

Terminal evaluation of the
areas beyond national
jurisdiction (ABNJ)
Program Coordination,
part of the "Global
sustainable fisheries
management and
biodiversity conservation
in ABNJ"

**Programme Evaluation Series
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beyond national jurisdiction
(ABNJ) Program Coordination,
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABNJ	Areas beyond national jurisdiction
BBNJ	Biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
EMS	Electronic monitoring systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GSC	Global Steering Committee
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
OPP	Ocean Partnership Project
RFMO	Regional fisheries management organizations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VME	Vulnerable marine ecosystems
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Executive summary

Introduction

1. The Common Oceans ABNJ (areas beyond national jurisdiction) Program (2014-2019) consisting of five child projects was implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (two full-sized projects were co-implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank) with a five-year implementation period. The programme consists of five child projects, including three full-sized projects: Tuna, Deep-Sea and Ocean Partnerships, a mid-sized Capacity project and a mid-sized Programme Coordination project. Besides the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding amounting to USD 50 million, over USD 370 million in co-financing by various partners was expended in implementation.
2. This terminal evaluation, a GEF requirement, is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes and to contribute to the formulation of a follow-up programme for the GEF-7 Common Oceans ABNJ Program. The terminal evaluation consists of simultaneous evaluations of the full-sized Tuna and Deep-sea projects, the medium-sized Capacity project and the evaluation of the Program as a whole (which includes the assessment of the coordination project), presented in this report. The Ocean Partnership Project (OPP) is not within the scope of this evaluation and is being evaluated by the World Bank as agreed in the ABNJ Program Framework Document.
3. The evaluation followed the latest GEF guidance on terminal evaluations (2019) in the selection of evaluation criteria, ratings and other key aspects. Given the nature of the interventions, evaluation used a **non-experimental** design, i.e. not involving any comparison group but focusing on the extent of change mainly for those affected by the intervention. The emphasis of analysis was on **transformative changes** that have potential to engender the relevant longer term outcomes and impacts, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) targets.

Main findings

4. The Common Oceans ABNJ Program addressed a growing area of concern over the state of multi-sectoral governance of ABNJ, and the implications for sustainable natural resource (specifically fish stocks and related species) management and biodiversity conservation. The design was congruent with GEF focal area strategies for International Waters and Biodiversity Conservation.
5. The programme showed several positive results in key areas and demonstrated leading contributions towards improving tuna fisheries governance, safeguarding of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME), strengthening monitoring, control and surveillance to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, mitigating bycatch mortality trends, and building awareness of cross-sectoral aspects in effective governance of ABNJ.
6. The major result areas of the programme have been in institutional governance in the fisheries sector and reduction in adverse fishery sector impact on biodiversity. The programme led to a number of transformational changes, i.e. changes or practices that are mainstreamed by the key institutional actors and can be deemed irreversible, which have the potential to show impact on the state of fish stocks and biodiversity, especially the impact of fishing operations on vulnerable species.

7. The programme helped build a critical mass of functionaries in government or regional institutions or industry actors equipped with knowledge and tools to implement transformational changes.
8. Several important results could not have been achieved without the GEF funding. The most important dimensions of GEF additionality as perceived by programme agencies were: institutional/governance, and financing for innovative/transformational techniques and pilots.
9. The programme fostered a strong array of partnerships among implementing agencies and executing partners that had never worked before. Over time the partnerships have remained intact and even grown stronger: the programme built trust between diverse stakeholders. However, there was scope for improvement in engagement with diverse stakeholders key to the biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) processes. The Program mobilized more than the targeted magnitude of co-financing, a significant share in form of in-kind contributions, although the specific use of in-kind contributions remained unclear and somewhat opaque.
10. Notwithstanding the positive results, weak areas in the programme were: monitoring and evaluation; coordination and knowledge management; and communications.
11. Although the programme consisted of five component projects (including three full-sized projects), the intended benefits and additionality of a programmatic approach were not fully realized, due to shortcomings in both design and in programme governance and leadership in implementation and monitoring. Particularly missing were a theory of change and programme level-results indicators linking to GEF focal area outcomes and international development targets, chiefly SDG 13,14 15 and CBD targets Aichi Targets 6 and 11. Evidence of gender-friendly outcomes is anecdotal, as the results framework did not include gender specific targets and indicators.
12. Coordination remained a weak pillar, the shortcomings emanating from weak design of programmatic approaches and under-resourcing for key aspects: leadership, monitoring, knowledge management and strategic external communications. Also, the programme did not have structured lesson learning and feedback mechanisms to use the wealth of knowledge generated across projects. However, important lessons have been learned and applied in subsequent GEF programmes, especially the Coastal Fisheries Initiative.
13. The most sustainable results are those in institutional governance measures and adoption of standards and good practices: harvest strategies, monitoring and control systems, and bycatch management. Several results are sustainable without further programme investments, while others require funding for recurring costs and expansion of coverage.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The programme was strongly aligned with GEF focal area strategies and international frameworks relating to ABNJ issues, although the emphasis was more on fisheries governance than cross-sectoral governance and biodiversity conservation of the ABNJ as a whole. However, it lacked a veritable programmatic approach, with limited coherence among project components and missed opportunities for synergies.

Conclusion 2. The programme catalyzed important transformational changes and practices in governance and operational aspects of fisheries and their impact on biodiversity. There is encouraging evidence that these are being mainstreamed by the key institutional actors and early trends of positive impact of the programme point to improvement in fish stocks health and in bycatch mitigation, starting by the quality and quantity of information available.

Conclusion 3. Implementation was marked by several project level adjustments to adapt to unforeseen challenges and factors, but the implementing agencies successfully adapted to these and delivered the major outputs satisfactorily. However, the full benefits of a programmatic approach were not realized.

Conclusion 4. (Sustainability) The ABNJ Program has generated a mix of results, some of which are sustainable without further programme investments, and some require continued funding for recurring costs and expansion of coverage.

Conclusion 5. GEF funding was instrumental to the achievement of several important programme results. The most important dimensions of GEF additionality were: institutional/governance, and financing for innovative/transformational techniques and pilots, which brought critical thresholds of activities to engender visible results.

Conclusion 6. The programme effectively managed a large number and diversity of first-time partners. There was notable change of mutual perceptions and attitudes among conservationists, fisheries management institutions and governments. However, there was scope for improvement in engagement with regional fisheries management organizations (RFMO) membership, and in programme-initiated interactions among stakeholders that are key to the BBNJ processes.

Conclusion 7. (Monitoring and evaluation) Although individual projects, particularly the Tuna and OPF projects had sound monitoring mechanisms, programme-level monitoring was weak due to deficient design and resourcing, particularly: the absence of appropriate programme-level indicators, insufficient human resources and no provisions for mid-term evaluation. Quality assurance of progress reports was lacking.

Conclusion 8. (Knowledge management) The programme lacked a structured knowledge management mechanism for the effective harvesting and dissemination of the wealth of knowledge emanating from the projects. Knowledge networks were fragmented and not put to effective use in the programme. External communications focused on passive consumption but did not have segmented strategies for key stakeholder groups.

Recommendations

14. The evaluation took note of the preparations for a possible follow-on programme: at the Steering Committee 2019, a new programme theory of change was introduced, and several project/activity proposals were made by implementing agencies and executing partners. The evaluation confirms the merit of a follow-on programme with due incorporation of the important lessons from the implementation of this programme. In this regard, the following recommendations are being made.

Recommendation 1. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Before detailing individual projects, finalize a programme partnership framework document with an agreed programme theory of change to guide the selection of appropriate projects, activities, budget allocations sharing for programme level tasks, roles, responsibilities and mutual accountability arrangements among implementing agencies and executing partners.

Recommendation 2. (To GEF SEC) Provide guidance on the desired cross-sectoral balance between fisheries governance and biodiversity conservation aspects, and clarify scope for engagement with other economic sectors impacting ecosystem services and biodiversity in context of the BBNJ negotiations.

Recommendation 3. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Improve stakeholder consultation with national stakeholders (RFMO members besides regional institutional secretariats) in design and allocate commensurate programme preparation resources from co-financing.

Recommendation 4. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Sufficiently resource a full-sized project for programme coordination, and develop clear terms of reference (TOR) for programme leader (executive, not coordinator), and programme Steering Committee with clear descriptions of role, responsibilities and powers. Programme coordination project should be directly tasked with centralized knowledge management, communications and outreach, and monitoring arrangements including full-time focal points in all projects.

Recommendation 5. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Develop clear work plans, budgets and specific results (process and outcomes) indicators for knowledge management, expert networks and communities of practice contributions guidance and quality assurance.

Recommendation 6. (To FAO and GEF SEC) Issue clear and unambiguous guidelines on co-financing with requirements of supporting details and breakdowns of in-kind contributions and recurrent public expenditures. At the same time, be flexible on the minimum co-financing targets for transnational programmes which have only grant or in-kind contribution avenues.

Recommendation 7. (To GEF Coordination Unit) Include in the programme document the TORs of GEF Coordination Unit, including requirements for a brief note on review and quality checks of progress reports submitted by the Programme Management Unit. Have more stringent appraisal mechanisms at programme level, including programmatic level indicators for processes and results.

GEF rating table

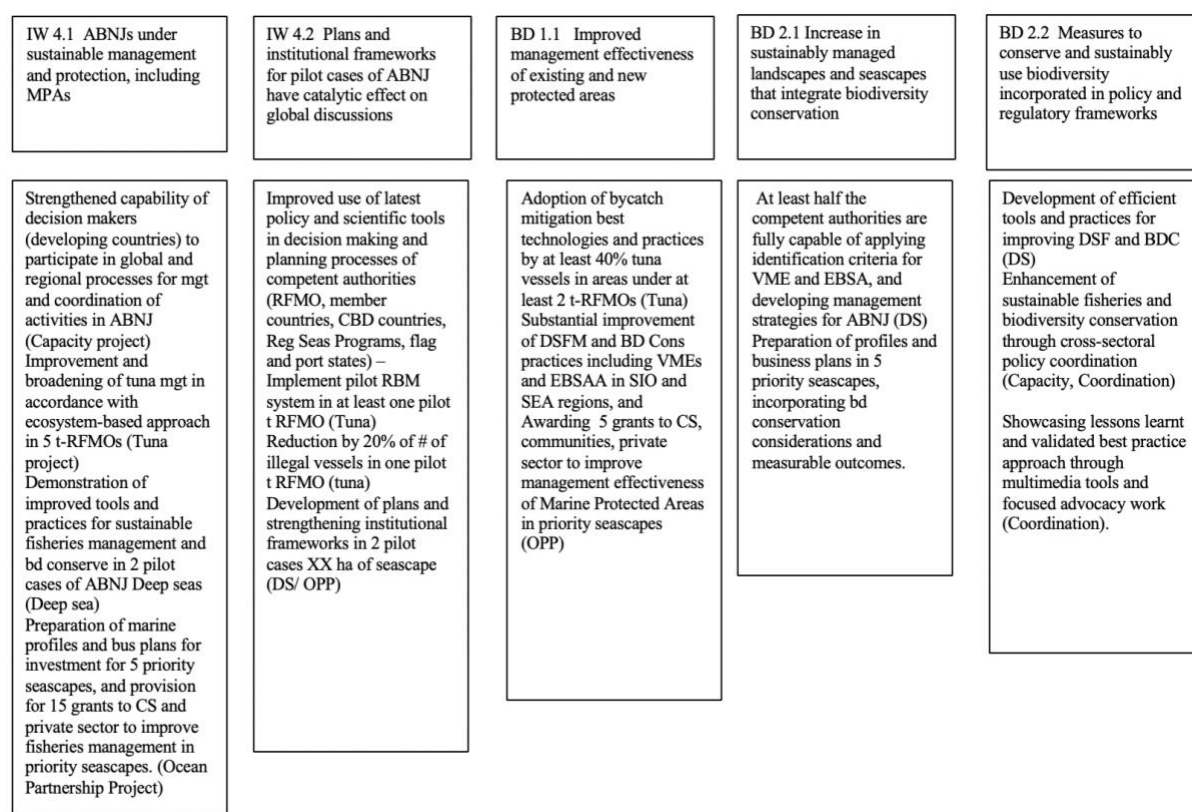
FAO - GEF Rating Scheme	Rating	Summary Comments
1) Relevance		
Overall relevance of the program	S	The program and projects were aligned to GEF objectives and international priorities; however, the program lacked a veritable programmatic approach in design, results framework and resourcing for programme coordination and monitoring.
2) Effectiveness		
Overall assessment of program results	S	The tuna and deep-sea projects demonstrated overall effectiveness and potential for impact; but the OPP and Capacity projects produced useful results, contribution to impacts is indeterminate.
3) Efficiency, project implementation and execution		
Overall quality of program implementation & adaptive management (implementing agency)	S	Implementing agencies salvaged projects that were struggling in implementation, and raised delivery to acceptable levels.
Quality of execution (executing agencies)	S	All executing agencies (except OPP on which information is not available) delivered their outputs within reasonable limits.
Efficiency (incl. cost effectiveness and timeliness)	S	Projects were completed in time with some adjustments. GEF grant utilization was around 90%.
4) Sustainability		
Overall sustainability	ML	There is high likelihood of sustainability of the knowledge demonstrated in the program, but upscaling and expanding the foot print depends on political initiative and continued funding by national stakeholders, which were not the focus of the program.
5) Factors affecting performance (M&E and Stakeholder engagement)		
Overall quality of stakeholder engagement	S	Projects managed a complex diversity of partners effectively, several working together for the first time.
Overall quality of M&E	MU	Lower of the two sub component ratings below.
M&E design at start up	MU	Poor design of programmatic approaches resulted in lack of clear indicators to report on besides under resourcing of monitoring and evaluation components.
M&E plan implementation	MS	Monitoring reports were provided in time based on information from projects. However, program level reporting was missing (rooted in design).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the evaluation

1. The marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) comprises 40 percent of the earth's surface, it covers 64 percent of the surface of the ocean and 95 percent of its volume. Management of resources in the ABNJ is complex due to various ecosystems within the ABNJ, the actual depth and distance to the coast. Also, the ABNJ has multiple uses, which are reflected in its diverse stakeholders with overlapping interests. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 2010, encouraged the reduction of (human) pressures and the application of the ecosystems approach in meeting goals to achieve sustainable use of the ABNJ.
2. The Common Oceans ABNJ Program - one of the first International Waters programmes under GEF 5 - was formulated as a response to this global need to have a concerted effort in bringing various stakeholders to work together to manage and conserve the world's common oceans. The programme aimed to achieve transformational changes in the management and sustainability of resources in the high seas. It had a wide scope of coverage: tuna and deep-sea fisheries management, policy, conservation of biodiversity, capacity development, building networks, testing, documenting and disseminating best practices, and improving the interface of science and policy for improved decision-making.
3. The Common Oceans ABNJ Program was implemented globally, covering all four major oceans of the world: Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean and Southern Ocean. The programme is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank. Besides the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding amounting to USD 50 million, co-financing by various partners is estimated to be USD 370 million..
4. The programme consists of five child projects, including three full-sized projects: Tuna, Deep-Sea, and Ocean Partnerships, a mid-sized Capacity project and a mid-sized Program coordination project. Their linkages to the GEF focal areas International Waters and Biodiversity focal areas are shown in Figure 1. The ABNJ Tuna project and the ABNJ Capacity project started in January 2014, whereas the ABNJ Program coordination and the ABNJ Deep-Sea Project commenced later in June 2014 and September 2014, respectively. The ABNJ Ocean Partnership project (OPP) started in November 2014. All projects in the ABNJ Program closed in December 2019.
5. This terminal evaluation is a requirement of the GEF. It is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of the implementing agencies (FAO, UNEP and the World Bank), the programme/project team, participating institutions, and the national governments. The terminal evaluation will serve as an input to improve future programme and project formulation and implementation of similar projects. Currently, FAO and its partners are preparing a follow-up programme for the GEF 7 Common Oceans ABNJ Program.
6. The terminal evaluation consists of a simultaneous evaluation of the full-sized Tuna and Deep-Sea projects, the medium-sized Capacity project and this evaluation of the Program as a whole (which includes the assessment of the Coordination project). The Ocean Partnership project is not within the scope of this evaluation and is being evaluated by the World Bank as agreed in the ABNJ programme framework document.

Figure 1: ABNJ projects components mapped to GEF focal area outcomes



Source: Programme framework document and programme progress reports

Table 1: GEF funding of ABNJ programme

Project	Project budget	Project preparatory frant	Fee	Total	Co-financing realized
Tuna fisheries (FAO)	26 922 936	600 000	2 477 064	30 000 000	264.70
Deep-sea fisheries (UNEP)	7 315 597	400 000	694 403	8 410 000	80.08
Ocean Partnership Fund (WB)	8 874 312	300 000	825 688	10 000 000	20.00 (estimates)
Global Coordination (glue) [Now Capacity Project] FAO	950 000	50 000	90 000	1 090 000	4.83
FAO Coordination	500 000			500 000	0.954
Total amount	44 562 844	1 350 000	4 087 156	50 000 000	370.56

7. The primary audience and intended users of the evaluation are the implementing GEF agencies of the programme:
 - i. FAO, UNEP and World Bank; in FAO: all the project management teams and members of project task forces of all the ABNJ projects, FAO divisions such as the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department (FI), the Climate and Environment Division (CBC) which houses the FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, FAO regional, subregional and national offices who will use the findings and lessons identified in the evaluation to plan for sustainability of results achieved and improve formulation and implementation of similar projects.

- ii. The GEF and other donors who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future.
 - iii. Regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), national government counterparts, and executing partners (foundations, ocean research institutes, advocacy groups and private sector, especially fisheries industry) who will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future planning.
8. The secondary intended users include donors, national governments and organizations interested in supporting sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation.

1.2 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

9. Evaluation of child projects: Terminal evaluations of the **ABNJ Tuna project, ABNJ Deep-Sea project and ABNJ Capacity Development project** are being undertaken simultaneously with this **programme evaluation**. The Coordination project, given its largely supportive role in coordination, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, does not have a separate outcome level results framework; rather, the project consists of a number of one-off steps to establish structures and processes, and a number of periodic activities linked to coordination, monitoring and reporting. Programme level synthesis of lessons learned, which could have been justified in this project, have instead been subsumed under Component 3 of the Capacity project. As a result, the Coordination project be assessed only as a programme support intervention, covered under appropriate sections of this programme-level evaluation.
10. **The ABNJ Ocean Partnership project**, implemented by the World Bank, follows requirements of the World Bank for monitoring and evaluation, as well as progress reporting to GEF; however, it reports on progress and exchanges information with the rest of the programme through the periodic inter-project coordination calls and the Global Steering Committee (GSC) meetings. The OPP is presently undergoing a terminal evaluation, and its key findings and conclusions¹ if and when available shall contribute to the ABNJ programme evaluation. However, the evaluation team engaged with the OPP implementation team with observations on issues that are relevant to the programme level evaluation
11. **The ABNJ Program terminal evaluation report** is an assessment of the programme results linking to GEF International Water (IW) and Biodiversity focal area outcomes as formulated in the programme framework document, and the added value of a programmatic approach to harness synergies among the four component projects. The programme level evaluation draws on the findings of the Tuna, Deep-Sea and Capacity project evaluations in making programme level assessments, particularly for effectiveness and sustainability.

1.3 Methodology

12. In line with GEF evaluation policy requirements and guidance as of May 2019, the evaluation followed the latest GEF guidance on terminal evaluations in the selection of evaluation criteria. The list of evaluation questions is presented in Table 2.

¹ However, as of the submission of this report, no information had been shared despite follow ups.

Table 2: Evaluation questions by area of analysis

Relevance	Were the programme and projects outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, FAO's global and regional priorities, and the international agreements and frameworks on the ABNJ ?
Achievement of project results	To what extent have programme and projects objectives been achieved, and were there any unintended results? To what extent can the attainment of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component?
Efficiency, project implementation and execution	(implementation) To what extent did FAO deliver on programme and projects identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision? How well risks were identified and managed? (execution) To what extent did the execution agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the programme and projects?
Monitoring and evaluation	(M&E design) Were the programme and projects M&E plan practical and sufficient? (M&E implementation) Did the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Was information gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? Was the information from the M&E system appropriately used to make timely decisions and foster learning during programme and projects' implementation?
Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the programme and project results will continue to be useful or will remain even after the end of the project? What are the key risks which may affect the sustainability benefits brought about by the programme and projects?
Stakeholder engagement	Were other actors, such as civil society, indigenous population, private sector or other important stakeholders involved in programme and projects' design or implementation, and what was the effect on the projects' results?
Environmental and social safeguards	To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the programme and projects?
Gender	To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the programme and projects? Were the programme and projects implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits?
Co-financing	To what extent did the expected co-financing materialize, and what are their contribution to the programme and projects' result?
Progress to impact	To what extent may the progress towards long-term impact be attributed to the programme and projects?
Knowledge management	To what extent was knowledge management used by programme and projects?

13. Given the nature of the interventions, which collectively aim at strengthening institutional mechanisms and knowledge for promotion and governance of sustainable use and biodiversity conservation across a broad spectrum of economic and scientific research interests in the ABNJ, and the global, regional and national tiers at which such governance is to be promoted, the evaluation shall have a non-experimental design, i.e. focusing on the extent of change mainly for those affected by the intervention and not for a comparison group. Given the programme thrust on establishing and propagating good practices and enabling stakeholders with knowledge to support better governance, and the longer time horizon for manifestation of biodiversity impacts, the emphasis of analysis will be on the transformative changes that have potential to engender the relevant longer term outcomes and impacts, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and CBD targets. More details on the methodology can be found in the programme inception report.

1.4 Data collection and analysis tools

14. To reach its findings and conclusions, the evaluation used four data collection tools: i) document/literature reviews; ii) in-depth key informant interviews (project implementing and executing agencies, direct participants and ultimate beneficiaries, other key relevant actors); iii) direct observation of a selection of project level events; and iv) three case studies, one each from the Tuna, Deep-Sea and Capacity projects respectively, focusing on specific components.
15. **Document reviews.** The evaluation team received a sizeable set of documents for all projects, in a single comprehensive depository (the ANBJ evaluation library). The repository includes: project preparation documents, progress reviews, implementation reports, mid-term evaluations, Steering Committee notes, and details of various outputs under the projects. A list of documents perused can be found in the Bibliography section.
16. **Case studies.** Given the importance of the cross-sectoral dimensions of the ABNJ as a whole, and that all the projects had specific capacity development components/elements in their design, the evaluation undertook three case studies on the common theme of capacity development:
 - i. **Tuna:** Monitoring Control and Surveillance
 - ii. **Deep-Sea:** Marine Spatial Planning
 - iii. **Capacity project:** Regional Leaders Programme
17. **Key informant interviews.** Given that the target direct beneficiaries of the projects are anchor functionaries in relevant institutions connected to different parts of the ABNJ, a purposive sampling approach was used to select relevant informants for face-to-face and Skype interviews (Table 3). Specific guidance questions were prepared for each interview.
18. **Direct observation.** The evaluation also used the opportunity of evaluators attending key events: the biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) negotiations (Intergovernmental Conference, IGC3) (New York, 19-30 August 2019); the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) joint tuna RFMO meeting, (Rome, 15-19 September 2019) and the International Symposium on Fisheries Sustainability (ISSF, Rome, 18-21 November 2019) is an opportunity for the evaluation to witness deliberations first-hand and interview delegates (including project beneficiaries) at the sidelines of the events.

Table 3: Sample of key informants

Profile of institutions	Number of interviewees
Project co-finance partners	5-10
COP members	5-10
Executing agencies	5-10
GEF	4-5
Government representatives	?
Intergovernmental organizations	10
Non-governmental organizations	5
Private sector	5-10
Public Outreach Network members	5-10
Regional fisheries management organizations	5-10
Technical advisory group members	3-5
Total potential informants	52-85

* Possibilities of double counting exist, given multiple memberships of key informants. Full list appears in Annex 1.

19. **Analysis.** In line with the non-experimental design of the evaluation, the main emphasis of analysis was on the emerging evidence of transformational changes and environmental benefits from the data and qualitative observations from a diversity of stakeholders, mainly those that participated directly in the programme. The GEF's Review of Outcomes to Impacts (ROtI) approach was consulted for assessing progress towards impacts, with the preparation of a (reconstructed) theory of change that incorporated two levels of intermediate outcome states. The evaluation considered irreversible positive changes (identified scalable good practices, formulation of policies, legal frameworks and management strategies for sustainable use and biodiversity conservation, behavioural changes and best practice adoption) as intermediary states having likelihood of longer term outcomes and impacts beyond the programme's span. A contribution analysis framework (Mayne, 2001) was used to develop a 'performance story' for the programme's results, quality of implementation and coordination effectiveness, drawing on evidence from desk reviews and triangulating the perceptions of various stakeholders to inform the evaluation's conclusions.

1.5 Structure of the report

20. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, cross-cutting issues and sustainability. Lessons learned are presented in Chapter 3, followed by conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 4.

2. Findings

2.1 Relevance

Finding 1. The programme design was congruent with GEF focal area strategies and international frameworks relating to ABNJ issues. Resource allocations suggested a greater emphasis on International Waters focal area than on Biodiversity.

21. **Congruence with GEF focal areas strategies and international frameworks.** A high alignment and congruence with GEF objectives are expected for all GEF funded interventions, and sought to be ensured through the pre-funding appraisals and checks, including comments from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP). Thus, it would be fair to expect the ABNJ Program to be congruent and strongly aligned with GEF objectives, particularly with the International Waters (FA4) and Biodiversity (FA2) areas which guided the formulation of the Common Oceans program as the central programme theme. The programme was designed around GEF Strategic Goal 1 (conservation, sustainable use and management) and Goal 4 (national and regional capacities and enabling conditions) in respect of areas beyond national jurisdiction, and more specifically to Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2 of the International Waters focal area, and Outcomes 1.1, 2.1 and 2.2 under the Biodiversity focal area, as summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: GEF goals and focal area strategies guiding ABNJ Common Oceans programme design

GEF strategic goals	
Goal 1: Conserve, sustainably use and manage biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources globally, taking into account the anticipated impacts of climate change.	Goal 4: Build national and regional capacities and enabling conditions for global environmental protection and sustainable development.
Focal area 4 (International Waters)	Focal area 2 (Biodiversity)
Outcome 4.1: ABNJ (including deep-sea fisheries, oceans areas, and seamounts) under sustainable management and protection.	Outcome 1.1: Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas.
Outcome 4.2: Plans and institutional frameworks for pilot cases of ABNJ have catalytic effect on global discussions – demo for management measures in ABNJ with institutions.	Outcome 2.1: Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation.
	Outcome 2.2: Measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity incorporated in policy and regulatory frameworks.

Source: Programme framework document

22. While both IW and Biodiversity focal areas are important to the programme, the distribution of GEF funding indicates a **greater emphasis on the IW focal area than the biodiversity focal area**: 60 percent of net GEF funding (USD 44 million, after deduction of agency fees) was for IW components. Including financing figures, the overall distribution of budgets was 63 percent for IW (USD 164 million) and 37 percent for BD (USD 93 million) focal areas. The focus on improving institutional capacities and management measures for sustainable management and protection of ABNJ areas was strongly reflected in designs of the three full-sized projects. As implementation agencies, FAO and World Bank contributions covered both focal areas, whereas UNEP contribution (through the Deep-Sea project) was entirely to the biodiversity focal area.
23. **The funding distribution along focal areas** provides preliminary insight into the thrust of the programme, especially the emphasis on improving governance in both large and highly migratory pelagic fisheries and deep-sea fisheries, with an aim to improving sustainable harvesting, and reducing impact on associated species (relevant bycatch species) and ecosystem components. With a large share of resources of all three full sized projects invested in fisheries management, the programme's results are more visible in terms of fisheries sector performance than from a multi-sectoral management (especially biodiversity conservation) in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Biodiversity impacts were considered mostly from the perspectives of impact of fisheries with remedial actions scoped within the fisheries sector, rather than a cross-sectoral perspective including other ocean economy sectors (deep-sea mining, exploration, renewable energy, submarine cables, research and prospecting for marine genetic resources, etc.). Although conceptually relevant, they were touched only to a limited extent in the Deep-Sea project (in the context of deep-sea ecosystems, where multi-sectoral interactions are more significant) and the Capacity project (in the context of capacity building needs for an internationally binding legal instrument for the BBNJ).

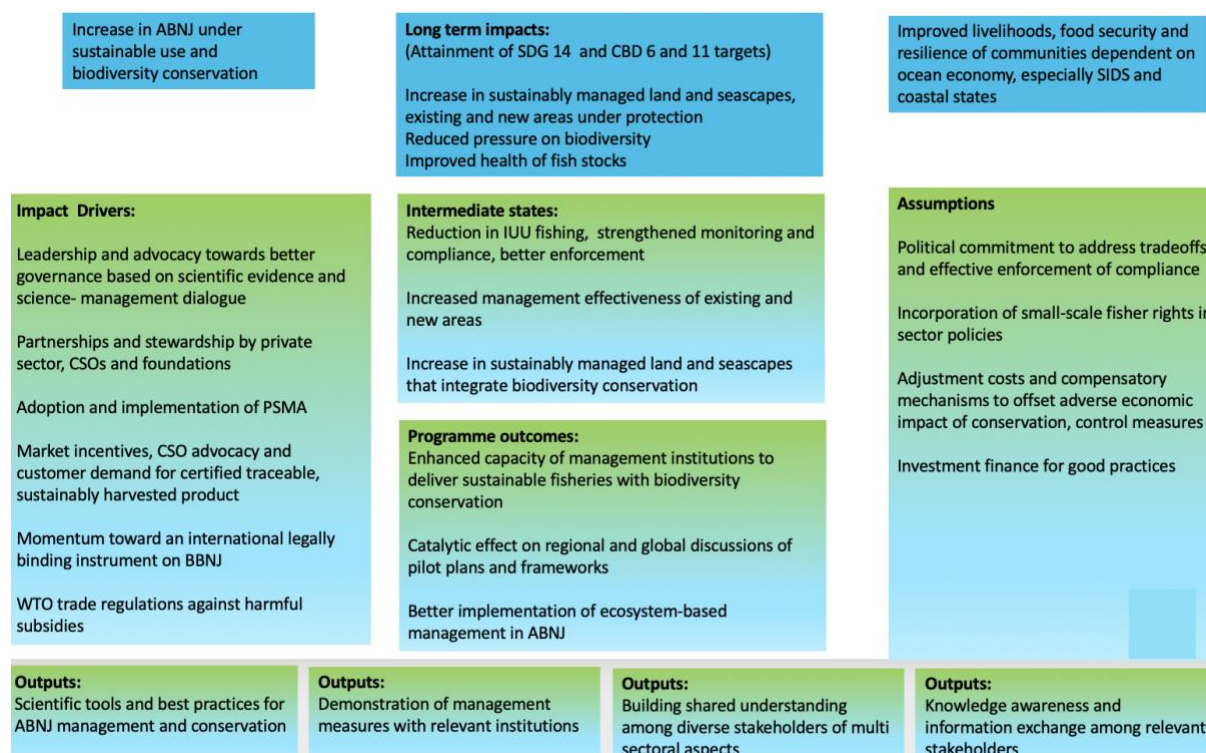
Finding 2. The programme was largely perceived and presented as a package of 'four projects' rather than a 'one programme with four interconnected projects' without a combined theory of change.

24. **Programmatic approach.** The design of a Common Oceans programme was driven by GEF's interest in a programmatic approach rather than as a moto initiative by the implementing agencies. It was the first programmatic approach in GEF's International Waters focal area portfolio and evolved by stringing together several project proposals already developed by individual agencies, rather than setting the logic and design of constituent projects. However, a clear and shared understanding of what a programmatic approach would entail remained unclear through the three-year-long project preparation phase 2011-2014. Resultantly, elements characterizing a programmatic approach remained undeveloped, beyond a few references in the programme framework document. The absence of a programme level theory of change and results indicators beyond the project level, and the subsequent approval of the results framework by the GEF appraisal processes indicates a lack of understanding of what was expected in terms of a programmatic value addition.
25. **Indicators for programmatic approach.** The programme level results framework indicators are more an aggregation of the outcome level results of the child projects (see GEF programme framework document results framework). The programme framework document provided the following guidance on characteristics of the programmatic approach:

- i. a more strategic level interaction with the GEF;
 - ii. improved opportunities for horizontal and vertical integration of global environmental concerns into decision-making at the national level;
 - iii. optimizing all possible synergies and beneficial impacts of various activities across the broad areas of intervention;
 - iv. enhanced opportunities to pool resources;
 - v. increased opportunities to coordinate and mobilize co-financing;
 - vi. increased flow of knowledge exchange between projects, including good practices;
 - vii. cost effectiveness;
 - viii. overall close coordination.
26. With the Steering Committee reports of 2015 highlighting the limitations of not having programme level indicators, a retrofitting exercise was undertaken, leading to a theory of change based on the child projects. The Global Steering Committee meeting (July 2015) identified the following to monitor processes that reflected a programmatic approach. However, these were not eventually used in reporting:
- i. degree of information sharing between projects;
 - ii. level on knowledge sharing between projects;
 - iii. consistent programme-wide communications and messaging;
 - iv. optimization of possible synergies (mutually-reinforcing) and beneficial impacts of the various activities;
 - v. programmatic identity and perception and programme partners' perception of added value of the programmatic approach.
27. **Retrofitted theory of change.** The evaluation reconstructed a theory of change (Figure 2) beginning with the objectives and target longer term outcomes enshrined in SDG and CBD targets, and identified a sequence of intermediate outcomes linking the programme to the longer term outcomes. In line with GEF guidance on theory of change, the impact pathways from the projects to the desired impacts can be classified in three stages:
- i. Programme level impacts: in line with target results at project/programme level.
 - ii. Intermediate state 1: evidence of scaling up and expansion in coverage.
 - iii. Intermediate state 2: measurable results under water.
 - iv. Long-term impact: progress against SDG 14 targets and Aichi Targets 6 and 11.
28. Key drivers and assumptions leading to the consequent outcome states were identified, and the programme components were mapped to these. As a result, a few important impact-relevant areas which are not within the programme scope were identified. These areas would need to be addressed by other complementing interventions whether GEF supported or not.
29. The evaluation clarifies that when the ABNJ Program was formulated, the 2030 Agenda and SDGs were not in place; however, they had been adopted widely by 2017 by countries and also by international development partners. A number of SDG targets are relevant and

useful as monitoring frameworks to gauge the contribution of the programme under specific indicators.

Figure 2: Simplistic programme theory of change linking outputs to outcome and impact states



Source: Evaluation team

- The intervention logic and the components of the four child projects show five areas of contribution: development of scientific tools and pilots for demonstration; strengthening of institutional frameworks for application and propagation of good practices; strengthening institutional capacities to participate in regional and global processes; building shared understanding of multisectoral aspects of ABNJ governance among diverse stakeholders; and demonstration of rights-based management approaches. These were present to varying extents in the child projects; however, the bulk of resource investments went to development of scientific tools and pilots, and improving institutional frameworks, a large share going into the Tuna project (logical as tuna is the commercially most important and also with most impact on sustainable use and biodiversity impact from a fisheries perspective). Table 5 presents a mapping of these contribution areas by project.

Table 5: Areas of contributions to programme objectives from ABNJ child projects

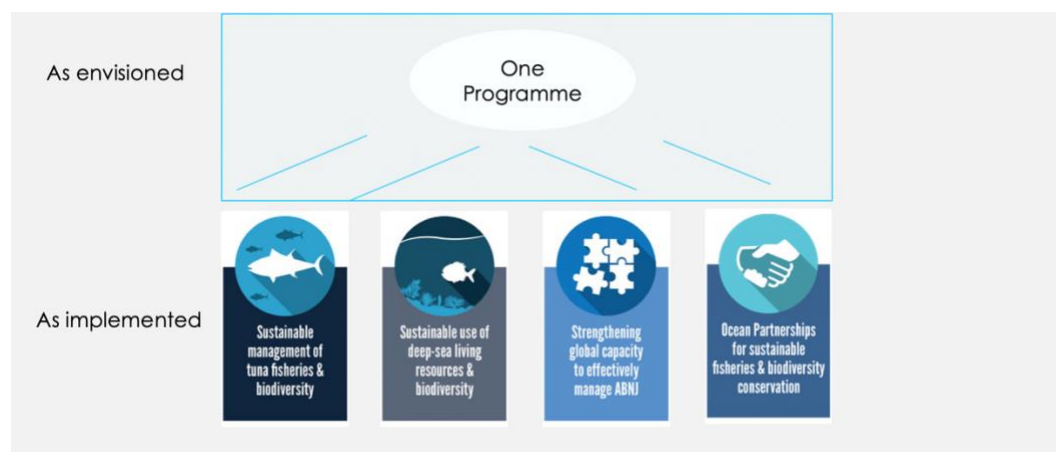
Area of contributions	Tuna	Deep-Sea	OPP	Capacity
Development of scientific tools, pilots for demonstration of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.	**	**	*	-
Institutional frameworks: application and propagation of good practices at global, regional and national level towards effective management of IUU fishing, bycatch mitigation and rights-based management.	**	*	*	-
Institutional capacities to participate in global and regional processes.	*	*	*	**
Building shared understanding among diverse stakeholders of multisectoral aspects.	*	*	-	*
Demonstration of rights-based management approaches.	-	-	*	-

* indicates presence, ** strong presence in project components - indicates absence

Source: Evaluation team

31. **Quality of programme design.** The programme developed as a physical assembly of disparate projects rather than as a coherent and composite intervention intermeshing and integrating the projects in outcome formulation, programme strategies, delivery mechanisms and resource sharing, knowledge management and strategic communication. The Programme Coordination MSP was an afterthought² and developed only after all the child projects had been approved. This resulted in a lack of coherence and fragmentation across projects. As some respondents mentioned, the programmatic 'glue' was missing; except a few individuals in Rome, implementers saw themselves as implementing isolated projects rather than a unified programme. Even components within the same project were implemented somewhat in isolation (for instance the harvest strategies and management strategy evaluation components in the Tuna project). Figure 3 shows the missing elements in the shaded rectangle.

² Mentioned by several persons with institutional memory of the programme.

Figure 3: Depiction of the gap in programmatic approach in design and implementation

Source: Evaluation team - based on presentation made to GEF

- i. **Tuna and OPP:** both had sizeable tuna and associated species management components. FAO, besides having the programme coordination role was also the implementing agency of the Tuna project and an executing partner in the OPP, yet there were practically no deliberations to exploit synergies and complementarities in the design or later in implementation. Also not explained is reasoning or justification for the regions and RFMOs selected by the two projects and steps outlined for knowledge and experience sharing.
 - ii. **Deep-Sea and Capacity projects:** area based multisectoral planning was an important theme in both projects, as a full component in the Deep-Sea project, and as one of the two policy briefs for the communities of practice in the Capacity project. However, there was practically no interaction between the projects to coordinate their activities to benefit their key stakeholders and to share knowledge and expert resources. The lack of synchronization led not only to fragmentation of activities (the communities of practice could have been a resource to the Deep-Sea project as well) but also poor utilization of the resources and results between projects.
 - iii. **Capacity, Tuna and OPP projects:** the purpose and justification of a separate Capacity project when capacity development was an ingrained feature in all projects was not clarified sufficiently in the programme document. The understanding among some stakeholders (refuted by others, especially the executing partners of the Capacity project) was that the Capacity project was to synthesize key lessons for the programme. However, during implementation, the Capacity project reoriented strongly to support for the BBNJ process, which was opportunistic yet somewhat tangential to the focus at other projects.
 - iv. **BBNJ negotiations:** an area of work unspecified in the initial design that later led to divergent perceptions among stakeholders in other projects was the opportunistic orientation of the Capacity project almost exclusively around the international agreement on BBNJ. The implementation of the project's key components was largely isolated from the Tuna and Deep-Sea projects whose stakeholders represented an important grouping for the negotiations of the draft texts.
32. **Programme coordination authority:** the programme design did not have any mechanisms to consider deviations from the original design to ensure synergies between

projects with due consultation and consensus building among partners. The lack of a programme leader (rather than coordinator); roles, authority and powers of global Steering Committee to assess and authorize necessary course corrections and reallocations; the absence of a coordination team with full-time focal points in each project to support centralized monitoring, reporting and outreach at the programme level, including strategic communications with key global stakeholders of ABNJ, can also be seen as weaknesses rooted in programme design. The ABNJ Program was the first programmatic approach in GEF's IW focal area and also at FAO, therefore these can be seen as learning experiences.

Table 6: Relevance rating

Element	Rating	Description
Congruence with GEF focal areas strategies, and international frameworks	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The programme had no shortcomings
Appropriateness of strategy, entry points	Satisfactory (S)	The programme had minor shortcomings
Quality of programme design - articulation of programmatic approach	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	The programme had significant shortcomings
Coherence between programme and child project approaches	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	The programme had moderate shortcomings
Overall	Satisfactory (S)	The programme had minor shortcomings in terms of relevance

2.2 Effectiveness

33. This assessment draws on the results emerging from the child projects and attempts to aggregate them at the programme level to consider the effects in form of transformational changes - regulatory, governance, institutional and industry-level behaviour changes towards sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in ABNJ. Any emerging evidence of environmental benefits from the projects has been included. However, it needs to be noted that the Tuna project did the heavy lifting in terms of results, although, the evaluation finds it reasonable given the lion's share of the programme budget went to the Tuna project activities at the field level compared to other projects. The downscaling of OPP's results framework limited the field level results from that project. Therefore, programme level results especially at the intermediate state levels can be seen emerging mostly from the Tuna project.

Finding 3. The ABNJ Program showed several positive results in key areas and demonstrated leading contributions toward improving tuna fisheries governance, safeguarding of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), strengthening monitoring, control and surveillance to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, mitigating bycatch mortality trends, and building awareness of cross-sectoral aspects in effective governance of ABNJ. The major result areas of the programme have been in institutional governance in the fisheries sector and reduction in adverse fishery sector impact on biodiversity.

34. Results can be seen at the programme outcome level, and also at intermediate states as described in the theory of change. Emerging evidence considered by the evaluation appears below. Table 7 provides a listing of salient results from each project.
- i. **Stocks maintained or restored to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yields where possible.** There has been a steep reduction in overfishing, with the number of stocks experiencing overfishing down from 13 in 2013 to 5 in 2018.
 - ii. **Reduced pressure on biodiversity and promotion of sustainable use.** There were major reductions in turtle mortality in Western and Central Pacific Ocean from mandatory use of circle hooks and other mitigation measures; there was an apparent steep reduction in marine mammals caught in Pakistani gill net fisheries (from 12 000 in 2013 to less than 200 in 2018). Aided by the Deep-Sea project, management measures to protect VMEs were adopted in all RFMO/As - large areas under RFMO/As are closed to fishing, except exploratory fishing under strict protocols.
 - iii. **Reduction in IUU fishing, strengthened monitoring and compliance, better enforcement.** A global comprehensive web-based list of authorized vessels exists and is updated real time; electronic monitoring systems (EMS) have been piloted in Fiji and Ghana for monitoring, compliance and data collection in tuna fishing, a legal guide is available for countries to facilitate implementation of FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA); a large scale tuna fleet capacity management programme was implemented in Eastern Pacific Ocean, and the world's first university-certified training course in fisheries enforcement and compliance was delivered for fisheries officers from Pacific Island countries.
 - iv. **Increase in sustainably managed land and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation.** New protocols have been approved by all eight Deep-Sea RFMOs for fishing impact assessments on potential VMEs; 18 new VME sites have been designated, for protection of deep-sea habitats and species such as corals and sponges.
 - v. **Increased management effectiveness of existing and new areas.** Bycatch and marine pollution reduced through use of non-entangling and biodegradable fish aggregating devices (FADs) - FAD guidelines were in place in all four oceans in 2019 (there were none in 2013); Western and Central Pacific Ocean impose mandatory use of circle hooks to reduce bycatch mortality; all five tuna (t)-RFMOs have agreed to develop plans for implementation of ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) and all eight deep-sea RFMOs comply with ecological pillar of the EAF; industry and government have put together plans for management and conservation of billfish in the Caribbean.
35. **Transformational changes.** The evaluation notes a number of transformational changes, i.e. changes or practices that are mainstreamed by the key institutional actors and irreversible, which have the potential to show impact on the state of fish stocks and biodiversity, especially the impact of fishing operations on vulnerable species. Examples from the various projects are summarized below (details can be studied in the individual evaluation reports).

Table 7: Salient results from child projects

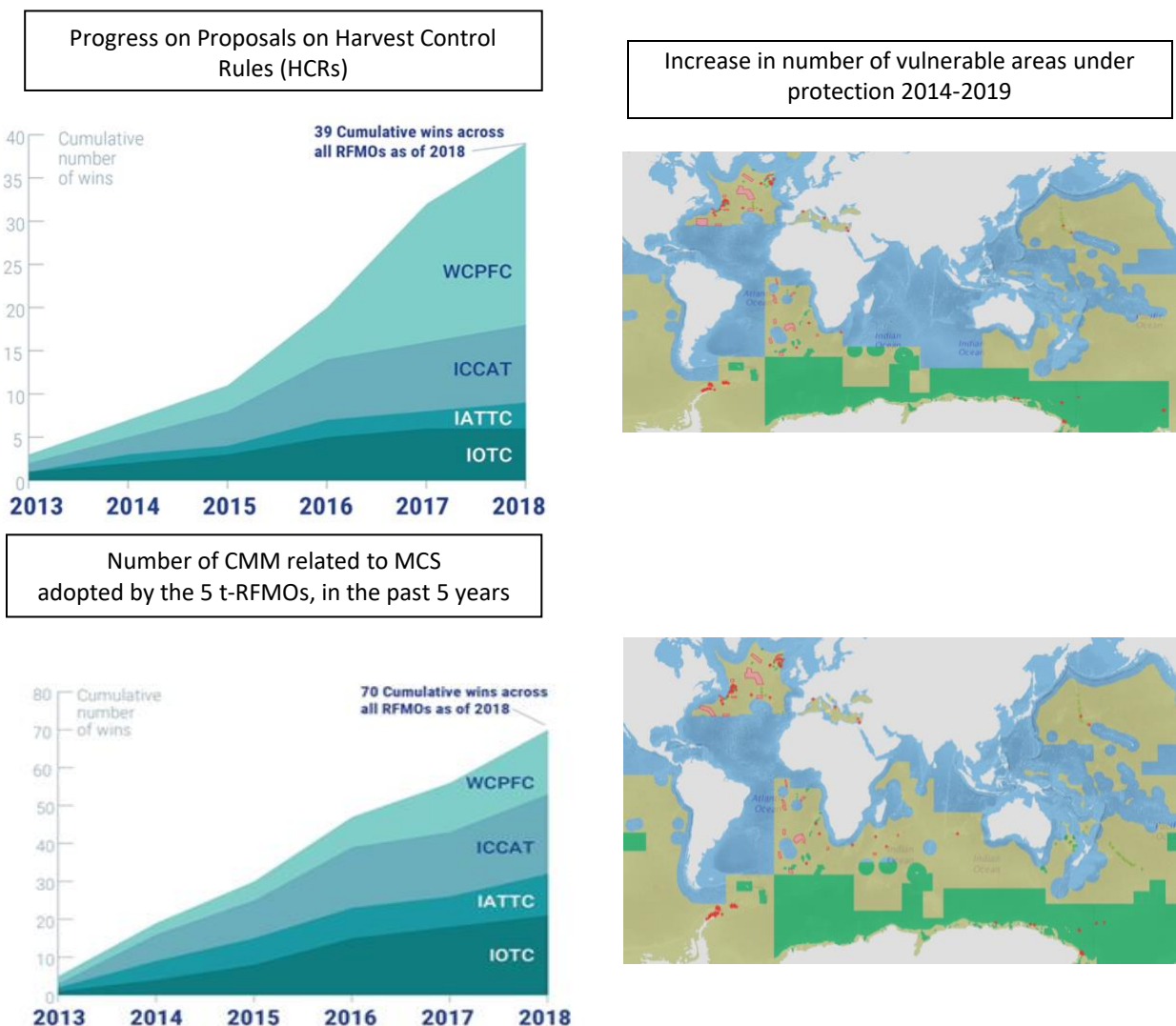
Project	Associated environmental benefits
Tuna	<p>Significant reductions in environmental impacts of fishing.</p> <p>Number of major commercial tuna stocks experiencing overfishing decreased from 13 in 2013 to 5 in 2019.</p> <p>Sub-surface setting in gillnet fishing lead to reduction of marine mammals caught.</p> <p>Reduction in marine turtle mortality rates in Pacific from mandatory application of measures since 2018.</p> <p>Data on shark status influenced management measures in Pacific.</p> <p>Non-entangling FADs mandated by all RFMOs; biodegradable FADS lading to less gear-related pollution (source: ISSF).</p>
Deep-Seas	<p>VME protection now included in all RFMO/As convention area. With the creation of new RFMO/As, only the South West Atlantic is without international governance. In most RFMO/As, previously unfished areas can only be fished following strict exploratory fishing protocols. 18 new VMEs identified, area coverage not measured (4 300 million ha was the programme target). Cross-fertilization between established and new RFMOs (e.g. NAFO support to SWIOFA), support to improve performance of the newer secretariats.</p>
OPP	<p>Introduction of non-entangling and biodegradable FADs in Pacific (Nauru Agreement).</p> <p>Vessel Day Scheme for long liners to improve fish stock health.</p> <p>Caribbean bill fish management and conservation plan under implementation – long-term effects on tuna quality and billfish stocks expected.</p>
Capacity	<p>Awareness raising and capacity development actions have indirect benefits that will ensue only in the long-term, depending on the effective implementation of the agreements</p>

36. **Tuna fisheries.** One of the programme's major transformational result is the global improvement of management strategies; consensus among all five tuna RFMOs on the importance to develop/adopt harvest strategies for determining catch limits, which sets a global standard for sustainable harvesting for the major tuna commercial stocks. As of 2019, of the 23 major tuna stocks, harvest strategies are in place for 6 species and under way for 8; compared to only 1 harvest strategy in 2013 (before the project began). These have strong causal linkages with a steep reduction in overfishing of major tuna stocks, with the number of stocks experiencing overfishing down from 13 in 2013 to 5 in 2018. The programme has generated widespread awareness of the benefits of electronic vessel monitoring systems, and all RFMOs are in support of implementation of EMS to monitor the fleets under their purview. A real time updated comprehensive list of authorized vessels is now available, which supports the implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement and also monitoring for IUU activities. A certified training course has been developed as curriculum for fisheries officers in the Pacific. The programme's scientific data and the successful demonstration of innovative fish aggregating devices led to large-scale endorsement resulting in mandatory use of non-entangling fishing gear (FADs, circle hooks, etc.) in all four oceans.
37. **Deep-sea fisheries.** In the deep-seas, the programme contributed to the establishment of 18 new sites to protect VMEs - such as corals and sponges, representing a huge increase in the areas under effective management and protection, although only from the perspective of deep-sea fisheries. Whether these aggregate to the programme target of

4 300 million hectares could not be confirmed to the evaluation. However, the evaluation learned that adequate protection exists for VMEs in regions with potential for deep-sea fishing activities due to the adoption of precautionary measures. All the deep-sea RFMOs are now complying with the ecological pillar of the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries.

- 38. **Ocean partnerships.** The Caribbean bill fish business case has secured a conservation and management agreement between governments, communities, fishing and sports industry actors, besides investment funding from the International Pole and Line Foundation, with impacts not only on the bill fish stocks but also price incentives for tuna for adoption of good bycatch management practices.
- 39. **Associated environmental benefits.** The programme design did not contain plans and appropriate indicators for systematic measurement of environmental benefits. However, important evidence has been collected, especially in the Tuna project, that demonstrate the positive impact of the programme in terms of improvement in fish stocks health and in bycatch mitigation, starting by the quality and quantity of information available.

Figure 4: Examples of transformational changes in governance measures



Source: International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)

Figure 5: Evidence from Tuna and Deep-Sea projects of transformational governance measures



40. **Progress to impact.** The evaluation considers SDG 14 (life below water) and CBD targets Aichi 6 and 11 as the relevant long-term impact targets for the programme. Although the programme did not take any steps to measure contributions to these, the evaluation team prepared a simple tabulation to map project level results that are irreversible and can be scaled up to lead to long-term improvements toward specific SDG and CBD target indicators.
41. While there are observable linkages between programme components and SDG 14 targets and also Aichi Target 6 (Table 8) the programme’s links are rather weak with Aichi target 11, which relates to effective management of all protected areas from a multi-sector perspective. The evaluation considers this to be a reflection of design emphasis in the Deep-Sea project. The targets of Aichi 11 involve cross-sectoral initiatives, however, the Deep-Sea project largely addressed fisheries sector issues. There was very little coverage of the interplay of other sectors competing for the ocean bed, and other key actors, such as International Seabed Authority (ISA), mining industry and others were not engaged by the project. Similarly, although the Capacity project focused on capacities for cross-sectoral governance of the ABNJ, there was practically no involvement of stakeholders from the key economic sectors in the deep-seas. Thus, the programme was not sufficiently oriented to the Aichi target 11 stakeholders (this reaffirms the observation on the programme balance being less on biodiversity conservation than sustainable fisheries).

Table 8: Contribution towards global development targets

SDG 14 indicators relevant to the programme	Contributing projects
SDG 14.2.1 Proportion of national exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches	Tuna
14.4.1 Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels	Tuna
14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas	Deep-Sea
14.6.1 Degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing	Tuna
14.b.1 Degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/ institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries	None
14.c.1 Number of countries making progress in ratifying, accepting and implementing through legal, policy and institutional frameworks, ocean-related instruments that implement international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources	Tuna (PSMA implementation Capacity (BBNJ negotiation) Deep-Sea)
Aichi target 6 indicators relevant to the programme	
By 2015, parties should have restored stocks to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield	Tuna
By 2015, pressure on marine ecosystems from fishing is halved at the global level	
By 2015, parties are implementing measures for the sustainable management of bycatch and have reduced the level of discard by 50 percent	Tuna
Aichi target 11 indicators relevant to the programme	
By 2012, in the marine area, a global network of comprehensive, representative and effectively managed national and regional protected area systems is established	Indeterminate
By 2012, all protected areas are effectively and equitably managed, using participatory and science-based site planning processes that incorporate clear biodiversity objectives, targets, management strategies and monitoring and evaluation protocols	Indeterminate
By 2015, all protected areas and protected area systems are integrated into the wider land and seascape, and relevant sectors, by applying the ecosystem approach and taking into account ecological connectivity, likely climate change impacts and, where appropriate, the concept of ecological networks.	Indeterminate

Source: Evaluation ReM (results measurement) compilation

42. **Capacity building.** A key factor behind the transformation was the programme emphasis on capacity building for functionaries and operators throughout the programme. There are several illustrations of capacity development with one common element: they are all aimed at the functionaries and operators at the front of implementation. The programme helped build a critical mass of functionaries in government or regional institutions or industry actors equipped with knowledge and tools to implement transformational changes 'on the water'. In all, the programme had a direct influence on more than 2 700 vessel operators/skippers, 120 fisheries inspection officers; and 44 negotiators. Box 1 provides more details on the key capacity development activities.

Box 1: Capacity development emphasis - skills development for functionaries

Certificate IV Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance

The Certificate IV Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance Course (CFEC) organized by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the University of the South Pacific is globally the first university-accredited 'Diploma in MCS' programme to develop technical qualifications in monitoring, compliance and surveillance for fisheries officers. It is a 12-month course with four modules, delivered online and supplemented by one week of face-to-face learning. It focuses on persons already having field experience in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). Successful candidates receive a Diploma Certificate from the University of South Pacific, based on assessments by the Forum Fisheries Agency, New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industry and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

Over time, the programme will lead to a cadre of trained fisheries officials with specific skills and training in MCS. So far, 140 people have graduated, 35 supported by the programme. The programme's importance has been endorsed by the Forum Fisheries Committee, the governing body of the FFA, along with recognition of the need for supplementing programmes, such as a Diploma in Advanced Investigation and Prosecution Skills for Fisheries Officers; and a mechanism for accreditation of the PIRFO Observer Courses. The CEFC has potential to develop into a global programme, with potential for replication in other regions.

Regional Leaders Program (Capacity project)

An important result from the Capacity project is the training of regional leaders from developing countries and representing relevant disciplines (including emerging negotiators) to support and effectively participate in global and regional ABNJ processes. An important element of the Regional Leaders Program (RLP) strategy was to complement existing programmes such as those by the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS) supporting existing negotiators (foreign affairs officials) with emerging negotiators from other portfolios (environment, fisheries, etc.), to enable better representation of multi-sectoral approaches called for in the BBNJ discussions. The programme trained 43 people from 34 countries and enhanced their awareness of the cross-sectoral linkages in the governance of ABNJ and exposed them to the BBNJ processes (Prep Coms and IGC 2) as observers attached to their negotiating delegations. 19 of the 43 trainees are now officially involved in the negotiations and making substantive contributions to the submissions as was seen in the IGC 3.

Global Think Tank Outputs (OPP)

The Global Think Tank (GloTT), comprising 13 experts on financing, economics, international law, management of tuna fisheries, and ecology of highly migratory fisheries was tasked with developing a new vision for managing fishing on the high seas **that uses incentives as a mechanism for improving practices**. Over three years, the Think Tank held a series of facilitated meetings during which experts exchanged and reviewed findings, debated ideas and ultimately agreed upon a vision for the management of highly migratory fisheries with a high seas component. The resultant *Principles for Fisheries Management in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction - the Essential Role of Incentive-Based Approaches* (Anderson J. et al, 2018), describes two types of incentives and outlines nine principles for creating "smart mixes" of regulatory and incentive-based push and pull tools. The management challenges of highly migratory, high seas fisheries in complex, adaptive systems where no single entity is in control can be addressed "by segmenting the problem into manageable parts, sequencing the "right" mix of interventions that include incentives and scaling up over time."

Skipper Training Workshops (Tuna)

Close to 100 ISSF-led Skippers Training Workshops on Best Practices for mitigating bycatch impacts of the global tuna purse seine fleet have been conducted, since 2009, involving nearly 4 000 participants. Of these, 62 workshops were held with partial funding from the ABNJ Tuna project, from June 2015 to July 2019, with more than 2 700 participants, including more than 1 700 skippers and 1 000 additional relevant industry stakeholders, such as fishing crews, ship owners, fleet managers and cannery managers. Specific details of trainings under the OPP could not be obtained.

Marine Spatial Planning (Deep-Sea project)

The Deep-Sea project contributed to capacity building by funding attendance at various scientific and management meetings of existing RFMO/As. It also arranged for training in marine spatial planning with the Nairobi Convention and the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur. Six regional VME training workshops have been convened (in the Western Central Atlantic, the Mediterranean, Eastern Central Atlantic, Southern Indian Ocean, and two in the North Pacific) and ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSA) training has been provided at four regional workshops (North East Indian Ocean, North West Indian Ocean, Seas of South East Asia, Black Sea, Baltic Sea and the Caspian Sea). The countries that participated in the workshops were trained to apply improved management tools for mitigation of threats to sustainable deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity in national processes.

Table 9: Ratings on effectiveness

Project	Rating	Description
Tuna	Highly Satisfactory (S)	The project had no shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of effectiveness.
Deep-Sea	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	The project had moderate shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of effectiveness.
OPP	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MS)	The project had significant shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.
Capacity	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	The project had moderate shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of effectiveness.
Overall programme	Satisfactory (S)	The program had minor shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of effectiveness.

2.3 Efficiency – quality of implementation and execution

Finding 4. The programme had a moderately satisfactory (timely and within budget) record of completion; however, this was not without challenges; yet, implementing agencies were able to intercede effectively and implement changes to steer projects away from potential failure.

43. With the exception of the OPP, all projects adhered to their original design and completed most of their target outputs; however, some outputs were dropped, merged or not delivered. OPP underwent a major restructuring (at the outcome level) in early 2018, following the unsatisfactory progress of several components until 2017. Although no information of these developments was shared with the programme Steering Committee, the evaluation was able to access online the *Public Disclosable Document on Restructuring the Ocean Partnerships' for Sustainable Fisheries & Biodiversity Conservation* (Report no. RES 29641 of the World Bank, accessed on World Bank site). The project had a significant change/downsizing of its development objective and results indicators, as tabulated in Table 10. The evaluation notes the changes as a step to salvage the project and achieve a realistic level of results in the remainder of the project duration. Result expectations were scaled down to more manageable levels while not compromising the quality requirements of World Bank-supported initiatives.

Table 10: Major amendments to components in ABNJ child projects

Project	Project components not completed/dropped/downscaled	
Tuna	Following the mid-term review, Outputs 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 (RBM system in at least one t-RFMO) were dropped entirely. Output 1.1.2 (increased capacity of ten coastal developing states to comply with t-RMO member states obligations) was moved from Component 1 to Component 2, while Output 1.1.3 (Output 1.1.3 bycatch and catch data gaps in the northern Indian Ocean tuna-directed driftnet fisheries effectively filled through engagement of fishing communities and civil society organizations (CSOs) using co-management approaches) was moved to Component 3. Following the revision of the project results framework, most of the intermediate outcome indicators, as well as the end-of-project targets for each of the outputs were significantly changed.	
Deep-Seas	After the mid-term review, Activities 1.1.3.4 (revision of national legislation), 3.1.2.3 and 3.1.2.4 (development of operational objectives and options for improved adaptive management in pilot areas), and 3.1.3.1 and 3.1.3.2 (selection of objective-based indicators and design and implementation of monitoring programmes) were dropped. Activities not completed were: 3.1.2.2 (issue identification and prioritization for management planning – due to disagreement with contractor) and 3.1.5.1 (experimental testing and trial implementation of measures, indicators and thresholds- above accountability ceiling).	
Capacity	Communities of practice tasks reduced to preparation of policy brief. Synthesis of lessons from all projects not produced. High focus on substance of BBNJ agreement especially capacity building.	
OPP	Major changes/downsizing of objective and results indicators see below.	
Description	Original formulation	Amendment
Project objective	Catalyze investment into transformational public-private partnerships that mainstream sustainable management of highly migratory stocks spanning areas within and beyond national jurisdictions.	Identify potential investors and develop business cases that promote sustainable management of highly migratory stocks spanning areas within and beyond national jurisdictions.
Indicator 1	Increased investment in sustainable management of SHMF.	Business cases developed based on minimum criteria approved by the PSC.
Indicator 2	Improved ability of client states to engage effectively in international policy processes.	Developed business cases presented to potential investors.
Indicator 3	Increased interregional cooperation.	New targeted initiatives to increase capacity of Member States to participate in the work of RFMOs developed.

Project	Project components not completed/dropped/downscaled	
IR 1	Four regional subprojects established to define business plans for SFMF.	Criteria for business cases developed and agreed upon by project Steering Committee.
IR 2	Business planning processes active in all four regions.	Participation by entrepreneurs and potential investors in development process of business cases for SHMF.
IR 3	Funding and disbursement sub-project mechanism operational.	Technical analyses and capacity building activities related to preparation of business cases carried out.
IR 4	New.	Economic social and environmental cost benefit analyses of business cases carried out.
IR 5	Funds allocated to activities in four subregions to support pilot business planning processes by informing management and conservation decision-making.	Demand-driven analytical activities completed, validated, disseminated regionally.
IR 6	Global Think Tank established and operational.	'Operational' defined as strengthening of design of business cases and identification of potential investors.
IR 7	Economic and sector work for the Bank/GEF publication and other knowledge products.	Knowledge products prepared under Global Think Tank auspices.
IR 8	M&E frameworks including roll out of WB Fisheries Performance Indicators to determine baselines and BP quality methodologies in the four project subregions.	Deleted.
Budget	9.16.	9.16.

44. **Funds utilization. Overall, the programme spent over 90 percent of the GEF funds,** according to the latest available data. Both the Capacity project and the OPP reported full utilization. Around USD 4.4 million remained unspent: around USD 2 million in the Tuna and USD 2.29 million in the Deep-Sea projects, and over USD 100 000 from the coordination project (see Table 11).

Table 11: Programme financial utilization

Project	GEF funds provided	Utilization as per latest data	Unexpended GEF funds (USD)	% utilization
Tuna	27.17	24.19	2.98 million	79%
Deep-Seas	7.37	5.02	2.29 million	68%
Capacity	0.91	0.91		100%
OPP	9.16 ³	-	-	-
Coordination	0.46	0.35	0.11 million	77%
Total			5.38 million	

45. **Human resource attritions.** The programme encountered a number of human resource transitions but overcame them eventually. The most important of these were the long vacancies in the posts of programme coordinator (11 months) and the Deep-Sea project manager (two changes), which created leadership gaps in the initial stages of programme implementation. Even in the Tuna project, there was a prolonged phase where the project manager had to share responsibilities of being the acting Secretary of an RFMO with his responsibilities as coordinator of the Tuna project. While long vacancies at the highest levels can impact delivery, the evaluation could not identify any major negative impacts on these accounts. On the contrary, OPP and Deep-Sea projects were salvaged and brought back on track largely due to the experience and troubleshooting skills of the respective GEF implementing agencies, which has been a key factor of programme performance.

Finding 5. FAO's corporate administrative environment delayed issue of procurement contracts, which led to delays and incomplete delivery of important capital goods. FAO's modalities for GEF programmes came into place when the programme was already under implementation. The programme was a major learning opportunity for FAO to implement GEF programmes and induct appropriate modalities.

46. Programme implementation involved contracting arrangements between the implementing agencies and several executing agencies and partners. Also, especially the Tuna project involved competitive procurement of hardware, equipment and support services from third parties. The brunt of administrative arrangements was borne by FAO, with an overall unsatisfactory experience. In several interviews, there were mentions of the long delays on FAO's part in developing execution agreements with executing partners which delayed the initial phase of implementation and the mobilization efforts of partners. However, later, the impacts of FAO's complex procurement processes were felt on critical phases of the programme, especially in the Tuna project. Two specific instances noted by the evaluation are: the much-delayed arrival of gillnet conversion gear in Pakistan, which had not arrived even by November 2019 after most of the project activities had ended; and the late arrival of EMS equipment in Ghana, and its storage in poor conditions.
47. The above inefficiencies are due to the institutional enabling environment in FAO as a whole rather than programme-specific deficiencies. Several reviews and evaluations of FAO, the latest being the Evaluation of FAO Strategic Results Framework (FAO, 2019a), have pointed out inefficiencies in FAO's contracting and procurement procedures, which lag

³ The latest data for OPP could not be obtained. However, the restructuring review indicated that the GEF fund will be fully used.

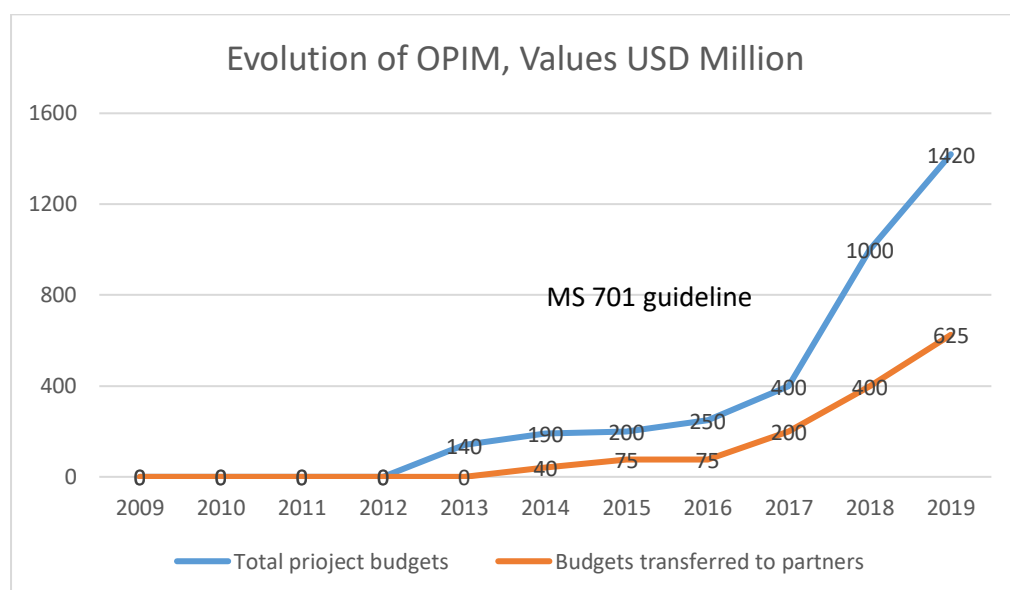
behind other comparable agencies. A revision of corporate policies and guidelines has been proposed in these assessments for consideration by management. However, these factors are important in an agency's appointment as implementing and coordinating agency.

48. Another aspect in the assessment of contracting arrangements is that GEF increasingly requires implementing agencies to distance from direct execution modalities and have arrangements with national or other executing agencies. However, as a technical agency, FAO's delivery has mostly been through direct implementation. The ABNJ was the first GEF Program for FAO as an implementing agency, and also the first time FAO partnered with several agencies, including with several foundations. At the time of designing the ABNJ Program, FAO did not have appropriate instruments to transfer funds to executing agencies while having fiduciary responsibility of the GEF funds. Disbursement of funds by FAO was against specific tasks covered under execution agreements, and experienced delays. Over time, FAO has evolved and piloted modalities such as the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) and now implements several GEF programmes, aggregating to over USD 1 billion in GEF funding (Box 2). Thus, while ABNJ may have had to face inefficiencies, these have supported FAO's learning curve as a GEF implementing agency.

Box 2: The Operational Partners Implementation Modality facility evolved by FAO for GEF programmes

In November 2015 FAO released a new implementation modality called Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM), to implement FAO projects through eligible operational partners using a risk-based approach for the management of funds transferred from FAO to its operational partners. The risk-based approach assigns a level of risk to implementing partners on the basis of their operational capacity. The risk level, together with the amount of funds to be transferred to the operational partner determine the intensity and type of assurance activities that must be carried out during implementation.

Figure 6: Evolution of Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) in FAO GEF projects, USD million



Source: FAO Manual, section 701, November 2015

Table 12: Ratings on timely completion and financial utilization

Project	Rating	Description
Tuna (FAO)	Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings, timely completion with adjustments, substantial financial utilization.
Deep-Sea (UNEP)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings in timely completion with adjustments, moderate financial utilization by FAO, budget fully utilized by UNEP-WCMC.
OPP (WB)	Unable to Assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation or execution.
Capacity (FAO)	Modestly Satisfactory (S)	There were some shortcomings, non-completion of some outputs, full utilization of budgets.
Coordination (FAO)	Satisfactory (MU)	There were some shortcomings, timely completion, moderate financial utilization.
Overall programme	Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings, timely completion with adjustments, substantial financial utilization.

Table 13: Ratings on quality of implementation

Project	Rating	Description
Tuna (FAO)	Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of implementation meets expectations.
Deep-Sea (UNEP)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation more or less meets expectations. Initial delays in recruiting at UNEP-WCMC, but once recruitment took place, the project was implemented well, even with changes in personnel. FAO was very slow in recruiting the first coordinator and even slower in replacing him.
OPP (WB)	Satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation more or less meets expectations.
Capacity (FAO)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation more or less meets expectations.
Coordination (FAO)	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution somewhat lower than expected.
Overall programme	Moderately Satisfactory (S)	There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation more or less meets expectations.

Table 14: Ratings on quality of execution

Project	Rating	Description
Tuna (FAO)	Highly Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of execution meets expectations.
Deep-Sea (UNEP)	Satisfactory (S)	There were some shortcomings and quality of execution more or less meets expectations. Execution improved after recruitment of the second coordinator.
OPP (WB)	Unable to Assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation or execution.
Capacity (FAO)	Modestly Satisfactory (MS)	There were moderate shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution somewhat lower than expected.
Coordination (FAO)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	There were moderate shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution somewhat lower than expected.
Overall programme	Satisfactory (S)	There were minor shortcomings and quality of execution more or less meets expectations.

2.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation

Finding 6. Weakness in design led to under-resourcing and insufficient resources for effective implementation.

49. In line with GEF guidelines, the programme monitoring and evaluation system was assessed and rated on monitoring and evaluation '(M&E) Design', 'M&E Plan Implementation' and 'Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities'. In this regard, 'M&E plan implementation' was considered a critical parameter for the overall assessment of the M&E system, with the overall rating for the M&E systems not being higher than the rating on "M&E plan implementation."
50. **M&E design.** As pointed out earlier, the evaluation notes the absence of programme level indicators and a theory of change for the program to be a major weakness in the M&E design of the programme. Although subsequently the programme Global Steering Committee tried to reconstruct a theory of change, there was reluctance on part of agencies⁴ to retrofit a theory of change and adopt new indicators that were not approved in the final programme document. Thus, in a sense, the programme framework document was approved without an explicit theory of change and indicators absolved the programme agencies' obligations to report progress along GEF focal area outcomes. However, the evaluation notes that section B 1.1 (GEF/LDCF/SCCF Focal area strategies) of the programme framework document links individual outputs of various projects to the focal area outcomes, and this could be considered an implicit expectation for programme level reports. The contributing projects for each outcome have been summarized in Table 15 below. However, no programme level aggregation was attempted in progress reports.

⁴ See fourth GSC meeting notes 2015.

Table 15: Programme outcomes and contributing projects

Focal area objectives	Expected FA outcomes	Expected FA outputs	Contributing projects as per PFD
IW 4	ABNJ including deep-sea fisheries, oceans areas and sea mounts under sustainable management and protection (including marine protected areas from biodiversity area)	4.1 Demonstrations for management measures in ABNJ (including deep-sea fisheries, ocean areas) with institutions	Capacity, Tuna, Deep-Sea, OPP
	4.2 Plans and institutional frameworks for pilot cases of ABNJ have catalytic effect on global discussions	4.2 Demonstrations for management measures in ABNJ (including deep-sea fisheries, ocean areas) with institutions	Tuna, Deep-Sea, OPP
BD 1	1.1 Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas	1.1 New protected areas (at least two) and coverage (at least 4 300 million ha) of unprotected ecosystems	Tuna, Deep-Sea, OPP
BD 2	2.1 Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation	2.1 National and subnational sea-plans (at least four) that incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem services evaluation	Tuna, Deep-Sea, OPP
	2.2 Measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity incorporated in policy and regulatory frameworks	2.2 Policies and regulatory frameworks (at least one) for production sectors	Deep-Sea, Capacity

Source: ABNJ programme framework document

51. **M&E plan implementation.** The programme level implementation components considered by the evaluation were: the periodic progress reports from the projects, annual reviews at steering Committees and mid-term evaluations of the three full-scale projects.

Finding 7. Reporting of results did not include any programme level analysis.

52. Progress reports were prepared and submitted as scheduled. These were discussed at annual Steering Committee meetings and submitted to GEF SEC as required. The contents of several reports perused by the evaluation present a sense of the key actions in projects for the reporting period. However, the annual progress reports, especially those of the Program Coordination project were merely an assembly of information from individual projects and lacked any aggregated narratives on progress against or contributions towards GEF focal area outcomes.

53. The evaluation notes due efforts by the programme Global Steering Committee to rectify the design and consider process level indicators to monitor compliance with a programmatic approach. The fourth meeting of the GSC (July 2015) noted that absence of indicators which go beyond what will be achieved under the different projects, and agreed on a set of draft programme level indicators (presented as Appendix 2) and set-up a working group to develop these.⁵ However, even after the deliberations of the fourth Global Steering Committee meeting, the draft indicators were not agreed and thus none

⁵ In this context, the GSC proposed that outcomes and indicators which are similar across project be identified and that, on that basis, the possible formulation of programme-level outcomes and the merging of the corresponding indicators be considered. In addition, a small working group on programmatic indicators including representatives of all four projects was proposed and the chair called for nominations. This group should report back to the GSC three months after this meeting in October 2015.

were applied in progress reports. Furthermore, subsequent GSC meetings and even the GEF Coordination Unit (which reviewed progress reports) did not question the non-use of indicators. Thus, even though the programme could have reported on some programme level indicators to showcase the additionality of the programmatic approach, this did not happen.

Table 16: Coordination and collaboration matrix among projects

Thematic area/Project	Projects
Precautionary approaches	T, D
Ecosystem approach and impact on ecosystems and non-target species	T, D, C
Compliance and MCS	T, D
Policy and legal frameworks	T, D
Market-based incentives, e.g. catch documentation schemes	T, D, O
VMEs and EBSAs	D
Area-based planning	D, C
Rights-based management	T, O
Knowledge management and dissemination	T, D, O, C
Advocacy	T, D, O, C
Draft programmatic indicators proposed by GSC in 2015	
Degree of information-sharing between projects	
Level of knowledge-sharing between projects	
Consistent programme wide communications and messaging	
Optimization of possible synergies and beneficial impacts of various activities	

T- Tuna, D-Deep Sea, O- Ocean Partnership, C-Capacity

Source: Fourth GSC, meeting notes, July 2015

Finding 8. Mid-term and terminal evaluation resource needs at the programme level were under-budgeted, there was no mid-term review of the programme concomitant with the Tuna and Deep-Sea projects' mid-term evaluations.

54. As required for all GEF full-sized projects, the Tuna and Deep-Sea projects had mid-term evaluations in 2017, funded from the respective project budgets. OPP also had a mid-term review in 2017 funded from the project budget. The evaluation learned that OPP had its mid-term review conducted in 2017 and a terminal evaluation was completed in November 2019. However, the programme Global Steering Committee received no information on the same. Also, despite requests, the OPP team has not shared even the executive summary with this evaluation. Therefore, the evaluation's observations in this section are based on the other two full-scale projects, i.e. Tuna and Deep-Seas projects.
55. The lack of attention to a programmatic approach is further established by the fact that programme level evaluation was grossly under-resourced in the design. First, there was no provision for a mid-term evaluation of the programme. Although, the mid-term evaluations of the Tuna project and Deep-Sea project contained an annex on programme level observations. More importantly, the programme budgeted only USD 4 000 for the terminal evaluation of the programme, which raises questions on the importance attached to a programmatic evaluation for the ABNJ programmes' stature and strategic importance. The programme evaluation has been funded from the Tuna project's budgets.

Table 17: Evaluation rating of monitoring and evaluation

Description	Rating	Description
M&E Design	MU	There were significant shortcomings.
M &E plan implementation	MS	There were moderate shortcomings.
Budgeting and funding for M&E activities	MU	There were significant shortcomings.
Overall rating (not higher than implementation)	MU	There were significant shortcomings in program M&E.

2.3.2 Programme coordination

Finding 9. Coordination remained a weak pillar in the programme, with low understanding and application of programmatic approaches and grossly under-resourced in relation to the magnitude and complexity of the programme.

56. Notwithstanding the good results observed on the ground, the evaluation observes that overall, Program Coordination was a weak pillar of the programme. On the ground, it was more an implementation of four independent projects than of one programme with four child projects. Interactions among projects were minimal, with any cross-fertilization and learning only at the annual Steering Committee meetings - which brought all the project teams together to review their progress. Notably, programme level reviews and reports covered only processes such as coordination calls and communication products, but no results level analysis and reporting progress against the outcomes agreed in the programme framework document.
57. Interviews with a few persons conversant with the programme's design stages revealed that the programmatic approach was primarily a GEF initiative and its rationale and added value (how the whole could be more than the sum of its parts) remained poorly understood and applied by implementing partners. Barring a few persons in Rome, implementing agencies and executing agencies saw themselves implementing their individual projects but without any interlinkages with the other projects. This is evident from the absence of any justification at the programme level for the overlaps and similarities in components across projects; notably:
- i. **Tuna and OPP:** both had sizeable tuna and associated species management components. FAO besides having the programme coordination role was also the implementing agency of the Tuna project and an executing partner in OPP, yet there were practically no deliberations to exploit synergies and complementarities. The lack of communication from the OPP implementing partners on the project constituted a visible gap in the coordination of activities, which was partly ameliorated by the involvement of FAO in the bill fish project, which enabled some visibility of some components of the OPP.
 - ii. **Deep-Sea and Capacity projects:** area-based multisectoral planning was an important theme in both projects, as a full component in the Deep-Sea project, and as one of the two policy briefs for the communities of practice in the Capacity project. However, there was practically no interaction between the projects to coordinate their activities to benefit their key stakeholders and to share knowledge and expert resources. The lack of synchronization led not only to fragmentation of activities (the communities of

practice could have been a resource to the Deep-Sea project as well) but also poor utilization of the resources and results between projects. The fact that this was not discussed in coordination calls or reviewed at the Global Steering Committee meetings reflects the weak programmatic focus in implementation.

- iii. **Capacity, tuna and OPP projects:** the purpose and justification of a separate capacity project when capacity development was an ingrained feature in all projects was not clarified sufficiently in the programme document. The understanding among some stakeholders (refuted by others especially the executing partners of the capacity project) was that the capacity project was to be the glue among all projects and coordinate capacity development functions across projects and synthesize key lessons for the programme. However, during implementation, the capacity project reoriented strongly to support for the BBNJ process, which was opportunistic yet somewhat tangential to the focus at other projects. The primary beneficiaries of the capacity project were negotiators, and not fisheries regulatory organizations, who were key partners in the Tuna, Deep-Sea and, to an extent, the OPP project. However, with the BBNJ process gathering momentum, RFMOs became more active on the negotiations, and presented requests for support. However, there were no interactions between the Capacity project and the other projects (and their stakeholders) on the texts of the BBNJ document which were strongly debated among fisheries, conservationists and other ocean stakeholders. The evaluation noted parallel consultation processes across the child projects in supporting stakeholders at the IGC 3 New York, 2019, and the notable absence of diverse stakeholders debating and clarifying their perspectives and building a shared understanding of issues. This, in the evaluation's view, was the greatest potential utility of the Capacity project that remained insufficiently harnessed.
 - iv. **OPP and rest of the programme:** another distinct feature was the separate governance and review mechanism for OPP which remained under the World Bank and outside the Global Programme Coordination Unit and Global Steering Committee of the ABNJ Program. The OPP had its own steering board of representatives from World Bank, Conservation International and other partners; a technical advisory group of subject matter specialists; and an operations secretariat to oversee operational and technical delivery, including advocacy and communications, and a dedicated M&E structure and processes which were to feed into the M&E arrangements for the ABNJ Program. However, in reality, the OPP remained opaque to the rest of the programme, with scant interaction and exchange of information from the OPP, including on the significant review and restructuring of the project (with reformulation of outcomes and targets) in late 2017. The World Bank recently concluded an evaluation of the OPP, and despite requests, even the executive summary of the evaluation was not shared with this evaluation. All the information and insights the evaluation team could obtain on the project's performance was only through a visit to Washington to meet the relevant persons at World Bank, Conservation International and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The different arrangements for the OPP also led to parallel communications and technical advisory structures: where the programme set-up a ten-member Technical Advisory Group (TAG), the OPP had its Global Think Tank (GloTT) for thematic expertise. While the TAG did not eventually convene, the GloTT operated with limited interactions with the Tuna project even though there were several common elements in both.
58. Another fact pointing to the neglect of a programmatic approach is that despite three years of preparation and several coordination meetings among implementing agencies (eight

according to some sources), practically no attention was given to a programmatic approach or to an adequately resourced programme coordination project. Section D of the programme framework document provides some information regarding the added value of the programme *vis-à-vis* a project approach (cost-effectiveness; overall close coordination; optimizing possible synergies and beneficial impacts) and some specific GEF guidance: a more strategic level interaction with the GEF; enhanced opportunities to pool resources; improved opportunities for horizontal and vertical integration of global environmental concerns into decision-making at the national level; increased opportunities to coordinate and mobilize co-financing; and increased flow of knowledge exchange between projects, including good practices. The glaring absence of any programme level outcome indicators in the PFD and GEF approval (the GEF SEC review of the PFD had no responses or comments on questions 24 and 25⁶ which relate specifically to indicators and monitoring) indicate a lapse on part of all stakeholders, including GEF.

59. The formulation of a Program Coordination project (a medium-sized project) came at the very last stages of the design phase, and more at the insistence of GEF than as a proposal from the programme partners. The evaluation learned that the programme coordination project was designed as an afterthought, after all projects had been designed, and with some reluctance on FAO's part to become the coordinating agency. The evaluation learned (in interviews) that FAO was reluctant to take on the coordination role: the ABNJ Program was the first experience in partnering with several other agencies, especially the World Bank, WWF, UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) and others.
60. The implications of the Coordination project being designed at the very end were that nearly all the GEF funding had been allocated under the four child projects. This led to a rather small project – USD 0.5 million from GEF and USD 0.5 million FAO – to coordinate over USD 400 millions of delivery (USD 50 million GEF and more than USD 370 million in co-financing). Thus, project coordination was severely under-resourced to perform its functions of guidance and leadership to harness inter-project synergies, strategic communications and effective monitoring.
61. An analysis of the Coordination project document suggests an array of one-off outputs relating to processes rather than progressive contributions to programme level results. A perusal of the budget breakdowns (Table 18) shows that a lion's share of the budget (over 70 percent) were allocated for the preparatory stages and secretariat services rather than implementation monitoring and external communications. Particularly, the allocation of USD 85 000 for coordination of external communications appears miniscule in relation to the programme's magnitude. Even if the budgets from the Capacity project were added, the total communications budget in the programme is not much higher. Despite the inadequate funding for programme coordination, the programme could not even fully use the GEF grant: as of November 2019, only USD 353 637 of the USD 458 716 GEF funding (corresponding to 77 percent of the budget) had been spent. This was largely due to human resource constraints in coordination.

⁶ Page 9 of the GEF SEC Review for Programme Framework Document: the GEF SEC responses are blank for Q24: Have appropriate tracking tools been included with information for all relevant indicators as applicable? and Q25: Does the proposal include a budgeted M&E plan that monitors and measures results with indicators and targets?

Table 18: Budget for programme coordination including co-financing

Component	GEF grant amount (USD)	Co-financing
Coordination and oversight of preparation and implementation of the ABNJ programme	254 716	760 057
Monitoring and evaluation of Programme	139 000	174 557
Coordination of external communication activities of ABNJ Program	65 000	19 914
Total	458 716	954 528

62. **Program leadership.** The lack of a full-time programme coordinator with due authority and leadership status over the entire programme was a design weakness. The allocations for the programme coordinator were 51 weeks over five years, translating into approximately 10 weeks per year, or about 20 percent of FTE. The progress reports show actual allocations to be even lower, about 5 percent of FTE. The evaluation also noted an 11-month gap⁷ where there was no programme coordinator. With the coordinator position vacant, projects took off on their own, and it was difficult for the new coordinator to take over the reins and synergize the projects effectively. Any scope for redesign of activities and reallocation of funds across projects was impossible as projects guarded their individual funding pots zealously. The evaluation also notes that the terms of reference of the programme coordinator were insufficient: a programme of this complexity and magnitude needed a **programme leader rather than a coordinator**, a position with soft authority (through a programme partnership strategy) over project level work plans and expenditures to ensure synergies, and also with focal points assigned to each project to ensure effective coordination, and commensurate budgets and human resources for monitoring, reporting and strategic communications and outreach as a programme. The functioning of the Global Steering Committee more as an information exchange platform than a strategic review and direction setting mechanism for the programme is also linked to the profile of the programme coordinator, who is the chair of the GSC. The profile of the programme leader needs to be carefully crafted.

⁷ The gap between the departure of Jeremy Turner and appointment of Jacqueline Alder.

Box 3: Ocean Partnerships project's low integration into the programme

The Ocean Partnerships Project (OPP) was somewhat isolated from the rest of the programme from the outset: being implemented by the World Bank, it had its own reporting, monitoring and review mechanisms aligned to World Bank procedures. Even though the World Bank was part of the programme governance arrangements, its participation and reporting ebbed over time. The programme progress reports did not have any coverage of OPP's progress. The World Bank reviewed the project and restructured it significantly, but this was not reported to the program Steering Committee. No implementation documents were made available for this evaluation despite follow-up. However, the evaluation was able to obtain basic details from in-person interviews with persons involved in the project. Given the lack of information on the OPP, the following texts provide a rudimentary understanding of the intent and its performance.

One reason for the opacity around OPP was that the project was an aberration even in the Bank's portfolio: it operated very differently from the standard projects; it was not aligned to the loan portfolio and there was no link to any national programme with loan arrangements. Also, where the Bank usually interacts with governments, the counterparts in the OPP were all NGOs. Its scale was very small compared to the typical Bank engagement (USD 100 million). The project made sense only because the Bank was designing a model - Global Partnership on Oceans (GPO), which was experimenting with several types of financing. However, with several changes in operations, the GPO did not evolve. The redesigned Pro Blue program represents the bank's approach: to fisheries and oceans governance, alignment of trust funds with loan portfolio and a reduction in thematic and small loans portfolios. Thus, the project remained somewhat isolated.

As an implementing agency the Bank envisaged only a funds transfer to executing agencies but did not budget Bank staff time for OPP design or supervision of the project. Initially, the target was for each of the four ecosystem approachers to come up with two business cases; and at least two of them were to be funded. The business cases were to become pilots for larger future investments by the Bank and government partners. However, most business plans coming from the EAs did not fulfil the Bank's safeguard requirements. Also, some elements of the projects, especially the lining up of investors, were found to be overambitious and unlikely to be attained within the scope of the project. However, as investment mobilization was not under control of the ecosystem approaches, the outcomes had to be modified.

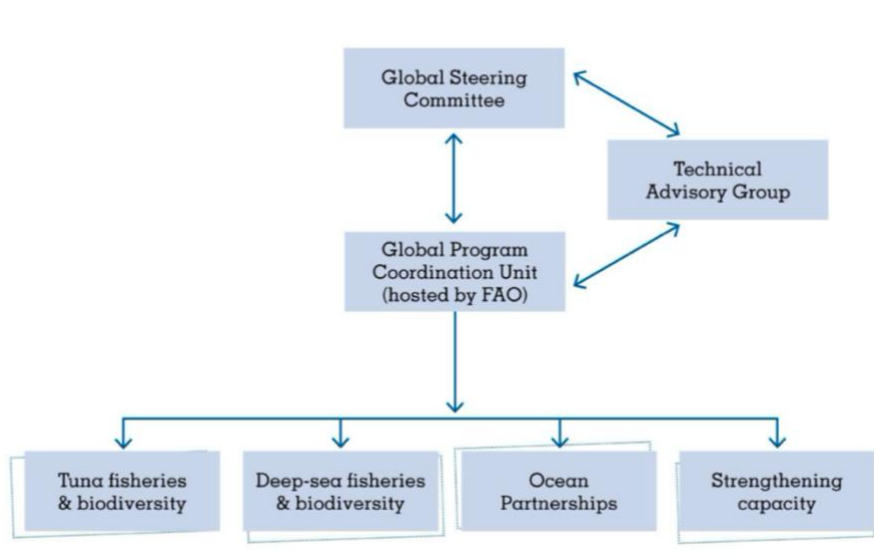
Resultantly, there was a major restructuring of the project, with downscaling of objective and outcomes, and more involvement by the Bank in appraising risks and quality assuring the business cases. This led to a revival and completion of several outputs.

Source: interviews with World Bank staff associated with OPP

63. **Governance mechanisms.** The rightful role of the Global Steering Committee in the programme was to guide the implementation of a programmatic approach, maximize inter-project synergies and promote strategic communications to anchor stakeholders and specifically GEF, based on a synthesis of the programme level results and good practices from the projects. In practice, the Global Steering Committee merely acted as an annual information exchange platform besides taking on record the progress reports from projects. The post-facto coordination added little value in terms of direction setting and recalibration of the programme and project components, as the GSC did not indulge in discussions of rationale: there were no deliberations on how projects were coordinating related activities, e.g. the area-based management in Deep-Sea and Capacity projects. There were no discussions on the lack of information from the OPP and its impact on progress reporting at the programme level, and how to deal with the same. There was little reflection on how projects were reporting on impacts 'below water' in respect of enhanced management capacities, better implementation of ecosystem approaches and biodiversity conservation practices. Also missing was effort towards harvesting high-level strategic messages that needed to be conveyed not only to GEF but also to other anchor stakeholders.

64. The programme in general did not adequately avail of its various technical expertise panels, especially in peer review, and assurance of key technical outputs and findings. The GSC did not question why Technical Advisory Group with the role of providing guidance on specific technical issues and to provide quality assurance of the outputs of the programme, was never convened. The explanation offered was that none of the projects expressed need for TAG support, however several TAG members had been contacted individually for their specific expertise. The evaluation notes that the TAG could have been used more effectively within the programme coordination resources, which remained insufficiently utilized at the end of the programme. In comparison, the OPP made more fruitful use of the GloTT, which had a work plan and developed strong messaging around principles and good practices for sustainable management of shared highly migratory fish stocks, however, there were no interactions with the rest of the programme.

Figure 7: Programme governance mechanisms (schematic from evaluation terms of reference)



Source: Programme framework document

65. The weaknesses in the programme governance emanate from the design of programme coordination as an afterthought rather than as the driver determining the programme logic for setting roles and interlinkages of the individual projects. The Coordination project's profile and resources as a medium-sized project and the authority of the programme coordinator and the Steering Committees was not communicated or enacted strongly enough to demonstrate leadership and decision-making over the full-sized projects, which were implemented rather autonomously, and without any suo moto initiatives to enhance synergies and effectiveness. Resultantly, the vision of the ABNJ as a programme of four projects did not percolate inside the projects; it derived its identity only in the external communications but not in implementation arrangements. The different starting dates of various projects only exacerbated the coordination challenges.
66. There was no reporting against programme indicators. Program level reports were merely an assembly of reports from individual projects. The fourth meeting of the GSC (July 2015) noted the absence of indicators which go beyond what will be achieved under the different projects, agreed on a set of draft programme level indicators (presented as Appendix 2)

and set-up a working group to develop these.⁸ However, subsequent Steering Committee meetings never discussed the indicators, and no programme level reports contains any reporting on the draft indicators or on the coordination and collaboration matrix of similar activities among projects. The evaluation also learned that retro-fitting indicators that were not in the approved programme document and were numeric rather than qualitative caused concerns to some partners, besides entailing resource implications for programme coordination.

67. Neither the GEF Coordination Unit in FAO nor focal points at GEF SEC pointed out the lack of reporting against indicators that the programme partners had initiated invites further elaboration. The GEF Coordination Unit in FAO plays an important role in programme formulation as well as in monitoring and quality assurance of progress reporting. The rapid expansion of FAO's GEF portfolio (projects aggregating to over USD 1 billion in budgets under implementation) over the past few years has placed increasing bandwidth constraints on the GEF Coordination unit. With each officer following several projects at a time, qualitative interactions between the GEF coordination unit and project staff over programme progress and results have been fewer than necessary. Similarly, at the GEF SEC, the excessive portfolio loads on managers have led to rising demand for more succinct, strategic, higher level messages on progress towards impacts rather than progress reports reporting on activities and outputs. This need has remained unfulfilled in the programme, until very recently.⁹
68. The evaluation notes that the programme under-budgeted human resources for programme coordinator, M&E specialist and communications specialist. Against a budget of 51 weeks for the programme coordinator (which translates into 25 percent of FTE), the program coordinator's time allocation was 5 percent, or about 10 weeks over a four-year implementation. There was also a gap of 11 months when the position remained vacant. Also, the positions of M&E and communications specialist for the programme were under-budgeted, and later supported from the Tuna project resources. Yet, as per the latest data, the Program Coordination project had spent only 77 percent of the GEF grant (USD 353 637 from the USD 458 716 funds received).¹⁰

⁸ In this context, the GSC proposed that outcomes and indicators which are similar across project be identified and that, on that basis, the possible formulation of programme-level outcomes and the merging of the corresponding indicators be considered. In addition, a small working group on programmatic indicators including representatives of all four projects was proposed and the chair called for nominations. This group should report back to the GSC three months after this meeting in October 2015.

⁹ GEF SEC staff observed the need for the program to post more frequent high-level updates on transformational changes and value-for-money assessments, such as the recent presentation made by FAO: 'What has GEF got for its USD 50 million?'

¹⁰ Budget statements provided by programme staff.

Finding 10. Important lessons have been learned and applied by FAO in subsequent GEF programmes, especially the Coastal Fisheries Initiative such as a partnership framework document and a contribution from child projects to programme monitoring, communications and other common elements.

69. ABNJ is FAO's first GEF programme and the first experience implementing simultaneous projects with a diversity of partners, many of whom were working together for the first time. Therefore, there were several unknowns. Even though the programme suffered from these challenges, many lessons were learned by partners and have been used well in design of subsequent GEF programmes. The evaluation specifically took note of FAO's Coastal Fisheries Initiative in this regard (Box 4). In another GEF-supported programme (Drylands), a new approach was adopted for programme coordination. Where in the ABNJ, the role of programme coordination automatically fell on the agency with the biggest delivery portfolio and budgets; in the Drylands programme, the coordination role was open to competition among partnering agencies, the premise being that programme coordination skills were not automatic based on the magnitude of delivery.

Box 4: Lessons learned from the ABNJ Program in the Coastal Fisheries Initiative

Three salient features explain the superiority of the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI) design from a programmatic approach.

The first is a programme-level roles and responsibilities of implementing agencies, formulated in the Program Partnership project which has the six implementing agencies in a structured partnership arrangement across the programme, including the various child projects. Such an arrangement was missing in the ABNJ programme, and the lack of visibility of the OPP throughout the programme is partly a result of this gap.

The second feature of the CFI is a well-fleshed out communication and knowledge sharing strategy, which recognizes upfront the need to make '...the whole bigger than the sum of its parts by contributing to global knowledge sharing and awareness raising on coastal fisheries management.' To ensure adequate involvement and contributions from all the projects, the oversight of CFI communications and knowledge sharing is vested in the CFI communications team, whose members are the project coordinators of CFI projects and communication staff from CFI partners. The team convenes bi-monthly. FAO coordinates communication and knowledge sharing activities, as part of its responsibility in the CFI Global Partnership project. To this effect, FAO has dedicated communication experts and supporting staff at national, regional and global level.

The third feature of the CFI is the allocation of a sizeable share (25-30 percent) of each child project's budget for monitoring, knowledge management and communications. This ensures sufficient resources for important functions that were poorly funded in the ABNJ.

According to the common programme leader for both programmes, the CFI programme is a vast improvement in implementing a programmatic approach, based on the initial experiences of the ABNJ. New lessons being learned in implementing the CFI will now inform the design of a possible follow-on phase of the ABNJ Program.

Source: Interviews with FAO staff and CFI programme documents

2.3.3 Communications and knowledge management

Finding 11. The projects collectively generated a wealth of knowledge on effective governance and sustainable use of ocean resources; however, the programme did not have a structured lesson-learning and communications targeted at specific interest groups and stakeholders.

70. An enormous amount of knowledge and experience has been generated in the programme, with significant contributions from all four projects. The knowledge has also been put to good use on the water; however, the programme did not have mechanisms for systematically integrating the knowledge; as a result, both the content and the networks in projects remained fragmented.
71. As mentioned in the assessment of project coordination, resources allocated to communications and knowledge management were miniscule: USD 84 000 under the coordination project, and USD 57 000 for the Common Oceans portal, aggregating to just over 0.28 percent of GEF funding. The evaluation learned that the Tuna project provided additional support for communications and knowledge management, yet, the overall magnitude of resources would seem very low in relation to the value of strategic communications that the programme offers at a global and regional level.
72. The programme's major contributions to knowledge management and outreach are: the publications on ABNJ issues compiled by the various projects; the communities of practices developed by various projects; the various workshops and high-level policy dialogue events convened under the programme; and social media and electronic outreach from the Common Oceans portal. There has been a steady increase in traction as can be seen from the website and social media analytics (Table 19).
73. However, the evaluation notes these as more as passive consumption rather than active engagement with anchor stakeholders and influencers, with little evidence on how this outreach has translated into policy decisions or positions around international discussions.

Table 19: Salient details of knowledge communication and outreach

Knowledge and outreach content	Details
ABNJ publications on country office portal	129 (Tuna 70, Deep-Sea 35, OPP 15, Capacity 9)
Communication products	37 (Tuna 9, Deep-Seas 11, OPP 10, Capacity 7)
Website hits (January-June)	221 in 2014 to 1086 in 2019 (more than five-fold increase)
Twitter followers	25 000 FAO FISH, 10 000 FAOPESCA
Newsletter mail list	7461 reads of 8 issues, average 900 per issue
Media mentions	More than 150 mentions, with more than 50 for Tuna project
ABNJ workshops and policy dialogues	
ABNJ workshops and High-level policy dialogue events	8 high-level policy dialogue events; 135 attendees, more than 50 continue interaction through membership in communities of practice and Regional Leaders Program beneficiaries GEF events including IW Conferences: Cancun, Marrakech, Vietnam
Knowledge networks	
Communities of Practice	
COP – Fisheries, Climate Change	57 members, including 18 core members
COP-Multi-sector Area Management	51 members, including 10 core members

Knowledge and outreach content	Details
Global Think Tank	13 experts
Tuna Compliance Network ¹¹	20 members including 12 core group members
Contributions to IW LEARN	<p>Four experience notes:</p> <p>Capacity Development Needs and Existing Efforts in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.</p> <p>Capacity Development as a Key Aspect of a New International Agreement on BBNJ and Possible Modalities for Addressing Area-Based Management, Environmental Impact Assessment, and Marine Genetic Resources in the Context of Climate Change.</p> <p>Mainstreaming the Management and Conservation of Sharks and Bycatch in Pacific High Seas Tuna Fisheries.</p> <p>Caribbean Billfish Project</p> <p>Participation in two IW Conferences in Sri Lanka, 2016 and Morocco, 2018.</p>

Source: Common Oceans portal and progress reports

74. The evaluation holds that given the programme's global influence, the communication strategy should have included segmented strategies for different stakeholder groups: international organizations with mandates under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), regional and global sector-level organizations, national government agencies. The evaluation believes that the generic and 'passive'¹² outreach tools used by the programme alone are not effective for policymakers, and there should have been additional avenues of influence and awareness raising, with persons with relevant ocean mandates, negotiators, media persons, conservationists and other groups. The Communication Strategy document (Section 4: Target audiences, page 9 and 10) lists ten stakeholder groups and the specific messaging for each to be developed under the programme. The advocacy focus was much lower on national governments and other national stakeholders, although they have a huge influence on the progress of the BBNJ negotiations, which was one of the Capacity project's main areas of work. This was also pointed out by several stakeholders in the Tuna project.
75. There was no provision for structured lesson learning and experience-sharing between project partners and interested groups, identification of good practices, development, dissemination and feedback on communication products. Roles and responsibilities for knowledge management were shared by both the Capacity project and the Coordination project, which also led to ambiguities over accountability. While the management of the knowledge portal and external communications were with the Coordination project, synthesizing lessons from all the projects was an output under the Capacity project. However, the expected synthesis of lessons was not carried out. The reasons cited were that time and resources in the Capacity project were insufficient to complete these tasks as the other projects were still under implementation as of end 2018. The evaluation notes that it was unrealistic for the capacity project without commensurate structures and

¹¹ The TCN is organized around a Core Group composed of officers (generally two) responsible for compliance in the five tuna RFMO Secretariats. In addition, the TCN includes an Extended Group of experts in compliance and MCS, including officials from Compliance Committees and equivalent in the RFMOs, who participate in the exchange of information for specific projects.

¹² The term passive is used by the evaluator to convey that social media outreach did not involve active targeting and push strategies targeting specific stakeholder groups; for instance, there were no call to action or active engagement using even the free social media poll tools. The outreach was limited to just sending the messages and tracking eyeballs.

specialist resources to systematically harvest the knowledge from projects and provide the programme level synthesis. This task should have been under the Program Coordination and using the expertise of the Technical Advisory Group and Global Think Tank.

Finding 12. Knowledge networks were fragmented and not put to effective use in the programme. External communications focused on passive consumption (social media and web-based information) but did not have segmented strategies for key stakeholder groups (negotiators, programme partners, GEF, policymakers, media, etc.).

76. While the Capacity project attracted leading experts to join the communities of practice, due efforts were not made to engage them fruitfully in bringing about an improved or shared understanding among diverse stakeholders on the complexities of the BBNJ. Particularly missing was an effort to bring together the fisheries and conservationists, besides other sectors (mining, etc.) to deliberate these key issues identified in the community of practice:
- i. What are the overlaps, similarities and differences among the approaches in the management of ABNJ and its resources that are promoted by regional and global organizations (e.g., International Maritime Organization (IMO), ISA, UNEP, CBD, FAO) and how can they be coordinated/harmonized?
 - ii. How can the fragmented legal framework in ABNJ at the regional level be addressed?
 - iii. What are good examples of convening bodies (e.g. political bodies such as Caribbean Community, CARICOM) that can bring various stakeholders together at the regional level?
 - iv. How can best practices and approaches in the management of ABNJ, e.g. in the Pacific (oceans capes), in the Mediterranean (use of memoranda of understanding), in the North Atlantic (Sargasso Sea initiative) be identified and disseminated?
 - v. What do national government agencies need to do in order to mainstream best practices in ABNJ into existing authorities and processes?
77. These questions were central to the BBNJ discussions given the contentious positions of diverse stakeholders on issues such as multi-sector area management, environment impact assessments, and pure issues of jurisdiction. The programme agencies and the communities of practice were best placed to deliberate these issues under the informal settings of the programme. The opportunity to bring together the diverse regional and global organizations, and sector representatives to clarify positions and bridge differences through technical discussions was not sufficiently utilized. The policy briefs developed under the Capacity project while useful and even referred to in the BBNJ discussions, cannot be a substitute for more structured stakeholder discussions.
78. The lack of involvement of fisheries organizations (both tuna and deep-sea) in the policy briefs and the policy dialogue events conducted by the Capacity project further exemplify the fragmentation of knowledge management in the programme.
79. The OPP's use of the Global Think Tank in a systematic manner is a good example of harnessing technical expertise towards effective advocacy. The Think Tank had a series of engagements spread over three years to examine incentive-based approaches for management of highly migratory fisheries in the high seas. The deliberations led to the identification of nine principles which could be used to create right mixes of regulatory (push) and incentive (pull) based tools. The GloTT produced a set of knowledge products

on principles, legal instruments and innovating tools, drawing from the project's business cases in the four regions.

80. The GloTT also provided technical advice to test business incentives, and evaluated the performance of the project on the ground. A similar approach could have been considered for the Technical Advisory Groups and the Communities of Practice of the Capacity project. The poor use of expert advisory groups in all projects except the OPP leads to one of two inferences: either the projects did not adequately budget for engaging identified experts or did not deliberate on the best use of the expertise, or merely enlisted them to enhance credibility of the programme document. While the impact of this suboptimal use on the programme results is indeterminate, the evaluation believes they did not get the opportunity to add value to the quality of results: this can clearly be stated for the Capacity project.

Finding 13. The programme did not effectively engage in media outreach to communicate flagship results and generate discussion on marine ecosystem and common ocean issues.

81. Raising media awareness on ABNJ issues was one of the communication plan's pillars. The communications strategy identified press broadcasts - briefings, senior officer media interviews and feature stories - as elements to achieve the communication objectives delivering information on the programme and the common oceans theme to large audiences. The Capacity project aimed at developing a Public Outreach Network (PON) through the support of Nausicaa. The project developed a very informative media guide which can be considered a general primer for media and also policymakers on the economic, social and environmental benefits associated with the ABNJ. It raises the profile of conservation and governance issues to be addressed. Media interest in ABNJ issues was found to be lukewarm as tested in the Nausicaa event in 2017.
82. The programme observed the need to cultivate interest of reputed and celebrity anchors and editors in reporting ABNJ issues; however, the evaluation could find no evidence in terms of actions to identify champion media persons, provide more focused training on ABNJ issues, and build a constituency of influencers around the major lessons that were emerging from the programme. At a minimum, a more targeted media briefing and engagement around key results from the programme could have been part of the communications plan. The good results on bycatch assessment and mitigation, including sharks, seabirds, cetaceans and sea turtles, is a particular example in this regard. However, there are several other good results that the evaluation considers media-worthy and could have been leveraged well:
- i. how all tuna RFMOs are demonstrating stewardship for sustainable tuna fishing, by incorporating harvest strategy and improving monitoring, control and surveillance;
 - ii. how 18 new vulnerable marine ecosystems have been accorded protection;
 - iii. how a low-cost innovation in Pakistan gill-net fishing is saving sharks, cetaceans and turtles;
 - iv. how communities, conservationists and regulators are coming together to save billfish in the Caribbean.
83. GEF programmes also require submission of knowledge products to the IW: Learn portal to contribute to GEF's overall knowledge management outcomes. As part of this requirement, 1 percent of the total budget was to develop experience notes for IW: Learn outcomes. In all, the programme had four experience notes, two by the Capacity project

and two by the OPP. The two papers developed by the Capacity project focused on capacity development needs in context of the BBJN agreement. Whether these were the most relevant and significant lessons from the programme for sharing with the IW: Learn can be debated, considering the significant knowledge generated from other projects.

2.3.4 Co-financing

Finding 14. The programme mobilized more than the targeted magnitude of co-financing, from a diversity of contributors. Regional governance bodies and private sector brought in important contributions.

84. The GEF Guidelines for Co-financing define co-financing as financing that is additional to GEF project financing and supports the implementation of a GEF-financed project or programme and the achievement of its objective(s) (GEF, 2018f. p. 7). GEF reports co-financing under several sub-headings: grants, loans, equity, guarantee, in-kind, public investment, etc., from a range of sources (GEF agencies, donor agencies, governments, private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), beneficiaries, etc).
85. The overall co-financing raised by the ABNJ Program was USD 370 million, **representing a co-finance ratio of 7.55:1 over GEF gross funding of USD 50 million**. The amounts mobilized were far in excess of the value of USD 222 million proposed in the programme framework document. The largest amounts were mobilized by the Tuna project (USD 264 million) and Deep-Sea project (USD 80 million), together accounting for nearly 93 percent of the co-financing for the entire programme (Table 20). The precise values for the OPP have been estimated roughly on the higher side (assuming the co-finance by the World Bank at USD 10 million and CI at USD 10 million were brought in and those of other OPP partners not materializing in view of the downscaling of the project's investment outcomes).

Table 20: Project-wise co-financing of ABNJ Program

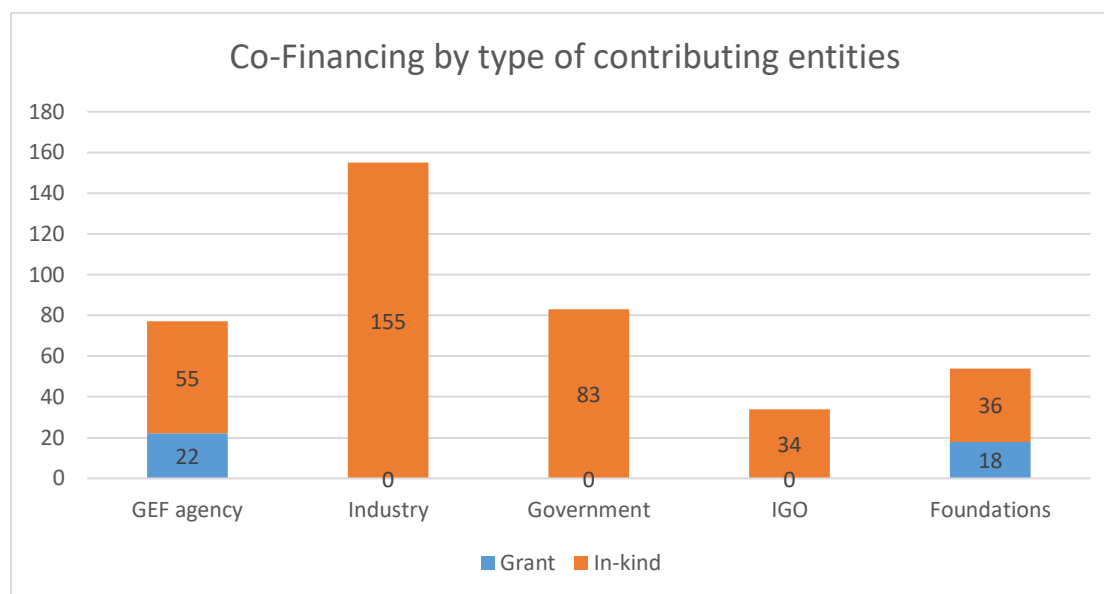
Project	GEF funding	Co-financing proposed	Co-financing realized
Tuna	26.53	143.90	264.70
Deep-Seas	7.37	27.49	80.08
Ocean Partnership Fund	8.74	38.87	20.00 (estimates)
Capacity	0.92	4.08	4.83
Coordination	0.46	0.95	0.954
Program	44.02	222.74	370.56

Source: Co-financing details provided by project teams

86. The programme received co-financing from at least 47 entities, covering a wide diversity of contributors. The largest contributions by type of entity were from: industry/private sector (USD 155 million, entirely in-kind); governments (USD 83 million, of which over USD 80 million from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (US-NOAA) alone, entirely in-kind); GEF agencies (USD 55 million, including USD 22 million in grant), foundations/NGOs (USD 36 million including USD 18.7 million in grant), and intergovernmental organization/RFMOS (USD 35 million, entirely in kind). The major contributors from each category were: GEF agencies - FAO, World Bank and UNEP-WCMC;

Industry - ISSA (Ghana), Fishing Industry Association (FFIA, Fiji), Southern Indian Ocean Deepsea Fishers Association (SIODFA) and Sealord International; Foundations: WWF, Conservation International, Global Ocean Forum (GOF), BirdLife International (BLI) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); RFMOs - Inter-American-Tropical-Tuna-Commission (IATTC), Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO); and governments (Fiji, Ghana, United States of America). A full list of co-financing by entity is provided in Appendix 4. Figure 8 provides a visual comparison by type of entity.

Figure 8: Co-financing composition



Source: Compiled from co-financing tables provided by child projects

87. Grant (cash) co-financing, at USD 41 million represented only 11 percent of co-financing, and was contributed from only four entities - FAO, World Bank, WWF and Conservation International and went into only the Tuna and OPP projects. Thus, a huge share (89 percent) of co-financing was from in-kind resources.

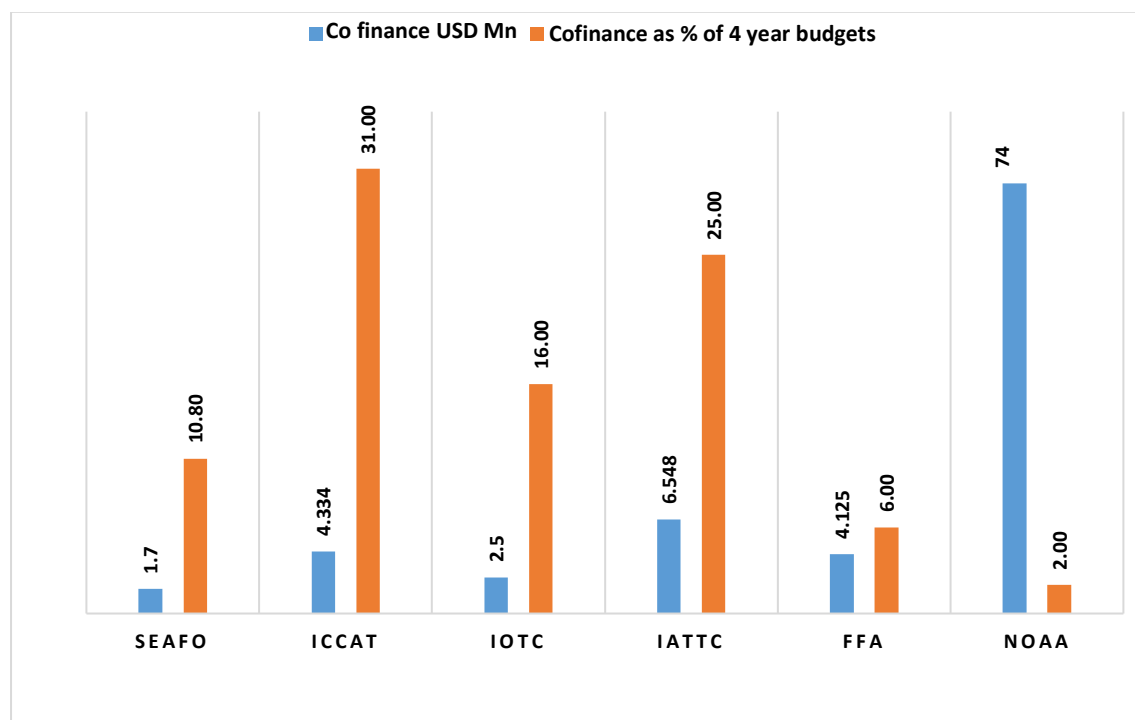
Finding 15. In-kind financing represented a significant share, but its composition, and details of specific utilization in the programme remained unclear and somewhat opaque, raising the prospect of inflated estimates.

88. **In-kind contributions: a black box.** Specifically, for in-kind co-financing, GEF requires that the resources are accounted for with the same diligence as other co-financing, and that co-financing should be valued as the lesser of the cost or market value of inputs provided. However, this diligence does not seem to have been followed in general by co-financing entities. Whether and to what extent the co-finance value is notional or actual expenditure specific to the programme is a critical distinction that is missing. The evaluation was unable to obtain breakdowns of in-kind resources in terms of human resources (number of staff, and percentage of their time allotted to ABNJ Programme); contribution to infrastructure, equipment and hard assets acquired in the programme; and administrative overhead counted toward ABNJ co-financing. Responses were somewhat ambiguous as to how co-financing was actually interpreted; whether additional staff were recruited for ABNJ

Program activities; and whether the ABNJ Program activities added to the expenditures of the entities or were the co-financing values merely extracted from existing expenditures. This is noted even for entities that had provided co-financing estimates in the programme document.

89. In the absence of specific and stringent guidelines on detailing of co-financing estimates, the evaluation notes a risk of mechanistic and potentially inflated estimates of contributions, which defeats the real purpose behind co-financing requirements. Interpretational ambiguities can arise if (as was pointed by some respondents) entities apply the definition of co-financing loosely to include all relevant areas of their regular work programmes that are aligned to the programme objectives. RFMOs, the key institutional partners for the programme, brought in USD 34 million, representing 9 percent of total co-financing, all from in-kind resources. To have a rough idea of how significant the ABNJ Program was, the evaluation looked at the published expenditure data of a selection of RFMOs to compare the co-finance figures as a percentage of activities that could be considered similar to the work undertaken in the programme. The US-NOAA, a government agency and the largest contributor of co-finance in the programme was also considered for this comparison.
90. The comparison (Figure 9) shows that co-financing for the ABNJ Program ranged from 6 percent (Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, FFA) to 31 percent (ICCAT) of the four-year expenditure budgets of five RFMOs that made significant in-kind contributions. Given the mandates of RFMOs, ABNJ Program activities can be expected to have a strong alignment with work plans of RFMOs, and thus reflect high percentage in terms of imputed co-financing.

Figure 9: Co-financing by select fisheries management organizations



Source: Prepared by evaluation from published accounts statements of select institutions

91. To understand these more specifically, the evaluation considered the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency's example. FFA reported co-financing of USD 4 125 million for the Tuna

project (Table 20). At the same time, FFA's annual expenditure for FY 2016-17 as reported in its consolidated statement (latest available data) was USD 29 001 million (Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, 2017, Table 2, p.11) divided under five outputs: High level advice (5.01), Fisheries management (5.65); Fisheries development (3.54), Fisheries Operations (8.58) and Corporate Services (4.54). Logically assuming that the GEF programme engagements relate to the first three outputs, the co-finance estimate of USD 0.75 million per year represents over 9 percent of FFA's relevant annual expenditure. Based on these, the evaluation considers that regional institutions have made realistic co-financing estimates for the ABNJ Program.

92. Similarly, the high co-financing estimates given by industry can be justified within their regular working budgets. For instance, in the Tuna project's on-board training components such as electronic monitoring, vessel observers training and bycatch mitigation good practices, it is reasonable for partners to include applicable vessel operational costs in co-financing. With over 100 skipper workshops conducted, the co-financing values can be significant, even though they may not be a real expenditure by the project.

Figure 10: Illustration of how Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency arrived at areas beyond national jurisdiction co-financing estimates

Expenditure head	Budget per year (USD)	Co-financing (5.5 years) (USD)
Provision of fisheries management and policy advice to members	100 000	550 000
Provision of MCS goods and services	250 000	1 375 000
Fisheries development support	200 000	1 100 000
Trade and market access	100 000	550 000
Ecosystems approach	100 000	550 000
Total	750 000	4 125 000

Source: Co-financing data provided by Tuna project

Finding 16. The programme did not identify and secure commitments toward recurrent expenditures (related to equipment and hard assets), which are an important form of co-financing with significant implications for sustainability.

93. **Estimation of recurrent expenditures.** The Tuna project example of Ghana provides an important lesson linking co-financing with sustainability of results: despite the success of the project, there is a big risk to the continued operation of the monitoring systems as the government has not budgeted recurrent expenditures (suspended as of December 2019) – budgets for human resources, operating and maintenance costs for the infrastructure and hard assets, etc. funded by the GEF project. In line with GEF requirements, there could have been discussions with beneficiaries and governments (Fiji and Ghana) to provide estimates for 'government recurrent expenditure' for operational costs, with firm commitments before the installation and commissioning of the project-funded equipment. More importantly, the projects could have sought and ideally secured co-finance commitments for recurrent expenditure before undertaking the capital expenditures. Besides reflecting co-financing in line with GEF-specified categories, this would also provide a check point for ensuring sustainability.

94. Another aspect to be noted is that while GEF programmes can attract several forms of co-financing, there are limited options for co-financing transnational initiatives such as Common Oceans, in comparison with national GEF programmes: loan, investment and equity channels can be difficult in the absence of sovereign jurisdiction. This can cause excessive reliance on 'in-kind resources' to arrive at the qualifying ratio for project approvals.
95. The main lessons from the assessment on co-financing are: i) GEF should issue more precise guidelines that remove scope for ambiguity in the interpretation and calculation of what goes into co-financing; ii) progress reports could include account-certified co-finance tables carrying breakdown details (as referred to in paragraph 90); iii) the minimum co-finance ratio requirements need not be applied rigidly: guidelines should include provisions for exemption with adequate justification based on specific contexts of the application; and iv) a compulsory category of recurrent expenditures should be included against all capital expenditures for infrastructure and fixed assets funded by GEF projects.

2.3.5 Factors affecting performance

96. The ABNJ Program and its child projects constituted a complex, multi-disciplinary, multi-year, multi-regional intervention with global and regional dimensions. The evaluation identified the following factors of performance that supported or debilitated delivery effectiveness.

Enabling factors

97. **Domain leadership, comparative advantage and credibility of implementing agencies and executing partners.** The programme's success is rooted in the authoritative statures of the implementing agencies. In particular, FAO's global mandate, domain leadership and institutional networks in the fisheries sector make it the best placed if not the only intergovernmental agency to lead the programme with its strong fisheries governance orientation. However, other key agencies brought the same comparative advantages in their respective projects. The implementing agencies have long experience of managing large global programmes and both FAO and World Bank were able to effectively troubleshoot and steer their projects to satisfactory levels of delivery – the programme could have been lot worse without the leadership of the respective GEF agencies.
98. **Effective partnership management.** The effective management of diverse profiles of partner institutions without any adverse developments were key to the programme's numerous achievements. Key partners delivered well against their expected deliverables and managed the institutional relationships rather well, and improved trust and mutual perceptions among NGOs and intergovernmental agencies.
99. **Strong institutional commitment by fisheries sector institutions and private sector.** The fisheries sector institutions – RFMOs as well as industry – made stellar co-finance contributions to the programme and engaged actively in the programme's components to implement the transformational changes ideated in the programme. Without the commitment and ownership of private sector industry and the RFMO secretariats, the programme would have been unable to demonstrate the emerging impacts that made it a success.

Debilitating factors

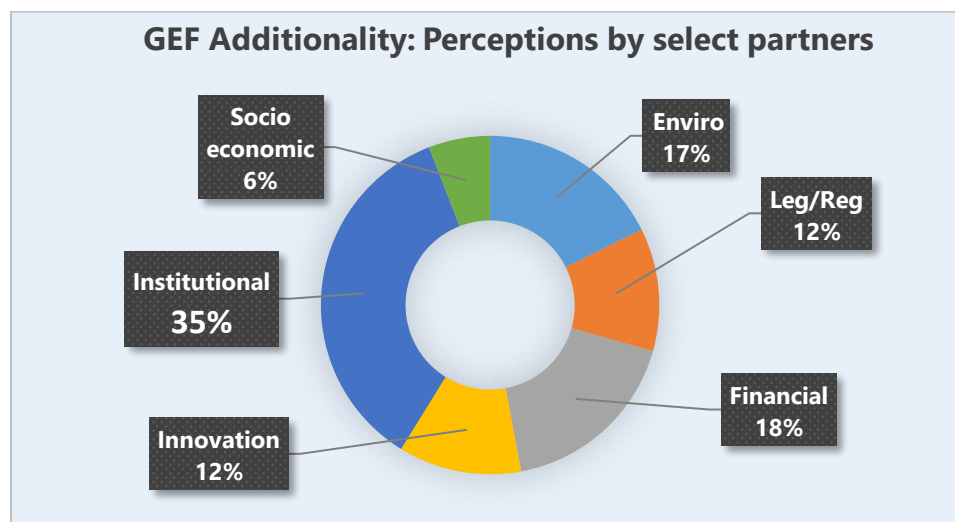
100. **Lack of programmatic approach.** The lack of a programmatic approach can be deduced from the absence of programme level indicators, under-resourced programme coordination and knowledge management, insufficient articulation and empowerment of programme leader/coordinator and Global Steering Committee in redirecting project level activities and reapportionment of budgets and use of unspent funds.
101. **FAO operational procedures.** FAO's institutional administrative enabling environment has been a subject of concern to several partners and has featured in several thematic and corporate evaluations. Administrative procedures slowed execution of letters of agreement, execution agreements and issue of tenders for procurement of goods and services. Lack of corporate operational mechanisms and tools for transfer of resources to execution agencies also affected FAO's role as GEF implementing agency. FAO's Operational Partners Implementation Modality facility became available when the programme was already under implementation. These causes were beyond the programme's influence.

2.3.6 GEF additionality

Finding 17. Several important results could not have been achieved without GEF funding. The most important dimensions of additionality as perceived by programme agencies were: institutional/governance, and financing for innovative/transformational techniques and pilots.

102. The new GEF guidelines (2019) require terminal evaluations of projects/programmes to assess GEF additionality in six dimensions: environmental; legal/ regulatory; financial; innovation; institutional/governance; and socio-economic. These guidelines have been introduced close to the programme's completion; therefore, the implementing agencies may not have explicitly taken these dimensions into account. Also, the additionality aspect was not analysed in this detail in the mid-term evaluation of the Tuna and Deep-Sea projects. This evaluation attempted to assess additionality as perceived by the programme leader, project leaders and some executing agencies tasked with implementation of the child projects. These perceptions were gauged in the main interviews or through specific follow-up questions.
103. Based on the discussions with key actors, the evaluation notes that the major dimensions of GEF additionality (in order of significance) have been: institutional (six counts), followed by equal ratings for financial and environmental (three counts each), and third place taken by legal/ regulatory and innovation (two counts each). Figure 11 shows the distribution of perceptions by dimension.
104. The institutional/governance additionality received the highest scores due to the common emphasis in all the projects on strengthening institutions of governance, especially RFMOs. The key outcomes of the programme, especially the Tuna project and OPP, are in the positive measures adopted by institutions to address sustainable management of fisheries and biodiversity conservation. These components could not have been delivered without the ABNJ Program resources, hence the strong GEF additionality.

Figure 11: Perceptions of GEF additionality dimensions by programme implementing partners



Source: Evaluation team

105. The strong environmental additionality element is linked to the institutional/governance additionality. The significant results in bycatch management are linked strongly to the ABNJ Program, as well as the increase in the areas under protection (18 VMEs) in the Deep-Sea project.
106. Even though the programme was able to achieve a co-financing ratio of 7:1, far in excess of the proposed levels, respondents did not consider financial additionality to be the main dimension of GEF additionality (this also echoes the observation on in-kind contributions being notional and not actual) Rather, financial additional is expected to be strong in GEF supported projects due to the inbuilt co-financing elements. The co-financing contributions from partners were linked to programme components reflecting their needs, priorities and goals.
107. A few important innovations – the installation of EMS in Fiji and Ghana, and the use of non-entangling fish aggregating devices — can be largely attributed to the project. GEF funding was crucial for these capital-intensive investments which were able to demonstrate results. The Tuna Spatial Structure exchange was organized by CI and partners to assemble knowledge and assess how to best apply modern molecular techniques to identify the spatial structure of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye stocks.
108. The socio-economic dimension received the lowest count, explained by the fact that by design, only the OPP had any components directly addressing community benefits. The business cases in Dominican Republic and Grenada were designed with the communities as primary beneficiaries from the recreation fishing arrangements, and active participants as parties to the conservation agreement.

2.4 Cross-cutting issues

2.4.1 Stakeholder engagement and partnerships

Finding 18. The ABNJ Program fostered a strong array of partnerships among implementing agencies and executing partners that had never worked before. Over time the partnerships have remained intact and even grown stronger and built trust between diverse stakeholders, although not without exceptions.

109. A key feature of the ABNJ Program, given its complexity and coverage, was the weave of partnerships composed of: international agencies (FAO, World Bank, UNEP), foundations and civil society organizations (WWF, ISSF, GOF), regional fisheries management organizations (the five tuna RFMOs and several deep-sea RFMOs, the FFA), national government agencies (Fiji, Ghana, Grenada,) private sector industry actors (members of the ISSA, OPAGAC, World Ocean Network, etc.) and others. In total, over thirty entities came together in the ABNJ Program. For several, it was the first experience of partnering with the implementing agencies. For instance, the programme represented an uncharted territory in the partnership between FAO and WWF. Also, the ABNJ was the first partnership between the World Bank and FAO that led to the two agencies collaborating on several more GEF projects.
110. The partnerships brought together complementing skills and advantages: the field networks of private sector actors and foundations, the institutional entry points in regional fisheries governance organizations, networks of influencers and negotiators connected to global negotiations on ABNJ issues, the scientific knowledge of research institutions and think tanks, and the links to policymakers and governments. In this regard, the involvement of the private sector, especially the strong support from vessel owners, skippers and processing industry, has been the key to transformational impact. The role of partners that enabled and managed private sector participation in the programme is worthy of specific acknowledgement.
111. Where new partnerships were built on one hand, some old partnerships were rekindled as well: the Tuna project served to revive the spirit of technical cooperation among RFMOs embodied in the original Kobe process. The programme was instrumental in bringing together all the RFMOs covering ABNJ - the five tuna RFMOs and the eight deep-seas RFMOs together to deliberate on ecosystem-based approaches and improve fisheries governance measures covering nearly all catches in the ABNJ.
112. Partners also made significant contributions in monitoring impacts, and some of the most telling evidence of reduction in overfishing, and the reduced mortality rates of large marine mammals has emerged from the continuous field monitoring by executing partners (International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), WWF, BLI) rather than the official programme monitoring mechanisms. The acceptance of this evidence by programme partners is not automatic, which underscores the important role of the programme's technical advisory networks (GloTT, TAG) in quality assuring the evidence. The evaluation learned that the GloTT provided useful inputs on assessments.
113. The most important observation made by several entities interviewed by the evaluation was that the programme helped **improve mutual understanding and reduced the trust deficit among various types of partners**; particularly between RFMOs and conservationists, and between governments and international NGOs. Two ground-breaking examples that the evaluation came across are: the progressive change in attitudes of several RFMO secretariats to work along with WWF as a programme executing agency

and member of the programme Steering Committee; and the strong partnership evolved between the government of Pakistan and the WWF implemented bycatch component, including the acceptance of WWF data on both bycatch and target catch, for policy decisions and compliance purposes in t-RFMOs. However, there were also some casualties in trying to foster these unconventional partnerships; the most prominent example being the stalemate in the OPP's subregional project in the Bay of Bengal Program over accepting funding from international NGO for project activities, as a result of which the subproject was dropped.

114. Most partnerships have endured and are likely to continue in future initiatives - as evidenced by the proposals emerging for a follow-on programme. The evaluation also noted that new partners are willing to join the programme, including reputed charitable and private foundations (such as Pew Charitable Trusts and Walton Foundation) and private sector players (OPAGAC, Thai Union, International Pole and Line Foundation).

Finding 19. Stakeholder engagement had scope for improvement especially in engagement with RFMO membership, and between fisheries and other stakeholders key to the BBNJ processes.

115. Amidst an overall successful experience in engaging with a diversity of stakeholders, there were a few deficiencies as well. The evaluation received specific feedback on the need for more consultations with members on the design of future phases. The second major gap was the failing on part of the Tuna, Deep-Sea and Capacity projects to bring together the stakeholders for specific activities around the BBNJ negotiations as part of the programme; instead, the uncoordinated actions between capacity and other projects led to some concerns by tuna stakeholders over non-engagement by the Capacity project to bring sector stakeholders in dialogue with environment conservation groups and others that had diverging views on the governance issues within the fishery sector and the impact on biodiversity. The third weakness, as covered in the communications and knowledge management section, was the lack of engagement of stakeholders in developing and disseminating key messages, and the lack of feedback channels on the external communications and even between projects.
116. The evaluation also has an observation on the relative weight and visibility of the three implementing agencies in the programme within the overall partnership. The programme is mainly perceived as an FAO-led programme, with FAO having a significant share of budgets and delivery responsibilities. In comparison UNEP, a key player in the biodiversity space, had a much smaller visibility at the programme level, and mostly through the UNEP-WCMC. World Bank involvement was confined to the OPP and almost invisible at the programme level. Whether this distribution was considered optimal could not be answered except through anecdotal references in interviews of implementing agencies and their executing partners. The evaluation had the impression that biodiversity and conservation advocacy partners of the partnership felt overshadowed by the fisheries governance parts of the programme. This perception also has its roots in the fact that the ABNJ Program was originally designed by the biodiversity and conservation partners but was later amended to a more prominent fisheries governance programme led by FAO, as the initial proposals had several major components in the fisheries sector, in which FAO had several institutional entry points besides a direct mandate. That the next phase of the programme will have the same implementing agencies and a somewhat similar distribution of budgets is rather unlikely.

117. In the GEF 7 programming directions (GEF, 2018j), the emphasis of biodiversity fisheries association is on mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes, and enlisting International Waters/Sustainable Fisheries as a delivery mechanism. At the same time, emphasis of the IW focal area is on sustainable fisheries, healthy coastal and marine ecosystems and [marine] pollution reduction - with biodiversity conservation not being a main pillar of the IW approach itself. It would thus be very important for GEF SEC to provide guidance on the primary entry points and the balance of the programme components, as these will define the primary implementing agency for the new programme.

Table 21: Ratings on stakeholder engagements and partnerships

Aspect	Rating	Description
Stakeholder engagement in design and implementation	Satisfactory (S)	Level of outcomes achieved as expected, there were no or minor shortcomings.
Partnerships	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Level of outcomes achieved exceeds expectations and there were no shortcomings.
Channels for feedback	MS	Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected; there were moderate short comings.
Overall	Satisfactory (S)	Level of outcomes achieved as expected, there were no or minor shortcomings.

2.4.2 Gender and environmental safeguards

Finding 20. Programme results framework did not include gender specific targets and indicators. Evidence of gender-friendly outcomes is anecdotal. Outreach activities demonstrated good gender balance.

118. There were no gender specific targets in the results framework of the programme document, and women are covered as part of the private sector in the socio-economic benefits articulation (section G of the programme framework document) and the full-sized projects. There were almost no components that engaged with communities in any project, except the Ocean Partnership project, which included challenge grants for active and productive participation of women in the business cases. Women's engagement in the high seas fishing is almost negligible, but rather high in processing and trading aspects, which were not covered in the programme. Accordingly, the GEF review sheet of the programme document noted programme description of socio-economic benefits including gender dimension to be overall good (Question 15a).
119. Within projects, the evaluation did not find any policies or proactive measures for gender equality in the selection of participants and beneficiaries from the programme's capacity development activities. Thus, any evidence of gender-friendly outcomes is anecdotal: in the Tuna project, the employment of women observers in Fiji's vessel monitoring systems was one such example. In the capacity project, 19 of the 44 Regional Leaders Program graduates (43 percent) were women. The Capacity project had a systematic documentation of the gender balance in activities, and ensured a good gender balance among participants, as can be seen in Table 22.

Table 22: Gender balance in Capacity project events

Activity/event under Capacity project	Women	Men	Women %
First ABNJ workshop	39	59	40%
Second ABNJ workshop	27	28	49%
2016 Regional Leader Program	19	25	43%
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ Prep Com 1	32	40	44%
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ Prep Com 2	21	19	53%
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ Prep Com 4	31	25	55%
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ IGC Org Meeting	43	39	52%
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ IGC Session 1	22	33	36%*
High-Level Policy dialogue BBNJ IGC Session 2	22	33	50%*
Nausicaa Global Media Forum	41	44	48%
First Policy brief on Capacity Development	19	24	44%
Second Policy brief on Capacity Development	8	4	67%
*7 and ** 5 participants did not specify gender at these events			

120. Environmental safeguards are not covered in this section, as they are a key part of the programme substance rather than a cross-cutting issue.

2.4.3 Sustainability

Finding 21. The ABNJ Program has generated a mix of results, some sustainable without further programme investments, while others require continued funding for recurring costs and expansion of coverage. The most sustainable results are those in institutional governance measures and adoption of standards and good practices: harvest strategies, monitoring and control systems, and bycatch management.

121. For assessment of sustainability, the evaluation used the GEF interpretation:

- i. The continuation/likely continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has come to an end, and its potential for scale-up and/or replication; interventions need to be environmentally as well as institutionally, financially, politically, culturally and socially sustainable.

122. The three main contributors to sustainability assessed by the evaluation are:

- i. legal instruments and regulatory frameworks representing global minimum standards on ABNJ governance;
- ii. institutional capacities and mechanisms towards adoption of standards and good practices;
- iii. resource mobilization for upscaling and expanding the initiatives introduced.

123. In this regard, there are several indicators the programme has contributed to on all three fronts, although most on the institutional capacities and mechanisms, as summarized below in Table 23.
124. **Institutional.** The programme has resulted in a mix of institutional governance improvements – which are irreversible – and on-ground investments in innovation and good practices, which require continuing investments (capital as well as operating expenditure) to be upscaled. Several results are expected to continue after the end of the programme.
125. **Tuna project.** Several results of the Tuna project are sustainable at the levels they have been introduced and expected to continue beyond the project. These include transformative governance measures such as: management strategy evaluation towards the adoption of management procedures for major stocks; adoption of harvest strategies; closer cooperation towards adoption and harmonization of monitoring control and surveillance systems by all five tuna RFMOs; the automated CLAV system for registration of vessels and the mandatory IMO numbers for all vessels; the installed EMS equipment in purse seine fishing vessels in Fiji, Ghana and Seychelles, and the adoption of minimum standards for electronic monitoring by all purse seine fishing vessels. Similarly, for bycatch management, the assessment of impacts of tuna fishing on sharks, sea turtles, seabirds and cetaceans, and the results from bycatch mitigation practices and alternative fishing methods introduced in the project (Pakistan tuna gill net fisheries) are expected to continue. The high involvement of RFMOs as well as the private sector (through the ISSF initiatives) in adoption and propagation of the good practices and innovative methods used in the project is a key contributor of the high sustainability of results, with positive impacts on the commercially most important fish species globally. Notwithstanding the impressive results, the evaluation noted risks of sustainability of the EMS in Ghana -where activities were discontinued with no government initiatives in place to fund recurrent operations and place human resources - and in Fiji -where administrative and legal procedures over the timely access of surveillance footages to the vessel owners threatens the very purpose of EMS installations.
126. **Deep-Sea project.** The major results of the Deep-Sea project, particularly the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems, are largely sustainable, as protocols have been put in place to avoid any future impact from fishing. Also, the possibility of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Deep-Sea has been practically eliminated in the developed regions. However, the impact on Deep-Sea ecosystems from other sectors (mining, renewable alternative energy, etc) remain unchanged by the project, the project could not produce changes in terms of improved multi-sector marine spatial planning, as there was little engagement with the actors representing these sectors. At the same time, programme design did not have scope for engagement with sectors other than fishing. While Component 4 of the Deep-Sea project was designed to engage all relevant sectors, the executing agency chose to do research projects rather than engage all sectors, including fisheries, in marine spatial planning.
127. **Capacity project.** The most sustainable result of the project is the pipeline capacity developed around ABNJ issues: the 44 regional leaders trained in the project, several of them are now formally engaged in the BBNJ negotiations and making increasing contributions towards the articulation of a definitive agreement. The other results of the project remained one-off even within the project, with practically no linkages with the sector-level capacity development initiatives in fisheries management and biodiversity conservation. On the other hand, the Capacity project, with an increasing focus on the BBNJ

agreement, has diverged from the rest of the programme, which was more downstream in nature. The successful conclusion of a BBNJ agreement, while desirable and useful, was not central to the GEF strategy, and not a specific priority in the IW or biodiversity focal areas. Also, with the BBNJ discussions reaching more mature states, sector and country positions are beginning to crystallize, and overt support of multilateral agencies to the negotiations would not be appropriate. Thus, GEF programme linkages to the BBNJ process shall most likely remain opportunistic and not strategic.

128. **Ocean Partnerships project.** Based on the limited information unearthed by the evaluation, the results of the OPP are not considered sustainable. First, the revised outcomes of the project, i.e. development of 'business cases' do not represent a significant threshold of change to be assessed for sustainability. Only a few business cases, specifically the Caribbean billfish project, have progressed to the stages of a definitive conservation plan and have attracted the next levels of funding. Meanwhile, the World Bank has revised its strategy for oceans, and seeks to implement it through the PROBLUE programme focusing on SDG 14 more directly, and with government partners. Thus, the financial grant modality that characterised the OPP will no longer be continued.

Table 23: Transformative and sustainable institutional changes through the programme¹³

Transformative, sustainable institutional results	Coverage
Consensus on the importance to adopt harvest strategies pre-agreed method to determine catch limits for major tuna stocks	All five t RFMOs
Harvest strategies in place	Six completed. Eight more under way
New RFMO measures for sharks and bycatch	Particularly in the Pacific
Non-entangling and bio-degradable FADs guidelines	Adopted in all four oceans
Protocols for fishing impact assessments on VMEs. Exploratory fishing protocols to fish in previously unfished areas	All eight deep-sea RFMOs
Designation of new VME sites	18 new sites
Comprehensive list of authorized vessels for tuna fisheries	Real time updates
Ecosystem approach to fisheries	All t-RFMOs agreed to develop plans All deep-sea RFMOS comply with Ecological pillar of EAF
Electronic monitoring system installations in vessels	Fiji and Ghana
University-certified training course in fisheries enforcement and compliance	Pacific Countries Fisheries Officers

Source: ABNJ project staff

129. **Legal.** The two major legal instruments to which the programme has contributed in relevant ways are: the Port State Measures Agreement, which is already in force, and the emerging international agreement under UNCLOS on conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of the ABNJ (BBNJ). The programme, through the Tuna project, supported the legal guide to facilitate implementation of the PSMA, and the update/consolidation of the comprehensive list of authorized vessels (CLAV), for use by

¹³ Further details on these can be found in the project evaluation reports for the Tuna, Deep-Sea and Capacity projects.

signatories to the PSMA. The BBNJ negotiations had not gathered momentum when the programme was designed and there were no specific components to address these needs. However, the programme responded through the Capacity project to strengthen capacities of emerging negotiators at the regional level, supplementing the ongoing negotiations. Component 4 of the Deep-Sea project also contributed significantly to the BBNJ process. However, stakeholders met by the evaluators at the BBNJ IGC 3 noted very low chances of an agreement in the near future, given the continuing deep divide in positions.

130. **Financial.** The programme financial resources – USD 50 million by GEF and over USD 370 million in co-financing – enabled a significant threshold of engagement that included¹⁴ all the tuna and several deep sea RFMOs; there is no other intervention that has had this universal coverage in terms of regional governance institutions. The magnitude and duration of engagement were instrumental in putting into place the transformative processes mentioned above. As a result, follow-on initiatives may not require the same magnitude of resources for demonstration of good practices. However, upscaling and sustaining the results would require new forms of financing, especially investment mobilization to modernize fishing methods and induct innovative technologies for monitoring and surveillance. These investments need to come from commercial finance rather than development finance channels, and will be aimed at the private sector more than intergovernmental channels. The increase in demand for sustainability certification (Marine Stewardship Council, etc) is a positive indication of the increasing consumer acceptance of sustainably harvested fish. However, as noted in paragraph 40, the financial sustainability of the EMS – the most capital-intensive component of the Tuna project - is at risk due to insufficient attention by the national governments involved.
131. **Political.** While the programme has effectively targeted institutional governance, the focus of engagement has been on RFMO secretariats and not the members themselves. The evaluation considers this a good risk management measure, as the RFMO secretariats are best placed to interface with the programme on behalf of a wider membership. This also ensures that only issues common to a large majority of members would be included in the programme. However, the evaluation also observed the potential risks of not engaging the membership sufficiently in programme design and on actions that may be agreed at RFMO secretariats but need to be implemented by individual member countries. The Tuna project evidenced instances of RFMO membership not being adequately apprised by secretariat of the engagements with the ABNJ Program, including over preparations for a follow-on phase. In comparison, the political risks of the programme (especially the Capacity project) in aligning with the BBNJ negotiations can be considerable, given the rather divergent positions of various sector stakeholders on issues of jurisdiction associated with multi-sectoral governance. The divergent perspectives of fisheries, mining and conservationist stakeholders have not been addressed duly in the programme, and there can be consequences of being perceived as promoting one perspective over others given that the programme has mainly focused on the fisheries sector, especially pelagic stocks.
132. **Social and cultural.** The evaluation was unable to assess sustainability on these dimensions in the absence of sufficient programme engagement on these issues - the OPP was the only project with links to coastal communities through the business cases. The Bill

¹⁴ All tuna RFMOs were involved, but general RFMO/As were less universally included. Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) members are mostly non GEF-eligible. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has some GEF-eligible countries and there were activities targeting them. But most of the work was with the new RFMO/As and regional sea programmes (RSPs) (Nairobi Convention and Permanent Commission for the South Pacific, CPPS).

fish project involved the communities in conservation and management plans, in the distribution of benefits from recreational fishing, and through market incentives (better prices for tuna harvested with by catch management practices). With many business cases yet to be implemented, this element could not be assessed at the results level.

Table 24: Rating on sustainability

	Rating	Description
Institutional	Likely (L)	There is little or no risk to sustainability.
Financial	Moderately Likely (L)	There are moderate risks to sustainability.
Political	Moderately Likely (ML)	There are moderate risks to sustainability.
Social	UA	Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.
Cultural	Unable to Assess (UA)	Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.
Overall	Moderately Likely	There are moderate risks to sustainability.

3. Lessons learned

Lesson learned 1. A robust programme design and partnership framework should precede and inform project designs. The ABNJ Program shows the importance of programmatic approaches to manage complex and multi-dimensional programmes, and the importance of getting the overall programme design, theory of change and the partnership frameworks in place before developing component project details. Also, appropriate operational modalities should be designed for efficient execution of contracting and procurement arrangements involving multiple partners. These lessons have been learned and applied by FAO in subsequent GEF programmes.

Lesson learned 2. Co-financing should be targeted to enhance sustainability. Recurring public expenditures hold the key to sustainability of technology and innovation funded from GEF grants. In interventions that fund capital goods and assets requiring recurrent operational costs on part of beneficiaries, it is important to secure upfront commitments of **recurrent public expenditure** as a specific component of co-financing, before irreversible expenditures are undertaken.

Lesson learned 3. Capacity development initiatives should focus on anchor influencers. Transformative changes in governance and practices require a minimum threshold of engagement to improve the knowledge, skills and capacities of anchor influencers - functionaries in key institutions, including in the private sector, who can drive change from within their institutions. Identification of the right mix of anchor influencers should be a part of the stakeholder engagement exercise in large and complex programmes.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The programme was strongly aligned with GEF focal area strategies and international frameworks relating to ABNJ issues, although the emphasis was more on fisheries governance than cross-sectoral governance and biodiversity conservation of the ABNJ as a whole. However, it lacked a veritable programmatic approach, with limited coherence among project components and missed opportunities for synergies.

133. The ABNJ Program was built around GEF objectives, especially outcomes under the International Waters and Biodiversity focal areas. However, the emphasis of design and resource allocations was more on outcomes relating to sustainable fisheries sector governance - including biodiversity impacts linked to fisheries operation - and less on biodiversity conservation from a cross-sectoral perspective. Whether the programmatic balance was appropriate could not be determined due to lack of upfront guidance on the programme's thrust and also because the programme was somewhat assembled from pre-existing project proposals addressing disparate components (there was no programme theory of change to guide the development of child projects).
134. Despite being approved as a programme, implementing agencies largely perceived, implemented and presented the ABNJ intervention as a 'tale of four projects' rather than a 'one programme with four interconnected child-projects'.

Conclusion 2. The programme catalyzed important transformational changes and practices in governance and operational aspects of fisheries and their impact on biodiversity. There is encouraging evidence that these are being mainstreamed by the institutional actors and early trends of positive impact of the programme reflect improvement in fish stocks health and in bycatch mitigation, starting by the quality and quantity of the information available.

135. The programme demonstrated leading contributions towards improving tuna fisheries governance, safeguarding of VMEs, strengthening monitoring, control and surveillance to combat IUU fishing, mitigating bycatch mortality trends, and building awareness of cross-sectoral aspects in effective governance of ABNJ. The major result areas have been in institutional governance in the fisheries sector and reduction in adverse fishery sector impact on biodiversity.
136. The programme also enabled improved understanding of cross-sectoral issues in the context of international legally binding instrument for conservation and protection of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
137. There are strong and promising indicators that the programme has contributed to measurable improvements to health of fishing stocks and decrease the mortality of sharks, marine mammals, reptiles and birds through adoption and propagation of good practices.

Conclusion 3. Implementation was marked by several project level adjustments to adapt to unforeseen challenges and factors, but the implementing agencies successfully adapted to these and delivered the major outputs satisfactorily. However, the full benefits of a programmatic approach were not realized.

138. Implementation witnessed several issues and developments associated with delivering a large, complex programme over a five-year implementation and across multiple regions, with a diversity of partners. Adjustments were made to project components as necessary.

The expertise of implementing agencies salvaged some projects from potential disasters, resultantly, the programme utilized close to 90 percent of GEF grants and completed most outputs.

139. However, the child projects were implemented in isolation, with component level overlaps between projects. Due to weak programme coordination, knowledge management and lack of programme level reviews and reporting, opportunities for synergies could not be fully exploited.

Conclusion 4. (Sustainability) The ABNJ Program has generated a mix of results, some of which are sustainable without further programme investments, and some require continued funding for recurring costs and expansion of coverage.

140. The programme's most sustainable results are in institutional governance measures and adoption of standards and good practices: harvest strategies, monitoring and control systems, and bycatch management. The major and likely to be irreversible improvements in governance are: legal instruments and regulatory frameworks representing global minimum standards on ABNJ governance, and institutional capacities and mechanisms towards adoption of standards and good practices.
141. The programme enabled a significant threshold of engagement (both magnitude and duration) which were instrumental in engendering transformative processes relating to sustainable and responsible fishing. Several knowledge products and capacity development trainings were one-off and not expected to continue. Thus, follow-on initiatives may not require the same magnitude of resources for demonstration of good practices. However, upscaling and sustaining the results would require new forms of financing, especially investment mobilization to modernize fishing methods and induct innovative technologies for monitoring and surveillance.
142. The programme (Tuna project) also made significant on-ground investments in capital goods and good practices, which will require continuing investments (for operating expenditure) besides similar investments for upscaling. Unfortunately, the sustainability of even the most significant results (EMS in Fiji and Ghana) is in jeopardy due to necessary public recurrent expenditures for operations (human resources and operating expenses of equipment) not forthcoming.

Conclusion 5. GEF funding was instrumental to the achievement of several important programme results programme. The most important dimensions of GEF additionality were: institutional/governance, and financing for innovative/transformative techniques and pilots, which brought critical thresholds of activities to engender visible results.

143. The institutional/governance additionality was the highest, given the common emphasis in all projects on strengthening institutions of governance, especially RFMOs. The positive measures adopted by institutions to address sustainable management of fisheries and biodiversity conservation could not have been delivered without the ABNJ Program resources, which enabled a sustained five-year engagement with the governance institutions.
144. The strong environmental additionality element is linked to the institutional/governance additionality. The significant results in bycatch management are linked strongly to the ABNJ Program, as well as the increase in the areas under protection (18 VMEs) in the Deep-Sea project.
145. GEF funding was also crucial for capital-intensive investments the installation of EMS in Fiji and Ghana, and the use of non-entangling fish aggregating devices and the modern

molecular techniques to identify the spatial structure of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye stocks.

Conclusion 6. The programme effectively managed a large number and diversity of first-time partners. There was notable change of mutual perceptions and attitudes among conservationists, fisheries management institutions and governments. However, there was scope for improvement in engagement with RFMO membership, and in programme-initiated interactions among stakeholders that are key to the BBNJ processes.

146. A key feature of the ABNJ Program was the weave of partnerships (over 30 entities) composed of: international agencies, non-governmental organization, foundations, regional fisheries management organizations, national government agencies, private sector industry and others through uncharted territory: the key implementing agencies and executing partners worked on a programme for the first time. The programme improved mutual understanding and reduced the trust deficit among various types of partners; particularly between RFMOs and conservationists; and between governments and international NGOs.
147. Besides enabling new partnerships, the programme also revived the Kobe process of technical cooperation among RFMOs and enabled consensus on ecosystem approaches to fisheries management and improving fisheries governance measures covering nearly all catches in the ABNJ.
148. However, insufficient engagement with national governments (RFMO membership), uncoordinated actions between projects and the lack of engagement of stakeholders in developing, disseminating and collecting feedback on key messages limited the benefits from the partnership mechanisms created.

Conclusion 7. (Monitoring and evaluation) Programme level monitoring was weak, due to deficient design and resourcing, particularly: the absence of appropriate programme-level indicators, insufficient human resources and no provisions for mid-term evaluation. Quality assurance of progress reports was lacking.

149. The absence of programme level indicators and inadequate resources for programme coordination were major weaknesses in the M&E design of the programme that went unobserved even in GEF's appraisal mechanisms. Subsequent attempts by the programme to retrofit these elements were not sustained. As a result, progress reports lacked any aggregated narratives on progress against or contributions towards GEF focal area outcomes and were merely an assembly of information from the child projects.
150. The programme coordination budgets for evaluation were insufficient resulting in no mid-term review of the programme, and negligible budgets for this terminal evaluation (which is subsidized from unspent funds.)

Conclusion 8. (Knowledge management) The programme lacked a structured knowledge management mechanism for the effective harvesting and dissemination of the wealth of knowledge emanating from the projects. Knowledge networks were fragmented and not put to effective use in the programme. External communications focused on passive consumption but did not have segmented strategies for key stakeholder groups.

151. An enormous amount of knowledge and experience has been generated in the programme; however, the programme did not have mechanisms for systematically integrating such knowledge; both the content and the expert networks in projects remained fragmented. In general, the programme (except OPP) did not make meaningful

use of enlisted technical expert groups and did not allocate tasks and resources for their formal engagement.

152. The programme's external communications did not have targeted actions for specific stakeholder groups, and focused more on generic, passive outreach formats (newsletters, website and social media tools). Media outreach, though prioritized in the Capacity project, was a one-time activity and did not capitalize on media-worthy results such as tuna stocks and bycatch reductions.

4.2 Recommendations

153. The evaluation took note of the preparations for a possible follow-on programme: at the Steering Committee 2019, a new programme theory of change was introduced, and several project/activity proposals were made by implementing agencies and executing partners. The evaluation confirms the merit of a follow-on programme with due incorporation of the important lessons from the implementation of this programme. In this regard, the following recommendations are being made.

Recommendation 1. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Before detailing individual projects, finalize a programme partnership framework document with an agreed programme theory of change to guide the selection of appropriate projects, activities, roles, responsibilities and mutual accountability arrangements among implementing agencies and executing partners.

This recommendation is based on findings in programme design (paragraphs 22 and 25) and programme coordination (paragraphs 56 and 58) and Conclusion 1.

154. Suggestions:

- i. The next phase of the programme should focus first on a broad program partnership framework based on an agency - and budget-agnostic programme-level theory of change with a results level framework mapped to SDGs, CBD targets and GEF IW 1,2 and IW 4 focal areas, showing outcome pathways and intermediate outcomes as recommended by GEF guidelines. This should be agreed among potential implementing agencies and key executing partners, ideally under a memorandum of understanding that outlines the cooperation.
- ii. The program partnership framework should be the key document for GEF appraisal, following which individual project components can be further developed. This exercise could be funded from co-financing by FAO and prospective implementing agencies and a few key executing agencies.

Recommendation 2. (To FAO and GEF SEC) Provide guidance on the desired cross-sectoral balance between fisheries governance and biodiversity conservation aspects, and clarify scope for engagement with other economic sectors impacting ecosystem services and biodiversity in context of the BBNJ negotiations.

This recommendation is based on findings in relevance (paragraphs 19 and 20) and partnerships (paragraphs 108 and 109) and Conclusion 1.

155. For the follow-on programme, GEF SEC should clarify upfront the importance of cross-sectoral approaches and particularly the balance of programme components between BD and IW focal areas as they entail different entry points and institutional comparative

advantages for FAO, UNEP and World Bank. This would enable a more coherent programme design based on GEF expectations of outcomes and the optimal involvement of respective implementing agencies. For instance, whether the programme should have marine pollution as an explicit component (given the dumping of non-biodegradable fishing gear and also the impact of tourism cruise vessel discharge and plastic debris on fish stocks) will necessitate new execution partners and a frontal role of UNEP as custodian agency for the SDG indicator on marine pollution.

Recommendation 3. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Improve stakeholder consultation with national stakeholders (RFMO members besides regional institutional secretariats) in design, and allocate commensurate programme preparation resources from co-financing

This recommendation is based on findings in stakeholder engagement (paragraph 114) and related specific observations in the tuna project evaluation and Conclusion 6.

156. Suggestions:

- i. A priori engagement with national governments - being the members of respective RFMOs – would inform and improve programme design and prospects of effective implementation.
- ii. The programme design phase in the next phase of the programme could consider furnishing a stakeholder consultation report along with other key documents submitted for GEF appraisal.

Recommendation 4. (To FAO Fisheries Department) Sufficiently resource a full-sized project for programme coordination, and develop clear terms of reference for programme leader (executive, not coordinator), and programme Steering Committee with clear descriptions of role, responsibilities and powers. Programme coordination project should be directly tasked with centralized knowledge management, communications and outreach, and monitoring arrangements including full-time focal points in all projects.

This recommendation is based on findings in programme design (paragraphs 23-24); programme coordination (paragraphs 56 -58); monitoring and evaluation (paras 49 and 52) and Conclusions 3,7 and 8.

157. Suggestions:

- i. Due deliberation should be done by implementing partners to elevate the position of programme coordinator to an executive programme leader with substantial time allocation (at least 50 percent FTE) for programme leadership.
- ii. The coordination structure should have matrix management elements, with the coordination unit having full time focal points in all projects for communications, knowledge management, monitoring and reporting.
- iii. The role of the programme Steering Committee should be strengthened to include decisions on design amendments and resource re-allocations among projects where necessary, with due justification based on periodic reviews and make project management teams more accountable for performance and conformance to programme commitments.

Recommendation 5. (To FAO Programme Management Unit) Develop clear work plans, budgets and specific results (process and outcomes) indicators for knowledge management, expert networks and communities of practice contributions guidance and quality assurance.

This recommendation is based on findings in communications and knowledge management (paragraphs 72-75) and Conclusion 8.

158. Suggestions:

- i. The next phase should include clear work plans with costs for the use of expert resources and not relegate their involvement to pro bono contributions.
- ii. Specific deliverables should be assigned to expert networks: ideally, expert groups should be tasked with qualitative reviews of major outputs and technical knowledge products of the programme, besides bringing leading-edge thinking to the projects in implementation.
- iii. Programme results framework should include specific indicators of processes and results under knowledge management and expert advice beyond just listing the number of products released.

Recommendation 6. (To GEF SEC) Issue clear and unambiguous guidelines on co-financing with requirements of supporting details and breakdowns of in-kind contributions and recurrent public expenditures. At the same time, be flexible on the minimum co-financing targets for transnational programmes which have only grant or in-kind contribution avenues.

This recommendation is based on findings in co-financing (paragraphs 87-88).

159. Suggestions:

- i. GEF SEC should prescribe programmes to include more specific details and verifiable or certified breakdowns of in-kind resources of implementing and executing agencies, at the very least: how co-financing amounts were estimated; breakdowns of human resources (number of staff and staff time allocated to the programme); infrastructure and equipment procured or funded for the programme; and administrative overhead allocated. Co-financing cumulative drawdowns should be reported in each annual progress report and ideally self-certified by a competent authority in the reporting entity.
- ii. To ensure sustainability of programme results, GEF SEC should prescribe specific co-finance commitments for recurrent expenditures related to equipment and infrastructure funded by the programme to be confirmed by beneficiary governments before the capital expenditure is incurred (minimum thresholds may be specified for this condition). Due diligence on the same should be exercised and cleared by the programme Steering Committee before expending the budgets for any capital goods procured from GEF grants.
- iii. The GEF-7 requirement of a 7:1 co-finance target can be a challenge for global and regional programmes which have low prospects for sovereign loans and private sector equity funding. To avert the propensity for inflated co-financing, GEF SEC could consider more flexibility in prescribing minimum co-financing targets for transnational programmes that have only grant or in-kind contribution sources.

Recommendation 8. (To FAO-GEF Coordination Unit) Include in the programme document the TORs of GEF Coordination Unit, including requirements for a brief note on review and quality checks of progress reports submitted by Programme Management Unit. Have more stringent appraisal mechanisms at programme level, including programmatic level indicators for processes and results.

This recommendation is based on findings in programme coordination (paragraph 46) and Box 3.

160. Suggestions:

- i. The GEF Coordination Unit, which provides inputs to the programme documents, is best placed input resource requirements and budgets for GEF coordination in programme costs, based on the estimated workloads. GEF Coordination tasks should be part of the work programmes, and programme and project progress reports submitted to the Steering Committee and GEF SEC should include formal GEF Coordination Unit comments on the same.
- ii. The GEF Coordination Unit, which attends all annual Steering Committee meetings should make a short intervention on the review of progress and also flag any major deviations from design and GEF compliance requirements.

Recommendation on FAO administrative procedures: beyond the programme scope

161. Even though the evaluation made important observations on FAO's administrative procedures, no specific recommendation is made in this report, as the underlying issues are corporate issues rooted outside of the programme. The evaluation, however, takes note of the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework (FAO, 2019a) which covered institutional issues in detail and made the following specific recommendation on administrative issues:

To deliver on its core values, aspirations and commitment to be a best-in-class organization and partner of choice, FAO needs to make its enabling administrative environment fit for purpose, using relevant benchmarks. Administrative policies need to manage the trade-offs between efficiency and effectiveness. Consider the following actions, in particular: Enhance delegation of authority to the frontline. Revise administrative policies to increase the decision-making power of managers over issues of recruitment, travel or procurement, as appropriate. In particular, there should be greater delegation of authority to Regional Representatives (and, to some extent, Country Representatives) in key areas involving decentralized delivery, especially when it comes to consultant recruitment, procurement ceilings, resource mobilization and partnerships.

FAO. 2019. Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework (Recommendation 7, paragraph 170, page 46)

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Appendix 1. People interviewed (incremental to programme aspects)

Surname	First name	Position	Organization/Location
Aider	Jacqueline	ProgramCoordinator	FAO/Rome
Anganuzzi	Alejandro	Program Manager Tuna	FAO/Rome
Braun	Genevieve	GEF Coordination unit	FAO/Rome
Cicin-Sain	Biliana	Chairperson	GOF/Washington
De Fontaubert	Charlotte	Senior Fisheries Specialist	World Bank/Washington
Emerson	William	Program Manager Deep Sea	FAO/Rome
Farmer	Tina	Lead Technical Officer	FAO/Rome
Fox	Charles	Director	Oceans 5/Washington
Gibbons-Fly	Bill	Former US Dept of State	ATBA/Washington
Gjerde	Kristina	Senior High Seas Policy Adviser	IUCN/Washington
Hett	Katherine	Program M& E Officer	FAO/Rome
Jackson	Susan	President	ISSF/Washington
King	Melanie	Foreign Affairs Specialist	NOAA/Washington
Maharaj	Vishwani	Lead Economist Oceans	WWF/Washington
Martenson	Emelie	Program Communications	FAO/Rome
Obregon	Paul	Manager	Conservation International/Washington
Scott	Jerry	Advisor	ISSF/Washington

Appendix 2. GEF evaluation criteria rating table

FAO-GEF rating scheme	Rating	Summary comments
1) Relevance		
Overall relevance of the programme	S	The programme and projects were aligned to GEF objectives and international priorities; however, the programme lacked a veritable programmatic approach in design, results framework and resourcing for programme coordination and monitoring.
2) Effectiveness		
Overall assessment of programme results	S	The Tuna and Deep-Sea projects demonstrated overall effectiveness and potential for impact; but the OPP and Capacity projects produced useful results, contribution to impacts is indeterminate.
3) Efficiency, project implementation and execution		
Overall quality of programme implementation and adaptive management (implementing agency)	S	Implementing agencies salvaged projects that were struggling in implementation, and raised delivery to acceptable levels.
Quality of execution (executing agencies)	S	All executing agencies (except OPP on which information is not available) delivered their outputs within reasonable limits.
Efficiency (including cost effectiveness and timeliness)	S	Projects were completed in time with some adjustments. GEF grant utilization was around 90 percent.
4) Sustainability		
Overall sustainability	ML	There is high likelihood of sustainability of the knowledge demonstrated in the programme, but upscaling and expanding the footprint depends on political initiative and continued funding by national stakeholders, which were not the focus of the program.
5) Factors affecting performance (M&E and stakeholder engagement)		
Overall quality of stakeholder engagement	S	Projects managed a complex diversity of partners effectively, several working together for the first time.
Overall quality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	MU	Lower of the two sub component ratings below.
M&E design at start-up	MU	Poor design of programmatic approaches resulted in lack of clear indicators to report on, besides under resourcing of monitoring and evaluation components.
M&E plan implementation	MS	Monitoring reports were provided in time based on information from projects. However, programme level reporting was missing (rooted in design).

Appendix 3. Rating scheme¹⁵

Project results and outcomes

Project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

Rating	Description
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no short comings."</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor short comings."</i>
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate short comings."</i>
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings."</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major short comings."</i>
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>"Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe short comings."</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.</i>

During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes has been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is taken into account and despite achievement of results as per the revised results framework, where appropriate, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given.

Project implementation and execution

Quality of implementation and of execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF Agencies that have direct access to GEF resources. Quality of Execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF Agencies and executed the funded activities on ground. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale:

¹⁵ See instructions provided in Annex 2: Rating Scales in the "Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations for Full-sized Project", April 2017.

Rating	Description
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	<i>There were no shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution exceeded expectations.</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution meets expectations.</i>
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<i>There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution more or less meets expectations.</i>
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution somewhat lower than expected.</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>There were major shortcomings and quality of implementation substantially lower than expected.</i>
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>There were severe shortcomings in quality of implementation or execution.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation or execution.</i>

Monitoring and evaluation

Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of:

- i. Design
- ii. Implementation

Sustainability

The sustainability will be assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, socio-political, institutional, and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a four-point scale:

Rating	Description
Likely (L)	<i>There is little or no risk to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Likely (ML)	<i>There are moderate risks to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Unlikely (MU)	<i>There are significant risks to sustainability.</i>
Unlikely (U)	<i>There are severe risks to sustainability.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.</i>

Rating of project objectives and results

Highly Satisfactory (HS): The project had no shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Satisfactory (S): The project had minor shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Moderately Satisfactory (MS): The project had moderate shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): The project had significant shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Unsatisfactory (U) The project had major shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): The project had severe shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Please note: Relevance and effectiveness will be considered as critical criteria. The overall rating of the project for achievement of objectives and results **may not be higher** than the lowest rating on either of these two criteria. **Thus, to have an overall satisfactory rating for outcomes a project must have at least satisfactory ratings on both relevance and effectiveness.**

Ratings on sustainability

Sustainability will be understood as the probability of continued long-term outcomes and impacts after the GEF project funding ends. The Mid-term evaluation will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to contribute or undermine the persistence of benefits after the project ends. Some of these factors might be outcomes of the project, i.e. stronger institutional capacities, legal frameworks, socio-economic incentives /or public awareness. Other factors will include contextual circumstances or developments that are not outcomes of the project but that are relevant to the sustainability of outcomes.

Rating system for sustainability sub-criteria

On each of the dimensions of sustainability of the project outcomes will be rated as follows.

Likely (L): There are no risks affecting this dimension of sustainability.

Moderately Likely (ML). There are moderate risks that affect this dimension of sustainability.

Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks that affect this dimension of sustainability

Unlikely (U): There are severe risks that affect this dimension of sustainability.

All the risk dimensions of sustainability are critical. Therefore, overall rating for sustainability will not be higher than the rating of the dimension with lowest ratings. For example, if a project has an Unlikely rating in either of the dimensions then its overall rating cannot be higher than Unlikely, regardless of whether higher ratings in other dimensions of sustainability produce a higher average.

Ratings of project M&E

Monitoring is a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing project with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, its

design, implementation and results. Project evaluation may involve the definition of appropriate standards, the examination of performance against those standards, and an assessment of actual and expected results.

The Project monitoring and evaluation system will be rated on 'M&E Design', 'M&E Plan Implementation' and 'Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities' as follows:

Highly Satisfactory (HS): There were no shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Satisfactory(S): There were minor shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were moderate shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Unsatisfactory (U): There were major shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): The Project had no M&E system.

"M&E plan implementation" will be considered a critical parameter for the overall assessment of the M&E system. The overall rating for the M&E systems will not be higher than the rating on "M&E plan implementation."

All other ratings will be on the GEF six-point scale.

GEF Performance Description	Alternative description on the same scale
HS = Highly Satisfactory	Excellent
S = Satisfactory	Well above average
MS = Moderately Satisfactory	Average
MU = Moderately Unsatisfactory	Below Average
U = Unsatisfactory	Poor
HU = Highly Unsatisfactory	Very poor (Appalling)

M&E system rating descriptions

GEF Performance Description	Alternative description on the same scale
HS = Highly Satisfactory	There were no shortcomings in the project M&E system.
S = Satisfactory	There were minor shortcomings in the project M&E system.
MS = Moderately Satisfactory	There were moderate shortcomings in the project M&E system.
MU = Moderately Unsatisfactory	There were significant shortcomings in the project M&E
U = Unsatisfactory	There were major shortcomings in the project M&E system.
HU = Highly Unsatisfactory	The Project had no M&E system.

Appendix 4. GEF co-financing table

Co-financing by key entity

Co-financing entity	Proposed in PFD	Actualized	Cash	In-kind
GEF Agencies		55.1		
FAO	44.0	40.7	11.0	28.7
<i>Tuna</i>		25.7	5	20.7
<i>Deep-Sea</i>		12.5	5.5	7.0
<i>Capacity</i>	1.5	1.5	0.5	1.0
<i>OPP</i>				
<i>Coordination</i>	1.0	1.0		
UNEP WCMC	4.0	4.0		4.00
UNEP	0.40	0.40		0.40
World Bank	10.00	10.00	10.00	
Other international agencies		3.38		
CBD	-	1.43		
Nairobi Convention	0.87	0.87		
Un Centre Grid Arendal	0.85	0.85		0.80
UNESCO Nat Sc	0.1	0.1		*
UNESCO IOC	0.13	0.13		
Foundations/NGOs		35.95		
WWF	15	18	8	10
CI	10	10		
IUCN	3.11	2.11		
GOF	1.5	1.54	0.71	0.83
BLI	2.9	4.3		
RFMOs/IGOs		34.81		
CCBST	1.3	1.25		
FFA	2	4.125		
IATTC	6.3	6.55		
ICCAT	4.3	4.33		
IOTC	2.5	2.5		
PNA	0.4	0.37		
SPC	0.2	0.18		
WCPFC	6.3	7.96		
CCAMLR	0.1	0.1		
CPP Sect	1.21	0.85		0.68
GFCM	0.35	0.35		
NAFO	2.10	2.10		
NEAFC	1.95	1.95		
NPFC	0.3	0.3		0.3
SEAFO	1.7	1.7		1.7
SPRFMO	0.2	0.2		
Governments		83.17		
US-NOAA				
tuna	14.7	74.0		
Deep sea	6.5	6.5		
Fiji	0.3	0.8		
Ghana	1.2	1.2		
France	0.1	0.1	0.05	0.05

Co-financing entity	Proposed in PFD	Actualized	Cash	In-kind
Korea	0.17	0.17	0.1	
EU	0.4	0.4		
Industry		155.90		
ISSA	2.3	6.0		
ISSA- Ghana	19.8	46.2		
Fiji FFIA	14.9	59.1		
SIODFA	20.0	20.0		20.0
Sealord Group	14.0	14.0		14.0
ICFA	5.00	5.00		5.00
Duke University	5.13	5.13		5.13
Nausicaa	0.45	0.45	0.15	0.30
Others				
WIOMSA	0.1	0.1		
Vietnam Nat University	0.1	0.1		
Gobi Sect	0.3	0.3		
IDDR	0.12	0.12		

Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

<http://www.fao.org/3/cb0505en/cb0505en.pdf>

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