GEF IEO 2019) and programmatic and integrated approaches in the GEF (GEF IEO 2018a; 2022b), and mainly focuses on programs. GEF programs and regional projects in the Caribbean SIDS will be covered in a forthcoming evaluation.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Context

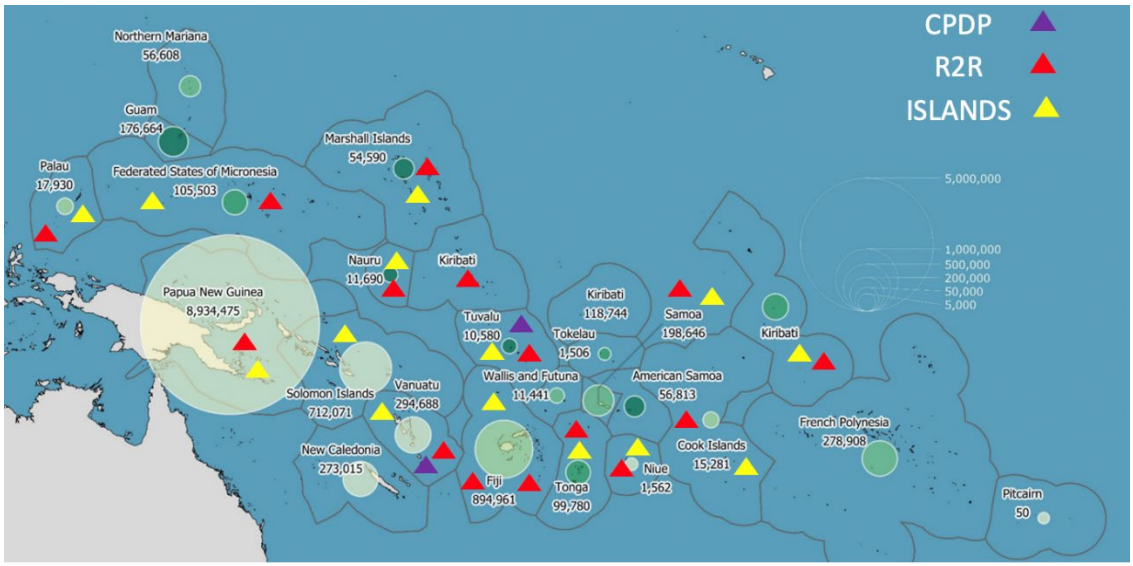
3. **The Pacific SIDS that the GEF supports, a subgroup of the SIDS, encompass 14 nations and territories.** These include the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of Pacific SIDS and their population densities. While these countries share broad characteristics, such as being small and

[1] SIDS share many similar features, such as their small size, limited natural resources, narrow economic bases, large distance to major markets and vulnerability to climate-related disasters, which have a demonstrable effect on growth and have often led to a high degree of economic volatility. For more information: https://www.unido.org/sids

[2] The United Nations uses a set of criteria to classify countries as SIDS. These criteria were first outlined in the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) adopted in 1994 and were further elaborated in the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPOA (MSI) in 2005. For more information: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/small-island-developing-states.

geographically dispersed, they also exhibit significant heterogeneity in terms of income level, differences between volcanic and atoll islands, and relative development progress.

Figure 1: Geographic distribution and population of Pacific SIDS

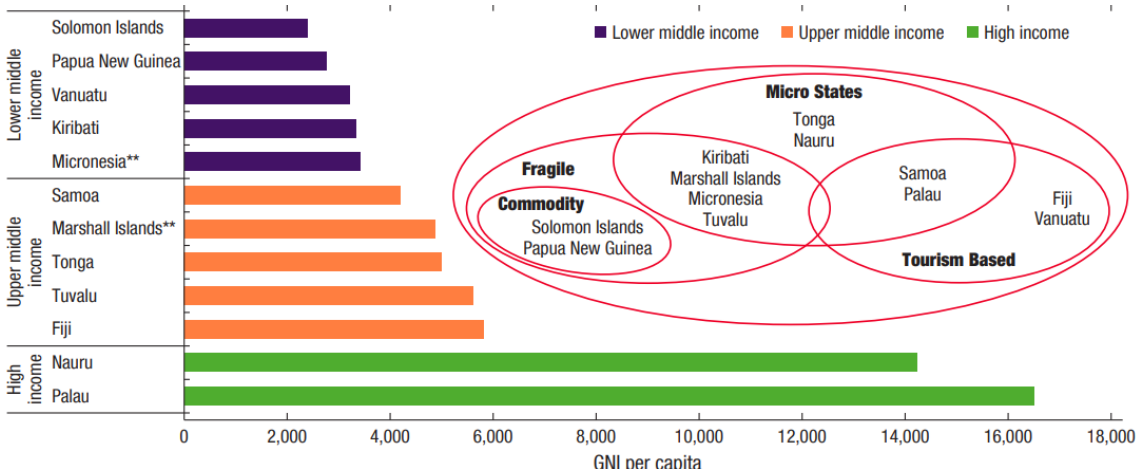


Source: GEF IEO based on Pacific Community, Pacific Population 2020 Projection Map; https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/pacific-population-2020-projection-map; accessed October 2024.

Note: CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS are GEF impact programs with child projects in the Pacific SIDS. CPDP = Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific Program; R2R = Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities Program; ISLANDS = Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS program.

4. **The Pacific SIDS span a wide economic spectrum, with gross national income (GNI) per capita ranging from $2,000 to $16,500.** Two-thirds of these nations are considered "micro-states" with populations below 200,000, and half of these are also classified as fragile states. Papua New Guinea stands out as the only non-small state in the group, with a population of nearly 8 million (figure 2). Collectively, the region is home to approximately 10 million people spread across millions of square miles of ocean (Fouad et al. 2021).

Figure 2: Characteristics of Pacific SIDS ($, 2019)



Note: Includes the 12 countries for which data are available.
Source: Fouad et al. 2021.

5. **Pacific SIDS face disproportionate threats from climate change despite contributing only 0.03 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.** The World Risk Index 2021[3] ranks several Pacific Island countries among the most at-risk globally, with Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Tonga occupying the top three positions. Common climate-related risks include rising sea levels, stronger and more frequent tropical storms, accelerated soil and beach erosion, changed and variable weather pattern, reduced food and water security, and damage to infrastructure.

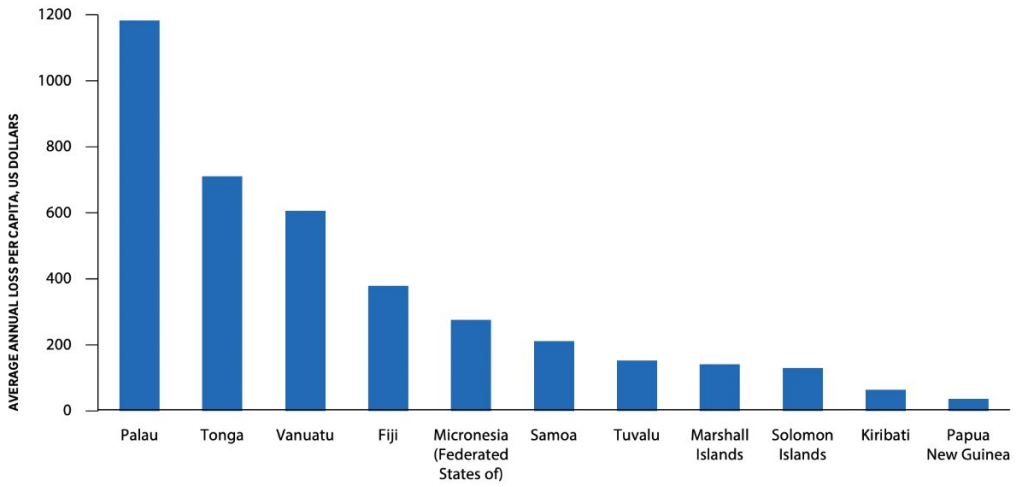
6. **Projections indicate an average sea level rise of 25–58 centimeters by midcentury along the Pacific Island countries, posing an existential threat to low-lying islands.** For instance, it is estimated that by 2050, half of Tuvalu's capital will be submerged by tides (UNDP 2024).[4] Rising temperatures are expected to cause unprecedented biodiversity loss, with projections suggesting that 90 percent of coral reefs throughout much of the Pacific Island region will suffer severe degradation, significantly impacting the ecosystem (NSF 2022).

7. **Pacific SIDS experience some of the highest economic losses and damages due to disasters globally.** Between 2015 and 2020, this subregion suffered the highest economic losses as a percentage of GDP among the global regions and subregions, with an average loss of almost 9 percent (ESCAP 2023). The average annual loss per capita in Pacific SIDS is at least three times higher than in South-East Asia, South and South-West Asia, and North and Central Asia (ESCAP 2020). Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu are particularly vulnerable to these losses (figure 3).

[3] The World Risk Index 2021 assesses the disaster risk for 181 countries. This covers almost 99 percent of the world's population. For more information: https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WorldRiskReport_2021_Online.pdf

[4] At its highest point, Tuvalu is just 4.5 meters above sea level, making it the second lowest-lying nation in the world after Maldives and highly vulnerable to sea level rise. It is estimated that a rise in sea level of 8–16 inches over the next century could submerge the nation entirely (World Bank 2021).

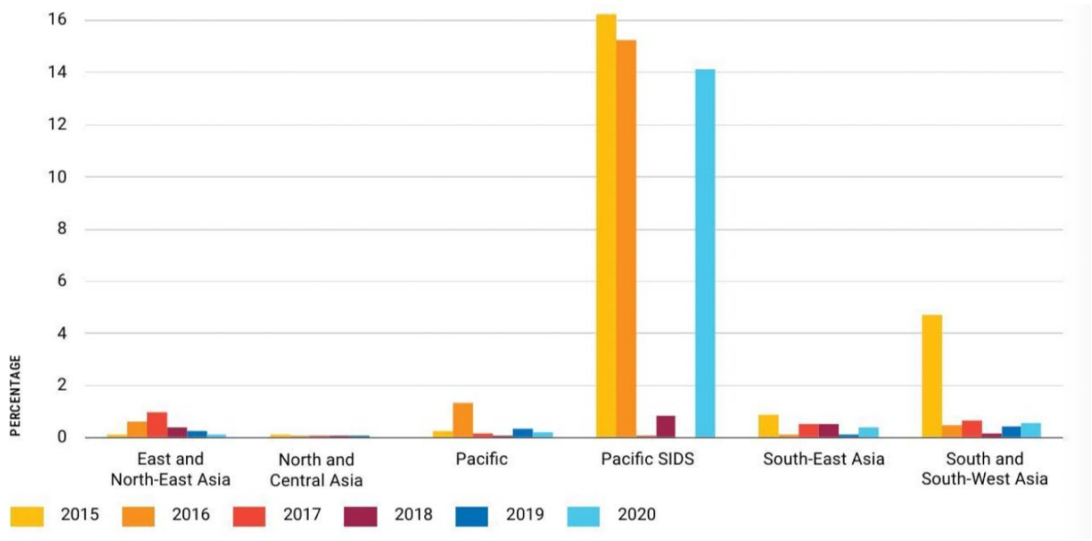
Figure 3: Pacific SIDS average annual loss per capita due to disasters ($)



Source: ESCAP 2020.

8. **Climate change not only results in significant economic losses but also negatively impacts the health and safety of the population.** Floods and tropical cyclones inflict particularly severe economic damage across the Pacific SIDS, with losses amounting to $157 million and $533 million, respectively. These financial impacts are projected to escalate due to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (ESCAP 2023). Among the world's regions, the Pacific SIDS face the highest vulnerability to these climate-related disasters (figure 4).

Figure 4: Average economic loss as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), 2015–2020



Source: EM-DAT, The International Disaster Database, 2021.

9. **The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the vulnerabilities of Pacific SIDS**. The impacts were disproportionately significant due to economic lifelines dependent on food imports, tourism, and remittances; agricultural limitations with short value chains; and limited and remote

healthcare infrastructure. Government preventive measures, such as border closures and restrictions on business hours, unintentionally triggered near-total economic paralysis. The collapse of the tourism sector had far-reaching ramifications for livelihoods, agriculture, and food security. Recovery efforts are being further undermined by external shocks such as inflation and supply shortages. For example, In Samoa, fuel rose 44 percent, and in Nauru liquified petroleum gas bottle prices increased 41 percent, from 2019 to 2022 (FAO 2022). These compounding challenges are reversing critical progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the SAMOA Pathway[5] in Pacific SIDS.

2.2 Previous evaluation findings relevant to SIDS

10. **Many GEF IEO evaluations have incorporated coverage of SIDS through analysis of regional variation in development impacts.** GEF Annual Performance Reports and Comprehensive Evaluations of the GEF routinely report performance outcomes and factors related to implementation and inclusion in GEF programming in SIDS as a priority group. The Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7) noted that GEF-7 impact programs included low participation from SIDS, and there was room for the programs to be more inclusive of priority country groups. OPS7 also discussed the Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) program (GEF ID 10185, UNEP), noting that it represented the largest chemicals and waste investment in GEF-7 and substantially increased funding towards investments in least developed countries (LDCs) and SIDS from GEF-6.[6] While the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R) program (GEF ID 5392, UNDP) itself is not discussed, OPS7 describes the "ridge-to-reef" approach taken in GEF programming in SIDS, addressing the interconnectedness between environmental challenges on land and in the ocean (GEF IEO 2022a). An R2R project would often have an integrated watershed management approach project, with the project area spanning from the top of an island to the coral reef. Regarding priority country groups, OPS7 noted that GEF resources allocated to LDCs and SIDS are too limited to have an impact at a sufficiently large scale in addressing environmental problems and included a key recommendation that the GEF should increase its support to LDCs and SIDS to have greater impact in these priority countries.

11. **The Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation (SCCE) of SIDS (GEF IEO 2019) found that overall programmatic approaches have not gained much traction yet in SIDS.** One exception noted by the SCCE is that the GEF is encouraging integrated approaches by promoting R2R, an integrated watershed management approach to sustainably manage soil, water, and biodiversity, while also

[5] The SAMOA Pathway (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway) is an international framework adopted in 2014 at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa. It outlines the sustainable development priorities for SIDS, including Pacific SIDS. The pathway addresses unique challenges faced by SIDS, such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, sustainable energy, and economic development. It serves as a blueprint for international cooperation and support to enhance the resilience and sustainable development of these vulnerable island nations.

[6] There are seven SIDS that are also classified as least developed countries (LDCs). Among these, two are in the Pacific region: Kiribati and Solomon Islands. Tuvalu graduated from LDC status in December 2020. The GEF continues to support LDCF projects approved prior to a country's graduation through project completion.

considering renewable energy resources and productive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism. The more recently approved ISLANDS program (2019) has a less integrated and more narrow focus, supporting SIDS in improving chemicals and waste management with funding beyond their STAR (System for Transparent Allocation of Resources) allocation. The GEF assists SIDS in identifying sustainable public and private national investments within the blue economy space, through funding of collective management of coastal and marine systems and implementation of integrated ocean policies and legal and institutional reforms. GEF support to SIDS in land degradation seeks to ultimately restore degraded ecosystems, and sustainably manage resources. Another driver for support to SIDS from the GEF has been the need for climate change adaptation; the GEF's two adaptation funds—the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)—have an active portfolio in SIDS in all regions.

12. **The SCCE SIDS evaluation highlights that projects funded are well aligned with national priorities and address key environmental challenges.** However, their performance is generally below the GEF average in outcomes and execution, though sustainability is on par. Regional projects tend to perform better in both outcomes and sustainability. Factors aiding sustainability include legal reforms, environmental funds and public-private partnerships, training, adaptive management, and scaling up based on lessons learned. Challenges to sustainability frequently involve deficiencies in project design, low institutional capacity, lack of environmental awareness, pressures from sectors like agriculture and tourism, and insufficient capacity investment. The GEF has improved long-term sustainability ratings and increased focus on cross-cutting issues like gender equality and resilience, but accessing private sector financing remains challenging. The evaluation recommendations include establishing a permanent GEF presence to enhance stakeholder engagement, designing more integrated and multiphase projects, promoting innovation and knowledge exchange, strengthening institutional capacity, and continuing to explore alternatives for renewable energy (annex A).

13. **The formative evaluation of the GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation found that some categories of countries, such as SIDS, have not yet benefited from the integrated approach pilots (IAPs) and impact programs**. The evaluation assessed the approach applied through the GEF-6 IAPs and GEF-7 impact programs to address the drivers of environmental degradation (GEF IEO 2022b). Only one SIDS country is participating, which is a missed opportunity given SIDS' experience with regional, R2R, and whole-island approaches. One of the evaluation's recommendations calls for the GEF to ensure a greater diversity of countries included in integrated programs and to be more inclusive of smaller countries such as SIDS.

14. **Earlier, the GEF IEO conducted the Vanuatu and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) portfolio evaluation (GEF IEO 2015).** Among the main findings are that the GEF has been crucial in advancing the environmental and sustainable development agenda in Vanuatu and other SPREP countries, facilitating the development of national plans, the creation of environmental agencies, and the implementation of legislative frameworks. While there has been success in replicating projects at the subnational level and increasing environmental awareness, institutional capacity for national-level implementation remains

insufficient. The GEF has contributed to capacity building, especially in climate change, but sustaining these capacities is problematic. Additionally, excessive project preparation time and low national ownership have affected the efficiency and impact of initiatives. The recommendations emphasize aligning GEF-funded action plans with national priorities, integrating coordination mechanisms into national processes, reducing approval times, enhancing knowledge management, and strengthening SPREP's technical assistance after GEF funding concludes.

2.3 Evaluation purpose, scope, and objectives

15. **Given the GEF's priority in addressing environmental efforts in the Pacific SIDS countries, their vulnerabilities, and the growing set of programs,[7] the GEF IEO conducted an in-depth evaluation of the topic.** The GEF has invested $528 million through 140 interventions in Pacific SIDS. IEO's previous Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of SIDS covered GEF's support to SIDS from the GEF-4 (2006–10) replenishment period through GEF-6 (2014–18; GEF IEO 2019). Additionally, the Evaluation of Programmatic Approaches in the GEF assessed the program modality from May 2008 to 2016 (GEF IEO 2018a). While the SCCE of SIDS assessed several standalone projects this evaluation assessed three programs approved in GEF-5 (2010–14) or later and their corresponding child projects. During GEF-5, program design started to become increasingly complex. Compared with earlier programs, GEF-5 shows a greater range of nonhomogeneous, multifocal, multi-Agency, and/or regional/global programs (GEF IEO 2018a).

16. **This evaluation assessed three programs approved in GEF-5 or later and their corresponding 19 child projects (13 completed and 6 ongoing) implemented in Pacific SIDS (annex B).** The focus on programs from the GEF-5 replenishment period onward eliminated from consideration the largest programs focused on SIDS—the global LDC and SIDS Targeted Portfolio Approach for Capacity Development of Sustainable Land Management program (GEF ID 2441, UNDP), approved in GEF-3—and the second largest, the GEF Pacific Alliance for Sustainability program (GEF ID 3420, World Bank),[8] approved in GEF-4. From the GEF-5 replenishment period onward, the largest program in terms of number of child projects approved in Pacific SIDS countries is the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R) program (GEF ID 5395, UNDP). This program also had an approach focused on integration within the context of island ecosystems. The other two programs implemented in Pacific SIDS are: the Climate Proofing

[7] For the purposes of this evaluation, "program" refers to a parent program and a variable number of child projects designed to contribute to the overall program objective. The GEF programmatic approach was approved under the post-2008 programmatic approach modality; programs conform to the requirement of having a program framework document (PFD). "Child project" is a project belonging to and approved under a post-May 2008 program.

[8] While the 2019 GEF IEO SCCE of SIDS did not assess programs, it included 13 of 17 child projects under the GEF Pacific Alliance for Sustainability (PAS) program (GEF ID 3420, World Bank). The PAS program aimed to promote sustainable development by addressing environmental challenges specific to the Pacific SIDS. The issues covered were related to biodiversity loss, land degradation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and waste management. The child projects were designed to support integrated and multisectoral approaches to sustainability through tailored, region-specific interventions in the Pacific SIDS context. The conclusions and recommendations of the SIDS SCCE can be found in annex A.

Development in the Pacific (CPDP) program (GEF ID 5037, ADB), and the Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) program (GEF ID 10185, UNEP).

17. **The evaluation of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS countries focused on three main objectives.** These objectives were to: a) understand the evolution of GEF programs and integrated interventions in Pacific SIDS countries and to evaluate the extent to which interventions respond to lessons learned from past projects; b) evaluate the outcomes and factors influencing the performance of GEF programs and integrated interventions in Pacific SIDS countries; and c) provide recommendations for future GEF projects in Pacific SIDS, with potential transferability to other SIDS.

2.4 Methodology and evaluation questions

18. **To better understand and evaluate the ways the program could achieve its targeted outcomes, the IEO leveraged or developed a theory of change for each program.** A program's theory of change (ToC) provides a basis for evaluation of the theory and results. A ToC is structured as a continuous cycle to consider feedback loops, allowing interventions to capitalize on past achievements, make gradual enhancements, expand their impact, and/or achieve results in different regions. Both the R2R and ISLANDS programs provided a ToC in the program documentation (annexes C and D). Since the GEF did not provide an explicit ToC for the CPDP program, the evaluation team developed a ToC for this program to gain a deeper understanding of how the program could attain the objectives of the different interventions (annex D). The ToC is based on the goals, principles, dimensions of success, and lines of action contained in the program justification and consistency framework. This ToC was also validated by reviewing the logic of the child projects. Finally, the evaluation team developed an integrated ToC for the three programs for this evaluation (R2R, CPDP, and ISLANDS; figure 5).

19. **The ToC frameworks served to establish a transparent chain of accountability, linking inputs, activities, and outcomes**. Consequently, they enabled a comprehensive assessment of the projects' contribution to broader systemic changes. This assessment provided valuable insights into the projects' role in catalyzing social, economic, and environmental transformations, while also highlighting any challenges and potential issues that could affect the sustainability of the projects' outcomes.

Figure 5: Integrated theory of change for evaluated programs

Source: GEF IEO, based on data from project documents.

20. **This evaluation employed a comprehensive, mixed-methods approach to assess GEF programs in Pacific SIDS.** The methodology included a thorough review of documentation, an in-depth desk analysis of the program and project portfolio, and key informant interviews conducted both virtually and during on-site country visits. Additionally, the evaluation used contribution analysis[9] to enhance the depth of insights. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the evaluation aimed to address the following key questions:

(a) **Relevance.** To what extent do the GEF programs' objectives and design respond to Pacific SIDS' national and regional strategies, priorities, and environmental challenges?

[9] Contribution analysis is further described and discussed in paragraph 27.

(b) **Coherence**. How compatible are the objectives of the GEF programs with similar government and/or donor–funded interventions in Pacific SIDS countries? Additionally, how compatible are the objectives and activities of the child projects in each program with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change, and the other child projects?

(c) **Effectiveness**. To what extent have each of the GEF programs in Pacific SIDS achieved or are likely to achieve their planned outcomes?

(d) **Efficiency**. To what extent have GEF programs in Pacific SIDS delivered, or are likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner?

(e) **Sustainability.** To what extent will benefits of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS continue or be likely to continue?

21. A set of sub-questions and methods for capturing the answers to these questions are included in the evaluation matrix (annex E). These key questions are set out as themes in the key findings section of this report. The evaluation used the methods described in the evaluation's approach paper and summarized in the following paragraphs to collect and triangulate information.

22. **Document review.** To better understand the parent programs, the evaluation team reviewed good practices and lessons from other organizations with experience in R2R, non-chemical development, and climate proofing development. The team also reviewed national development plans of participating countries to assess the relevance of interventions.

23. **Portfolio review and analysis.** The evaluation team reviewed project design and performance documents for all three programs and all their child projects. All 19 child projects (13 completed and 6 ongoing) were assessed for quality of design, including integration of lessons learned from past projects. Projects with performance information available in the form of a project implementation report, midterm, or terminal evaluation were also reviewed for progress towards achievement of project and program–level outcomes. Additionally, the evaluation team conducted a scoping exercise to identify past projects in Pacific SIDS countries taking similar approaches. This scoping was done both through a search of the GEF database of all projects for the use of key terms in the projects' results framework and through compiling a list of past projects mentioned in the three program's program framework document (PFDs) and child project design documents. The identified past projects were reviewed to identify lessons learned relevant to the programs and child projects assessed for the evaluation.

24. The portfolio review of 10 of 13 completed projects for which terminal evaluations were available and 6 ongoing projects included the following elements:

(a) **Review of the three program framework documents (PFDs).** The PFDs for the three programs were reviewed for information on the interventions supported and strategies for program support and knowledge management.

(b) **Quality-at-entry of child project documents.** Quality-at-entry of child projects was assessed for all 19 child projects under the 3 programs using a standardized project review protocol. Of the total child projects, 13 have been completed and 6 are ongoing, and the quality was assessed for both. The purpose of this review was to assess relevance of interventions and coherence with the overall program, as well as incorporation of lessons learned from relevant past GEF projects.

(c) **Review of completed projects.** The effectiveness of 10 completed projects was assessed based on information and ratings in terminal evaluations.[10] This information was aggregated using a standardized project review protocol.

(d) **Review of past GEF projects for lessons relevant to the programs and child projects.** Relevant lessons learned were aggregated in a database to serve as a reference point for stakeholder interviews and in review of program framework documents and child projects.

25. **Interviews.** Key informant interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including present and former GEF Secretariat members involved in the three programs and child projects, GEF Agencies active in Pacific SIDS, GEF focal points, child project managers, relevant government and nongovernmental actors, project stakeholders, and beneficiaries in select Pacific SIDS. These interviews were part of the data gathering process to further support documentation and portfolio reviews. A list of interviewees is available in annex F.

26. **Case studies.** Field visits were conducted to gather the perspectives of country stakeholders. Members of the evaluation team visited three SIDS countries: Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu.[11] These countries were selected based on a set of objectives and country-specific characteristics, including diversity of GEF funds, representation of the four GEF Agencies included in the overall evaluation portfolio, and different stages of project status. The case study countries were chosen to ensure coverage of all three programs and included seven child projects, five from the R2R program, two from the ISLANDS program, and one from the climate-proofing program (table 1). More specifically, Tonga and Vanuatu ranked among the top three countries with the highest number of projects in the portfolio, while Fiji was selected due to its strategic role as the location of GEF Agency offices and its importance as a regional hub for logistics and influence. Child projects selected for field visits were national, regional, and global projects. Field visits

[10] Terminal evaluations for three recently completed projects were not available as of the December 2023 cutoff date.
[11] In Tonga, two projects from the R2R program were carried out: the child project Integrated Land and Agro-ecosystem Management Systems (GEF ID 5578), with funding of $2.34 million, and project Integrated Environmental Management of the Fanga'uta Lagoon Catchment (GEF ID 5663) for $1.76 million. In Vanuatu, one child project from the CPDP program was implemented (GEF ID 9197), with funding of $5.55 million, and another project (GEF ID 5397) from the R2R program for $4.6 million. In Fiji, a child project (GEF ID 5398) was implemented as part of the R2R program for $7.38 million. Finally, all three countries participated in the regional Pacific Islands (GEF ID 10267) and global communications (GEF ID 10267) child project of the ISLANDS program, which received funding of $20 million and $2 million respectively, as well as in the regional project (GEF ID 5404) of the R2R program, for $10.32 million.

focused on collecting country-level evidence to validate the findings of the portfolio review of closed and ongoing projects on relevance, coherence, and effectiveness of interventions.

Table 1 Distribution of GEF projects among selected case studies

Countries	CPDP	R2R	ISLANDS	Total
Fiji	-	2	2	4
Tonga	-	3	2	5
Vanuatu	1	2	2	5

27. **Contribution analysis**:[12] The evaluation team used contribution analysis to help identify the extent to which the GEF interventions contributed to the development outcomes articulated in each of the programs' theory of change (annexes D, E, and F). Contribution analysis starts from a theory of change with a clear results chain linking GEF interventions to outcomes and impacts, which acknowledges any underlying assumptions, risks to the outcomes, and other influencing factors outside of the direct control of the GEF. After gathering all existing evidence available to test the theory of change, the evaluation team assessed the contribution narrative, relating observed actions of the intervention or program to the observed outcomes. The contribution analysis provided the evaluation team with an evaluable framework for judging how the GEF interventions "moved the needle."

Limitations and quality assurance

28. **The evaluative evidence was in some cases limited in terms of results and sustainability.** This was especially true for the ISLANDS program, which was approved in 2019 but formally launched only in June 2022 and has no completed child projects. To address this issue, the evaluation team conducted a quality-at-entry analysis to provide early evidence on the ongoing child projects.

29. **In many countries, the GEF operates within a landscape that involves multiple donor and government initiatives.** The simultaneous or sequential actions carried out by governments, diverse donors, and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the effect of the national context, make it challenging to clearly attribute the outcomes. To the extent possible, the evaluation team has applied a contribution analytic framework as described above to the case studies to assess to what degree GEF interventions materially changed the course of the situation.

30. **The evaluation has gone through a comprehensive quality assurance process.** The draft approach paper and draft evaluation report were circulated and validated before finalization

[12] A key challenge in assessing the GEF's program effectiveness lies in isolating its specific contributions from other factors influencing observed outcomes and impacts. The complex, multistakeholder nature of environmental interventions often results in attribution difficulties. Instead, activities contribute to observed outcomes that are also influenced by local and global policies, events, and activities, both positive and negative. Contribution analysis provides an explicit framework to consider the plausible association of interventions or programs to outcomes while accounting for other factors that may have influenced observed outcomes. See Mayne (2008).

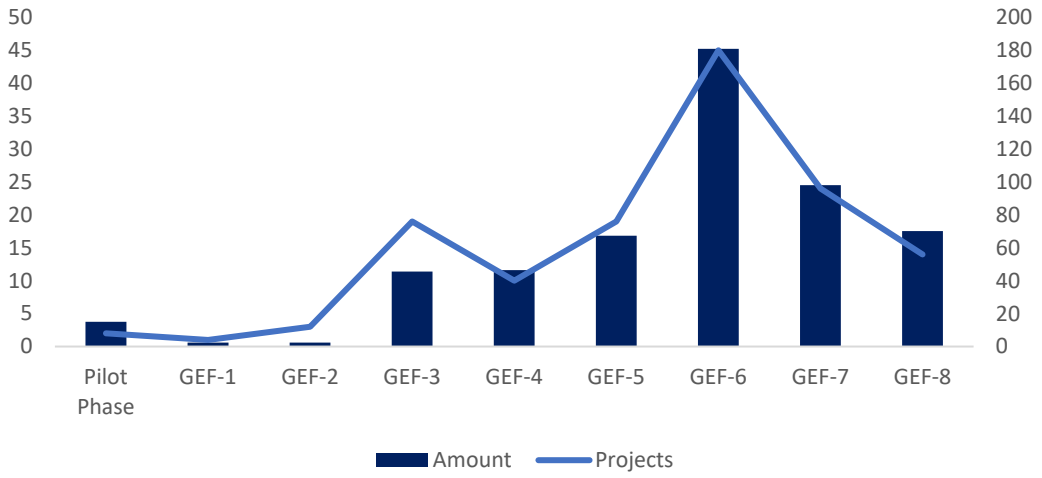
through a feedback process with key stakeholders. In addition to GEF IEO management and an external reviewer, the evaluation's design and methods were carefully documented, adhering to the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, and utility.

III. GEF PROGRAMS IN PACIFIC SIDS

3.1 GEF engagement in the Pacific SIDS

31. **Between 1991 and 2023, the GEF made substantial investments in Pacific SIDS, allocating $528 million across 140 projects.** While the number of projects and funding varied from year to year, certain periods stood out for exceptional activity. Notably, 2014 and 2015 were peak years for GEF engagement in the Pacific SIDS. A record 15 projects were approved in 2014, followed by 13 projects in 2015; 2004 was also a peak year, with 13 projects approved. From the standpoint of total project funding, 2015 saw the highest allocation at $62 million, with 2014 and 2022 closely following at $59.5 million and $58.2 million, respectively (figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of projects and annual investment in Pacific SIDS, 1991–2023 ($ million)



Source: GEF IEO, based on data from the GEF Portal.
Note: Financial data represents CEO endorsement amounts for completed and ongoing projects, and PIF-approved amounts for GEF-8 projects. The GEF-8 data is preliminary as several Pacific SIDS had not yet submitted their projects at the time of this evaluation, though their STAR allocations remain secured and available for programming. Historical amounts are not adjusted for inflation.

32. **Thirty-four of the 140 projects were regional in scope, accounting for $185.9 million in investment.** National projects comprised the majority, with 106 implemented across various countries, adding up to $342.1 million. Papua New Guinea led in both number of project approvals and project funding, with 15 projects receiving a total of $81.12 million. The Solomon Islands followed with 12 projects totaling $48.7 million, while Vanuatu also had 12 projects, securing $44.7 million in funding. The relationship between a country's population and its average funding per project shows interesting patterns in resource allocation across Pacific SIDS (figure 7). The

correlation coefficient of 0.61 indicates a moderate positive relationship—meaning larger countries tend to receive higher average funding per project, but this relationship is not straightforward. This moderate correlation suggests that while population influences funding allocation, the full picture is shaped by multiple factors. Countries often differ in their project portfolio strategies, with some choosing a few large full-size projects while others engage in multiple medium-size projects. Additionally, the STAR determines each country's funding based on various country-specific characteristics beyond population, such as environmental priorities and implementation capacity. The regional dimension adds another layer of complexity, as participation in regional projects can significantly impact a country's average funding figures.

Figure 7: Funding average amount of GEF projects by country ($ million)

Source: GEF IEO, based on data from the GEF Portal.
Note: The analysis reflects the number of projects that are financially closed, implemented, under implementation, or approved by the GEF Council. Also, at the time of this evaluation, several countries had not yet submitted their GEF-8 projects, though their allocated funding remains available. The project submission patterns described here reflect a snapshot of submissions and may not represent the final distribution of GEF-8 projects across countries.

3.2 Evolution of GEF support

33. **Over the years, the utilization of GEF funding[13] to support Pacific SIDS has evolved significantly, adapting to the unique and complex challenges faced by these vulnerable island nations.** The transition from multifocal area approaches to integrated strategies reflects a growing

[13] The System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) is a mechanism for allocating resources to countries based on their capacity, policies, and global environmental priorities. The STAR allocation system is designed to be transparent and consistent, and to provide predictability in funding. The STAR determines how much GEF resources a country can access during a replenishment period. The number of resources a country receives is based on its country score, which is calculated using the Country Performance Index (CPI), the Global Benefits Index (GBI), and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The STAR allocates resources to three focal areas: biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation. Each focal area has an allocation floor, which is the minimum amount a country can receive for that area.

understanding of the interconnected environmental, social, and economic issues that SIDS grapple with, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable resource management.[14]

34. **Multifocal area (MFA) approaches have become increasingly important for SIDS, as it allows for leveraging GEF financing from multiple focal areas to address a blend of GEF objectives and outcomes.** This approach is particularly relevant for SIDS, where environmental challenges are often interlinked and require holistic solutions. The prevalence of MFA projects has increased considerably, rising from 13 percent of GEF funding during GEF-4 to 28 percent in GEF-5, demonstrating a growing recognition of the need for integrated approaches in SIDS contexts.

35. **From GEF-5 onward, a greater multifocal approach is observed compared to earlier replenishment periods, reflecting the complex and interrelated challenges faced by SIDS.** The GEF has made significant efforts to implement more complex strategies and solutions that simultaneously address the multiple issues facing the Pacific SIDS, such as biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, sustainable land management, and protection of international waters. The introduction of Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) programs and other larger-scale systemic investments during GEF-6 marked a tangible shift in addressing the specific needs of SIDS. For example, programs addressing sustainable fisheries, coastal zone management, and climate resilience are particularly relevant to the Pacific SIDS. In GEF-7, the launch of impact programs further enhanced the GEF's ability to promote large, integrated, and impactful programs across more sectors in SIDS. These programs address multiple drivers of environmental change, which is crucial for SIDS facing compounded challenges such as sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and pressure on limited natural resources. Findings from OPS7 conducted by the GEF IEO support integrated approaches as a mechanism for incorporating innovation in multiple sectors.

36. **The GEF-8 programming architecture specifically addresses the critical need to ensure that GEF investments are targeted toward addressing systemic pressures on food, energy, urban, health, and natural systems that underpin human development.** The focus on blue and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in GEF-8 integrated programs is particularly relevant for SIDS, many of which have been severely impacted by the pandemic due to their reliance on tourism and limited economic diversification.

37. **Throughout much of the GEF's history, program definitions have evolved based on their operational and financial features.** In May 2008, the GEF Council formally approved the programmatic approaches modality. This reform marked the official start of programs at the GEF. Prior to the approval of the programmatic approach modality, 5 percent of the total GEF grants were allocated to programs without PFDs (GEF IEO 2018a). Since then, child project identification forms (PIFs) under programs with PFDs began constituting a substantial volume of Council work programs, accounting for 30 percent of the total funding in GEF-6 and 28 percent in GEF-7 as of June 2021 (GEF IEO 2022a). Early post-2008 programs tended to be designed and implemented

[14] Integration implies the use of systems thinking. It involves specifying system boundaries, addressing multiple drivers of environmental degradation simultaneously, addressing relationships among the system elements across scales, addressing key risks and vulnerabilities, considering system resilience, and establishing a feedback loop that facilitates timely course correction (GEF STAP 2018).

through several child projects brought together under an “objectives framework” that aimed to secure a larger-scale and sustained impact on the global environment.

3.3 Characteristics of the evaluation portfolio

38. **This evaluation focuses on three parent programs implemented in Pacific SIDS and their corresponding child projects.** As noted earlier, the programs under examination are the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R; GEF ID 5395), Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP; GEF ID 5037), and Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS; GEF ID 10185). While the ISLANDS and CPDP programs are distributed across the global regions, all child projects for the R2R program are located in Pacific SIDS.

Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific

39. The CPDP is a GEF-5 program, financed by the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and implemented by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), with an overall goal of reducing the vulnerability of vital infrastructure in LDCs that are also SIDS through the implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) priorities (figure 8). Two of the countries covered by the program were Pacific SIDS at the time of approval. The intended impact was to reduce absolute investments losses from the negative impacts of climate change.

40. The program aimed for countries to work together to strengthen methodologies relevant to the context of small islands and exchange lessons, learning, and recommendations in several sectors and at different levels of decision making, such as project, policy, and budgeting decisions. This was intended to multiply the benefits compared to that of a country-by-country project approach. The program results framework lists different interventions across three core program components with one corresponding outcome per component. The first program component is focused on technical assistance for improved decision making and knowledge development, with outputs related to improving the processes for budgetary allocations for adaptation, and completion of impact and vulnerability information in the countries specific to infrastructure needs in the areas of water supply and sanitation, transport, urban planning and small-scale hydropower. It also included revised policies and investment plans to incorporate climate change adaptation in Tuvalu, and the development of knowledge products and information exchange on approaches for strengthening infrastructure resilience and ecosystem-based adaptation. Investments included the development of an urban drainage and transport plan that incorporates climate change adaptation and disaster risk management in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Additionally, a component focused on the institutional assessment of barriers to ecosystem-based adaptation, piloting of ecosystem-based adaptation to protect infrastructure, and developing green infrastructure guidance materials.

Figure 8: CPDP child projects and funding

Source: GEF IEO, based on data from the GEF Portal.

Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities

41. The R2R program is a GEF-5, multitrust fund (GEF, LDCF), MFA program, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the objective of maintaining and enhancing the ecosystem goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural) of Pacific Island countries (figure 9). This is to be achieved through integrated approaches to land, water, forests, biodiversity, and coastal resource management that contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, and climate resilience.

42. In this program, the Pacific Island countries emphasize the need to focus on their own national priority activities as they utilize STAR resources. Experience has shown that an integrated approach from R2R is necessary for poverty reduction, sustainability, and capacity enhancement in small countries with limited human resources to undertake projects. Hence, each country planned to adopt specific aspects of R2R.

43. The program results framework is expansive, with 28 outputs and 11 outcomes listed. The first component focuses on Ridge to Reef (R2R)[15] demonstrations in all Pacific Island countries, and includes interventions in areas such as integrated coastal management and integrated water resources management (ICM/IWRM), sustainable land management, the establishment of

[15] As noted earlier, the Ridge to Reef (R2R) approach is a whole-of-ecosystem or integrated management strategy. In Pacific SIDS, "Ridge to Reef" refers to integrated methods for managing freshwater and coastal areas, emphasizing the interconnections between natural and social systems. This spans from the mountain ridges of volcanic islands, through coastal watersheds and habitats, and across coastal lagoons to the fringing reef environments associated with most Pacific SIDS (Pacific R2R Ridge to Reef website; What is Ridge to Reef, https://www.pacific-r2r.org/help/faq/what-ridge-reef; accessed October 2024).

terrestrial protected areas, coastal blue forest conservation, reforestation and restoration of forests in watersheds resulting in CO_2 sequestration, climate change risk and vulnerability assessments, and integration of community-based approaches. The second component focuses on improved governance for these interventions, including the development of integrated policy frameworks, trainings and training assessments, as well as national coastal diagnostic analyses. The third component focuses on monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management, including developing national and local indicators and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and national and regional platforms for sharing good practices and lessons learned. The program's fourth component is focused on regional program coordination.

Figure 9: R2R child projects and funding

Source: GEF IEO, based on data from the GEF Portal.

Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS

44. The ISLANDS program, a GEF-7, GEF trust fund program, implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), aims to support SIDS to enter a safe chemical development pathway through strengthening their ability to control the flow of chemicals, products, and materials into their territories and unlocking resources for long-term management of chemicals and waste, including integrated chemicals and waste management in SIDS. Seven child projects have been approved, all of which are implemented regionally or globally in SIDS countries. One of the child projects is a global communications, coordination, and knowledge management project (GEF ID 10266), while the other six are regional projects focusing on ocean areas (Caribbean, Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans). This evaluation covers the regional Pacific Child Project (GEF ID 10267, UNEP) and the global Communications, Coordination, and Knowledge Management Project (GEF ID 10266, UNEP; figure 10.)

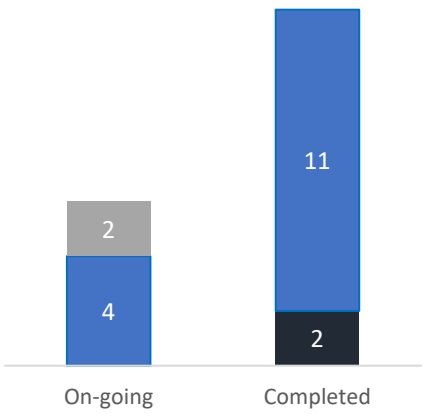
45. The ISLANDS program, through a combination of interventions and initiatives, aims to address specific needs at the country level while simultaneously reinforcing regional and global cooperation to tackle the challenges facing SIDS. Implementation involves several sectors, such as tourism, recycling, and shipping in integrated chemicals and waste management. The ISLANDS program has a results framework with four planned outcomes. The outcomes focus on developing mechanisms to control the import of chemicals and products that lead to the generation of hazardous waste, the safe management and disposal of existing chemical products and materials, the establishment of effective circular and life-cycle management systems in partnership with the private sector, and knowledge management and communication.

Figure 10: ISLANDS child projects and funding

Source: GEF IEO, based on data from the GEF Portal.

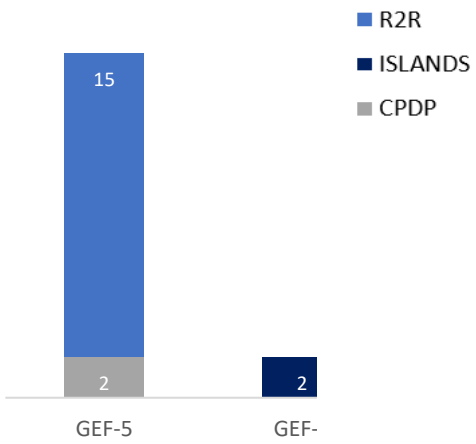
46. As noted earlier, the evaluation portfolio covers the child projects under three programs: Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP), Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R), and Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS). Most of these child projects are in advanced stages of implementation and disbursement. Thirteen projects have been completed, with terminal evaluations available for 10 of them (figure 11). The portfolio covers only the GEF-5 and GEF-7 replenishment periods, with a notable emphasis on GEF-5, which includes 17 projects (figure 12). The GEF Agencies for the portfolio are ADB, UNEP, UNDP, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with UNDP implementing 11 of these projects (figure 13). The projects are primarily multifocal, integrating topics such as climate change, biodiversity, international waters, and land degradation. Only two child projects, both part of the ISLANDS Program, address chemicals and waste management (figure 14).

Figure 11: Status of child projects



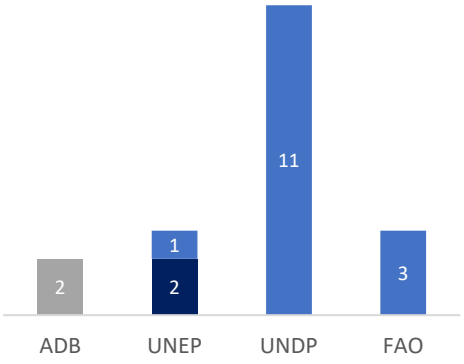
Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 12: GEF phase of child projects



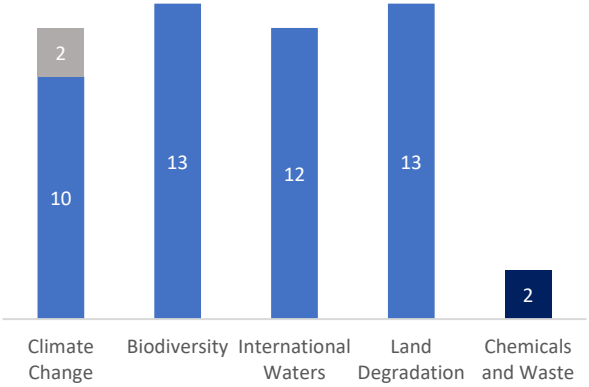
Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 13: GEF Agencies of child projects



Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 14: Focal area of child projects



Source: GEF Portal.

IV. KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Relevance

Alignment with national and regional strategies

47. **The three programs demonstrate strong alignment with the national priorities of the Pacific SIDS countries, emphasizing consistency with national strategies, plans, and reporting under relevant conventions**. The programs' objectives align with numerous national priorities, including global initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the SAMOA Pathway; environmental assessments and action plans such as National Implementation Plans (NIPs), Minamata Initial Assessments (MIAs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs); and country-specific development plans like the Cook Islands' National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP), the Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS), the Tonga Strategic Development Framework, Vanuatu's Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA), the Tuvalu National Strategic Action Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, and the Kiribati Development Plan (KDP), as well as subregional initiatives such as the Micronesia Challenge Initiative. The projects emphasize aligning their activities with these priorities to ensure effective implementation and maximize impact, suggesting that the programs' objectives are relevant to the countries' priorities and strategies.

48. **Within the portfolio, 18 of the 19 child projects actively engage with the environmental legislation of Pacific SIDS member countries.** This engagement includes compiling legal and regulatory information to support the development and enforcement of national environmental laws. Complementarily, various projects incorporate components focused on improving decision making through technical assistance and capacity building at different levels. Finally, 16 projects (84 percent) discuss alignment with multilateral environmental conventions, including the Basel, Rotterdam, Minamata, and Stockholm Conventions; the Montreal Protocol; the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM); the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), among others.

49. **The portfolio review reveals that the GEF programs in Pacific SIDS were designed to respond to national policies and priorities. These programs demonstrate strong alignment with each country's prioritization of GEF focal areas and STAR allocation, focusing on seven specific priority areas determined by each country.** This approach aims to address the most critical environmental and developmental concerns of each Pacific SIDS. Furthermore, the evaluation team found that each of the three programs had a stakeholder consultation plan, providing additional evidence of the programs' responsiveness to national policies and priorities. This consultation process is particularly notable in the Pacific Islands R2R program, where it has played a key role in aligning the program's objectives and implementation strategies with the participating countries' national priorities. Table 2 presents selected examples of alignments between GEF programs and Pacific SIDS national priorities.

Table 2: Examples of alignment of GEF programs with Pacific SIDS national priorities[16]

Country	Program	National priorities
Papua New Guinea	**R2R**	• The R2R program is strongly aligned with the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030, as it includes a pillar focused on achieving a sustainable forestry sector. Additionally, it incorporates the area of climate change and natural disaster management, with goals such as adapting to the impacts of climate change and contributing to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
	ISLANDS	• The ISLANDS program is moderately aligned with the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010–2030, as it incorporates a strategy that states, "to ensure a balance between material wealth and a cleaner environment, economic incentives must be in place to deter pollution" (Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010–2030). However, while the need to promote a clean environment is highlighted, there is no specific mention of chemical management.
Samoa	**R2R**	• The R2R program is highly aligned with the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2012-2016, which incorporates the environment as a priority area. National strategies that align with the R2R program include sustainable management of natural resources, protection of critical ecosystems and species, promotion of good land-use management practices, effective assessment and monitoring of water resources, and strengthening awareness and consultation on climate change and disaster risk management (Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2012–2016).
	ISLANDS	• The ISLANDS program is closely aligned with the Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS) 2021/22–2025/26. This plan includes a priority area for effective environmental protection and management frameworks, establishing enhanced sustainable solid and chemical waste management as an expected outcome. Additionally, the plan states that "in keeping with its commitment to responsible practices, the Government will support proper management of agricultural chemicals" (Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS) 2021/22–2025/26).
Tonga	**R2R**	• The R2R program is aligned with both the Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) 2011–2014 and the TSDF 2015–2025. The 2011–2014 framework incorporates goals focused on cultural awareness, environmental sustainability, disaster risk management, and climate change adaptation, integrating these aspects into all planning and implementation of programs through the establishment and adherence to appropriate procedures and consultation mechanisms (Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2011–2014). The more recent national development plan (2015–2025) includes objectives related to improved land use planning, management, and administration, with stronger and more effective enforcement to ensure better provision of public and private spaces (Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025).
	ISLANDS	• The ISLANDS program shows medium alignment with the Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025, as it includes a pillar focused on improving waste management and promoting a cleaner environment. However, it does not explicitly mention chemical management.

[16] While ten Pacific SIDS (Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Nauru, Palau, and Marshall Islands) have fulfilled their obligation to submit their first national reports to the Minamata Convention, this compliance should be distinguished from genuine political prioritization. The integration of chemical and waste management into national development strategies serves as an objective indicator of political commitment than mere convention reporting requirements. Data on Stockholm Convention National Implementation Plans (NIPs) submissions remain incomplete for comparison.

Tuvalu	**R2R**	• The R2R program is aligned with the Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005–2015, as it incorporates an environmental pillar with objectives to stop unregulated development and environmental degradation, increase the number of marine and terrestrial conservation areas, minimize climate change impacts, ensure regulatory compliance, and establish national climate change adaptation and mitigation policies (Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005–2015).
	CPDP	• The CPDP program is aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030. The national plan incorporates a pillar on climate change and infrastructure, which states that "new infrastructure and better service support will, by definition, play central roles in combating the effects of climate change. The Government of Tonga commits to embarking on aggressive climate change adaptation measures, as permitted by available funding" (Tuvalu National Strategy of Sustainable Development 2016–2020). Among the strategies are climate-proofed civil infrastructure, coastal works to protect foreshores, enacting and enforcing strict building codes, and upgrading existing civil infrastructure.
	ISLANDS	• The ISLANDS program is moderately aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021–2030, as it includes a pillar focused on waste management. The strategies include developing and implementing improved waste management practices in collaboration with local communities and the private sector (Tuvalu National Strategy of Sustainable Development 2021–2030). However, there is no specific mention of chemical management.
Vanuatu	**R2R**	• The R2R program aligns with Vanuatu's key national development strategies: the Priorities and Action Agenda 2006–2015 (PAA) and the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016–2030. • The PAA aims to enhance institutional capacity within the Department of Forestry, recognizing the importance of strong governance in environmental management. Furthermore, the agenda emphasizes implementing sustainable management practices for coastal and reef resources, crucial for the island nation's ecosystem and economy. It promotes the establishment of protected areas to safeguard biodiversity and natural habitats. Lastly, the PAA prioritizes the design and implementation of community-based risk reduction programs, enhancing local resilience (Vanuatu Priorities and Action Agenda 2006–2015). The NSDP 2016–2030 includes an environmental pillar that prioritizes becoming a resilient nation in the face of climate change; sustainably managing, and utilizing land, water, and natural resources; and committing to biodiversity conservation. The NSDP Goal ECO 2 focus on improving infrastructure, including policy objectives ECO 2.4: Enacting clear infrastructure governance, legislative frameworks, and standards for resilient infrastructure and maintenance, and ECO 2.5: Improving partnerships and the cost-effective use of resources to ensure sustainable asset management and maintenance (Vanuatu National Development Plan 2016–2030).
	CPDP	• While the CPDP program effectively addresses resilient infrastructure needs, Vanuatu's National Development Plan 2016-2030 only partially aligns with this focus. The Development Plan acknowledges infrastructure deficits and the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, but does not specifically emphasize resilient infrastructure as a priority.
	ISLANDS	• The National Development Plan 2016–2030 prioritizes waste reduction and pollution control. However, it does not explicitly address chemical management, leading to a medium level of alignment with the plan.

Source**:** GEF IEO, based on project documents.

Quality of the design

50. **The strategies in each of the three GEF programs were considered appropriate at the time of design, tailored to address specific needs in the Pacific SIDS context.** The ISLANDS regional child project in Tonga (Pacific Child Project; GEF ID 10267, UNEP) exemplifies this through its integrated approach to waste management, combining reduced importation of hazardous substances with improved recycling and disposal infrastructure, while involving nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Similarly, some R2R projects successfully integrated traditional systems, such as taro water farming, with scientific models to address multidisciplinary local planning in Vanuatu (Integrated Sustainable Land and Coastal Management; GEF ID 5397, FAO). The CPDP program's child project, Climate Resilience in the Outer Islands of Tuvalu (GEF ID 9512, ADB) incorporated forward-thinking visions, including the reassessment of island landing sites and the integration of adaptation into broader infrastructure planning processes.

51. **The programs addressed various environmental and developmental issues across different sectors, with strategies designed to engage communities through practical solutions.** In the ISLANDS program, planned initiatives included establishing reconstruction workshops for electronic equipment repair and using diverse media for public outreach. The R2R program design encompassed a range of projects, from techniques for hazardous waste management and coastal protection (Implementing a Ridge to Reef Approach to Protect Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions in Tuvalu; GEF ID 5550, UNDP) to a comprehensive approach to environmental issues (Vanuatu; GEF ID 5397). These examples highlight how the programs were designed to respond to specific challenges in Pacific SIDS while addressing key areas such as infrastructure planning, waste management, and community engagement.

52. **The design of project strategies accounted for various regional and national contexts, but some potential obstacles were not fully anticipated.** The design of project Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji (GEF ID 5398, UNDP) included plans for nature-based jobs and a payment for environmental services (PES) scheme. While the nature-based jobs component was well conceived, the design may not have fully accounted for the complexities of implementing a PES scheme in the local context. In Tonga's project design (R2R Integrated Land and Agro-ecosystem Management Systems; GEF ID 5578, FAO), demographic challenges like population decline and the potential for limited political support were not fully addressed. Additionally, the design of projects across the programs did not sufficiently account for potential administrative and financial bottlenecks, particularly in coordinating with GEF Agencies like UNDP. These aspects of the design phase highlight the need for more comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation strategies in future program designs for the Pacific SIDS context.

53. **Of the 19 child projects in the portfolio, 14 have incorporated lessons learned from similar past projects or initiatives into their design, with varying degrees of success.** Each child project draws on different lessons and conclusions to tailor approaches to specific contexts and needs. The ISLANDS program's regional child project (GEF ID 10267) aimed to address a key challenge identified in previous SIDS initiatives: insufficient cross-project learning and knowledge

sharing. While the project designed mechanisms to facilitate knowledge exchange across regions and projects, implementation of these activities has been delayed due to issues with the initial program manager. One of the R2R program's child projects Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation, and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Service and Cultural Heritage in Niue (GEF ID 5552, UNDP) incorporated lessons from the completed Sustainable Land Management (SLM) project (GEF ID 3213), addressing the ongoing challenge of declining interest from the host community due to Niue's decreasing and aging population. However, the effectiveness of this approach in maintaining community engagement has been limited. In the CDPD program, the child project in Tuvalu (GEF ID 9512) was designed in response to a request from the Government of Tuvalu to enhance its transportation development plans, demonstrating alignment with national priorities and coherence with national context, but also raising questions about the balance between government requests and broader adaptation priorities included in the country's NAPA and the GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF/SCCF). The project Integrated Environmental Management of the Fanga'uta Lagoon Catchment (GEF ID 5663, UNDP) acknowledged limitations of the 2001 Fanga'uta Lagoon environmental management plan, particularly in enforcement, resource allocation, and coherent management, and attempted to address these issues. However, similar challenges persisted, indicating that the project's design did not fully overcome previous shortcomings. The R2R regional child project Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries (GEF ID 5404, UNDP) drew insights from an earlier initiative (GEF ID 2131), modifying its approach to regional mechanisms based on past limitations. While this showed an attempt at adaptive design, the project still faced difficulties in fostering institutional changes at the national level. The incorporation of lessons learned across the portfolio indicates an intention to improve project effectiveness and avoid repeating past mistakes in environmental initiatives across Pacific SIDS. However, the evaluation has found that this approach has had mixed results, with some projects showing improved outcomes while others continue to face similar challenges to their predecessors, despite attempts to incorporate past lessons.

Results framework

54. **The analysis of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reveals misalignments between program-level and child project-level results frameworks.** This disconnect hinders the assessment of overall program impact and makes it difficult to link child project outcomes to broader program objectives. For instance, in the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398), inconsistencies in baselines and targets created compliance and reporting issues, affecting both program-wide impact assessment and reporting accuracy. Additionally, the R2R child project in Kiribati (GEF ID 5551) used indicators that were narrowly defined and did not sufficiently align with broader program objectives, hindering the aggregation of findings at the program level. This variability across projects points to differences in indicator design and baseline alignment, which can affect how M&E frameworks function at both project and program levels.

55. **Indicator quality[17] across child projects varies substantially, ranging from overly simplistic to highly specific yet operationally restrictive, further reducing the effectiveness of the M&E system.** These issues constrain the M&E system's ability to capture nuanced outcomes and support adaptive management. The R2R child project in Niue (GEF ID 5552) relied on basic output-focused indicators such as "management plans developed," which did not reflect broader conservation impacts. Projects like the R2R child project in Micronesia (GEF ID 5517) also leaned heavily on output indicators such as, "number of people trained," rather than outcome-based measures, reducing their contribution to overall program-level evaluation.

56. **The lack of alignment between parent and child project frameworks creates significant challenges for coherent program evaluation.** This disconnect is further complicated by the fact that while most child projects (14 of 19) established measurable baselines, the parent program level often lacked such foundational metrics. This issue, also noted in a previous IEO evaluation (GEF IEO 2018a) highlights limited evidence of program-level M&E and makes it especially difficult to assess overall program impact and coherence in evaluations.

57. **The ISLANDS program demonstrates improved alignment between project and program indicators, yet challenges persist in consistently linking project-level metrics to program outcomes across the portfolio.** While some newer projects demonstrate enhanced indicator alignment and relevance, inconsistencies remain, underscoring the need for a more structured and integrated M&E approach. Addressing these issues would strengthen program-level evaluations and foster adaptive management by ensuring that project-level insights contribute meaningfully to broader program assessments, supporting comprehensive impact evaluation and learning across all programs.

Environmental and social safeguards

58. **The assessment reveals varying trends in the implementation of environmental and social safeguards, and project risk management across the portfolio.** Environmental and social safeguards have been clearly established in 63 percent (12 of 19) of the child projects. However, among parent programs, only the ISLANDS program has implemented and documented these measures, indicating a significant gap at the program level. The CPDP program mentioned that safeguard supervision will be carried out, but specific strategies are not yet mentioned. Regarding the R2R program, nothing is mentioned about the establishment of safeguards. In addition, cases like the child project Advancing Sustainable Resources Management to Improve Livelihoods and Protect Biodiversity in Palau (GEF ID 5208, UNEP) are presented, in which an environmental and social safeguard plan was not developed during the project development stage, despite its importance being recognized for the expansion of the protected area network. Risk management practices show considerable diversity: merely 37 percent (7 of 19) of child projects actively monitor and update risk matrices as contexts change. Further analysis of risk management

[17] Quality refers to an indicator's ability to accurately measure intended outcomes and its relevance to project objectives. Effectiveness relates to how well indicators capture progress towards objectives and inform adaptive management decisions.

engagement during implementation reveals a concerning pattern: 33 percent of projects showed limited consideration of risks, 46 percent demonstrated moderate consideration, and only 20 percent exhibited a high degree of focus. Additionally, some projects, such as the R2R child project in Palau (GEF ID 5208), did not present contingency plans or mitigation strategies to address unforeseen circumstances.

Gender mainstreaming

59. **Gender integration demonstrates varying levels of incorporation across the portfolio, with improvements noted in recent designs.** Across the portfolio, 42 percent (8 of 19) of child projects have incorporated gender-disaggregated indicators into their results frameworks, while 37 percent (7 of 19) include gender-specific indicators. However, the use of tracking tools with gender-disaggregated indicators is limited to only 26 percent (5 of 19) of child projects, indicating a gap in comprehensive gender monitoring. The ISLANDS program demonstrates a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming, incorporating gender-disaggregated indicators, gender-specific indicators, and gender action plans. This thorough integration reflects the program's alignment with evolving best practices in project design and implementation, providing valuable insights for enhancing gender considerations in future programming.

60. **In this regard, it is worth highlighting that the GEF-8 Blue and Green Island Integrated Programme demonstrates significant advancements in gender mainstreaming and monitoring for SIDS projects.** Although it is beyond the scope of this evaluation, the new integrated program (GEF ID 11250)—which has 15 SIDS as countries beneficiaries (including 5 located in the Pacific Islands)—shows very advanced gender considerations, not only enabling gender-responsive, nature-integrated outcomes, but also improving M&E design. The program explicitly aims to mainstream gender equality across all components and child projects, with specific goals to increase women's leadership opportunities, close gender gaps in natural resource management, support women's economic empowerment, and strengthen gender-responsive collaboration. The M&E framework includes gender-sensitive indicators and disaggregated data collection to track progress on gender equality outcomes. Additionally, the program emphasizes collecting robust sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform context-specific actions and mainstream gender considerations into strategies, plans, and solutions. While the design is promising, time will be needed to determine if it is truly aligned with the challenges of implementation.

4.2 Coherence

Internal coherence

61. Of the 19 child projects, there is a generally positive trend in alignment with parent project objectives, although with some notable areas for improvement. Most of the child projects (13 of 19) have developed key indicators that support the objectives of their respective parent programs. This demonstrates a significant level of coherence within the program structure. However, the quality and effectiveness of these indicators vary considerably across the portfolio. In this context, the quality of indicators refers to their ability to accurately measure the intended outcomes and impacts of the project, while effectiveness relates to how well the indicators

capture progress towards the project's objectives and their utility in informing adaptive management decisions. While most child projects created indicators aligned with the parent program objectives, the assessment made by the GEF IEO uncovered several limitations. Some indicators were found to be overly simplistic, potentially failing to capture the complexity of the programs' impacts. Other indicators lacked sufficient operationalization, making it challenging to measure progress effectively. For instance, the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398) illustrates a case where there is no distinct monitoring plan and the indicators are not sufficiently operational, such as in the case of protected area (PA) management effectiveness. Similarly, the R2R child project in Niue (GEF ID 5552) designed very simplistic indicators that do not broadly support the program's objectives. Additionally, certain indicators were focused on outcomes within very restricted contexts, which limited their overall effectiveness and applicability at the broader program level. The child projects under evaluation demonstrated varying degrees of success in developing indicators that align with and support the program's broader objectives. For instance, the project Reimaanlok Looking to the Future: Strengthening Natural Resource Management in Atoll Communities in the Republic of Marshall Islands Employing Integrated Approaches (GEF ID 5544, UNDP) developed indicators[18] that support the program's objectives, but the number of indicators was limited, potentially constraining comprehensive assessment. In contrast, the R2R Implementing an Integrated Ridge to Reef Approach to Enhance Ecosystem Services, to Conserve Globally Important Biodiversity and to Sustain Local Livelihoods project in Micronesia (GEF ID 5517, UNDP) created indicators that were primarily output-focused, which restricted their ability to contribute meaningfully to program-level outcomes and impact measurement. The R2R project in Niue (GEF ID 5552), operating within a highly constrained context, designed indicators that were primarily output-oriented. This approach potentially limited insight into broader outcomes. In a similar vein, the R2R Resilient Islands, Resilient Communities project in Kiribati (GEF ID 5551, FAO) developed overly simplistic indicators that failed to adequately capture or support the program's objectives at a more comprehensive level.

62. **Despite the overall coherence observed, it is important to note that some terminal evaluations lacked information on this aspect of alignment.** This gap in reporting highlights a potential weakness in the evaluation process itself, suggesting a need for more stringent requirements in documenting the alignment between child project and parent program objectives. Furthermore, some projects faced issues related to indicator tracking, which could hinder effective monitoring and evaluation of the program’s progress and outcomes.

External coherence

63. **The objectives and activities of the child projects have generally been coherent with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change and other development projects**

[18] The child project (GEF ID 5544) indicators include: terrestrial and marine ecosystems under enhanced management; number of Resource Management Plans (NRMPs); position of the National Protected Areas (PAN) Coordinator; number of trained Marine Resource Integrated (RMI) professionals in integrated approaches; national repository for spatial biodiversity and resource management information enhanced and sustained; and cultural expressions linked to resource management documents.

dealing with the same issues. The child projects have also been designed to complement other projects and interventions, aiming to avoid duplication of efforts. Some projects promote synergies among different initiatives and organizations, demonstrating coherence in their objectives and activities. For example, in Tonga, the two R2R child projects seek to complement the activities of the ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and other ministries related to climate change, by fostering coordination and avoiding duplication of efforts. In Vanuatu, collaboration is underway with two major projects from the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and all information is channeled through the National Advisory Board (NAB), which ensures that no other projects operate in the same area, thus preventing overlap and duplication, such as with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Australia Aid (AusAid).

64. **The GEF's regional approach has been particularly beneficial in attracting other donors to work in the Pacific SIDS, providing compatibility and facilitating intervention opportunities.** This approach is characterized by flexibility, allowing for better integration with other donor-funded projects and adaptability to changing circumstances. For example, the CPDP Protecting Urban Areas Against the Impacts of Climate Change in Vanuatu child project (GEF ID 9197, ADB) demonstrated remarkable adaptability by shifting its focus from general resilient infrastructure investment to targeted cyclone recovery efforts. This adjustment exemplified the project's responsiveness to urgent local needs in the aftermath of a natural disaster, highlighting the importance of flexibility in project design and implementation in SIDS contexts. However, the GEF IEO also identified challenges in coordination, as exemplified by the R2R project Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Functions through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in the Cook Islands (GEF ID 5348, UNDP), where different funding sources led to implementation complications. Despite these issues, evidence collected from stakeholder interviews indicates that GEF projects contribute significantly to capacity building and institutional strengthening, which in turn benefits other donor-funded projects. The complementary nature of GEF funding, often focusing on specific components within or parallel to larger multidonor projects, further enhances its external coherence in the Pacific SIDS context. This approach allows the GEF to fill critical gaps and leverage its resources effectively, while also promoting synergies with other development initiatives in the region. In the same direction, in terms of cofinancing commitments and realization, according to the GEF IEO evaluation of cofinancing (GEF IEO 2024a), GEF projects demonstrate varying levels of cofinancing success based on their institutional arrangements and geographic context. Nevertheless, projects show particularly strong cofinancing performance when they are funded through the GEF trust fund, implemented by multilateral development banks, or operate as child projects under programmatic approaches. This pattern suggests that institutional capacity and national economic conditions play a significant role in attracting cofinancing resources.

Policy coherence

65. **The analysis reveals a complex picture in terms of policy coherence.** While the projects generally align well with national policies and priorities, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), implementation faces various challenges. Interviews conducted during missions to Pacific SIDS did not uncover widespread

policy inconsistencies, but rather highlighted specific obstacles in certain countries. These challenges include regulatory issues, such as slow processes due to national legislation on procurement, which can hinder alignment with policies and priorities. The level of government support for environmental initiatives varies across SIDS. In some cases, governmental engagement appears limited, leaving the private sector to take the lead. A notable example of this is in Tonga, where waste management efforts are driven primarily by private sector initiatives rather than government-led programs. This situation highlights the potential gap in public sector involvement in addressing critical environmental issues in certain SIDS contexts.

66. **The GEF's regional approach in Pacific SIDS facilitates coordination and knowledge sharing across countries while addressing the diverse needs and capacities of different SIDS.** While programs like R2R[19] were not specifically designed with policy coherence as an objective, they have provided insights into the complexities of working across different sectors and governance levels in the region. The experience from these programs highlights both opportunities and challenges in cross-sectoral coordination, including issues with implementation and enforcement, varying levels of government support, and difficulties in harmonizing interventions across sectors.

4.3 Effectiveness

67. **The effectiveness of the CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS programs in Pacific SIDS showed considerable variation in outcomes and achievements.** The CPDP program reported limited but positive results, particularly in infrastructure projects and as a response to natural disasters. The R2R program demonstrated a more comprehensive range of outcomes, including both concentrated environmental successes and implementation challenges. The ISLANDS program encountered significant obstacles in meeting its objectives, facing numerous implementation challenges and delays, with limited progress reported in its early stages. These diverse results highlight factors related to effective program management and adaptive strategies. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of each program's effectiveness, emphasizing key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.

CPDP Program

68. **The CPDP program has reported limited but positive outcomes.** The overall goal of the CPDP program is to integrate climate-proofing measures in infrastructure projects, helping SIDS countries mitigate investment losses caused by climate change. These projects are closely linked with national priorities under the NAPA and focus on vital sectors, such as coastal protection, water management, and agriculture. The CPDP child project in Vanuatu (GEF ID 9197) has achieved significant success in reconstructing transport infrastructure along the Efate ring road, emphasizing climate resilience and disaster protection. A key anticipated outcome of the project is enhanced road connectivity with greater climate resilience. Notably, the terminal evaluation for

[19] The R2R program offers valuable lessons for current policy coherence efforts, nevertheless it is important to note that it was designed during GEF-5, before policy coherence became an explicit priority in the GEF's mandate.

this project indicates no unachieved or underachieved results, suggesting successful implementation within its scope. In contrast, although the Tuvalu child project (GEF ID 9512) has achieved its infrastructure outputs, evidence from the 2023 PIR indicates limited demonstration of direct climate-resilience benefits in these investments, raising questions about the additionality of LDCF funding for adaptation outcomes.

69. **The CPDP program demonstrates a noteworthy effort in knowledge sharing.** The transfer of knowledge and skills to national and local institutions, as well as communities, has been a central part of the program design. This has been done through a multifaceted approach that includes capacity building, community engagement, technical assistance, development of tools and resources, and promotion of both modern and traditional knowledge. These efforts aim to embed climate resilience into the development process at all levels, ensuring long-term sustainability in the face of climate challenges. All child projects under the CPDP program developed mechanisms to transfer knowledge and skills to national and local institutions and communities for long-term environmental management. For example, the child project GEF ID 9197 in Vanuatu includes knowledge-sharing activities such as technical assistance and training in climate-resilient road standards and disaster risk management in the capital city, Port Vila, as well as training for asset operators and consulting firms involved in vulnerable infrastructure. Additionally, numerous ongoing initiatives aim to gather improved data and enhance measurement and modeling efforts related to the country, contributing to a better understanding of climate change and its impacts on infrastructure.

R2R Program

70. **The R2R program demonstrates a more comprehensive range of outcomes, with both successes and challenges reported.** Ten child projects have reported successful environmental outcomes, including: habitat restoration and conservation, development of management plans for protected areas, sustainable fisheries management, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, increased coverage of protected areas, development of a national policy integrating Ridge to Reef principles, and protection of endangered species and reforestation and rehabilitation efforts.

71. **The R2R program's outcomes span seven key environmental interventions, with varying levels of success across different areas (table 3).** Three interventions demonstrated high impact: improved management of protected areas, increased management in coastal and marine areas, and implementation of water catchment management activities. For instance, the program exceeded its goal in developing catchment management plans and significantly expanded marine protected areas in some regions. Medium impact was observed in restoration and conservation efforts, as well as in improving road connectivity with resilience to climate change. While reforestation and mangrove restoration showed progress, some projects faced challenges with low survival rates. The program achieved limited success in reducing environmental stress and improving conditions for endangered species, with these areas showing low impact. For example, while some projects made progress in sustainable land and water management, others struggled to develop species recovery or management plans for endangered fauna.

Table 3: R2R program environmental outcomes: expected vs. actual results

Main environmental outcomes	Description of outcomes (as stated in project documents)	Examples (with information collected from TEs)	Level of achievement
Improved management of protected areas	- Improvement in the management effectiveness of protected areas, ensuring better protection and conservation. - Improvement in national and state capacity for managing protected areas and implementing sustainable land management practices. - Development of management plans for conservation areas to ensure effective protection.	**R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398):** - Two comprehensive Biological Rapid Assessment Programme assessments, management plans developed and implemented for each PA. - The goal was to develop four catchment management plans in priority areas that integrated biodiversity, forests, land, and water. The project exceeded this goal by producing five catchment management plans.	**High**
Increased management in coastal and marine areas	- Establishment of Special Management Areas to promote sustainable fishing practices and conserve biodiversity. - Establishment of marine protected areas to safeguard marine biodiversity and promote sustainable use of marine resources. - Increased fish biomass observed in marine protected areas, indicating positive impact on conservation. - Development of integrated coastal management plans to promote sustainable coastal development and protect coastal ecosystems.	**R2R Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga (GEF ID 5663):** - 20% of marine environment designated for sustainable fisheries and conservation in Fanga'uta Lagoon; 3 villages were proposed for community-based managed areas for sustainable fisheries. **R2R child project in Cook Island (GEF ID 5348):** - The target was exceeded by more than 800 times by establishing marine protected area zones extending 50 nautical miles around the islands, prohibiting large-scale commercial fishing and mining to protect marine habitats.	**High**
Implementation of water catchment management activities	- Implementation of water-catchment management activities to improve water quality and availability. - Enhancing catchment management practices, potentially leading to better water quality and reduced pollution.	**R2R regional project (GEF ID 5404):** - 9 national pilot-area diagnostics conducted and local governance of water, land, forests, and coasts reviewed. - 14 national pilot projects, in various stages of implementation, are testing innovative technologies.	**High**
Improved road connectivity with resilience to climate change	- Provision of improved and reliable road connectivity with increased resilience to climate change.	**R2R child project in Samoa (GEF ID 5417):** - In excess of 12,000 people have been able to benefit from improved flood management from climate-resilient flood protection measures.	**Medium**
Restoration and conservation	- Restoration and conservation of critical lagoon habitats, such as	**R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398):**	**Medium**

	mangroves, through replanting and clean-up efforts. - Establishing new conservation areas in terrestrial, marine, and reef ecosystems. - Expansion of protected areas, contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. - Restoration of habitats, including wetlands, to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. - Progress in reforestation and forest rehabilitation efforts, including tree planting and improved forest management.	- The project completed about 76% of planned 1,245 ha reforestation as of June 30, 2022, although some notable low survival rates in Tuvu catchment were reported (<30%), along with estimates ranging from 45–70% in Tunuloa catchment. **R2R Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga (GEF ID 5663):** - Planted almost 20 ha of mangroves and rehabilitated about 69 ha of mangroves cover through the waste clean-up campaign, leading to reduced pollution pressure. **R2R child project in Nauru (GEF ID 5381):** - Component 1, focused on conservation of marine biodiversity, 20% of the targets were achieved, 20% were partially achieved, and 60% not achieved. **R2R child project in PNG (GEF ID 5510):** - Total area of expansion of PA = 84,683 ha, one third (33.2%) of the target.	
Reduced environmental stress	- Reduce environmental stress, via sustainable land management practices, erosion measures, and waste management. - Completion of flood protection infrastructure, reducing the risk of flooding and its associated impacts. - River dredging and maintenance work conducted to improve water flow, reduce flood risk, and maintain healthy ecosystems. - Reduce pollution to aquifers, potentially leading to safer drinking water and healthier ecosystems.	**R2R child project in Nauru (GEF ID 5381):** - In Component 2, which addresses sustainable land and water management, 71% of the targets were fully achieved, while 14% of the targets were partially achieved, and 14% were not achieved.	**Low**
Improvement in endangered species	- Protection of key resources and contribution to the recovery of endangered and endemic species.	**R2R child project in Niue (GEF ID 5552):** - Biodiversity surveys were conducted on land reptiles, sea snakes, Pacific flying foxes, and cave fauna, but no recovery or species management plans were developed.	**Low**

Source**:** GEF IEO, based on project documents.

72. **Terminal evaluations show that 11 child projects (73 percent) reported one or more unachieved or below-expected results on key outcome areas.** Among the main examples, the R2R

Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga (GEF ID 5663), did not meet its objective of increasing vegetation cover, with the seedling survival rate in reforestation activities remaining low due to issues related to planning, monitoring, and technical support. The R2R child project (GEF ID 5398), implemented in Fiji, similarly failed to achieve its objectives of creating new terrestrial protected areas and improving existing marine protected areas. In Kiribati, the R2R Resilient Islands, Resilient Communities child project (GEF ID 5551, FAO) did not reach its targets for hectares dedicated to agroforestry, sustainable forest management, and marine area co-management. Lastly, the R2R child project in Niue (GEF ID 5552) fell short of achieving certain environmental outcomes, particularly in species recovery and management plans. This suggests that while the R2R approach in the Pacific SIDS has yielded positive outcomes, there are still significant areas for improvement.

73. **The R2R approach has proven relevant and complementary to other interventions addressing climate change, biodiversity, international waters, and land degradation in the Pacific region**. For example, the R2R approach has been integrated into national development plans and aligned with national priorities, particularly in response to environmental risks such as cyclones and sea-level rise. The LDCF-financed Economy-wide Integration of Climate Change Adaptation and DRM/DRR to Reduce Climate Vulnerability of Communities project in Samoa (GEF ID 5417, UNDP) incorporated climate change and disaster management into the existing Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2016/17–2019/20. This integration was achieved under the Priority Area "Improved Disaster Resilience" and addressed multiple key outcomes. Specifically, it aligned with Key Outcome 14: Climate and Key Outcome 4: Environment, as well as Key Outcome 13: Environmental Resilience. This comprehensive approach demonstrates how the project effectively mainstreamed climate and disaster concerns across various critical aspects of Samoa's national development strategy, enhancing the country's overall resilience planning. The R2R program has also contributed to enhancing policy coherence. The regional R2R initiative has fostered consistency in policies across various sectors and governance levels, while facilitating coordination among multiple agencies and projects within participating countries, ultimately resulting in greater policy alignment.

74. **The R2R program demonstrates a systematic approach to knowledge sharing at both national and inter-regional levels, with 10 child projects reporting the development of mechanisms for transferring knowledge and skills.** This number suggests a more systematic approach to knowledge dissemination within the R2R program compared to the CPDP program. At the inter-regional level, the program actively engaged with the IW:LEARN platform and implemented innovative SIDS-to-SIDS twinning arrangements, particularly notable in the knowledge exchange between Pacific R2R and Caribbean IWEco projects. These cross-regional initiatives facilitated sharing of lessons and good practices among SIDS across different oceans. At the national level, the R2R child project on Integrated Land Management Systems in Tonga (GEF ID 5578) provides a particularly illustrative example of diverse and engaging knowledge sharing practices. The project employed a multifaceted approach to knowledge dissemination through community engagement with weekly television and radio broadcasts, which were used to reach a wide audience, complemented by monthly visits to six villages. This combination of mass media and direct community interaction ensures broad dissemination of project information. There was also social media presence: a local Facebook page dedicated to the R2R Tonga initiative was

maintained, leveraging popular social media platforms to engage with younger demographics and provide real-time updates. The program utilized a regional website as a repository for success stories, showcasing the project's impact and providing a centralized location for information sharing. The project coordinators participated in regional events, fostering knowledge exchange beyond national boundaries, and facilitating cross-pollination of ideas and good practices. Finally, the program organized an overarching event with awards for youth programs, demonstrating a commitment to engaging younger generations in environmental management. This comprehensive approach in Tonga demonstrates the potential for effective knowledge sharing when multiple platforms and methods are employed strategically. The situation of the R2R child project in Vanuatu provides an interesting contrast. While each department within the Ministry of Climate Change maintains its own website, the National Advisory Board (NAB) provides a centralized portal that integrates access to all departmental resources. The NAB website, updated weekly, experiences high traffic, suggesting effective local information dissemination. Additionally, the Climate Future Smart portal (GCF-SPREP) covers various sectors including agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure, and water.

ISLANDS Program

75. **The ISLANDS program in the Pacific region has struggled to meet its objectives, facing numerous implementation challenges.** Initially, the program was thoughtfully designed through consultations with SPREP (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme) and other key stakeholders. It aimed to align with the GEF's strategic directions and introduce innovations such as harmonized policies across the region and centralized waste treatment facilities. However, despite these well-intentioned plans, the program's effectiveness in the Pacific has not lived up to expectations, with implementation proving more difficult than anticipated. This stands in contrast to some other regions, such as the Caribbean, where implementation appears to have progressed more smoothly. The Pacific region encountered several obstacles that hindered the program's success. These included delays due to COVID-19, changing priorities among participating countries, and a lack of regional cohesion. The original design became outdated soon after the project's kickoff, leading to difficulties in implementation. There were also challenges with the project manager in the executing agency (SPREP), who was fired on request from UNEP. Some participating countries expressed concerns about the low level of attention given to the project, which led to some frustration and delays in implementation. Supervision reports indicated low expenditure rates and poor performance reviews for the Pacific component of the program.

76. **Despite these setbacks, the ISLANDS program achieved some focused small successes in specific areas.** These included a targeted mercury pollution awareness campaign, and small-scale youth engagement through initiatives like the Tide Turners challenge. However, the programmatic approach yielded mixed results overall. While it fostered some collaboration, stakeholders often found it overly rigid and sometimes ill-suited to the Pacific context. At the global level (GEF ID 10266), the program coordination group involving all stakeholders proved less effective than anticipated, with an ongoing mid-term review suggesting the establishment of a project steering committee. At the regional level (GEF ID 10267), while the Pacific project's governance structure includes a project steering committee with annual meetings for progress review and decision-

making, initial misunderstandings about governance arrangements required additional guidance from UNEP. Interviews revealed that single-country allocations significantly hindered regional cooperation, a key aim of the program. Stakeholders characterized the current program as highly complex and challenging to manage within the Pacific SIDS context, emphasizing the need for more focused strategic objectives. They also advocated for a revised approach to program duration that better accommodates the limited capacities and heavy workloads of ministries in Pacific SIDS governments.

77. **The ISLANDS program's effectiveness is challenging to evaluate comprehensively due to its early implementation stage and limited available data.** As of the evaluation period, no child projects had reached the terminal evaluation stage, significantly restricting the ability to assess long-term outcomes. The primary source of information, the project implementation report (PIR) for the regional child project GEF ID 10267, indicates 0 percent achievement of outcomes and only 5 percent of outputs reached. These figures reflect early-stage implementation rather than final results. The program has faced substantial delays in initiating project activities, stemming from various factors including weak regional project management, challenges in securing national policy support for waste management, limited alignment with government priorities, insufficient coordination with related projects, and inadequate support from some stakeholders. These early challenges primarily indicate implementation difficulties. The lack of comprehensive data and terminal evaluations means that the full scope of the program's effectiveness remains unclear at this stage. Current assessments are based on limited progress reports and stakeholder feedback, which suggest that the program has not yet achieved its intended outcomes. The early implementation phase and the absence of completed projects limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the ISLANDS program's overall effectiveness in addressing waste management and chemical issues in Pacific SIDS.

78. **The ISLANDS program presents a more complex picture of knowledge sharing, with variations in practices and effectiveness across different countries.** In Tonga, the regional child project (GEF ID 10267) faces challenges in utilizing the knowledge sharing platforms effectively. The regional website is not frequently used, with the Department of Environment preferring to use its own website for information dissemination. While both online and in-person seminars are conducted for the program, along with national events, the project website's instability poses a challenge to consistent information sharing. A notable issue is the limited direct connection between countries participating in the program, which hampers the understanding and development of the regional component. In Vanuatu, the ISLANDS program's knowledge sharing appears to be more centralized but somewhat limited in scope. Information is primarily received through SPREP and the ISLANDS website. However, there has been no exchange of experiences with other countries where the ISLANDS Program is implemented, indicating a gap in regional knowledge sharing and peer learning opportunities.

GEF programs' additionality

79. **GEF programs in Pacific SIDS have demonstrated additionality compared to standalone projects, but this comes with implementation challenges and costs that require careful**

consideration. The additionality is evident in several key areas: enhanced knowledge sharing and capacity building (such as the ISLANDS program's global Coordination, Communications and Knowledge Management component facilitating cross-regional learning), improved regional coordination (such as the Pacific R2R program coordinating actions across 14 countries), increased operational flexibility (demonstrated by CPDP's ability to accommodate changes in expected project outcomes and budget in response to more urgent needs related to a cyclone), enhanced ability to attract cofinancing and leverage additional donor resources, and a greater ability to attract and engage diverse stakeholders (including government agencies, NGOs like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), academic institutions, and private sector actors like Iberostar). The program format also enables cross-country learning and replication of good practices, as seen in the R2R projects where Vanuatu's successful decentralized approach involving local community chiefs could be shared with and adapted by other Pacific Island countries like Tonga. These benefits must also consider the increased complexity in program management (such as coordinating across multiple countries and sectors in the Pacific R2R program), longer implementation time frames (the ISLANDS program extension by 1.5 years due to new additions), and higher administrative burdens (such as the need for dedicated program-level coordination and reporting in ISLANDS). These challenges are particularly significant given the Pacific SIDS context of limited human resource capacity, geographic isolation, high travel costs, and technical capacity constraints.

80. **A cornerstone of GEF additionality in the Pacific is the facilitation of knowledge exchange and technical support across projects and countries.** The regional program structure has proven particularly beneficial for the many small countries in the Pacific with limited institutional capacity. Parent programs have provided crucial support through technical advisory services, training, and capacity building initiatives that individual countries might have struggled to access independently. This "global glue," as described by some stakeholders, enables managers and governments from different countries to interact and learn from each other in ways not possible with isolated projects. The ISLANDS program, with its global child project, exemplifies how a programmatic approach can optimize impact through synthesized knowledge and shared learnings.

81. **This knowledge sharing has led to successful examples of replication and scaling-up of approaches across different projects, promoting South-South knowledge transfer.** Community conservation areas, the use of indigenous farming methods, and Farmer Field Schools are among the initiatives that have seen broader implementation. A notable example is the World Bank's adoption of the "Jobs-for-Nature" program, inspired by approaches implemented in the R2R national and regional child projects in Fiji[20] (GEF IDs 5398 and 5404). This led to the creation of "Jobs for Nature 2.0," with substantial additional funding from the World Bank, demonstrating how GEF initiatives can catalyze larger investments.

82. **The programmatic approach also provides greater flexibility in fund allocation and project implementation.** ADB representatives noted the ease of use and simplicity in accessing

[20] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/05/23/new-world-bank-project-helps-create-thousands-of-green-jobs-in-fiji

and approving GEF funds within a program framework. This flexibility extends to addressing multiple issues in a coordinated manner, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to complex environmental challenges. The R2R program, for example, was instrumental in helping Pacific SIDS utilize their STAR allocations effectively before expiration, demonstrating an indirect benefit of this approach in maximizing resource use. The influence of the R2R approach extends beyond GEF-funded projects, with organizations such as Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society, and IUCN integrating this approach into their own initiatives.

83. **GEF programs have demonstrated an ability to engage the private sector and attract other donors.** Their larger scale and comprehensive nature appeal to private companies that might overlook smaller projects. This engagement is crucial for leveraging resources and ensuring long-term sustainability. For instance, the ISLANDS regional child project (GEF ID 10267) partnered with Swire Shipping, which committed $35 million in cofinancing for a recycling operation for end-of-life vehicles in the Pacific. This partnership, catalyzed by the GEF's feasibility study funding, addresses a key waste management challenge in Pacific SIDS.[21] The programmatic approach also facilitates donor coordination, as seen in the collaboration with initiatives like PacWaste Plus and alignment with Australian government agencies, enhancing the viability and impact of these environmental interventions. However, there is room for improvement in inter-organizational collaboration. The success of coordination mechanisms like the Joint Policy Action Matrix,[22] employed by other donors, serves as a testament to the potential benefits of enhanced collaborative frameworks. This coordinated approach has demonstrated its value in minimizing bureaucratic hurdles, aligning support with country policy reforms, and leveraging sector-specific expertise across various development sectors in Pacific Island countries.

84. **Private sector engagement, while pursued, shows room for improvement.** Only 32 percent of child projects report actual collaboration with this sector. However, the evaluation mission observed some specific private-sector initiatives, including support for data collection, co-financing of fuel costs, and involvement in environmental sustainability and waste management

[21] However, it is important to note that while initial preparatory work has been completed, including feasibility studies and business case development, the supervision reports indicate limited tangible progress on Swire Shipping's plans. This slower-than-expected progress reflects broader shipping industry challenges, including COVID-19 recovery and global shipping route disruptions, as well as the complexity of establishing sustainable fee collection systems for ELV recycling in Pacific SIDS. This suggests a gap between the ambitious partnership plans and their current implementation status.

[22] The Joint Policy Action Matrix is a coordinated framework used by multiple donors (including Australia, New Zealand, ADB, the European Union, and the World Bank) to align support with country policy reforms in Pacific Island countries. It provides a single set of policy actions and targets, reducing government transaction costs, enhancing donor coordination, and leveraging sector-specific expertise. Often used in conjunction with development policy operations, it has been effective in countries like Tonga and Samoa for minimizing bureaucratic issues and coordinating technical assistance across various development sectors (World Bank Regional Partnership Framework 2017–2021; https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/zh/137341508303097110/pdf/120479-WP-P156647-PUBLIC-SydneyRPFFA.pdf; accessed October 2024).

projects. The private sector has also contributed to the establishment of start-up companies in the waste sector.

85. **However, it is important to note that the additionality of the programmatic approach is not without challenges.** Some stakeholders pointed out that programs can sometimes progress at the speed of the "slowest player," potentially hindering overall effectiveness. Stakeholder feedback indicates higher transaction costs compared to bilateral funding mechanisms, with Pacific SIDS governments noting that the multiple implementation layers and consultative requirements create additional burdens on their limited institutional capacity.

86. **Stakeholder engagement and inclusion have been key focus areas for GEF programs in Pacific SIDS, with varied outcomes across projects and countries.** These programs have aimed to involve local communities and address cross-cutting issues from their inception. Gender equality has been emphasized to varying degrees across the CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS programs, with efforts to integrate it into project designs and activities. These variations partly reflect the evolution of GEF's gender policies over time, with ISLANDS (designed under GEF-7) incorporating more systematic gender considerations compared to earlier programs like R2R and CPDP that were designed under previous policy frameworks. Women's participation has been noted in sectors such as climate change adaptation planning, disaster risk management, coastal fisheries, and waste management (table 4). In Tonga, waste management projects reported high participation rates from women and girls. Some projects established women's clubs and implemented gender mainstreaming policies. In Vanuatu, projects implemented provided specific examples of engagement strategies, such as establishing women as leaders of initiatives encouraging local communities to engage in ecotourism and providing solar power for phone charging. While these efforts show potential for promoting inclusivity and enhancing project sustainability, their long-term impact and the consistency of implementation across different projects and countries require further evaluation. The effectiveness of these measures in achieving lasting change at the community level remains an area for continued assessment.

Table 4: Examples of gender participation in child projects

Child projects	Gender participation
R2R child project in Cook Islands (GEF ID 5348)	- Over 295 people from 26 communities (73% women) participated in eco-tourism training.
R2R child project in Nauru (GEF ID 5381):	- 8 women from the Nauru Environment Division, Department of Commerce, Industry & Environment staff enrolled in the University of South Pacific Climate Change & Resilience course.
R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398):	- The project raised a total of 9,000 seedlings in a nursery set up by women in the community.
R2R child regional project (GED ID 5404)	- 8 women out of 16 people successfully completed the postgraduate diploma. - 17 women out of 32 people completed the postgraduate certificate.

R2R child project in Samoa (GEF ID 5417)	- More than 60% of project beneficiaries are women.
R2R child project in Niue (GEF ID 5552):	- Capacity of local communities was enhanced through trainings related to use of agrochemicals and beekeeping delivered with project support. 125 farmers attended these trainings, 71 of whom were women.
CPDP child project in Vanuatu (GEF ID 9197)	- The project achieved a 27.5% participation rate for women throughout design and implementation, against a target of 30%.

Source: GEF IEO, based on project documents.

87. **Youth involvement has been another significant aspect of these programs.** In Tonga, the R2R execution team included a high proportion of young people. Youth groups have been established, and efforts have been made to engage church youth and community youth in environmental initiatives. Indigenous peoples' participation and the involvement of traditional village leaders have been prioritized, demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity. In Fiji, for instance, indigenous participation was organized with 6 representatives from each of the 10 villages involved in the program.

Innovation

88. **Innovation[23] was frequently incorporated into program designs, yet the implementation and results revealed notable limitations.** The three programs examined—CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS—each emphasized different aspects of innovation. The CPDP program primarily focused on technological innovations, introducing new processes and significant technical changes to existing products and processes. The R2R program, while also concentrating on technological innovations, expanded its scope to include innovative financing mechanisms, such as exploring PES arrangements. In contrast, the ISLANDS program targeted institutional innovation and behavioral change, aiming to shift informal institutions (values, beliefs, and customs) that guide individual behavior and community interactions. Despite these varied approaches, challenges in implementation and outcome achievement were observed across all programs, suggesting a need for further analysis of the innovation strategies employed.

89. **The CPDP Program, particularly child project GEF ID 9197, introduced an innovative solution to address persistent flooding on the critical road to Port Vila's airport in Vanuatu.** Departing from conventional pipeline drainage systems, project engineers implemented infiltration galleries—a network of dry ponds and porous materials designed to manage water runoff more effectively. This approach was reportedly well received by project stakeholders, who described it as a "brilliant solution." The system aimed to address immediate flooding concerns

[23] For this evaluation, innovation is defined as “doing something new or different in a specific context that adds value.” It represents an improvement compared to conventional alternatives, catalyzes or produces environmental benefits, and may result in socioeconomic advantages. However, it may also be associated with risks and a higher likelihood of failure (GEF 2021).

while also protecting the main supply lines of Vanuatu's capital city against inundation. By integrating with the local environment and utilizing natural filtration processes, this infrastructure adaptation appears well suited to the unique challenges faced by Pacific SIDS. The innovation's potential significance lies in its scale and efficiency. While infiltration systems have been previously employed in smaller infrastructure projects, this implementation was notable for its type and size. The project reduced pipeline requirements from 30 km to 7 km, potentially resulting in cost savings and reduced environmental impact. However, long-term performance and maintenance requirements of this system warrant further evaluation to fully assess its effectiveness and sustainability in the local context.

90. **Interestingly, this innovative solution was born out of necessity rather than initial design.** The innovative infiltration gallery solution emerged as a response to financial constraints rather than initial design intentions. The approach, reportedly successful, was subsequently replicated by the government in other projects. However, its effectiveness may be closely tied to specific geological conditions, warranting careful consideration in future applications. The solution's purported advantages include simplicity and low maintenance requirements, which are beneficial given the assumed local government responsibility for long-term upkeep. Its performance was notably tested post-Cyclone Pam, where it reportedly complemented recovery efforts. Nevertheless, a comprehensive long-term assessment of its durability, maintenance needs, and performance under various conditions would be valuable to fully evaluate its sustainability and replicability.

91. **The R2R program implemented a more diverse range of innovation approaches, some of which involved higher levels of risk and potential for transformative change.** Knowledge transfer strategies were a key focus. In Vanuatu, FAO's R2R child project (GEF ID 5397) introduced Farmer Field Schools, an approach well established internationally but novel in the local context. The program also pursued significant modifications to existing products and processes. For instance, the R2R regional project (GEF ID 5404) in Tonga developed an innovative toilet design that produces fertilizer, potentially offering groundwater protection benefits. However, scaling of this innovation was reportedly hindered by Cyclone Harold in 2020 and the subsequent conclusion of the project. In Tuvalu, the R2R child project (GEF ID 5550) incorporated innovative techniques for waste management and coastal protection. Additionally, the program explored innovative financing strategies to generate funds from new sources. In Papua New Guinea the project Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas (GEF ID 5510, UNDP), made efforts to develop new sustainable financing mechanisms for protected areas, including exploration of PES arrangements. While the R2R program reported some significant achievements, with certain child projects claiming outstanding outcomes, it is noteworthy that 73 percent of the projects reported unachieved results or outcomes below expectations. This outcome underscores the inherent risks associated with more ambitious innovative strategies and highlights the need for careful risk management in innovation-focused programs.

92. **The ISLANDS program's approach combines behavioral change and knowledge management elements with attempts at broader systemic changes, though implementation of more ambitious innovations remains limited.** The regional child project (GEF ID 10267)

implemented a reuse workshop in Samoa, aiming to promote the repair and reuse of electronic equipment. It also engaged in the Tide Turners program, which targeted behavior change, particularly among youth. The global child project (GEF ID 10266) focused on developing a central knowledge management system to collect and curate SIDS-relevant resources and developed a strategy for behavior change utilizing modern communication methods such as podcasts and a youth-centered app. While the program design included more ambitious innovations, such as harmonized regional waste policies and private sector partnerships for sustainable waste management, evidence from stakeholder interviews indicates these remain largely in planning stages. The ISLANDS program currently promotes behavioral change through digital engagement platforms, including a mobile app that encourages youth-led behavior adoption and Communities of Practice that facilitate peer-to-peer social learning among executing agency officials. Although these knowledge-sharing and engagement activities are in progress, concrete evidence of transformational behavioral changes is still being gathered.

Socioeconomic benefits

93. **Analysis of project outcomes across the CPDP, ISLANDS, and R2R programs reveals varying degrees of success in achieving socioeconomic benefits within Pacific SIDS.** The high vulnerability of these islands to environmental and economic challenges provides a critical backdrop for assessing project impacts beyond environmental outcomes. Examination of project reports and evaluations indicates that while some initiatives successfully integrated socioeconomic benefits with environmental goals, others struggled to demonstrate or quantify such impacts. The CPDP program reported widespread economic and social benefits across its child projects, whereas the ISLANDS program has not yet reported any socioeconomic benefits. The R2R program showed mixed results, with about half of its projects reporting social and economic benefits, primarily through livelihood diversification. This section presents a detailed analysis of these findings, highlighting the observed relationships between socioeconomic outcomes and overall project performance across the three programs.

94. **From the CPDP program, both child projects reported economic and social benefits associated with environmental outcomes.** The project in Tuvalu (GEF ID 9512) aims to improve maritime transfer operations, which contributed to strengthening the fishing sector and tourism, as well as providing efficient and safe maritime transportation. Additionally, the project (GEF ID 9197) accelerated economic and social recovery in the Tropical Cyclone Pam-affected provinces of Vanuatu. Tourism businesses reopened thanks to the restoration of connectivity, and the restoration of roads and bridges reinstated access to education and social and economic services. This resulted in improvements in employment opportunities, income, well-being, and living standards.

95. **The R2R program has reported social and economic benefits from 53 percent of its child projects, with several initiatives exceeding their projected targets.** A key achievement has been increased community income through strategic livelihood diversification. For example, the project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398) enhanced economic well-being through a multifaceted approach, including honey production, gardening, and crab fattening, which not only boosted local incomes but also

supported natural resource conservation. Project GEF ID 5510 focused on increasing community revenue by developing high-value agricultural products, specifically coffee and cocoa. Meanwhile, the Fanga'uta Lagoon project in Tonga (GEF ID 5663) stimulated the local economy by promoting ecotourism, renovating historical sites, and supporting related initiatives. These projects have contributed significantly to the development of sustainable tourism and fishing sectors. In particular, all these initiatives have surpassed their initially projected targets for socioeconomic benefits. The program also established sustainable management areas to encourage sustainable fishing practices. Both components aim to generate long-term economic benefits for local communities. However, it is important to note that many projects face challenges in quantifying their economic impacts, making it difficult to assess their long-term contributions to economic well-being. For instance, while reports from project in Tuvalu (GEF ID 5550) suggest that establishing locally managed marine areas and promoting sustainable land management practices likely improved economic conditions, specific economic gains were not documented.

96. **Analysis of the rated R2R projects reveals a distinct pattern connecting socioeconomic benefits to project success.** All projects receiving the highest rating, "highly satisfactory," included plans for generating socioeconomic benefits. Furthermore, 75 percent of projects rated "satisfactory" also demonstrated contributions to economic and social well-being. In contrast, only 33 percent of "moderately satisfactory" projects included such provisions. This distribution highlights a clear correlation between the incorporation of socioeconomic benefits and higher project satisfaction ratings. While the analysis cannot definitively establish causation, the relationship is evident. Projects that actively plan for and contribute to community economic and social well-being appear more likely to achieve or surpass performance expectations.

Monitoring and evaluation

97. The analysis of project documents reveals a concerning trend of ineffective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices hindering project success.[24] This weakness is primarily evident in the failure of M&E systems to function effectively as early warning systems, hampering adaptive management and ultimately hindering achievement of desired outcomes.

98. **M&E reports in GEF projects within Pacific SIDS frequently lack a sufficient focus on outcome-oriented data.** Instead of primarily demonstrating progress towards achieving the intended outcomes, PIRs often prioritize reporting on completed activities. This was clearly illustrated in the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398), where the PIR lacked crucial data on progress towards expected outcomes, making it difficult to assess whether the project was on track to achieve its goals. This tendency to focus on outputs rather than outcomes hinders the ability of the M&E system to provide a clear picture of project effectiveness and impact.

[24] The design and implementation of M&E systems in GEF projects falls under the mandate of GEF Agencies. GEF policies on M&E have undergone several iterations, including updates to results frameworks, tracking tools, and reporting requirements. PIFs and M&E frameworks developed by Agencies during this period reflect these evolving policy requirements.

99. **The absence of baseline data in many projects further complicates the ability to assess progress and identify deviations from planned targets.** Without a clear understanding of the initial conditions and starting point, it becomes challenging to measure the effectiveness of interventions and make necessary adjustments. This lack of baseline data limits the ability to determine whether observed changes are attributable to project activities or other external factors.

100. **Inconsistent reporting and data gaps pose additional challenges for effective monitoring and evaluation.** Inconsistent information on key project activities, such as reforestation efforts in the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398), creates an incomplete and potentially misleading picture of project performance. These data gaps hinder the ability to identify potential problems early on and take corrective action, potentially jeopardizing the achievement of project objectives.

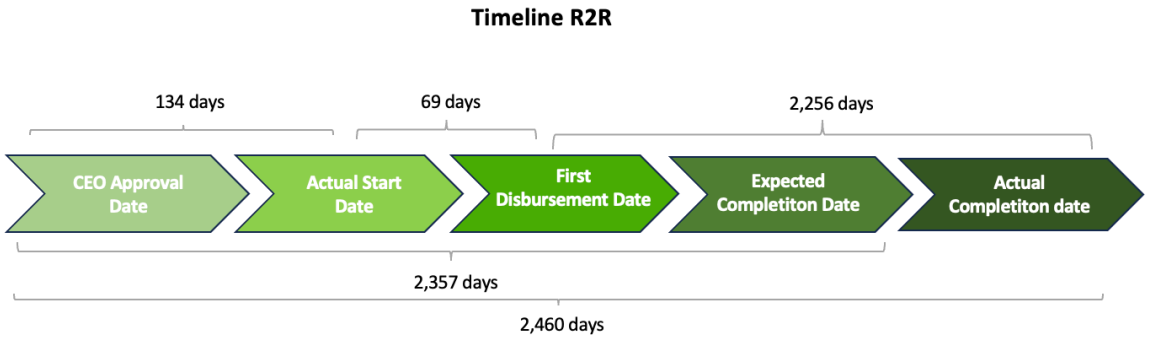
101. **Even when M&E reports identify areas for improvement, the evaluation suggests that these findings are not consistently used to inform project management decisions and adapt implementation strategies.** This indicates a missed opportunity to leverage M&E insights for improving project performance and achieving desired outcomes. Failing to act on M&E recommendations limits the potential for learning and improvement, perpetuating existing challenges and hindering project success.

4.4 Efficiency

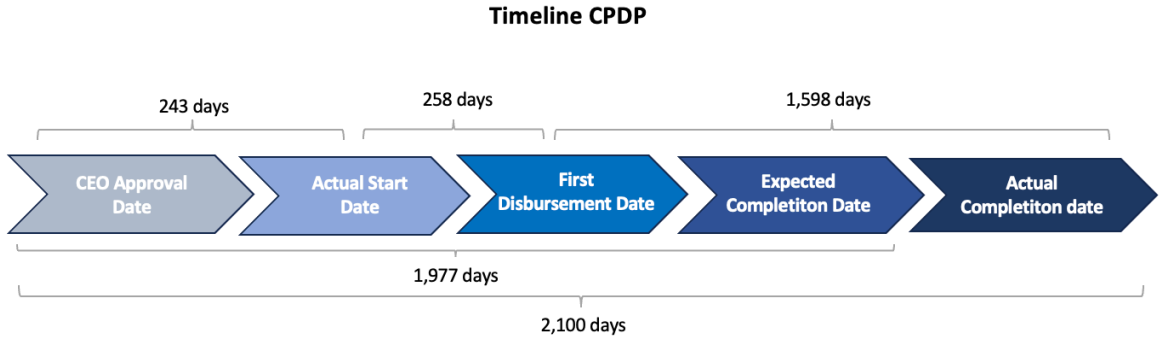
102. **All three programs suffered from implementation delays due to a combination of internal and external factors, reflecting the complex challenges inherent in implementing environmental projects in SIDS contexts.** These delays stemmed from issues such as inadequate planning, limited local capacity, bureaucratic hurdles, coordination difficulties among multiple stakeholders, and external shocks including the COVID-19 pandemic and severe natural disasters such as tropical cyclones and volcanic eruptions that particularly affected Pacific SIDS. The impact of these external shocks was evident across the region: Fiji experienced extended COVID-19 lockdowns (2020–2021), Samoa implemented weeks of restrictions (2022), Solomon Islands instituted measures in early 2022, while Tonga faced compound challenges from both COVID-19 restrictions and a devastating volcanic eruption in 2022. Lockdowns ranged from weeks to months depending on infection rates and regional circumstances.

103. **The R2R and CPDP programs in Pacific SIDS experienced significant delays compared to the broader GEF portfolio, particularly in project completion timelines.** According to the GEF Monitoring Report 2023, presented as a working document at the 66th GEF Council, the average duration of child projects under the evaluated programs was 2,280 days, which exceeded the 2,191-day threshold met by 89 percent of GEF projects (GEF 2024). More specifically, as shown in figure 15, the R2R program's child projects had an average completion time of 6.7 years (2,460 days), while the CPDP program's child projects averaged 5.8 years (2,100 days). These figures stood in stark contrast to the GEF portfolio norm, where 89 percent of projects were completed within 6 years (figure 16). This disparity highlighted the unique challenges faced by Pacific SIDS in implementing GEF-funded initiatives, mainly due to factors such as limited institutional capacity, geographic isolation, and complex environmental conditions.

Figure 15: Average timeline of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS

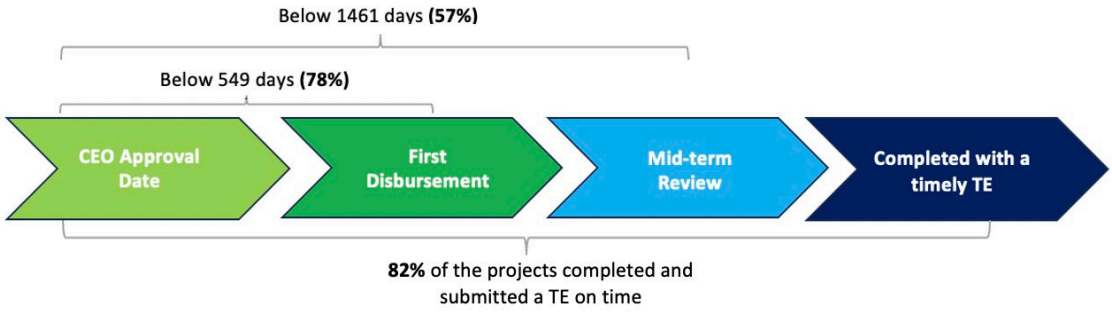


Source: GEF Portal.



Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 16: Average timeline of GEF portfolio (all regions)



Source: GEF Portal.

104. **The delays observed in Pacific SIDS programs extended beyond just completion times, affecting various stages of the project lifecycle.** The data revealed that 78 percent of full-size projects in the broader GEF portfolio achieved their first disbursement within 549 days of CEO

approval. Additionally, 57 percent of projects completed their midterm review in less than 1,461 days. The overall trend of delays in the R2R and CPDP programs showed that these milestones experienced slower progress across all project phases compared to the GEF average. This comprehensive pattern of delays stressed the need for tailored approaches and enhanced support mechanisms for GEF-funded programs in Pacific SIDS, aiming to improve efficiency across all project stages while addressing the unique contextual challenges of these regions.

105. **The efficiency challenges faced by these programs could be attributed to several factors specific to the SIDS context**. Limited local capacity often resulted in difficulties in project management, implementation, and reporting, leading to delays in achieving milestones. The geographic isolation of many Pacific SIDS complicated logistics, increased costs, and slowed down the delivery of resources and expertise. Complex environmental conditions, such as vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, also disrupted project timelines and required adaptive management. Furthermore, the coordination difficulties among multiple stakeholders, including various government agencies, NGOs, and international partners, led to delays in decision making and implementation. Bureaucratic hurdles, within both the GEF Agencies and local governments, slowed down processes such as approvals, fund disbursements, and procurement.

106. **The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, causing significant disruptions to project activities, travel restrictions, and shifts in priorities for both GEF Agencies and local partners.** This external shock likely contributed to the extended timelines observed in the R2R and CPDP programs. The experience of these programs highlighted several areas where efficiency improvements could be considered in future GEF initiatives in Pacific SIDS. These included local capacity building, streamlining of administrative processes, enhancement of coordination mechanisms, development of flexible project designs, leveraging of technology to overcome geographical barriers, and provision of additional support for navigating external shocks.

CPDP Program

107. The CPDP program encountered significant delays across its child projects, illustrating the challenges faced during project implementation. In the CPDP Tuvalu child project (GEF ID 9512), delays were attributed to the contractor’s underestimation of adverse weather impacts on construction activities. While this suggests a need for careful contractor selection, it is also recognized that severe weather conditions can sometimes be difficult to anticipate or mitigate fully. The Vanuatu child project (GEF ID 9197) faced additional delays due to two primary factors: first, the government's lack of reporting on project loan details to Parliament, indicating potential gaps in governmental communication and procedural compliance; second, delays in signing the cofinancing agreement with AusAID, highlighting the complexities of multistakeholder financing arrangements. These cases highlight the importance of thorough planning, effective communication with government stakeholders, and streamlined processes for financial agreements in project implementation.

108. **The Asian Development Bank's performance as lead agency for the CPDP Program demonstrates both strengths and limitations in project implementation and management.** The ADB has established itself as one of the main infrastructure financiers in the region and is

recognized as an agency capable of mobilizing funding. During implementation of the child projects, the lead agency has generally demonstrated good performance. For example, in the CPDP Vanuatu child project (GEF ID 9197), it showed satisfactory performance by processing and managing the project with timely support and guidance, conducting regular reviews to improve implementation. However, its reluctance to extend the project beyond 47 months may have compromised the completion of physical works.[25]

R2R Program

109. **The R2R program has not been spared from the trend of implementation delays, with all projects reporting significant setbacks.** The reasons for delays in this program are multifaceted and include: limited technical training, suggesting a need for capacity building initiatives; restricted human resources, indicating staffing challenges; lengthy community consultation processes, highlighting the time-intensive nature of stakeholder engagement; slow government procedures, pointing to bureaucratic hurdles; staff shortages and high turnover, suggesting difficulties in retaining skilled personnel; coordination issues among multiple GEF Agencies, indicating challenges in multi-agency collaboration; inefficient bureaucratic processes, further emphasizing the need for streamlined administrative procedures. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major contributor to delays across R2R projects, compounding the existing difficulties.

110. **UNDP manages the R2R program, leveraging its experience in working with SIDS in the Pacific, but performance so far in the implementation of the child projects has been mixed.** For instance, in Fiji, the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme has established effective collaboration with local stakeholders, and several projects maintain regular communication with them. The Ridge-to-Reef approach has been integrated into various initiatives. However, it also faces challenges: the distribution of GEF funds often experiences delays, which leads local stakeholders to seek provisional funding from other sources. In locations like Vanuatu and Tonga, UNDP's support on the ground has been limited, with participation primarily focused on meetings.

111. **FAO also has extensive experience in managing GEF-related projects in the region, as well as significant REDD+[26] and food security initiatives, but there were delays in procurement.** Its expertise encompasses integrated agroecosystem and agroforestry management, livestock management, land-use change, its Land Administration System, and sustainable forest management. Additionally, it has demonstrated capacity in sustainable fisheries management, community resource management, and climate change adaptation, which is essential for projects

[25] According to the project completion report, road signage and line markings from the second lagoon to Rentapau bridge remained incomplete at project closure. This was due to early demobilization of the design and supervision consultant before the defect liability period ended, compromising contract closeout. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities planned completion in late-2021, though the absence of as-built drawings and lack of independent supervision posed safety risks on this high-speed road section.

[26] REDD stands for "Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries." The "+" stands for additional forest-related activities that protect the climate, such as sustainable forest management and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. See https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/redd/what-is-redd

in the Pacific region and globally. The Agency's participation has also provided lessons learned from other FAO and SPC (The Pacific Community) projects (including those related to vegetables). FAO's performance has been mixed during the implementation of the child projects. For instance, in Tonga, it demonstrated capacity in project management, addressing village needs and actively participating in the coordination of the project management unit of the project. However, delays in procurement were mainly due to efforts to meet all FAO operational and technical requirements, ensuring the technical quality of the outputs to be generated.

ISLANDS Program

112. **In the ISLANDS program, all child projects have experienced notable delays or shown indicators of potential setbacks.** A striking example is the regional child project (GEF ID 10267), where despite 40 percent of the scheduled time having elapsed, only 7.2 percent of the allocated budget has been spent. More alarmingly, the achievement of outcomes and outputs stands at a mere 0 percent and 5 percent, respectively. This significant disparity between time elapsed and progress achieved emphasizes the severity of the implementation challenges faced. The delays in the ISLANDS program can be attributed to a combination of factors: the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted project activities and timelines; team coordination issues, highlighting potential weaknesses in project management structures; lack of institutional memory, suggesting challenges in knowledge retention and transfer; loss of talent in Pacific SIDS, indicating broader human resource challenges in the region; and changes in legal agreements between the executing agency and participating countries, pointing to complex bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, all three components of the global child project (GEF ID 10266) are facing delays, indicating that implementation difficulties are not isolated to a single aspect of the program but are prevalent across various project components.

113. **In the ISLANDS Program, UNEP coordinates the United Nations' environmental efforts and acts as the GEF Agency for both regional and global activities**. UNEP's work includes concept testing and the application of scientific knowledge to GEF investments. Since the child projects of the program are still in the early stages, it is not possible to evaluate their performance.

114. **The widespread implementation delays across ISLANDS, CPDP, and R2R programs indicate systemic issues requiring comprehensive solutions in GEF projects within Pacific SIDS.** While some factors like the COVID-19 pandemic were unavoidable, many challenges suggest areas for improvement in project design and management. The complex nature of these projects is evident in the varying effectiveness of partnerships, integrated approaches, and agency roles across different locations, with ongoing issues such as funding delays and inconsistent local support. Low efficiency, particularly during project initiation, exacerbates implementation challenges. These widespread setbacks across the ISLANDS program and all child projects under the three programs point to underlying systemic issues. The delays stem primarily from low institutional capacity, adversely affecting various aspects of project management. Particularly problematic are the lengthy processes for staff recruitment and fund transfers. These bottlenecks hinder project initiation and impede ongoing operations, creating a cascade of delays throughout project lifecycles. Recruitment of project management unit staff and establishment of project

boards often took up to a year, and start-up activities (including budgets, project operations manuals, procurement plans) were insufficiently thorough, detailed, or advanced before project approval. In many instances, this was compounded by local limitations in policymaking and project implementation.

115. **The evaluation employed contribution analysis to assess how GEF programs contributed to observed outcomes while accounting for other influencing factors in the Pacific SIDS context.** Analysis of project documentation and stakeholder interviews revealed several key pathways through which GEF programs made distinct contributions. For instance, in Tonga's R2R Integrated Land Management Systems child project (GEF ID 5578), multiple donors supported environmental initiatives. However, the GEF's unique contribution came through its integrated watershed management approach that linked upland conservation with coastal protection—an approach not covered by other donors. Yet, the analysis also highlighted how contextual factors, particularly human resource constraints, significantly influenced program effectiveness. The severe shortage of qualified personnel in Pacific SIDS, combined with insufficient project management allocations to attract and retain talent, contributed to implementation delays across all three programs. The geographic isolation of Pacific SIDS further compounded these capacity challenges, as the region lacks specialized regional entities that could provide technical and project management support. This was particularly evident in the ISLANDS program, where the absence of regional chemical management expertise, rather than program design issues, emerged as a key limiting factor.

4.5 Sustainability

Institutional sustainability

116. **Institutional sustainability is a frequent concern in the child projects.** The lack of capacity in the public sector, along with high staff turnover, including labor migration to Australia and New Zealand, poses challenges to sustainability in most Pacific Island countries. Although the ISLANDS program's child projects have not yet reported on sustainability in their terminal evaluations, challenges are already apparent, particularly regarding institutional capacity. In Tonga, for example, the lack of government prioritization of waste management presents a significant obstacle to sustainability, highlighting the need to recognize waste management as a priority. Similarly, the R2R child project in Marshall Islands (GEF ID 5544), reported concerns about sustainability in its terminal evaluation, particularly regarding institutional and governance risks. The midterm review emphasizes the need for greater government support and the establishment of frameworks and processes to ensure the continuity of project benefits after completion.

117. **There are however some cases where institutional sustainability is likely to be achieved.** For example, in the R2R Integrated Land Management Systems child project in Tonga (GEF ID 5578), the relevant ministries committed to including the annual monitoring of watershed ecological health in their sectoral plans for the next five years. Additionally, the Tonga Department of Environment plans to develop a proposal for a second phase of the project. Similarly, the R2R child projects implemented in Tuvalu, Micronesia, and Samoa (GEF IDs 5550, 5517, and 5417) have reported progress in strengthening the capacities of governmental institutions. Furthermore, the CPDP child project implemented in Tuvalu (GEF ID 9512) has contributed to strengthening

institutional capacity, which favors its sustainability. Finally, several countries have shown interest in improving their development strategies. For example, Fiji has requested support to complete the update of its waste management law, which contributes to the sustainability of the ISLANDS regional child project (GEF ID 10267).

118. **Some projects have also contributed to strengthening community capacities, which has supported their sustainability.** For instance, the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398) facilitated the creation of watershed management committees (WMCs) in the pilot areas. These committees can serve as local governance structures to oversee and coordinate natural resource management activities, potentially ensuring the continuation of project initiatives at the community level.

119. **A significant insight from a previous GEF IEO Evaluation (GEF IEO 2018b) highlighted that expanding partnerships with regional and national agencies can greatly improve project sustainability by utilizing local expertise and fostering regional ownership.** The evaluation emphasized that in the context of Pacific SIDS, involving more Pacific-based entities as implementing agencies for GEF projects could enhance institutional resilience and better align with the priorities of these nations. Such an approach would embed capacity development within local institutions, resulting in sustained benefits and a higher probability of long-term impact, especially given the complex environmental challenges and frequent climate disruptions faced by these countries.

Financial sustainability

120. **Securing long-term financial sustainability for project outcomes emerges as a recurring challenge across GEF programs in Pacific SIDS.** For example, the R2R child project in Fiji (GEF ID 5398) failed to establish adequate financial mechanisms to support the long-term maintenance of protected areas, raising concerns about the project's ability to sustain its achievements after GEF funding ceases. The child project Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions in Nauru (GEF ID 5381, UNDP) lacks a documented Sustainability Plan with explicit financial resource allocation, indicating a lack of proactive planning for long-term financial sustainability. This absence of a clear plan raises questions about the project's preparedness to secure and manage resources for continued operation and maintenance. The R2R child project in Tuvalu (GEF ID 5550) identifies financial sustainability as a potential risk due to uncertainty regarding ongoing funding to maintain project achievements, such as data updates and monitoring systems. Additionally, the R2R regional project (GEF ID 5404) reported in its midterm review that it faces financial uncertainty after the conclusion of GEF assistance. It is noted that, in the long term, R2R approaches should not require additional financial resources but should instead generate overall financial savings due to improvements in investment efficiency. However, the timeline needed to achieve this remains uncertain.

121. **It is important to bear in mind that many of the financial sustainability risks are linked to government institutions.** For example, interviews conducted in Vanuatu reveal that ministries lack funding, leading to low expectations of financing. Moreover, the ISLANDS regional project (GEF ID 10267) notes that, although the Cook Islands, Micronesia, and Niue have prioritized waste flow in their national strategies, they still lack economic instruments to sustainably finance management

of electronic waste, used oil, and bulky waste. The R2R child project in Cook Islands (GEF ID 5348) raises serious concerns about its financial sustainability due to a lack of actions taken on a comprehensive report that presents sustainable financing options, which is attributed to a lack of political will in the country.

122. **Despite the challenges, several GEF projects in Pacific SIDS demonstrate promising efforts to enhance financial sustainability.** These projects employ diverse strategies to secure long-term funding and reduce reliance on limited sources. For example, the R2R child project in Palau (GEF ID 5208) stands out for promoting diversified funding sources and successfully improving sustainability for nine states through various techniques, including investments, ecotourism, and grants. Four states have fully operational IPP programs that invest their funds, while another four have developed ecotourism plans. Five additional states generate income from visitor fees, and several have accessed grant funding for their protected area network site. Only six states depend exclusively on the Green Fee (down from 13). Additionally, the R2R child project in Papua New Guinea (GEF ID 5510) has developed sustainable financing mechanisms such as a biodiversity offsets policy.

Technical sustainability

123. **Technical sustainability is not identified as a key risk in the programs.** The programs have focused on providing technical assistance with the goal of making the projects sustainable once the GEF's intervention ends. On the other hand, the CPDP program, focused on infrastructure, has made efforts to ensure that the infrastructure does not require continuous maintenance but can withstand the effects of climate change. For example, CPDP child project in Vanuatu (GEF ID 9197) is considered likely to be sustainable due to its concrete and steel structures, which require minimal maintenance. Regarding the external factors that support the sustainability of this project, the "Roads for Development Phase Two" (R4D2) program, funded by the Australian Government, stands out. Its objective is to improve the operational skills of personnel so they can independently manage the infrastructure investments made under the program.

124. **Among the child projects that received sustainability ratings, four were considered moderately likely, four moderately unlikely, and one unlikely.** It is noteworthy that none of the projects were rated as likely to achieve sustainability. Among the main sustainability challenges are concerns regarding government institutional capacity and uncertainty about funding once GEF intervention concludes. The findings provided by the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation (SCCE) of SIDS (GEF IEO 2019) reveal that the main sustainability challenges of the projects are low institutional capacity and difficulties in accessing financing from the private sector. Similarly, the evaluation of the Vanuatu and SPREP portfolio (GEF IEO 2015) indicates that obstacles related to capacity issues persist, both at the individual and institutional level.

125. **Some Pacific SIDS face unique challenges due to their classification as fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS**). The World Bank's 2024 FCS list includes several Pacific SIDS, such as the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. While these nations are not experiencing violent conflicts, they tackle high levels of institutional and social fragility. This fragility necessitates careful consideration of risks throughout the project

lifecycle—from design to implementation and conclusion—to ensure the long-term sustainability of outcomes in these vulnerable environments.

126. **Effective monitoring and early warning systems are crucial for project success in fragile contexts.** The Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (GEF IEO 2024b) emphasizes the importance of continuous monitoring and early risk identification in fragile countries. It advocates for a shift in focus towards procedural aspects rather than solely environmental outcomes, recognizing that building basic institutional capacity is fundamental to achieving sustainable environmental benefits. However, projects in the Pacific SIDS portfolio have shown deficiencies in their monitoring systems, hampering their ability to detect deteriorating security situations and identify negative impacts early on. These projects also face sustainability risks linked to weak institutional capacities, further highlighting the importance of procedural considerations. While efforts were made to strengthen these capacities, most indicators remained environmentally focused. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed additional vulnerabilities, accentuating the need for adaptive, crisis-resilient project approaches.

127. **Projects increasingly recognize and plan for addressing resilience in fragile contexts, including in Pacific SIDS.** The IEO fragility evaluation identifies five strategic approaches that contribute to project adaptability and effectiveness in the challenging contexts of Pacific SIDS (GEF IEO 2024b). Projects tend to set moderate and achievable objectives that acknowledge the inherent complexities and limitations of fragile environments. Furthermore, effective stakeholder participation is a common feature of successful projects. This involves meaningful engagement with local communities and stakeholders, recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge systems and community engagement in these island nations. Additionally, robust dispute resolution mechanisms are often integrated into project design and implementation to address potential conflicts and grievances constructively, fostering collaboration and consensus building among stakeholders. Finally, projects in Pacific SIDS demonstrate a consistent pattern of engaging with local and customary norms and institutions. This engagement acknowledges the significant role of traditional governance structures and cultural values in these island nations. By aligning with community priorities and contributing to social cohesion, projects enhance their relevance and effectiveness.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

128. Significant progress has been observed in the GEF's programmatic approaches since the last SIDS evaluation, with some challenges still to be addressed. The evolution from standalone projects to multifocal area programs, to integrated programs has led to better alignment with national priorities and enhanced environmental outcomes. This approach has produced more inclusive and informed interventions. However, persistent obstacles remain, including project delays, limited institutional capacity, and difficulties in achieving long-term sustainability. The programmatic approach has demonstrated both benefits and drawbacks in the unique and challenging context of Pacific SIDS.

129. **Persistent gaps in results framework alignment limit cohesive impact assessment and adaptive management.** While GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are well-designed and generally aligned with national priorities, gaps in the results frameworks continue to pose challenges. The analysis highlights that inconsistencies between program-level and child project frameworks obstruct comprehensive program evaluation. For instance, indicators in certain child projects remain narrowly defined and lack relevance to broader program goals, as seen in the Fiji and Kiribati R2R child projects. These discrepancies in baseline alignment, indicator relevance, and operational challenges to collect the data restrict accurate monitoring and learning, weakening the capacity for adaptive management and the assessment of true program impact.

130. **Weak and misaligned indicators reduce the efficacy of M&E and hinder the demonstration of program impact.** The assessment reveals that the diversity in indicator quality across child projects—from basic output measures to overly restrictive metrics—limits the overall effectiveness of the M&E system. The reliance on simplistic output indicators, such as "number of management plans developed," fails to capture more meaningful conservation or developmental outcomes. This fragmentation compromises coherent reporting and hinders the ability to aggregate data effectively across projects. Consequently, both program-level and child project evaluations lack a consistent, outcome-oriented approach, reducing the capacity to assess and communicate the program's overall impact.

131. **The programs in the Pacific SIDS showed variation in their effectiveness.** Outstanding results were achieved in protected area management, coastal and marine resource management, and infrastructure resilience to natural disasters. However, limited results were obtained regarding species recovery, reforestation, and waste management. Challenges in reducing environmental stress and improving conditions for endangered species were evident. Factors hindering effectiveness included implementation delays, weak institutional capacity, financial constraints, and challenges in intersectoral coordination. Additionally, shortcomings in the monitoring system impacted overall effectiveness.

132. **GEF programs in the Pacific SIDS have demonstrated some additionality compared to standalone projects, although this has been limited.** Benefits include enhanced knowledge sharing, capacity building, regional coordination, operational flexibility, and stakeholder engagement. Programs align with global initiatives like the SDGs and Rio convention, bridging national priorities and global environmental benefits. The structure supports small island countries with limited capacity through regional assistance. However, implementation faced constraints from execution challenges, including slow national processes and occasional regional coordination gaps.

133. **All child projects in Pacific SIDS face significant delays, indicating systemic challenges.** The GEF programs in Pacific SIDS faced widespread implementation setbacks, pointing to underlying issues that demand strategic intervention. These delays stemmed from multiple factors, with inadequate planning and low institutional capacity being primary contributors. Limits to national capacity were underestimated in program design, leading to unrealistic timelines and expectations. This miscalculation, coupled with insufficient preparation of start-up activities such

as budgets, project operations manuals, and procurement plans, created a cascade of delays throughout the project cycle. Administrative and financial bottlenecks, particularly in staff recruitment and fund transfers, further impeded project initiation and management of ongoing operations. The programs also struggled with coordination challenges among multiple stakeholders and were adversely affected by external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues across all child projects highlight the critical need for more realistic planning, thorough project preparation, and sustained efforts in capacity development.

134. **The sustainability of GEF projects in Pacific SIDS faces significant challenges, primarily rooted in low institutional capacity, financial challenges and country context.** While opportunities exist to enhance sustainability through targeted capacity building, establishing robust legal frameworks, and diversifying funding sources, persistent issues continue to hamper long-term success. A key factor impeding sustainability is the lack of sustained institutional support, often exacerbated by the overwhelming workload of government staff managing multiple donor-funded projects simultaneously. This strain on human resources restricts the ability to effectively implement and maintain project outcomes beyond the funding period. Limited private sector engagement and the short-term nature of external funding can impact the longevity of initiatives. The fragile socioeconomic and environmental context of many Pacific SIDS further complicates efforts to achieve long-term sustainability of environmental interventions.

135. **There is room for improvement in coordination and collaboration across GEF Agencies and other development partners.** The experience of GEF programs in the Pacific region has highlighted the critical role of sector coordination in enhancing development impact. While some positive examples of coordination between national governments and international agencies have been observed, the full potential for collaboration remains largely untapped. The landscape of development agencies active in the Pacific, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), European Union (EU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australian Aid (AusAid), and New Zealand Aid, presents a complex web of actors with shared goals but often disparate approaches. The current state of coordination, both among GEF Agencies and with other development partners, has shown significant room for improvement. This gap in collaboration has implications for resource utilization efficiency, potential duplication of efforts, and the overall effectiveness of development initiatives in the region.

136. **The evaluation highlights opportunities to strengthen institutional capacity in Pacific SIDS through careful consideration of Agency partnerships.** While the current GEF Agencies bring valuable expertise and resources, the experience with national agencies in other regions suggests that expanding Agency partnerships to include qualified Pacific regional organizations could help build sustained institutional capacity and enhance country ownership. However, any expansion would need to be balanced against the increased complexity of managing an expanded partnership and ensuring new Agencies can meet GEF standards and requirements.

137. **Stakeholder involvement is uneven, with notable progress in gender mainstreaming but gaps in other areas.** While gender inclusion has improved, particularly in the design of the ISLANDS program, which includes updated gender guidelines, participation of other key local

stakeholder groups remains limited. With a few exceptions, youth and the private sector are often underrepresented in project activities and decision-making processes. This imbalance in stakeholder engagement restricts the potential for comprehensive, inclusive development outcomes. Furthermore, there is a lack of South-South learning opportunities focused on integrating women, youth, indigenous peoples, and the private sector in income-generating activities. This gap hampers the sharing of good practices and innovative approaches to inclusive economic development across the region.

5.2 Recommendations

138. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the IEO developed the following three recommendations.

139. **Recommendation 1: Enhance coordination and collaboration to maximize development impact and resource efficiency.** While existing coordination between governments and international agencies shows promise, there remains significant untapped potential to enhance donor alignment and government engagement for improved project outcomes. Key opportunities exist to strengthen external coherence through expanded partnerships among GEF Agencies and other development partners working in the Pacific. By implementing proven coordination mechanisms and fostering deeper collaboration, organizations can achieve more efficient resource allocation, minimize redundant efforts, and reduce transaction costs for governments. This coordinated approach would ultimately lead to more sustainable and impactful development initiatives that better serve the region's needs while optimizing the GEF's strategic influence through harmonized support systems.

140. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen program effectiveness by further improving the alignment and operational delivery between Pacific SIDS parent programs and their associated child projects.** It is crucial that parent and child projects maintain strong internal coherence while addressing persistent implementation delays that hinder overall program performance. A more streamlined M&E framework at the program level will enable better tracking of outcomes, facilitate adaptive management, and support strategic decision making across the portfolio. By enhancing internal coherence and operational efficiency, while maintaining robust yet simplified oversight mechanisms, programs can achieve more consistent and impactful results. These actions should be strategically designed to foster a culture of adaptive management, ensuring that M&E findings are regularly used to inform decision making and refine implementation strategies.

141. **Recommendation 3: Prioritize robust institutional capacity development to ensure program success and enduring impact.** Given implementation constraints in Pacific SIDS, programs must establish realistic objectives aligned with local institutional capabilities. This requires focused capacity building in project management, environmental governance, and technical skills, supported by systematic performance monitoring. Effective capacity development should leverage existing governance structures, traditional knowledge, and community engagement to ensure sustained project benefits. Programs should emphasize practical training that addresses immediate implementation needs while building long-term institutional resilience. This balanced approach will support both timely project delivery and sustainable outcomes

beyond project completion. Additionally, to strengthen institutional capacity in Pacific SIDS, the GEF should explore opportunities to accredit regional organizations thereby increasing the pool of qualified GEF Agencies working in the region. Any expansion would need to be balanced against the increased complexity of managing an expanded partnership and ensuring new Agencies can meet GEF standards and requirements.

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VII. ANNEXES

Annex A. Conclusions and recommendations of the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation (SCCE): Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Conclusions

In its evaluation, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office reached the following nine main conclusions:

(1) GEF-financed projects in SIDS are strongly aligned with the government's priorities and reflect the heterogenous needs of the various countries.

(2) GEF interventions are relevant to national environment challenges and are aligned with the GEF focal areas.

(3) The GEF is encouraging integrated approaches by promoting ridge to reef, an integrated watershed management approach to sustainably manage soil, water, and biodiversity, while considering renewable energy resources and productive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism.

(4) The performance of SIDS projects was lower than for the overall GEF portfolio on the dimensions of outcome performance, and project implementation and execution. The SIDS ratings on sustainability are similar to the overall GEF portfolio. Regional projects perform significantly better on outcomes and sustainability.

(5) Context-related factors which support sustainability include legal and regulatory reforms, national ownership, establishment of national environment funds, institutional and public private partnerships. Weak institutional capacity, low levels of environmental awareness, pressure from agriculture and tourism sectors impede sustainability.

(6) Project-related factors which have a positive influence on sustainability include training and building capacity, adaptive project management, strong project teams with a good steering committee, and scaling up and replication based on lessons learned. Limited attention to the quality of project design, inadequate investment in building local and national capacity, and lack of a clear exit strategy and future financing are project-related factors which negatively impact sustainability.

(7) The GEF has supported the long-term sustainability of outcomes in the SIDS through a variety of interventions and verified post-completion sustainability ratings of several projects have improved since project completion.

(8) The GEF has been given increasing attention to cross-cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming, resilience and fragility, and private sector engagement and financing in project design; the ability to accessing private sector financing was noted as a challenge.

(9) The GEF's main areas of additionality are strengthening institutions and assistance with legal and regulatory frameworks.

Recommendations

In its evaluation, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office reached the following five recommendations.

(1) Derive greater benefits from the expanded GEF partnership. GEF Agencies should focus their efforts in SIDS based on their thematic and geographic competence and establish a permanent presence to strengthen dialogue with the respective government and key stakeholders.

(2) Increase the number of integrated interventions. GEF Agencies should respond to the SIDS demand by designing more integrated projects, in line with the ridge to reef, whole island, and blue economy approaches. When justified, multiphase projects should be a prioritized model for GEF projects to improve outcome sustainability.

(3) Promote innovation and knowledge exchange. The GEF project portfolio in SIDS should include a combination of innovative (e.g., income-generating products from invasive alien species) and scaling-up approaches that have shown to be effective. Innovation should be supported even if it has a higher risk. Regional programs should encourage a transfer of knowledge to the poorest SIDS through a South-South capacity-building approach.

(4) Strengthening institutional capacity. GEF Agencies and projects should continue to build institutional capacity in the SIDS and assist in improving project design with due consideration to sustainability (exit strategy, stakeholder engagement, national and local capacity building to ensure continuation, M&E) and in the use of financial resources.

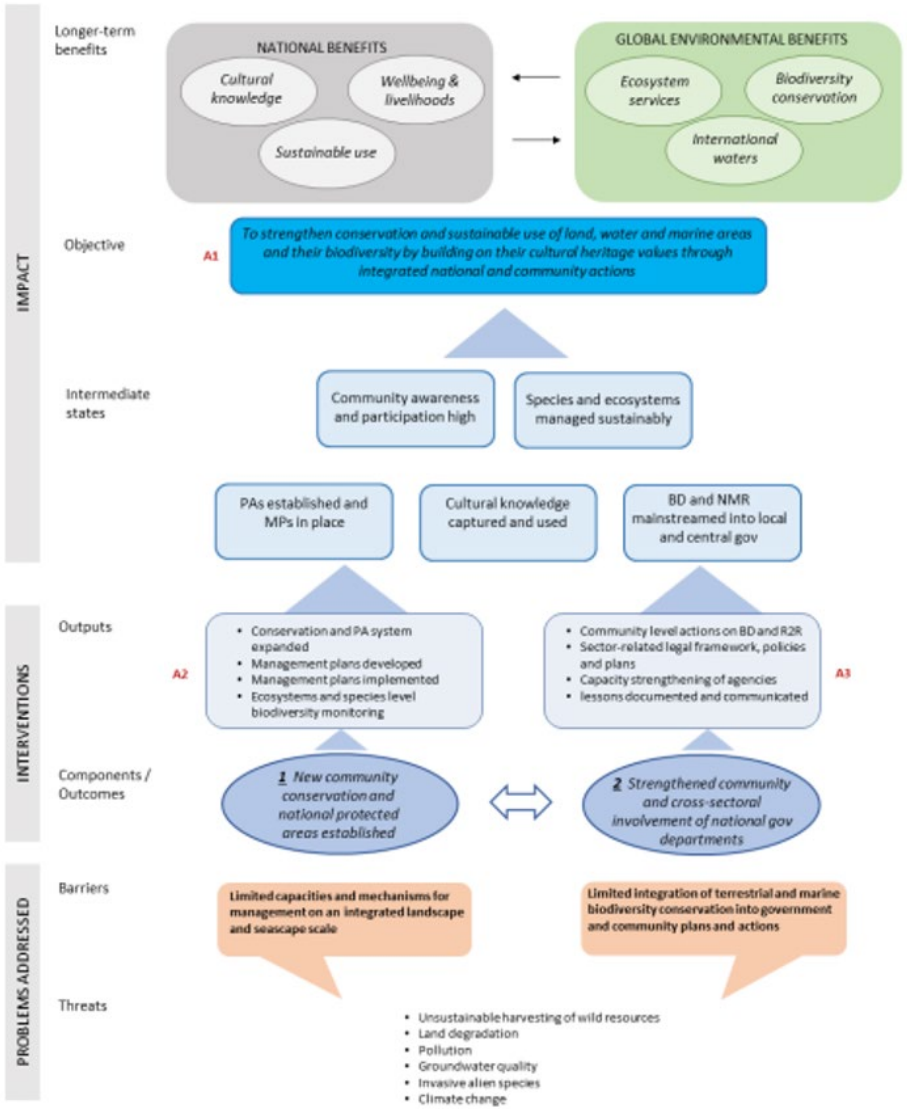
(5) Within the context of the climate change mitigation projects, build on the GEF's comparative advantage. When considering interventions in the climate change mitigation area, the GEF should strategically explore the opportunity to address two of the main challenges facing SIDS—deficient waste management and the lack of sustainable energy. GEF financing should continue to explore the various alternatives for renewable energy in SIDS, possibly including wind, tidal and ocean wave power, and geothermal energy resources.

Annex B. Approved child projects in Pacific SIDS countries

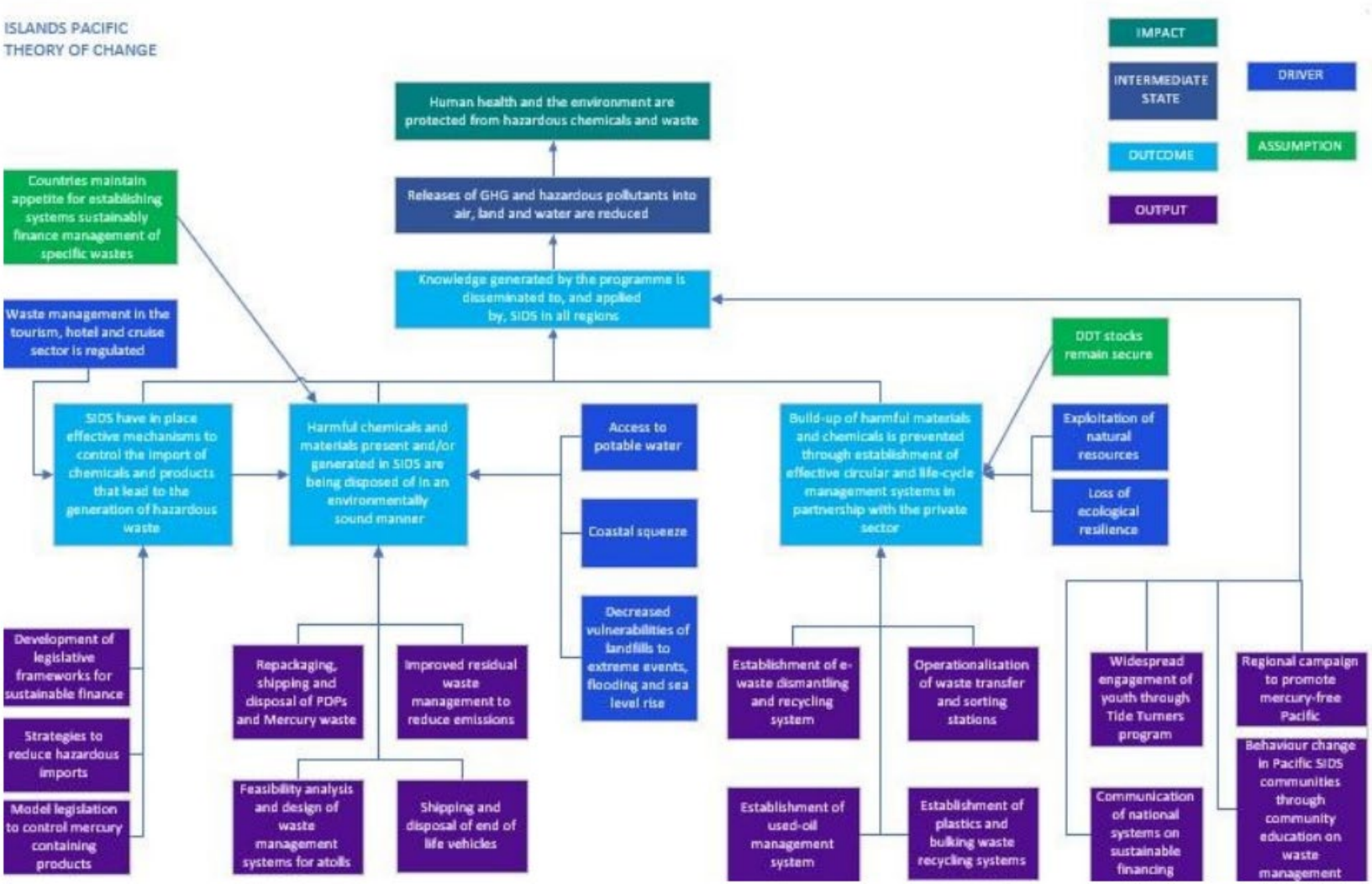
GEF ID	Project Title	GEF phase	Agency	Country	Focal areas	Fund source	Status
Parent GEF ID 5037 - Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP)							
9197	Protecting Urban Areas Against the Impacts of Climate Change in Vanuatu	GEF-5	ADB	Vanuatu	CC	LDCF	Completed
9512	Climate Resilience in the Outer Islands of Tuvalu	GEF-5	ADB	Tuvalu	CC	LDCF	Ongoing
Parent GEF ID 5395 - Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R)							
5208	R2R: Advancing Sustainable Resources Management to Improve Livelihoods and Protect Biodiversity in Palau	GEF-5	UNEP	Palau	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5348	Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Functions through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in the Cook Island	GEF-5	UNDP	Cook Islands	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5381	R2R: Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions in Nauru	GEF-5	UNDP	Nauru	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5397	R2R: Integrated Sustainable Land and Coastal Management	GEF-5	FAO	Vanuatu	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5398	Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji	GEF-5	UNDP	Fiji	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5404	R2R: Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest & Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries	GEF-5	UNDP	Regional, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	IW	GEF	Completed
5417	Economy-wide Integration of Climate Change Adaptation and DRM/DRR to Reduce Climate Vulnerability of Communities in Samoa	GEF-5	UNDP	Samoa	CC	LDCF	Completed
5510	R2R Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas	GEF-5	UNDP	Papua New Guinea	BD, LD	GEF	Completed

5517	R2R Implementing an Integrated Ridge to Reef Approach to Enhance Ecosystem Services, to Conserve Globally Important Biodiversity and to Sustain Local Livelihoods in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	GEF-5	UNDP	Micronesia	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5544	R2R Reimaanlok Looking to the Future: Strengthening Natural Resource Management in Atoll Communities in the Republic of Marshall Islands Employing Integrated Approaches	GEF-5	UNDP	Marshall Islands	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5550	R2R Implementing a Ridge to Reef Approach to Protect Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions	GEF-5	UNDP	Tuvalu	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5551	Resilient Islands, Resilient Communities	GEF-5	FAO	Kiribati	BD, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5552	Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation, and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Service and Cultural Heritage in Niue	GEF-5	UNDP	Niue	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5578	R2R Integrated Land and Agro-ecosystem Management Systems	GEF-5	FAO	Tonga	BD, LD	GEF	Completed
5663	R2R Integrated Environmental Management of the Fanga'uta Lagoon Catchment	GEF-5	UNDP	Tonga	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
Parent GEF ID 10185 - Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS)							
10266	Communications, Coordination and Knowledge Management Project	GEF-7	UNEP	Global	Chem	GEF	Ongoing
10267	ISLANDS - Pacific Child Project	GEF-7	UNEP	Regional, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	Chem	GEF	Ongoing

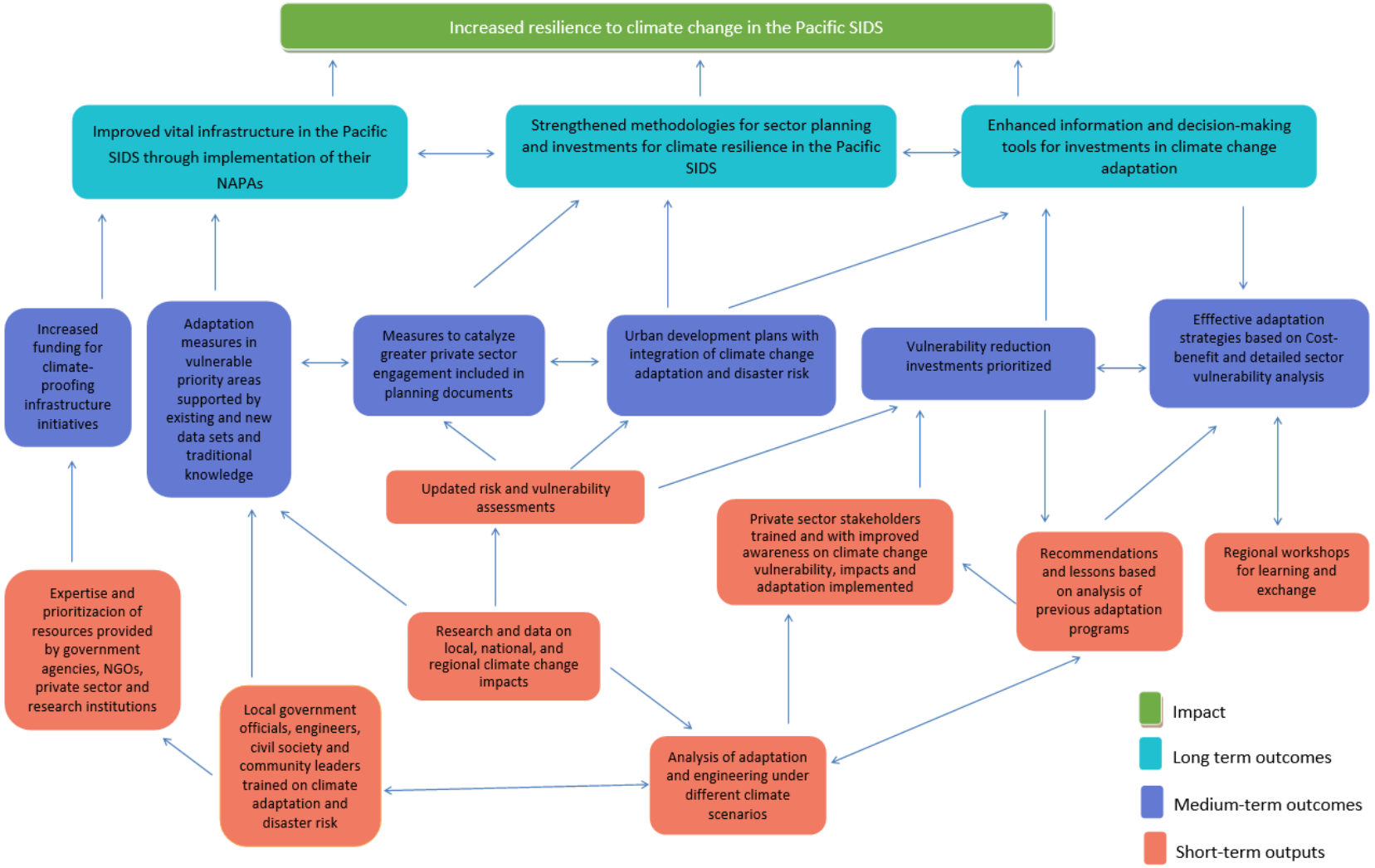
Annex C. Theory of change of R2R (GEF ID 5395)



Annex D. Theory of change of ISLANDS (GEF ID 10185)



Annex E. Theory of change of CPDP (GEF ID 5037)



Annex E. Evaluation matrix

Relevance: To what extent do the GEF programs' objectives and design respond to Pacific SIDS' national and regional strategies, priorities, and environmental challenges?			
Key question	**Indicators/measures**	**Source of information**	**Methodology**
Considering the contribution of the rest of the portfolio of national projects, are the programs' objectives aligned with the GEF's programming directions and relevant to the countries' priorities and strategies?	Magnitude of the alignment of program's design with GEF'S programming directions (low, medium, high)	Project Proposals, performance documents, country engagement strategies and national development plans	Project portfolio review
Were the strategies in each of the three programs the most appropriate and innovative given the state of technology and risks in these countries at the time of design?	Evidence of design, replication or scaling up of innovative and appropriate components into the programs' strategies	Project Proposals, performance documents, stakeholders	Project portfolio review, interviews, case studies
How well has the design of the child projects in each of these programs responded to and built on outcomes and lessons of completed projects?	Evidence of integration of conclusions and lessons from other completed projects in the program's design	Project Proposals, performance documents, stakeholders	Project portfolio review
Does the project design facilitate efficient monitoring and evaluation?	Quality of the results framework and its targets/indicators, Quality of the project's risk matrix, Quality of assessment of the project's potential environmental and social impact, and monitoring/mitigation, Quality of Gender assessment/targets	Results Framework, Risk Matrix, Environmental & Social Impact Assessment, Gender assessment	Desk study
Coherence: How compatible are the objectives of the GEF programs with similar government and/or donor-funded interventions in Pacific SIDS countries? Additionally, how compatible are the objectives and activities of the child projects in each program with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change, and the other child projects?			
Are the objectives and activities of the child projects in each program coherent with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change, the other child projects and other development projects dealing with the same issues?	Magnitude of the alignment of child projects design with parent program and other child projects	Project Proposals, performance documents, country engagement strategies and national development plans, terminal evaluations, midterms reviews, PIRs, stakeholders	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews

To what extent have the programs achieved or are likely to achieve policy coherence across sectors (horizontal), across levels of governance (vertical), and across time frames (temporal)?	Development outcome and progress implementation ratings for interventions	Project terminal evaluations, midterms reviews, PIRs	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews, contribution analysis
Are policy inconsistencies addressed differently in the participating countries by each of the programs?	Evidence of programs' interventions to identify and address policy inconsistencies	Project Proposals, performance documents, country engagement strategies and national development plans, terminal evaluations, midterms reviews, PIRs, stakeholders	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
Effectiveness: To what extent have each of the GEF programs in Pacific SIDS achieved or are likely to achieve their planned outcomes?			
How effective have the child projects been in terms of implementation and attaining outcomes in accordance with the theories of change outlined within each program and project?	Assessment of projects' ratings and other performance indicators	Stakeholders, Project proposals and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews, contribution analysis
To what extent have cross-cutting issues of gender, youth, indigenous peoples, private sector engagement, and socioeconomic benefits been considered in the design of each of the programs, and to what extent have they been achieved?	A detailed review of the incorporation of cross-cutting issues in the design and implementation of each of the programs	Stakeholders, project proposals and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
How effectively has knowledge been shared within programs through the knowledge platforms or in other ways?	Assessment of the design, quality and use of knowledge products and platforms of each of the programs	Stakeholders, knowledge products and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
To what extent has program level reporting been systematized and enables establishing a link between program and project results?	Assessment of the monitoring and evaluation tools established by each of the programs	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
To what extent did the GEF interventions demonstrate their additionality of having programs with child projects compared with standalone projects?	Assessment of the additional contribution (financial and non-financial) by each of the programs	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews

To what extent has the GEF Agency selection and the coordination across Agencies influenced the performance of each of the programs?	Assessment of the unique value and expertise of agencies as well as their coordination throughout the implementation of the programs	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
Efficiency: To what extent have GEF programs in Pacific SIDS delivered, or are likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner?			
How efficient has the implementation of child projects been compared to the broader GEF portfolio?	Assessment of time between milestones in the project cycle of child projects compared to the broader GEF portfolio	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Council documents, project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
What are the main factors that have affected the efficiency of the programs?	Assessment of child project implementation issues	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
Sustainability: To what extent will benefits of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS continue or are likely to continue?			
To what extent are the achieved and emerging results of child projects sustainable?	Assessment of sustainability ratings of terminal and midterm evaluations	Stakeholders, project documents and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews

Annex F: Interviewees

Global/central stakeholders

Rawleston Moore, Senior Climate Change Specialist, GEF Secretariat

Anil Sookdeo, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat

Sarah Wyatt, Biodiversity Specialist, GEF Secretariat

Christian Severin, Former Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat

Andre Hume, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat

Stephen Blaik, Principal Urban Development Specialist, ADB

Lianchawii Chhakchhuak, Former GEF Technical Officer, FAO

Raushan Kumar, Forestry Officer, FAO

Ines Benabdallah, Former Task Manager, UNEP

Dickson Ho, Associate Programme Management Officer, UNEP

Akiko Yamamoto, Regional Team Leader for Environment in Asia Pacific, UNDP

Sofiane Mahjoub, Regional Technical Advisor, UNDP

Fiji

Sivendra Michael, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and GEF Operational Focal Point

Michelle Baleikanacea, Technical Officer, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Senimili Baleicakau, Director of Environment, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Jose J. Antonio, Country Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation Adviser Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Naveet Lal Online Coordinator and Graphic Designer, SPC

Vere Bakani, Programme Administrator, SPC

Herman Timmermans, Project Manager, SPC

Talei Kocovanua, Manager, iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

Caroline Mate, Senior Research Officer, iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

Eleni Nayacaibuna, Principal Environment Officer, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Women's Club and Youth Group Members, Sawanii Village

Rusiate Ratuniyata, Program Officer, UNDP

Tonga

Sione 'Akau'ola, CEO, Ministry of Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) and GEF Operational Focal Point

Lupe Matoto, Director of Environment, Ministry of MEIDECC

Sulieti 'Ofa, Environment Officer, Ministry of MEIDECC

Mafile'o Masi, Deputy Director, Environment Department, Ministry of MEIDECC

Kelelia Apikotoa, Environment, Ministry of MEIDECC

Paula Pouvalu Ma'u, Chief Secretary and Secretary to the Cabinet, Prime Minister's Office

Viliami Manu, CEO, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF)

Taaniela Kula, CEO, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR)

'Isileli 'Aholelei, Assistant FAO Representative for Tonga, FAO

Lusia Taulanga, MAFF Extension Officer

Soane Takaituli Naufahu, Farmer in Haveluliku village

Uili Naufahu, Farmer in Haveluliku village

Seini Tonga, Farmer in Haveluliku village

Sifoni Mahe, Project Officer and Administrator, Waste Authority Ltd.

Faafetiai Tuikolovatu, Co-owner, GIO Recycling Ltd.

Saimone K. Vuki, Director, SAP Pacific Co. Ltd. and Member of Tonga Recyclers Association, Inc.

Sam Fonua, Member, Tonga Recyclers Association; and owner of recycling company in Tonga

Vanuatu

Rolennas Baereleo, Acting Director General, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster and GEF Operational Focal Point

Florence Iautu, Strategic Manager, National Advisory Board Secretariat, Ministry of Climate Change

Julia Salerua, Project Development Officer, National Advisory Board Secretariat, Ministry of Climate Change

Anna Salwai, Director, Vanuatu Project Management Unit, Prime Minister's Office

Ericksen Packett, Project Coordinator, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster

Roselyn Bea, Senior Officer, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster

Donna Kalfatak, Project Coordinator, FAO

Graham Nimoho, FAO Representative, Vanuatu Office

Ricardo Llosa, Chief Technical Advisor, FAO

Jason Harry, M&E Specialist, FAO

Harrington Tamla, National Project Coordinator, FAO

Donald Wouloseje, Former Program Analyst, UNDP

Leah Nimoho, National Coordinator, Small Grants Programme

Chief of Management Committee, Pang Pang Village

Management Committee, Pang Pang Village Silofon, Community Conservation Area

Women’s Committee Member, Pang Pang Village, Community Conservation Area

Amy Siro, Smeth (Community Based Organization), Committee Member

Joseph David, Community Member, Tagabe Bridge Community