*Summary of conclusions, recommendations and lessons*

1. The TE finds that despite a problematic start-up and implementation hiccups in the first two years, the project has exceeded delivery on 10 targets, fully delivered on 7 and delivered over 80% on the other 2. Using threat reduction as a measure of impacts, the project significantly reduced threats to biodiversity in Seychelles by;
2. **Direct protection** – via increasing PA estate by 5,677.1 hectares: of which 294.1 is Terrestrial PA. This is significant for Seychelles which has a total land surface of only 459 sq km (or 45,900 ha), of which 45.5% was already gazetted by 2010. Any additional area to the terrestrial PAs matter a great deal.
3. Once the new legislation is in place, the PA is likely to increase by a further 3,000 hectares upon gazettement of North and Dennis Islands, as well as the four Temporal PAs (2 for whale sharks and 2 for turtles). There is also a proposal to designate 11 new sites in inner and outer islands under the Outer Island Project, once the legislation is in place. This will bring the total PA estate to 150,000 in the next few years.
4. **Policy and legislation for PA expansion under multi-stakeholder (private sector) management:** The approval of the new PA policy has far reaching impacts on strengthening the PA management into the future. The new policy forms the framework for more effective planning and management of PAs, and guides the expansion of the current PA system with the introduction of new categories of protected area in accordance with international criteria and international obligations. The real impact of the PA Policy is that it reinforces the commitment of Seychelles to manage 50% of its land area and up to 30% of its marine area as protected areas (including sustainable use zones). The PA Policy, additionally addresses co-management of PAs, a concept which is novel in the Seychelles, and strengthens the potential for private partnerships in PA management. Allowing private sector investments in PA is cost effective for a SIDS, which suffers HR and financial difficulties;
5. The TE finds that overall the results obtained by the project for US$ 2.1 million represent a very good return on capital, and that delivering a new PA policy in less than 4 years is exceptional. Four strategies adopted yielded efficiency gains, namely: i) involvement of NGOs in a partnership aimed at expanding the PA estate and improve the management effectiveness, even without the legal provisions being in place yet: ii) the use of, and composition of the Technical Working Group that led PA policy process: iii) the PCU as the coordinator of all the GEF projects in Seychelles; iv) the three tier project management modality adopted by UNDPis an efficient distribution of “labour” and increased efficient use of resources in this project.
6. Moreover the TE finds that the impacts described above are likely to be sustained in future due to improved Management Effectiveness on all PAs and Islands, improved financial sustainability and improved systemic and individual and institutional capacities for PA management (targets 1 and 2 in table 3).
7. The PCU played a significant role in connecting the project to other GEF projects and development processes in the country, with significant gains in relevance, mainstreaming, replication and catalytic role; these generated further gains in cost effectiveness (both efficiency and effectiveness). However, absence of the PCU coordinator at the crucial start-up period weakened the project support to other entities at a time when many critical decisions were required, which the Project Manager alone could not take. Staff changes in the financial department of the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Finance often exacerbated the difficult financial flows of project funds (see section on project finance). In addition, changes in staff in the PCU and the PM in 3 of the 4 ENGOs during the course of the caused delays in the submission of quarterly reports, causing additional delay in disbursement of funds for all partners. However, staff turn-over problems are not unusual for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and there is no evidence that the turn-over problems experienced during the implementation of this project were greater than would be expected of SIDS.
8. Active management of knowledge sharing improves chances of replication and catalytic character of a project. Knowledge management was however not included as an activity with a budget in this project. Although the MTE Management response reported knowledge sharing as organic in the project, a more systematic knowledge management would have improve cross-learning amongst the project partners.
9. **Financial Planning:** the TE finds that there were several problems with financial planning, primarily caused by delays in disbursements during the first two years. The delays seems to have been due to the following reasons: i) misunderstanding of the 80% rule: ii) the complex institutional arrangements around financial transfers: iii) frequency of requests for financial clearance. However, the project clearly overcame these difficulties in the later part of implementation to deliver very impressive achievements.
10. There is very high country ownership of the project demonstrated primarily by the high level of NGO participation and commitment to the technical issues tackled by the project, with 80% of the budget delivered by ENGOs; but also by the fact that most partners pre-financed implementation when disbursement was slow. Although there was a high degree of annoyance for having to do so, this does not change the fact that keeping implementation going despite delayed disbursements contributed very much to the project delivering on most of its targets within the planned time.
11. The project has significantly strengthened the partnerships for PA management in Seychelles: although the partnership still needs to be consolidated, interviews with the partners confirmed that some of them felt that by being part of the process, they, in turn, increased their capacity for PA management.
12. The TE finds no financial, socio-economics, institutional, governance or environmental risks to the sustainability of impacts from the project

Lessons learnt

**Lesson 1:** Projects targeting policy change should either be implemented over longer periods (e.g. six years) or limit the indicators to the actual contribution that use of project resources can be held accountable for (see addition to this lesson after the section on “use of M&E and adaptive management”)

**Lessons 2:** Replication is necessary for sustaining project impacts: however, for it to happen, projects need to actively link with other on-going processes, something that is often difficult when project teams are isolated and are too focused on tight deadlines. The presence of the PCU made a big difference in this project. They were able to link the project to other important GEF and national programs;

**Lesson 3:** Active management of knowledge sharing improves chances of replication. Although knowledge sharing was, to some extent organic[[1]](#footnote-1), providing knowledge sharing systems would have improved knowledge sharing and learning: however, when this is not factored in as an activity with a budget (as was the case for this project), it is likely to be downplayed. In the absence of such effort, the four sub-components were implemented as a disparate set of activities with limited cross-fertilization.

**Lesson 4:** Seychelles is a Small Island Developing State – and will always have Human Resources issues manifested in high staff turnover in many organizations. The planning stage should be used to formulate mitigation strategies to handle the inevitable human resources issues during implementation.

**Lesson 5:** Mainstreaming lessons from other projects is a cost effective measure because it avoids duplication and waste. The choice of Implementing Partner with the necessary linkages to other conservation programs, and the unique position of the PCU for UNDP-GEF projects in Seychelles played a key role in the excellent level of mainstreaming lessons demonstrated by this project.

**Lesson 6:** The TE echoes the lesson highlighted by the MTE regarding operational matters in partnerships: setting up multi-stakeholder PA management regimes requires attention to trust, respect and equality for implementing partners. While putting in place neutral platforms for participatory decision making is important, the adage “perception is the only reality” matters where capacities vary amongst the members of the partnership; there is need to find a more effective means of overcoming perceptions of un-equal power relations;

**Lesson 7:** As a SIDS, all project partners need to develop more effective incentives for recruiting and retaining staff. Solving this issue is beyond this project, but it is definitely necessary for the country.

**Lesson 8:** For projects being implemented through more than one institution, the possibility of several AWARDS in ATLAS should be considered, supported by a cost benefit analysis of the additional work occasioned by several AWARD numbers.

**Lesson 9:** similar to the replication issue, the diligence of the partners and the PCU in ensuring that the project is informed by, and informed other relevant process played a key role in ensuring that the project catalyzes other processes. A more systematic knowledge management process, that would have ensured that the various sub-components are implemented as parts of a whole (rather than a disparate set of activities) would have increased the catalytic character of this project significantly.

Recommendation

**Recommendation 1:** Formulate an exit strategy that explains how the legislation approval will be followed up and coordinated with the outputs of this project, to ensure sustainability of the impacts;

**Recommendation 2**: For future projects involving multiple partners (as the PA finance is likely to do), all efforts must be expended to avoid the single award, multiple implementers. HACT (harmonization for cash transfer) should be used so that funds transfer becomes simpler and more straightforward;

**Recommendation 3:** The funds approval systems can be simplified by allowing the PCU to authorize all expenditures below US$ 25,000 against the normal contracts signed between the main implementer (government in this case) and the implementing partners). The important thing is to have robust contracts that would not allow abuse of resources. The current approval system puts too much burden on an already limited staffing situation. The significance of such a system is that 90% of the project expenditures fall within this range, suggesting significant efficiency gains.

**Recommendation 4:** By being at the centre of all the GEF projects in the country, the PCU played a critical role in linking the project to other GEF projects and to relevant development programs and processes in the country. This enabled two important things: i) it ensured that implementation of any specific project is closely coordinated with all relevant projects, for the benefit of both; ii) ensured that all project outputs and processes are known to, and taken into consideration by all relevant development processes. This has increased the cost effectiveness, relevance, replicability and catalytic role of this project considerably (compared to the situation without the PCU). Although it might be difficult to establish coordination units for GEF projects in all countries, there are significant benefits to be gained by having, at a minimum, a GEF coordinator in all UNDP Country Offices, paid for by small contributions from each of the projects. Such a mechanism would yield significant benefits especially in countries where the CO capacity is either weak or environment is not on the top agenda, or both … e.g. South Africa?

**Recommendation 5:** Factor in knowledge management and sharing as an activity with a budget for similar projects. This will yield significant replicability and catalytic gains.

1. Response to MTE [↑](#footnote-ref-1)