**Management Response Template**

**Management response to the Midterm Review of RMI Ridge to Reef Project. 67**

Project Title: Reimaanlok- Looking to the Future: Strengthening Natural Resource Management in Atoll Communities in the Republic of the Marshall Islands employing integrated approaches (RMI R2R).

Project PIMS #: 5685

GEF Project ID (PMIS) #: 00104152

Midterm Review Mission Completion Date: February 2021

Date of Issue of Management Response: March 2021

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**Context, background and findings**

The RMI Ridge to Reef (R2R) project supports the implementation of the [*Reimaanlok*](https://www.bing.com/search?q=reimaanlok&form=PREXEN&ocid=iehp&mkt=en-us&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&refig=401e2ced229949779808b942f60a8699&sp=-1&pq=reimaanlok&sc=1-10&qs=n&sk=&cvid=401e2ced229949779808b942f60a8699)*,* the National Conservation Plan of the Marshall Islands, which aims to conserve and protect marine and terrestrial resources in line with Micronesia Challenge and the Aichi Targets. The RMI R2R project is piloted in five sites of Wotho, Ebon, Mejit, Aur and Likiep with GEF grants of $3.9m for a period of five years (2017-2022).

The project is implemented by UNDP using the Direct Implementation Modality (DIM) with Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Majuro and UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji. The implementation phase started in Quarter 3, 2018, after the appointment of the Project Manager, Deputy Project Manager and Project Associate. Other project staffs based in country includes the Admin/Finance Officer and five site coordinators who are based in the five sites to monitor and lead the work at the ground level. The Climate Change Directorate office of the RMI is the Operational Focal Point (OFP).

The implementation progressed smoothly with five responsible partners (RP) engaged to implement the project activities under the three components. However, the RMI, like other small island states has its own set of challenges, which is largely due to its remoteness where the islands and atolls are vastly distributed over two million square kilometers of ocean. Specific challenges encountered by the project includes inconsistent mode of transportation to the five sites, lack or no connectivity that makes communication very difficult, and lack of human resources including technical capacities, in the field of environment conservation and management. In July 2019, the Dengue fever outbreak in Ebeye and Majuro, (the two urban centers in RMI) resulted in a 6-month internal travel restriction between islands. This caused a significant delay in the implementation, and with the Covid-19 pandemic, it further elevates this with more stringent measures including border closure.

The findings and recommendations of the mid-term review (MTR) are valid and very important to help understand the status of the project and providing an opportunity to plan and re-strategize the project approach in light of the new normal, and importantly to achieve the objective of the project by thy end of the project period. The PMU with support of UNDP, RTA, government counterparts and responsible partners will conduct a planning meeting to identify pending activities, map existing resources and capacities to leverage the project capacity to deliver. As recommended in the MTR, the PMU will strengthen other areas including increasing partnerships and collaboration, raising awareness, dissemination of project results to the wider RMI populace, building local capacity, UNDP monitoring and overciting, quality assurance, risk monitoring, etc. Corresponding actions (refer below) and adaptive management are put in place as measures to guide the PMU to effectively implement project activities for the remainder of the project period.

1. This template is in alignment with the [Management Response Template f](http://web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/documents/templates/Independent-Evaluation-Management-response.doc)or UNDP project-level evaluations in the Evaluation Resource Centre.
2. If the MTR is uploaded to the ERC, the status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).
3. Status of Implementation: Completed, Partially Completed, Pending.

**Recommendations and management response**

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 1. The planned completion date of the project is not realistic. To ensure full achievement of all planned end-of-project targets, the project implementation period must be extended. | | | |
| **Management response:** | Agree. Implementation of project activities was delayed in light of the:   1. Dengue fever outbreak in Majuro and Ebeye (the two urban centers) that prevents all outer islands travel for a period of six-months (July-December 2019). 2. Covid-19 pandemic border closure and movement restrictions.   Based on the recommendation, request for the no-cost extension will be discussed at the Project Steering Committee before submission to GEF Secretariat. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking68** | |
| **Comments** | **Status69** |
| * 1. Organize planning meeting for the PMU team to re-strategize approach for the implementation of remaining project activities, in line with the MTR recommendations. | June 2021 | Project Management Unit (PMU) and UNDP. |  |  |
| * 1. Review the multi-year workplan and integrate (repeal/include) activities that are contributing to targets and outputs, submitted for Board’s approval. | June 2021 | Project Management Unit and UNDP |  |  |
| * 1. Regular meeting with project partners and stakeholders to check on the status of implementation and providing support where needed. | **Weekly**: PMU **Monthly**: Email update from partners to give an update  **Quarterly**: PMU + IP meeting (separately) + QPR | Program Management Unit/UNDP/existing RPs including IOM, MICS, Jojikum, CMI, and MIMRA. |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 2. There has been a considerable delay in developing the necessary surveys and studies (**marine survey, terrestrial surveys, socio-economic studies, LEAP surveys, hydrological survey, network scenario, management plans, delineation of the proposed sites, et**c.) due to travel restrictions. As it is not clear when travel restrictions will be eased, an effective adaptive management plan must be put in place with clear measures to undertake the necessary work under a pro-longed travel restriction. | | | |
| **Management response:** | Agree. Covid-19 delayed implementation of these activities, e.g., marine biologist was not able to travel to RMI to support conduct marine survey. In this instance, partners had to find alternate options by engaging local partners such as MIMRA to support the marine survey. In the delivery of the technical survey, partners with right capacity will be engaged with support provided by the UNDP and PMU team.  Whilst strategies were put in place to cope with COVID in 2020, for 2021 a management plan for the implementation of major activities that will be affected by COVID will be drawn up. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 2.0 Development and endorsement by the Project Board of a management plan for the implementation of major activities that will be affected by COVID | June 2021 | PMU and UNDP |  |  |
| 2.1 Hold regular meeting (on weekly basis) to track progress, monitor and address any project issues/holdups. | Weekly meeting starting April 2021. | PMU/UNDP with RPs, including IOM, MICS, MIMRA, CMI, HPO, Jojikum Youth Group. |  |  |
| 2.2 Continuous partnerships with local entities in the wider sector that have an input into any corresponding project activities, and to forge partnerships. | Feb 2023 | UNDP and stakeholders including MIMRA, Ministry of Education, |  |  |
| 2.3 Management Plan will also entail a re-visit project activities to assess its relevancy and practicality to be achieved within the remainder of the project period. | May 2021 | UNDP/PMU/Responsible Partners. |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 3. Due to the limited technical experts available at the national levels, it is recommended that peer experts, from other Micronesian Islands, provide technical support such as the development of a Conservation GIS database and online cleaning house for the different project sites | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. The project will seek to tap resources within the Micronesian NGOs such as the MCT – Micronesian Conservation Trust | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 3.1 Hiring of suitable technical experts, including those from other Micronesian islands, who can still be able to deliver the work despite being physically absent on the ground. It is important also to engage technical expertise who have worked in the RMI and currently reside in RMI. | June 2021 | Project Management Unit/UNDP. |  |  |
| 3.2 Strengthening partnership with local stakeholders., with expertise in environment management, such as MIMRA, Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce. | Feb 2023 | Project Management Unit |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 4. As for linking cultural expressions to resource management, the MTR Consultant believes it should not be a problematic issue as the Project collaborates with different stakeholders, mainly the Mayors of the outer islands, to take the lead role to promote the sense they are involved in the project as an important partner. The involvement of youth-related organizations is key for sustaining and transferring local and traditional knowledge to young and new generations | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree Wide collaborative effort in delivering this activity is very important to consolidate knowledge at different level of society, especially finding a clear nexus between cultural expressions/traditional knowledge and resource management. Inclusion of youth is important to ensure information and therefore they have been engaged to document some of the knowledge (Jo-Jikum booklet), thereby helping ensure the transfer of knowledge to the next generation. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 4.1 Planning meeting to discuss on further strengthening partnerships.  Existing partner (Jo-Jikum, HPO) | Feb 2023 | PMU/UNDP and existing RPs. |  |  |
| 4.2 identify potential partner that will be able to support the project (Youth Bureau within MoCIA, Alele Museum). | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 5. The MTR recommends making the project’s technical deliverables, lessons learned, and knowledge management productions with a focus on cultural expressions open to the public by sharing the materials through different websites, social media and any other proper tools | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree The College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) with funding support from the project upgraded the National Spatial Analytic Facility (NSAF) to an online database. This platform will be used to store information pertaining to the five project sites. This includes technical surveys, maps, management plans, etc, for public viewing. The platform will be upscaled as a national database for environment conservation.  Similarly, the information will be shared with the UNDP website, UNDP RSD Facebook and Twitter, Regional R2R website. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 5.0 Develop a user policy (data entry procedure, user access, vetting process, data verification and packaging, data privacy setting and ownership) | Dec 2021 | Bill Labija (CMI contract)/PMU |  |  |
| 5.1 Updating the NSAF with latest survey results for the five sites. | Dec 2021 | CMI/PMU |  |  |
| 5.2 Develop 5 interactive maps (one per site) displaying available datasets. Content can be embedded in RMI R2R website. Invite public to access data (via journal or radio) | Dec 2021 | PMU |  |  |
| 5.3 Sharing project achievements through various platforms in RMI and within UNDP. | Dec 2021 | PMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 6. An external consultant could be recruited to further assist in enrolling Marshallese students from the University of the South Pacific to get the needed capacity building and knowledge in integrated approaches | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. The Chief Technical Advisor will provide additional support to this. The PMU, however had several discussions with USP and had agreed on the course modality. What causes the delay is the inability to secure four candidates, who meet the admission requirements to undertake the course. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 6.1 Finalize discussions with USP | August 2021 | PMU |  |  |
| 6.2 Continue recruitment process of four eligible candidates for the course. | December 2021 | PMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 7. Several awareness sessions need to be organized to ensure the technical capacities are in place after the project closure with a paramount focus on conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and community-based adaptation | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. Community level awareness is planned for the five sites during the formulation of intergrated resource management plans for each island, and demarcation of protected areas. Apart from this, whole community will be trained on strengthening custodianship skills of the protected areas.Sustainability secured by LRC/Local council of each site. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 7.1 Community awareness targeting all communities in the five sites. | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |
| 7.2 Raise awareness (lessons-learned, best-practices, exchange sessions) of Mayors, community leaders, Site Coordinators | Feb 2023 | PMU/MIMRA |  |  |
| 7.3 Strengthening/enabling custodianship skills by providing information in order to make informed decision in the protection MPA and TPA | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |
| 7.4 Consult with Mayors and community leadership (including LRC/Council) s to identify the gaps (via Talanoa) | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |
| 7.5 Organized talk-back shows. | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 8. Development of the project’s communication plan to be prioritized to boost the project’s public awareness and stakeholders’ engagement efforts. Most of the project’s indicators need to be clearly and effectively communicated with outer islands. Poor communications and limited travel are defined as key obstacles to achieving the project’s targets | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. The development of the communication plan will be prioritized by the PMU. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 8.1 Development of the communication plan | December 2021 | PMU/CTA |  |  |
| 8.2 Implementation of the plan | Feb 2023 | PMU/CTA |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 9. The project’s M&E system should be strengthened. UNDP to play a key role in transforming the M&E system from a management tool to an adaptive management approach through the continuous and effective involvement of stakeholders as part of the project’s adaptive management framework. For example, the quarterly progress reports should be expanded to include an indicative work plan of activities for the next quarter as well as updated risks and mitigation measures. Furthermore, the project reporting function should include the documentation of lessons learned so that institutional memory is preserved, and a reference guide is created to support any future replication of similar project initiatives | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. Though not mandatory, the QPR, Quarterly Progress Report is being finalized for use by end Q1, 2021. It includes risks & mitigation measures, lessons learnt. The PMU will continue to work closely with the IRMU M&E staff and RSD M&R staff | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 9.1 Organize the Planning meeting and discuss, revise M&E plan | June 2021 | PMU/UNDP/Partners |  |  |
| 9.2 Current QPR includes updated risks and mitigation measures | Feb 2023 | PMU/UNDP |  |  |
| 9.3 Support Implementing Partners in producing quarterly workplans and documentation of lessons learned | Feb 2023 | PMU and Partners |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 10. UNDP-GEF Project Assurance to provide better guidelines and technical backstopping. Support for Implementation Phase of the project is critical to ensure that adaptation management measures are in place | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agreed Consultation with Integrated Resource Management Unit of UNDP to improve quality assurance. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 10.1 Consultation with IRMU on improving Project Quality Assurance | Feb 2023 | PMU/IRMU/UNDP |  |  |
| 10.2 Monitor implementation of recommendations from the project’s quality assurance process. | Feb 2023 | PMU/IRMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 11. The role of the Project Board needs to be strengthened, with more frequent meetings, adequate advance provision of documentation, follow-up mechanisms established, and the inclusion of representation at the local community level | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agreed. The Board is already meeting twice a year,. The Mayors of the five project sites are executive members of the Board so no decision can be made without their presence. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 11.1 Continue to carry out the standard procedure for the preparation and circulation of meeting documents before and after each meeting. | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |
| 11.2 .Ad Hoc Project Board meetings will continue to be called as and when needed. | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |
| 11.3 Develop and establish a follow-up mechanism. | Feb 2023 | PMU |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 12. The implementing /executing agency and stakeholders of the project can provide valuable technical (and political) support and the Project should draw on these relationships further in its management approach to this project. The MTR would recommend that a greater spirit of cooperation and inclusion of other stakeholders by the Project in all aspects of the project delivery needs to be emphasized | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. Continue to strengthen current collaboration and continue to explore inclusion of new stake holders as mentioned above for WUTMI & Youth Groups (MoCIA) | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 12.1 Continue to strengthen relations and draw lessons learnt specifically on partnerships from the first half of the project for improvement moving forward | Feb 2023 | PMU/UNDP/Partners |  |  |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation** | 13. The MTR did not see any collaboration with other UNDP, GEF or relevant initiatives, except the Regional R2R. It is recommended that effective and continuous collaboration with all other relevant initiatives, partners, and stakeholders to enhance knowledge sharing and build on each other work | | | |
| **Management response**: | Agree. All efforts made to collaborate with other UNDP GEF in the RMI as part of the project and work together in information sharing. | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 13.1 Identify areas of potential collaboration with RMI UNDP projects such as GEF SGP, GCF Water Security Project, Deep Dive, Coastal Aquifers, Climate Security, TNC/BUR, Japan Funded EDCR, PIOFM 2 apart from other development partners projects - eg WB PREP 2 | Feb 2023 | PMU/SGP |  |  |