

Final Report

Terminal Evaluation of Implementing a Ridge-to-Reef Approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji

(GEF ID # 5398 / UNDP PIMS # 5216)



Prepared by:

Stuart Black & Alan Ferguson

(International Evaluation Consultant & Technical Evaluation Specialist)

With support from:

Laitia Tamata (National Evaluation Consultant)

Submitted to: **UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji**

January 2023

Project Data

Project Title:	Implementing a Ridge-to-Reef approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji (R2R Fiji Project)
Parent Program:	Pacific Islands Ridge to Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest & Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods (Pacific R2R Program).
GEF Agency:	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
GEF ID:	5398
UNDP PIMS:	5216
UNDP Project ID:	00091748
Country:	Republic of Fiji
Region:	Asia Pacific
GEF Cycle & Trust Fund:	GEF 5 – GEF Trust Fund (GTF)
GEF Focal Area:	Multi-Focal Area: Biodiversity (BD), Land Degradation (LD) and International Waters (IW).
GEF Focal Area Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>BD-1</u>: Improve Sustainability of Protected Area Systems • <u>BD-2</u>: Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes, Seascapes and Sectors. • <u>LD-1</u>: Maintain or Improve Flows of Agro-Ecosystem Services to Sustain Livelihoods of Local Communities • <u>LD-3</u>: Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape. • <u>CC-5</u>: Promote conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks through sustainable management of land use, land-use change, and forestry • <u>SFM-1</u>: Reduce pressures on forest resources and generate sustainable flows of forest ecosystem services • <u>IW-3</u>: Support Foundational Capacity Building, Portfolio Learning and Targeted Research Needs for Ecosystem-Based, Joint Management of Transboundary Water Systems.
UNDAF Outcome: (UNDAF Pacific Sub-region 2013-17)	Outcome Area 1: Environmental management, climate change and disaster risk management.
Project Management Arrangement	NIM with Country Office Support
Project Management Organization:	Government of Fiji (GoF)
Project Executive Agency:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Waterways and Environment (MOWE) • Department of Environment (DOE)

Other Partners:**GoF**

- Ministry of Forestry (MoF)
- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) Department of Agriculture
- Ministry of Fisheries (MoF)
- Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development (MoRMD)
- Ministry of iTaukei Affairs
-

NGOS

- Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
- World Wildlife Fund for Nature, Pacific Office (WWF)
- University of the South Pacific's Institute of Applied Science (USP-IAS)
- Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas network (FLMMA)
- Conservation International (CI)
- Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI)
- The Vetiver Network International (TVNI)

Pilot Sites (see Figure 1):

6 Districts: 3 catchments on the main island of Viti Levu (Ba River, Tuva River and Rewa (Waidina River /Rewa Delta)) and 3 catchments on the second largest island of Vanua Levu (Labasa River, Tunuloa district and Vuniviva River)

Financing:	<u>At endorsement (US\$)</u>	<u>At completion (US\$)</u>
GEF financing ¹ (Total)	7,387,614	
UNDP (in-kind)	450,000	
GoF – MOWE	26,713,803	
Private sector	1,210,000	
NGO Partners	1,868,209	
Total co-financing:	30,242,012	Insufficient information to assess co-financing
<i>Total Project Cost</i>	<i>37,629,626</i>	
Planned Project duration:		48 months (4 years)
Actual Project duration (Oct 2016-July 2022)		69 months (two extensions granted)
PIF Approval Date		Jun 20, 2013
LPAC Meeting Date		Oct 21, 2014
CEO Endorsement Date		Mar 11, 2015
Planned Start (ProDoc Signature)		March-April 2015
Project Document Signature Date (project start)		Oct 4, 2016
Actual Start (Inception Workshop)		February 2016
Date of Inception Workshop		Apr 7, 2017
First Disbursement Date		Sep 9, 2016
Expected Date of Mid-term Review (MTR)		Aug 13, 2019
Actual Date of MTR		Oct-Dec 2019

¹The R2R project is an integrated project consolidated as an umbrella multi-focal project under GEF's funding streams of Biodiversity (4.74 mil.), Climate Change (2.0 mil.) and Land Degradation (0.65 mil.), PSC Meeting 2018, p. 3. The STAR-GEF resources did not allow for flexibility, so the deliverables and resources were aligned with a number of focal area funding sources, MTR, p.40

Expected Date of Terminal
Evaluation (TE)

Apr 4, 2022

Actual Date of TE

Nov-Dec 2022

Original planned Operational
Closing Date:

Oct 4, 2020

No Cost Extension(s)

First: 30 June 2020. Second Extension: 28 February 2021

Revised Planned Closing Date

Jul 4, 2022

Source: Key Project Dates (updated from 2022 PIR)

Figure 1: Map showing Pilot Catchment Sites on Fiji's R2R Project

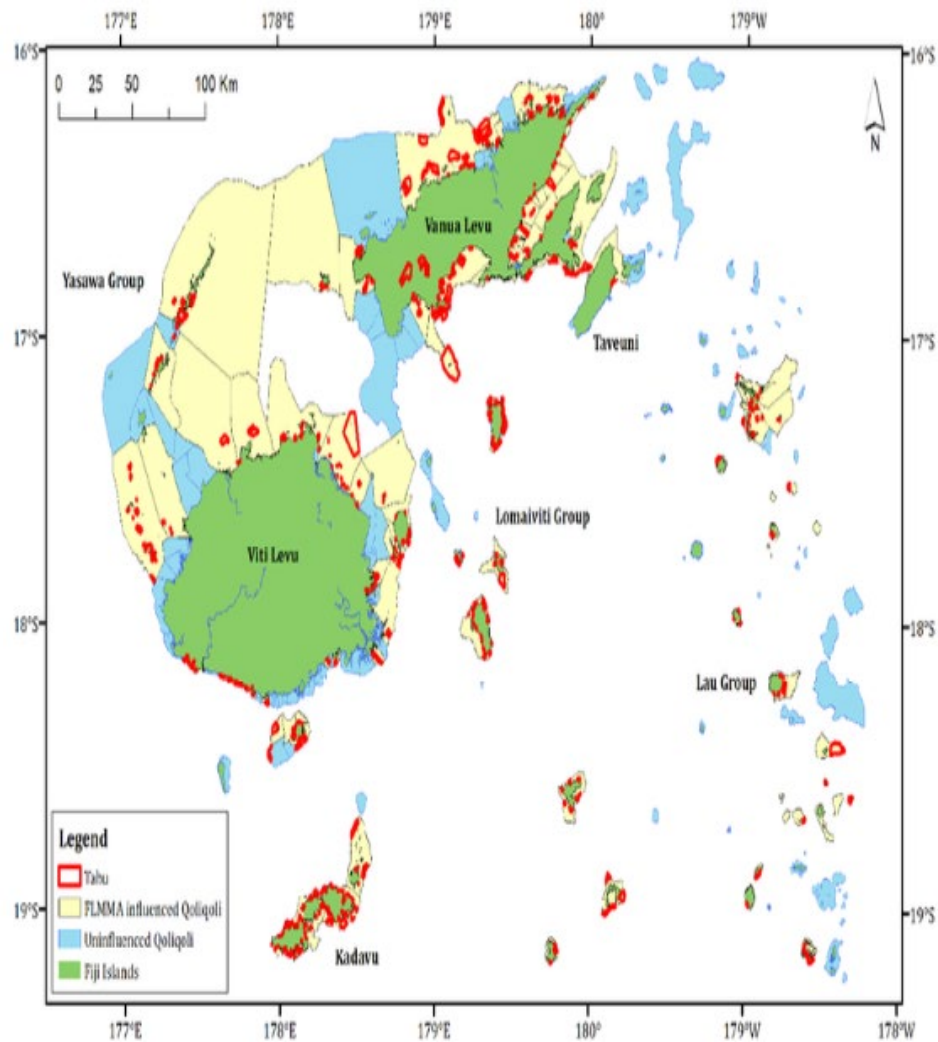


Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
List of Acronyms.....	iii
1.0 Executive Summary.....	vi
2.0 Introduction.....	1
2.1 Purpose and Objective Scope of the Evaluation.....	1
2.2 Scope of the Evaluation.....	1
2.3 Methodology.....	2
2.3.1 Evaluation Guidelines and Ethics.....	2
2.3.2 Evaluation Methods.....	3
2.3.3 Data Collection, Analysis & Triangulation.....	4
2.4 Limitations to the evaluation.....	6
2.5 Structure of the TE report.....	6
3.0 Project Description.....	7
3.1 Project start and duration.....	7
3.2 Immediate and development objectives of the project and expected results.....	7
3.3 Development and Environmental Context.....	8
3.4 Problems that the project sought to address: threats and barriers targeted.....	11
4.0 Findings.....	13
4.1 Project Design/Formulation.....	13
4.2 Project Implementation.....	24
4.2.1 Adaptive management (changes to design & outputs during implementation).....	24
4.2.2 Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements.....	26
4.2.3 Project Finance and Co-finance.....	27
4.2.4 Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry, implementation, assessment of M&E.....	30
4.2.5 UNDP implementation/oversight and Implementing Partner execution, project implementation/execution, coordination, and operational issues.....	31
4.3 Project Results.....	33
4.3.1 Relevance.....	33
4.3.2 Effectiveness.....	33
4.3.3 Efficiency.....	41
4.3.4 Country ownership.....	42
4.3.5 Gender Equality.....	43
4.3.6 Social and environmental standards and other Cross-cutting Issues.....	43
4.3.7 Sustainability: financial, socio-economic, institutional framework and governance, environmental, and overall likelihood.....	44
4.3.8 GEF Additionality and Potential Catalytic/Replication Effect.....	45
4.3.9 Progress to Impact.....	45

5.0	Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations & Lessons.....	48
5.1	Main Findings.....	48
5.2	Conclusions.....	52
5.3	Recommendations.....	54
5.4	Lessons Learned.....	57

List of Tables:

Table 1: Rating of Project Indicators

Table 2: Project Activities undertaken by Lead NGOs/Agencies in each Catchment Area

Table 3: Fund Utilisation by Calendar Year

Table 4: Co-financing Anticipated and Mobilized by June 2022

Table 5: Estimated forest carbon stocks in native forests and mangroves in priority catchments 2014-22

Table 6: Evaluation Ratings Table for Fiji Ridge to Reef Project

Table 7: Recommendations

List of Annexes: Attached as a separate document (Volume II – Annexes)*

1. Terms of Reference for the Terminal Evaluation
2. Fiji R2R Strategic Results Framework
3. Fiji R2R Project Targets
4. Post-project Exit Strategy Action Plan Status
5. List of persons interviewed
6. List of Documents reviewed
7. Lessons from Other Pacific R2R Projects
8. TE Mission itinerary
9. Synopsis of Field Visits to Communities
10. Overview of Local Administration and Community Stakeholder Engagement
11. Annual Budgets and Expenditures by Outcome
12. Signed UNEG Code of Conduct form
13. Diagram of a Whole Watershed Perspective
14. Evaluation Matrix (evaluation criteria with key questions, indicators, sources of data, & methodology)
15. TE Report Clearance Form

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APR	Annual Project Review
BD	Biodiversity
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CC	Climate Change
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CI	Conservation International
CBO	Community Based Organization
CMC	Catchment management committee
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DIM	Direct Implementation Modality
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DoE	Department of Environment
DoF	Department of Forestry
DoFish	Department of Fisheries
DoT	Department of Tourism
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FLMMA	Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas
FPL	Fiji Pine Limited
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoF	Government of Fiji
Ha	Hectare
IAS	Institute of Applied Science (of USP)
ICCM	Integrated Catchment and Coastal Management
ICM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
IP	Implementing Partner
INRM	Integrated Natural Resources Management
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KM	Knowledge Management
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area
LoA	Letter of Agreement
LVG	Low Value Grants
MCO	Multi-country Office (of UNDP)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MiTA	Ministry of iTaukei Affairs
MIT	Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport
MoWE	Ministry of Ministry of Waterways and Environment
MLMR	Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Monitoring and Evaluation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoF	Ministry of Forestry
MoF	Ministry of Fisheries
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (of carbon sequestration)

MTR	Mid-Term Review
MRMD	Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
NCWF	National Council of Women Fiji
NEC	National Environment Council
NFMV	Nature Fiji-Mareqete Viti
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NRM	Natural Resources Management
NTF	National Trust of Fiji
PA	Protected Area (as recognized in IUCN system)
PAC	Protected Area Committee
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PIC	Pacific Island Country
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIMS	Programme Information Management System
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PMU	Project Management Unit (of Department of Environment)
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PPR	Project Progress Report
RBM	Results Based Management
R2R	Ridge-to-Reef
RCU	Regional Coordinating Unit
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
RTA	Regional Technical Advisor
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SGP	Small Grants Programme of UNDP
SIDS	Small Islands Development States
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (of indicators)
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SRF	Strategic Results Framework
SVT	Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei
TA	Technical Assistance
TAB	iTaukei Affairs Board
TESSA	Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment
TF	Trust fund
TLTB	iTaukei Land Trust Board
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
USP-IAS	University of the South Pacific's Institute of Applied Sciences
WAF	Water Authority of Fiji
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wild Fund
YMST	Yaubula Management Support Team

Acknowledgements

The consultants would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the project implementation team in UNDP's Pacific office in Fiji and the Regional office based in Bangkok. The team also acknowledges the input provided by national and local authorities who took the time to participate in interviews and field visits.

1.0 Executive Summary

1. The Fiji R2R project was designed to establish an integrated multi-sector approach to biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, financial sustainability and knowledge development and sharing, with a primary focus on six catchment areas. This was an ambitious task in the face of the many institutional and managerial barriers at the national level constraining integrated approaches to ridge to reef environmental strategies, and limited technical capacity at local levels in Fiji, all of which were compounded by restrictions brought on by the Covid pandemic. The project achieved parts of all of the Outcomes except for Outcome 6 – strengthened governance for integrated natural resources management. While some local capacity was strengthened for catchment area management (under Outcome 3.2), an assessment of local capacity to implement the plans was not undertaken, and the interventions, which were led by consultants, are insufficient to declare significant capacity development. The lack of monitoring data leaves some uncertainty about output quality and sustainability in all of the project components. See Annex 3 for a summary of targets and results.

2. At least 69% of the planned activities were completed by project end (30 June 2022), and some elements for overall catchment management have been initiated involving upland land management and marine conservation with communities and government. The achievements broadly include expanded PAs with better biological baseline data, new methods to reduce invasive species, community mobilization and establishment of Catchment Management Plans and Committees, alternative livelihoods introduced and reforestation and forest management improvements at various sites along with proposed national forestry regulation improvements. About three quarters of the reforestation target (1245 ha) was achieved (although quality is unknown).

3. The R2R operational framework has yet to be fully established in Fiji as envisioned in the project design. This is mainly because the institutional and policy requirements for R2R cooperation and collaboration were never defined or addressed at the initial stages of the project, and the project's management structure was unable to provide sufficient coordination and active monitoring and field oversight of the various project activities. Too many of the implementation risks noted in the Project Document were encountered. Nevertheless, an initial process for catchment area planning has been developed and various conservation and forestry site activities have been implemented to assist in starting to address some of the issues. But the watershed-scale integrated strategies for jointly rehabilitating degraded catchment and marine areas and sustaining the results still remain to be established.

4. The Terminal Evaluation found that lengthy delays in implementation and the incomplete outputs were due to a combination of poor project planning, coordination and administration, and Covid-related constraints to undertaking the work. Lack of technical capacity, high turnover of staff, bureaucratic administrative processes were also factors adversely affecting project implementation. The general view of participants is that the project was implemented in separate activity silos without an overall R2R concept or effective coordination functions. The project design and STAR focal area funding arrangement

also affected this problem. Thematic (cross-sector) and geographic (upstream-downstream) integration were barely apparent.

5. The project has contributed to R2R environmental improvement in an incremental and unmeasured way through its many and varied activities. Integration between implementing partners and within cross sectoral issues was not a predominant feature of the project. Lack of follow-up independent inspection and response on the tree planting activities by the implementing partners appears to have been a deficiency, and there are uncertainties in communities about next steps for catchment area plans.

6. The R2R concept of a ridge to valley to reef strategy, including important spatial relationships (upstream/downstream/nearshore) and inter-sectoral relationships, was never really defined clearly in the project design or implementation. Overall, the Fiji experience suggests that the R2R concept needs to be completely reviewed, and placed on a more structured operational foundation.

Evaluation Ratings for Fiji Ridge to Reef Project

Criteria to be rated	Rating ²	Reasons for rating
Monitoring & Evaluation		
M&E design at entry	MU	No distinct monitoring plan. Indicators not sufficiently operational (e.g., PA management effectiveness). Project scope and locations complicates the wide set of monitoring tasks. No assessment of capacity or instructions for implementing a monitoring system.
M&E Plan Implementation	U	No dedicated monitoring officer with capacity to track and report on progress. GEF tracking tools not updated. No coordinated approach the limited monitoring and reporting functions. Significant results monitoring data not available.
Overall Quality of M&E	U	Annual PIR reporting based on activities completed. Insufficient empirical progress data relative to expected outcomes. (See Annex 3 which highlights the gaps in target achievement information). No quantitative database to evaluate before and after project (e.g., PA area expansion, rehabilitated forests and grasslands). ³
Implementation & Execution		
Quality of UNDP Implementation/ Oversight	MU	Unable to expedite project delivery with government after initial long delays and Covid-related disruptions. Poor monitoring and reporting system. MTR recommendations not fully addressed.
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	MS	Completed biological surveys and studies and catchment area plans and initiated community engagement, along with minor livelihoods development. Limited linkages between IPs and no overall integrated R2R strategies developed.
Overall quality of Implementation/ Execution	MU	Significant coordination and communication issues and major delays leading to underachievement of targets. Confusion over roles and responsibilities in managing and reporting on activities and results. Inexperienced project management staff. Better progress where IPs had previous relationships and programs in the catchment areas. Covid restrictions imposed implementation constraints.

² For an explanation of ratings, see Table 6, page 51

³ Note – PIRs are an annual report, not an internal project monitoring system. All GEF projects normally have a dedicated quarterly or monthly monitoring and reporting process under responsibility of an M&E Officer.

Assessment of Outcomes		
Relevance	MS	Project addresses key priorities in the catchment areas and is aligned with national and GEF objectives and programs. The importance of hydrological and SLM in affecting watershed-wide environmental and conservation issues (e.g., flooding, sedimentation) not fully recognized due to an emphasis on biodiversity and forestry interests, and absence of a broad R2R strategy.
Effectiveness	MU	69% of activities completed (June 2022); PA targets not met; management effectiveness marginally enhanced with biological surveys but capacity gaps unknown; no real progress on PA financing. 5 of 6 catchment plans completed. Communities partially mobilized. 76% reforestation targeted hectares achieved (but no data on quality). Policy development and PA financing not achieved.
Efficiency	U	Major implementation delays. Costs are high relative to outputs produced. Some plantation failures leading to added costs. Inefficiencies in advance payment approvals and issuance, creating IP activity scheduling and delivery problems.
Overall Project Outcome Rating	MU	Outcomes only partially achieved (e.g., PA management effectiveness improvement, sustainable forestry market mechanisms not achieved), little progress on Outcome 2 (PA finance) and Outcome 6 (policy development) abandoned in favour of reforestation. R2R integrated management approach not established.
Sustainability		
Financial resources	MU	No PA financing measures. Some livelihoods may be financially viable. Uncertainties about resources to continue with catchment area plans implementation.
Socio-political/economic	ML	Communities in 5 catchments have been oriented and mobilized for catchment rehabilitation activities. But leadership is variable, capacity is limited and the committees are generally uncertain about next steps.
Institutional framework and governance	MU	Surveys and plans and established working relationships with communities have provided an initial platform for local catchment area governance. But sustainability is limited by a lack of policy, no overall R2R strategy and relatively poor coordination mechanisms amongst implementing partners and across sectors.
Environmental	ML	Project activities aimed to enhance environmental quality and conservation. No adverse environment/social impacts identified. Future of local conservation commitments may be questionable. The lack of data on reforestation and rehabilitation quality and sustainability makes it difficult to assess environmental changes.
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	MU	There are a lot of uncertainties in the future implementation of the catchment area plans and the availability of national and local leadership skills and resources and essential collaborative relationships to sustain the project's modest results.

Summary of Recommendations

Six recommendations are offered from the Terminal Evaluation, with explanatory notes and implementation responsibilities in section 5.3:

No.	Recommendation	Entity responsible	Time frame
1	The Fiji UNDP Country Office and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment should coordinate and report on the remaining tasks under the Exit Strategy action plan, as documented in the 2022 Project Implementation Report, and recommend a program for further implementation of the Catchment Area Plans.	Fiji UNDP Country Office and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment	Q1 2023
2	UNDP/GEF should establish a regional Pacific technical advisory group to assist R2R projects and to provide guidance for R2R Project Implementation Strategies that need to be prepared during the inception phase of future projects.	UNDP/GEF	Q1 2023
3	The Fiji Ministry of Forests should undertake an independent review of the performance of reforestation activities in the Fiji R2R catchment areas and make program improvements based on experiences including the integration of tree planting and soil and water conservation.	Fiji Ministry of Forests	Q1-2 2023
4	The Government of Fiji should initiate a few small demonstration projects of integrated natural resources management by addressing selected priorities in some of the completed Catchment Area plans and in collaboration with Catchment Area Committees.	Government of Fiji, Ministry of Waterways and Environment	2023
5	The Government of Fiji should actively implement and monitor the progress of the Forest Sector Regulatory Framework and promote the catchment area planning process within this modernization program.	Government of Fiji Ministry of Forests	2023
6	UNDP should undertake a review of project procurement, management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation procedures consistent with results-based management principles and develop a procedures manual for future international projects. This would provide important guidance for operational improvements to UNDP's project design and management systems, especially assisting conformance with requirements for climate change financing opportunities.	Fiji UNDP Country Office	Q1 2023

2.0 Introduction

1. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) was conducted by a team of three consultants: two International Evaluation Consultants (Stuart Black and Alan Ferguson) and a National Evaluation Consultant (Laitia Tamata) based in Fiji. Because of travel restrictions related to Covid-19, the International Consultants were home-based and conducted all stakeholder consultations using remote video conferencing (Zoom). The National Consultant was able to undertake field visits to all 6 catchment sites, where meetings were held with local community stakeholders.

2.1 *Purpose and Objectives of the TE*

2. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) involved an independent review of the project, prepared in accordance with UNDP and GEF evaluation policies⁴, and the specific Terms of Reference issued for the evaluation (Annex 1). The evaluation objectives, as set out in the ToR, are to: ⁵

- assess the achievement of project results supported by evidence (i.e. progress of project's outcome targets)
- assess the contribution and alignment of the project to relevant national development plan or environmental policies
- assess the contribution of the project results towards the relevant outcome and output of the Sub Regional Programme Document (SRPD) & United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS/UNDAF)
- assess any cross cutting and gender issues
- examine the use of funds and value for money
- assess the impact of COVID-19 on the project's implementation, and
- draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming.

3. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) report provides an assessment of project results against what was expected to be achieved, along with lessons learned that are designed to improve the sustainability of benefits from the project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming.

4. The primary target audiences for the evaluation are expected to benefit from the relevant and useful information generated in support of evidence-based decision making. These organizations include: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the six implementing partners (SPC, WWF, USP-IAS, Conservation International, FLMMA, IUCN and other NGOs); as well as the main financing partners of this initiative (GEF and the Government of Fiji).

2.2 *Scope of the TE*

5. The scope of the assessment for the TE was governed by the Evaluation Criteria outlined in the terms of reference for the evaluation: **Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment and Impact.**

⁴ Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed Projects, 2020

⁵ Terms of Reference, Individual Consultant for Terminal Evaluation of the "R2R" project, 2022

6. The TE involved an assessment of the entire eight-year project period from the design and start up (2014-2016), the full period of implementation, which included two no-cost extensions (2016-2022), up until the end of project activities (June 2022). The report also covers the post-project period in examining the likelihood of sustainability (post-2022). It also considers the regional level by briefly comparing the performance of the Fiji R2R project with other ridge to reef projects in the Pacific (Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue and Marshall Islands, see Annex 7).

7. The geographic scope of the TE focused on the two levels of the project's interventions: national level and six pilot catchment sites, three on the larger island of Viti Levu (Rewa-Waidina, Tuva and Ba) and three on Vanua Levu (Labasa, Vuniviva and Tunulua, see Figure 1). The national level focused on assessing the possibilities for sustainability and linkages to relevant national policies, strategies and plans. The technical scope of the TE focused on the four components of the project: 1. Conservation of Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity, 2. Conservation, Restoration and Enhancement of Carbon Stocks through Sustainable Forestry, 3. Integrated Natural Resources Management and 4. Knowledge Management.

8. The TE was carried out from 24 October through December 2022, and will be completed by 30 December 2022. The scope included preparatory activities, desk review of documents, consultation with stakeholders, site visits and preparation of reports on preliminary findings, the draft and final TE report.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Evaluation Guidelines and Ethics

9. The overall approach and methodology followed by the TE team conforms with the requirements of the following documents and protocols: a) the R2R project document, b) the UNDAF for the Pacific Sub-region 2013-2017, c) UN Pacific Strategy 2018-2022, d) the Sub-Regional Programme Document for the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (2018-2022), and e) UNDP's Strategic Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development. The evaluation was also conducted in accordance with the principles and guidelines outlined in UNDP and GEF Evaluation Policy: United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) *Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations (2020)*⁶ and *Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects (2020)*. These documents set out a number of guiding principles, norms and criteria for evaluation in the organization, the most important of which are that the evaluation exercise should be independent, impartial and of appropriate quality, and also that it should be intentional and designed with utility in mind.⁷ Annex 12 contains a UNEG Code of Conduct form signed by the Evaluation Consultant.

2.3.2 Evaluation Methods

10. The methodology followed the Evaluation Matrix that was prepared based on the evaluation Terms of Reference provided by UNDP. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to assess project

⁶ <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866>

⁷ http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/GEF/TE_GuidanceforUNDP-supportedGEF-financedProjects.pdf

results and performance, with a central focus on the questions, indicators and data sources presented in the Evaluation Matrix (see Annex 14).

Inception Phase

11. The TE kicked off with the submission of an Inception Report by the International Evaluation Consultant (3 November 2022) following which an inception meeting was held between the UNDP team in Fiji and the International and National evaluation consultants (November 6). Minor revisions were made to the Inception Report, and changes were made to the dates of deliverables because of a slight delay in the contracting process for international and national evaluation consultants.

12. Because of Covid-19 travel restrictions, the International Consultants were not able to travel to Fiji to conduct stakeholder consultations and site visits. This resulted in the TE focusing on remote evaluation methods, which involved a greater effort on the review of documents, analysis of project monitoring reports and collection of information from key stakeholders through remote interviews.

Home-based Desk Review

13. During the desk review phase, the International Consultants reviewed a variety of documents, including the Project Document, Annual Project Reviews (APRs), Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs), project budget revisions, Mid Term Review (MTR) Report, Back to Office Reports (BTORs), national strategy documents, minutes of Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings, agreements signed by Implementing Partners, and other documents that were relevant for assessing project progress (see Annex 6).

14. It was anticipated that the TE would gather information through a combination of interviews and an online survey to about 50 individuals from a variety of representative stakeholder groups (UNDP, implementing partners, NGOs, national and local government representatives and members of the PSC). However, the team's initial enquiries received a poor response to the proposed online surveys, following which it was realized that the majority of relevant project information was concentrated in a few individuals within the implementing partner organizations (government ministries and NGOs). Instead, emails were sent to 24 interview subjects, who were given a choice of participating in a remote interview or submitting written responses to a set of evaluation questions. The majority of stakeholders who responded (12) preferred to participate in a short Zoom interview, and only two individuals electing to submit written responses. This represents a 58 percent response rate. In addition, stakeholder interviews were conducted at the local administration and community levels in all 6 catchment areas by the National Consultant (see Annexes 5, 8, 9 and 10 for a list of stakeholders interviewed). In order to ensure frank and open discussion, all stakeholders were informed that their responses (whether verbal or written) would be fully confidential.

Stakeholder Consultations

15. Given the short timeframe to cover the wide range of stakeholders, interviews with the Government and Project Management and Implementation Partners were carried out by the International Consultants, while the National Consultant focused on interviews with local administration and in the communities (see Annexes 5, 8, 9 and 10 for a full breakdown of stakeholders consulted).

16. Consultations for the TE included remote interviews with a representative sample of project stakeholders, including project staff from the UNDP implementing office in Fiji, staff from UNDP's Regional Office in Bangkok, the former R2R Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) based in Manila, senior staff from relevant government ministries, consultants who had worked on the project, community leaders and representatives from the catchment areas, and staff from several NGO Implementing Partners (Annex 5).

17. In addition, the TE team tried to gather project related data from the R2R Project Management Team and the UNDP country office by sending a series of tables and templates and requesting updated information on the progress of project activities and financial information, which was to be sent back to the International Consultants. However, the updated information requested was not provided. As a result, the TE was not able to complete the full analysis of all project outcomes and financial information (see gaps in Annexes 3, 4 and 11).

18. The National Evaluation Consultant was able to support the International Evaluation Consultants by undertaking field visits to all 6 catchment sites, holding meetings and interviews with local administration and community stakeholders and undertaking observations of project activities on the ground (see Annexes 8, 9 and 10 for a synopsis of the field mission).

2.3.3 Data Collection, Analysis & Triangulation

19. Information to support the TE was collected from a variety of sources (primary, secondary and subjective information).

Data Collection

20. Data collection tasks were assisted by a number of tools and instruments used to gather information from a wide selection of document sources, beneficiary stakeholders and implementation partners:

a) Literature review: the International Evaluation Consultants undertook an in depth review of project documents, technical studies, monitoring reports on outcome achievement, financial reports, steering committee meeting minutes, BTOR and PIR reports, among others (see Annex 5);

b) Tables on outcome achievement and financial data: the International Evaluation Consultants tried to obtain updated information from project staff by compiling tables of existing outcome achievements, training/capacity building activities, and budgets and expenditures, and asked project staff to complete the missing data (see Annex 4);

c) Interviews with a representative sample of project beneficiaries and stakeholders: The evaluation team interviewed a sample of key stakeholders about their experience with project activities, based on their level of knowledge and availability. The selection of key respondents was done in conjunction with the UNDP project management team in UNDP's Fiji Office. Other interviews were arranged based on information gathered from project implementation documents, such as consultants engaged to undertake various activities (see Annex 5).

d) An Interview Guide was used containing lead questions on several lines of enquiry related to project design, project results, implementation partnerships and management, and exit strategy/sustainability, with the aim to facilitate consistency and triangulation of responses from those interviewed. The interviews involved open-ended questions, where lines of inquiry were adapted to the context of the individuals, and focused on the important details (opinion and knowledge) of the particular respondents. The interview notes were consolidated with other information gathered, which was used to provide an assessment of the status and progress of the project toward its intended objective and outcomes. The majority of interviews involved the use of remote technology (Zoom and WhatsApp).

e) Field Visits: The TE involved a series of field visits intended to assess the activities and achievements of local interventions which were aimed at establishing integrated watershed and coastal management at the 6 pilot catchments. Field visits to Rewa-Waidina, Tuva and Ba on the island of Viti Levu and Labasa, Vunivia and Tunulua on Vanua Levu were undertaken by the National Evaluation Consultant under the supervision of the international consultants, between November 15 and 24 (see Annexes 8, 9, and 10).

Data Analysis and Triangulation

21. Data analysis was guided by the Evaluation Matrix, principally comparing the expected or targeted results to actual results, reviewing disbursements against annual budgets, and assessing respondent responses in relation to the indicators for the evaluation questions listed in the Matrix. The ability to answer the evaluation questions and to undertake the planned analyses depended on the information that was gathered and the extent to which information gaps were addressed in the interviews. The consultants used a common internal, confidential interview reporting format and common database for sharing information among the evaluation team members to assist analyses and report preparation. The consultants triangulated information by using a variety of sources and cross-checking the weight of evidence against the performance indicators. The TE GEF project rating scale is provided in Section 5.2.

Financial information

22. The evaluation team attempted to assess the financial aspects of the project, including variances between planned and actual expenditures. However, the team was unable to obtain updated financial information from UNDP. The table shown in Annex 11 was designed to enable an assessment of planned versus actual expenditures. However, in the absence the required information, it was not possible to undertake a full assessment of project finances and financial management.

23. The extent of co-financing (planned and actual) was assessed based on data provided in the project document, and various updates (eg, the PSC meeting of 2022). However, the information is not complete. In the absence of updated financial information, it was difficult to verify the many in-kind contributions by government departments and NGOs on the project.

2.4 *Limitations of the TE including Covid Restrictions*

24. The evaluation scope, design, methods and activities were influenced by restrictions on travel and face to face meetings necessitated by the Covid pandemic. The TE was also limited by the availability of key stakeholders, such as the R2R Project Management Unit, key government ministries of Environment, Forestry, Fisheries, among others who were non-responsive to emails sent requesting interviews. To compensate, the TE team gathered information from a wide variety of stakeholders, NGOs and beneficiary groups operating in a range of different sectors (FLMMA, WWF, CI, an independent forestry consultant, the Ministry of Agriculture, and communities in the six catchment areas – see Annexes 5, 8, 9 and 10 for a list of stakeholders consulted).

25. To address the limitations of relying solely on a remote evaluation approach (where consultations are confined to groups of stakeholders and beneficiaries with access to the internet) and to comply with international travel restrictions, the evaluation team included a national evaluation counterpart who conducted field missions to all 6 project sites.

26. The beneficiary reach of the evaluation was limited by time-sensitive deadlines, and by access to information through representatives of UNDP, implementing partners, NGOs, national and local government representatives and members of the PSC. Despite multiple requests to UNDP for up-to-date project data on outputs and finances, the necessary data were not provided. As a result, gaps remain in the analysis of results and financial information (see gaps in Annexes 3, 4 and 11). In order to mitigate these limitations, a greater effort was placed on the review of documents, analysis of project monitoring reports and collection of information from the project implementation team, and key stakeholders through remote interviews.

27. In addition, the evaluation team assessed the overall impact of Covid-19 restrictions and setbacks, including necessary remote adaptations, especially as these related to the sourcing of technical expertise, engagement with community members and financial mechanisms and sustainability. This line of inquiry was included in the evaluation questions, which was useful for deriving lessons and recommendations.

2.5 *Structure of the TE Report*

28. The TE report is structured to follow the outline provided in the ToR for the Evaluation. The report contains five sections: **1.0 Executive Summary; 2.0 Introduction; 3.0 Project Description; 4.0 Findings** (Project Design/Formulation, Implementation, Results (Relevance, Effectiveness of Achievement in Outcomes and Objective), Efficiency, Country ownership, Gender Equality and other Cross-cutting Issues including social and environmental standards, Sustainability, and Progress to Impact); and **5.0 Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations & Lessons**.

3.0 Project Description

3.1. Project start and duration

1. The Project was launched in October 2016 with funding of US\$7.39 million provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and substantial (in-kind) co-financing from the Government of Fiji, the private sector and NGO partners (US\$30.24 million), along with administrative and technical assistance provided by UNDP. The project is an integrated multi-focal 'umbrella' initiative which combines Fiji's GEF 5 STAR allocation under three thematic funding streams/allocation from Biodiversity (USD\$4.74m), Climate Change (USD\$2.0m) and Land Degradation (USD\$0.65m). The project is part of the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities initiative, a comprehensive approach that includes integrating water, land, forest and coastal management to preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, store carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods.
2. The Project was implemented through UNDP's National Implementation Modality (NIM), with the Government of Fiji's Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment (MLGHE) serving as the designated national executing agency ("Implementing Partner"). It was implemented with support from a number of technical implementing partners: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC); World Wildlife Fund for Nature, Pacific Office (WWF); University of the South Pacific's Institute of Applied Science (USP-UAS); Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas network (FLMMA); and Conservation International (CI) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Ministry (MLGHE), together with the R2R Project Management Unit was responsible for the timely delivery of project inputs and outputs, allocating resources, and coordination of all responsible parties, including other line ministries, local government authorities, NGOs, contractors and others. The R2R Project Management Unit (PMU), located in the Department of Environment, ran the project on a day-to-day basis on behalf of MLGHE, including overall operational and financial management, and monitoring and reporting.
3. The UNDP MCO located in Suva supported project implementation by assisting in the monitoring of project budgets and expenditures, providing support for procurement and recruitment of consultants and facilitating and streamlining various processes at the request of the MLGHE. The UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Center (APRC) in Bangkok provided technical oversight in the implementation of the project through its Regional Technical Advisor for Water and Oceans.
4. The planned duration of the project was 4 years, with an expected end date of October 2020. However, the executing agency faced multiple challenges related to administrative delays, contracting and financial disbursements, and the project required two no-cost extensions, which is quite rare in GEF projects.

3.2 Immediate and development objectives of the project and expected results

4. The project's **Development Goal** is *to maintain and enhance Fiji's and Pacific Island countries' ecosystem goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural) through integrated*

approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity and coastal resource management that contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.

5. The immediate objective is to *preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods through a ridge-to-reef management of priority watersheds in the two main islands of Fiji.*

6. This chain of results was pursued through four Components and seven Outcomes, as follows:

COMPONENT 1. CONSERVATION OF TERRESTRIAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY

- Outcome 1.1 Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas;
- Outcome 1.2 Improved financial sustainability for terrestrial & marine protected area systems

COMPONENT 2. CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF CARBON STOCKS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

- Outcome 2.1 Carbon stocks restored and enhanced in priority catchments;
- Outcome 2.2 Sustainable forest management achieved through innovative market-based schemes

COMPONENT 3. INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

- Outcome 3.1 Integrated catchment management plans integrating conservation of biodiversity, forests, land and water formulated and implemented in priority sites;
- Outcome 3.2 Strengthened governance for integrated natural resources (land, water, biodiversity, forests) management

COMPONENT 4. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

- Outcome 4.1 Improved data and information systems on biodiversity; land, forests, coastal and marine management; climate change and best practices.

Strategic Results Framework

7. The Logic Model represented by a Strategic Results Framework (SRF, see Annex 2) shows the categories of **Outputs** that were deemed to be needed to arrive at the above **Outcomes**. The Activities and Inputs provided by the various Implementing Partners and donors were designed to support the production of the necessary outputs.

8. This logic model does not fully convey an overall theory of change for a complex project such as the Ridge to Reef (see summary of project logic in Section 4.1, page 13). Nevertheless, the existing logic model provided enough of a basis against which the evaluation could measure progress. This shortcoming was recognized by the MTR, which recommended that the project improve its technical capabilities in order to meet the expected results during the second half of the project.⁸

3.3 Development and Environmental Context

9. The R2R project fits into the larger Pacific regional and Fijian environmental and development landscape, where there exists a broad set of multilateral, bilateral and civil society institutions and

⁸ R2R MTR, P. 11

project interventions designed to ***maintain and enhance ecosystem goods and services through implementing integrated approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity and coastal resource management that are designed to contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.***

10. The Ridge to Reef project was built on efforts by the Fijian Government to adopt a whole-of-government, integrated, holistic and environmentally sustainable approach through the Green Growth Framework, and building on the lessons and experiences generated from previous projects such as Sustainable Land Management project, the Integrated Watershed Resources Management, Ecosystem Based Management approaches, REDD+ readiness and forest carbon assessments, reforestation of native trees, and other relevant initiatives that key implementing partners of the project have executed.⁹ The project was an expansion of a Protected Areas project, where the concept was to improve protection by engaging communities to manage their land and watershed sustainably. See lessons from other relevant projects (the Findings Section below, page 20) and Annex 7 for a list of relevant projects in Fiji and the Pacific region.

11. Fiji comprises more than 332 islands, about one-third of which are inhabited, with a total land area of 18,333 km² in a vast marine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 1.6 M km². A significant portion of the economy is dependent on exploitation of Fiji's natural resource base especially the pelagic fisheries in its exclusive economic zone. With limited land area, Fiji experiences intense competing pressures on land resources for agriculture, tourism, transport, water and other needs. With some of the highest rainfall on the planet (typically more than 2000mm), Fiji is endowed with abundant natural water resources and indeed bottled mineral water has become a top export earner. Nevertheless domestic water supply and quality matters are common problems, exacerbated by leakages (often 50% or more losses) in poorly maintained water supply infrastructure. Improperly treated wastewater releases, poorly sited toilets and/or overuse of fertilizer in upstream communities/farms pollute coastal waters, create disease outbreaks, and contaminate sensitive groundwater supplies. Native forests are threatened by climate change and fire (although climate modeling indicates increased rainfall in the drier zones of Fiji), conversion to agriculture and most pervasively by invasive species especially by African tulip tree which invades abandoned shifting agricultural sites and open, degraded secondary forest. Forest harvesting practices, including in mahogany and pine plantations, are all too often not conducted in accordance with Fiji's code of logging practice.¹⁰

12. Extreme weather events, notably episodes of intense rainfall, coupled with cultivation on steep erodible soils¹¹ and in riparian zones and bad logging practices over many decades, have massively

⁹ R2R ProDoc, p. 78, and PSC Papers June 2018

¹⁰ R2R ProDoc, p. 9

¹¹ R2R ProDoc, p. 9: NB. Agriculture, both subsistence and for cash crops such as kava and ginger, can be conducted on moderately sloping lands with minimal soil erosion, but requires good planning, including a Keyline system and/or with bunds and vetiver, bamboo and/or pineapple belts, and preferably also with integration of trees/ agroforestry.

increased the frequency of damaging and flash flooding. Flooding has also been aggravated by poorly regulated and excessive gravel and boulder extraction in the mid and upper catchments, with the economic damage compounded by inappropriate developments and squatter settlements in flood plains. For some river systems, extreme sedimentation and reduced hydraulic capacity may need to be rectified by dredging, but such flood control measures will only be beneficial if complemented by measures to reduce soil erosion and improve infiltration (i.e. rotational cropping, reforestation, retarding basins, bunds, Keyline farming/subsoiling and other systems to slow runoff) and relocate sensitive infrastructure away from areas which will be subject to increasingly regular flooding due to climate change.

13. The R2R project was designed on the foundations of the GEF's 5 Focal Area strategies: the Biodiversity Strategy, Land Degradation Strategy, Sustainable Forest Management/REDD+ Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, and International Waters Strategy.

14. Nationally, the Ridge to Reef project is fully consistent with Fiji's national priorities and plans described in the following documents:

- 5 Year & 20 Year National Development Plan (2017)
- Green Growth Framework (2014)
- National Biodiversity Strategy and National Action Plan (2007)
- Fiji REDD + Policy (2011)
- National Climate Change Policy (2012)
- National Framework for Integrated Coastal Management (2011).

15. The R2R planning and overarching management approach was intended to be comprehensive. It aimed to cover all activities within a catchment area and out to sea to ensure natural resource sustainability and biodiversity. The six selected priority catchments¹² encompass a diverse and geographically dispersed group with markedly different environments and scales, intensities of land use and degradation, challenges and opportunities. The sites were selected to provide a suite of learning environments for biodiversity conservation (Component 1), forest carbon stock protection and increase (Component 2) and integrated natural resources management (Component 3). Broadly based Catchment Management Committees were to be established for each catchment. Some catchments (Ba, Labasa, Tuva and Waidina/Rewa) have major catchment-wide concerns such as land degradation, sedimentation and flooding. Component 4 (knowledge management) was designed to ensure that project experiences and results are properly captured and widely disseminated, and contribute to data and information systems on biodiversity, forests, climate change, and land, coastal and marine management in Fiji.

16. Within this context, the R2R project was designed to support implementation and/or upscaling of the country's priority actions, analysing and prioritising the needs of the catchment areas with respect to climate change adaptation and mitigation in priority sectors, including increasing their resilience in key livelihood

¹² Three on Viti Levu (Ba River, Tuva River and Waidina River/Rewa Delta) and 3 on Vanua Levu (Labasa River, Vunivia River and Tunuloa district).

sectors.¹³

Main stakeholders

17. The main stakeholders in the project are also the beneficiaries, represented through the Government of Fiji's GEF focal point, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment (MOWE), along with other ministries involved in implementation (Forestry, Fisheries, Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and iTaukei Affairs). The project also required technical support from two regional institutions (SPC, USP-IAS) and five national and international NGOs (CI, FLMMA, WWF, TERI, TVNI), all of which signed Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) or Low Value Grant (LVG) agreements with UNDP in order to expedite implementation. These organizations improved implementation by working under various components, outcomes and outputs, as follows:

1. Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC): Conservation, Restoration and Enhancement of Carbon Stocks through Sustainable Forestry (Component 2)
2. World Wildlife Fund for Nature – Pacific Office (WWF): Improved Management Effectiveness of Existing and New Protected Areas (Outcome 1.1)
3. University of the South Pacific's Institute of Applied Science (USP-IAS), Fiji: improved Management Effectiveness of Existing and New Protected Areas (Outcome 1.1)
4. Locally Managed Marine Areas network: Improved Management Effectiveness of Existing and New Protected Areas (Outcome 1.1)
5. Conservation International (CI): responsible for a range of activities across Components 1 to 4 involving the pilot catchment of Tuva, on the larger island of Viti Levu
6. International Union for Conservation of Nature (USP-IAS, IUCN) and other NGOs involved in empowering catchment communities to formulate their own conservation and catchment management plans through training and empowerment programmes to be undertaken by community catchments coordinators, NGOs and provincial environment/conservation officers (output 3.2.3).

3.4 Problems that the project sought to address: threats and barriers targeted

18. The key threats that the project sought to address included:

- threats to the conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity involving mangrove loss and degradation; loss and damage to seagrass beds; coral reef bleaching and decline; loss of aquatic ecosystem diversity and fisheries decline; loss of agrobiodiversity and terrestrial biodiversity;
- threats to the conservation, restoration and enhancement of carbon stocks from fire and deforestation;
- threats related to integrated catchment management and a lack of proper planning coupled with inappropriate developments and resource extraction, and bad agricultural and forest harvesting practices;

¹³ Text drawn from *Fiji GEF 5 STAR Ridge to Reef (R2R)* Project Document, UNDP Project# 00091748, GEF # 5216, January 2015.

- cross-cutting threats to the R2R project being able to achieve its objectives, notably climate change, alien invasive species and mining. The main barrier to the objectives of the project being achieved was considered to be institutional.¹⁴

19. In Fiji, the R2R approach in priority catchments was designed to address key environmental issues in an integrated manner, in part by bolstering Fiji's national system of marine protected areas through an enhanced, representative and sustainable system of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) including greater protection of threatened marine species. Negative impacts of land-based activities on these MPAs were to be reduced through development and implementation of integrated catchment management plans, including mangrove protection, the adoption of appropriate sustainable land use practices and riparian restoration in adjoining upstream watersheds as well as terrestrial PAs, restored and rehabilitated forests.¹⁵

¹⁴ Government of Fiji & United Nations Development Programme, Project Document: Implementing a Ridge to Reef approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji, PIMS 5216, Dec. 1, 2014, p.26-27 (Project Document)

¹⁵ Government of Fiji & United Nations Development Programme, Project Document: Implementing a Ridge to Reef approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji, PIMS 5216, Dec. 1, 2014, p. 1.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Project Design/Formulation

1. The Fiji R2R project was designed with ambitious intentions aiming to address key environmental issues in an integrated manner through preserving biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods.

Analysis of Results Framework: project logic and strategy, indicators

2. The critical threats, their root causes and existing and potential impacts on Fijians' traditional way of life and culture (*vanua*), livelihoods, economy, human health and ecosystems and the planned work in the six R2R catchments were described in Annex 3 of the Project Document. These included:

- threats to the conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity (Component 1) involving mangrove loss and degradation; loss and damage to seagrass beds; coral reef bleaching and decline; loss of aquatic ecosystem diversity and fisheries decline; loss of agrobiodiversity and terrestrial biodiversity;
- fire and deforestation threats to the conservation, restoration and enhancement of carbon stocks through sustainable forestry (Component 2) in the priority catchments;
- threats related to integrated catchment management (Component 3) frequently stemming from a lack of proper planning coupled with inappropriate developments and resource extraction, and bad agricultural and forest harvesting practices, leading to soil decline, loss and erosion; sedimentation and damaging floods; water quality degradation and pollution; and
- major cross-cutting threats to the R2R project objectives from climate change, alien invasive species and mining.

3. The Project Results Framework (see Annex 2) provides the main results chain:

Overall Goal: To maintain and enhance ecosystem goods and services through integrated approaches to land, water, forest, biodiversity and coastal resource management that contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.



Project Objective: To preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods through a ridge-to-reef management of priority water catchments in the two main islands of Fiji.



Outcomes:

1. Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas
2. Improved financial sustainability for terrestrial and marine protected area systems
3. Carbon stocks restored and enhanced in priority catchments
4. Sustainable forest management achieved through innovative market-based schemes
5. Integrated catchment management plans integrating conservation of biodiversity, forest, land and water formulated and implemented in priority sites
6. Strengthened governance for integrated natural resources (land, water, biodiversity, forests) management
7. Improved data and information systems on biodiversity; land, forests, coastal and marine management; climate change and best practices.



Activity Components:

1. Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas, and Improved financial sustainability for terrestrial and marine protected area system
2. Carbon stocks restored and enhanced in priority catchments
3. Strengthened governance for integrated natural resources
4. Improved data and information systems on biodiversity; land, forests, coastal and marine management; climate change and best practices.

Rating of Project Indicators

4. The project indicators were assessed from the perspective of 'SMART'* attributes. Table 1 summarizes the compliant, potentially compliant and non-compliant aspects of the indicators relative to SMART criteria. The 'potentially compliant' ratings are dependent on the context and use of an active monitoring system. The indicator quality also depends on the clarity and achievability of the expected results.

Table 1: Rating of Project Indicators

INDICATOR	S	M	A	R	T	Comment
Objective:						
Status of completion and implementation of the Fiji R2R Project Work plan						Measures activity completion. Only relevant if linked to actual objective results
Tracking Tool BD 1: Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas						Depends upon sustainability and performance factors Tracking Tools data not available
Tracking Tool BD 2: Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation						Potential bias in scoring; relevance depends on context and qualitative assessment of long-term changes Tracking Tools data not available
Tracking Tool LD 3: Integrated landscape management practices adopted by local communities						See above
Tracking Tool SFM/REDD+. Sustainable Forest Management Objective 1: Reduce pressures on forest resources and generate sustainable flows of forest ecosystem services						See above
Tracking Tool CC 5. Promote conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks through sustainable management of land use, land-use change, and forestry						See above
Tracking Tool IW 3. Capacity Building: Support foundational capacity building, portfolio learning, and targeted research needs for joint, ecosystem-based management of trans-boundary water systems						See above Tracking tool scores can be significantly affected by the short-term project expenditures effects
Outcome 1						
Outcome 1.1 Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas						Indicator appropriate but no data generated during implementation. See above.
Outcome 1.2 Improved financial sustainability for terrestrial and marine protected area systems						See above
Outcome 2						

Outcome 2.1 Carbon stocks restored and enhanced in priority catchments						Indicator appropriate but carbon stocks data not tracked during implementation
Outcome 2.2 Sustainable forest management achieved through innovative market-based schemes						Linked to measures of forest sector reform progress
Outcome 3						
Outcome 3.1 Integrated catchment management plans integrating conservation of biodiversity, forests, land and water formulated and implemented in priority sites						Integration and strategic characteristics of plans are an important part of measuring the outcome success
Outcome 3.2 Strengthened governance for integrated natural resources (land, water, biodiversity, forests) management						Capacity development measurement based on project engagements; sustainability uncertain
Outcome 4						
Outcome 4.1 Improved data and information systems on biodiversity; land, forests, coastal and marine management; climate change and best practices						SMART attributes ok, but highly dependent on a monitoring process

* SMART criteria: S= Specific, M=Measurable, A=Achievable, R=Relevant, T=Time bound

Rating of compliance with SMART criteria:

Compliant Potentially compliant Not compliant

Intervention Strategy

5. The 'Intervention Strategy' for the project was described in terms of a "fit to GEF 5 Focal Area Strategies" including the Biodiversity Strategy (Objectives 1 & 2), the Land Degradation Strategy (Objectives 1 & 3), the Sustainable Forest Management/REDD+ Strategy (Objective 1), the Climate Change Strategy (Objective 5) and the International Waters Strategy (Objective 3).¹⁶ Interventions were proposed at two interconnected levels: national (Project Outcomes 2.2, 3.1, 3.2) and catchment level (Project Outcomes 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1), and cross cutting (Project Outcome 4.1).

6. The complex and ambitious nature of the cross-sector and multi-stakeholder project design was influenced by the fact that the STAR-GEF resources did not allow for flexibility, which prompted a need to consolidate several GEF funding streams into one umbrella multi-focal project incorporating biodiversity, climate change and land degradation. In this way, the deliverables and resources from different focal areas were aligned with the source of funds: Biodiversity (\$4.74 mil), Climate Change Mitigation (\$2.0 mil), and Sustainable Forestry Management (\$0.65 mil). However, according to the MTR, the critical cross-cutting elements, such as capacity building, knowledge management, results monitoring, and communication were not well articulated in the project document and had a weak theory of change embedded in the Results Framework.¹⁷

7. The project aimed to address critical gaps and needs in biodiversity conservation for terrestrial and marine ecosystems and threatened species including the need for improved financial sustainability for

¹⁶ Ibid., op cit., 2014, p. 37; "the catchment approach is consistent with the R2R approach, and provides a convenient approach to address all of the relevant focal areas of GEF – BLD, LD, CC, SFM, and IW", ProDoc, p. 40

¹⁷ PSC Meeting minutes 2018, p. 3, and MTR p. 40

protected areas and locally managed marine areas (Component 1); enhanced ecosystem services in the six catchments, especially increased carbon sequestration in forests, including mangroves/blue carbon (Component 2), integrated catchment management approach involving improved management of water, soil and agro-ecosystem resources (Component 3), and strengthen knowledge and awareness of R2R management and technologies, and associated environmental and socio-economic benefits within the national stakeholders and local communities (Component 4). Project interventions, which are structured according to these four main component areas, were designed and developed through a participatory process facilitated by the R2R Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase and subsequent consultations with the Fijian Government, communities in the six catchments and numerous other stakeholders in private and NGO sectors.¹⁸

8. The Project Document described R2R management as an extension and enhancement of integrated water catchment management by extending the area under consideration and management to the connected coastal and marine ecosystems. Integrated approaches to natural resources management at landscape, catchment and/or ecosystems levels were in their infancy in Fiji, with only a few pilot projects, e.g. COWRIE (Towards Coastal and Watershed Restoration for the Integrity of Island Environments) in Ra Province (Viti Levu), WCS R2R project in Kubulau, Bua Province (Vanua Levu) and the Nadi River Basin IWRM project.¹⁹ Because of this lack of experience and capacity, the project required a large number of national implementing partners to deal with its wide scope, both in terms of sectors (forestry, agriculture, fisheries, iTaukei affairs), themes covered (biodiversity, land degradation, forest management, hydrology, climate change, livelihoods, gender) and geographic spread (6 catchment areas across two of Fiji's largest islands). The selection of implementing partners was undertaken through a broad consultative process, including considerable meetings, and input from Government and NGO sectors.²⁰

9. Although there is no explicit theory of change for the project, the logic model is essentially based on expanding PAs and their financial sustainability, increasing forest cover, introducing market-based forest management schemes and formulating integrated catchment management plans to be implemented by local Catchment Management Committees, with support from policy development on integrated natural resources management and better data and information systems, as a result of which:

- Biodiversity resources, ecosystem services, carbon sequestration, climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods will be maintained and enhanced in priority catchment areas, and
- Improved environmental quality, biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction and climate resilience will occur as a result of integrated R2R interventions.

10. This is a long, assumption-laden causality theory. The model for R2R and integrated NRM is still under development in Fiji, and testing this project design has helped to further highlight the major challenges ahead. The following observations and suggestions were compiled during the TE discussions:

¹⁸ Ibid., op.cit., 2014, p. 45

¹⁹ Project document p. 40

²⁰ Ibid., op.cit., 2014, p. 38

- The policy and institutional development aspects, including capacity building, which take considerable time and effort, may be pre-conditions to launching an effective R2R integrated approach and should come earlier in the sequence of activities. Setting up clear management responsibilities and coordination and monitoring mechanisms at the design and inception stage were major themes during the TE discussions.
- The role of coordination and technical support is critical in any integrated NRM strategy, as highlighted in the Mid Term Review report. There were a lot of different partners implementing the project, and aligning them toward common objectives proved to be a difficult task underestimated in the project design. Most importantly, *the linkages and processes for integrating sectors and different communities* (upland, lowland, marine) were not articulated in the project strategy or subsequent implementation phases.
- The interrelated climate change, hydrological, land use, and human drivers of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, clearly documented in detail in the Project Document, are somewhat lost in the GEF-structured components which focus on protected areas, forestry/carbon stocks, financing mechanisms, alternative livelihoods and governance/knowledge systems. The operational strategies to address these key drivers in a cross-sectoral manner are not prominent in the design.
- The conventional ridge to valley approach to watershed rehabilitation, focusing on managing hydrology and water balance beginning at the top of the catchment area and working downstream to control soil loss/sedimentation, increasing water holding capacity and groundwater infiltration and stabilizing runoff and stream flows, despite elements of sustainable land management in catchment priorities, is not apparent in the project implementation or the catchment plans.²¹
- The appropriate balance between promoting natural regeneration of vegetation and ecosystem attributes through soil and water conservation and access/harvesting restrictions, versus extensive tree planting and active forest management enhancements needs to be considered particularly in steep gradient landscapes typical of Fiji. Reforestation alone, principally to meet national tree planting targets and forest sector priorities, without companion soil and water conservation was a significant gap in the project strategy.
- The Results Framework indicators are mostly measures of activities rather than changes in desired environmental conditions or behavioural aspects leading to environmental improvement. The project monitoring and reporting was mostly based on activity completion as reported in annual

²¹ The Project Document (p.1) stated that: “Negative impacts of land-based activities on these Marine Protected Areas will be reduced through development and implementation of integrated catchment management plans, including mangrove protection, the adoption of appropriate sustainable land use practices and riparian restoration in adjoining upstream watersheds as well as terrestrial protected areas, restored and rehabilitated forests.”

PIRs. The Project Objective for example, had an end of project target described as “sound catchment management plans being implemented by multi-stakeholder catchment area committees”. Rather, the plans are the means to achieve expected results in reduced environmental degradation and improved conservation values (i.e., changes in environmental or behavioural conditions).

- The reforestation activities (Component 2) were well-aligned with the Government’s goal of planting 30 million trees in 15 years. However, this might have unduly influenced the changes in the original design (substituting policy development in Outcome 6 with reforestation) and created undue pressure to advance the national tree planting quantitative targets rather than addressing catchment area priorities.
- Some stakeholders felt that the 2014 project design should have been updated to take account of new pressures such as climate change and other priorities.

Assumptions and Risks

11. The Project Document identified the key risks as being *Low* to *Medium*. The medium risks included pressure on the environment and natural resources due to poverty, increase in population, urbanization and economic development, a lack of capacity for legal enforcement of environmental policies/ legislation and community based support, and climate change, fire and tsunami threats to terrestrial and marine resources. But it was also noted that the main barrier to project achievement was probably institutional.

12. The MTR report also noted key risks related to a lack of technical oversight, allocation and disbursement of funding, the need for a full staffing of the PMU, and for MTR interviewees, the greatest risks to project implementation included slow disbursement of project funds, the need for technical recruitment, planting in a short time, and risk of fire and weather-related disasters hindering planting.²²

13. The ATLAS risk log was not provided but some insight into risk management can be observed from the annual PIRs and Project Steering Committee meetings, where the risks were reduced from “*High*” in the early years to “*Low*” after 2020 once the project contracted IPs to implement various components.

- **2018 PIR** – Overall risk rating: *High*. Various political, environmental and operational risks noted. Discussions with UNDP and Director of Environment were undertaken to highlight the problem.
- **2019 PIR** – Overall risk rating: *High*. Financial risks relate to low delivery rate; contractual agreements executed between UNDP and 5 NGOs and one institution. Operational risks linked to delay in processing of reimbursement/ disbursement of funds from Department of Environment through Ministry of Economy to UNDP or from UNDP to Ministry of Economy to Department of Environment. Environmental risks: bad road conditions making catchment area travel difficult.

²² Fiji R2R Mid Term Review Report, 2021, p. 52

- **2020 PIR** – Overall risk rating: *Low (mostly financial)*. Financial risks: delays in the Government system to clear the disbursed funds, specifically from the Ministry of Economy to the IP, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment and to the other co-IPs. Further compounded when the Government's financial year ends, the delay is experienced for the months of June and July. Proposed that government partners make arrangements to have funds for implementation work advanced through the NGO partners.
- **2021 PIR** – Overall risk rating: *Low*. The risk assessment included (a) slow progress in Vuniva catchment due to boundary issues, the need for more regular consultation between Fiji MCO and IP senior management, the need to increase and strength project visibility, and to prepare a realistic workplan for the remaining period, strengthen IP-RPs collaboration and discuss an exist strategy. Low overall risk rating due to considerable amount of work completed in 2019 and 2020.
- **2022 PIR** – Overall risk rating: *Substantial*. no risk assessment information.
- **PSC Meetings:** The concerns over delays and administrative issues were discussed at board meetings. The recruitment problems, financial disbursement slowness, Covid disruptions and staff capacity to accelerate progress were the main areas of concern, with some efforts made to ameliorate these constraints. For example, the PSC meeting of October 2018 discussed UNDP's concern with the low expenditure, which was due to administrative delays in vetting of MoAs with Government partners, agreements with NGOs and recruitment of staff. The need to establish a Performance Subcommittee was discussed to track the development and achievement of project milestones and to proactively review and oversee the operational and financial performance of the project.

14. This design carried a very ambitious set of expectations for the project. The Project Document succinctly described the key challenges: *"The main barrier to the objectives of the project being achieved will probably be institutional: the Fijian Government has yet to implement such a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and geographically dispersed project. This R2R project will be challenging to implement and the lack of experience in such projects is a risk that can only be addressed through careful detailed planning, excellent collaboration and integration of Government department and NGO programs, recruitment of highly capable personnel and ability to adapt and learn quickly during project implementation. A further barrier is climate change which needs to be dealt with by effective, coordinated and concerted international action, but the project design has adopted implementation strategies and approaches which will go a long way to minimizing impacts on the project."*²³ The most critical assumptions affecting implementation were that (a) the government and UNDP Country Office would have the capacity to jointly coordinate and manage the array of implementing partners from government, NGOs and communities, and (b) a pandemic would not have the disruptive effect on operations that it did.

Lessons from other relevant projects (e.g. same focal area) incorporated into project design

²³ Project Document, oOp.cit., 2014, p. 27

15. The Project Document identified various projects in Fiji that were used in the design of the R2R project:

- ✓ The Pacific IWRM Demonstration Project involving integrated land and catchment management, and establishment of the Nadi Basin Catchment Committee (NBCC) provided a useful model and lessons for the planned CMCs for the R2R project, particularly for the governance structure to oversee and coordinate the implementation activities. A key lesson related to the lack of robust coordination arrangements and the need for capacity building to establish improved linkages between sectors, both formal and information including at the local and watershed planning scale.²⁴
- ✓ Community-based fisheries management projects implemented in Fiji in the 1990s were successful at integrating stakeholders into the management and monitoring of their resources, and these networks helped catalyze the spread of the Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) 'adaptive co-management' approach, which was successfully pioneered in the Kubulau District with the involvement of local Fijian communities and *qoliqolis*, conservation NGOs such as WCS, FLMMMA secretariat, WWF, CORAL, Seaweb Asia Pacific, IUCN and PCDF. This approach involved a highly consultative review of protected area boundaries and management rules in order to enhance management effectiveness and improve resilience to climate change.
- ✓ In forestry, the 2005 Rural Land Use Policy (RLUP) provided an umbrella framework for forest policy with regard to forest land use planning and sustainable use of forest resources.²⁵

Planned stakeholder participation

16. Project preparation benefited from extensive national and local input ranging from consultations with Fijian Government ministries, communities in the six catchments and numerous other stakeholders in private and NGO sectors. National implementing partners in the ministries of environment, forestry, agriculture and fisheries participated in providing baseline biological and socio-economic studies and other project inputs in a variety of relevant areas (biodiversity, land degradation, forest management, hydrology, climate change, livelihoods, gender). International and national NGOs provided much needed guidance in the catchment areas where they had been working for years and sometimes decades establishing trust and building capacity. However, leadership in the communities ended up being done on an ad hoc basis, largely because the project was implemented in such a hurried manner that the NGO/IPs did not have time to sequence activities properly or build the requisite capacity at the local level.

Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector

17. The Project Document (2014) listed at least 20 related projects in Fiji that touch on aspects of the R2R project. The Pacific Mangroves Initiative emphasized the need to conserve mangroves as key to coastal ecosystems and to formalize regional cooperation on their conservation and sustainable use. Eight projects in biodiversity involved promoting sustainable fisheries, building community governance systems, enhancing access to food, income generating opportunities and livelihoods (funded by NZ Aid, Australian Aid and David & Lucille Packard Foundation to WWF). Six projects in forestry involving

²⁴ Environmental and Socio-economic Protection in Fiji: Integrated Flood Risk Management in the Nadi River Basin, Final Report, SPC/SOPAC (funded by GEF) June 2014, p.1

²⁴ R2R Project Document, p. 25

²⁵ R2R Project Document, p. 25

environment reforestation, SFM and REDD+ and forest management FSC certification with the Ministry of Forestry and the private sector. The Project Document also lists the small number of integrated catchment management approaches and studies that have been undertaken in Fiji by the DoA Land Use Planning group, Ecosystem based management/R2R planning in Kubulau, Bua Province, Vanua Levu (WCS), COWRIE/USP and CI work in Ra Province, and Nadi River Basin Integrated Water Resources Management Demonstration Project (2014); and projects managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Strategic Planning and National Development, Ministry of Infrastructure and Works, Local Government, Housing & Environment and USP-IAS.

18. There are also new climate change programs that could be linked to Fiji's R2R projects. For example, the 2021 agreement with the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility provides US\$26M in results-based payments for increasing carbon sequestration and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

Gender responsiveness of project design

19. The Project Document outlined a range of gender issues that related primarily to the catchment areas. Section 1.3.1, *Demographic and Employment Profile by Catchment* (pg 18) described the tendency for females to migrate to urban centres for employment and education, and to move away from the difficult and arduous tasks of rural living, because of poor infrastructure/utilities, etc. Males, on the other hand, are entrusted with the traditional role of leadership as heads of households, churches, villages and land owning units and therefore enjoy a more permanent status. In the catchment management planning, the men, women and youth were separated into groups and discussions were centred on benefits or loss of biodiversity, livelihoods, health, culture and traditions, etc., which is a recognition of the different gender roles.

During the consultations for the project design field visits, it was found that the role of women that chose to remain in the catchment communities, in addition to household chores and school/child care, generally involved undertaking most of the livelihood activities around planting/tending gardens, harvesting and selling produce at markets/wholesale sources on a weekly basis (Project Document pg 51). So it was fitting that the livelihood activities under the R2R project were partly targeted towards providing women with empowerment and support for micro-financing facilities with the government and NGOs. This included alternative livelihoods such as honey and orchard production, crab fattening, etc. It was deliberate that the livelihood pursuits identified by the design team were focused on activities that would have an impact on natural resources conservation and environmental sustainability, e.g. smokeless stove, water/sanitation, composting, solar food drying, honey production, mariculture (especially seaweed, sea cucumber, giant clams) and yasi/sandalwood plantings. It was anticipated that the R2R project would create "economic empowerment, leadership and ownership" in the catchment sites for all social groups, but particularly for women, who would be assisted with capacity building and training in livelihood pursuits. As such, the livelihood component was designed to support both the environmental focus as well as the inclusive socio/economic development objectives and especially increasing the earning

capacity of women (Project Document pg 51).

20. The *Environmental and Social Screening Checklist* (Annex 13 of the Project Document) included a probing question that asked whether the project was “likely to significantly impact gender equality and women’s empowerment?”. Not surprisingly, the answer provided was “no”. This is because women are often more vulnerable than men to environmental degradation and resource scarcity, and they typically have weaker and less secure rights to the resources they manage (especially land), and spend longer hours on collection of water, firewood, etc. (OECD, 2006). Women are also more often excluded from other social, economic, and political development processes. The underlying assumption appears to be that it was considered unlikely that much progress would be made through the livelihood efforts on the Fiji R2R project.

21. Although the Project Document identified a range of relevant livelihood activities, particularly those targeting women, it did not include a way to measure how effective the gender and social inclusion activities were to be addressed during project implementation, such as through comparative income generation surveys. This is a shortcoming in the design, as there is no way of knowing if the livelihood activities were acting as incentives to further the environmental and social goals of the project. The small scale of activities also limits the measurability of results.

22. The SRF includes some measures for collection of gender disaggregated data: for example in Output 1.2.1 (Valuation of biodiversity conservation and other ecosystem services), and Output 4.1.3 (Community leaders, YMSTs, resource owners, associations (women, youth, faith-based), farmers, educators and students better informed of best R2R land-use practices through program of learning exchange visits within catchments and, to and from neighbouring catchments). However, these are listed as “project activities” and anticipated “targets”. There are no measurable indicators attached to the gender equality or women’s empowerment activities. This is a shortcoming in the project design, which should have included gender indicators under all project components in the SRF, supported by a specific plan to implement gender and social inclusion actions across all components during project implementation. The extent of involvement by the project team in monitoring appears to be limited to recording of activities that were designed to target women in progress reports, such as the establishment of mangrove nurseries by women, the purchase of benches and tables for a women’s group roadside restaurant, and the purchase of a sewing machine for a village women’s club. The project design should have included a Gender Action Plan to plan and monitor these activities.

Social and Environmental Safeguards

23. During the project design, an *Environmental and Social Screening Procedure* (ESSP) was prepared in accordance with UNDP requirements, which contained a series of questions and checklists (Annex 13 of the Project Document). However, there was no systematic field monitoring of potential adverse effects of project interventions.

24. It is clear from the Project Document that the R2R project was modelled on the Nadi Basin Catchment Committee (NBCC), where the UNDP/GEF initiative was designed to build on the experiences and lessons learned, particularly with respect to the governance structure established under the IWRM project, the CMC. In the R2R Project Document (under the *Sustainability, Replicability and Potential for Scaling up* section, 2.8), it acknowledged that the government had not allocated enough resources after the end of the IWRM project to enable the NBCC to continue to function in the planning, co-ordinating and monitoring of IWRM activities (pg. 84). Similar to the IWRM project, the CMCs in the R2R project were envisaged to be developed for those catchments only, to address the specific priorities for a particular catchment-wide approach by addressing the major economic and environmental issues of each catchment. Similarly, although the R2R project recognized the importance of the continued role of the implementing partner (SPC), the design did not factor in the continued support that would be necessary to sustain the CMCs in the priority communities (by providing an ongoing role for WWF, CI, UNDP, GEF, etc.). This is a major oversight in the project design, as it is clear that sustainability is dependent on the technical and financial support provided by the IP/NGOs for a period of 10 to 15 years.

25. The Project Document recognized the need to promote effective land use planning and management of water catchments in Fiji by mainstreaming environmental issues that contribute to conservation and sustainable development into the national strategic development plans. The lessons and outputs of the Fiji R2R project were intended to be used to inform future national planning and policies, including national development and sector plans for integrated land, water and catchment management; sustainable forest management and REDD+; wildfire control and management; sustainable fisheries and National Protected Areas Strategy and biodiversity conservation. In addition, the Project Document recognized the importance of the R2R project's technical and financial support in environmental and social safeguards and associated policies and procedures for strengthening mechanisms to achieve poverty reduction, enhance the livelihoods of communities and protect their environment. The objective of these safeguards, policies and procedures was to prevent and mitigate or minimize adverse environmental and social impacts of projects and strategies, and to implement projects and strategies that produce positive outcomes for people and the environment (pg 86).

26. The Project Document listed several strategies and key pieces of legislation that would promote environmental safeguards in Fiji: Environment Management Act 2005 (EMA); National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2010 (NBSAP), the 2011 Integrated Coastal Management Framework, the 2012 National Climate Change Policy. The project was intended to have major local environmental benefits, with a key component being biodiversity conservation – this was to include replanting and assisted natural regeneration using indigenous or native trees and shrubs only, and the control/removal of invasive alien weed trees (pg 86).

27. In addition, social safeguards were provided through the 2009 Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, the 2010-2014 Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development, the 2013 Constitution/Bill of Rights. Additional social safeguards were to be promoted in the R2R project by

actively involving communities, women and youth and their representative associations, such as SVT, in design and implementation of project activities. Land to be set aside or leased for PAs and/or REDD+ would follow the UN REDD Guidelines on free, prior informed consent (FPIC) (pg 86).

4.2 Project Implementation

4.2.1 Adaptive management (changes to the project design and project outputs during implementation)

1. The MTR recommended actions to accelerate the HACT assessments for the IP contracts. This took some time to be completed and reportedly led to interim activity financing difficulties for some of the implementing partners. The MTR also recommended a team building and monitoring results retreat, and further action to establish standard operating procedures for administrative processes (streamlined allocation and disbursement) and inclusion of monitoring elements in funding agreements with IPs. The stakeholders indicated that some action was taken to resolve the administration issues, although not to the extent recommended by the MTR. In addition, in March/April 2022 there was an end of project symposium for the communities in the north, where all the catchment committees came together to launch the management plans and share results and lessons learned. Such a decentralized workshop can be considered adaptive management, even if little critical review and reflection seems to have occurred.

2. A review of Project Steering Committee meetings indicated few significant management adjustments to respond to challenges. Regarding Outcome 6, under time pressure near the end of the project, it was decided to redirect funding from policy development to reforestation. Given the lengthy implementation start-up and delays and project extensions, it is difficult to find a pro-active management approach to implementation. A distinct lack of national coordination and the failure to clearly assign lead roles in catchment area activities were identified in TE discussions as major failures along with the slow bureaucratic administrative processes and the constraints imposed by Covid travel restrictions.

3. UNDP raised concerns about the lack of progress on the project in the October 2018 PSC meeting, suggesting that the 8% delivery rate against the overall annual budget would make it difficult to implement a 4 year project in the remaining 2 years. By April 2019, the implementation delays had not improved, and with the project's August 2020 deadline approaching, the Government's GEF Operational Focal Point in MOWE wrote a letter to UNDP requesting that the project abandon the National Implementation Modality (NIM) in favour of Direct Implementation Modality (DIM), which would allow UNDP to expedite delivery of project components, including project management.²⁶ Although the NIM modality wasn't changed, this situation prompted UNDP to get more involved in implementation by providing direct support services such as signing a series of Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs),

²⁶ Letter from Mr. Joshua Wycliffe MOWE to UNDP Resident Representative a.i., Mr. Vineet Bhatia, April 2019

Letters of Agreement (LoAs) and Low Value Grants (LVGs) with five government ministries, four NGOs and two regional institutes, which resulted in boosting the annual delivery rate to an acceptable 99% in 2020.²⁷

4. The project's NIM designation was suggested as a constraint to UNDP intervention which may have been affected by limited risk management options to accelerate progress and coordination, and UNDP's constraints on overcoming project executing agency management capacity limitations. Whatever the reason, according to participants, the management structure and processes led to confusion and delays.

5. The job of managing the delays and making key decisions to ramp up project implementation fell to the Project Steering Committee, whose membership was made up almost entirely of Permanent Secretaries from the key government Ministries involved in implementation and/or co-financing (Local Government, Housing and Energy, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Provincial Development and National Disaster Management, iTaukei Affairs, Infrastructure and Transport, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, and Environment), along with a representative from the UNDP Fiji MCO and a co-financing environmental academic institution (USP-IAS).

6. PSC meetings were held annually, and there was a provision for holding ad hoc meetings on an as needed basis. This became necessary in 2018 when three meetings were held (February, June and October) in an attempt to boost project delivery, which was performing well below what had been expected. One meeting was held in 2019 (November), two in 2020 (March and September), one in 2021 (November) and one in 2022 (July).

7. The Covid pandemic, which surfaced in early 2020, imposed restrictions on travel both internationally to and internally within Fiji. This placed additional constraints on project activities that had already been significantly delayed. NGOs and implementing partners indicated that they were not able to travel to the communities to undertake the necessary studies, monitoring visits, or to convene consultations or meetings with local stakeholders. This further delayed implementation of activities, which together with a lack of national coordination and the failure of the PSC to clearly assign lead roles in catchment area activities, led to the need for two no-cost extensions. Nevertheless, UNDP and the project team were able to quickly adjust to the new way of working remotely, by recruiting a home-based CTA, and other technical experts and consultants. Prior to the MTR, there was no CTA, the absence of which perhaps aggravated many of the problems surrounding proper management and technical leadership. Similarly, community engagement had to be undertaken using remote technology (via zoom and WhatsApp). According to the IPs interviewed for the TE, this was not very successful, and led to delays in implementation and interrupted the proper sequencing of activities: for example, where baseline, studies and implementation activities were all occurring at the same time.

²⁷ Minutes of PSC Meetings, Oct 2018 and July 2022.

8. The government commitment to national tree planting targets and other changes after 2017 project approval led to some adjustments in activity planning and adaptation to Covid and other circumstances. The technical surveys and studies also apparently influenced subsequent catchment area and reforestation plans so some adaptive management may have occurred. But the lack of a systematic and reliable monitoring system and deficiencies in national project coordination also severely inhibited adaptive management modalities. Part of the problem may have originated in an inflexible STAR allocation to GEF focal areas rather than cross-cutting watershed issues.

4.2.2 Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements

9. According to many interviewees, MOWE was not very effective in coordinating the many implementing partners, nor did the project staff have the technical capacity to understand the complexities of a Ridge to Reef project. As a result, rather than using an integrated framework, the project ended up being implemented in silos with each ministry following their sector priorities (Forestry, Fisheries, Environment, iTaukei Affairs, Rural Development, etc.).

10. During the protracted start-up period, which lasted more than two years, there were difficult negotiations with government about the terms of IP contracts and disagreements over lead roles in each activity component that caused significant delays and substantial changes in the roles and responsibilities of national and local stakeholders. For example, NGOs that had worked in the communities for decades, building capacity and trust, were concerned about the need for better coordination at the national and community levels. During the initial consultations, they expressed a need for each community to be led by a particular Implementation Partner or NGO throughout the period of implementation so as to minimize confusion. However, this was not adopted by the PSC, and as a result during implementation it was observed that in communities where an IP took the lead (WWF in Ba and Labasa, and CI in Tuva) the members were much more involved and aware (including taking ownership), while the 3 communities without a lead IP (Rewa-Waidina, Tunuloa and Vunivia) were left confused as to how the project would benefit them.

11. At the community level, the primary stakeholder participation occurred in the preparation of the catchment area plans. Although there is no record of the participants, the documents reflect local issues and priorities that resulted from community discussions. The men, women and youth were separated into groups and discussions were centred on benefits or loss of biodiversity, livelihoods, health, culture and traditions, etc. From the TE interviews and field visits, there appears to have been generally good local collaboration in the catchment planning processes. Local representatives and guides from the communities were directly engaged. In the biological surveys, MOWE PMU and line ministries in the area of research/study were invited, and in many instances, there was good participation. The survey teams camped with local communities and there were good exchanges on what some of the findings were and why the research was important, resulting in some capacity-building.

12. The participation of NGOs as intermediaries or brokers operating between the desired project results and the needs of the communities might have been better coordinated had the PSC adopted the suggestion that particular NGOs take a lead role in implementing project activities in specific catchments. Instead, participation by NGOs was done on an informal basis, based on the NGO's past experience of working a particular community. For example, none of the NGOs had worked in Tuva before, but CI agreed to work there on the condition that it was allowed to take the lead in implementation. Table 2 shows the general and sporadic allocation of various responsibilities carried out by NGOs among the catchment areas.

Table 2: Project Activities undertaken by Lead NGOs/Agencies in each Catchment Area

Catchment Area/ Lead agency	Viti Levu			Vanua Levu		
	Ba	Tuva River	Waidina River/ Rewa Delta	Labasa River	Tunulua	Vunivia
WWF (engaged to compile CMPs)	☐			☐		
CI (engaged to compile CMP)		☐				
IAS-USP (engaged to compile CMPs)				☐	☐	☐
USP-IAS (engaged to undertake scientific research to influence the management process with the communities)	☐	☐		☐		
USP-IAS (engaged to undertake biophysical and socioeconomic assessments)		☐	☐		☐	☐
FLMMA (engaged to establish CMC)			☐			

Source: TE Consultants, constructed from interviews with IPs

4.2.3 Project Finance and Co-finance

13. The project design anticipated that three quarters (75%) of the project budget would be utilized by Outcomes 1 and 2 – 40% by Outcome 1 (improved management effectiveness of protected areas, including financial sustainability), and 35% by Outcome 2 (sustainable forest management including carbon stacks). 16% was to be utilized by Outcome 3 (Integrated catchment management plans including strengthened governance), 3.7% by Outcome 4 (Improved data & information systems) and 5% by UNDP for project management (see Annex 11).²⁸

14. For the first three years of the project, expenditure was well below what was anticipated. Table 3 shows the progress of fund utilisation on the project between 2016 and September 2021. The low

²⁸ Analysis of Project Budget figures in R2R ProDoc, TE Team

utilisation rates and meagre budgeted amounts (6% in 2016, 76% in 2017 and 53% in 2018) are an indication of the executing agency's inability to both plan and utilize expenditures in the early stages of the project. The low delivery rate (measured by percentage of budget utilisation) is evidence of the very slow start to the project, which was caused by a number of factors:

1. Delayed recruitment of project staff.
2. Protracted inception phase, involving two sets of inception consultations within the communities over a year apart, which subsequently raised and lowered expectations, leaving communities confused.
3. Delayed negotiations to formalize relationships with Implementing Partners with MoAs, LoAs and LVGs, which were eventually signed between UNDP, government ministries and NGOs.

15. In 2019, UNDP intervened by signing a series of MoUs, LoAs and LVGs with five government ministries (Fisheries, Forestry, Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and i-Taukei Affairs), two regional institutions (USP-IAS and SPC) and five NGOs (WWF, CI, FLMMA, TERI, TVNI).²⁹ Following this, the project's budget and utilization rates improved considerably, where over USD2 million was budgeted in 2019, 2020 and 2021, and the project achieved utilization rates of 77%, 99% and 74% respectively.

Table 3: Fund Utilisation by Calendar Year

Year	Budget (USD)	Utilisation (USD)	Update (Nov 2022)	Utilisation (%)
2016	369,178	21,463.67	21,463.67	6%
2017	250,741	190,365.02	190,365.02	76%
2018	1,245,429	658,738.82	658,434.78	53%
2019	2,744,754	2,109,673.29	2,100,034.20	77%
2020	2,235,627	2,210,925.30	2,211,868.81	99%
2021	2,416,448	1,794,871	1,656,431.45	74%
2022	216,148	137,414	505,450.86	64%
Total	7,387,614	\$ 7,171,466	7,344,048.79	99.5%
Amount unspent/% unspent			43,565.21	0.5%

Source: PSC meeting minutes, 25 July 2022 and Nov. 2022 email

16. The decline in utilization rates in 2021 (74%) and 2022 (64%) was a direct result of the restrictions on travel and other project activities caused by the Covid pandemic, which affected implementation of project activities (recruitment of specialists to undertake studies, consultations with community stakeholders, etc.).

17. The evaluation team attempted to undertake an assessment of planned versus actual expenditures by comparing annual workplan approvals against actual annual expenditure of GEF funds in all years of implementation (see Annex 11). However, updated expenditure figures were not provided in time for the team to undertake this analysis. In the absence of the required information, it

²⁹ Minutes of PSC Meeting 25 July 2022

was not possible to undertake a full assessment of project finances and financial management. For further details see the Efficiency section (4.3.3) for an assessment of the level of utilization and co-financing.

18. The extent of co-financing mobilized (planned and actual) was assessed based on data provided in the Project Document along with updates from the PSC meeting of July 2022. The amount of co-financing mobilized by the end of the project (June 30, 2022) was much lower than anticipated. Table 4 shows that approximately 1.2% of co-financing (USD \$364,723) was mobilized relative to the anticipated \$30 million. The main reason for this shortcoming appears to be the low amount of co-financing reported by the government. However, the information is not complete, largely because co-financing was not tracked. In the absence of updated financial information, it was difficult to verify the co-financing, which were primarily in-kind contributions made by government departments and NGOs on the project.

Table 4: Co-financing Anticipated and Mobilized by June 2022

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Co-financing amount confirmed at CEO Endorsement / Approval	Investment mobilized	Materialized co-financing as of Jun 30, 2022
Recipient Government	Ministries	In Kind	26,713,803	Recurrent expenditures	166,877
GEF Agency	UNDP	In Kind	450,000	Recurrent expenditures	187,846
Others	WWF	Grants	775,180	Investment mobilized	0
Others	WCS	In Kind	359,687	(not set or not applicable)	0
Others	Institute of Applied Sciences, University of South Pacific	Grants	330,000	(not set or not applicable)	0
Others	Institute of Applied Sciences, University of South Pacific	In Kind	55,000	Recurrent expenditures	10,000
Others	Nature Fiji Mareqeti Viti	Grants	132,921	(not set or not applicable)	0
Others	Nature Fiji Mareqeti Viti	In Kind	215,421	(not set or not applicable)	0
Private Sector	Fiji Pine Ltd	In Kind	1,210,000	(not set or not applicable)	0
CSO	Fiji Locally Managed Areas (FLMMA) Network	In Kind	(not set or not applicable)	Recurrent expenditures	0
Totals			30,242,012		364,723

Source: PIR 2022

4.2.4 Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry, implementation, and assessment of M&E

19. **Design at Entry:** The Project Document and Results Framework (Annex 2) provided mostly qualitative indicators of the objective and outcomes achievements. There was no formal monitoring plan other than a general commitment to M&E in the Project Document. Some of the indicators were not reliable

measures of expected results. For example, the overall achievement of the Objective of the project was to be measured by “Fiji R2R Project Work plan being implemented on time and budget”, whereas a proper high level indicator might reflect trends in environmental degradation slowing, or environmental quality measures increasing (such as improved water quality, reduced flooding, etc.). The lack of systematic monitoring processes negated the relevance and use of the indicators. For example, under Outcome 1, it has been impossible to find information on the basic indicator: “Status of protected areas (terrestrial and marine) in terms of biodiversity conserved, size and number in the six catchments and their connected marine habitats”.

20. **Monitoring implementation:** The monitoring data was reported in annual reports and focused on activities completed. No GEF tracking tool data were generated to compare to baseline conditions, and no consistent data were available to the TE team on the quantity and quality of reforestation work. Also, the R2R Project Management team failed to appreciate the importance of managing the monitoring activities in the catchments, and did not delegate this task effectively to the IPs through the members of the PSC or UNDP.

21. In the absence of a monitoring plan and database, the TE team compiled some of the missing data (see Annexes 3 and 4) based on discussions with government officials and project stakeholders. The existence of data gaps made it difficult to measure progress and actual results. The Project Document indicated that a Project Terminal Report would be prepared in the last four months summarizing results achieved, lessons learned, problems met and areas where results may not have been achieved.³⁰ However, no Project Terminal Report had been prepared by the time of the TE.

22. **Overall assessment:** In the absence of a monitoring plan and without reliable information on indicators or details on the status of activities, it is difficult to make an overall assessment. There are some data on areas under new PAs and reforestation areas but it is simply not possible to know if environmental end conditions remain in decline, are staying the same, or are improving. Nor is it possible to determine if the integrated policy outcomes are making any progress.

23. The information reported in the annual PIRs revealed difficulties with management of the project, which as stated above begins with lack of clarity in the design: under the banner of demonstrating ‘integrated approaches’ to solve priority issues in the project watersheds, when in reality the project was simply funding activities in different sectors (biodiversity and forestry) without recognition of hydrology. No monitoring plan or systematic approach was evident. In addition, some activities on the upland and marine side were implemented by different organisations without coordination.

24. No UNDP/GEF RTA assessment was provided in several PIRs, apparently due to personnel changes or constraints on regional travel to Fiji.

³⁰ Fiji R2R Project Document, Oct. 2014, p. 100.

4.2.5 UNDP implementation/oversight and Implementing Partner execution, overall project implementation/execution, coordination, and operational issues

UNDP management and oversight

25. Insufficient national coordination, the lack of an operational framework for catchment planning (see Outcome 5 discussion) and the lack of technical backstopping limited the effectiveness of UNDP's role in guiding the project. The absence of a distinct monitoring plan or regular tracking of progress indicators on a quarterly basis were clear weaknesses in project implementation. Part-time (and remote) CTA services did not appear to have been adequate, and the recruitment of a CTA was only undertaken after this was suggested in the MTR, which aggravated many of the problems surrounding proper management, and technical leadership. Financial disbursements were very slow, taking 5 to 6 months for payments to arrive, causing some delays in implementation. Overall, UNDP oversight and intervention was disappointing, but this was understandable because Covid and staff changes did not help matters.

26. Because of the protracted delays, shifting from NIM to DIM was considered but not pursued. Such a shift might have strained the meagre resources of the UNDP MCO in Fiji, which was resorting to implementing Multi Country Projects, such as the R2R, in order to facilitate the sharing of technical advice, best practices, resources and project coordination.³¹

27. Allowing Outcome 6 policy development to be completely shifted to national reforestation activities during late stages of the project (at locations unknown to the TE) was a highly questionable decision given the lack of time available to meet the original reforestation target (1245 ha), and the complete lack of achievement at the policy level.

IP execution of the project

28. The organisation of responsibilities between the lead agency (MOWE) and the implementing partners led to some confusion, especially for the three catchments where there was uncertainty around the lead IP (Rewa-Waidina, Tunuloa and Vunivia). Inadequate national coordination limited the activity synergies between implementing partners. Some participants considered that the project ended up being implemented in silo's due to lack of an overall catchment planning processes and clarification of responsibilities and duties in each area.³² But local participation and cooperation appears to have been good, based on a review of the plans and field discussions. Collaboration occurred between some technical inputs and the planning process. For example, the scientific and technical surveys and studies undertaken by IAS-USP were presented to the Ministry of Forestry/SPC-LRD Technical Working Group and reportedly used to influence the management and reforestation plans. Five of the priority catchment

³¹ DIM vs NIM information note, UNDP

³² For example, in one area WWF managed the mangrove planting on the marine side while MoF pursued reforestation upstream with almost no coordination between upstream and downstream activities in a drainage that has major sedimentation issues. Each organisation is managing separate parts of the catchment system without direct teamwork and harmonization of interventions.

areas have completed these survey and planning processes of varying quality except for the Rewa area where no information was available.

Risk Management Performance

29. The risks to project achievements, excluding Covid, were identified in the Project Document. The management team responded to issues as they arose, although not in a particularly timely or proactive manner. The management systems were not sufficiently oriented to project coordination and communication to fully address many of the risks, as noted elsewhere in this report (see Project Design/Formulation, section 4.1 above).

30. The project document identified that the main barrier to project achievement was institutional. The MTR report also noted key risks related to a lack of technical oversight, allocation and disbursement of funding, the need for a full staffing of the PMU, and that the greatest risks to project implementation included slow disbursement of project funds, the need for technical recruitment, planting in a short time and, risk of fire and weather-related disasters hindering planting. Because of the delays and shortcomings in management by the executing agency, UNDP raised concerns about the lack of progress on the project, and there was consideration of switching from NIM to DIM. This situation prompted UNDP to get more involved in implementation by providing direct support services such as signing a series of agreements and grants with government ministries and NGOs, which boosted the delivery rate in 2019 and 2020. However, this process of solving the implementation delay took almost 2 years, half the duration of the 4 year project. The PIRs had “High” risk ratings in 2018 and 2019 for operational risks related to delays, low delivery, and weather-related conditions with respect to travel to the communities. By 2020, the PIR had lowered the financial risk to “Low” due to considerable amount of work completed in 2019 and 2020. But this protracted process came at a great cost to the project’s sequencing of activities and the overall sustainability of outcomes.

31. Clearly there were missed opportunities by the executing agency, UNDP CO and the project steering committee in managing the risks in an effective, efficient and timely manner. However, the biggest risk to the project, Covid, was managed in a much more prudent way, with all parties recognizing that they had to adopt new techniques and technologies to manage the project’s activities. The appearance of a global pandemic likely played a key role in GEF approving two much needed no-cost extensions. Without this, it is highly likely that the project would have failed.

32. Allowing the transfer of funding from a critical policy outcome (#6) to be used for planting trees to meet an immediate government target was a major risk to the achievement of the longer term objectives of the project, particularly those associated with integrated natural resource planning and management.

4.3 Project Results

4.3.1 Relevance

33. The project is highly relevant to Fiji's needs in preserving biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods. The project was highly ambitious with interventions implemented at two interconnected levels (national and catchment area), which was intended to improve management effectiveness of protected areas, improve financial sustainability for protected area systems, restore and enhance carbon stocks, and strengthen governance for integrated natural resources management, along with a cross-cutting element of improved data and information systems on biodiversity; land, forests, coastal & marine management; climate change and best practices.

34. The catchment area plans highlight the issues and priorities in each area and the relevant challenges facing sustainable natural resource management. The plans describe the key local R2R related concerns identified such as:

- 1) Sustainable Forest Management and Sustainable Land Management Practices (Consultations and training on land use plans conducted with communities, sustainable forest harvest practices, replanting, ban burning, restrict gravel extraction near rivers; Encourage organic farming and pesticides; Livelihood opportunities for community)
- 2) River Care and Water Management (Community consultation and awareness on water use and water management, riverbank restoration and monitoring)
- 3) Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR plans, trained on alternatives and climate resilient crops)
- 4) Capacity building was identified as a need, but actions were not specified.³³

35. While the project was aligned with national priorities, GEF objectives, and local priorities, there were some deficiencies in the design that affected implementation. At the national level, the project concept was to scale up prior focused GEF work and good practices in Fiji, which as indicated above involved the COWRIE project and a few others. It was suggested that implementation would have been more successful if it involved building on this previous work in the same catchment communities. However, the final scaled up version of the project involved focusing on some new catchment areas that did not have prior experience with the multi-focal and integrated concepts. For example, this was the case in Tuva where none of Fiji's conservation NGOs had experience, but CI agreed to take on this area on the condition that it be allowed to lead the implementation process.

4.3.2 Effectiveness

Objective achievements

36. The planned Objective level results are reported in terms of the activities completed under each of the Outcomes.³⁴ The original targets included six catchments with sound catchment management plans, the rationalization of FLMMMA system and enhanced management and protection of LMMAs in Ba (153,180 ha), Labasa (142,300 ha), Rewa (15,510 ha), Tunuloa (70,940 ha), Tuva (970 ha) and Vuniviva (13,200 ha) and totaling 396,100 ha (covering mangroves, seagrass meadows and coral reefs), integrated landscape

³³ Labasa Catchment Management Plan, p. 15

³⁴ Source: Fiji R2R Mid Term Review Report, 2021, p.40-43.

management practiced by local communities across all six catchments (approx. 240,000 ha), key stress reduction: 17,295 ha mangroves better managed, protected and restored; and 239,334 ha in six catchments under catchment management plans. The amount of Co2 equivalents from emissions avoided and additional carbon sequestered (direct project lifetime) is 2,580,117 tonnes, etc.

37. The reported results were: sound catchment management plans, multi-stakeholder catchment management committees successfully operating in four of the five catchments with plans (exceeding the target), improved management of existing PAs and LMMAs, and expansion of PA system, etc. (see 2022 PIR), the reported Objective results also presented under each Outcome.³⁵ Targets such as “up to 20% of degraded grasslands (16,322 ha) recovering through reduction in fire” and other quantitative measures were not tracked in a monitoring system (there was no apparent formal monitoring system except for annual PIRs). It has not been possible to determine the level of targets achievement in a specific manner due to the lack of data. Nevertheless, the level of activities completed contributed toward partial achievement of the objective.

Outcome Achievements

38. Outcome 1: PA Management Effectiveness: Targets were listed in the Project Document as:

- Three new terrestrial protected areas (9,200 ha) and six enhanced MPA/LMMAs (IUCN Category VI) (387,200 ha) and one new LMMA of 9,700 ha. The TE team is uncertain whether this was achieved or not.
- Two additional comprehensive BIORAP assessments, Management plans developed and implemented for each PA.
- Comprehensive valuation of biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services undertaken for Waidina (viz. Sovi basin PA, Wainavadu catchment) and Rewa Delta mangroves and seascape PAs.
- Rapid Assessment of Ecosystem Services for new/enhanced marine and terrestrial PAs in Ba, Labasa, Tunulua, Tuva and Vunivia catchments (this is different from the end of project target, shown in Annex 3)

39. The project was able to establish some new protected areas and some MPAs/LMMAs were reportedly ‘enhanced’ and developed, but no data were available. The Tunulua community did not allow any biological surveys to be conducted so it was not possible to establish the proposed 4400 ha PA. An assessment of PA management capacity and operations was not completed and no METT tracking tool data are available so actual achievement of these aspects is unclear. Nevertheless, catchment plans should strengthen the management processes in the communities.

40. At least one comprehensive BIORAP assessment and various other biological surveys were completed (two were originally targeted: Tuva PA in Year 1 and Natewa/Tunulua IBA). The biological surveys and Catchment Area plans and other biodiversity related activities were assumed to represent this outcome

³⁵ The Mid Term Review report also noted: “The GEF PIR system reporting is against the wrong objective-level indicators.” P.50.

as presented in the PIR progress report for this outcome (see Annex 3). Monitoring data on progress and results per the Results Framework have not been easily available.

41. Based on trials in the Waidina Catchment on eradication of African tulip control by Ministry of Forestry Silviculture and Research Division (SRD) and IAS–USP, these methods identified were used to improve 150 hectares of standing forests in the buffer zone of the Sovi Basin Protected Area. Villagers were taught the methods to eradicate the African tulips, and this capacity remains in the villages.

42. **Outcome 2: PA Financial Sustainability:** The planned results included valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services for Sovi Basin and one seascape PA, and a user fee system developed and pilot tested for one marine PA/LMMA (Tuva-Natadola). The reported results were:

- Tuva Catchment: Conservation International contracted Nature Fiji Mareketi Viti to conduct the ecosystem valuation using the TESSA methodology.
- Consultation for Ecosystem Service Valuation was conducted by the Ministry of Environment to attain information from resource owners from Tunuloa, Dogotuki and Labasa on the uses, importance and what the ecosystem provides to the community.

43. **Outcome 3: Carbon Stocks Restoration/Enhancement:** The project end targets were to have 1,305 ha of new plantings and 600 ha of rehabilitated forests (480 ha est) and grasslands (120 ha est). In addition, an area totaling approx. 16,000 ha in fire-prone catchments (Ba, Labasa, Tuva) were to regenerate scrub/woodland/forest following education and awareness campaigns to reduce burning and promotion of assisted natural regeneration. The long-term target for reforestation in the six R2R priority catchments is 20,000 ha.³⁶

44. The actual results as reported in the PIR June 30, 2022 were 1,245 ha planted (95% of the 1,305 ha target).³⁷ No data on forest and grassland rehabilitated, or on natural regeneration in fire-prone catchments. The reforestation plantings were reported as follows:

- Ba Catchment – 246.70 hectares planted out of 270 hectares target (89%)
- Labasa Catchment – 210.70 hectares planted out of 270 hectares target (78%)
- Waidina Catchment – 159 hectares planted out of 180 hectares target (88%)
- Tunuloa Catchment – 98 hectares planted out of 90 hectares target (109%)
- Vunivia Catchment – 2.6 hectares planted out of 75 hectares target due to unresolved problem in Vunivia when the Matagali³⁸ of Namako village withdrew their support to the project
- Tuva Catchment – 227.5 hectares planted out of 360 hectares target (63%), replanting needed due to low survival rate (60-70%) on the initial plantings
- Rewa delta – 30 ha of Mangrove Demonstration Stands.

45. The project completed about 76% of the planned 1245 ha reforestation as of June 30, 2022. No data

³⁶ Source – PIR 2022; the 20,000 ha reforestation figure was probably meant to include forest rehabilitation

³⁷ Similar figures were reported in the IAS SPC/LRD Technical Report, October 2021 to December 2021. Another 13 ha associated with coconut planting on Rewa Is has not been included in the figures.

³⁸ Land owning clans are known as *mataqali*

on forest and grassland under natural regeneration were available. The seedling survival and growth rates have not been verified for the completed plantations.

46. On Timber Stand Improvement, the project completed the treatment of 150 hectares of second growth forest within the Waidina Catchment using the guidelines for the eradication of African Tulip developed by the Silviculture Research Division of the Min. of Forestry. Workshop/trainings provided to communities engaged to do the treatment. Another 5 ha was completed in Labasa catchment. IAS reportedly undertook one-off stand improvement activities in secondary forests (planned at a rate of 50 ha per year in Years 2, 3 and 4), including removal/cutting of African tulip and cutting of overtopping vines – wadamu (*Merremia peltata*). In Tunola district eradication of African tulip in 150 hectares of forest stand have been treated.³⁹

47. There was little consistent data on tree seedling survival rates. Some notable low survival rates in Tuvu catchment were reported (<30%⁴⁰), along with estimates ranging from 45-70% in Tunulua catchment.⁴¹ But typical survival rates for seedlings in most of the plantations were said to be around 80% although no actual data were provided; the reference standard set by Ministry of Forests is not known. Tree seedlings survival rates within the coastal area of Ba Catchment had limited success with low survival rate and only 0.145 ha established. The project raised a total of 9,000 seedlings in a nursery set up by women in the community. Follow-up monitoring, gap filling and weeding and other maintenance were a noted concern during the field evaluation.

48. Establishment of Forest Carbon Sample Plots occurred at 7 Permanent Sample Plots (PSPs) in Labasa Catchment and 8 plots in Tunulua Catchment established. Leaf litters and ferns analysed by SPC-LRD and soil carbon by USP-IAS with lab analysis done in New Zealand. This activity is expected to be continued by the Ministry Forestry as part of the REDD+ Program and the National Forest Inventory Programme of the Ministry.

49. Little data on mangrove plantation were available. The Institute of Applied of Applied Sciences had of 2020, 24.5 out of 30 hectares have been planted.⁴² The total estimated area of mangrove/coastal rehabilitation, based on available data) is approximately 30 ha (see Table 5).

50. Table 5 provides estimates of changes in carbon stocks for the native forests and mangrove reforestation completed by the project (based on assumptions of average carbon stocks used in the baseline 2014 assessment). The estimated 945 ha of native and mangrove forests that were added by the project are best guesses from available reports because there were no basic monitoring data provided by the project. The 2014-2022 comparison shows that the project created less than a 0.5% increase in total

³⁹ IAS, SPC/LRD Technical Report, 1 October – 31 December 2021, p 9.

⁴⁰ Kelera Wesele, Back to Office Report (BTOR), UNDP, Pacific Office in Fiji, 21 Aug 2019.

⁴¹ Fane Cinavilakeba, Back to Office Report (BTOR), UNDP, Pacific Office in Fiji, 13 Dec 2021.

⁴² The Institute of Applied of Applied Sciences, Fiji Ridge to Reef Project, Quarterly Report, Reporting Period: 1 October to 31 December, 2020, p.1

native and mangrove forest carbon stock from the baseline conditions (this estimate excludes carbon stock changes from natural regeneration of trees, shrubs and grasses).

Table 5

Estimated forest carbon stocks in native forests and mangroves in priority R2R catchments 2014-2022

Fiji R2R project catchment area	Native forest area + area planted	Average native forest carbon stock*	Total native forest carbon stock	Mangrove area + area planted	Average mangrove carbon stock	Total mangrove carbon stock	Total native and mangrove carbon stock
<i>parameter</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>CO₂ MT eq/ha</i>	<i>CO₂ MT eq</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>CO₂ MT eq/ha</i>	<i>CO₂ MT eq</i>	<i>CO₂ MT eq</i>
Ba 2014 Ba 2022	28,939 + 246.7	153	4,418,985 5,775,000	4,594 +0.145	851**	3,909,494 3,909,617	13,753,959
Labasa 2014 Labasa 2022	8,890 + 210.7	181	1,608,201	3,000	851**	2,553,000	5,559,531
Rewa delta Rewa - 2022	2,943 + 0	175	515,025	8,636 +30	1,703	14,707,108	15,222,133
Rewa-Waidina 2014 Rewa-W. 2022	49,397 + 159	172	8,491,344	0	.	0	8,491,344
Tunuloa 2014 Tunuloa 2022	5,493 + 98	322	1,769,295	<10	N.A	N.A	1,769,295
Tuva 2014 Tuva 2022	1,780 + 228	153	271,806	710 0 est.	851**	604,210	3,469,554
Vunivia 2014 Vunivia 2022	4,298 + 2.6	229	982,523	355	851**	302,105	1,284,628
TOTAL	101,740 102,685		18,057,180 18,227,444	17,305 30.1		22,075,917 22,076,040	49,550,444 102,715
% Change	0.928		0.942	0.173		0.002	0.474

Sources: 2014 Fiji R2R Project Document, Table 7; and Reported areas of native and mangrove reforestation (native forest and mangrove areas) completed by the project to June 30, 2022.

* Based on data collected from permanent sample plots within the respective catchments and plots adjoining the catchment with similar environmental conditions

**Conservatively estimated at half the carbon stock for Rewa mangroves, with mangrove carbon stocks connected to these catchments to be assessed during R2R project. (not completed)

51. In spite of the flurry of planting activity, there is no geographic integration of project activities; each organisation is managing separate parts of the catchment system without teamwork and harmonization of interventions. For example, WWF managed the mangrove planting on the marine side while MoF pursued reforestation upstream with almost no coordination between upstream and downstream activities in drainages that have major sediment transport and sedimentation issues.

52. Outcome 4: Sustainable Forest Management Market-based Schemes: This outcome focused on Forest Policy and Related Legal and Regulatory Frameworks. The project end targets included updated forestry legislation, leading to Fiji's key forest assets permanently protected and gazetted and providing

an optimal range of services and products for resource owners, the general population, forest industry and Government. International certification of sustainable forestry was to provide market-based schemes.

53. The Project has provided inputs into the sustainable development and management of Fiji's forests through the development of related legislation, policies, strategies and regulations. South Pacific Community Land Resources Division, (SPC-LRD) in collaboration with the Ministry of Forests engaged consultants to undertake the following activities:

- Review of the Code of Harvesting Practices and Enforcement
- Development of Monitoring Protocols (MRV) and trainings
- Development of Sandalwood Regulations
- Finalize Forest Genetic Resources Action Plan
- Review of Sawmill Regulations and Treatment Plants
- Development of a National Rural Forest Fire Management Strategy
- Proposed Amendment to the Fiji Forestry Law.

54. Included in the new framework is a Co-regulatory Framework to promote a more responsible and accountable forest industry that has greater expertise and capacity to comply with regulatory requirements.⁴³ It expects to reduce the cost of governmental regulation and allow the Ministry to move away from 'hands-on' control and focus its limited resources on higher level support (including research, training and education), monitoring and enforcement of sustainable practices.

55. Forest Certification support involved workshop/trainings and awareness campaign among stakeholders on the process/steps involved to secure certification from FSC and benefits of forest certification. A gap analysis report vital to the Certification process of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited was presented on 24 June 2022.

56. It is hoped that the new regulatory framework will lead to better environmental outcomes within catchments and contribute to enhanced conservation of natural and cultural values, both directly within forests being managed for wood production and indirectly by providing linkages and management regimes that complement the maintenance of habitat, ecological health and genetic diversity within protected areas and across the broader landscape. However, a more direct commitment toward integrated catchment area management arrangements between MOF and other agencies and organisations may be needed in the implementation of this framework.

57. Outcome 5: Integrated Catchment Management Plans: The catchment management plans are one of the highlight accomplishments of the project. Although formats and strategies vary between the five plans

⁴³ This is expected to reduce the cost of governmental regulation and allow the Ministry to move away from 'hands-on' control and focus its limited resources on higher level support (including research, training and education), monitoring and enforcement of sustainable practices. See draft forestry code of practice and regulations produced by the consultant under Outcome 4.

that have been produced, the extensive participation with stakeholders appears to reflect meaningful issues and priorities in each catchment. The end target was to have four priority area catchment management plans⁴⁴ integrating biodiversity, forests, land and water formulated and being implemented; five were produced. The resulting outputs were:

1. Ba Catchment Management Plan, facilitated by WWF
2. Tuva Catchment Management Plan, facilitated by Conservation International
3. Tunuloa-Natewa Penninsula Catchment Management Plan, facilitated by Institute of Applied Sciences, University of South Pacific
4. Unuloa-Natewa Penninsula Catchment Management Plan facilitated by Institute of Applied Sciences, University of South Pacific
5. Dogotuki Catchment Management Plan, facilitated by Institute of Applied Sciences, University of South Pacific
6. Rewa-Waidina did not complete a management plan but a catchment management committee was established, facilitated by Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA).

58. Biological assessments of terrestrial and marine resources, socio-economic and demographic surveys were conducted and integrated in the development of an integrated catchment management plan for each selected priority sites.

59. The organisation and approaches to planning varied between the catchment areas. Initial ideas to clearly allocate catchments to implementing partners and to adopt more consistent area planning processes and activities and close communication between IPs did not proceed. The project did not have an overall framework and process for catchment management planning, and Covid and continuous staff changes aggravated the communications around the catchment planning. Nevertheless, there was good involvement of stakeholders in the somewhat ad hoc processes, and the plan preparation processes appear to have utilized the important technical and scientific surveys and studies that were prepared for the project (despite a general neglect of hydrological processes).

60. Proposed strategies in the plans include a) process actions, such as clarifying roles and responsibilities, management procedures, bylaw enactment, leadership training, etc., and b) physical actions, such as land use controls, agricultural practices, logging restrictions, erosion control, riparian restorations, etc. Land uses that conflicted with traditional structure of communal governance were a particular concern. Catchment Management Committees are reportedly empowered to pursue implementation and monitoring of the plans. However, this remains to be seen depending on available resources and ongoing commitments.

61. Success in establishing catchment management plans and the ongoing management of project activities by the committees entails utilizing existing local governance systems to review current and potential roles and functions in the relay and dissemination of information by respective project partners

⁴⁴ This target (Annex 4) of 4 plans seems to be inconsistent with the Project Document expectations.

and stakeholders. As highlighted in Vunisea (2020) report, “there are existing resource mechanisms and governance structure that requires strengthening in partnership and participatory role in communicating the short- and long-term goals of the project. Capitalising on these supportive platforms would ensure mutual agreements and understanding of actions plans, in particular, to land owning communities with identified degradation sites.” These supportive platforms are namely the: Nadroga/Navosa Management Yaubula Support Team (NNYMST) and the i-Taukei Affairs both of which are champion focal points of good governance, conservation of natural resources, income generation and resilient communities (Vunisea, 2020).⁴⁵ In addition, NGOs indicated that they have spent 10 years in some cases working in the communities, building trust and capacity. This was not the case in some communities (Tuva), which CI agreed to take provided it was able to take the lead in implementation.

62. Despite the good participation and documentation of issues and priorities, the end result scenarios and the strategies to achieve them, including capacity building actions needed, were not well defined in the planning processes particularly from a multi-sectoral and upstream-downstream perspective. In addition to this, there was limited guidance on an integrated approach to catchment area planning, and the designs were heavily influenced by the Government’s goal of planting “30 million trees in 15 years”. The lead agency in three catchments (Rewa-Waidina, Tunuloa and Vunivia) was MOWE and according to TE interviews, the local communities were less certain about how they would benefit from the project. In the other catchment areas, WWF (Ba and Labasa Catchments) and CI (Tuva) were allocated catchments to lead implementation, and as a result these communities were much more involved and USP-IAS more engaged to provide technical scientific research in support of the planning process. There was no Rewa Catchment Management planning process although the local committee has been established under FLMMA’s guidance.

63. Outcome 6: Strengthened Governance for Integrated NRM: The original plan proposed as an interim measure to “strengthen DoE/NEC with new/additional NBSAP type model to encapsulate land, water, forests and fisheries conservation under its structure. Empowerment to TAB with additional resources. It has mainstreamed environment into its provincial operation e.g. Provincial Conservation officers and YMST.”⁴⁶

64. This outcome target was not understood or pursued by the government and implementing partners. The uncertainty about a national integrated natural resources management policy along with overall delays in project implementation and lack of time to develop policies led to abandoning this outcome. Instead, a management decision was made to focus on the activities of Outcome 2.1 “due to the fact that this was long lasting and it got the support from the Fiji Government because of its 15 million trees reforested mandate.”⁴⁷ It was expected that this policy aspiration would be pursued after the project.

⁴⁵ Tuva Management Plan, 2020, page 20

⁴⁶ ProDoc, page 75

⁴⁷ PIR 2022, p.25

65. Outcome 7: Improved Data and Information Systems: The planned result was to have key decision makers in Fiji Government, relevant professionals in concerned Departments, NGOs and private sector well informed on approaches, needs and benefits for integrated catchment management, biodiversity conservation and development of forest and blue carbon stocks through the R&D activities of the project, and through a well-formulated and implemented KM protocol and communications strategy

66. The concept of integrated approaches to natural resources management (NRM) and environmental management has been introduced in a general way through the Catchment Area Management Plans. This involved multi sector and multi-stakeholder inputs into strategic program plans for local Catchment Area Committees to oversee. The reported result has been a project website and project materials distributed. The project has nevertheless created awareness about the various issues facing the catchment areas and the need for cooperation to address these issues.

4.3.3 Efficiency

67. The project delays, some of which were related to lengthy government and community approval processes, were the major source of inefficiencies. Others may have been related to institutional constraints that might have been recognized early, such as in the Tunuloa catchment where the Tui Cakau community did not allow any biological survey in the Cakaudrove marine areas. Other constraints may have related to capacity and Covid-affected conditions and travel restrictions. For example, only seven out of thirteen villages within Tunuloa catchment had submitted documents on their gazetted MPA as of June 30, 2021⁴⁸ and the current status of PA legal designation is unknown.

68. Table 2 (page 28) shows the low utilization rates and meagre budgeted amounts in the first three years (6% in 2016, 76% in 2017 and 53% in 2018), which was an indication of the executing agency's inability to both plan and utilize expenditures in the early stages of the project. This supports the above findings on the very slow start to the project, which was due to delayed recruitment of project staff and protracted negotiations with IPs to formalize agreements. As indicated above, once the agreements with IPs were signed, largely through the intervention of UNDP, the project's budget and utilization rates improved considerably. In 2019, 2020 and 2021 over USD 2 million was budgeted, and the project achieved utilization rates of 77%, 99% and 74% respectively. As mentioned above, the declining utilization rates in 2021 (74%) and 2022 (64%) were most likely a result of the travel and other restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic, which affected implementation of project activities (recruiting specialists to undertake studies, consultations with community stakeholders, etc.).

69. In addition, the amount of co-financing mobilized by the end of the project (June 30, 2022) was much lower than anticipated, approximately 1.2% (USD \$364,723) of the anticipated \$30 million. The low amounts of co-financing reported by the government and NGO partners is an indication that co-financing has not been sufficiently tracked.

⁴⁸ UNDP/GEF, Project Implementation Report (PIR), June 30, 2022.

70. Some comments were received during the TE about the slow process of accessing project funds, via Ministry of Economy, then to Ministry of Environment GEF focal point and then to the implementing partner, a process that can take several months.

71. The project was also constrained in bringing in international specialists due to the COVID restrictions, which also played a part in delaying the biological assessments, although all were eventually completed as planned.

72. The larger cost-effectiveness and value-for-money questions relate to the project design assumptions and the failure to analyse ridge to reef drainage as a whole and in context with the degradation drivers in a systematic rather than on piecemeal sector by sector basis. The appropriate type and sequence of treatments need to be guided by an understanding of the inter-related upstream-downstream hydrological functions (see discussions under Outcome 6: Catchment Area Plans). Given the well-documented issues in the Project Document and the draft Catchment Plans, what are the most efficient means of addressing them in the ridge to reef system? For example, it may have been more cost-effective in some catchments to invest in reducing the intensity of open livestock grazing on steep headwater hillsides⁴⁹ than to plant more trees in the lowlands. An integrated approach can lead to more strategic and cost-effective allocation of resources aimed at desired ecosystem service end results.

73. Poor tree seedling survival rates create added costs for replanting. Total area of reforestation completed was three-quarters of the target yet available budget was increased with the shift of Outcome 6 to reforestation. Costs relative to reforestation outputs need to be examined in order to improve efficiency.

4.3.4 Country ownership

74. The extensive participation in preparing catchment area plans contributed to a high degree of local ownership. Follow-up assistance and direction on implementation was considered a critical aspect of maintaining support and momentum for the plans.

75. Communications were an issue for many participants and likely affected the level of engagement. “Continuous and regular monitoring, awareness and consultation with communities by the project team and responsible party to support and inform decisions to be made by communities on the demonstration project” was a typical comment in the field reports. This aspect was considered deficient by many of those interviewed. However, the community engagement appears to have generated considerable local support for the project and ongoing implementation of the plans, contributing to ownership, at least at the catchment level. However, continued community ownership is highly dependent on the follow-up activities to be provided by NGOs and sector ministries (Forestry, Fisheries and Agriculture).

⁴⁹ E.g., through a variety of possible rangeland recovery strategies such as social fencing, live fencing, cut and carry, stall feeding incentives, and enhanced fodder systems, etc.

4.3.5 Gender Equality

76. As indicated above (Project Design/Formulation, section 4.1), although the project document identified a range of relevant livelihood activities, particularly those targeting women, it did not include a way to measure the effectiveness of the gender and social inclusion activities in the project, such as through a survey of income effects. This is a shortcoming of the project, as there is no way of knowing if the livelihood activities are acting as incentives to further the environmental and social goals of the project. In addition, there were no measurable indicators attached to the gender equality/ empowerment activities, and the PMU's role was limited to recording activities designed to target women, such as the establishment of mangrove nurseries by women, purchase of benches and tables for a women's group roadside restaurant, and purchase of a sewing machine for a village women's club. The lack of monitoring information made it difficult for the TE to assess the extent of livelihoods in meeting the gender equality goals established for the project. Interviews with IPs revealed a range of livelihood activities (such as nurseries selling seedlings to the government), however, without data on income effects, the impact of these activities could not be discerned.

77. The MTR noted a lack of gender-focused activity and indicated that there was a need to build capacity for addressing gender and structural inequality through implementation. It was recommended that UNDP provide a range of technical support to the PMU (to design activities for training and capacity building activities for gender inclusion and structural inequality in land use planning) and in the communities including coordination, gender equality and livelihoods project ideas, monitoring planning, capacity development and training and knowledge management strategies to help guide the work planning and cross-cutting areas for results (MTR pg 18). However, discussions with IPs and with community groups revealed little evidence of the "economic empowerment, leadership and ownership" that the R2R project was supposed to create in the catchment sites,

4.3.6 Social and environmental standards and other cross-cutting Issues

78. The main adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts identified in the TE have to do with missed opportunities by the project's executing agency. As indicated above (Project Design/Formulation, section 4.1), although the R2R project recognized the importance of involving the implementing partners (WWF, CI, UNDP, GEF, etc.), an ongoing role for these partners was not factored into the needs of the CMCs in the communities. It was known from previous projects that sustainability was dependent on the technical and financial support provided by NGOs for a period of 10 to 15 years.

79. In addition, although it was recognized that the lessons and outputs of the Fiji R2R project would be used to inform national NRM plans and policies (including national development and sector plans for integrated land, water and catchment management) the project elected to defer many of these policy outputs in favour of meeting the government's short term objectives of planting 15 million trees in 15 years. This is a major omission on the INRM policy front. Similar opportunities were missed in strengthening the necessary capacities in the various levels of government (central, local administration and community levels) because of project delays in the first 3 years of implementation which led to the

need to rush activities to complete them before the end of the project.

80. The utilization of traditional knowledge was mentioned as an under-recognized element in catchment management. The catchment area plans do not explicitly consider biodiversity and ecosystem-based climate adaptation within reforestation. Also, as noted elsewhere in this report, monitoring information is lacking details on the extent of environmental and social achievement.

4.3.7 Sustainability: financial, socio-economic, institutional framework and governance, environmental, and overall likelihood

Financial

81. The expectation of payments for ecosystem services and other sources of potential finance to maintain PAs and other programs has not been realized. Some gap analysis on market-based incentives for sustainable forestry has been completed but forest certification premiums will take much more time. Minor financial sustainability could occur with a few of the alternative livelihoods such as honey and orchard production although there are no data on income effects. Overall, however, the likelihood of financial sustainability for project outputs is Low.

Socio-economic

82. The commitment of local communities to maintain the expanded PAs, reforested areas and resource harvesting restrictions may vary with local circumstances and leadership of Catchment Area Committees. The increased public awareness of and support for environmental action suggests that sustainability likelihood is Moderate.

Institutional framework and governance

83. The scientific studies and biological surveys and related engagement of national and international NGOs has assisted the momentum for ongoing support and enhanced local working relationships. The main institutional support feature has been the creation of local committees, although many are uncertain about next steps. Sustainability related to institutional frameworks and governance may be limited by a lack of policy development and relatively poor coordination mechanisms between implementing partners and sectors. Institutional sustainability likelihood is considered Low.

Environmental

84. The potential for sustainable use and management of land, biodiversity, forest and marine resources depends on national policies and programs, and public engagement in sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The lack of data on reforestation quality in the project makes it difficult to assess forest cover enhancement. Some progress from WWF support for sustainable fisheries, some of which is external to the project, offers positive encouragement. The environmental sustainability, given a lack of data, is considered Uncertain.

Overall likelihood

85. Management issues and long implementation delays faced by the project, and the lack of reliable monitoring data on project results suggests that the likelihood of sustainability is Low.

4.3.8 GEF Additionality and Potential Catalytic/Replication Effect

86. The project's GEF additionality to leverage resources and results is questionable since co-financing has not been sufficiently tracked. GEF funding supported the national tree planting campaign (with uncertain results) in the pilot catchment areas and in development of initial catchment area planning. It also assisted in introducing new methods for eradication of invasive species. The funding provided incremental outputs but no systemic change in institutional structures nor was an integrated resource management policy generated.

87. The project is unlikely to catalyze changes toward integrated NRM within R2R systems given the lack of policy development and limited advances in coordinating stakeholders. The local catchment area plans and committees may provide support to address specific area and site priorities provided resources and momentum can be continued. But there is no established framework that can provide a foundation for future catalyzing R2R programs and projects. The follow-up to the Exit Strategy action plan ("sustainability strategy") which has been promised needs clear evidence of progress, and the general views expressed by catchment area planning stakeholders present a lot of uncertainties.

88. Despite incremental activity results in different sectors, the project has not established a proven working model for protected area and related R2R management and rehabilitation that can be replicated in other areas. Effectiveness of the catchment area plans, which vary in format and orientation between the pilot areas, remains to be seen. They have however, provided local experiences that could contribute to future development of a model approach for R2R initiatives. The design weaknesses are elaborated in other sections of this report and highlighted in the Conclusions and Lessons Learned.

4.3.9 Progress to Impact

89. It is impossible to determine whether the Fiji R2R Project has had any measurable impact on environmental conditions and issues in the ridge to reef ecosystems. The issues and priorities have been well documented and some interventions have been tested, which is a promising start. The R2R concept has been introduced and some community awareness and momentum have been created suggesting limited, incremental progress toward potential impact.

90. The MTR's Exit Strategy for the Fiji R2R Project highlights the importance of government coordination responsibilities and mainstreaming outcome results into policies and supportive resources, and harmonizing development activities with conservation commitments. The 24 recommendations in the Exit Strategy focus on:

- (a) establishing coordination responsibilities for the outcomes,

- (b) urging relevant ministries to further incorporate outcome results into policies under their custody,
- (c) sharing the outcome results with all stakeholders,
- (d) ensuring the Community Management Committees process is fully documented and supported by national policy and budgets and technical support at the local level,
- (e) working with the iTaukei Affairs Board on policy and guidelines to ensure development leases do not encroach on community protected areas, and
- (f) continuing to work on a National Policy on Integrated NRM and Catchment Management in conjunction with the Green Growth Framework and the Coastal Management Framework.

91. These policy and governance issues have been largely left to the late stages of the project, and many remain unresolved or only partially addressed. They could have been given a higher priority in the project design since they are important to generating R2R outcome results. The lack of progress in these areas was evident at the midpoint where the MTR's June 2020 Exit Strategy highlighted the lack of capacity throughout all outcomes. For each outcome, the Exit Strategy was consistent in finding "low" institutional and human resource capacity to sustain the project, and "low" existence of a viable plan to sustain the project. This was particularly evident with respect to establishing integrated management approaches in the catchment areas (*Component 3: Governance and Planning Integrated catchment management approach involving improved management of water, soil and agro-ecosystem resources*). Under Output 3.2.3, the Exit Strategy scored all categories "low" (Empowered communities as a result of participation in: 1. formulation of PA management plans and catchment management plans; 2. alignment of community livelihoods with local priorities; 3. development of market-based instruments by the project, including ecosystem services and 4. monitoring and reporting on progress and status of project to CMC.) (p. 27).

92. These were all known weaknesses at the beginning of the project. The Project Document noted the "lack of knowledge, capacity and designated agency(s) within GOF to implement integrated approaches to rational planning and management of natural resources." The Project Document described the baseline situation thus: "hitherto none of these efforts, studies and recommendations have crystallized into the adoption of a whole-of-Government/R2R approach for integrated catchment management of natural resources in Fiji. Accordingly the GEF 5 STAR Fiji Ridge-to-Reef Project will be of a pioneering nature. Getting all departments working effectively together will be paramount."⁵⁰

93. Correcting this lack of collaboration and building capacity should have been of paramount importance in the early stages of project implementation. Indeed, UNDP's exit policy for NIM projects is based on increasing government capacity and/or external constraints, such as lack of donor contribution. UNDP provides support through programmes and projects to *strengthen national capacities and expand the options and opportunities available to partners and beneficiaries in programme countries*.⁵¹

⁵⁰ R2R ProDoc page 34 and 35

⁵¹ Exit Strategy p. 5

5.0 Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations & Lessons

5.1 Main Findings

1. The project was designed to establish an integrated multi-sector approach to biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, financial sustainability and knowledge development and sharing, with a primary focus on six catchment areas. This was an ambitious task in the face of the many institutional and managerial barriers constraining integrated approaches to ridge to reef environmental strategies, and limited technical capacity at local levels, which were all compounded by restrictions under the Covid pandemic. The project achieved parts of all of the Outcomes except for Outcome 6 – strengthened governance for integrated natural resources management, although the lack of monitoring data leaves some uncertainty about output quality and sustainability in all of the project components. See Annex 3 for a summary of targets and results.

2. At least 69% of the planned activities were completed by project end (June 30, 2022), and some elements for overall catchment management have been initiated involving upland land management and marine conservation with communities and government. The achievements broadly include expanded PAs with better biological baseline data, new methods to reduce invasive species, community mobilization and establishment of Catchment Management Committees, alternative livelihoods introduced and reforestation and forest management improvements at various sites along with proposed national forestry regulation improvements. About three quarters of the reforestation target (1245 ha) was achieved (although quality is unknown).

3. The R2R operational framework has yet to be fully established as envisioned in the project design. This is mostly because the institutional and policy requirements for R2R cooperation and collaboration were never defined or addressed at the initial stages of the project, and the management structure was unable to provide sufficient coordination and active monitoring and field oversight of the various project activities. Too many of the implementation risks noted in the Project Document were encountered. Nevertheless, an initial process for catchment area planning has been developed and various conservation and forestry site activities have been implemented to assist in starting to address some of the issues. But the watershed-scale integrated strategies for jointly rehabilitating degraded catchment and marine areas and sustaining the results still remain to be established.

4. The Terminal Evaluation found that lengthy delays in implementation and the incomplete outputs were due to a combination of poor project planning, coordination and administration, and Covid-related constraints to undertaking the work. Lack of technical capacity, high turnover of staff, bureaucratic administrative processes were also factors adversely affecting project implementation. The general view of participants is that the project was implemented in separate activity silos without an overall R2R concept or effective coordination functions. The project design and STAR focal area funding arrangement

also affected this problem. Thematic (cross-sector) and geographic (upstream-downstream) integration were barely apparent.

5. The project has contributed to R2R environmental improvement in an incremental and unmeasured way through its many and varied activities. Integration between implementing partners and within cross sectoral issues was not a predominate feature of the project. Lack of follow-up independent inspection and response on the tree planting activities by the implementing partners appears to have been a deficiency, and there are uncertainties in communities about next steps for catchment area plans. The Fiji experience suggests that the R2R concept needs to be completely reviewed, and placed on a more structured operational foundation.

Table 6: Evaluation Ratings Table for Fiji Ridge to Reef Project

Criteria to be rated	Rating ⁵²	Reasons for rating
Monitoring & Evaluation		
M&E design at entry	MU	No distinct monitoring plan. Indicators not sufficiently operational (e.g., PA management effectiveness). Project scope and locations complicates the wide set of monitoring tasks. No assessment of capacity or instructions for implementing a monitoring system.
M&E Plan Implementation	U	No dedicated monitoring officer with capacity to track and report on progress. GEF tracking tools not updated. No coordinated approach the limited monitoring and reporting functions. Significant results monitoring data not available.
Overall Quality of M&E	U	Annual PIR reporting based on activities completed. Insufficient progress data relative to expected outcomes. No quantitative database to evaluate before and after project (e.g., PA area expansion, rehabilitated forests and grasslands).
Implementation & Execution		
Quality of UNDP Implementation/ Oversight	MU	Unable to expedite project delivery with government after initial long delays and Covid-related disruptions. Poor monitoring and reporting system. MTR recommendations not fully addressed.
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	MS	Completed biological surveys and studies and catchment area plans and initiated community engagement, along with minor livelihoods development. Limited linkages between IPs and no overall integrated R2R strategies developed.
Overall quality of Implementation/ Execution	MU	Significant coordination and communication issues and major delays leading to underachievement of targets. Confusion over roles and responsibilities in managing and reporting on activities and results. Inexperienced project management staff. Better progress where IPs had previous relationships and programs in the catchment areas. Covid restrictions imposed implementation constraints.
Assessment of Outcomes		
Relevance	MS	Project addresses key priorities in the catchment areas and is aligned with national and GEF objectives and programs. The importance of hydrological and SLM in affecting watershed-wide environmental and conservation issues (e.g., flooding, sedimentation) not fully recognized

⁵²Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, I&E Execution, Relevance are rated on a 6-point rating scale: 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability is rated on a 4-point scale: 4 = Likely (L), 3 = Moderately Likely (ML), 2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU), 1 = Unlikely (U)

		due to an emphasis on biodiversity and forestry interests, and absence of a broad R2R strategy.
Effectiveness	MU	69% of activities completed (June 2022); PA targets not met; management effectiveness marginally enhanced with biological surveys but capacity gaps unknown; no real progress on PA financing. 5 of 6 catchment plans completed. Communities partially mobilized. 76% reforestation targeted hectares achieved (but no data on quality). Policy development and PA financing not achieved.
Efficiency	U	Major implementation delays. Costs are high relative to outputs produced. Some plantation failures leading to added costs. Inefficiencies in advance payment approvals and issuance, creating IP activity scheduling and delivery problems.
Overall Project Outcome Rating	MU	Outcomes only partially achieved (e.g., PA management effectiveness improvement, sustainable forestry market mechanisms not achieved), little progress on Outcome 2 (PA finance) and Outcome 6 (policy development) abandoned in favour of reforestation. R2R integrated management approach not established.
Sustainability		
Financial resources	MU	No PA financing measures. Some livelihoods may be financially viable. Uncertainties about resources to continue with catchment area plans implementation.
Socio-political/economic	ML	Communities in 5 catchments have been oriented and mobilized for catchment rehabilitation activities. But leadership is variable, capacity is limited and the committees are generally uncertain about next steps.
Institutional framework and governance	MU	Surveys and plans and established working relationships with communities have provided an initial platform for local catchment area governance. But sustainability is limited by a lack of policy, no overall R2R strategy and relatively poor coordination mechanisms amongst implementing partners and across sectors.
Environmental	ML	Project activities aimed to enhance environmental quality and conservation. No adverse environment/social impacts identified. Future of local conservation commitments may be questionable. The lack of data on reforestation and rehabilitation quality and sustainability makes it difficult to assess environmental changes.
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	MU	There are a lot of uncertainties in the future implementation of the catchment area plans and the availability of national and local leadership skills and resources and essential collaborative relationships to sustain the project's modest results.

Rating categories as per the UNDP/GEF Evaluation guidelines:

<p><i>Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, I&E Execution:</i></p> <p>Highly Satisfactory (HS): no shortcomings Satisfactory (S): minor shortcomings Moderately Satisfactory (MS): moderate shortcomings Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): significant shortcomings Unsatisfactory (U): major problems Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe problems</p>	<p><i>Sustainability ratings:</i></p> <p>Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks Unlikely (U): severe risks</p>
	<p><i>Relevance ratings:</i> Relevant (R) Not relevant (NR)</p>

5.2 Conclusions

1. The long implementation delays (21 months from original planned closure in October 2020 to official closure June 2022) and the incomplete project activities were attributed by those interviewed to:

- (a) unrealistic or in some cases poorly defined targets,
- (b) Covid-related restrictions and disruptions,
- (c) a project structure mostly based on individual sector activities,
- (d) insufficient coordination mechanisms to align the many IPs and government agencies,
- (e) limited local capacity to lead a multi-faceted project across a large area,
- (f) inability to develop national policies before the catchment area plans were established, and
- (g) ineffective monitoring and reporting systems to address progress and respond to issues.

2. The primary achievements of the project included expansion of protected areas, training and mobilization of community groups, introduction of various alternative livelihoods, and preparation of five Catchment Area Plans and associated Catchment Management Committees. An assessment of PA management capacity and operations was not completed and no METT tracking tool data are available so actual achievement of these aspects is unclear but catchment plans should, if implemented, strengthen the management processes. Ecosystem valuation studies were completed but no PA user fee system has been piloted as had been planned. While progress has been made in starting the catchment planning processes, the vision of integrated R2R conservation, rehabilitation and management was not fully realized in the project.

3. The carbon stocks enhancement/forest rehabilitation component had completed about 76% of planned 1245 ha reforestation as of June 30, 2022, although some notable low survival rates in Tuvu catchment were reported (<30%⁵³), along with estimates ranging from 45-70% in Tunuloa catchment.⁵⁴ Field plantings were undertaken by local communities and landowners. The reasons for some plantation failures were explained as exceptionally degraded site conditions, planting outside the appropriate season, inexperienced staff, poor practice of dumping dredged river sediment on young plants along the river banks, lack of follow-up and monitoring of seedlings by government, NGOs and local groups. Quality of planting stock from newly established community-run nurseries might have also been a factor. Stand improvement including improved methods for eradication of African Tulip, and mangrove plantation and demonstration stands were also completed. A Forest Policy and Related Legal and Regulatory Framework have been prepared by a consultant as part of the sustainable forestry component, proposing an improved system for protecting and managing forest resources, although follow-up implementation will be critical.

4. Strengthened governance for integrated natural resources (land, water, biodiversity, forests) management has been very marginal and only enhanced, with the assistance of three NGOs, through the

⁵³ Kelera Wesele, Back to Office Report (BTOR), UNDP, Pacific Office in Fiji, 21 Aug 2019.

⁵⁴ Fane Cinavilakeba, Back to Office Report (BTOR), UNDP, Pacific Office in Fiji, 13 Dec 2021.

limited experiences of developing the catchment area plans and establishing local committees to carry on with implementation (although many are uncertain about next steps). The development of a national policy on integrated natural resources management is expected in the future, but no firm commitments were apparent.

5. The project design issues focused on the delivery of outputs in support of GEF focal areas rather than addressing the specific drivers of landscape degradation in each catchment (detailed in the Project Document and annexes). The other design issue was the need to manage the project risks including capacity building needs and policy/ institutional requirements for an integrated approach. A sector by sector approach still dominates and the operational concept for integration is mostly undefined and currently limited to preparation of catchment area plans. The underestimated challenges of coordinating the many partners under an integrated R2R approach remain at project closure. At the field level, hydrological processes from height of land to marine habitats and runoff-related soil erosion and sedimentation processes were insufficiently addressed in preference to a central focus on protected area expansion and forest management (reforestation and stand management).

6. The TE assessment of results reveals that the R2R project faced challenges related to administrative delays in contracting and financial disbursements requiring two no-cost extensions, and the difficulties of introducing new approaches and institutional change over a short project period. Moreover, there appeared to be a lack of overall management strategy and policy mandate, which are needed for an R2R approach, and necessary to effectively implement an integrated, strategic and comprehensive approach from the height of land to the reef. Also, at the local level, it is not clear if strategies are sufficiently comprehensive in each of the priority watersheds. They appear to be focused on a series of activities by several different implementing partners without having a clear overarching landscape watershed and coastal management program.

7. The very slow start to the project and long delays in negotiating the implementing partner contracts and working arrangements, including resolving roles and responsibilities, created time pressures which led to general underperformance and also inability to complete many of the expected PA finance and policy development outputs. Poor management structure and communications contributed to the project being implemented in separate, uncoordinated activity components. Lack of an effective project monitoring system also inhibited the necessary adaptive management.

8. Despite the shortcomings, and difficulties imposed by Covid, the project has raised R2R awareness, initiated the R2R catchment management planning and started small but important activities to begin the environmental and natural resources rehabilitation and recovery processes through expanded protected areas, methods for invasive species removal, forest sector regulatory reforms, tree planting for reforestation, alternative livelihoods development and other site improvements.

5.3 Recommendations

The TE provides six recommendations as summarized in Table 7, and described in detail below.

Table 7: Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Entity responsible	Time frame
1	The Fiji UNDP Country Office and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment should coordinate and report on the remaining tasks under the Exit Strategy action plan, as documented in the 2022 Project Implementation Report, and recommend a program for further implementation of the Catchment Area Plans.	Fiji UNDP Country Office and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment	Q1 2023
2	UNDP/GEF should establish a regional Pacific technical advisory group to assist R2R projects and to provide guidance for R2R Project Implementation Strategies that need to be prepared during the inception phase of future projects.	UNDP/GEF	Q1 2023
3	The Fiji Ministry of Forests should undertake an independent review of the performance of reforestation activities in the Fiji R2R catchment areas and make program improvements based on experiences including the integration of tree planting and soil and water conservation.	Fiji Ministry of Forests	Q1-2 2023
4	The Government of Fiji should initiate a few small demonstration projects of integrated natural resources management by addressing selected priorities in some of the completed Catchment Area plans and in collaboration with Catchment Area Committees.	Government of Fiji, Ministry of Waterways and Environment	2023
5	The Government of Fiji should actively implement and monitor the progress of the Forest Sector Regulatory Framework and promote the catchment area planning process within this modernization program.	Government of Fiji Ministry of Forests	2023
6	UNDP should undertake a review of project procurement, management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation procedures consistent with results-based management principles and develop a procedures manual for future international projects.	Fiji UNDP Country Office	Q1 2023

Recommendation 1 – The Fiji UNDP Country Office and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment should coordinate and report on the remaining tasks under the Exit Strategy action plan, as documented in the 2022 Project Implementation Report, and recommend a program for further implementation of the Catchment Area Plans.

The 2022 PIR provided recommendations originating in the MTR Exit Strategy that specified needed action after official project closure (Annex 4). These included (at June 30, 2022) completing the catchment area plans, completing reforestation and timber stand improvement targets, further developing small and micro-enterprises, financing forestry laws and regulations and forest certification processes, and further clarifying coordination responsibilities, incorporating project outcomes into relevant policies, designating forestry protection and carbon capture the responsibility of the Ministry of Forest, establishing

certification permits and facilitating continued joint community planning with private sector and other relevant stakeholders through community management committees which are supported at national level by policy and at local levels by budgets and technical support, and finally to continue to work toward a national policy on Integrated Natural Resources and Catchment Management Policy (see Annex 4 for Exit Strategy Action Plan). The Catchment Area Committees have been established but they need further direction and access to sector Government ministry resources (Forestry, Fisheries, Agriculture) and/or financial support in order to continue their programs.

Recommendation 2 – The Fiji Ministry of Forests should undertake an independent review of the performance of reforestation activities in the Fiji R2R catchment areas and make program improvements based on experiences including the integration of tree planting and soil and water conservation.

There are few available data on the results of the reforestation activities under Outcomes 3 and 6. The focus on national tree planting targets, and the uncertain quality of many of the plantations in addressing the multiple issues in catchment areas warrant more elaborate strategies, particularly ones that address the hydrological regime, water balance and sediment transport processes. Tree planting alone is inadequate for catchment area rehabilitation. Controlling soil erosion and sedimentation requires complementary measures. In all countries like Fiji, where steep gradient catchment drainages and unstable slopes and natural and human disturbances occur, reforestation or afforestation activities are always accompanied by measures that endeavor to slow the rate of runoff, promote groundwater infiltration and encourage natural regeneration of the vegetation alongside forest management, farm forestry/agroforestry and climate-smart agriculture. This means encouraging a shift beyond just trees toward a wider view of catchment area and forest and grassland landscape management. In conjunction with the Carbon Emission Reduction Programme and REDD+, the government should expand the forest rehabilitation and tree planting activities to include targeted sustainable land management (SLM) methods that take a broad catchment treatment and rehabilitation perspective.⁵⁵

Recommendation 3 – UNDP/GEF should establish a regional Pacific technical advisory group to assist R2R projects and to provide guidance for R2R Project Implementation Strategies that need to be prepared during the inception phase of future projects.

An integrated NRM approach to R2R conservation and environmental rehabilitation has significant policy and governance implications and preconditions that need to be addressed at the outset. Notably, the

⁵⁵ The multiple processes that lead to forest and environmental degradation need to be addressed through a complex and targeted set of interventions. The Carbon Emissions Reduction and the REDD+ programs also provide an opportunity to further strengthen the R2R catchment area concept and to enhance the effectiveness of the current catchment area plans. The agreement with the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, signed by Fiji in 2021 provides \$26 M USD in results-based payments for increasing carbon sequestration and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

coordination and capacity issues are major barriers to project results. Bridging the coordination and cross sector integration requirements within government, communities and NGOs is essential for the R2R concept. But the Fiji project and others illustrate the difficulties integrating inter-departmental responsibilities and non-governmental roles. The experience to date reflects a general lack of understanding of how to effectively apply the integration concept in conjunction with existing governance and traditional knowledge systems. An institutional and capacity assessment should be a standard part of the inception phase implementation strategy preparations and the requirements for R2R also need to be clearly articulated in advance by UNDP/GEF and advisors. R2R projects present design challenges for institutional change and new partnership approaches. Technical capacity is a distinct limitation in the Pacific small island states. A more cost-effective way of providing this support needs to be considered.

Recommendation 4 – The Government of Fiji should initiate a few small demonstration projects of integrated natural resources management by addressing selected priorities in some of the completed Catchment Area plans and in collaboration with Catchment Area Committees.

Outcome 6 of the project aimed to improve governance for integrated NRM. A new national policy was envisioned along with new institutional arrangements and powers. This has not occurred. The challenges to change institutional practices toward integrated approaches are significant at the national and local level. It would be more effective to develop a model approach (directly building upon the Nadi IWRM project) with integrated strategies that address some selected priorities as a means of further advancing the R2R approach. This would mean taking a ‘bottom-up’ approach by first demonstrating how expedited cross-cutting multi-agency/civil society approaches can address selected priorities in a time-bound manner in a few catchment area plans⁵⁶ before scaling up to a top-down, national level and policy initiatives. The Fiji R2R project has not yet developed that model. For example, a joint, mission-oriented approach (with clear purpose, teamwork, plan and measurable outcomes) to rehabilitate certain forest or grassland ecosystems in a degraded watershed through intensive collaboration between forestry, agriculture and water sectors and local communities, under the supervision of the Catchment Area Committees would provide a practical example for development of a national integrated NRM model. Another integrated demonstration could focus on a ridge to reef multi-sector water quality problem; for example, applying sustainable land management and climate smart agriculture techniques to the serious upstream agricultural and forestry practices that cause major downstream flooding and water supply disruptions in the Dogotuki catchment area.⁵⁷ Cooperation, commitment, teamwork, multi-sector expertise, results-based planning, local ownership and rigorous monitoring and accountability are needed to make integration work within a structured R2R institutional arrangement.

⁵⁶ These plans are strategic and broadly identify priorities. However, operational strategies and programs are needed to engage the local committees in coordinated action and to implement the plans. This offers an opportunity to demonstrate the use of customised multi-sector teams working within a comprehensive local R2R programme to address the priorities.

⁵⁷ Fiji R2R Project Draft Dogotuti Catchment Area Management Plan, The Institute of Applied Sciences, USP.

Recommendation 5 – The Government of Fiji should actively implement and monitor the progress of the Forest Sector Regulatory Framework and promote the catchment area planning process within this modernization program.

The Ministry of Forests needs additional support to pursue the adoption and implementation of the project-funded Regulatory Framework outputs. The outputs contain major changes to the regulatory framework that will require institutional reform. These have reportedly been supported by senior management, staff and stakeholders during consultations but senior management currently lacks the capacity to move forward without further expert advice and support at a high level within government. Follow-up action on this package of reforms is uncertain. The R2R catchment area planning process, including integrated approaches, should be an integral part of the forestry reform and modernization program. The Terminal Evaluation concern is that these forest sector project outputs need active support to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

Recommendation 6 – UNDP should undertake a review of project procurement, management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation procedures consistent with results-based management principles and develop a procedures manual for future international projects.

The TE was unable to fully assess the financial, value for money and delivery efficiency aspects of the project due to lack of expenditure and results data at the activity level (although annual financial audits were provided for 2019, 2020 and 2021). The IP contracting and administrative payment arrangements presented some difficulties that need further review (see Conclusion 6). In addition, the results of the reforestation expenditures should be reviewed given the re-allocation of funds from Outcome 6 and the lower-than-expected areas of reforestation, and the apparent low survival rate and poor maintenance of the plantations. The cost-effectiveness and lack of reporting on the reforestation/catchment area rehabilitation strategies and investment was a particular concern. The performance issues on the project warrant a review of all aspects of project management practices. This review would provide important lessons for operational improvements to UNDP's project design and management systems, especially assisting conformance with requirements for climate change financing opportunities.⁵⁸

5.4 Lessons Learned

1. The first overall lesson from the Fiji R2R project is the need to have a clear management strategy on the integration of the project interventions to ensure joint focus on defined outcomes or particular threats

⁵⁸ This recommendation focuses on UNDP's internal project management, M&E and reporting systems, which need to be reviewed in light of this project (separate from the GEF evaluation guidelines). A Fiji project management procedures manual should be produced drawing on the R2R project experience to ensure the systemic weaknesses don't occur on future projects, especially NIM projects.

to environmental quality within ridge to reef ecosystems. It is a question of whether the integrated approach is a collection of unconnected individual sector activities, or a matrix of targeted interventions jointly aimed at addressing specific issues. This requires strong organisation and coordination of the multiple implementing partners and stakeholder groups. Many of the participants interviewed expressed concern about coordination of the implementing partners and uncertainty about the overall project strategy. Also, the project strategy seemed to focus on completing the activities and not on the policy level interventions or sustainability. One of the recommendations from the previous IWRM project was to 'establish a cross sectoral institution at local level aligned to national objectives'.⁵⁹

2. The R2R concept of a ridge-valley-reef strategy was never really defined clearly in the project design or implementation. The **spatial** upstream/downstream/near shore relationships and the **inter-sectoral** relationships that are central to a landscape scale R2R approach were not directly considered in a project theory of change. This system delineation and strategic identification of spatial and inter-sectoral relationships particular to the R2R project areas are needed in order to develop an integrated project strategy. Characterization of the R2R landscape system – including the key system-wide environmental degradation drivers and determinants, should be part of the project design and inception. This requires new institutional thinking and arrangements to address multiple strategic objectives across the R2R system. Annex 13 outlines a whole watershed perspective as an example of such landscape scale characterization.

3. The second lesson relates to the importance of a monitoring system that tracks progress against outcome indicators. The lack of an effective monitoring plan and process meant that reporting was based on activities completed, creating a challenge for project adaptive management and evaluation. For example, extensive investment has been directed at reforestation but almost no data are available on results, not only on plantation success but also whether tree planting is having an effect on the expected catchment improvements. In steep gradient and unstable watersheds, tree planting and natural regeneration alone are usually not enough to achieve landscape rehabilitation; selective land and water management methods are also essential.

4. The third lesson is that it takes time and persistent effort for advances in natural resources management institutional and land use practices. The partner NGOs that had long standing programs in the communities were able to implement the project easier than in those areas where they had not worked previously. The longer time horizon for support was a key theme for the shift toward integrated R2R management; i.e., program development and presumably sustainability. As noted during TE discussions, the process of change requires cultural and attitudinal changes within organisations and communities and sustained effort in training and education over a much longer time frame than afforded by short term projects.

⁵⁹ Planning the Transition from IWRM to the Regional Ridge to Reef Initiative, Pacific IWRM Demonstration Project, 2014

5. The available project reports (PIRs and BTORs) also listed several key lessons learned:

- Communication between project, responsible parties and line government ministries needs to be strengthened
- The need for regular site monitoring by the project team to ensure momentum on reforestation at the community level
- Integrated community reforestation management led by communities requires support from local line governance structures to assist sustainability, advocacy and reinforcement of forest conservation messages
- The honorarium concept for local participation needs to be clearly articulated and monitored (e.g., the incentive amount provided for tree planting sites that have reached 80% survival rate).
- Maintenance of weeds on reforestation sites need close monitoring and continuous awareness and advocacy with communities.

6. The Fiji experience emphasizes the need for better operational planning of R2R projects which are inherently more complex than other projects. A quick review of the other Pacific R2R projects (Annex 7) also indicates concerns about project strategy/theory of change, realistic work planning, inter-agency synergies, technical capacity and human resources, the coordination and collaboration of stakeholders, and effective reporting systems. Below is a summary of findings and lessons from the Regional R2R Project emphasizing various design, M&E and sustainability issues:

- Design was highly oversized and overly ambitious.
- Project did not have properly imbedded mechanisms to programmatically ensure methodical and strategic coordination between and among the different child projects and the regional intervention.
- Design also did not properly entail process, metrics, and tools to engender nor benchmark outcomes and results.
- Although there was a downsizing of indicators as a result of mid-term analysis, there was no overhauling of the log frame to make up for the above issues.
- Products and outputs were achieved at expected levels for all PICs (particularly after midterm indicator downsizing).
- Expecting national bodies to implement and commit to regional outcomes without the necessary resources, materials and technical capacity and support was not feasible.
- Project faced a large number of challenges that in turn affected implementation and effectiveness.
- The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected project implementation since many of the technical support aspects could not materialise as expected due to travel restrictions, lockdowns, etc.
- The RPCU showed adaptive management by moving to online delivery as much as possible due to the mentioned restrictions.
- Governance uptake did not take place at the expected (tacit or explicit) level.
In the last year of implementation, mainly, RPCU greatly stepped up delivery in order to achieve a number of technical studies, processes, and outputs at the expected product and processes levels.

- Project has delivered a number of technical studies, analysis, studies, and knowledge management products.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Elmer Mercado and Maria Onestini, Jan. 25 2022

Volume II – Annexes (attached as a separate document)

1. Terms of Reference for the Terminal Evaluation
2. Fiji R2R Strategic Results Framework
3. Fiji R2R Project Targets
4. Post-project Exit Strategy Action Plan Status
5. List of persons interviewed
6. List of Documents reviewed
7. Lessons from Other Pacific R2R Projects
- 8: TE Mission itinerary
- 9: Synopsis of field visits to Communities
- 10: Overview of Local Administration and Community Stakeholder Engagement
- 11: Annual Budgets and Expenditures by Outcome
- 12: Signed UNEG Code of Conduct form
- 13: Diagram of a whole watershed perspective
14. Evaluation Matrix – evaluation criteria, key questions, indicators, sources of data & methods
15. TE Report Clearance Form