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## **COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION – VANUATU AND SPREP MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**(Prepared by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office)**

# 1 – MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1.1 – Background

At the request of the GEF Council, the Evaluation Office conducts country portfolio evaluations (CPEs) every year. CPEs aim to provide the GEF Council and the national governments with an assessment of results and performance of GEF-supported activities at the country level, and of how GEF-supported activities fit into the national strategies and priorities as well as within the global environmental mandate of the GEF. In 2012, the Vanuatu national project portfolio and the SPREP-executed regional project portfolio were selected for evaluation.

In Vanuatu, the GEF has supported a portfolio totalling US\$17.9 million with US\$70.0 million in co-financing for 13 national projects. As shown in Table 1.1, these include five climate change (CC) projects, five biodiversity (BD) projects, one in land degradation (LD), one in persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and one multifocal area (MF) project. These 13 national projects have been implemented solely in Vanuatu. Nine projects have been completed, one is ongoing, and three are in the pipeline. Eight of the 13 projects are enabling activities (EAs). The projects have been implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank.

**Table 1.1**

**Vanuatu National Projects in the GEF Portfolio, by Focal Area and Funding**

Focal Area	Number of projects	Total GEF Support	Total Cofinancing	Percentage of GEF Support by Focal Area
BD	5	\$1.24M	\$0.84M	6.95%
CC	5	\$15.52M	\$68.68M	86.80%
LD	1	\$0.50M	\$0.43M	2.80%
MF	1	\$0.22M	\$0.06M	1.26%
POPs	1	\$0.39M	\$0.02M	2.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>\$17.88M</b>	<b>\$70.03M</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Since 1991, the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has been involved as regional executing agency through various GEF Agencies (UNDP, World Bank, UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization) in 11 projects totalling over US\$63.1 million in GEF financing or US\$204.4 million with co-financing.<sup>1</sup> Regional projects include multiple countries throughout the Pacific region; all but one SPREP-executed project included Vanuatu.<sup>2</sup> As shown in the top half of Table 1.2, these include six climate change projects, three biodiversity projects, one international waters project, and one persistent organic pollutants (POPs) project. Eight of the 11 SPREP regional projects are full-sized projects (FSPs), one is a medium-sized project (MSP), and two are EAs. Seven out of the 21 SPREP-member Small Island Developing States (SIDS) –Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Samoa and Tuvalu – are involved in at least nine SPREP-executed GEF projects.

<sup>1</sup> Previously, SPREP was known as the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

<sup>2</sup> The exception is: PAS Implementing the Island Biodiversity Programme of Work by Integrating the Conservation Management of Island Biodiversity (GEF ID 4023).

As shown in the bottom half of Table 1.2, GEF has also committed US\$119.6 million for other regional projects in which Vanuatu participates, but which are *not* executed by SPREP. All of these projects are FSPs, and the majority of the funding has gone to projects in the multifocal area, notably the project ‘Implementation of Global and Regional Oceanic Fisheries Conventions and Related Instruments in the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS)’ (GEF ID 4746), which received US\$45.6 million. Most of these projects are in the pipeline or ongoing.

**Table 1.2****Vanuatu Regional Projects in the GEF Portfolio, by Focal Area and Funding**

Project Scope	Focal Area	Number of projects	Total GEF Support	Total Cofinancing	Percentage of GEF Support by Focal Area
SPREP Regional	BD	3	\$15.00M	\$10.84M	8.21%
	CC	6	\$32.32M	\$116.28M	17.69%
	IW	1	\$12.29M	\$8.12M	6.73%
	POPs	1	\$3.50M	\$6.05M	1.92%
Vanuatu Regional	BD	1	\$6.63M	\$11.79M	3.63%
	CC	2	\$19.95M	\$57.54M	10.92%
	IW	3	\$31.59M	\$239.98M	17.29%
	MF	3	\$59.39M	\$362.31M	32.51%
	POPs	1	\$2.00M	\$4.13M	1.09%
<b>Grand Total</b>		21	\$182.68M	\$817.03M	100.00%

## 1.2 – Objectives, Scope and Methodology

As noted in the Terms of Reference (TOR): ‘The purpose of the Vanuatu and SPREP Portfolio Evaluation is to provide the GEF Council with an assessment of how GEF is implemented in Vanuatu and more broadly in the Pacific region, report on results from projects and assess how these projects are linked to national and regional environmental and sustainable development agendas as well as to the GEF mandate of generating global environmental benefits within its focal areas.’<sup>3</sup> The evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, and efficiency of the GEF project portfolio in Vanuatu and the South Pacific from 1991-2012. Intended audiences for the evaluation results include the GEF Council, SPREP countries, GEF Agencies, and partners.

The evaluation was conducted between October 2012 and August 2013 by an evaluation team comprised of staff from the GEF Evaluation Office and consultants with extensive knowledge of environmental program evaluation, the environmental sector in Vanuatu, and SPREP. The methodology employed several qualitative and quantitative methods, including: (i) interviews conducted with 40 people from 12 institutions; (ii) quantitative analysis examining the efficiency of GEF support using standard metrics (e.g., the time and cost of preparing and implementing projects); (iii) use of standardized analytic tools and project review protocols adapted to the Pacific context; and (iv) development of Review of Outcomes to Impact (ROtI) field studies for two completed projects: Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Programme (GEF ID 1058) and Local Conservation Initiatives (GEF ID 1682). The evaluators triangulated across qualitative and quantitative data sources to confirm findings and strengthen confidence in the results.

<sup>3</sup> GEF Evaluation Office, *Terms of Reference for GEF Vanuatu and SPREP Portfolio Evaluation (1991-2012)*, December 2012.

## 1.3 – Conclusions

### 1.3.1 – Results, Effectiveness and Sustainability

**Conclusion 1: The GEF helped pave the way for the development of national plans, establishment of environmental agencies, and establishment of relevant environmental legislative frameworks in Vanuatu and SPREP countries in all focal areas through enabling activities.**

In Vanuatu, GEF support has focused primarily on EAs to develop national sectoral plans for climate change, POPs, land degradation, biodiversity and capacity building self-assessments, and establishment or strengthening of legislative frameworks and environmental institutions. EAs have played a valuable role in the portfolio by enhancing capacity and building awareness of global environmental issues at the national level. GEF support through EAs has also facilitated implementation of international conventions on the environment by providing a regular, if limited, stream of support to key government agencies responsible for the conventions, and providing technical and financial assistance to develop capacity within these ministries and enhance multi-sectoral collaboration across government ministries, the private sector, and civil society.

EA projects generate information and build capacity for addressing environmental challenges and fulfilling commitments to international conventions, thereby laying the groundwork for MSPs and FSPs. Prior to GEF EAs, there was limited information on each of the GEF focal areas in Vanuatu and other SPREP countries. Through these EAs, Vanuatu produced its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) and Climate Change Policy Framework (CCPF), the National Implementation Plan (NIP) for Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), and the National Action Plan (NAP) for land degradation, which provided the baseline information and assessment of threats at the country level, and identified the priority actions for each focal area. The NBSAP, in turn, directly contributed to the development of the Environmental Protection and Management Act 2006, identifying and developing multi-stakeholder consensus on priority issues, and proposing inputs that were mainstreamed into the approved legislation.

GEF-supported EAs have built awareness of environmental issues and helped attract donor funding to implement several of the priority actions identified in the national plans that were developed with GEF support. EAs have also strengthened institutional capacity and multi-sectoral coordination, because all the EAs require multi-sectoral steering committees to produce these plans, and promote inclusive multi-stakeholder consultative processes.

At the regional level, the level of technical capacity across focal areas was also quite limited prior to GEF support. In climate change, the need to address this limited technical capacity prompted the Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Program (PICCAP) (GEF ID 336), which was executed by SPREP to assist countries in building their capacity. The PICCAP produced national communications plans and conducted inventories and vulnerability assessments for climate change, which became the basis for much of the climate change work currently being implemented. The project also established multi-sector country teams that continue to spearhead the implementation of climate change actions at the national level as well as the effective participation of SPREP countries at international climate change forums.

The Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Program (PIREP) (GEF ID1058), another SPREP-executed project, compiled national renewable energy assessments that have since been widely used to develop

national plans for renewable energy in Pacific Island Countries (PICs). The PIREP also established national committees that have since been used to further implement the follow-up GEF project on Pacific Islands Greenhouse Gases Abatement and Renewable Energy Program (PIGGAREP) (GEF ID2699). Some PICs have gone on to develop and adopt renewable energy legislation and policies. For example, Tonga's Renewable Energy Bill 2008 was developed with the support of the PIGGAREP.<sup>4</sup> Cook Islands announced its Renewable Energy Chart in July 2011, acknowledging support from PIGGAREP and GEF.<sup>5</sup> Changes in legislation and policies in Vanuatu, Samoa, and other countries are strongly linked to and built on the national renewable energy assessments carried out under PIREP and later continued with PIGGAREP.

**Conclusion 2: Replication and scaling up of community-based project outcomes has occurred at the sub-national level; however, projects have faced constraints in scaling up to the national level.**

GEF project outcomes have been sustained when they could be replicated at a sub-national scale (e.g., at the local community level) and with direct impact on individuals. This is reflected in the establishment of community conservation areas, which are managed by traditional communities, as generated by the South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Project (SPBCP) (GEF ID 403), the International Waters Project (IWP) (GEF ID 530), the Vanuatu Local Conservation Initiatives (LCI) project (GEF ID 1682), and the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP). The community-based conservation approach piloted in the SPBCP is now widely adopted throughout the Pacific, in various forms and scales. The scaled-down version is helping overcome difficulties with shared boundaries on customary-owned lands and other land tenure issues and village capacities, while the integration of community livelihood issues into conservation plans strengthens their relevance and appeal to local communities.

The SPBCP supported 17 conservation areas projects (CAPs) spread over 12 PICs. At least 12 are still operating, some as part of new larger-scale initiatives, while others are maintained by local communities at a low level of activity, with varying levels level of external funding and technical support. In this way, initial threats to biodiversity have been reduced or eliminated. Although some efforts have floundered due to internal village conflicts, others such as the Takitimu CAP in Cook Islands and the Kosrae Conservation Project in the Federated Islands of Micronesia have continued to flourish and grow – the former with strong ecotourism linkages, and the latter with increasing partnerships and support from several international conservation organizations and funders.

However, sustaining and scaling up community activities to the *national* level has been limited, mostly by the lack of continued funding and technical support from government agencies or other donors after the end of GEF support. The projects generally did not develop financial sustainability strategies or mechanisms to sustain efforts at the same scale beyond the GEF funding period. In addition, the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation's (DEPC) acute lack of capacity (both in terms of local budgetary resources and personnel) severely limits its ability to play an effective technical support role. Moreover, the Conservation Area Regulation drafted in 2009 as part of the LCI to legalize conservation areas and provide national support to traditional communities in managing conservation areas still has not been enacted, contributing to the uncertain state of many community conservation activities initiated under the LCI.

<sup>4</sup> [www.reeep.org/projects/clean-energy-policy-and-regulation-tonga](http://www.reeep.org/projects/clean-energy-policy-and-regulation-tonga). Downloaded 10/8/2013.

<sup>5</sup> [www.sids-i.iisd.org/cook-islands-announces-renewable-energy-plan](http://www.sids-i.iisd.org/cook-islands-announces-renewable-energy-plan). Downloaded 10/8/2013.

***Conclusion 3: GEF support has been instrumental in raising environmental awareness in all focal areas in Vanuatu and the SPREP countries.***

The current level of awareness of environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity, and conservation in Vanuatu and SPREP countries is very high among government officials and the general public. This is, to a large extent, a result of the considerable resources invested in producing environmental information and the engagement of wider stakeholders in the GEF EAs. Much of the information and several publications produced in Vanuatu projects such as LCI, NBSAP, and NAPA are still in use. In addition, the Government of Vanuatu has incorporated biodiversity, climate change, and waste management issues into the primary and tertiary education curriculum.

***Conclusion 4: GEF paved the way for strengthening capacity at the individual, institutional and system levels, but sustaining this capacity has been and still is problematic, in all focal areas except climate change.***

Some GEF projects produced useful capacity building results, such as the strengthening of the DEPC during the LCI project, the establishment of multi-sectoral country teams used in the implementation of PICCAP, the training of Conservation Area Support Officers (CASOs) and similar project officers during SPBCP and IWP, and the preparation of NBSAP, NAP and NIP. Unfortunately, these country teams have been dormant since the completion of the above plans, thus most of the actions identified in these plans have not been used or mainstreamed by the relevant government agencies into their sectoral work. The DEPC, which is supposed to coordinate these committees, does not have the resources or staff to sustain them.

GEF projects invested heavily in building the capacity of the specific individuals involved with projects. Unfortunately, the Government of Vanuatu has not been able to retain the individuals beyond projects, and so the organization's capacity reverts to zero. According to DEPC, the department is developing a new organizational structure that aims to attract, sustain, and retain individual capacity.<sup>6</sup>

The only exception to this general trend is in climate change. The national climate change country teams established during PICCAP continue to function effectively, despite staff transitions, due to the mainstreaming of such committees into national frameworks. These same country teams have been used for subsequent GEF projects such as PIREP, PIGGAREP, and PACC. The ability to retain the country teams and continue working together at the national level proved to be effective in the sustainability of activities, and for engaging in international forums on climate change. This underscores the need for new projects to build on existing systems and structures, such as those established under PACC, to maintain and leverage capacity gains from previous projects.

***Conclusion 5: Institutional capacity in Vanuatu to effectively implement national-level projects is insufficient.***

National projects in Vanuatu experience more delays and extensions than SPREP projects. Whereas regional project coordinators provide additional assistance to national coordinators in the preparation of project reports and implementation of activities for regional projects, the regional coordinators do not have the institutional mechanisms to provide such support for nationally-executed projects. This is highlighted in the EAs for preparing the POPs NIP and the NAP, which have not been closed yet. The proper records and financial acquittals have not been completed despite the project activities having

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<sup>6</sup> Written comments from the Government of Vanuatu, 2 February 2014.

been completed for several years. According to DEPC, the department is undergoing reforms to better deliver projects on time and within budget.<sup>7</sup>

SPREP, on the other hand now, has a strengthened technical capacity in several GEF focal areas and has been providing much-needed backstopping to national initiatives, notably in climate change and biodiversity. These technical support teams have been used extensively in the implementation of the PIGGAREP (GEF ID 2699) and the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) (GEF ID 3101) projects, as well as the Island Biodiversity and Invasive Species (IBIS) project (GEF ID 3664), which is just beginning implementation. In addition, SPREP has appointed a GEF Support Advisor and established a GEF support team within the Secretariat to strengthen SPREP's support for Pacific countries in GEF matters.<sup>8</sup>

### **1.3.2 – Relevance**

**Conclusion 6:** **GEF support is highly relevant to Vanuatu and the SPREP region's environmental needs and challenges in all GEF focal areas.**

The evaluation found that all GEF focal areas are relevant to Vanuatu and the SPREP region. The majority of projects have addressed biodiversity and climate change. For Vanuatu, GEF support enabled the preparation of environmental sector national plans such as the NAPA, the NBSAP, the NAP, NIP and the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) through seven completed EAs – i.e., one in climate change, four in biodiversity, one in POPs and one multifocal project. SPBCP introduced community-based approaches to biodiversity and sustainable resource use that were adopted and replicated through other initiatives including the LCI and smaller-scale SGP initiatives, to address threats of overexploitation of resources. Similarly, IWP introduced an integrated and holistic approach to the management of water resources, which complements and reinforces strategies for biodiversity conservation as well as climate change.

The dominance of biodiversity and climate change projects in the GEF Vanuatu/SPREP portfolio reflects the importance of those focal areas in the SPREP Regional Plan and in Vanuatu. The impact of climate change is regularly felt in the SPREP region, including Vanuatu, and is reflected in projects mostly focusing on adaptation measures and improving resilience. Climate change is not only an environmental issue but is now perceived in all PICs as the biggest source of economic vulnerability confronting Pacific economies. Biodiversity is a priority as the fragile ecosystems in the region are easily impacted by invasive species, and threatened by overexploitation.

To date, there has been less activity in the POPs and land degradation focal areas. Resources have been directed toward establishing baseline information in these areas and developing national plans.

**Conclusion 7:** **GEF support in Vanuatu and SPREP has been highly relevant for accelerating the sustainable development agenda and meeting development needs. GEF has been a major catalyst in helping move the environmental and sustainable development agenda into the national forefront.**

The GEF-supported EAs that produced the NBSAP and the PICCAP were catalytic in preparing the Environmental Management and Conservation Act, and in integrating the concept of sustainable development into national development plans. SPBCP and LCI not only raised awareness and the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Written comments from SPREP, 8 January 2014.

profile of areas with globally significant biodiversity but, with IWP, also demonstrated community-based approaches that Vanuatu and other PICs have since increasingly adopted in managing biodiversity and natural resources on customary land areas. The PIREP and PIGGAREP projects have been influential in the development of national energy policies and the recent shift in emphasis to renewable energy technologies among PICs. Much of the planning information now available to countries in the GEF focal areas was generated from GEF projects. These have not only been useful in the design of projects, but also in the formulation of sector policies.

Similarly, GEF contributed to accelerating the national sustainable development agendas elsewhere in the region. The outcomes of the PICCAP, with its national greenhouse gas assessments and the vulnerability assessments, helped frame the Pacific Forum Leaders Communiqué of the past 10 years, stressing the importance of actions to combat climate change and prioritise adaptation measures. In Fiji, the NBSAP project helped accelerate the development of national sustainable development plans. In Samoa, the outcomes of GEF projects have been instrumental in mainstreaming climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation into the country's Development Strategy 2012-2014. GEF's contribution in the climate change focal area is particularly relevant, as Samoa and other PICs recognize the threat of climate change-induced extreme weather events as a major source of economic vulnerability for their development ambitions.

**Conclusion 8: National ownership of GEF projects in Vanuatu is generally low, except for enabling activities.**

The evaluation found a strong sense of national ownership of GEF enabling activities, with their expedited procedures and absence of co-financing component; seven of the nine completed Vanuatu national projects are EAs. The only two completed MSPs in Vanuatu (the LCI project and Sustainable Land Management project) were both initiated by a GEF Agency.

SPREP regional projects including SPBCP, IWP, and PACC were based on SPREP Meeting resolutions. These projects are intended to address issues that are common throughout the region as well as national concerns; however, the evaluation findings suggest that these projects have not always addressed specific national priorities. Country obligations under various multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and initiatives of GEF Agencies in facilitating access to GEF funding are other drivers that prompt PICs to engage in activities that are not necessarily consistent with national priorities.

Consequently, the GEF supported some national plans in areas that were not fully aligned with the highest national priorities and were not supported by national budget allocations. As a result, the use or implementation of the outputs from these projects has been limited. Examples include National Biosafety Frameworks (NBF), POPs National Implementation Plans (NIP), and to an extent, National Action Plans (NAP) for addressing land degradation and desertification.

### **1.3.3 – Efficiency**

**Conclusion 9: The preparation time for GEF projects in Vanuatu and the SPREP region is excessive. This affects the efficiency of implementation in terms of changes in institutional memory, staff turnover, and national co-financing allocations.**

The approval process takes 1.7 years on average for national projects and 2.4 years on average for regional projects. However, there is substantial variation across different project modalities. For

example, national FSPs in Vanuatu have a longer approval process (4.3 years) on average than SPREP-executed regional FSPs (2.5 years). On the other hand, EAs have been approved somewhat faster, on average, for Vanuatu national projects (1.2 years) compared to SPREP-executed regional EAs (1.4 years). Overall, these figures compare favourably with the GEF global average of 5.5 years (GEF Evaluation Office, 2007), as well as with those reported in the OECS Cluster CPE (GEF Evaluation Office, 2012). However, the averages for MSPs and FSPs still exceed the GEF Secretariat standard of an 18-month approval process. Furthermore, interviewees from the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies acknowledged that the process takes longer than it should, considering the reforms introduced during GEF-4 and the rather small number of nationally-executed projects in Vanuatu. Moreover, the average time required to approve national projects has increased, from less than one year in GEF-1 to 4.3 years in GEF-4. The GEF Council is aware of the delays and is continuing its efforts to streamline the approval process.

As projects take longer to prepare, priorities and commitments identified in the project documents may change, potentially affecting the efficiency of implementation. In most of the regional projects, a complete reworking of the project documents was undertaken after the GEF Council and GEF Agency approvals, due to changes that occurred in some countries concerning national priorities, the institutional memory of the national focal points, staff turnover, and budgetary constraints. In addition, in some instances co-financing initially allocated to those projects had to be shifted to newly emerging national needs. This was the case for the IWP and PACC projects and the Vanuatu LCI project.

**Conclusion 10: GEF projects' monitoring and evaluation (M&E) produced very important information and lessons both for institutional capacity building and identifying actions to address environmental concerns. The use of these lessons has varied, with some being successfully used and several others not having been used at all.**

All GEF projects have monitoring and evaluation (M&E) protocols in the form of annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs), Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs), and Terminal Evaluations (TEs). The evaluation team found that the M&E systems in place are used effectively for adaptive management during the life of the projects. All the completed regional and national projects include examples of improvements since the relevant MTR took place.

Some good examples of adaptive management include the changes that UNDP and SPREP initiated to address delays in the disbursement of funds for the PACC project. This was an issue since UNDP and SPREP started working together on GEF projects in the mid-1990s. The new approach allows disbursement of funds only to those countries that have submitted the necessary reports on time, rather than waiting until all countries have submitted their reports before funds are disbursed to SPREP. Also, SPREP now only has to submit progress reports on a six-month basis rather than quarterly, freeing up staff time to work on project activities. SPREP reports that it will soon appoint an M&E Advisor which will, in part, support SPREP's M&E activities relating to the GEF.<sup>9</sup>

The evaluation team also found that project TEs produced some very useful lessons and recommendations for future action. Unfortunately, these lessons do not appear to have been incorporated into the design of subsequent projects or taken up by government in their relevant work programs. Examples include the recommendations from the LCI to enact the Conservation Area Regulation (CAR) in Vanuatu and providing support for the communities to maintain their established

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

conservation areas. The evaluation found that neither of these has been addressed. Other recommendations from the TE of the LCI project, and the NBSAP projects as well as the IWP, highlighted the need for strengthening the capacity of DEPC. Unfortunately this has not happened, mainly due to a lack of political commitment to raising the profile of environmental issues at the national level.

## 1.4 – Recommendations

### 1.4.1 – Recommendations to the Government of Vanuatu

***Recommendation 1: Identify and implement action items in GEF-funded action plans that are most closely aligned with national priorities.***

The GEF has supported the Government in developing a myriad of strategies and action plans through EAs. These plans include suggested action items to address pressing environmental issues. While some of the recommended actions have been implemented, several others have not. The Government should systematically review the pending action items in the National Biosafety Frameworks, POPs National Implementation Plans, and National Action Plans for addressing land degradation and desertification; decide which action items are most closely aligned with national priorities and available funding; and redouble efforts to implement the selected actions. This effort would not only benefit the specific areas highlighted in the plans, but would demonstrate the Government's commitment to the environment while raising the profile of environmental issues in Vanuatu.

***Recommendation 2: Mainstream project coordination mechanisms into ongoing national planning processes to sustain progress and strengthen national capacity.***

Through GEF EAs, the Government has established committees and teams to work on meeting the country's environmental obligations under various international agreements. While these arrangements have resulted in effective coordination during the lifetime of the projects, these mechanisms have not been integrated into broader national planning processes and have gone dormant, with the exception of committees and teams working on climate change issues. The Government should actively consider opportunities to integrate coordination mechanisms established during GEF EAs into its ongoing national work programs. In so doing, the Government should look for opportunities to improve cross-sector integration and coordination between DEPC and other line ministries and organizations to ensure efficient use of resources and expertise.

### 1.4.2 – Recommendations to the GEF Council

***Recommendation 3: Continue to work on reducing the time required to approve GEF projects, while accounting for delays in project execution.***

The time required to approve MSPs and FSPs exceeds the GEF's 18-month target. This evaluation was not able to fully determine the causes of delays due to missing and inaccurate data; going forward, the GEF should track this issue carefully to identify and address the sources of delays. As indicated in many other GEF CPEs, excessive approval time is an ongoing challenge. While making every effort to shorten the approval process over the medium to long term, the GEF should acknowledge that delays are likely to be encountered within the current process, and plan projects accordingly. For example, the evaluation finds that national priorities and resources often change between the time when project proposals are developed and when projects are approved; the GEF may want to set aside additional

resources for stakeholder consultations after projects have been approved to reaffirm national commitment and make any needed changes to project plans based on recent developments.

### 1.4.3. – Recommendation to the GEF Council and SPREP

***Recommendation 4: Further strengthen knowledge management by integrating communication and outreach components in GEF projects and disseminating lessons learned more broadly through SPREP's regional platform.***

While the evaluation finds some successful examples of knowledge sharing, it also finds that lessons from past projects are not being fully utilized. The GEF should ensure that communication and outreach are integrated in project designs to facilitate ongoing learning and dissemination. For its part, SPREP should include 'learning and adaptive management' as a permanent webpage on SPREP's website. This should build on the existing resources available on SPREP's website and help crystalize good practices and lessons for specific types of projects. In addition, SPREP technical staff should draw on this knowledge when helping countries design and implement projects. For example, SPREP could help ensure that lessons learned are reflected in the design of new projects.

### 1.4.4 – Recommendation to SPREP

***Recommendation 5: Continue and reinforce SPREP's role of providing technical assistance for GEF projects, particularly after GEF funding ends.***

Evaluation stakeholders identified SPREP as playing an important role in providing technical support for project design, implementation, replication, and scale-up. The evaluation findings suggest that countries would benefit from even more technical assistance, particularly after GEF funding ends. SPREP should continue to build its technical expertise in climate change and biodiversity, in addition to other focal areas that are aligned with SPREP's mandate. In addition, SPREP should look for opportunities to leverage and coordinate technical expertise throughout the region to address country-specific capacity needs.