

## Exploring the potential of GEF funding for the CMS/IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network

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This note explores various options that may exist within the Global Environment Facility for securing financial support to implement necessary conservation measures within the framework of the CMS/IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network<sup>1</sup>.

The overarching goal of the IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network is to promote the long-term conservation of sites of regional and global importance for six species of marine turtles<sup>2</sup>, including the specific habitats upon which they depend. The Site Network strives to:

- (i) Provide a framework for participating sites to function more cooperatively and synergistically, both ecologically and administratively, in their shared conservation aims;
- (ii) Assure ecological connectivity and enhance governance benefits that would otherwise not be achievable by managing individual sites in isolation;
- (iii) Contribute, through enhanced regional conservation efforts, to more effective maintenance of ecosystem services that support human well-being; and
- (iv) Catalyse opportunities for participatory resource management and community development centred on marine turtles, through enhanced local-to-global scale recognition of sites and network-wide information exchange.

Robust criteria were developed to evaluate areas nominated for potential inclusion in the Site Network, in order to prioritise the most critical sites needed to secure the future of marine turtle species/management units. The 18 evaluation criteria fall into four discrete categories: Ecological/Biological, Governance-related, Socio-economic/Political, and Network-wide Ecological.

The IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network was formally launched in September 2014 with the acceptance of 10 sites from nine Signatory States: Itsamia (Comoros), Europa Island (France), Sheedvar Island (Islamic Republic of Iran), Thameehla Island (Myanmar), Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary (Philippines), Aldabra Atoll (Seychelles), iSimangaliso Wetland Park (South Africa), Bu Tinah Shoal/Abu Dhabi and Sir Bu Na'air/Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), and Rufiji - Mafia Seascape (United Republic of Tanzania).

For the Site Network to realise its full potential, external funding is required for the preparation of complementary site management plans, upgrading of local infrastructure, development of human resources and capacity-building, execution of coordinated conservation interventions, harmonisation of information-sharing, promotion of community engagement through financially-sustainable activities, and implementation of network-wide actions (including cooperative training, monitoring, surveillance and enforcement).

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) describes itself as “a unique partnership of governments, international institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector to undertake actions to protect the global environment.”<sup>3</sup> The GEF supports developing countries by providing grants to meet the cost of implementing the additional, incremental cost of activities in five thematic areas of interest, one of which is biodiversity. “Since 1991 the GEF Trust Fund has provided \$13.5 billion in grants and leveraged \$65 billion in co-financing for more than 3,900 projects in 165 developing countries. In addition, the GEF has provided more than 19,000 grants to community-based organizations through its Small Grants Programme for a total of \$1 billion.”

The GEF biodiversity thematic area presently contains at least six strategic programmes that support activities which are also among the shared goals of the IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network, as follows (not necessarily in order of relevance):

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<sup>1</sup> After many years of development, the *Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles in the Indian Ocean – South-East Asia Region* (IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network) was formally launched in September 2014 by the 35 Signatory States to the *Convention on Migratory Species / Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia* (CMS/IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU), on the occasion of their Seventh Meeting in Bonn, Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and Flatback (*Natator depressus*).

<sup>3</sup> In this document, the source for information on the functioning of the GEF is: "THE A TO Z OF THE GEF · A GUIDE TO THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY, GEF Secretariat, October 2015.

**Programme 1: Improving Financial Sustainability and Effective Management of Ecological Infrastructure**

e.g. improving protected area financial sustainability and effective management (including incentives to engage the private sector and other stakeholders)

**Programme 2: Expanding the Reach of the Global Protected Area Estate**

e.g. establishment and effective management of coastal and near shore protected area networks to increase the representation of globally significant marine ecosystems

**Programme 3: Preventing the Extinction of Known Threatened Species**

e.g. strengthening of national legislation, institutions, and law enforcement to reduce poaching and demand; strengthening of science-based wildlife monitoring, education and awareness

**Programme 4: Prevention, Control, and Management of Invasive Alien Species**

e.g. prevention, early detection, control and management of invasive alien species

**Programme 6: Maintaining Integrity and Function of Globally Significant Coral Reef Ecosystems**

e.g. expansion of coral reef areas within Marine Protected Areas; mitigation of marine-based pollution and damage to coral reef ecosystems; and addressing local marine pressures on coral reef ecosystems.

**Programme 9: Managing the Human-Biodiversity Interface**

e.g. securing ecological integrity and sustainability of protected area systems through policy and regulatory frameworks and testing of financial mechanisms.

The following simplified table illustrates four avenues through which to explore possible to access GEF funding for the IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network. Note that any proposal must meet the strict GEF eligibility criteria with regard to: country eligibility; content (country-driven, focus on incremental costs); national endorsement; and public involvement.

Funding Mechanism	Purpose	Scale	Typical duration	Approval Process
Full-sized Project	To address longer-term global environmental issues.	> USD 2 million	5 - 6 years	Requires development of Project Identification Form (PIF) and fully elaborated Project Endorsement document; approvals via GEF Council, GEF CEO, and GEF Agency
Medium-sized Project	To test / implement innovative solutions to global environmental issues	Up to USD 2 million	3 years	Requires development of comprehensive MSP Approval document; direct approval via GEF CEO and GEF Agency
Government Enabling Activity	To prepare inventories, integrated strategies, action plans, reporting.	Up to USD 500,000	1 - 1.5 years	Requires development of Enabling Activities justification document; direct approval via GEF CEO (expedited procedure)
Community Small Grants Programme	To develop capacity; test new methods, technologies	Up to USD 50,000 (typically USD 20-25,000)		Requires a budgeted project concept paper (and then full project proposal), developed in response to a national "Call for proposals"; National Steering Committee approval.

Developing a successful GEF project proposal can be a challenging and lengthy process, not to mention the implementation phase. The timeframe from conceptualisation to official project inception may take more than three years for a full-sized project that is expected to last 4-5 years.

The GEF Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project<sup>4</sup>, which runs from January 2015 to December 2018, is a good example of a project comparable in content and scale. The timeline for its development gives an idea of what can be expected to develop a similar project. Focusing on eight countries (Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Vanuatu), the USD 5.88 million project (with USD 99 million in co-finance) has four main objectives:

<sup>4</sup> Full Title: Enhancing the Conservation Effectiveness of Seagrass Ecosystems Supporting Globally Significant Populations of Dugongs across the Indian and Pacific Ocean Basins

1. Encouraging community involvement in and responsibility for targeted protected areas;
2. Encouraging sustainable fisheries practices among local fishing communities;
3. Addressing critical knowledge gaps; and
4. Incorporating dugong and seagrass conservation measures into policy, planning and regulatory frameworks.

The preliminary Project Identification Form (PIF) and Project Preparation Grant (PPG) were prepared by a consultant by June 2012. The proposal was fleshed out through a series of national consultations over the following nine months, until April 2013, when the Project Document (ProDoc) was formally submitted to the GEF CEO with a request for endorsement. Along the way, the project proponents were supported by expert advice and feedback from UNEP. After incorporation of comments from the GEF Secretariat, the final ProDoc was ready for final submission to GEF in June 2013.

Official GEF endorsement came about one year later, in July 2014, which set in motion a process to secure a Project Coordinator. After interviews, this person was appointed in April/May 2015. Finally, in October 2015, the inception workshop was held to formally launch the project, with some 40 individual projects to be implemented in collaboration with more than 30 Project Partners. The time from 'idea conception' to official launch of the four-year project was about 3.5 years. This probably represents an ideal scenario, insofar as the secretariat in Abu Dhabi driving the project development was well-resourced and well-staffed; and the agency identified to execute the project was itself well-resourced and located in close proximity.

*What are the implications of all of the above for the possible development of a GEF project linked to the IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network?*

Short of securing significant financial support from less conventional sources – such as specialised foundations or targeted corporate offsets – financing of future Site Network activities is likely to be *ad hoc* and site-specific. The dearth of funding for a genuinely cooperative project of this magnitude is what makes the Global Environment Facility so attractive. Clearly the potential rewards – in terms of available project funding – are very substantial, but the development of a successful proposal requires considerable patience, dedication and perseverance among all involved. The current (sixth) GEF-funding cycle runs from 2014-2018. As we begin 2016, and bearing in mind the indicative time frames highlighted above, countries with an interest in participating in a full-size collaborative project should already be gearing up for a submission for the next (seventh) GEF-funding cycle.

After identifying a number of *GEF-eligible* countries interested to come on board, a starting point would be to engage a consultant to prepare a first draft of the Project Identification Form. The selection of countries to approach initially might be based, in part, on those that have already had sites accepted into the IOSEA Network and/or are not pre-occupied with the GEF Dugong project (which covers a similar geographic range). In South-East Asia, countries that appear to meet these three criteria include: Cambodia, **Myanmar**, Papua New Guinea, **Philippines**, Thailand, and Viet Nam. In the Northern Indian Ocean: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Pakistan. In the Northwest Indian Ocean: Egypt, Eritrea, **Islamic Republic of Iran**, Sudan, and Yemen. In the Western Indian Ocean: Comoros, Kenya, Mauritius, **Seychelles**, and **United Republic of Tanzania**. (Bold face indicates IOSEA Site Network country.)

The challenge will be to craft a proposal that meets the objectives of the IOSEA Site Network, while satisfying the GEF criteria and avoiding duplication of existing projects and programmes. For the project to be interesting from the vantage point of GEF, it must demonstrate that it will deliver wider benefits for biodiversity and ecosystem management than marine turtles alone (as flagship species), and it must also offer the prospect of replicability within countries and to other countries.

The project must also be persuasive enough to convince the GEF Operational Focal Point (in each country) to pledge a portion of their country's future GEF "STAR"<sup>5</sup> allocations towards a regional project to strengthen the effectiveness of conservation interventions at network sites, against other competing interests.

And, in practical terms, it will be essential to identify a suitable agency to take the lead in overseeing the execution of a project that may involve up to 8 or 10 countries in four regions spanning the Indian Ocean.

There will be a few opportunities over the coming months to discuss these ideas further in public fora, including two IOSEA sub-regional meetings foreseen in 2016 for the Northwest Indian Ocean (in United Arab Emirates) and South-East Asia (in Thailand).

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<sup>5</sup> System for Transparent Allocation of Resources, whereby eligible countries can access a certain amount of GEF funding for activities under four thematic areas, allowing for some discretion on where the funding is to be allocated within each country.