



GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States

An Evaluation Report by the GEF IEO

2026 | January





GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States

Evaluation Report No. 172
January 2026



© 2026 Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office
1818 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20433
Internet: www.gefieo.org/; email: gefievaluation@thegef.org

Reproduction permitted provided source is acknowledged. Please cite the work as follows: Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States*, Evaluation Report No. 172, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2026.

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the GEF Council or the governments it represents.

This report was presented to the GEF Council in December 2024.

ISBN: 978-1-64233-066-3

Task Team Leader: Anna Birgitta Viggh, aviggh@thegef.org
GEF IEO Director: Geeta Batra

Cover design: AM Mascia Design + Illustration Inc.

Interior design and layout: Nita Congress

Editing: Karen Holmes

Cover photo: In Sawani Village on Viti Levu, Fiji, homes situated close to the Waimanu River face periodic flooding during heavy rain. Through a GEF ridge-to-reef initiative, the community was supported in strengthening waste management, reducing pollution, and improving resilience to flood events. Photo by Anna Viggh, GEF IEO.

All dollar amounts are U.S. dollars unless otherwise indicated.

GEF replenishment periods: **Pilot phase:** 1991–94; **GEF-1:** 1995–98; **GEF-2:** 1999–2002; **GEF-3:** 2003–06; **GEF-4:** 2006–10; **GEF-5:** 2010–14; **GEF-6:** 2014–18; **GEF-7:** 2018–22; **GEF-8:** 2022–26

Contents

Foreword	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Abbreviations	vi
Executive summary	vii
1 Introduction	1
2 Background	3
2.1 Context	3
2.2 Earlier evaluation findings relevant to SIDS	5
2.3 Evaluation purpose, scope, and objectives	8
2.4 Methodology and evaluation questions	9
3 GEF programs in Pacific SIDS	14
3.1 GEF engagement in Pacific SIDS	14
3.2 Evolution of GEF support	15
3.3 Characteristics of the evaluation portfolio	16
4 Key findings	21
4.1 Relevance	21
4.2 Coherence	27
4.3 Effectiveness	29
4.4 Efficiency	41
4.5 Sustainability	46
5 Conclusions and recommendations	49
5.1 Conclusions	49
5.2 Recommendations	51
Annexes	
A SIDS SCCE conclusions and recommendations	53
B Evaluation portfolio	55
C Program theories of change	57
D Evaluation matrix	60
E Interviewees	63
References	65
Figures	
2.1 Characteristics of Pacific SIDS	4
2.3 Pacific SIDS average annual loss per capita due to disasters	6
2.4 Integrated theory of change for evaluated programs	10
3.3 CPDP child projects and funding	17
3.4 R2R child projects and funding	18
3.5 ISLANDS child projects and funding	19
3.6 Status of child projects	19
3.7 Child projects by GEF period	19
3.8 Child projects by GEF Agency	19
3.9 Focal area of child projects	20
Map	
2.1 Geographic distribution and population of Pacific SIDS	4
Tables	
2.1 Distribution of GEF projects across the case study countries	12
4.1 Examples of alignment of GEF programs with Pacific SIDS national priorities	23
4.2 R2R program environmental outcomes: expected versus actual results	31

Foreword

The Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is pleased to present the Evaluation of GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This evaluation examined three major GEF programs in Pacific SIDS and their corresponding 19 child projects and assessed the evolution of GEF integrated programming in the region, analyzed factors influencing program performance, and identified lessons learned to inform future GEF interventions in SIDS.

Pacific SIDS are challenged by their remoteness, high vulnerability to climate change-induced disasters, and dependence on mostly imported products. The GEF has a long history of supporting Pacific SIDS through investments in biodiversity protection on land and in the ocean, resilience to climate change and related disaster risk management, increased energy access through renewable energy and energy efficiency, halting and reversing land degradation,

cooperation on international waters, and improved chemicals management. This evaluation provides the first in-depth assessment of how programmatic approaches perform in Pacific SIDS and what gaps remain.

The findings of this evaluation were presented to the 68th GEF Council meeting in December 2024. The Council took note of the conclusions and endorsed the recommendations, taking into account the GEF management response to address them. Through this report, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office intends to share the lessons from this evaluation with a wider audience.

Geeta Batra
Director, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

Acknowledgments

Anna Viggh, Senior Evaluation Officer in the Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO) led this evaluation. Core evaluation team members included Molly Watts Sohn until October 2022, former IEO Evaluation Analyst; Rasec Niembro, IEO Evaluation Analyst; and Trond Norheim, consultant. Country case studies were carried out by Anna Viggh and Trond Norheim in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Tonga. Sarah Nagel, consultant, identified and cataloged past project lessons relevant to programs. The evaluation benefited from oversight and support from Geeta Batra, Chief Evaluation Officer and GEF IEO Director since April 2024; and Juha Uitto, GEF IEO Director until March 2024.

Marie-Constance Manuella Koukoui, Senior Executive Assistant, supported the evaluation team. Operational and administrative oversight were provided by Juan

Jose Portillo, Senior Operations Officer. Karen Holmes edited the report, and Nita Congress designed and laid out the publication and provided editorial quality control.

The GEF Secretariat, as well as the relevant GEF Agencies, provided information, data, and insights during interviews. Critical information was provided during the country case study work by the GEF focal points, national and local government staff, GEF Agencies, members of the private sector, and community members in the three case study countries. The final responsibility for this report remains firmly with the Office.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank	PES	payment for ecosystem services
CPDP	Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific	PFD	program framework document
GDP	gross domestic product	PIR	project implementation report
GEF	Global Environment Facility	R2R	Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office	SCCE	strategic country cluster evaluation
ISLANDS	Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS	SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
LDC	least developed country	SIDS	small island developing states
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund	SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
M&E	monitoring and evaluation	STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
NAPA	national adaptation program of action	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
NGO	nongovernmental organization	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
OPS	comprehensive evaluation of the GEF (previously overall performance study)		

Executive summary

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

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

Key findings and conclusions

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

GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are strategically aligned with regional priorities, advancing key environmental and development goals. These initiatives effectively support the objectives outlined in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, nationally determined contributions, Sustainable Development Goals, and various multilateral environmental agreements. The R2R program, for example, advances ecosystem-based management by promoting ridge-to-reef approaches critical for safeguarding these fragile environments. Similarly, the ISLANDS program addresses pressing issues in chemical and waste management, essential for regions with limited waste disposal infrastructure. However, gaps remain in incorporating broader socioeconomic dimensions into environmental programming, as limited capacity

within many SIDS constrains the multisectoral management required for fully integrated approaches.

GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are aligned with child projects but face significant operational hurdles. While the objectives and activities of child projects generally align well with program theories of change and other development initiatives, practical challenges often emerge in day-to-day execution of these programs. Key obstacles include limited technical capacity within implementing Agencies, difficulties in maintaining consistent stakeholder engagement, and complications in coordinating donor activities. Program fragmentation often occurs at operational interfaces, resulting in duplicative efforts and resource inefficiencies. Institutional barriers persist in establishing unified monitoring systems, maintaining regular inter-Agency communication channels, and synchronizing project timelines across different implementing bodies. Additionally, staff turnover in key positions and varying levels of governmental commitment across different jurisdictions affect program continuity and effectiveness.

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

The evaluation revealed systemic weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation frameworks that significantly affect program assessment and adaptive management. Results frameworks show critical gaps in three main areas:

- **There is persistent misalignment between program-level and child project indicators.** For example, in the R2R program, child projects in Fiji and Kiribati employed indicators that failed to capture broader program conservation goals or environmental outcomes.
- **Indicator quality and measurement approaches are inconsistent.** These are characterized by (1) a predominant focus on basic outputs like “number of management plans developed” or “workshops conducted” rather than measuring meaningful environmental and social changes, (2) a lack of standardized baseline data collection protocols across related projects, (3) an absence of early warning mechanisms for implementation challenges, and (4) incompatible metrics that prevent effective aggregation of results across projects.
- **The frameworks lack robust outcome measurement systems.** While projects can demonstrate activity completion, they struggle to quantify actual environmental improvements or long-term impact on biodiversity, water quality, or community resilience. These framework deficiencies have direct implications: they limit the ability to demonstrate program impact, hinder adaptive management responses, and complicate efforts to aggregate and compare results across the portfolio. The situation is particularly challenging in Pacific SIDS, where limited institutional capacity further constrains the collection and analysis of complex environmental and social indicators.

Knowledge management, innovation, and socioeconomic co-benefits contributed to program effectiveness. Knowledge management proved to be a particular strength, especially in the R2R program where 10 child projects established successful knowledge transfer

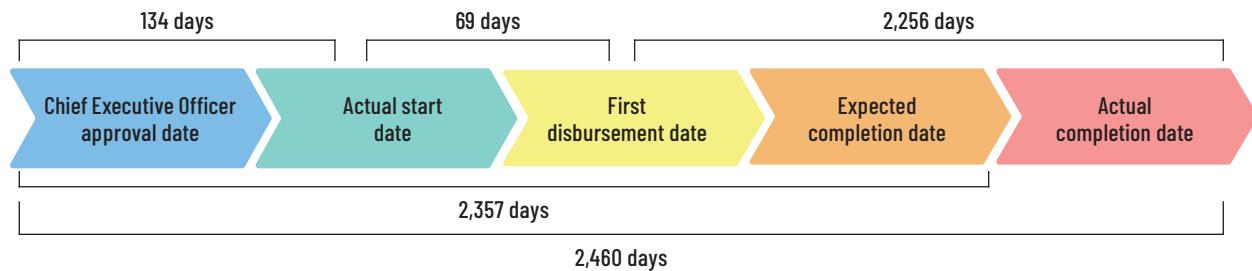
mechanisms. While the programs demonstrated innovative approaches—such as the CPDP's infiltration galleries for flood management and R2R's integrated watershed management—limited institutional capacity often prevented full realization of these innovations. Social and economic benefits were achieved in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

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

constraints already posed significant hurdles to project implementation.

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

The sustainability of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS faces significant challenges, rooted in low institutional capacity, limited financial mechanisms, and country context. Program ratings reflect these concerns, with none of the rated projects achieving a "likely" sustainability rating—four were rated as moderately likely, four as moderately unlikely, and one as unlikely for project achievements to be sustained. Institutional sustainability emerged as a primary concern, with limited public sector capacity and high staff turnover, including labor migration to Australia and New Zealand, affecting most Pacific Island countries. While some projects showed promise in institutional strengthening, such as Tonga's integration of watershed

Figure ES.1 Average timeline for ridge-to-reef program in Pacific SIDS

Source: GEF Portal.

ecological health monitoring into sectoral plans, financial sustainability remained problematic. Many projects struggled to establish adequate financial mechanisms for long-term maintenance of their achievements. The complex context of Pacific SIDS as fragile states—including geographic isolation, limited economic diversification, exposure to natural disasters, and institutional capacity constraints—added multiple layers of vulnerability, although some projects demonstrated resilience through effective community engagement and alignment with local governance structures. Technical sustainability presented fewer challenges, particularly in infrastructure projects designed for minimal maintenance requirements and climate change resilience. Projects that effectively combined traditional knowledge systems with modern approaches, such as engaging village chiefs in Vanuatu's decentralized management approach, demonstrated stronger prospects for sustained outcomes.

There is room for improvement in coordination and collaboration across GEF Agencies and other development partners.

The experience of GEF programs in the Pacific region has highlighted the critical role of sector coordination in enhancing development impact. While some positive examples of coordination between national governments and international agencies have been observed, the full potential for collaboration remains largely untapped. The landscape of development

agencies active in the Pacific, including the Green Climate Fund, the European Union, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Australian Aid, and New Zealand Aid, presents a complex web of actors with shared goals but often disparate approaches. The current state of coordination, both among GEF Agencies and with other development partners, has shown significant room for improvement. This gap in collaboration has implications for resource utilization efficiency, potential duplication of efforts, and the overall effectiveness of development initiatives in the region.

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

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

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

Recommendations

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

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

Recommendation 2: Strengthen program effectiveness by further improving the alignment and operational delivery between Pacific SIDS parent programs and their associated child projects. It is crucial that parent and child projects

maintain strong internal coherence while addressing persistent implementation delays that hinder overall program performance. A more streamlined monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework at the program level will enable better tracking of outcomes, facilitate adaptive management, and support strategic decision-making across the portfolio. By enhancing internal coherence and operational efficiency, while maintaining robust yet simplified oversight mechanisms, programs can achieve more consistent and impactful results. These actions should be strategically designed to foster a culture of adaptive management, ensuring that M&E findings are regularly used to inform decision-making and refine implementation strategies.

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

1

Introduction

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

Given the importance of the continued support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for SIDS' environmental efforts, their unique vulnerabilities, and the growing GEF portfolio of programs, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) conducted an evaluation with a special focus on the Pacific Islands. Around 2008, the GEF broadened its approach in SIDS by incorporating programmatic approaches

¹As per the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, [UNIDO and Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](#) web page, SIDS "share many similar features, such as their small size, limited natural resources, narrow economic bases, large distance to major markets and vulnerability to climate-related disasters, which have a demonstrable effect on growth and have often led to a high degree of economic volatility." The United Nations uses a set of criteria to classify countries as SIDS. These criteria were first outlined in the Barbados Programme of Action adopted in 1994 and were further elaborated in the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation in 2005; see the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [Small Island Developing States](#) web page for more information.

alongside individual projects. This expansion was primarily motivated by the need to safeguard System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) allocations for Pacific SIDS in GEF-5. While programmatic approaches offered additional opportunities to address interconnected environmental challenges and vulnerabilities, individual projects remained an important part of GEF support to SIDS. The combination of both approaches allowed the GEF to provide flexible support that could integrate environmental,

social, and economic dimensions. The evaluation builds on previous IEO evaluations of SIDS (GEF IEO 2019) and programmatic and integrated approaches in the GEF (GEF IEO 2018b, 2022a), and mainly focuses on programs. GEF programs and regional projects in the Caribbean SIDS will be covered in a forthcoming evaluation.

2

Background

2.1 Context

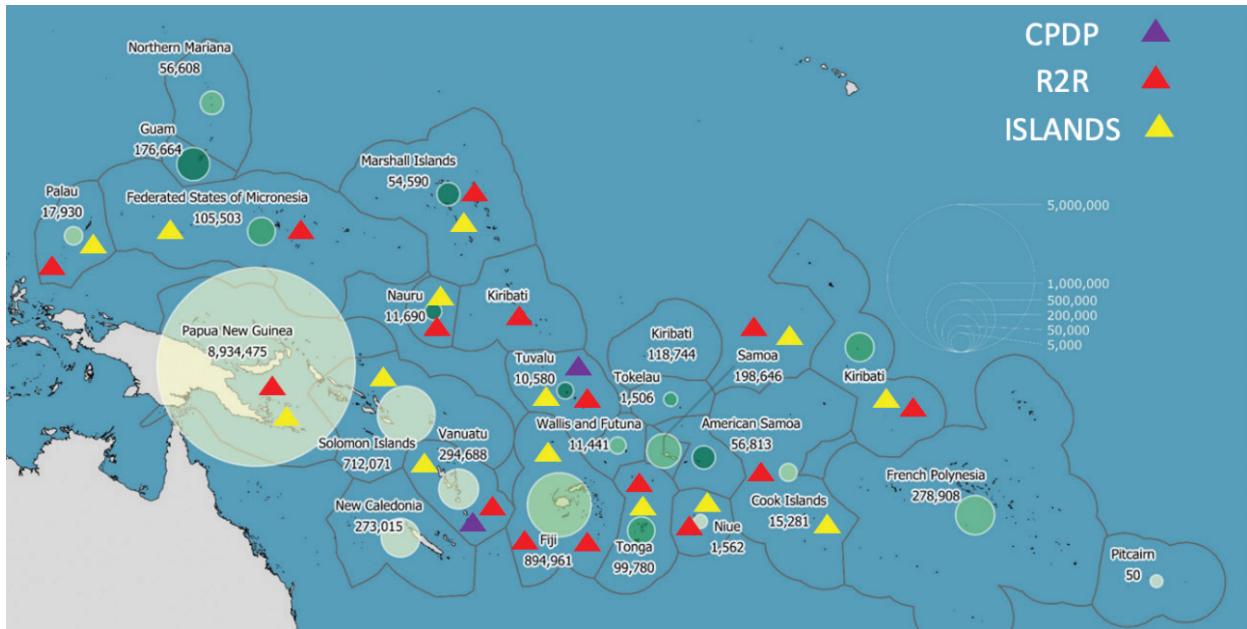
The Pacific SIDS that the GEF supports encompass 14 nations and territories. These are Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. [Map 2.1](#) shows the geographic distribution of Pacific SIDS and their population densities. While these countries share broad characteristics, such as being small and geographically dispersed, they also exhibit significant heterogeneity in terms of income level, geologic composition (e.g., volcanic island or atoll), and relative development progress.

The Pacific SIDS span a wide economic spectrum, with gross national income (GNI) per capita ranging from \$2,000 to \$16,500. Two-thirds of these nations are considered “micro-states” with populations below 200,000, and half of these are also classified as fragile states. Papua New Guinea stands out as the only nonsmall state in the group, with a population of nearly 8 million ([figure 2.1](#)). Collectively, the region is home to approximately 10 million people spread across millions of square miles of ocean (Fouad et al. 2021).

Pacific SIDS face disproportionate threats from climate change despite contributing only 0.03 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The World Risk Index 2021 ranks several Pacific Island countries among the most at risk globally, with Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Tonga occupying the top three positions.¹ Common climate-related risks include rising sea levels, stronger and more frequent tropical storms, accelerated soil and beach erosion, changed and variable weather patterns, reduced food and water security, and damage to infrastructure.

¹The World Risk Index 2021 assessed the disaster risk for 181 countries; this covers almost 99 percent of the world’s population (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft 2021).

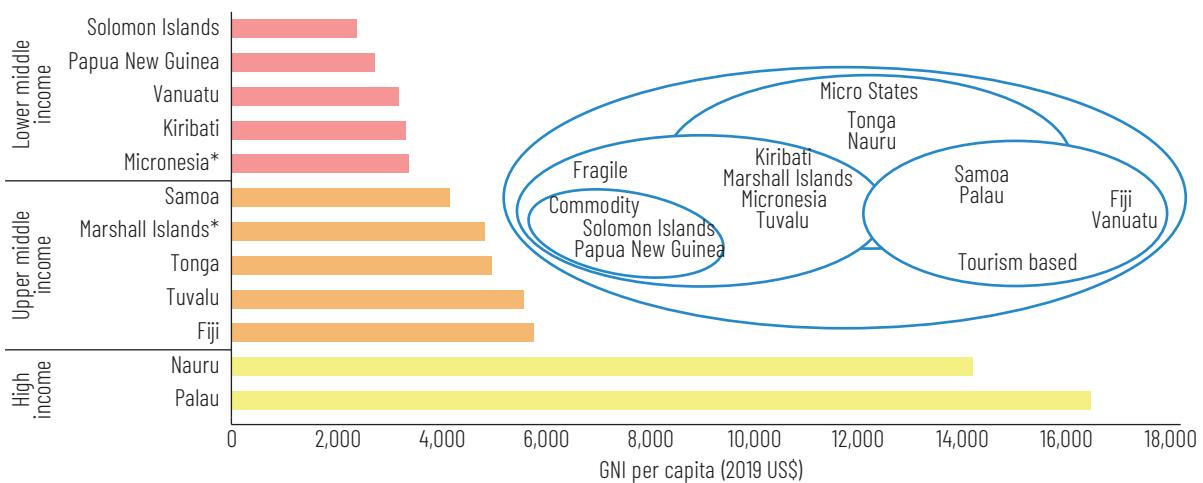
Map 2.1 Geographic distribution and population of Pacific SIDS



Source: Pacific Community, [Pacific Population 2020 Projection Map](#); accessed October 2024.

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

Figure 2.1 Characteristics of Pacific SIDS



Source: Adapted from Fouad et al. 2021.

Note: GNI = gross national income; * classified based on GNI per capita in 2018 to reflect latest data available. Includes the 12 countries for which data are available.

Projections indicate an average sea level rise of between 25 and 58 centimeters by midcentury along the Pacific Island countries, posing an existential threat to low-lying islands. For instance, it is estimated that by 2050, half of Tuvalu's capital will be submerged by tides.² Rising temperatures are expected to cause unprecedented biodiversity loss, with projections suggesting that 90 percent of coral reefs throughout much of the Pacific Island region will suffer severe degradation, significantly affecting the ecosystem (Parsons 2022).

Pacific SIDS experience some of the highest economic losses and damages due to disasters globally. Between 2015 and 2020, this subregion suffered the highest economic losses as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) among the global regions and subregions, with an average loss of almost 9 percent (ESCAP 2023; [figure 2.2](#)). The average annual loss per capita in Pacific SIDS is at least three times higher than in South-East Asia, South and South-West Asia, and North and Central Asia (ESCAP 2020). Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu are particularly vulnerable to these losses ([figure 2.3](#)).

Climate change not only results in significant economic losses but also negatively affects the health and safety of the population. Floods and tropical cyclones inflict particularly severe economic damage across the Pacific SIDS, with losses amounting to \$157 million and \$533 million, respectively (ESCAP 2020). These financial impacts are projected to escalate due to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (ESCAP 2023). Among the world's

² Source: United Nations Development Programme, [Notes from Tuvalu: Leading the Way in Adapting to Sea-Level Rise](#) web page. At its highest point, Tuvalu is just 4.5 meters above sea level, making it the second lowest-lying nation in the world after Maldives and highly vulnerable to sea level rise. It is estimated that a rise in sea level of 8–16 inches over the next century could submerge the nation entirely (World Bank 2021).

regions, the Pacific SIDS face the highest vulnerability to these climate-related disasters.

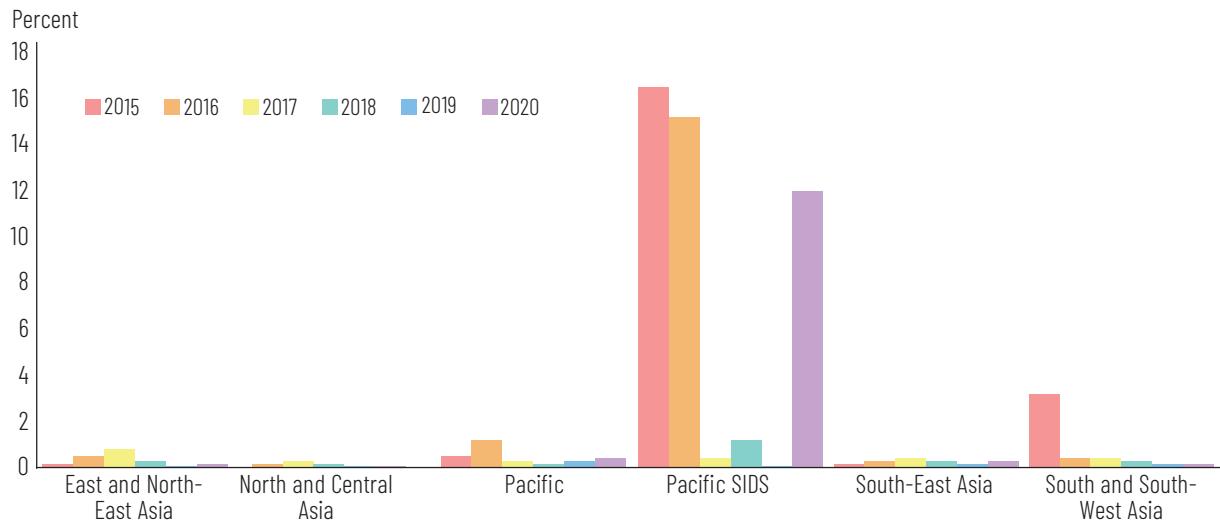
The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the vulnerabilities of Pacific SIDS. The impacts were disproportionately significant due to economic lifelines dependent on food imports, tourism, and remittances; agricultural limitations with short value chains; and limited and remote health care infrastructure. Government preventive measures, such as border closures and restrictions on business hours, unintentionally triggered near-total economic paralysis. The collapse of the tourism sector had far-reaching ramifications for livelihoods, agriculture, and food security. Recovery efforts are being further undermined by external shocks such as inflation and supply shortages. For example, In Samoa, fuel rose 44 percent from 2019 to 2022; in Nauru, liquefied petroleum gas bottle prices increased 41 percent in 2022 compared to 2021 (FAO 2022). These compounding challenges are reversing critical progress made toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway in Pacific SIDS.³

2.2 Earlier evaluation findings relevant to SIDS

Many GEF IEO evaluations have incorporated coverage of SIDS through analysis of regional variation in development impacts. GEF annual performance reports

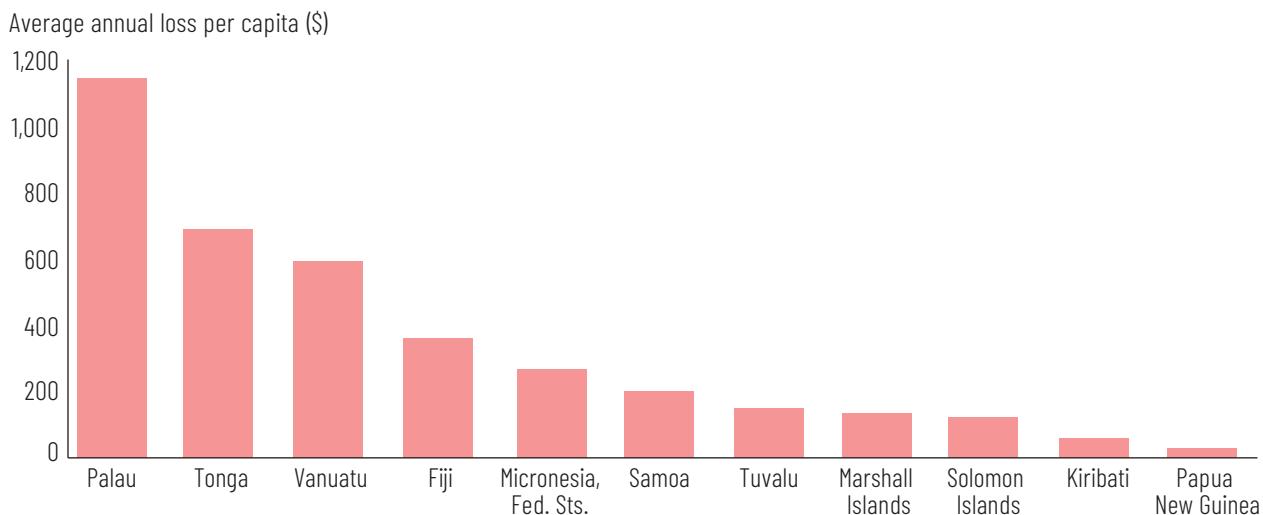
³The SAMOA Pathway is an international framework adopted in 2014 at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa. It outlines the sustainable development priorities for SIDS, including Pacific SIDS. The pathway addresses unique challenges faced by SIDS, such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, sustainable energy, and economic development. It serves as a blueprint for international cooperation and support to enhance the resilience and sustainable development of these vulnerable island nations.

Figure 2.2 Average economic loss as a percentage of gross domestic product, 2015-20



Source: ESCAP 2023.

Figure 2.3 Pacific SIDS average annual loss per capita due to disasters



Source: ESCAP 2020.

and comprehensive evaluations of the GEF routinely report performance outcomes and factors related to implementation and inclusion in GEF programming in SIDS as a priority group. The Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPST) noted that GEF-7 impact programs included low participation from

SIDS, and there was room for the programs to be more inclusive of priority country groups. OPS7 also discussed the Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) program (GEF ID 10185, United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP]), noting that it represented the

largest chemicals and waste investment in GEF-7 and substantially increased funding toward investments in least developed countries (LDCs) and SIDS from GEF-6.⁴ While the Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R) program (GEF ID 5392, United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]) itself is not discussed, OPS7 describes the ridge-to-reef approach taken in GEF programming in SIDS, addressing the interconnectedness between environmental challenges on land and in the ocean (GEF IEO 2022b). An R2R project would often have an integrated watershed management approach, with the project area spanning from the top of an island to the coral reef. Regarding priority country groups, OPS7 noted that GEF resources allocated to LDCs and SIDS are too limited to have an impact at a sufficiently large scale in addressing environmental problems and included a key recommendation that the GEF should increase its support to LDCs and SIDS to have greater impact in these priority countries.

The IEO's SIDS strategic country cluster evaluation (SCCE) found that overall programmatic approaches have not gained much traction yet in SIDS (GEF IEO 2019). One exception noted by the SCCE is that the GEF is encouraging integrated approaches by promoting R2R—an integrated watershed management approach to sustainably manage soil, water, and biodiversity—while also considering renewable energy resources and productive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism. The more recently approved ISLANDS program (2019) has a less integrated and more narrow focus, supporting SIDS in improving chemicals and waste management with funding beyond their STAR allocation. The GEF assists SIDS in identifying sustainable public and private national

⁴ There are seven SIDS that are also classified as LDCs. Among these, two are in the Pacific region: Kiribati and Solomon Islands. Tuvalu graduated from LDC status in December 2020. The GEF continues to support Least Developed Countries Fund projects approved prior to a country's graduation through project completion.

investments within the blue economy space through funding of collective management of coastal and marine systems and implementation of integrated ocean policies and legal and institutional reforms. GEF support to SIDS in land degradation seeks to ultimately restore degraded ecosystems and sustainably manage resources. Another driver for support to SIDS from the GEF has been the need for climate change adaptation; the GEF's two adaptation funds—the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)—have an active portfolio in SIDS in all regions.

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

The formative evaluation of the GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation found that some categories of countries, such as SIDS, have not yet

benefited from the integrated approach pilots and impact programs (GEF IEO 2022a). This evaluation assessed the approach applied through the GEF-6 integrated approach pilots and GEF-7 impact programs to address the drivers of environmental degradation. Only one SIDS country is participating, which is a missed opportunity given SIDS' experience with regional, R2R, and whole-island approaches. One of the evaluation's recommendations calls for the GEF to ensure a greater diversity of countries included in integrated programs and to be more inclusive of smaller countries such as SIDS.

Earlier, the GEF IEO conducted a portfolio evaluation of Vanuatu and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Among the evaluation's main findings are that the GEF has been crucial in advancing the environmental and sustainable development agenda in Vanuatu and other SPREP countries, facilitating the development of national plans, the creation of environmental agencies, and the implementation of legislative frameworks (GEF IEO 2015). While there has been success in replicating projects at the subnational level and increasing environmental awareness, institutional capacity for national-level implementation remains insufficient. The GEF has contributed to capacity building, especially in climate change, but sustaining these capacities is problematic. Additionally, excessive project preparation time and low national ownership have affected the efficiency and impact of initiatives. The recommendations emphasize aligning GEF-funded action plans with national priorities, integrating coordination mechanisms into national processes, reducing approval times, enhancing knowledge management, and strengthening SPREP's technical assistance after GEF funding concludes.

2.3 Evaluation purpose, scope, and objectives

Given the GEF's priority in addressing environmental efforts in the Pacific SIDS countries, their vulnerabilities, and the growing set of programs,⁵ the GEF IEO conducted an in-depth evaluation of the topic. The GEF has invested \$528 million through 140 interventions in Pacific SIDS. The IEO's SIDS SCCE covered GEF support to SIDS from the GEF-4 replenishment period through GEF-6. The Evaluation of Programmatic Approaches in the GEF assessed the program modality from May 2008 to 2016 (GEF IEO 2018b). While the SIDS SCCE assessed several stand-alone projects, the present evaluation assessed three programs approved in GEF-5 or later and their corresponding child projects. During GEF-5, program design started to become increasingly complex. Compared with earlier programs, GEF-5 shows a greater range of nonhomogeneous, multifocal, multi-Agency, and/or regional/global programs (GEF IEO 2018b).

This evaluation assessed three programs approved in GEF-5 or later and their corresponding 19 child projects (13 completed and 6 ongoing) implemented in Pacific SIDS (annex B).

The focus on programs from the GEF-5 replenishment period onward eliminated from consideration the largest programs focused on SIDS—the global LDC and SIDS Targeted Portfolio Approach for Capacity Development of Sustainable Land Management program (GEF ID 2441, UNDP), approved in GEF-3—and the second largest, the GEF Pacific Alliance for Sustainability program (GEF ID 3420, World Bank),⁶ approved

⁵ For the purposes of this evaluation, "program" refers to a parent program and a variable number of child projects designed to contribute to the overall program objective. The GEF programmatic approach was approved under the post-2008 programmatic approach modality; programs conform to the requirement of having a program framework document. A child project is a project belonging to and approved under a post-May 2008 program.

⁶ While the IEO SIDS SCCE did not assess programs, it did include 13 of the 17 child projects under the GEF Pacific

in GEF-4. From the GEF-5 replenishment period onward, the largest program in terms of number of child projects approved in Pacific SIDS countries is the R2R program. This program also had an approach focused on integration within the context of island ecosystems. The other two programs implemented in Pacific SIDS are the CPDP program (GEF ID 5037, Asian Development Bank [ADB]) and the ISLANDS program.

The evaluation of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS countries focused on three main objectives:

- To understand the evolution of GEF programs and integrated interventions in Pacific SIDS countries and to evaluate the extent to which interventions respond to lessons learned from past projects
- To evaluate the outcomes and factors influencing the performance of GEF programs and integrated interventions in Pacific SIDS countries
- To provide recommendations for future GEF projects in Pacific SIDS, with potential transferability to other SIDS.

2.4 Methodology and evaluation questions

To better understand and evaluate the ways the program could achieve its targeted outcomes, the IEO leveraged or developed a theory of change for each program. A program's theory of change provides a basis for evaluation of the theory and results. It is structured as a continuous cycle to consider feedback loops, allowing

Alliance for Sustainability program. This program aimed to promote sustainable development by addressing environmental challenges specific to the Pacific SIDS. The issues covered were related to biodiversity loss, land degradation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and waste management. The child projects were designed to support integrated and multisectoral approaches to sustainability through tailored, region-specific interventions in the Pacific SIDS context.

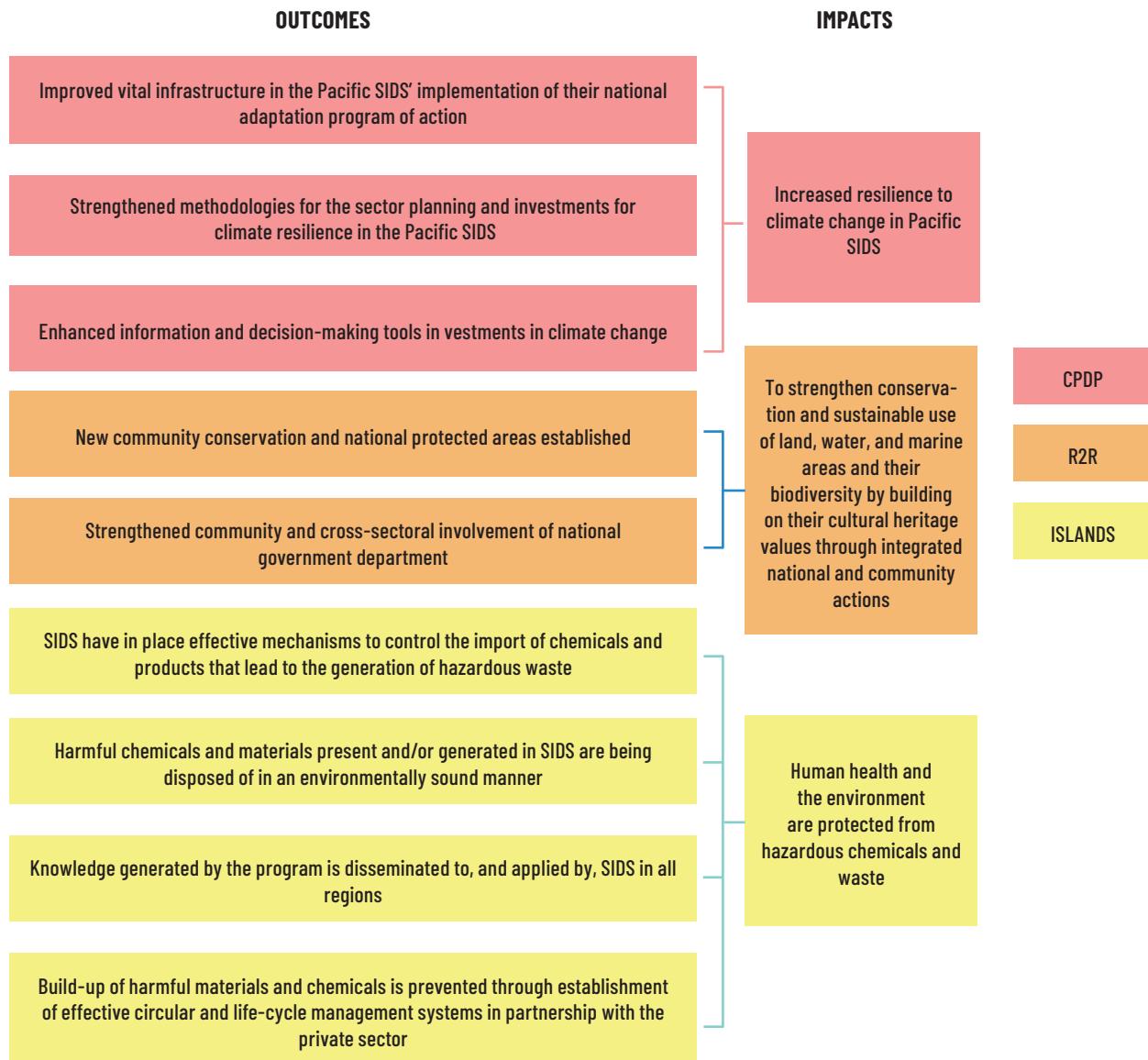
interventions to capitalize on past achievements, make gradual enhancements, expand their impact, and/or achieve results in different regions. Both the R2R and ISLANDS programs provided a theory of change in their program documentation ([annex C](#)). Since the GEF did not provide an explicit theory of change for the CPDP program, the evaluation team developed a theory of change for it to gain a deeper understanding of how the program could attain the objectives of the different interventions. The theory of change is based on the goals, principles, dimensions of success, and lines of action contained in the program justification and consistency framework. It was validated by reviewing the logic of the child projects. Finally, the evaluation team developed an integrated theory of change for the three programs for this evaluation ([figure 2.4](#)).

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

This evaluation employed a comprehensive, mixed-methods approach to assess GEF programs in Pacific SIDS. The methodology included a thorough review of documentation, an in-depth desk analysis of the program and project portfolio, and key informant interviews conducted both virtually and during on-site country visits. Additionally, the evaluation used contribution analysis (further discussed on [page 12](#)) to enhance the depth of insights. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the evaluation aimed to address the following key questions:

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

Figure 2.4 Integrated theory of change for evaluated programs



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

- **Coherence.** How compatible are the objectives of the GEF programs with similar government and/or donor-funded interventions in Pacific SIDS? Additionally, how compatible are the objectives and activities of the child projects in each program with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change and the other child projects?
- **Effectiveness.** To what extent have each of the GEF programs in Pacific SIDS achieved or are likely to achieve their planned outcomes?
- **Efficiency.** To what extent have GEF programs in Pacific SIDS delivered, or are likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner?

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

A set of subquestions and methods for capturing the answers to these questions is included in the evaluation matrix ([annex D](#)). These key questions are set out as themes in the [key findings chapter](#) of this report. The evaluation used the methods described in the evaluation's [approach paper](#) and summarized in the following paragraphs to collect and triangulate information.

Document review

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

Portfolio review and analysis

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

framework document (PFDs) and child project design documents. The past projects were reviewed to identify lessons learned relevant to the programs and child projects assessed for the evaluation.

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

- **Review of the three PFDs.** The PFDs for the three programs were reviewed for information on the interventions supported and strategies for program support and knowledge management.
- **Quality at entry of child project documents.** Quality at entry of child projects was assessed for all 19 child projects under the three programs using a standardized project review protocol. Of the total child projects, 13 have been completed and 6 are ongoing, and the quality was assessed for both. The purpose of this review was to assess relevance of interventions and coherence with the overall program, as well as incorporation of lessons learned from relevant past GEF projects.
- **Review of completed projects.** The effectiveness of 10 completed projects was assessed based on information and ratings in terminal evaluations.⁷ This information was aggregated using a standardized project review protocol.
- **Review of past GEF projects for lessons relevant to the programs and child projects.** Relevant lessons learned were aggregated in a database to serve as a reference point for stakeholder interviews and in review of PFDs and child projects.

Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including present and former GEF Secretariat members involved in the three

⁷ Terminal evaluations for three recently completed projects were not available as of the December 2023 cutoff date.

programs and child projects, GEF Agencies active in Pacific SIDS, GEF focal points, managers of child projects, relevant government and nongovernmental actors, project stakeholders, and beneficiaries in select Pacific SIDS. These interviews were part of the data-gathering process to further support documentation and portfolio reviews. A list of interviewees is available in [annex E](#).

Case studies

Field visits were conducted to gather the perspectives of country stakeholders. Members of the evaluation team visited three SIDS countries: Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu.⁸ These countries were selected based on a set of objectives and country-specific characteristics, including diversity of GEF funds, representation of the four GEF Agencies included in the overall evaluation portfolio, and project status. The case study countries were chosen to ensure coverage of all three programs and included seven child projects, five from the R2R program, two from the ISLANDS program, and one from the CPDP program ([table 2.1](#)). More specifically, Tonga and Vanuatu ranked among the top three countries with the highest number of projects in the portfolio, while Fiji was selected due to its strategic role as the location of GEF Agency offices and its importance as a regional hub for logistics and influence. Child projects selected for field visits were national, regional, and global projects. Field visits focused on collecting country-level evidence to validate the findings of the portfolio review of closed and

⁸ In Tonga, two projects from the R2R program were carried out, with funding of \$2.34 million and \$1.76 million. In Vanuatu, one child project each from the CPDP (funding of \$5.55 million) and R2R (\$4.6 million) programs were implemented. In Fiji, a child project was implemented as part of the R2R program for \$7.38 million. Finally, all three countries participated in the regional Pacific Islands and global communications child project of the ISLANDS program, which received funding of \$20 million and \$2 million respectively; as well as in the regional project of the R2R program for \$10.32 million.

Table 2.1 Distribution of GEF projects across the case study countries

Country	CPDP	R2R	ISLANDS	Total
Fiji	0	2	2	4
Tonga	0	3	2	5
Vanuatu	1	2	2	5

ongoing projects on relevance, coherence, and effectiveness of interventions.

Contribution analysis

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

The evaluation team used contribution analysis to help identify the extent to which the GEF interventions contributed to the development outcomes articulated in each of the programs' theory of change. Contribution analysis starts from a theory of change with a clear results chain linking GEF interventions to outcomes and impacts, which acknowledges any underlying assumptions, risks to the outcomes, and other influencing factors outside of the direct control of the GEF. After gathering all existing evidence available to test the theory of change, the evaluation team assessed the contribution narrative, relating observed actions of the intervention or program to the observed outcomes. The contribution analysis provided the evaluation team with an

evaluable framework for judging how the GEF interventions “moved the needle.”

Limitations and quality assurance

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

In many countries, the GEF operates within a landscape that involves multiple donor and government initiatives. The simultaneous or sequential actions carried out by governments, diverse donors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as the effect of the national context, make it challenging to clearly attribute the outcomes. To the extent possible, the evaluation team has applied a contribution analytic framework as described [above](#) to the case studies to

assess to what degree GEF interventions materially changed the course of the situation.

The evaluation has gone through a comprehensive quality assurance process. The draft approach paper and draft evaluation report were circulated and validated before finalization through a feedback process with key stakeholders. In addition to GEF IEO management and an external reviewer, the evaluation’s design and methods were carefully documented, adhering to the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, and utility.

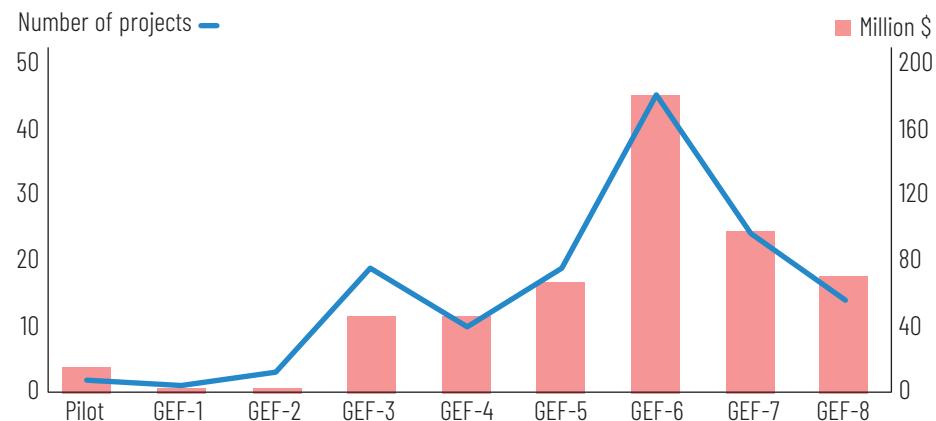
3

GEF programs in Pacific SIDS

3.1 GEF engagement in Pacific SIDS

Between 1991 and 2023, the GEF made substantial investments in Pacific SIDS, allocating \$528 million across 140 projects. While the number of projects and funding varied from year to year, certain periods stood out for exceptional activity. Notably, 2014 and 2015 were peak years for GEF engagement in Pacific SIDS. A record 15 projects were approved in 2014, followed by 13 projects in 2015; 2004 was also a peak year, with 13 projects approved. From the standpoint of total project funding, 2015 saw the highest allocation at \$62 million, with 2014 and 2022 closely following at \$59.5 million and \$58.2 million, respectively (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Number of GEF projects and annual investment in Pacific SIDS, 1991–2023



Source: GEF Portal.

Note: Financial data represent Chief Executive Officer endorsement amounts for completed and ongoing projects, and project identification form-approved amounts for GEF-8 projects. GEF-8 data are preliminary as several Pacific SIDS had not yet submitted their projects at the time of this evaluation, although their STAR allocations remain secured and available for programming. Historical amounts are not adjusted for inflation.

Thirty-four of the 140 projects were regional in scope, accounting for \$185.9 million in investment. National projects comprised the majority, with 106 implemented across various countries, adding up to \$342.1 million. Papua New Guinea led in both number of project approvals and project funding, with 15 projects receiving a total of \$81.12 million. Solomon Islands followed, with 12 projects totaling \$48.7 million; Vanuatu also had 12 projects, securing \$44.7 million in funding. The relationship between a country's population and its average funding per project reveals interesting patterns in resource allocation across Pacific SIDS ([figure 3.2](#)). The correlation coefficient of 0.61 indicates a moderate positive relationship—meaning larger countries tend to receive higher average funding per project, but this relationship is not straightforward. This moderate correlation suggests that while population influences funding allocation, the full picture is shaped by multiple factors. Countries often differ in their project portfolio strategies, with some choosing a few large full-size projects while others engage in multiple medium-size projects. Additionally, the STAR determines each country's funding based on various country-specific characteristics beyond population, such as environmental priorities and implementation

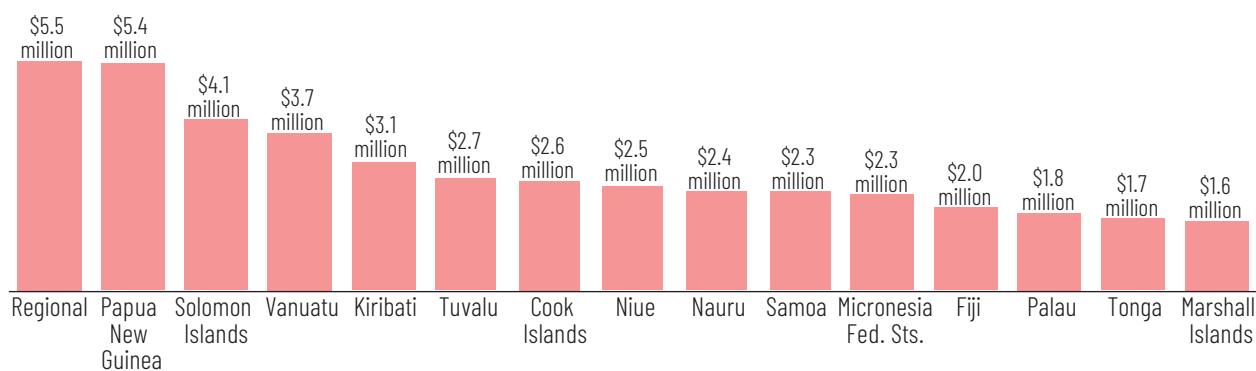
capacity.¹ The regional dimension adds another layer of complexity, as participation in regional projects can significantly affect a country's average funding figures.

3.2 Evolution of GEF support

Over the years, the utilization of GEF funding to support Pacific SIDS has evolved significantly, adapting to the unique and complex challenges faced by these vulnerable island nations. The transition from multifocal

¹ The STAR is a mechanism for allocating resources to countries based on their capacity, policies, and global environmental priorities. The system is designed to be transparent and consistent, and to provide predictability in funding. The STAR determines how much GEF resources a country can access during a replenishment period. The amount of resources a country receives is based on its country score, which is calculated using the Country Performance Index, the Global Benefits Index, and GDP. The STAR allocates resources to three focal areas: biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation. Each focal area has an allocation floor, which is the minimum amount a country can receive for that area.

Figure 3.2 Average funding amount of GEF projects by country



Source: GEF Portal.

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

area approaches to integrated strategies reflects a growing understanding of the interconnected environmental, social, and economic issues that SIDS grapple with, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable resource management.²

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

From GEF-5 onward, more multifocal area projects were initiated in SIDS compared to earlier replenishment periods, reflecting the complex and interrelated challenges faced by SIDS. The GEF has made significant efforts to implement more complex strategies and solutions that simultaneously address the multiple issues facing the Pacific SIDS, such as biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, sustainable land management, and protection of international waters. The introduction of integrated approach pilot programs and other larger-scale systemic investments during GEF-6 marked a tangible shift in addressing the specific needs of SIDS. For example, programs addressing sustainable fisheries, coastal zone management, and climate resilience are particularly relevant to Pacific SIDS. In GEF-7, the launch of impact programs further enhanced the GEF's ability to promote large, integrated, and impactful programs

across more sectors in SIDS. These programs address multiple drivers of environmental change, which is crucial for SIDS facing compound challenges such as sea level rise, extreme weather events, and pressure on limited natural resources. Findings from OPS7 conducted by the GEF IEO support integrated approaches as a mechanism for incorporating innovation in multiple sectors.

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

Throughout much of the GEF's history, program definitions have evolved based on their operational and financial features. In May 2008, the GEF Council formally approved the programmatic approaches modality. This reform marked the official start of programs at the GEF. Prior to the approval of the programmatic approach modality, 5 percent of all GEF grants were allocated to programs without PFDs (GEF IEO 2018b). Since then, child project identification forms under programs with PFDs began constituting a substantial volume of Council work programs, accounting for 30 percent of the total funding in GEF-6 and 28 percent in GEF-7 as of June 2021 (GEF IEO 2022b). Early post-2008 programs tended to be designed and implemented through several child projects brought together under an objectives framework that aimed to secure larger-scale and sustained impact on the global environment.

3.3 Characteristics of the evaluation portfolio

This evaluation focuses on three parent programs implemented in Pacific SIDS and their corresponding child

²Integration implies the use of systems thinking. It involves specifying system boundaries, addressing multiple drivers of environmental degradation simultaneously, addressing relationships among the system elements across scales, addressing key risks and vulnerabilities, considering system resilience, and establishing a feedback loop that facilitates timely course correction (GEF STAP 2018).

projects: the CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS programs. While the child projects for the CPDP and ISLANDS programs are distributed across two or more regions, all child projects for the R2R program are located in Pacific SIDS.

CPDP program

The CPDP is a GEF-5 program, financed by the LDCF and implemented by ADB, with an overall goal of reducing the vulnerability of vital infrastructure in LDCs that are also SIDS through the implementation of national adaptation program of action (NAPA) priorities ([figure 3.3](#)). Two of the countries covered by the program were Pacific SIDS at the time of approval. The intended impact was to reduce absolute investment losses from the negative impacts of climate change.

The program aimed for countries to work together to strengthen methodologies relevant to the context of small islands and exchange lessons, learning, and recommendations in several sectors and at different levels of decision-making, such as project, policy, and budgeting decisions. This was intended to multiply the benefits compared to that

of a country-by-country project approach. The program results framework lists different interventions across three core program components with one corresponding outcome per component. The first program component was focused on technical assistance for improved decision-making and knowledge development, with outputs related to improving the processes for budgetary allocations for adaptation, and completion of impact and vulnerability information in the countries specific to infrastructure needs in the areas of water supply and sanitation, transport, urban planning, and small-scale hydropower. It also included revised policies and investment plans to incorporate climate change adaptation in Tuvalu, and the development of knowledge products and information exchange on approaches for strengthening infrastructure resilience and ecosystem-based adaptation. Investments included the development of an urban drainage and transport plan that incorporated climate change adaptation and disaster risk management in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Additionally, a component focused on the institutional assessment of barriers to ecosystem-based adaptation, piloting of ecosystem-based adaptation to protect infrastructure, and developing green infrastructure guidance materials.

Figure 3.3 CPDP child projects and funding



Source: GEF Portal.

R2R program

The R2R program is a GEF-5 multitrust fund (GEF, LDCF) multifocal area program implemented by UNDP, with the objective of maintaining and enhancing the ecosystem goods and services (provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural) of Pacific Island countries ([figure 3.4](#)). This is to be achieved through integrated approaches to land, water, forests, biodiversity, and coastal resource management that contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, and climate resilience.

In this program, the Pacific Island countries emphasize the need to focus on their own national priority

Figure 3.4 R2R child projects and funding

Source: GEF Portal.

activities as they utilize STAR resources. Experience has shown that an integrated approach from R2R is necessary for poverty reduction, sustainability, and capacity enhancement in small countries with limited human resources to undertake projects. Hence, each country planned to adopt specific aspects of R2R.

The program results framework is expansive, with 28 outputs and 11 outcomes listed. The first component focuses on R2R demonstrations in all Pacific Island countries,³ and includes interventions in areas such as integrated coastal management and integrated water resource management, sustainable land management, the establishment of terrestrial protected areas, coastal blue forest conservation, reforestation and restoration of forests in watersheds resulting in carbon dioxide sequestration, climate change risk and vulnerability assessments,

³ As noted earlier, the R2R approach is a whole-of-ecosystem or integrated management strategy. In Pacific SIDS, “ridge to reef” refers to integrated methods for managing freshwater and coastal areas, emphasizing the interconnections between natural and social systems. This spans from the mountain ridges of volcanic islands, through coastal watersheds and habitats, and across coastal lagoons to the fringing reef environments associated with most Pacific SIDS (source: Pacific R2R Ridge to Reef, [What is Ridge to Reef?](#) web page).

and integration of community-based approaches. The second component focuses on improved governance for these interventions, including the development of integrated policy frameworks, trainings and training assessments, as well as national coastal diagnostic analyses. The third component focuses on monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management, including developing national and local indicators and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and national and regional platforms for sharing good practices and lessons learned. The program’s fourth component is focused on regional program coordination.

ISLANDS program

The ISLANDS program, a GEF-7 GEF Trust Fund program implemented by UNEP, aims to support SIDS in entering a safe chemical development pathway through strengthening their ability to control the flow of chemicals, products, and materials into their territories and unlocking resources for long-term management of chemicals and waste, including integrated chemicals and waste management in SIDS. Seven child projects have been approved, all of which are implemented regionally or globally in SIDS countries. One of the child projects is a global communications, coordination, and knowledge management project; the other six are regional projects focusing on ocean areas (Caribbean, Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans). This evaluation covers the regional Pacific Child Project (GEF ID 10267, UNEP) and the global Communications, Coordination, and Knowledge Management Project (GEF ID 10266, UNEP) ([figure 3.5](#)).

The ISLANDS program, through a combination of interventions and initiatives, aims to address specific needs at the country level while simultaneously reinforcing regional and global cooperation to tackle the challenges facing SIDS. Implementation involves several sectors, such as tourism, recycling,

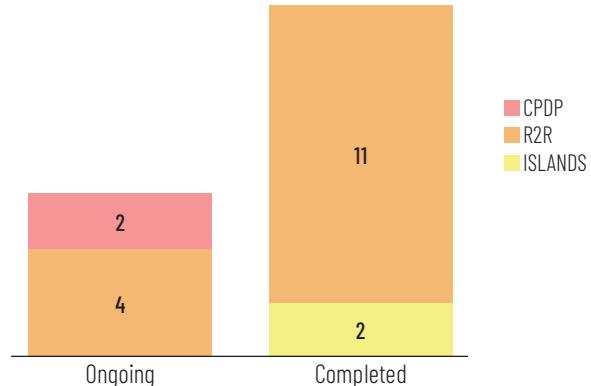
Figure 3.5 ISLANDS child projects and funding

Source: GEF Portal.

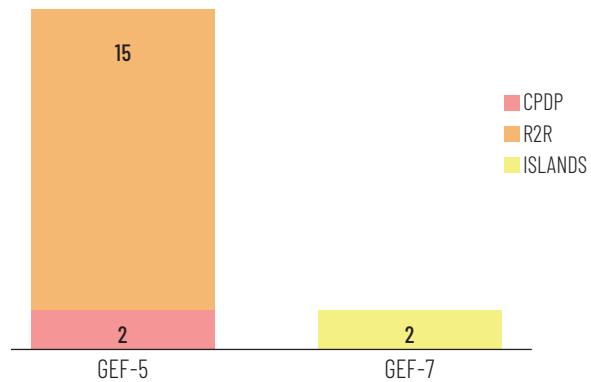
and shipping in integrated chemicals and waste management. The ISLANDS program has a results framework with four planned outcomes. The outcomes focus on developing mechanisms to control the import of chemicals and products that lead to the generation of hazardous waste, the safe management and disposal of existing chemical products and materials, the establishment of effective circular and life-cycle management systems in partnership with the private sector, and knowledge management and communication.

Child projects

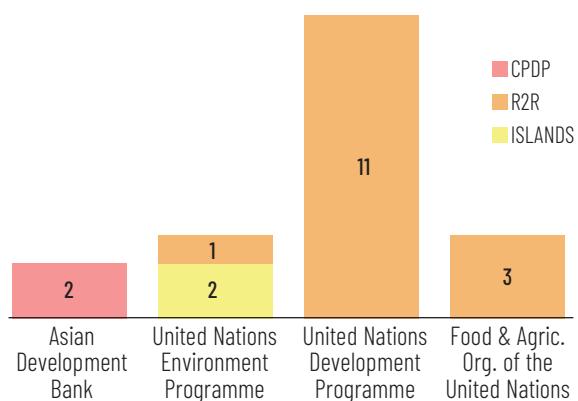
Most of the three programs' child projects are in advanced stages of implementation and disbursement. Thirteen projects have been completed, with terminal evaluations available for 10 of them (figure 3.6). The portfolio covers only the GEF-5 and GEF-7 replenishment periods, with a notable emphasis on GEF-5, which includes 17 projects (figure 3.7). The GEF Agencies for the portfolio are ADB, UNEP, UNDP, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with UNDP implementing 11 of these projects (figure 3.8). The projects are

Figure 3.6 Status of child projects

Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 3.7 Child projects by GEF period

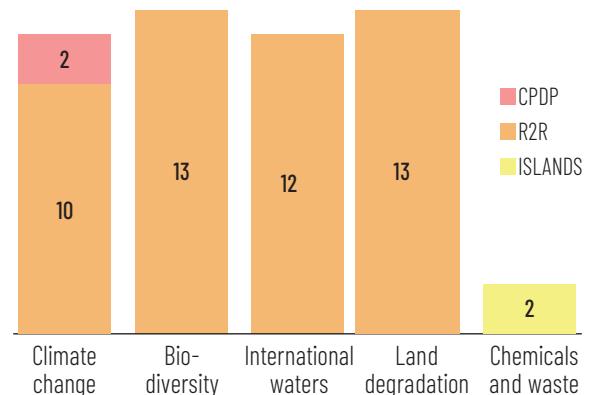
Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 3.8 Child projects by GEF Agency

Source: GEF Portal.

primarily multifocal, integrating topics such as climate change, biodiversity, international waters, and land degradation. Only two child projects, both part of the ISLANDS program, address chemicals and waste management ([figure 3.9](#)).

Figure 3.9 Focal area of child projects



Source: GEF Portal.

4

Key findings

4.1 Relevance

Alignment with national and regional strategies

The three programs demonstrate strong alignment with the national priorities of the Pacific SIDS countries, emphasizing consistency with national strategies, plans, and reporting under relevant conventions. The programs' objectives align with numerous national priorities, including global initiatives like the SDGs and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway; environmental assessments and action plans such as national implementation plans under the Stockholm Convention, Minamata initial assessments, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and NAPAs; and country-specific development plans such as Cook Islands' National Sustainable Development Plan, the Pathway for the Development of Samoa, the Tonga Strategic Development Framework, Vanuatu's Priorities and Action Agenda, the Tuvalu National Strategic Action Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, and the Kiribati Development Plan, as well as subregional initiatives such as the Micronesia Challenge Initiative. The programs emphasize aligning their activities with these priorities to ensure effective implementation and maximize impact, suggesting that the programs' objectives are relevant to the countries' priorities and strategies.

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

Framework Convention on Climate Change; and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, among others.

The portfolio review revealed that the GEF programs in Pacific SIDS were designed to respond to national policies and priorities. These programs demonstrate strong alignment with each country's prioritization of GEF focal areas and GEF STAR allocations, focusing on seven priority areas determined by each country. This approach aims to address the most critical environmental and developmental concerns of each Pacific SIDS. Furthermore, the evaluation team found that each of the three programs had a stakeholder consultation plan, providing additional evidence of the programs' responsiveness to national policies and priorities. This consultation process is particularly notable in the R2R program, where it has played a key role in aligning the program's objectives and implementation strategies with the participating countries' national priorities. [Table 4.1](#) presents selected examples of alignments between GEF programs and Pacific SIDS national priorities.

Quality of design

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

reassessment of island landing sites and the integration of adaptation into broader infrastructure planning processes.

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

The design of project strategies accounted for various regional and national contexts, but some potential obstacles were not fully anticipated. The design 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) included plans for nature-based jobs and a payment for ecosystem services (PES) scheme. While the nature-based jobs component was well conceived, the design may not have fully accounted for the complexities of implementing a PES scheme in the local context. In the project design of Tonga's R2R Integrated Land and Agro-ecosystem Management Systems (GEF ID 5578, FAO), demographic challenges like population decline and the potential for limited political support were not fully addressed. Additionally, the design of projects across the programs did not sufficiently account for potential administrative and financial bottlenecks, particularly in coordinating with GEF Agencies such as UNDP. These aspects

Table 4.1 Examples of alignment of GEF programs with Pacific SIDS national priorities

Country	Program	National priorities
Papua New Guinea	R2R	The R2R program is strongly aligned with the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030 , as it includes a pillar focused on achieving a sustainable forestry sector. Additionally, it incorporates climate change and natural disaster management, with goals such as adapting to the impacts of climate change and contributing to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
	ISLANDS	The ISLANDS program is moderately aligned with the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030, as it incorporates a strategy that states, "to ensure a balance between material wealth and a cleaner environment, economic incentives must be in place to deter pollution." However, while the need to promote a clean environment is highlighted, there is no specific mention of chemical management.
Samoa	R2R	The R2R program is highly aligned with the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2012-2016 , which incorporates the environment as a priority area. National strategies that align with the R2R program include sustainable management of natural resources, protection of critical ecosystems and species, promotion of good land use management practices, effective assessment and monitoring of water resources, and strengthening awareness and consultation on climate change and disaster risk management.
	ISLANDS	The ISLANDS program is closely aligned with the Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS) 2021/22-2025/26 . This plan includes a priority area for effective environmental protection and management frameworks, establishing enhanced sustainable solid and chemical waste management as an expected outcome. Additionally, the plan states that "in keeping with its commitment to responsible practices, the Government will support proper management of agricultural chemicals."
Tonga	R2R	The R2R program is aligned with both the Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) 2011-2014 and the TSDF 2015-2025 . The 2011-14 framework incorporates goals focused on cultural awareness, environmental sustainability, disaster risk management, and climate change adaptation, integrating these aspects into all planning and implementation of programs through the establishment and adherence to appropriate procedures and consultation mechanisms. The 2015-25 national development plan includes objectives related to improved land use planning, management, and administration, with stronger and more effective enforcement to ensure better provision of public and private spaces.
	ISLANDS	The ISLANDS program shows medium alignment with the TSDF 2015-2025, as it includes a pillar focused on improving waste management and promoting a cleaner environment. However, it does not explicitly mention chemical management.
Tuvalu	CPDP	The CPDP program is aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030. The national plan incorporates a pillar on climate change and infrastructure, which states that "new infrastructure and better service support will, by definition, play central roles in combating the effects of climate change. The Government of Tonga commits to embarking on aggressive climate change adaptation measures, as permitted by available funding" (Tuvalu National Strategy of Sustainable Development 2016-2020). Among the strategies are climate-proofed civil infrastructure, coastal works to protect foreshores, enacting and enforcing strict building codes, and upgrading existing civil infrastructure.
	R2R	The R2R program is aligned with the Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005-2015 , as it incorporates an environmental pillar with objectives to stop unregulated development and environmental degradation, increase the number of marine and terrestrial conservation areas, minimize climate change impacts, ensure regulatory compliance, and establish national climate change adaptation and mitigation policies.
Tuvalu	ISLANDS	The ISLANDS program is moderately aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030, as it includes a pillar focused on waste management. The strategies include developing and implementing improved waste management practices in collaboration with local communities and the private sector. However, there is no specific mention of chemical management.

(continued)

Table 4.1 Examples of alignment of GEF programs with Pacific SIDS national priorities (continued)

Country	Program	National priorities
Vanuatu	CPDP	While the CPDP program effectively addresses resilient infrastructure needs, Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016-2030 only partially aligns with this focus. The plan acknowledges infrastructure deficits and the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, but does not specifically emphasize resilient infrastructure as a priority.
	R2R	<p>The R2R program aligns with Vanuatu's key national development strategies: the Priorities and Action Agenda 2006-2015 (PAA) and the NSDP 2016-2030.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PAA aims to enhance institutional capacity within the Department of Forestry, recognizing the importance of strong governance in environmental management. The agenda emphasizes implementing sustainable management practices for coastal and reef resources, crucial for Vanuatu's ecosystem and economy. It promotes the establishment of protected areas to safeguard biodiversity and natural habitats. Lastly, it prioritizes the design and implementation of community-based risk reduction programs, enhancing local resilience. The NSDP 2016-2030 includes an environmental pillar that prioritizes becoming a resilient nation in the face of climate change; sustainably managing and utilizing land, water, and natural resources; and committing to biodiversity conservation. NSDP Goal ECO 2 focuses on improving infrastructure, including policy objectives: under this, ECO 2.4 aims to enact clear infrastructure governance, legislative frameworks, and standards for resilient infrastructure and maintenance; and ECO 2.5 looks to improve partnerships and the cost-effective use of resources to ensure sustainable asset management and maintenance.
	ISLANDS	The National Development Plan 2016-2030 prioritizes waste reduction and pollution control. However, it does not explicitly address chemical management, leading to a medium level of alignment with the plan.

Source: Project documents.

Note: While 10 Pacific SIDS (Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) have fulfilled their obligation to submit their first national reports to the Minamata Convention, this compliance should be distinguished from genuine political prioritization. The integration of chemical and waste management into national development strategies serves as an objective indicator of political commitment rather than merely fulfilling convention reporting requirements. Insufficient comparable data are available for Stockholm Convention national implementation plan submissions.

of the design phase highlight the need for more comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation strategies in future program designs for the Pacific SIDS context.

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

regions and projects, implementation of these activities has been delayed due to issues with the initial program manager. One of the R2R program's child projects, Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation, and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Service and Cultural Heritage in Niue (GEF ID 5552, UNDP), incorporated lessons from the completed project Building for Sustainable Land Management in Niue (GEF ID 3213, UNDP), addressing the ongoing challenge of declining interest from the host community due to Niue's decreasing and aging population. However, the effectiveness of this approach in maintaining community engagement has been limited.

In the CPDP program, the child project in Tuvalu was designed in response to a request from the government to enhance its transportation development plans, demonstrating alignment with national priorities and coherence with national context—but also raising questions about the balance between government requests and broader adaptation priorities included in the country's NAPA and the GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF/SCCF. The Integrated Environmental Management of the Fanga'uta Lagoon Catchment (GEF ID 5663, UNDP) project acknowledged limitations of the 2001 Fanga'uta Lagoon environmental management plan, particularly in enforcement, resource allocation, and coherent management, and attempted to address these issues. However, similar challenges persisted, indicating that the project's design did not fully overcome previous shortcomings. The R2R regional child project in Tonga, Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries (GEF ID 5404, UNDP), drew insights from an earlier initiative, Pacific Islands Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (GEF ID 2131, UNDP), modifying its approach to regional mechanisms based on past limitations. While this showed an attempt at adaptive design, the project still faced difficulties in fostering institutional changes at the national level.

The incorporation of lessons learned across the portfolio indicates an intention to improve project effectiveness and avoid repeating past mistakes in environmental initiatives across Pacific SIDS. However, the evaluation has found that this approach has had mixed results, with some projects showing improved outcomes while others continue to face similar challenges to their predecessors, despite attempts to incorporate past lessons.

Results framework

The analysis of M&E reveals misalignments between program-level and child project-level results frameworks.

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

Indicator quality across child projects varies substantially, ranging from overly simplistic to highly specific yet operationally restrictive, further reducing the effectiveness of the M&E system.¹ These issues constrain the M&E system's ability to capture nuanced outcomes and support adaptive management. The R2R child project in Niue relied on basic output-focused indicators such as "management plans developed," which did not reflect broader conservation impacts. Projects like the R2R child project in the Federated States of Micronesia—R2R Implementing an Integrated Ridge to Reef Approach to Enhance Ecosystem Services, to Conserve Globally Important Biodiversity and to Sustain Local Livelihoods in the Federated States of Micronesia (GEF ID 5517, UNDP)—also leaned heavily on output indicators such as "number of people trained" rather

¹Quality refers to an indicator's ability to accurately measure intended outcomes and its relevance to project objectives. Effectiveness relates to how well indicators capture progress toward objectives and inform adaptive management decisions.

than outcome-based measures, reducing their contribution to overall program-level evaluation.

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

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

Environmental and social safeguards

The evaluation found varying trends in the implementation of environmental and social safeguards, and project risk management across the portfolio. Environmental and social safeguards have been clearly established in 63 percent (12 of 19) of the child projects. However, among parent programs, only the ISLANDS program has implemented and documented these measures, indicating a significant gap at the program level. The CPDP program mentioned that safeguard supervision will be carried out, but specific strategies are not yet mentioned. Regarding the R2R program, nothing is mentioned about the establishment of safeguards. In addition,

cases like the child project Advancing Sustainable Resources Management to Improve Livelihoods and Protect Biodiversity in Palau (GEF ID 5208, UNEP) were found in which an environmental and social safeguard plan was not developed during the project development stage, despite its importance being recognized for the expansion of the protected area network.

Risk management practices show considerable diversity: only 37 percent (7 of 19) of child projects actively monitor and update risk matrices as contexts change. Further analysis of risk management engagement during implementation reveals a concerning pattern: 33 percent of projects showed limited consideration of risks, 46 percent demonstrated moderate consideration, and only 20 percent exhibited a high degree of focus. Additionally, some projects, such as the R2R child project in Palau, did not include contingency plans or mitigation strategies to address unforeseen circumstances.

Gender mainstreaming

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

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

4.2 Coherence

Internal coherence

Of the 19 child projects, there is a generally positive trend in alignment with parent project objectives, although with some notable areas for improvement. Most of the child projects (13 of 19) have developed key indicators that support the objectives of their respective parent programs. This demonstrates a significant level of coherence within the program structure. However, the quality and effectiveness of these indicators vary considerably across the portfolio. While most child projects created indicators aligned with the parent program objectives, the assessment made by the

GEF IEO uncovered several limitations. Some indicators were found to be overly simplistic, potentially failing to capture the complexity of program impacts. Other indicators lacked sufficient operationalization, making it challenging to measure progress effectively. For instance, the R2R child project in Fiji illustrates a case where there is no distinct monitoring plan and the indicators are not sufficiently operational, such as with protected area management effectiveness. Similarly, the R2R child project in Niue designed very simplistic indicators that do not broadly support the program’s objectives. Additionally, certain indicators were focused on outcomes within highly restricted contexts, which limited their overall effectiveness and applicability at the broader program level. The child projects under evaluation demonstrated varying degrees of success in developing indicators that align with and support the programs’ broader objectives. For instance, the R2R Reimaanlok Looking to the Future: Strengthening Natural Resource Management in Atoll Communities in the Republic of Marshall Islands Employing Integrated Approaches (GEF ID 5544, UNDP) project developed indicators that support the program’s objectives, but the number of indicators was limited, potentially constraining comprehensive assessment.² In contrast, the R2R child project in the Federated States of Micronesia created indicators that were primarily output-focused, which restricted their ability to contribute meaningfully to program-level outcomes and impact measurement. The R2R project in Niue, operating within a highly constrained context, designed indicators that were primarily output-oriented. This approach potentially limited insight into broader outcomes. In a similar vein, the

²The child project indicators include terrestrial and marine ecosystems under enhanced management; number of resource management plans, position of national protected areas coordinator, number of trained marine resource integrated professionals in integrated approaches, national repository for spatial biodiversity and resource management information enhanced and sustained, and cultural expressions linked to resource management documents.

R2R child project in Kiribati developed overly simplistic indicators that failed to adequately capture or support the program's objectives at a more comprehensive level.

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

External coherence

The objectives and activities of the child projects have generally been coherent with the goals and objectives of each program's theory of change and other development projects dealing with the same issues. The child projects have also been designed to complement other projects and interventions, aiming to avoid duplication of efforts. Some projects promote synergies among different initiatives and organizations, demonstrating coherence in their objectives and activities. For example, in Tonga, the two R2R child projects seek to complement ministry activities, such as the Ministry of Health and other ministries related to climate change, by fostering coordination and avoiding duplication of efforts. In Vanuatu, collaboration is under way with two major projects from the Green Climate Fund, and all information is channeled through the National Advisory Board, which ensures that no other projects operate in the same area—thus preventing overlap and duplication with, for example, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and Australian Aid.

The GEF's regional approach has been particularly beneficial in attracting other donors to work in Pacific SIDS, providing compatibility and facilitating intervention opportunities. This approach is characterized by flexibility, allowing

for better integration with other donor-funded projects and adaptability to changing circumstances. For example, the CPDP Protecting Urban Areas Against the Impacts of Climate Change in Vanuatu child project (GEF ID 9197, ADB) demonstrated remarkable adaptability by shifting its focus from general resilient infrastructure investment to targeted cyclone recovery efforts. This adjustment exemplified the project's responsiveness to urgent local needs in the aftermath of a natural disaster, highlighting the importance of flexibility in project design and implementation in SIDS contexts. However, the GEF IEO also identified challenges in coordination, as exemplified by the R2R project Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Functions through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in the Cook Island (GEF ID 5348, UNDP), where different funding sources led to implementation complications. Despite these issues, evidence collected from stakeholder interviews indicates that GEF projects contribute significantly to capacity building and institutional strengthening, which in turn benefits other donor-funded projects. The complementary nature of GEF funding, often focusing on specific components within or parallel to larger multidonor projects, further enhances its external coherence in the Pacific SIDS context. This approach allows the GEF to fill critical gaps and leverage its resources effectively, while also promoting synergies with other development initiatives in the region. In the same direction, in terms of cofinancing commitments and realization, according to the GEF IEO evaluation of cofinancing (GEF IEO 2025), GEF projects demonstrate varying levels of cofinancing success based on their institutional arrangements and geographic context. Nevertheless, projects show particularly strong cofinancing performance when they are funded through the GEF Trust Fund, implemented by multilateral development banks, or operate as child projects under programmatic approaches. This pattern suggests that institutional capacity and national economic conditions play a significant role in attracting cofinancing resources.

Policy coherence

The analysis reveals a complex picture in terms of policy coherence. While the projects generally align well with national policies and priorities, including nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and SDGs, implementation faces various challenges. Interviews conducted during missions to Pacific SIDS did not uncover widespread policy inconsistencies, but rather highlighted specific obstacles in certain countries. These challenges include regulatory issues, such as slow processes due to national legislation on procurement, which can hinder alignment with policies and priorities. The level of government support for environmental initiatives varies across SIDS. In some cases, governmental engagement appears limited, leaving the private sector to take the lead. A notable example of this is in Tonga, where waste management efforts are driven primarily by private sector initiatives rather than government-led programs. This situation highlights the potential gap in public sector involvement in addressing critical environmental issues in certain SIDS contexts.

The GEF's regional approach in Pacific SIDS facilitates coordination and knowledge sharing across countries while addressing the diverse needs and capacities of different SIDS. While programs like R2R were not specifically designed with policy coherence as an objective,³ they have provided insights into the complexities of working across different sectors and governance levels in the region. The experience from these programs highlights both opportunities and challenges in cross-sectoral coordination, including issues with implementation and enforcement, varying levels of government support, and difficulties in harmonizing interventions across sectors.

³Although the R2R program offers valuable lessons for current policy coherence efforts, it is important to note that it was designed during GEF-5, before policy coherence became an explicit priority in the GEF's mandate.

4.3 Effectiveness

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

CPDP program

The CPDP program has reported limited but positive outcomes. The overall goal of the program is to integrate climate-proofing measures in infrastructure projects, helping SIDS countries mitigate investment losses caused by climate change. These projects are closely linked with national priorities under the NAPA and focus on vital sectors such as coastal protection, water management, and agriculture. The CPDP child project in Vanuatu has achieved significant success in reconstructing transport infrastructure along the Efate ring road, emphasizing climate resilience and disaster protection. A key anticipated outcome of the project is enhanced road connectivity with greater climate resilience. Notably, the terminal evaluation for this project indicates no unachieved or underachieved results, suggesting successful implementation within its scope. In contrast, although the Tuvalu child project has achieved its infrastructure outputs, evidence from its 2023 PIR indicates limited demonstration of direct climate resilience benefits in

these investments, raising questions about the additionality of LDCF funding for adaptation outcomes.

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

R2R program

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

The R2R program's outcomes span seven key environmental interventions, with varying levels of success across different areas. Three interventions demonstrated high impact: improved management of protected areas, increased management in coastal and marine areas, and implementation of water catchment management activities ([table 4.2](#)). For instance, the program exceeded its goal in developing catchment management plans and significantly expanded marine protected areas in some regions. Medium impact was observed in restoration and conservation efforts, as well as in improving road connectivity with resilience to climate change. While reforestation and mangrove restoration showed progress, some projects faced challenges with low survival rates. The program achieved limited success in reducing environmental stress and improving conditions for endangered species, with these areas showing low impact. For example, while some projects made progress in sustainable land and water management, others struggled to develop species recovery or management plans for endangered fauna.

Terminal evaluations show that 11 child projects (73 percent) reported one or more unachieved or below-expected results on key outcome areas. Among the main examples, the Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga did not meet its objective of increasing vegetation cover, with the seedling survival rate in reforestation activities remaining low due to issues related to planning, monitoring, and technical support. The child project implemented in Fiji similarly failed to achieve its objectives of creating new terrestrial protected areas and improving existing marine protected areas. In Kiribati, the child project did not reach its targets for hectares dedicated to agroforestry, sustainable forest management, and marine area co-management. Lastly, the child project in Niue fell short of achieving certain environmental outcomes, particularly in species recovery and management plans. This suggests that while the R2R approach in the Pacific SIDS has yielded positive outcomes, there are still significant areas for improvement.

Table 4.2 R2R program environmental outcomes: expected versus actual results

Outcome	Description of outcomes as stated in project documents	Example with information collected from terminal evaluations	Achievement
Improved management of protected areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in management effectiveness of protected areas, ensuring better protection and conservation Improvement in national and state capacity for managing protected areas and implementing sustainable land management practices Development of management plans for conservation areas to ensure effective protection 	Child project in Fiji <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two comprehensive Biological Rapid Assessment Programme assessments, management plans developed and implemented for each protected area Goal—to develop four catchment management plans in priority areas that integrated biodiversity, forests, land, and water—was exceeded with five catchment management plans produced 	High
Increased management in coastal and marine areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of special management areas to promote sustainable fishing practices and conserve biodiversity Establishment of marine protected areas to safeguard marine biodiversity and promote sustainable use of marine resources Increased fish biomass observed in marine protected areas, indicating positive impact on conservation Development of integrated coastal management plans to promote sustainable coastal development and protect coastal ecosystems 	Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga: 0% of marine environment designated for sustainable fisheries and conservation in Fanga'uta Lagoon; 3 villages proposed for community-based managed areas for sustainable fisheries Child project in Cook Islands: Target was exceeded by > 800 times by establishing marine protected area zones extending 50 nautical miles around the islands, prohibiting large-scale commercial fishing and mining to protect marine habitats	High
Implementation of water catchment management activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of water catchment management activities to improve water quality and availability Enhancing catchment management practices, potentially leading to better water quality and reduced pollution 	Regional project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 national pilot area diagnostics conducted and local governance of water, land, forests, and coasts reviewed 14 national pilot projects, in various stages of implementation, are testing innovative technologies 	High
Improved road connectivity with resilience to climate change	Provision of improved and reliable road connectivity with increased resilience to climate change	Child project in Samoa: > 12,000 people have been able to benefit from improved flood management from climate-resilient flood protection measures	Medium

(continued)

The R2R approach has proven relevant and complementary to other interventions addressing climate change, biodiversity, international waters, and land degradation in the Pacific region. For example, the R2R approach has been integrated into national development plans and aligned with national priorities, particularly in response to environmental risks such as cyclones and sea level

rise. The LDCF-financed Economy-wide Integration of Climate Change Adaptation and DRM/DRR [Disaster Risk Management/Disaster Risk Reduction] to Reduce Climate Vulnerability of Communities project in Samoa (GEF ID 5417, UNDP) incorporated climate change and disaster management into the existing Strategy for the Development of Samoa

Table 4.2 R2R program environmental outcomes: expected versus actual results (continued)

Outcome	Description of outcomes as stated in project documents	Example with information collected from terminal evaluations	Achievement
Restoration and conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoration and conservation of critical lagoon habitats, such as mangroves, through replanting and clean-up efforts Establishing new conservation areas in terrestrial, marine, and reef ecosystems Expansion of protected areas, contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services Restoration of habitats, including wetlands, to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience Progress in reforestation and forest rehabilitation efforts, including tree planting and improved forest management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child project in Fiji: About 76% of planned 1,245 hectare reforestation completed as of June 30, 2022, although some notable low survival rates in Tuvu catchment were reported (< 30%), along with estimates ranging from 45-70% in Tunuloa catchment Fanga'uta Lagoon child project in Tonga: Planted almost 20 hectares of mangroves and rehabilitated about 69 hectares of mangroves cover through waste clean-up campaign, leading to reduced pollution pressure Child project in Nauru: In Component 1, which focused on conservation of marine biodiversity, 20% of targets were achieved, 20% were partially achieved, and 60% were not achieved Child project in Papua New Guinea: Total protected area expansion of 84,683 hectares, 33.2% of target 	Medium
Reduced environmental stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce environmental stress, via sustainable land management practices, erosion measures, and waste management Completion of flood protection infrastructure, reducing the risk of flooding and its associated impacts River dredging and maintenance work conducted to improve water flow, reduce flood risk, and maintain healthy ecosystems Reduce pollution to aquifers, potentially leading to safer drinking water and healthier ecosystems 	Child project in Nauru: In Component 2, which addresses sustainable land and water management, 71% of targets were fully achieved, 14% targets were partially achieved, and 14% were not achieved	Low
Improvement in endangered species	Protection of key resources and contribution to recovery of endangered and endemic species	Child project in Niue: Biodiversity surveys conducted on land reptiles, sea snakes, Pacific flying foxes, and cave fauna, but no recovery or species management plans were developed	Low

Source: Project documents and terminal evaluations.

2016/17-2019/20. This integration was achieved under the “improved disaster resilience” priority area and addressed multiple key outcomes—specifically, climate (key outcome 14), environment (key outcome 4), and environmental resilience (key outcome 13). This comprehensive approach demonstrates how the project effectively mainstreamed climate and disaster

concerns across various critical aspects of Samoa’s national development strategy, enhancing the country’s overall resilience planning. The R2R program has also contributed to enhancing policy coherence. The regional R2R initiative has fostered consistency in policies across various sectors and governance levels, while facilitating coordination among multiple

agencies and projects within participating countries—ultimately resulting in greater policy alignment.

The R2R program demonstrates a systematic approach to knowledge sharing at both national and interregional levels, with 10 child projects reporting the development of mechanisms for transferring knowledge and skills. This number suggests a more systematic approach to knowledge dissemination within the R2R program compared to the CPDP program. At the interregional level, the program actively engaged with the [IW:LEARN](#) platform and implemented innovative SIDS-to-SIDS twinning arrangements, particularly notable in the knowledge exchange between Pacific R2R and Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States Caribbean (IWECO) projects. These cross-regional initiatives facilitated sharing of lessons and good practices among SIDS across different oceans. At the national level, the R2R child project on integrated land management systems in Tonga provides a particularly illustrative example of diverse and engaging knowledge-sharing practices. The project employed a multifaceted approach to knowledge dissemination through community engagement with weekly television and radio broadcasts, which were used to reach a wide audience, complemented by monthly visits to six villages. This combination of mass media and direct community interaction ensures broad dissemination of project information. There was also social media presence: a local Facebook page dedicated to the R2R Tonga initiative was maintained, leveraging popular social media platforms to engage with younger demographics and provide real-time updates. The program utilized a regional website as a repository for success stories, showcasing the project's impact and providing a centralized location for information sharing. The project coordinators participated in regional events, fostering knowledge exchange beyond national boundaries, and facilitating cross-pollination of ideas and good practices. Finally, the program organized an overarching event with awards for youth programs,

demonstrating a commitment to engaging younger generations in environmental management.

This comprehensive approach in Tonga demonstrates the potential for effective knowledge sharing when multiple platforms and methods are employed strategically. The situation of the R2R child project in Vanuatu provides an interesting contrast. While each department within the Ministry of Climate Change maintains its own website, the National Advisory Board provides a centralized portal that integrates access to all departmental resources. Its website, updated weekly, experiences high traffic, suggesting effective local information dissemination. Additionally, the SPREP-led [Vanuatu Climate Futures Portal](#) covers various sectors including agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure, and water.

ISLANDS program

The ISLANDS program in the Pacific region has struggled to meet its objectives, facing numerous implementation challenges. Initially, the program was thoughtfully designed through consultations with the SPREP and other key stakeholders. It aimed to align with the GEF's strategic directions and introduce innovations such as harmonized policies across the region and centralized waste treatment facilities. Despite these well-intentioned plans, the program's effectiveness in the Pacific has not lived up to expectations, with implementation proving more difficult than anticipated. This stands in contrast to some other regions, such as the Caribbean, where implementation appears to have progressed more smoothly. The Pacific region encountered several obstacles that hindered the program's success. These included delays due to COVID-19, changing priorities among participating countries, and a lack of regional cohesion. The original design became outdated soon after the project's kickoff, leading to difficulties in implementation. There were also challenges with the project manager in the executing agency (SPREP), who was fired

on request from UNEP. Some participating countries expressed concerns about the low level of attention given to the project, which led to some frustration and delays in implementation. Supervision reports indicated low expenditure rates and poor performance reviews for the Pacific component of the program.

Despite these setbacks, the ISLANDS program achieved some focused small successes in specific areas. These included a targeted mercury pollution awareness campaign, and small-scale youth engagement through initiatives like the [Tide Turners Plastics Challenge](#). However, the programmatic approach yielded mixed results overall. While it fostered some collaboration, stakeholders often found it overly rigid and sometimes ill-suited to the Pacific context. At the global level, the program coordination group involving all stakeholders proved less effective than anticipated, with an ongoing midterm review suggesting the establishment of a project steering committee. At the regional level, while the Pacific project's governance structure includes a project steering committee with annual meetings for progress review and decision-making, initial misunderstandings about governance arrangements required additional guidance from UNEP. Interviews revealed that single-country allocations significantly hindered regional cooperation, a key aim of the program. Stakeholders characterized the current program as highly complex and challenging to manage within the Pacific SIDS context, emphasizing the need for more focused strategic objectives. They also advocated for a revised approach to program duration that better accommodates the limited capacities and heavy workloads of ministries in Pacific SIDS governments.

The ISLANDS program's effectiveness is challenging to evaluate comprehensively due to its early implementation stage and limited available data. As of the evaluation period, no child projects had reached the terminal evaluation stage, significantly restricting the ability to assess long-term outcomes. The primary source of

information, the PIR for the regional child project, indicates 0 percent achievement of outcomes and only 5 percent of outputs reached. These figures reflect early stage implementation rather than final results. The program has faced substantial delays in initiating project activities, stemming from various factors including weak regional project management, challenges in securing national policy support for waste management, limited alignment with government priorities, insufficient coordination with related projects, and inadequate support from some stakeholders. These early challenges primarily indicate implementation difficulties. The lack of comprehensive data and terminal evaluations means that the full scope of the program's effectiveness remains unclear at this stage. Current assessments are based on limited progress reports and stakeholder feedback, which suggest that the program has not yet achieved its intended outcomes. The early implementation phase and the absence of completed projects limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the ISLANDS program's overall effectiveness in addressing waste management and chemical issues in Pacific SIDS.

The ISLANDS program presents a more complex picture of knowledge sharing, with variations in practices and effectiveness across different countries. In Tonga, the regional child project faces challenges in utilizing the knowledge-sharing platforms effectively. The regional website is not frequently used, with the Department of Environment preferring to use its own website for information dissemination. While both online and in-person seminars are conducted for the program, along with national events, the project website's instability poses a challenge to consistent information sharing. A notable issue is the limited direct connection between countries participating in the program, which hampers understanding and development of the regional component. In Vanuatu, the ISLANDS program's knowledge sharing appears to be more centralized but somewhat limited in scope. Information is primarily received through SPREP and

the ISLANDS website. However, there has been no exchange of experiences with other countries where the ISLANDS program is implemented, indicating a gap in regional knowledge sharing and peer learning opportunities.

GEF programs' additionality

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

significant given the Pacific SIDS context of limited human resource capacity, geographic isolation, high travel costs, and technical capacity constraints.

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

This knowledge sharing has led to successful examples of replication and scaling-up of approaches across different projects, promoting South-South knowledge transfer. Community conservation areas, the use of Indigenous farming methods, and Farmer Field Schools are among the initiatives that have seen broader implementation. A notable example is the World Bank's adoption of the Jobs for Nature program, inspired by approaches implemented in the R2R national and regional child projects in Fiji (World Bank 2022). This led to the creation of Jobs for Nature 2.0, with substantial additional funding from the World Bank, demonstrating how GEF initiatives can catalyze larger investments.

The programmatic approach also provides greater flexibility in fund allocation and project implementation. ADB representatives noted the ease of use and simplicity in accessing and approving GEF funds within a program framework. This flexibility extends to addressing multiple issues in a coordinated manner, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to

complex environmental challenges. The R2R program, for example, was instrumental in helping Pacific SIDS utilize their STAR allocations effectively before expiration, demonstrating an indirect benefit of this approach in maximizing resource use. The influence of the R2R approach extends beyond GEF-funded projects, with organizations such as Conservation International, the World Wildlife Fund, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and IUCN integrating this approach into their own initiatives.

GEF programs have demonstrated an ability to engage the private sector and attract other donors. Their larger scale and comprehensive nature appeal to private companies that might overlook smaller projects. This engagement is crucial for leveraging resources and ensuring long-term sustainability. For instance, the ISLANDS regional child project partnered with Swire Shipping, which committed \$35 million in cofinancing for a recycling operation for end-of-life vehicles in the Pacific. This partnership, catalyzed by the GEF's feasibility study funding, addresses a key waste management challenge in Pacific SIDS.⁴ The programmatic approach also facilitates donor coordination, as seen in the collaboration with initiatives like PacWaste Plus and alignment with Australian government agencies, enhancing the viability and impact of these environmental interventions.

However, there is room for improvement in inter-organizational collaboration. The success of coordination mechanisms like the Joint Policy

⁴ It is important to note that although initial preparatory work has been completed—including feasibility studies and business case development—supervision reports indicate limited tangible progress on Swire Shipping's plans. This slower-than-expected progress reflects broader shipping industry challenges, including COVID-19 recovery and global shipping route disruptions, as well as the complexity of establishing sustainable fee collection systems for end-of-life vehicle recycling in Pacific SIDS. This suggests a gap between the ambitious partnership plans and their current implementation status.

Action Matrix,⁵ employed by other donors, serves as a testament to the potential benefits of enhanced collaborative frameworks. This coordinated approach has demonstrated its value in minimizing bureaucratic hurdles, aligning support with country policy reforms, and leveraging sector-specific expertise across various development sectors in Pacific Island countries.

Private sector engagement, while pursued, shows room for improvement. Only 32 percent of child projects report actual collaboration with this sector. However, the evaluation mission observed some specific private sector initiatives, including support for data collection, cofinancing of fuel costs, and involvement in environmental sustainability and waste management projects. The private sector has also contributed to the establishment of startup companies in the waste sector.

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

⁵ The Joint Policy Action Matrix is a coordinated framework used by multiple donors (including Australia, New Zealand, ADB, the European Union, and the World Bank) to align support with country policy reforms in Pacific Island countries. It provides a single set of policy actions and targets, reducing government transaction costs, enhancing donor coordination, and leveraging sector-specific expertise. Often used in conjunction with development policy operations, it has been effective in countries such as Samoa and Tonga for minimizing bureaucratic issues and coordinating technical assistance across various development sectors (World Bank 2017).

Stakeholder engagement and inclusion have been key focus areas for GEF programs in Pacific SIDS, with varied outcomes across projects and countries. These programs have aimed to involve local communities and address cross-cutting issues from their inception. Gender equality has been emphasized to varying degrees across the CPDP, R2R, and ISLANDS programs, with efforts to integrate it into project designs and activities. These variations partly reflect the evolution of GEF gender policies over time, with ISLANDS (designed under GEF-7) incorporating more systematic gender considerations compared to R2R and CPDP, which were designed under earlier policy frameworks. Women's participation has been noted in sectors such as climate change adaptation planning, disaster risk management, coastal fisheries, and waste management ([table 4.3](#)). In Tonga, waste management projects reported high participation rates from women and girls. Some projects established women's clubs and implemented gender mainstreaming policies. In Vanuatu, projects implemented provided specific examples of engagement strategies, such as establishing women as leaders of initiatives encouraging local communities to

engage in ecotourism and providing solar power for phone charging. While these efforts show potential for promoting inclusivity and enhancing project sustainability, their long-term impact and the consistency of implementation across different projects and countries require further evaluation. The effectiveness of these measures in achieving lasting change at the community level remains an area for continued assessment.

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

Table 4.3 Examples of gender participation in child projects

Child project	Gender participation
R2R child project in Cook Islands	> 295 people from 26 communities (73% women) participated in ecotourism training
R2R child project in Nauru	8 women from the Nauru Environment Division, Department of Commerce, Industry & Environment staff enrolled in the University of South Pacific Climate Change & Resilience course
R2R child project in Fiji	Raised a total of 9,000 seedlings in a nursery set up by women in the community
R2R child regional project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 women out of 16 people successfully completed postgraduate diploma • 17 women out of 32 people completed postgraduate certificate
R2R child project in Samoa	> 60% of project beneficiaries are women
R2R child project in Niue	Capacity of local communities enhanced through trainings related to use of agrochemicals and beekeeping delivered with project support; 125 farmers attended trainings, 71 of whom were women
CPDP child project in Vanuatu	Achieved a 27.5% participation rate for women throughout design and implementation, against a target of 30%

Source: Project documents.

Innovation⁶

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

The CPDP program, through its child project in Vanuatu, introduced an innovative solution to address persistent flooding on the critical road to Port Vila's airport. Departing from conventional pipeline drainage systems, project engineers implemented infiltration galleries—a network of dry ponds and porous materials designed to manage water runoff more effectively. This approach was reportedly well received by project stakeholders, who described it as a “brilliant solution.” The system aimed to address immediate flooding concerns while also protecting the main supply lines of Vanuatu’s capital city against inundation. By integrating with the local environment and utilizing natural filtration

processes, this infrastructure adaptation appears well suited to the unique challenges faced by Pacific SIDS. The innovation’s potential significance lies in its scale and efficiency. While infiltration systems have been employed in smaller infrastructure projects, this implementation was notable for its type and size. The project reduced pipeline requirements from 30 kilometers to 7 kilometers, potentially resulting in cost savings and reduced environmental impact. However, long-term performance and maintenance requirements of this system warrant further evaluation to fully assess its effectiveness and sustainability in the local context.

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

The R2R program implemented a more diverse range of innovation approaches, some of which involved higher levels of risk and potential for transformative change. Knowledge transfer strategies were a key focus. In Vanuatu, FAO’s R2R child project introduced Farmer Field Schools, an approach well established internationally but novel in the local context. The program also pursued significant modifications to existing products

⁶For this evaluation, innovation is defined as “doing something new or different in a specific context that adds value” (GEF IEO 2021, iii). Innovation represents an improvement compared to conventional alternatives, catalyzes or produces environmental benefits, and may result in socio-economic advantages. However, it may also be associated with risks and a higher likelihood of failure.

and processes. For instance, the R2R regional project in Tonga developed an innovative toilet design that produces fertilizer, potentially offering groundwater protection benefits. Scaling of this innovation was reportedly hindered by Cyclone Harold in 2020 and the subsequent conclusion of the project. In Tuvalu, the R2R child project incorporated innovative techniques for waste management and coastal protection. Additionally, the program explored innovative financing strategies to generate funds from new sources. In Papua New Guinea, the child project Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas (GEF ID 5510, UNDP) made efforts to develop new sustainable financing mechanisms for protected areas, including exploration of PES arrangements. While the R2R program reported some significant achievements, with certain child projects claiming outstanding outcomes, it is noteworthy that 73 percent of the projects reported unachieved results or outcomes below expectations. This outcome underscores the inherent risks associated with more ambitious innovative strategies and highlights the need for careful risk management in innovation-focused programs.

The ISLANDS program's approach combines behavioral change and knowledge management elements with attempts at broader systemic changes, although implementation of more ambitious innovations remains limited. The regional child project implemented a reuse workshop in Samoa, aiming to promote the repair and reuse of electronic equipment. It also engaged in the Tide Turners program, which targeted behavior change, particularly among youth. The global child project focused on developing a central knowledge management system to collect and curate SIDS-relevant resources and developed a strategy for behavior change utilizing modern communication methods such as podcasts and a youth-centered app. While the program design included more ambitious innovations, such as harmonized regional waste policies and private sector partnerships for sustainable

waste management, evidence from stakeholder interviews indicates these remain largely in the planning stages. The ISLANDS program currently promotes behavioral change through digital engagement platforms, including a mobile app that encourages youth-led behavior adoption and communities of practice that facilitate peer-to-peer social learning among executing agency officials. Although these knowledge-sharing and engagement activities are in progress, concrete evidence of transformational behavioral changes is still being gathered.

Socioeconomic benefits

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

From the CPDP program, both child projects reported economic and social benefits associated with environmental outcomes. The project in Tuvalu aims to improve maritime transfer operations, which contributed to strengthening the fishing sector and tourism, as well as providing efficient and safe

maritime transportation. Additionally, the child project in Vanuatu accelerated economic and social recovery in provinces affected by Tropical Cyclone Pam. Tourism businesses reopened thanks to the restoration of connectivity, and the restoration of roads and bridges reinstated access to education and social and economic services. This resulted in improvements in employment opportunities, income, well-being, and living standards.

The R2R program has reported social and economic benefits from 53 percent of its child projects, with several initiatives exceeding their projected targets. A key achievement has been increased community income through strategic livelihood diversification. For example, the project in Fiji enhanced economic well-being through a multifaceted approach, including honey production, gardening, and crab fattening, which not only boosted local incomes but also supported natural resource conservation. The R2R child project in Papua New Guinea focused on increasing community revenue by developing high-value agricultural products, specifically coffee and cocoa. Meanwhile, the Fanga'uta Lagoon project in Tonga stimulated the local economy by promoting ecotourism, renovating historical sites, and supporting related initiatives. These projects have contributed significantly to the development of sustainable tourism and fishing sectors. In particular, all these initiatives have surpassed their initially projected targets for socioeconomic benefits.

The program also established sustainable management areas to encourage sustainable fishing practices. Both components aim to generate long-term economic benefits for local communities. However, it is important to note that many projects face challenges in quantifying their economic impacts, making it difficult to assess their long-term contributions to economic well-being. For instance, while reports from the child project in Tuvalu suggest that establishing locally managed marine areas and promoting sustainable land management practices likely improved

economic conditions, specific economic gains were not documented.

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

Monitoring and evaluation

The analysis of project documents reveals a concerning trend of ineffective M&E practices hindering project success.⁷ This weakness is primarily evident in the failure of M&E systems to function effectively as early warning systems, hampering adaptive management and ultimately hindering achievement of desired outcomes.

M&E reports in GEF projects within Pacific SIDS frequently lack a sufficient focus on outcome-oriented data. Instead of primarily demonstrating progress toward achieving the intended outcomes, PIRs often prioritize reporting

⁷ The design and implementation of M&E systems in GEF projects falls under the mandate of GEF Agencies. GEF policies on M&E have undergone several iterations, including updates to results frameworks, tracking tools, and reporting requirements. Project identification forms and M&E frameworks developed by Agencies during this period reflect these evolving policy requirements.

on completed activities. This was clearly illustrated in the R2R child project in Fiji, where the PIR lacked crucial data on progress toward expected outcomes, making it difficult to assess whether the project was on track to achieve its goals. This tendency to focus on outputs rather than outcomes hinders the ability of the M&E system to provide a clear picture of project effectiveness and impact.

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

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

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

4.4 Efficiency

All three programs suffered from implementation delays due to a combination of internal and external factors, reflecting the complex challenges inherent in implementing environmental projects in SIDS contexts. These delays stemmed from issues such as inadequate planning, limited local capacity, bureaucratic hurdles, coordination difficulties among multiple stakeholders, and external shocks including the COVID-19 pandemic and severe natural disasters such as tropical cyclones and volcanic eruptions that particularly affect Pacific SIDS. The impact of these external shocks was evident across the region: Fiji experienced extended COVID-19 lockdowns (2020–21), Samoa implemented weeks of restrictions (2022), Solomon Islands instituted measures in early 2022, while Tonga faced compound challenges from both COVID-19 restrictions and a devastating volcanic eruption in 2022. Lockdowns ranged from weeks to months depending on infection rates and regional circumstances.

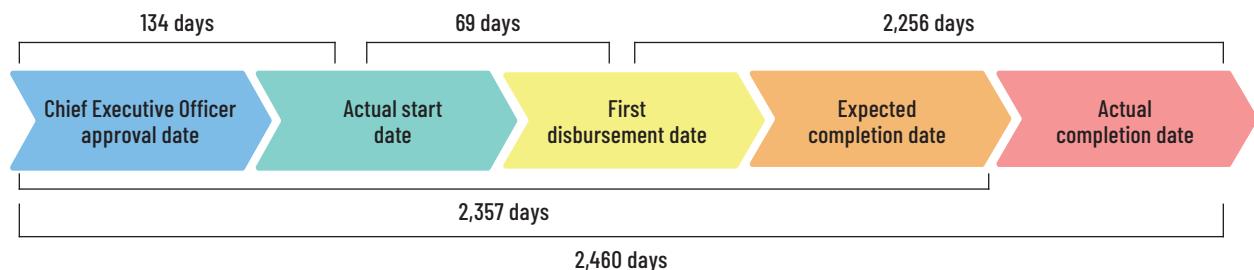
The R2R and CPDP programs in Pacific SIDS experienced significant delays compared to the broader GEF portfolio, particularly in project completion timelines. According to the GEF Monitoring Report 2023, the average duration of child projects under the evaluated programs was 2,280 days, which exceeded the 2,191-day threshold met by 89 percent of GEF projects (GEF 2024). More specifically, as shown in [figure 4.1](#), the R2R program's child projects had an average completion time of 6.7 years (2,460 days), while the CPDP program's child projects averaged 5.8 years (2,100 days). These figures stood in stark contrast to the GEF portfolio norm, where 89 percent of projects were completed within six years ([figure 4.2](#)). This disparity highlighted the unique challenges faced by Pacific SIDS in implementing GEF-funded initiatives, mainly due to factors such as limited institutional capacity, geographic isolation, and complex environmental conditions.

The delays observed in Pacific SIDS programs extended beyond just completion times, affecting various stages of the project life cycle. The data revealed that 78 percent of full-size projects in the broader GEF portfolio achieved their first disbursement within 549 days of Chief Executive Officer approval. Additionally, 57 percent of projects completed their midterm review in less than 1,461 days. The overall trend of delays in the R2R and CPDP programs showed that these

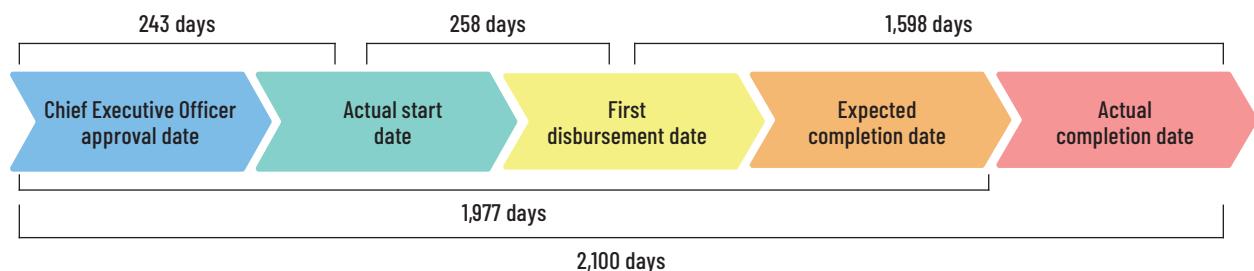
milestones experienced slower progress across all project phases compared to the GEF average. This comprehensive pattern of delays stressed the need for tailored approaches and enhanced support mechanisms for GEF-funded programs in Pacific SIDS, aiming to improve efficiency across all project stages while addressing the unique contextual challenges of these regions.

Figure 4.1 Average timelines for R2R and CPDP programs in Pacific SIDS

a. R2R timeline

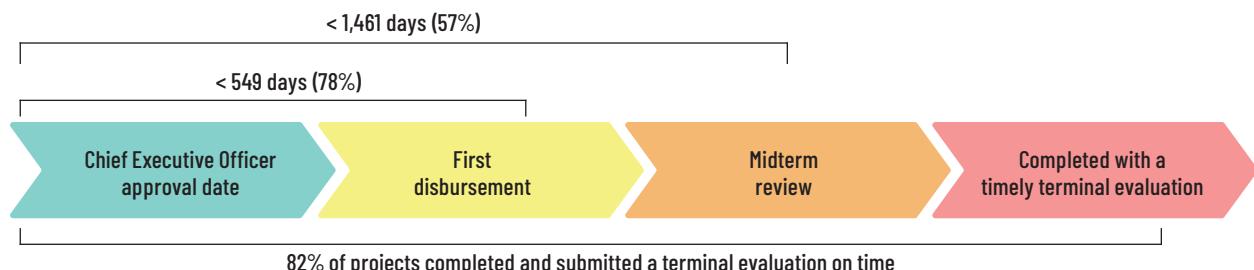


b. CPDP timeline



Source: GEF Portal.

Figure 4.2 Average project timeline across the GEF portfolio (all regions)



Source: GEF Portal.

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

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

CPDP program

The CPDP program encountered significant delays across its child projects, illustrating the challenges faced during project implementation. In the Tuvalu child project, delays were attributed to the contractor's underestimation of adverse weather impacts on construction activities.

While this suggests a need for careful contractor selection, it is also recognized that severe weather conditions can sometimes be difficult to anticipate or mitigate fully. The Vanuatu child project faced additional delays due to two primary factors: (1) the government's lack of reporting on project loan details to Parliament, indicating potential gaps in governmental communication and procedural compliance; and (2) delays in signing the cofinancing agreement with Australian Aid, highlighting the complexities of multistakeholder financing arrangements. These cases underscore the importance of thorough planning, effective communication with government stakeholders, and streamlined processes for financial agreements in project implementation.

ADB's performance as lead Agency for the CPDP program demonstrates both strengths and limitations in project implementation and management. ADB has established itself as one of the main infrastructure financiers in the region and is recognized as an agency capable of mobilizing funding. During implementation of the child projects, the GEF lead Agency has generally demonstrated good performance. For example, in the CPDP Vanuatu child project, it showed satisfactory performance by processing and managing the project with timely support and guidance, conducting regular reviews to improve implementation. However, its reluctance to extend the project beyond 47 months may have compromised the completion of physical works.⁸

⁸ According to the project completion report, road signage and line markings from the second lagoon to Rentapau bridge remained incomplete at project closure. This was due to early demobilization of the design and supervision consultant before the defect liability period ended, compromising contract closeout. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities planned completion in late 2021, although the absence of as-built drawings and lack of independent supervision posed safety risks on this high-speed road section.

R2R program

The R2R program has also exhibited implementation delays, with all projects reporting significant setbacks. The reasons for delays in this program are multifaceted and include limited technical training, suggesting a need for capacity-building initiatives; restricted human resources, indicating staffing challenges; lengthy community consultation processes, highlighting the time-intensive nature of stakeholder engagement; slow government procedures, pointing to bureaucratic hurdles; staff shortages and high turnover, suggesting difficulties in retaining skilled personnel; coordination issues among multiple GEF Agencies, indicating challenges in multi-Agency collaboration; and inefficient bureaucratic processes, further emphasizing the need for streamlined administrative procedures. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been a major contributor to delays across R2R projects, compounding the existing difficulties.

UNDP manages the R2R program, leveraging its experience in working with SIDS in the Pacific, but its performance so far in the implementation of the child projects has been mixed.

For instance, in Fiji, the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme has established effective collaboration with local stakeholders, and several projects maintain regular communication with them. The ridge to reef approach has been integrated into various initiatives. However, it also faces challenges: the distribution of GEF funds often experiences delays, which leads local stakeholders to seek provisional funding from other sources. In locations such as Tonga and Vanuatu, UNDP's support on the ground has been limited, with participation primarily focused on meetings.

FAO also has extensive experience in managing GEF-related projects in the region, as well as significant REDD+ and food security initiatives,⁹ but there were delays in procurement.

⁹ REDD+ refers to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing removals from conservation, sustainable management of forests and

Its expertise encompasses integrated agroecosystem and agroforestry management, livestock management, land use change, its Land Administration System, and sustainable forest management. Additionally, it has demonstrated capacity in sustainable fisheries management, community resource management, and climate change adaptation, which is essential for projects in the Pacific region and globally. The Agency's participation has also provided lessons learned from other FAO and [Pacific Community](#) (SPC) projects (including those related to vegetables). FAO's performance has been mixed during the implementation of the child projects. For instance, in Tonga, it demonstrated capacity in project management, addressing village needs and actively participating in the coordination of the project management unit. Delays in procurement were mainly due to efforts to meet all FAO operational and technical requirements, ensuring the technical quality of the outputs to be generated.

ISLANDS program

In the ISLANDS program, all child projects have experienced notable delays or shown indicators of potential setbacks. A striking example is the regional child project in Tonga, where, despite 40 percent of the scheduled time having elapsed, only 7.2 percent of the allocated budget has been spent. More alarmingly, the achievement of outcomes and outputs stands at only 0 percent and 5 percent, respectively. This significant disparity between time elapsed and progress achieved emphasizes the severity of the implementation challenges faced. The delays in the ISLANDS program can be attributed to a combination of factors: the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted project activities and timelines; team coordination issues, highlighting potential weaknesses in project

enhancement of forest carbons stocks in developing countries (source: United Nations Climate Change [REDD+ Web Platform](#)).

management structures; lack of institutional memory, suggesting challenges in knowledge retention and transfer; loss of talent in Pacific SIDS, indicating broader human resource challenges in the region; and changes in legal agreements between the executing agency and participating countries, pointing to complex bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, all three components of the global child project are facing delays, indicating that implementation difficulties are not isolated to a single aspect of the program but are prevalent across various project components.

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

Summary

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

and impede ongoing operations, creating a cascade of delays throughout project life cycles. Recruitment of project management unit staff and establishment of project boards often took up to a year, and startup activities (including budgets, project operations manuals, and procurement plans) were insufficiently thorough, detailed, or advanced before project approval. In many instances, this was compounded by local limitations in policy making and project implementation.

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

4.5 Sustainability

Institutional sustainability

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

There are, however, some cases where institutional sustainability is likely to be achieved. For example, in the R2R integrated land management systems child project in Tonga, the relevant ministries committed to including the annual monitoring of watershed ecological health in their sectoral plans for the next five years. Additionally, the Tonga Department of Environment plans to develop a proposal for a second phase of the project. Similarly, the R2R child projects implemented in the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, and Tuvalu have reported progress in strengthening the capacities of governmental institutions. Furthermore, the CPDP child project implemented in Tuvalu has contributed to strengthening institutional capacity, which favors its sustainability. Finally, several countries have shown interest in improving their development strategies. For example, Fiji has requested support to

complete the update of its waste management law, which contributes to the sustainability of the ISLANDS Pacific regional child project.

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

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

Financial sustainability

Securing long-term financial sustainability for project outcomes emerges as a recurring challenge across GEF programs in Pacific SIDS. For example, the R2R child project in Fiji failed to establish adequate financial mechanisms to support the long-term maintenance of protected areas, raising concerns about the project's ability to sustain its achievements after GEF funding ceases. The child project Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions in Nauru (GEF ID 5381, UNDP) lacks a documented sustainability plan with explicit financial resource allocation, indicating a

lack of proactive planning for long-term financial sustainability. The absence of a clear plan raises questions about the project's preparedness to secure and manage resources for continued operation and maintenance. The R2R child project in Tuvalu identifies financial sustainability as a potential risk due to uncertainty regarding ongoing funding to maintain project achievements, such as data updates and monitoring systems. Additionally, the R2R regional project in Tonga reported in its midterm review that it faces financial uncertainty after the conclusion of GEF assistance. It is noted that, in the long term, R2R approaches should not require additional financial resources but should instead generate overall financial savings due to improvements in investment efficiency. However, the timeline needed to achieve this remains uncertain.

It is important to bear in mind that many of the financial sustainability risks are linked to government institutions. For example, interviews conducted in Vanuatu reveal that ministries lack funding, leading to low expectations of financing. Moreover, the ISLANDS regional Pacific child project notes that, although Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Niue have prioritized waste flow in their national strategies, they still lack economic instruments to sustainably finance management of electronic waste, used oil, and bulky waste. The R2R child project in Cook Islands raises serious concerns about its financial sustainability due to a lack of actions taken on a comprehensive report that presents sustainable financing options, which is attributed to a lack of political will in the country.

Despite the challenges, several GEF projects in Pacific SIDS demonstrate promising efforts to enhance financial sustainability. These projects employ diverse strategies to secure long-term funding and reduce reliance on limited sources. The R2R child project in Palau stands out for promoting diversified funding sources and successfully improving sustainability for nine states through various techniques, including investments,

ecotourism, and grants. Four states have fully operational independent power producer programs that invest their funds, while another four have developed ecotourism plans. Five additional states generate income from visitor fees, and several have accessed grant funding for their protected area network site. Only six states depend exclusively on the green fee (down from 13). Additionally, the R2R child project in Papua New Guinea has developed sustainable financing mechanisms such as a biodiversity offsets policy.

Technical sustainability

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

Among the child projects that received sustainability ratings, four were considered moderately likely, four moderately unlikely, and one unlikely. It is noteworthy that none of the projects were rated as likely to achieve sustainability. Among the main sustainability challenges are concerns regarding government institutional capacity and uncertainty about funding once the GEF intervention concludes. Findings from the SIDS SCCE reveal that the main sustainability challenges of the projects are low institutional capacity and difficulties

in accessing financing from the private sector (GEF IEO 2019). Similarly, the evaluation of the Vanuatu and SPREP portfolio indicates that obstacles related to capacity issues persist both at the individual and institutional levels (GEF IEO 2015).

Some Pacific SIDS face unique challenges due to their classification as fragile and conflict-affected situations. The World Bank's [FY24 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations](#) includes several Pacific SIDS, such as the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. While these nations are not experiencing violent conflicts, they tackle high levels of institutional and social fragility. This fragility necessitates careful consideration of risks throughout the project life cycle—from design to implementation and conclusion—to ensure the long-term sustainability of outcomes in these vulnerable environments.

Effective monitoring and early warning systems are crucial for project success in fragile contexts. The Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations emphasizes the importance of continuous monitoring and early risk identification in fragile countries (GEF IEO 2024). It advocates for a shift in focus toward procedural aspects rather than solely environmental outcomes, recognizing that building basic institutional capacity is fundamental to achieving sustainable environmental benefits. However, projects in the Pacific SIDS portfolio have shown deficiencies in their monitoring systems, hampering their ability to detect deteriorating security situations and identify negative impacts early on. These projects also face sustainability risks linked to weak institutional capacities, further highlighting the importance of procedural considerations. Although efforts were

made to strengthen these capacities, most indicators remained environmentally focused. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed additional vulnerabilities, accentuating the need for adaptive, crisis-resilient project approaches.

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

5

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

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

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

Weak and misaligned indicators reduce the efficacy of M&E and hinder the demonstration of program impact. The evaluation found that the diversity in indicator quality across child projects—from basic output measures to overly restrictive metrics—limits the overall effectiveness of the M&E system. The reliance on simplistic output indicators, such as number of management plans developed, fails to capture more meaningful conservation or developmental outcomes. This fragmentation compromises

coherent reporting and hinders the ability to aggregate data effectively across projects. Consequently, both program-level and child project evaluations lack a consistent, outcome-oriented approach, reducing the capacity to assess and communicate the program's overall impact.

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

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

All child projects in Pacific SIDS face significant delays, indicating systemic challenges. The GEF programs in Pacific SIDS faced widespread implementation setbacks, pointing to underlying issues that demand strategic intervention. These delays stemmed from multiple factors, with inadequate planning and low institutional capacity being primary contributors. Limits to

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

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

There is room for improvement in coordination and collaboration across GEF Agencies and other development partners. The experience of GEF programs in the Pacific region has highlighted the critical role of sector coordination

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

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

Stakeholder involvement is uneven, with notable progress in gender mainstreaming but gaps in other areas. While gender inclusion has improved, particularly in the design of the ISLANDS program, which includes updated gender guidelines, participation of other key local stakeholder groups remains limited. With a few exceptions, youth and the private sector are often underrepresented in project activities and decision-making processes. This imbalance in stakeholder engagement restricts the potential for comprehensive, inclusive development outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a lack of South-South learning opportunities focused on integrating women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and the private sector in income-generating activities. This gap hampers the sharing of good practices and innovative approaches to inclusive economic development across the region.

5.2 Recommendations

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

Recommendation 1: Enhance coordination and collaboration to maximize development impact and resource efficiency.

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

Recommendation 2: Strengthen program effectiveness by further improving the alignment and operational delivery between Pacific SIDS parent programs and their associated child projects.

It is crucial that parent and child projects maintain strong internal coherence while addressing persistent implementation delays that hinder overall program performance. A more streamlined monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework at the program level will enable better tracking of outcomes, facilitate adaptive management, and support strategic

decision-making across the portfolio. By enhancing internal coherence and operational efficiency, while maintaining robust yet simplified oversight mechanisms, programs can achieve more consistent and impactful results. These actions should be strategically designed to foster a culture of adaptive management, ensuring that M&E findings are regularly used to inform decision-making and refine implementation strategies.

Recommendation 3: Prioritize robust institutional capacity development to ensure program success and enduring impact. Given implementation constraints in Pacific SIDS, programs must establish realistic objectives aligned with local institutional capabilities. This requires focused capacity building in project management, environmental governance, and technical skills, supported by systematic performance monitoring. Effective capacity development should

leverage existing governance structures, traditional knowledge, and community engagement to ensure sustained project benefits. Programs should emphasize practical training that addresses immediate implementation needs while building long-term institutional resilience. This balanced approach will support both timely project delivery and sustainable outcomes beyond project completion. Additionally, to strengthen institutional capacity in Pacific SIDS, the GEF should explore opportunities to accredit regional organizations, thereby increasing the pool of qualified GEF Agencies working in the region. Any expansion would need to be balanced against the increased complexity of managing an expanded partnership and ensuring new Agencies can meet GEF standards and requirements.

SIDS SCCE conclusions and recommendations

Following are the conclusions and recommendations from the GEF IEO's Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Small Island Developing States (GEF IEO 2019).

Conclusions

1. GEF-financed projects in SIDS are strongly aligned with the government's priorities and reflect the heterogeneous needs of the various countries.
2. GEF interventions are relevant to national environment challenges and are aligned with the GEF focal areas.
3. The GEF is encouraging integrated approaches by promoting ridge to reef, an integrated watershed management approach to sustainably manage soil, water, and biodiversity, while considering renewable energy resources and productive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism.
4. The performance of SIDS projects was lower than for the overall GEF portfolio on the dimensions of outcome performance, and project implementation and execution. The SIDS ratings on sustainability are similar to the overall GEF portfolio. Regional projects perform significantly better on outcomes and sustainability.
5. Context-related factors which support sustainability include legal and regulatory reforms, national ownership, establishment of national environment funds, institutional and public private partnerships. Weak institutional capacity, low levels

of environmental awareness, pressure from agriculture and tourism sectors impede sustainability.

6. Project-related factors which have a positive influence on sustainability include training and building capacity, adaptive project management, strong project teams with a good steering committee, and scaling up and replication based on lessons learned. Limited attention to the quality of project design, inadequate investment in building local and national capacity, and lack of a clear exit strategy and future financing are project-related factors which negatively impact sustainability.
7. The GEF has supported the long-term sustainability of outcomes in the SIDS through a variety of interventions and verified post-completion sustainability ratings of several projects have improved since project completion.
8. The GEF has been given increasing attention to cross-cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming, resilience and fragility, and private sector engagement and financing in project design; the ability to accessing private sector financing was noted as a challenge.
9. The GEF's main areas of additionality are strengthening institutions and assistance with legal and regulatory frameworks.

Recommendations

1. Derive greater benefits from the expanded GEF partnership. GEF Agencies should focus their

efforts in SIDS based on their thematic and geographic competence and establish a permanent presence to strengthen dialogue with the respective government and key stakeholders.

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

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

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

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

Evaluation portfolio

GEF ID	Title	GEF period	GEF Agency	Country	Focal area	Funding source	Status
Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP) (GEF ID 5037)							
9197	Protecting Urban Areas Against the Impacts of Climate Change in Vanuatu	GEF-5	ADB	Vanuatu	CC	LDCF	Completed
9512	Climate Resilience in the Outer Islands of Tuvalu	GEF-5	ADB	Tuvalu	CC	LDCF	Ongoing
Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R) (GEF ID 5395)							
5208	R2R: Advancing Sustainable Resources Management to Improve Livelihoods and Protect Biodiversity in Palau	GEF-5	UNEP	Palau	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5348	Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Functions through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in the Cook Island	GEF-5	UNDP	Cook Islands	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5381	R2R: Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions in Nauru	GEF-5	UNDP	Nauru	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5397	R2R: Integrated Sustainable Land and Coastal Management	GEF-5	FAO	Vanuatu	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5398	Implementing a "Ridge to Reef" Approach to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Sequester Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Fiji	GEF-5	UNDP	Fiji	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5404	R2R: Testing the Integration of Water, Land, Forest & Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods in Pacific Island Countries	GEF-5	UNDP	Regional	IW	GEF	Completed
5417	Economy-wide Integration of Climate Change Adaptation and DRM/DRR to Reduce Climate Vulnerability of Communities in Samoa	GEF-5	UNDP	Samoa	CC	LDCF	Completed
5510	R2R Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas	GEF-5	UNDP	Papua New Guinea	BD, LD	GEF	Completed
5517	R2R Implementing an Integrated Ridge to Reef Approach to Enhance Ecosystem Services, to Conserve Globally Important Biodiversity and to Sustain Local Livelihoods in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	GEF-5	UNDP	Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing

GEF ID	Title	GEF period	GEF Agency	Country	Focal area	Funding source	Status
5544	R2R Reimaanlok Looking to the Future: Strengthening Natural Resource Management in Atoll Communities in the Republic of Marshall Islands Employing Integrated Approaches	GEF-5	UNDP	Marshall Islands	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5550	R2R Implementing a Ridge to Reef Approach to Protect Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functions	GEF-5	UNDP	Tuvalu	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5551	Resilient Islands, Resilient Communities	GEF-5	FAO	Kiribati	BD, IW, LD	GEF	Ongoing
5552	Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation, and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Service and Cultural Heritage in Niue	GEF-5	UNDP	Niue	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed
5578	R2R Integrated Land and Agro-ecosystem Management Systems	GEF-5	FAO	Tonga	BD, LD	GEF	Completed
5663	R2R Integrated Environmental Management of the Fanga'uta Lagoon Catchment	GEF-5	UNDP	Tonga	BD, CC, IW, LD	GEF	Completed

Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) (GEF ID 10185)

10266	Communications, Coordination and Knowledge Management Project	GEF-7	UNEP	Global	CW	GEF	Ongoing
10267	ISLANDS - Pacific Child Project	GEF-7	UNEP	Regional	CW	GEF	Ongoing

Source: GEF Portal.

Note: *GEF Agency:* ADB = Asian Development Bank, FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNDP = United Nations Development Programme, UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme; *focal area:* BD = biodiversity, CC = climate change, CW = chemicals and waste, IW = international waters, LD = land degradation; *funding source:* GEF = GEF Trust Fund, LDCF = Least Developed Countries Fund, SCCF = Special Climate Change Fund.

Program theories of change

Figure C.1 Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R) theory of change

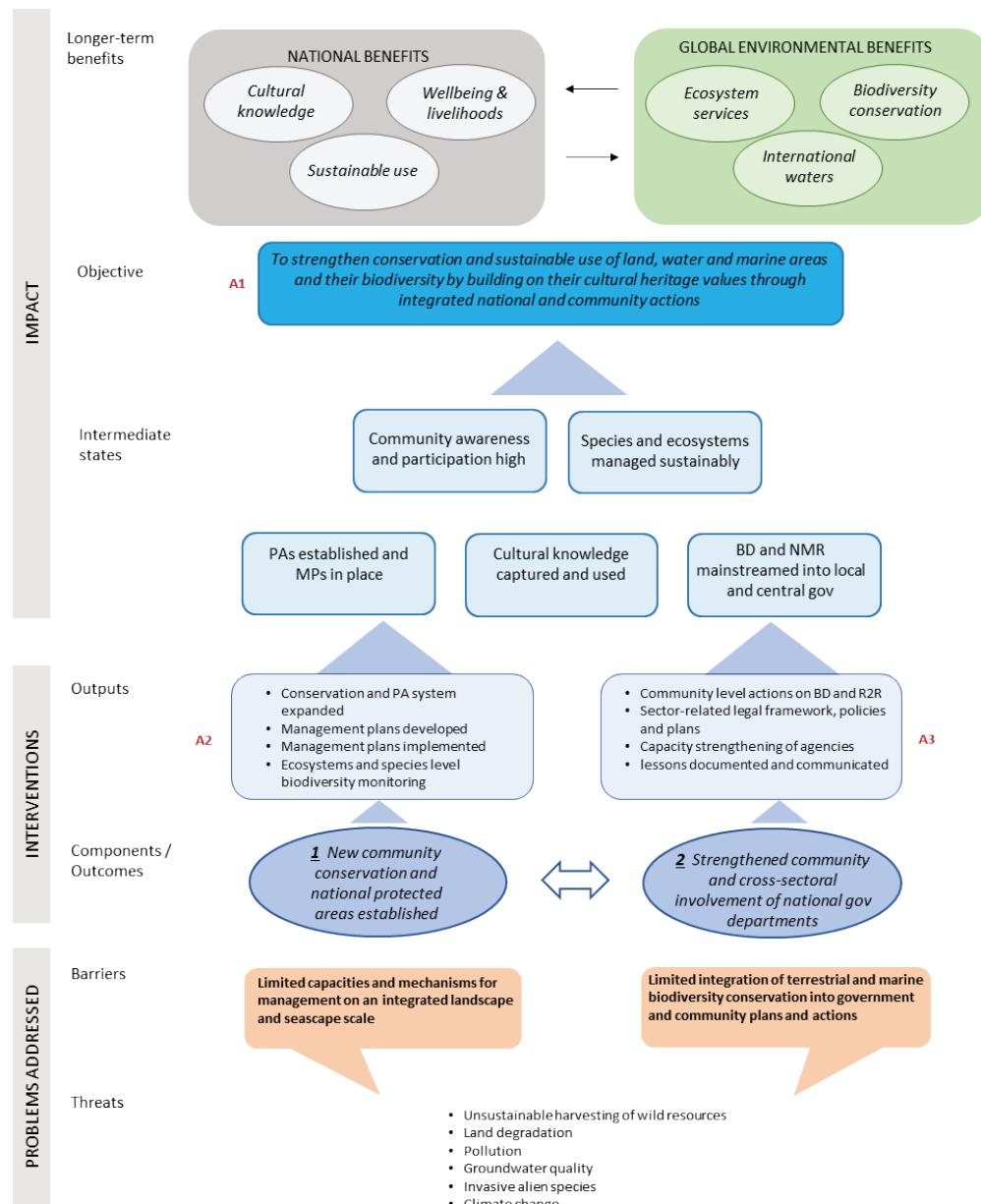
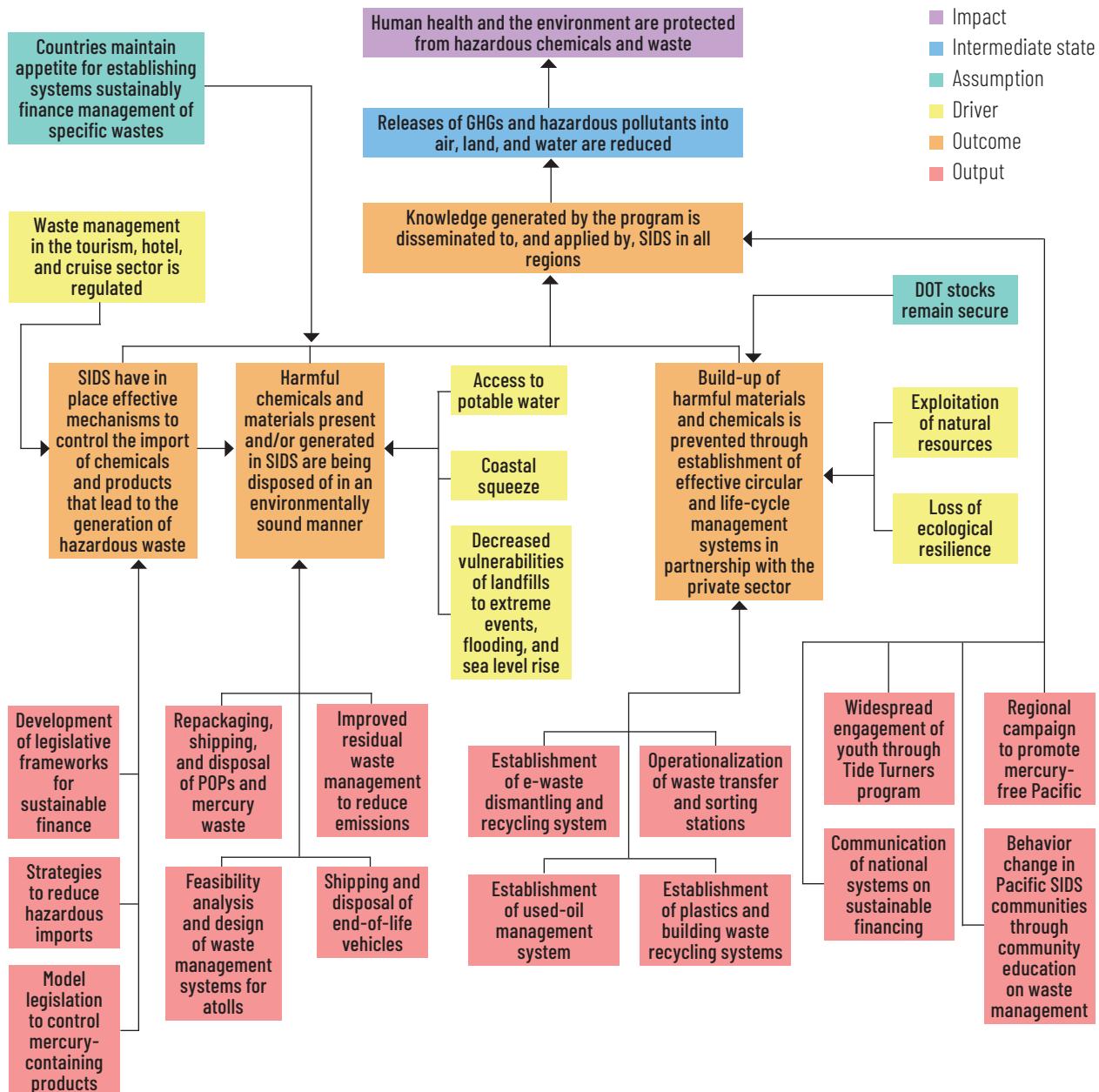
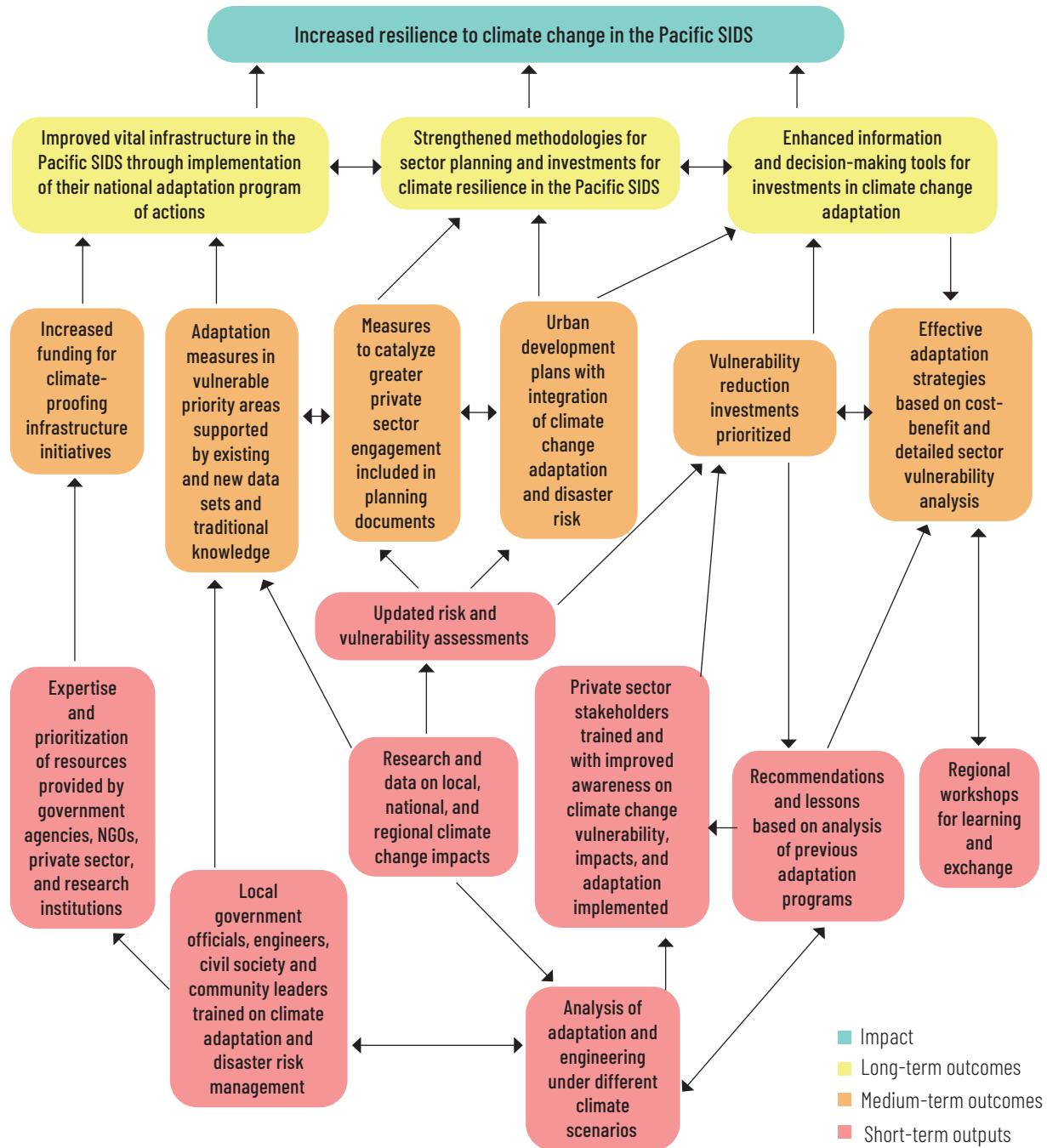


Figure C.2 Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) theory of change



Note: GHG = greenhouse gas; POP = persistent organic pollutant.

Figure C.3 Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP) theory of change

Evaluation matrix

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

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

Key question	Indicators/measures	Source of information	Methodology
Efficiency: To what extent have GEF programs in Pacific SIDS delivered, or are likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner?			
How efficient has the implementation of child projects been compared to the broader GEF portfolio?	Assessment of time between milestones in the project cycle of child projects compared to the broader GEF portfolio	Stakeholders, project documents, and performance documents	Council documents, project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
What are the main factors that have affected the efficiency of the programs?	Assessment of child project implementation issues	Stakeholders, project documents, and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews
Sustainability: To what extent will benefits of GEF programs in Pacific SIDS continue or are likely to continue?			
To what extent are the achieved and emerging results of child projects sustainable?	Assessment of sustainability ratings of terminal and midterm evaluations	Stakeholders, project documents, and performance documents	Project portfolio review, case studies, interviews

Interviewees

Global/central stakeholders

Rawleston Moore, Senior Climate Change Specialist, GEF Secretariat
Anil Sookdeo, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat
Sarah Wyatt, Biodiversity Specialist, GEF Secretariat
Christian Severin, former Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat
Andre Hume, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat
Stephen Blaik, Principal Urban Development Specialist, Asian Development Bank
Lianchawii Chhakchhuak, former GEF Technical Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
Raushan Kumar, Forestry Officer, FAO
Ines Benabdallah, former Task Manager, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Dickson Ho, Associate Programme Management Officer, UNEP
Akiko Yamamoto, Regional Team Leader for Environment in Asia Pacific, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Sofiane Mahjoub, Regional Technical Advisor, UNDP

Fiji

Sivendra Michael, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and GEF Operational Focal Point
Michelle Baleikanacea, Technical Officer, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
Senimili Baleicakau, Director of Environment, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Jose J. Antonio, Country Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation Adviser Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
Naveet Lal, Online Coordinator and Graphic Designer, SPC
Vere Bakani, Programme Administrator, SPC
Herman Timmermans, Project Manager, SPC
Talei Kocovanua, Manager, iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs
Caroline Mate, Senior Research Officer, iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs
Eleni Nayacaibuna, Principal Environment Officer, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
Women's Club and Youth Group Members, Sawani Village
Rusiate Ratuniyata, Program Officer, UNDP

Tonga

Sione 'Akau'ola, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) and GEF Operational Focal Point
Lupe Matoto, Director of Environment, MEIDECC
Sulieti 'Ofa, Environment Officer, MEIDECC
Mafile'o Masi, Deputy Director, Environment Department, MEIDECC
Kelelia Apikotoa, Environment, MEIDECC
Paula Pouvalu Ma'u, Chief Secretary and Secretary to the Cabinet, Prime Minister's Office
Viliami Manu, CEO, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF)
Taaniela Kula, CEO, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR)
'Isileli 'Aholelei, Assistant FAO Representative for Tonga
Lusia Taulanga, MAFF Extension Officer

Soane Takaituli Naufahu, Farmer in Haveluliku Village
Uili Naufahu, Farmer in Haveluliku Village
Seini Tonga, Farmer in Haveluliku Village
Sifoni Mahe, Project Officer and Administrator, Waste Authority Ltd.
Faafetiai Tuikolovatu, Co-owner, GIO Recycling Ltd.
Saimone K. Vuki, Director, SAP Pacific Co. Ltd. and Member of Tonga Recyclers Association, Inc.
Sam Fonua, Member, Tonga Recyclers Association; and owner of recycling company in Tonga

Vanuatu

Rolennas Baereleo, Acting Director General, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster and GEF Operational Focal Point
Florence lautu, Strategic Manager, National Advisory Board Secretariat, Ministry of Climate Change
Julia Salerua, Project Development Officer, National Advisory Board Secretariat, Ministry of Climate Change
Anna Salwai, Director, Vanuatu Project Management Unit, Prime Minister's Office

Ericksen Packett, Project Coordinator, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster
Roselyn Bea, Senior Officer, Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment and Disaster
Donna Kalfatak, Project Coordinator, FAO
Graham Nimoho, FAO Representative, Vanuatu Office
Ricardo Llosa, Chief Technical Advisor, FAO
Jason Harry, M&E Specialist, FAO
Harrington Tamla, National Project Coordinator, FAO
Donald Wouloseje, former Program Analyst, UNDP
Leah Nimoho, National Coordinator, Small Grants Programme
Chief of Management Committee, Pang Pang Village
Management Committee, Pang Pang Village Silofon, Community Conservation Area
Women's Committee Member, Pang Pang Village, Community Conservation Area
Amy Siro, Smeth (community-based organization), Committee Member
Joseph David, Community Member, Tagabe Bridge Community

References

All URLs were checked before publication.

Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft. 2021. "[WorldRiskReport 2021](#)." Berlin.

ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). 2020. "[The Disaster Riskscape across the Pacific Small Island Developing States: Key Takeaways for Stakeholders](#)." Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019: Pathways for resilience, inclusion and empowerment. United Nations, Bangkok.

ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). 2023. "[Seizing the Moment: Targeting Transformative Disaster Risk Resilience. Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2023](#)." United Nations, Bangkok.

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2022. "[Pacific Island countries: Impact of rising costs of food, feed, fuel, fertilizer and finance](#)." Issue #1.

Fouad, Manal, Natalija Novta, Gemma Preston, Todd Schneider, and Sureni Weerathunga. 2021. "[Unlocking Access to Climate Finance for Pacific Island Countries](#)." IMF Departmental Paper 2021/020. International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC.

GEF (Global Environment Facility). 2024. "[GEF Monitoring Report 2023](#)." GEF/C.66/03. GEF, Washington, DC.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2015. "[GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Vanuatu and SPREP](#)." Evaluation Report No. 98. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2018a. "[Evaluation of the Expansion of the GEF Partnership](#)." Evaluation Report No. 131. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2018b. "[Evaluation of Programmatic Approaches in the GEF](#)." Evaluation Report No. 113. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2019. "[Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: Small Island Developing States](#)." GEF/ME/C.57/02. GEF, Washington, DC.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2021. "[GEF Support to Innovation: Findings and Lessons](#)." GEF/C.60/02. GEF, Washington, DC.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2022a. "[GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation](#)." Evaluation Report No. 154. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2022b. "[OPS7: Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF: Working Toward a Greener Global Recovery](#)." Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2024. "[Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations](#)." Evaluation Report No. 151. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF IEO (Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office). 2025. "[Evaluation of Cofinancing in the GEF](#)." Evaluation Report No. 168. Washington, DC: GEF IEO.

GEF STAP (Global Environment Facility Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel). 2018. "[Integration: to solve complex environmental problems](#)." Washington, DC: GEF STAP.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). 2019. "[The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate: A Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)." IPCC.

Mayne, J. 2008. "[Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect](#)." ILAC Brief 16. Institutional Learning and Change Initiative.

Parsons, Chris. 2022. "[The Pacific Islands: The front line in the battle against climate change](#)." U.S. National Science Foundation Science Matters blog post, May 23.

UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2022. "[Trade and Development Report 2022: Development Prospects in a Fractured World](#)." United Nations, Geneva.

World Bank. 2017. "[Regional Partnership Framework for Kiribati, Nauru, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Independent State of Samoa, the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu for the Period FY17-FY21](#)." World Bank, Washington, DC.

World Bank. 2021. "[Tuvalu Second Resilience Development Policy Operation](#)." Report No. PGD268. World Bank, Washington, DC.

World Bank. 2022. "[New World Bank Project Helps Create Thousands of Green Jobs in Fiji](#)." Press release, May 23.



The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established by the GEF Council in July 2003. The Office is independent from GEF policy making and its delivery and management of assistance.

The Office undertakes independent evaluations at the strategic level. These evaluations typically focus on cross-cutting themes, such as focal area-wide topics or integrated approaches to delivering global environmental benefits. The IEO presents a GEF-wide annual performance report and also undertakes institutional evaluations, such as assessing GEF governance, policies, and strategies. The Office's work culminates in a quadrennial comprehensive evaluation of the GEF.

The Office cooperates with professional evaluation networks on developing evaluation approaches, setting standards, and delivering training—particularly with regard to environmental evaluation and evaluation at the interface of environment and socioeconomic development. We also collaborate with the broader global environmental community to ensure that we stay on the cutting edge of emerging and innovative methodologies.

To date, the Office has produced over 160 evaluation reports; explore these on our website: www.gefieo.org/evaluations.

Independent Evaluation Office, Global Environment Facility
1818 H Street, NW • Washington, DC 20433, USA
www.gefieo.org

