

Coastal Resilience to Climate Change:

**Developing a Generalizable Method for
Assessing Vulnerability and Adaptation of
Mangroves and Associated Ecosystems**



Mid Term Review

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Mid-Term Review¹

1. Executive Summary

The Mid-Term Review of the UNEP GEF Medium Sized Project (MSP) entitled “Coastal Resilience to Climate Change: Developing a Generalizable Method for Assessing Vulnerability and Adaptation of Mangroves and Associated Ecosystems” was conducted during the months of February to April, 2009. The consultants reviewed documentation provided by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and UNEP, conducted interviews with project principals, and conducted evaluation missions to the three participating countries. A draft for comment of the review was submitted on March 24, 2009; comments were received shortly thereafter and addressed through revisions to the text, as well as a summary document contained in Appendix 8 of this report.

The consultants have concluded that there is very fine coastal conservation work being undertaken in all three regions across the project sites in Fiji, Cameroon, and in Tanzania. The research underway is improving knowledge of mangrove ecosystems, and is providing some indication of how climate change is impacting these ecosystems. Standardization of methods for mangrove and reef assessments has been attempted for use in all three regions, and the various techniques used at each sites will be evaluated for utility in the vulnerability assessment model planned for the future. Adaptation projects are acting to lessen stresses on these ecosystems, and public awareness of climate change, at least at the sites visited, seems high.

However, this review has found that this MSP has suffered from a range of management and execution problems which appear to have affected several risk factors for success. Cross-project learning and ongoing tracking of results has not happened yet, though the project is past the mid-point of its lifespan. Of particular concern is the apparent inconsistency that has occurred with project management and oversight, as well as the intended integration of activities at the global level. The recent replacement of the

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Global Coordinator, purportedly in response to the financial crisis, may well derail the final, synthetic phase of the project – a prospective failure which threatens to overshadow the good results to date. That this decision was made without consulting the Global Advisory Group suggests serious governance issues that place the project at risk.

This medium-sized GEF project (MSP) design failed to anticipate that the time frame was far too short to allow the logical progression of activities as laid out in the proposal. This logical sequence was meant to be as follows: initial developing of baselines, allowing the use of baselines to then create a generalizable model for coastal ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment (VA). Subsequently, project executants were to use the VA to launch adaptation measures that mitigate most important climate impacts. That the MSP was imposed in a top-down manner has meant that the executors have had to respond creatively, amending the work to match realities on the ground. This could have been avoided had the WWF country programs and partners had more say in how the project was designed to match situations on the ground and was articulated.

The MSP design was also flawed in suggesting that development of a single generalizable model for mangrove and associated coastal ecosystems (coral reefs and seagrasses) was a realistic proposition. All the institutions involved should have foreseen the risks inherent in proposing such an ambitious project within such a limited timeframe and with such limited funds dispersed across a multitude of project sites, especially as the governance arrangements do not seem to have been given much thought. The roles and responsibilities of the Global Coordinator should have been articulated in enough detail so that the exact mechanism for consolidating and synthesizing information was clear, in order to create the conditions necessary to feed that information into a generalizable model. We recommend that in the future, project proposals be more carefully screened to question the logic and validity of approaches, as well as their feasibility within specified timeframes, or that the GEF clearly acknowledges the need for multiple (i.e. subsequent) phases to reach such a desired goal.

In light of this, the shift to an almost singular focus on mangrove ecosystems, brought about by realities of budget and timeframe, was a reasonable adjustment and the country coordinators should be commended for it. Even keeping to the mangrove focus, it may be that the process for assessment of vulnerability will be different from place to place, reflecting diverse environmental conditions (Pacific high islands versus continental deltaic mangroves, for instance), local capacities, and institutional arrangements.

The project was sold to GEF as an integrative and synthetic exercise, taking lessons learned from assessment and adaptation in three disparate countries with three rather different sets of coastal ecosystems and coastal conservation issues. Almost no integration has taken place to date, in large part due to high turnover of Global Coordinators and, more importantly, what we perceive as insufficient support of the project from WWF-US. That said, Global Coordinator Michael Case had made recent improvements in communications, many plans for integration in the future exist, and there continue to be commitments by WWF US to improve the project management.



Although this is a mid-term and not terminal review, it does not appear that the overall project goals of creating a useful generalizable model for coastal resilience to climate change and synthesizing lessons learned from adaptation to climate change will be met. This is especially true in light of the recent decision to remove the Global Coordinator from his post, adding more instability to a project history already rocked by unusually high levels of turnover among planning, managing and executing staff. Any new coordinator will have to familiarize him / her self with the project and its myriad staff and dive headlong into coordination, all within the 14 months remaining. What is more likely to be achievable is a generalizable model for vulnerability assessment of deltaic mangroves – but this is only likely if information starts flowing more efficiently to the Chief Scientist, who seems dedicated to this task.

The country programs and WWF's partners have been working diligently to make this project a success, and many good conservation interventions have flowed from it. Executors have struggled in very trying financial conditions, and under immense pressures of time, to adapt the project (with its delayed start) to the conservation realities on the ground. Activities on the ground have been well-managed in-country, with fiscal responsibility, and a true commitment to the spirit and goals of the MSP. It would be a significant and unnecessary lost opportunity if WWF were to limit fiscal support for this next integrative phase of the project. The lost opportunity refers not only to taking lessons learned from this project and having them inform WWF's and the broader conservation community's work in coastal resilience, but also in being able to generate spin-off proposals to the GEF for important related work in the future.

We therefore recommend the following measures be taken immediately to create necessary course corrections:

1) The project executants should keep the focus of the remaining activities wholly on mangrove ecosystems, emphasizing what scientific information is needed to develop a generalizable model and to steer adaptation activities based on the knowledge gained through the project.

2) WWF/US, working through its country and regional offices, should create an open and transparent database on project budget, specific allocations in-country, expenditures, and co-financing, indicating whether amounts represent actual funds or in-kind contributions.

3) Clear lines of communication must be re-established and must remain open for the remaining life of the project. This means providing financial information to the Global Advisory Group steering the project, continuing to have monthly teleconferences with as many principals as possible, and getting more input from the Technical Advisor back out to the executants in the field. Fully funding GAG meetings for all persons with active involvement in the project and committing to in-person meetings wherever possible would facilitate the latter.

4) The roles and responsibilities of the Global Coordinator must be clearly articulated and adhered to – we strongly suggest that WWF US ensure that no new turnover takes place in this position. Time for synthesis is very short and new



coordinators would further impact the process in the time remaining. At the request of the Technical Advisor/ Chief Scientist, we recommend the Global Coordinator explore the possibility of getting a no-cost extension from UNEP and GEF to ensure that whatever synthesis is possible is ultimately achieved.

5) Greater attention must be given to anchoring the results in government awareness-raising, policy-making, policy reform, or policy enhancement, in order to be truly relevant and meet the stated goals of the project. We second the suggestion of the UNEP Task Manager that a forum with relevant government agencies be held at the end of the project cycle.



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