## UNDP-GEF MTR Management Response

**Management response to the Midterm Review of the Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Services and Cultural Heritage in Niue (Niue R2R)**

**Project Title:** Management response to the Midterm Review of the Application of Ridge to Reef Concept for Biodiversity Conservation and for the Enhancement of Ecosystem Services and Cultural Heritage in Niue (Niue R2R)

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**Midterm Review Mission Completion Date:**

**Date of Issue of Management Response:**

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**Context, background and findings**

The project was designed to enhance Niue’s capacity to effectively create and manage protected areas for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and safeguarding of ecosystem services. It focuses on the expansion of its protected estate on land and on its marine areas through a combination of community conservation areas and government-led protected areas. In Community Conservation Areas, both strict protection and sustainable use zones will be identified and planned carefully, using innovative protection tools recognizing that tenure over most land areas is vested in local communities.

This project has been designed to engineer a paradigm shift in the management of terrestrial, coastal and marine protected sites from a site-centric approach to a holistic “ridge to reef” comprehensive approach. Through this approach, activities in the immediate production landscapes adjacent to marine and terrestrial protected areas will be managed to reduce threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services stemming from key production activities (e.g. tourism and agriculture).

Additionally, the project also introduces the concept of connectivity between landscape and seascape in Niue. Terrestrial protected areas will include a landscape that links strictly protected community areas (tapu) to each other to enhance their integrity and to form a functional ecological corridor between them. Similarly, the creation of a Marine Protected Area at Beveridge Reef also satisfies the integrated and holistic approach promoted by the project by recognizing the link that is thought to exist between the Reef and mainland Niue through which the former serves as a source of recruitment for clams and other marine species that make up Niue’s coral reefs.

The primary objective of the project is to strengthen conservation and sustainable use of land, water and marine areas and their biodiversity by building on their cultural heritage values through integrated national and community actions and this will be achieved through the following outcomes;

***Outcome 1:*** *New community conservation and national protected areas established at different levels, thus reducing threats and improving biodiversity status of conservation areas through effective community management*

Outcome 1 identifies communities as the agents of management and monitoring. It comprises the major project interventions on the ground leading to protective measures at different levels and through different instruments thus reducing threats and improving biodiversity status. A large part of the work will be carried out primarily by empowering Village Councils and Communities as owners.

***Outcome 2****: Strengthened community and cross-sectoral involvement of relevant national government departments to promote effective Ridge to Reef management by mainstreaming biodiversity and environmental concerns into plans and actions*

Outcome 2 is focussed primarily upstream at the central and local government levels and it targets institutional strengthening, capacity building and other foundational elements. At the local, Village Council level this Outcome seeks a stronger institutional foundation and enhanced capacities; likewise among central government functionaries. Institutional strengthening will be achieved through policy and regulatory reforms at central level but also through by-laws at Local Level. Capacities will be enhanced through the provision of expertise and know-how for land use planning and management, protected area management (including for eco-tourism), species protection and management, sustainability. Under this Outcome, the project will also make provision for information sharing, awareness raising, learning and outreach.

The total GEF trust funds for this project is US$4,194,862 with in-kind co-financing of US$11,068,600. The project document was signed in April 2016 and is now its 3rd year of implementation with a planned end date on the 20th April 2020. The executing agency for this project is the Ministry of Natural Resources and responsible parties are the Department of Education, Taoga Niue, Department of Public Works (Water), Office of the Premier, Treasury Department and the United Nations Development Programme.

The objective of the MTR was to gain an independent analysis of the progress mid-way through the projects. The MTR focused on identifying potential project design problems, assessing progress towards the achievement of the project objective, and identifying and documenting lessons learned about project design, implementation and management. Findings of this review will be incorporated as recommendations for enhanced implementation during the final half of the project’s term.

The recommendations of the MTR report have been proposed with the aim of improving project effectiveness and enhancing the likelihood of project results will be sustained after the GEF project funding ends.

The overall rating of the mid-term review is moderately satisfactory. The presentation of the MTR and preliminary recommendations of the MTR was well attended by high level managers and the Assistant Minister for the Ministry of Natural Resources and all were in agreement and supported the recommendations put forward.

**Recommendations and management response**

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 1.** Streamline and accelerate procurement and administrative processes in order to avoid further delays that are impacting upon the implementation process. | | | | |
| **Management response:** Agree with recommendation.The establishment of a new governance and oversight structure - the Project Oversight Steering Team (POST) – provides an opportunity to streamline processes, particularly as it meets every fortnight. Revised procurement and reporting/approval processes need to be developed to incorporate this change. | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking[[1]](#footnote-1)** | |
| **Comments** | **Status[[2]](#footnote-2)** |
| * 1. Develop revised procurement and administrative processes to incorporate the requirements of POST. | July 2019 | POST, PIU | New processes being set up  Processes will take time to bed in but should result in extra efficiency. | completed |
| * 1. Revised process shared with UNDP to ensure that it fits with the UNDP and GEF quarterly reporting requirements. | July 2019 | PIU, UNDP | Process submitted to POST and shared with UNDP | completed |
| 1.3 All parties provide all inputs, and requirements and approvals in timely manner in accordance with revised processes. | July 2019 | POST, PIU | There is POST submission form that the project fills in to submit activities for approval  To be implemented once processes agreed | In progress |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 2.** Update and rationalize the numerous activities that were originally planned in order to streamline implementation, reforming work plan as needed and seeking effectiveness and high impact processes and products, maintaining planning of the project’s second tranche focused on obtaining results, generating results-based incentives, effects and outcomes, as well as weaving in sustainability factors in all products and processes the project implements. | | | | |
| **Management response: Agreed with MTR recommendation 2** | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 2.1 Carry out detailed review of remaining project activities as planned in the Prodoc. | July 2019 | PIU, CTA | Amendments to the scope of the remaining activities have been discussed in build up to MTR reporting in 2018.  Further drafting to be completed and finalized Qtr 2 2019. This should factor in the project extension request. Q3 revision near completion for submission within the quarter | In progress |
| 2.2 Make recommendations to National Project Director, POST and WG for approval of a revised workplan to project end. | August 2019 | PIU, CTA | To be completed in Qtr 3 2019.  Revised 2019 AWP and MYWP factoring in extension and no-extension period | in progress |
| 2.3 Present modified project plan for consideration and approval by UNDP | August 2019 | PIU, CTA, NPD | To be completed in Qtr 3 2019. | In progress |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 3.** Fully incorporate staff to Project Implementation Unit as needed (such as national technical staff) in order to have a completely functioning management unit with all needed personnel as soon as possible. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with recommendation 3 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 3.1 Appoint a replacement Technical Officer | August 2019 | PIU, PD, NPSC | TOR completed previously. Position advertised previously with no suitable applicants.  Position is being re-advertised | in progress |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 4.** Strive to generate national capacity at all levels and in all areas (technical, project management, etc.). | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with recommendation 4 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 4.1 Maintain and enhance the practice of consultants working with local counterparts to pass on skills & experience. | According to each consultancy | PIU, Consultants | Previous consultants undertook capacity building with MNR staff during field work, and at final outcomes presentations.  To be undertaken with all consultants as feasible, relevant or of benefit to local teams | Ongoing |
| 4.2 Provide opportunities for students to join consultants in their work. | As each consultancy allows for, advise schools to nominate suitable Snr students | PIU, Consultants | To be scheduled in with each field component of consultancies and communicated to Education dept for coordination with students availability.  Done with cave fanua, reptile, and peka surveys. | Ongoing |
| 4.3 Continue the practice of consultants holding workshops to share details of their activities and results | Prior to completion of the final field mission for each consultancy. | PIU, Consultants | Factored into all consultancies TORs  To be undertaken on the last mission of each consultancy. | Ongoing |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 5.** Establish and enhance work with communities being fully aware of their needs without creating false expectations, and without overburdening communities with activities. Imbed livelihood aspects and income generation issues related to comparative advantages of sustainable use of biodiversity. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with MTR recommendation 5 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 5.1. Develop a community consultation plan each year to identify the different engagement activities and the outcomes sought. | January 2019 then ahead of each quarter | PIU | 1st Round consultations completed.  Qtr 3, Qtr 4 consultations drafted out but will also depend on LUP and PA consultants’ schedules | Ongoing (currently in practice) |
| 5.2. Assist communities to establish or further develop committees to drive their R2R activities. | March 2019 | PIU | 1st Round consultations complete,  R2R committees in order for most villages under village councils. | Completed |
| 5.3 Complete work to identify possible mechanisms to incentivize conservation area creation | Qtr 1 2019 onwards | PIU, Protected Areas consultancy | R2R community initiatives rolled out, targeting all villages for at least 1 project, to assure and encourage commitment by showing tangible benefits at ground level. All communities well aware of project conservation goals and committed to engaging in PA and MPAs. Further investigation needed regarding long term incentives. | Ongoing. Most villages engaged in small projects with others pending. Some villages completed and looking at what areas to expand upon. PIU have advised to work through management planning as path to further community projects and activities. |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 6.** Impel work, analysis, concept notes, and other processes and mechanisms to deal with sustainable financing of the products and process the project is and will achieve | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with MTR recommendation 6 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 6.1 Sustainable financing will be addressed in the 2nd phase of the Protected Areas Consultancy | January 2020 | PIU |  | Planned |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 7.** Continue to promote linkages with different government departments as well as other related projects so that these linkages in turn support and anchor further collaborations and sustainability. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with MTR recommendation 7 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 7.1 Continue to work closely with Government stakeholders through the POST and WG. | January 2019 onwards | PIU | Technical working group now has POST oversight which provides wider policy guidance and regulatory advice. | Completed |
| 7.2 Draft TOR and recruit consultant for Needs Assessment and institutional strengthening | July 2019 | PIU, CTA, DG | TOR drafted and consultancy to advertised in 2019 quarter 3 | In progress |
| 7.3 Complete work aimed at institutional strengthening of MNR to allow its Departments to collaborate more closely with the R2R project and sustain its initiatives in the long-term. | January 2019 onwards | MNR, DG, PIU, CNA Consultant | Preliminary strategic planning for MNR commenced quarter 4 2018. Consultancy TOR to be finalized for this task.  Activity should commence Qtr 3 2019. | Ongoing |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 8.** Generate an exit strategy/sustainability plan for all the implementing aspects of the project. This sustainability plan/exit strategy should outline explicitly what is needed for sustaining products, outcomes, and effects. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with MTR recommendation 8 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 8.1 Identify expected end of project products, outcomes and effects. | QTR 1 2019 onwards as results begin to take shape. | PIU, CTA, NPD | Task to be undertaken through Qtr 2 and as end goals become more concrete in terms of specific expected results. E.g. how much land and reef will be committed by villages. | Ongoing |
| 8.2. Work with stakeholders (particular Government Departments and communities to identify how these products, outcomes and effects will be sustained. | QTR 1 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, NPD, UNDP MCO | Part of needs assessment and capacity building task. Builds on from MNR strategic planning.  Long term planning with key stakeholders is part of project activities, via consultation, meetings and village consultations inclusive of key stakeholder partners in MNR and relevant depts.. | Planned??? |
| 8.3 Complete exit strategy/sustainability plan | September 2019 | CTA, PIU, DG |  | Planned |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 9.** Orientation mechanisms (presentations, inception-type meetings, written materials) should be developed at this mid-point stage. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agreed with MTR recommendation 9 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| Develop report on Niue’s biodiversity incorporating survey results (for general audience) | November 2019 | CTA | CTA in process of compiling  Qtr 3 discussion and completion | In progress (near completion) |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 10.** Improve communication as well as dissemination of the information the project is and will be generating. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR Recommendation 10 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 10.1 Fully implement the Communication Strategy (and launch it) | August 2019 | CO, PM | Cabinet approved, some of activities implemented, others planned. Align awareness and outreach to Comms strategy.  Need to launch | Planned |
| 10.2 improve social media engagement | January 2019 onwards | CO,PM | FB account to be reactivated  FB, twitter accounts to commence. Use of devices to assist in uploading from the field or on the go will assist. | Ongoing |
| 10.3 Finalise and publish all technical and survey reports completed by the project | December 2019 | CO, PM, CTA |  | Planned |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 11.** Start generating knowledge management mechanisms to promote the exchange of knowledge and expertise that is being created throughout the Project and sharing best practices and lessons learned. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 11 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 11.1 Review requirements for activities in output 1.4 (Environmental Information Management System and Environmental Monitoring System) as part of project streamlining. | July 2019 | PIU CTA | Assess scaling down of some components, without compromising usefulness and functionality of the tools to be gained.  Scoping for EiMS to be undertaken in 2019 Q3 | Planned |
| 11.2 Finalise draft TOR for the EIMS scoping | July 2019 | PIU, CTA, UNDP |  | In progress |
| 11.3 Advertise for scoping (design and specification) assessment consultant | August 2019 | PIU, CTA, UNDP |  | Planned |
| 11.4 Advertise for EIMS specialist | October 2019 | PIU, CTA, UNDP |  | Planned |
| 11.5 Procurement for EIMS associated equipment, software and training | October 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, UNDP, EIMS specialist |  | Planned |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation 12.** Assure that gender issues are more than just participation of women. Interweave gender equality outlooks in all tools, studies, publications, etc. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 12 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 12.1 Recruit a Gender Specialist (based on TOR drafted in Sept 2018) Carry out agreed work to develop a gender assessment and gender action plan. | July 2019 | UNDP, PIU, CTA | UNDP recruitment delayed as selected applicant fell ill,  UNDP internal consultant visited and drafting report | Completed |
| 12.2 Implement Gender Action Plan and mainstream into all project activities studies etc. | August 2019 | PIU, CTA, project partners | Will commence once Gender Action plan is received | Planned |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 13.** Generate exit and sustainability strategies for all the implementing aspects of the Project. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 13. This is linked to MTR recommendation 7 and 8 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 13.1 Ensure CAs and Reefs have long term sustainability cemented into long term maintenance plans of village communities well before project termination. | June 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, PA, VCs and R2R committees | Discussion and Implementation to take place during PA consultancy | In progress |
| 13.2 Ensure long term sustainability of terrestrial and marine conservation areas is factored into management planning via development of business plans for tourism related activities to sustain the terrestrial and marine conservation areas long term. | June 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, PA, VCs and R2R committees | Business plan for Vaiea being drafted, to be used as test case for sustainable financing option for other CAs and Reefs.  Implement once draft approved by village and endorsed by government | In progress |
| 13.3 Complete and launch and implement Vaiea Business Plan and replicate and customize for other sites. Ensure the economic benefits of these business plans are being implemented successfully prior to project termination. | June 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, PA, VCs, Niue Tourism, NCOC and R2R committees | Implementation of Vaiea business plan to provide lessons learned for other village CAs and Reefs. Shortfalls to be highlighted and amended for implementation in other villages.  Business plan to be completed, approved before implementation in Qtr 3. | Ongoing |
| 13.4 Implement reccommdenation form the Capacity needs assessment to ensure key stakeholder partners are committed, well equipped and resourced to take on the extra responsibility of providing support, coordination and sustainability of the CAs and Reefs long term at Govt and Community level. | October 2019 onwards | PIU, MNR Niue Tourism, NCOC and relevant Government and community partners | Needs assessment and capacity building, also under MNR strategic planning to assist in assessment of capacity and ID areas to strengthen.  MNR strategic planning key activity throughout 2019 | Planned |

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| **Midterm Review recommendation14.** An extension should be requested for the Project | | | | |
| **Management response**: | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 14.1 Agree with POST and WG whether an application for an extension is to be made and for how long, based on revised work planning (in response to recommendation 2) | September 2019 | PIU, PEB, PD, POST, CTA, UNDP MCO | Current discussion is identifying a proposed 6 or 12 months’ extension to the end of 2021.  Further discussion and approval from POST after conclusion of internal planning process. before submission to Cabinet | Planned |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 15.** Generate exchange mechanisms (South-South, between and among Ridge to Reef Projects in the Pacific, etc.) sharing best practices and lessons learned as well as technical issues that arise out of the interventions. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 15 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| 15.1 Ensure clarity between projects and what sector specific activities are being targeted to ensure closer cooperation and coordination ongoing | January 2019 onwards | PIU, Regional R2R PM, | STAR R2R activities, progress and outcomes to date shared with regional R2R to assist in the regional R2R MTR.  Regional R2R Mid-term review currently in progress. Positive outcome will attest to commitment and support between both projects. | In progress. |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 16.** Support staff and associated stakeholders in generating and obtaining capacity (both at the technical and at the organizational level and well as technical issues that arise out of the interventions. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 16 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| Support MNR staff undertaking capacity building | July 2019 onwards | PIU, MNR | Several MNR staff started the JCU PGC online course  Commitment currently an issue as workload for students is very high for all. Ongoing project engagements offer practical on the job solutions to complex issues.  Project has provided on-the-job through the various specific capacity components of all consultancies | Ongoing |
| Assess ongoing outcomes of community consultations to ensure responsiveness to changing dynamics within communities as interventions impact at ground level | July 2019 onwards | PIU, MNR | Community outcomes continually change as progress is made with intervention measures, responsiveness from PIU and key stakeholders needs to adapt accordingly to stay on track  PIU keeping close monitor of community outcomes for further action and recommendations to key stakeholders in Govt and across sectors in line with progressing community commitment to CAs and reefs.with expected outcomes. | Ongoing |
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| **Midterm Review recommendation 17.** Having learned that whatever is or is not included in design of projects permeates into implementation and often in results, design should be specific in certain aspects and expected results. | | | | |
| **Management response**: Agree with MTR recommendation 17 | | | | |
| **Key action(s)** | **Time frame** | **Responsible unit(s)** | **Tracking** | |
| **Comments** | **Status** |
| Develop and use a Monitoring matrix for project to gauge progress of project outcomes | July 2019 onwards | CTA, PIU |  | Planned |
| Monitoring of outcomes to gauge successful outcomes needs to be measurable in terms of results. Assess outcomes in prodoc and provide specific measurable gauge upon which the project results can be assessed. | July 2019 onwards | PIU, CTA, UNDP | Overview of current outcomes needed. Specific results based outcomes to be outlined. | In progress |
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1. If the MTR is uploaded to the ERC, the status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Status of Implementation: Completed, Partially Completed, Pending. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)