

Mid-Term Review for:
*Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve Conservation
of 1.25 Billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems*

(GEF Project ID: 10375)

Final Report

Prepared for:
Conservation International

December 2024



PROJECT DATA SHEET

PROJECT DATA	
Project name	Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve Conservation of 1.25 billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems
Key objectives	To catalyze the conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems, to safeguard biodiversity, help build resilience to climate change, promote human well-being and enhance ecosystem connectivity and function.
GEF Project ID	10375
GEF Agency	Conservation International
Project Executing Agency	Alliance
Countries	Global
Focal Area	International Waters
GEF Operational Programme	GEF-7
Total GEF Approved Budget	\$22,635,780 (+ \$300,000 PPG)
GEF Agency Fee	\$2,037,220 (+ \$27,000 PPG)
Total Co-financing Approved	\$115,465,618 (\$32,551,119 materialized as of June 30, 2024)
Total Project Costs	\$138,401,398
KEY DATES	
CEO Endorsement/Approval	September 3, 2021
Agency Approval	December 1, 2019
Implementation Start	October 5, 2021
Project Completion	April 30, 2028
EVALUATION INFORMATION	
Type of Evaluation	Mid-Term Review
Period to be Reviewed	October 2021 – August 2024
Evaluation Team	Dr. Heidi Gjertsen Dr. Eduard Niesten
Evaluation Timeframe	May 2024 – September 30, 2024
Evaluation Budget	\$29,640



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The analysis and recommendations conveyed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of CI-GEF or the Blue Nature Alliance partners. This document presents the views of the evaluation team.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Accountability and Grievance Mechanism
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CI	Conservation International
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Conservation of Migratory Species (of Wild Animals)
CONANP	National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (Mexico)
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EOI	Expression of Interest
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESIA	Social and Environmental Impact Assessments
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FY	Fiscal Year
GEB	Global Environmental Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLISPA	Global Island Partnership
ha	hectares
IEO	[GEF] Independent Evaluation Office
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
GMP	Gender Mainstreaming Plan
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
IW	GEF International Waters Strategy
km ²	Square kilometers
LME	Large Marine Ecosystems
LSMPA	Large-Scale Marine Protected Area
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MPAtlas	Atlas of Marine Protection
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NACES	North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea Basin
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
OECD-DAC	Org. for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OECM	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PMU	Project Management Unit
RFMOs	Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
TOR	Terms of Reference



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the GEF-funded Full-Sized Project *Alliance to Expand and Improve Conservation of 1.25 billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems* was conducted at the request of the CI GEF Agency. MTRs are a contractually required step within the overall Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) process for GEF-funded projects. The MTR covers the period from September 2021 until August 2024, and is based on document review, group discussions, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and two site visits.¹

Project Description

The ocean is vital for all life on this Earth. It regulates the climate, produces the oxygen we breathe, and determines our weather cycles. It contains the largest animals and the most diverse ecosystems on our planet. The ocean is also intrinsically linked with human development, providing food and economic opportunities for billions of people. Maintaining a healthy ocean is critical to achieving most of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including most notably the goals related to eliminating poverty (1), eliminating hunger (2), climate action (3), and the dedicated ocean goal on life below water (14). However, anthropogenic pressures and threats to ocean health are unprecedented and mounting. Habitat loss, fishing pressure, climate change, and pollution are leading threats to ocean health globally.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) passed a resolution at the 2016 World Conservation Congress calling for the designation and implementation of at least 30% of each marine habitat in a network of highly protected MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures by 2030, subject to the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities. The Global Environment Facility's (GEF) International Waters Focal Area Strategy similarly recognizes the need to establish and support existing MPAs in key biodiversity hotspots and coastal habitats in order to rebuild and protect essential habitats. As of January 2021, only 7% of the ocean was under some form of designated protection, including approximately 6.4% in implemented MPAs and only 2.6% classified as highly or fully protected (MPAtlas).

Conservation International (CI), the Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew), the Minderoo Foundation, the Rob Walton Foundation, and the Global Environment Facility have joined together to form the Blue Nature Alliance (the Alliance) with the objective to catalyze the effective conservation of at least 1.25 billion hectares of ocean in order to safeguard global ocean biodiversity, build resilience to climate change,

¹ Note that the scope of the Alliance is substantially larger than the GEF investment covered by this MTR. The Alliance as a whole works with more than 100 partners around the world in 161 ocean conservation areas, covering 21.9 million km² of ocean ecosystems. Stated impacts achieved to date include 1,857,000 km² of ocean under new or expanded protection, 685,000 km² of ocean under upgraded protection, and 187,000 km² of protected ocean under more effective management (see <https://www.bluenaturealliance.org/what-we-do/impact/>).



promote human wellbeing, and enhance ecosystem connectivity and function. By directly supporting the conservation of at least 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems (approximately 3.5% of the global ocean), this project intends to help deliver SDG14 Target 5 of protecting 10% of the global ocean and build momentum towards the Global Biodiversity Framework goal of protecting 30% of the global ocean by 2030. The approach of this project is to invest resources to:

- catalyze the establishment of at least 750 million hectares of new or expanded ocean conservation areas;
- support the strengthening of at least 500 million hectares of previously established ocean conservation areas through upgraded protection levels and/or improvement to management effectiveness;
- develop new science, tools, capacity, and innovations directly related to the fields of large-scale and transboundary ocean conservation in order to establish the global enabling conditions necessary to reach the global goal of protecting 30% of the world's oceans.
- cultivate the global enabling conditions required to reach the ambitious goal of protecting 30% of the ocean, including scientific research, knowledge management, capacity building, and learning initiatives to advance large-scale and transboundary ocean conservation.

Project Progress Summary

Outcome 1.1 of the project design was critical to initiate implementation by developing a portfolio of site engagements. Despite the challenges of COVID, the Alliance team successfully advanced with desk assessments and scoping of potential sites, exceeding the project targets for these steps as well as subsequent preparation of engagement frameworks (27 versus a target of 25) and securing of Steering Council endorsement of engagement sites (27 versus a target of 20). This means that the Alliance is, as of August 2024, actively engaged in work with implementation partners over an area of 1.06 billion ha for new ocean conservation areas (Outcome 2.1), as well as 1.06 billion ha for upgraded protection and/or improved management (Outcome 3.1). Considerable progress remains needed to achieve targets for Outcomes 2.1 and 3.1 (117M of 750M hectares [15.6%] and 87M of 500M hectares [17.4%] achieved to date respectively). However, this may be expected, as the first part of the implementation period focused on site identification and engagement leading to multi-year site engagements, with activities towards targets now advancing such that establishment, upgrading, and/or improved management of sites will be concentrated in the second half of the implementation period. As the project already is active over a total area of 2.12 billion ha, there is justified confidence in its ability to achieve its area targets.

The project already has substantially exceeded targets with respect to knowledge generation and dissemination (Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2), including for research projects supported, peer-reviewed publications produced, learning participants reached, new tools and innovations disseminated, organizations engaged, and presentations delivered, as well as materials to be shared through IW:Learn. The project can be expected to outperform on these fronts even further during the remainder of implementation. The project has recorded over 12,700 direct beneficiaries (35% women), well over half



the target of 20,000. Finally, in addition to the \$115.4 million co-financing in hand prior to the start of the project start, an additional \$426 million in funding has been leveraged across Alliance site engagements. Thus, the project is well positioned to achieve and surpass its targets by the end of the implementation phase.



Evaluation Ratings & Achievement Summary Table

Dimension	Rating	Achievements
Project Outcomes (overall)	Satisfactory	- Outcome 1.1: 27 engagement frameworks endorsed, versus target of 20. (All Output targets exceeded.) - Outcome 2.1: Full or partial target reached in 29% of engagement sites, totaling 116.97 M hectares, versus target of 750 M hectares. - Outcome 3.1: Full or partial targets achieved for management effectiveness improvement and/or proposed status upgrade in 20% of engagement sites, totaling 87.28 M hectares of ocean conservation area, versus target of 500 M hectares. - Outcomes 4.1 & 4.2: All Output targets exceeded (noting that targets for IW:Learn contributions readily will be met/exceeded following the resumption of IW:Learn activities). 12,700 direct beneficiaries (35% women) reached, versus target of 20,000.
<i>Relevance</i>	<i>Highly Satisfactory</i>	
<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	
<i>Efficiency</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	
Sustainability	Moderately Likely	- Sustainability of project outcomes benefits from alignment with country goals (e.g., GBF 30x30), existing networks and commitments (e.g., funders, MPA managers), and capacity building - Support for addressing financial sustainability at site level is tailored to the site's status along the conservation journey. - McKinsey & Company pro-bono support secured for site financing assessments and strategies.
Project M&E	Satisfactory	- Outcome 5.1: Project M&E on track. - ProDoc included concrete, fully budgeted M&E plan, aligned with Results Framework and using SMART indicators, including GEBs, socioeconomic co-benefits, and sex-disaggregated indicators. - Dedicated M&E capacity in place and operational, actively measuring indicators relative to baseline. - Continuous refinement of M&E processes and guidance, reducing reporting burden on sub-grantees.
Implementation and Execution	Satisfactory	- Securing co-financing for GEF Alliance investment as a whole has been a significant value add from the perspective of supported sites. - GEF participation as a Core Partner and Steering Council member has facilitated ongoing alignment. - Structure of the Alliance as a new entity with support from Executing Core Partners CI and Pew has incubated an effective and efficient institutional culture, marked by responsiveness to site partner needs and openness to input and feedback. - Flexibility and adaptive ability of the Alliance management team permitted significant progress on Outcome 1.1 despite challenges of the COVID pandemic and has been instrumental to ongoing streamlining and refinement of processes (e.g., site safeguard plans, financial reporting).
Environmental and Social Safeguards	Satisfactory	- Templates and manuals provided to sites, accompanied by direct support/guidance. - Project-level GMP, SEP, and AGM developed. - As of FY24 PIR, Limited ESIA, safeguards screenings, stakeholder engagement plans, gender mainstreaming plans, and grievance redress mechanisms have been completed for all engagements in implementation. - Safeguard processes updated in early 2024 to enhance efficiencies and reduce burden on sub-grantees.



Summary of conclusions

During the first half of its implementation phase, the Alliance has built a strong institutional culture, refined its organizational processes, and exceeded expectations in developing a diverse portfolio of supported initiatives and contributing to the global knowledge base relating to marine conservation. The Alliance offers clear and considerable added value within the global marine conservation arena. Beyond serving as an important funding mechanism, it is uniquely impactful in terms of aligning the efforts of a large and diverse range of actors and strengthening the global community of practice.

The Alliance has a clearly articulated theory of change that can be summarized by the Alliance's concept of a Conservation Journey. Different sites are at different points on this journey when they join the Alliance; the project's aim is to see progress along this journey for each site, while recognizing that Alliance will not be able to support each site through the entirety of its journey. The Alliance thus serves as an accelerant and considers what aspects they meaningfully can help advance in a site to leave lasting impact.

Adapting to reflect lessons learned during implementation is a particular strength of the project. The Alliance team is open to input and actively strives to improve on the basis of that input. A notable feature of the Alliance has been the ongoing innovation of processes, including: new safeguard templates that depend on level of risk; new customized project management system and online grantee reporting tool; and streamlined M&E indicators, reporting requirements, and new dashboards.

Implementers of projects supported by the Alliance highlighted the engagement and reachability of their regional contact points as a trusted source of input, guidance, and support. There was broad consensus among informants that the Alliance team is highly responsive and positive. The Alliance is explicit about its culture and values in its Code of Conduct, and the team holds itself to high standards and has created a culture of respect and collaboration. These interactions extend beyond those seen under a typical grant-making entity and embody a true partnership dynamic. Informants also almost universally noted the flexibility of the Alliance as a grantor or partner, open to working closely with project implementers or co-financing partners to tailor project designs, processes and arrangements.

Project implementers also noted the value of access to Alliance's technical expertise, particularly in the areas of innovative/sustainable financing; surveillance (e.g., Skylight); scientific expertise (e.g., baseline studies); policy engagement and access to policymakers; networking and exposure facilitated by the Alliance (including site exchanges, side-events at conferences, and access to other donors); and the overall strategic coordination and convening role that the Alliance plays (e.g. supporting regional networks and connecting them to each other, and convening donors to coordinate investments).

The evaluation revealed few challenges or weaknesses of note. Most project implementers described the grant-making process as long (though not necessarily more onerous than for other comparable funders). Implementers that described processes as onerous also stated that the Alliance was understanding and supportive (e.g., reflected in Alliance staff providing guidance and input on budget



template, safeguards, etc.). Some implementers noted that reporting – particularly financial reporting – remains a burden. Issues raised included frequency of reporting, changes in reporting expectations and requirements over time (attributed to turnover in Alliance finance/admin staff), the budgeting process during project design, and scope for/requirements relating to grant extensions and renewals. A few sources shared that the Alliance could benefit from more exchange with and input from other actors and/or a wider range of voices in the global marine conservation space. This could include, for example, other thought leaders in the marine conservation space. The Alliance can offer a rich set of learning experiences through interactions between the many and diverse initiatives that constitute the Alliance’s portfolio of supported projects. Although some informants highlighted specific exchanges that they much appreciated, others indicated that they experienced little in the way of cross-project fertilization. Some implementers did not seem entirely aware of the full range of resources and support potentially available to them through the Alliance.

A recurring topic of discussion throughout the evaluation process was the question of appropriate targets and priority setting. This relates to the value of ambitious total area targets for new and/or improved MPAs and ocean conservation areas versus a set of targets that better capture the quality of conservation management of such areas; the balance between strict protection and areas available for sustainable use; and the balance between pursuing large MPAs to achieve ambitious targets versus supporting small ocean conservation areas (including MPAs and OECMs) in areas with particularly high biodiversity value and/or levels of threat. This discussion remains unresolved, and likely will resist definitive universal answers.

Another unresolved topic revolves around optimal strategies for growing the field. Some informants noted that the needs of MPA managers were not always at the forefront of the Alliance’s work and that products were more relevant for NGOs than MPA managers, while others stated that MPA manager voices were clearly at the table and products reflected these voices. Similarly, there were differing views of what kinds of tools would be most useful for Blue Nature Alliance to develop, and the appropriate balance between customized approaches for individual MPAs and simple, readily available tools. A related discussion concerned the difficulty of measuring the impact of capacity building and thus conveying its fundamental importance to funders that are focused on area targets. The Alliance clearly understands the value of this work and can play a role in articulating its impact. Blue Nature Alliance has a well-developed strategy around capacity and learning and there is an opportunity for the Alliance to facilitate a shared global vision in this space.

As noted earlier, Blue Nature Alliance has innovated considerably in many areas. Given that many of these innovations have been deployed within the past 3-6 months (safeguards, M&E, project management, reporting), it is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes. It is expected that the value of these efforts will be observed in the second half of the project.



Recommendation Summary

Corrective actions for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project

The evaluators did not find a need for material corrective actions. The overall project design, including adaptations applied over the course of implementation, are appropriate to the aims of the project; the Blue Nature Alliance team is functioning effectively and site implementers are universally satisfied with their interactions with and support from the Alliance; and project monitoring and evaluation is effective and also is benefitting from ongoing refinement.

Recommended actions to follow up or reinforce initial benefits from the project

- Create an information packet (i.e., a simple factsheet or brochure) enumerating the types of technical support available to partners through the Alliance, and periodically run through the available types of support with implementers.
- Explore ways to further increase the amount of cross-fertilization between projects and proactively seek to catalyze more and deeper project-to-project linkages, such as exchanges and curated virtual interactions, in addition to facilitated side-events at major conferences.
- Explore opportunities for more interaction and exchange with relevant outside actors, platforms, etc.
- Continue to identify opportunities to improve and streamline, for example, grant-making processes and reporting requirements, and seek out opportunities for clearer and simpler templates and guidance documents that lay out timelines, processes and requirements (e.g., requirements and procedures for grant extensions and grant renewals).
- Explore ways to reduce the need to enter the same information multiple times for grant reporting (i.e., through the CI grants portal) by streamlining templates or automating the transfer of information from one section/template to another. Although the Blue Nature Alliance has made notable strides in simplifying reporting requirements, duplication of information remains a point a raised by some implementers.
- Document the gains/benefits from process improvements to date.
- Reach out to solicit concerns, suggestions and other input from partners and implementers, as proactive efforts to collect feedback from partners (e.g., assess performance of and satisfaction with revised safeguard processes to inform further possible refinements).
- Document examples of best-practices and lessons learned related to gender, including how the project has enhanced women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes. Better reflect this theme in reporting.
- Put greater emphasis on the value of considering (financial) sustainability as early as possible in the Conservation Journey.
- Assuming an intention to seek a second phase for the Blue Nature Alliance, articulate a financial sustainability plan for the Blue Nature Alliance itself, to sustain the Alliance's ability to continue



efforts relating to regional networks and capacity building as well as site support and growing the field.²

Proposals for future directions underlining main objectives

- Consider a target for improved management outside protected areas (corresponding, for example, to the Seychelles effort to apply Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) throughout its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), not just protected areas).
- Capture avoiding degazettement or weakening of management regimes in regular reporting. Consider developing a form of early warning & response framework for protected area degazettement or downgrading, to then measure success against threats identified through this framework.
- Include in the knowledge management and communications strategy a deliberate plan to articulate and demonstrate how investment in capacity building advances global marine conservation, and prepare effective communication material that conveys how the Growing the Field component of Blue Nature Alliance's work is conceived and operates.

² As currently articulated on, for example, the Blue Nature Alliance website, the Alliance is a time-bound initiative scheduled to close in 2028. However, many interviewees (including implementers, Blue Nature Alliance team members, co-funders and other partners) signaled a strong appetite for a second phase. Given the strong track record of achievements and the successful deployment of a highly effective structure and team, the evaluation team believes a second phase merits strong consideration.



1 Introduction and Overview

1.1 Purpose of the MTR and Objectives

This MTR has been initiated by CI General Counsel Office as the independent procurement office and CI GEF Agency as the Implementing Agency for the *Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve Conservation of 1.25 billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems* project, to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of Project activities in relation to the stated objectives.³ All Full-sized Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded projects are required to complete a Mid-Term Review (MTR). MTRs are conducted by independent consultants and are used as an adaptive management tool by GEF Agencies and as a portfolio monitoring tool by the GEF Secretariat. MTRs are primarily a monitoring tool to identify challenges and outline corrective actions to ensure that a project is on track to achieve maximum results by its completion. The MTR process is designed to provide a comprehensive and systematic account of the performance of a project by assessing its design, implementation, and achievement of objectives. The evaluation is expected to promote accountability and transparency and facilitate synthesis of lessons. The MTR also will provide feedback to allow the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) to identify recurring issues across the GEF portfolio and contribute to GEF IEO databases for aggregation and analysis. Thus, the MTR promotes learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the GEF and its partners, as basis for decision-making on policies, strategies, programme management, and projects and to improve knowledge and performance.

In sum, the purpose of the evaluation is to identify challenges encountered in project implementation and determine corrective actions to ensure achievement of desired results by project completion. The project timeline runs from October 2021 to April 2028 (following a one-year no-cost extension). The MTR has been scheduled for mid-2024, providing an opportunity for adjustments to be applied in the second half of the implementation period. The audiences for the information are CI GEF Agency and executing partners (to enable adaptive management) and the GEF Secretariat (as part of its monitoring of the GEF project portfolio).

Thus, the MTR will inform the donor and implementing partners about the progress towards the project objectives. The objective of the MTR process is to provide a comprehensive and systematic account of project performance based on an assessment of:

³ Note that the scope of the Alliance is substantially larger than the GEF investment covered by this MTR. The Alliance as a whole works with more than 100 partners around the world in 161 ocean conservation areas, covering 21.9 million km² of ocean ecosystems. Stated impacts achieved to date include 1,857,000 km² of ocean under new or expanded protection, 685,000 km² of ocean under upgraded protection, and 187,000 km² of protected ocean under more effective management (see <https://www.bluenaturealliance.org/what-we-do/impact/>).



- Project design (encompassing the Theory of Change and Results Framework: outputs, outcomes, intermediate states, and intended long-term environmental impacts of the project; the causal pathways for the long-term impacts; and implicit and explicit assumptions)
- Project implementation and execution (including execution arrangements and performance, monitoring and evaluation systems, and environmental and social safeguards)
- Progress toward intended results and impact (relative to articulated baselines and targets)

In addition, the MTR will identify follow-up needs; assess materialization of co-financing; examine knowledge management; and articulate lessons and recommendations.

This report provides an introduction to the MTR in Chapter 1, including background information on its objectives, scope, methodology, limitations and the Evaluation Team. Chapter 2 presents background information on the project, its context, its development, and main stakeholders. Chapter 3 discusses the evaluation findings, ending with a summary of the evaluation ratings. Conclusions and recommendations are offered in Chapter 4.

1.2 Scope & Methodology

Given the enormous scope of the project and the diversity of its engagements around the world, each site engagement on its own could be the subject of a full evaluation. Therefore, the MTR necessarily required a strict focus on the project Results Framework and its targets, and only will concentrate on the portions of the project financed with GEF funds. The assessment covers all aspects of the project as defined in the Results Framework. The MTR does not cover all the details of every site engagement conducted by the project.

The MTR will be based on the following criteria specified in the Terms of Reference reflecting CI and GEF evaluation guidelines as well as OECD-DAC evaluation best practice and methodology:

- **Relevance:** the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organisational policies, including changes over time.
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
- **Efficiency:** the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
- **Results:** the positive and negative, and foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects produced by the project intervention. In GEF terms, results include direct project outputs, short-to medium term outcomes, and longer-term impact including global environmental benefits, replication effects and other, local effects.
- **Sustainability:** the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.



1.2.1 Evaluation Timeline

The MTR commenced with a kick-off call conducted on April 18, 2024. Interviews were conducted over the period June-August 2024. Site visits took place in late July and early August of 2024. Initial findings were submitted to CI GEF Agency on August 15, 2024, and then the draft MTR report on September 13, 2024; the evaluators then processed feedback and submitted the final report on October 8, 2024.

1.2.2 Evaluation Team Composition

The overall responsibility for managing this MTR resides with CI GEF Agency, who has contracted the consultants. Dr. Eduard Niesten will be the lead consultant and will be responsible for directing and coordinating the evaluation and final production of deliverables. Dr. Heidi Gjertsen will be responsible for primary collection of project documentation and leading key informant interviews. She will lead activities relating to environmental and social safeguards. Dr. Niesten and Dr. Gjertsen will share joint responsibility for analysis and drafting of outputs. The Project Management Unit (PMU) will be responsible for liaising with the MTR team to provide documents, help set up stakeholder interviews and assist in coordinating site visits for the completion of the work.

1.2.3 Evaluation Methods

The methodologies used for this evaluation include desk reviews, key informant interviews, site visits, and stakeholder review and input, including presentation of draft findings for feedback and input, as described below. Throughout the evaluation, the consultants liaised with the CI team and partners to ensure that key interests and questions are addressed, and that the emerging report is consistent with CI and GEF expectations.

Desk reviews: The evaluation began with a desk review of background documents on the project (e.g., PIF, Project Document, Environmental and Social Safeguards plans [including Accountability and Grievance Mechanism, Gender Mainstreaming, and Stakeholder Engagement], Work plans, Budgets, Project Inception Report, Quarterly Reports, PIRs, documents with project results, Finalized GEF Focal Area Tracking Tools, policies and guidelines used by the Executing Agency, CI-GEF Evaluation Policy, GEF Evaluation Policy, Project Operational Guidelines, Manuals and Systems, etc.; see Annex 1 for a listing of documents reviewed). Staff of CI and partners were consulted for background briefings and to compile an inventory of additional relevant documentation. Desk-based analysis of project documentation was used to populate a data and information framework structured per the GEF outline for MTRs, as described in the Terms of Reference (See Annex 2). Initial analysis applied the ratings defined in the Terms of Reference (Annex 3), with further refinement based on site visits and key informant interviews.

Key informant virtual interviews: Themes and conclusions derived from the desk review provided the basis for interviews with key informants to refine and expand upon findings. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview methodology: they were conducted using an interview guide with prepared



open-ended questions and discussion topics, developed in consultation with the client (Annex 4). Semi-structured interviews allowed scope for discussions to evolve as they take place, to pursue promising lines of inquiry as they revealed themselves. An initial set of key informants was identified and prioritized together with CI and partners after which early participant referrals were solicited for additional informants. These interviews consisted of both one-on-one and group interviews. The priority was to capture perspectives from lead implementers, site level project partners and government representatives (see Annex 5 for interviews conducted).

Site visits: The team complemented desk review of documentation and key information interviews with site visits to selected project geographies. Given the available budget, the evaluation was limited to visits to two sites. Selection of locations for site visits resulted from consultation between the evaluation team and CI, and considered (among other factors):

1. Geographic diversity
2. Partner diversity
3. The nature and maturity of project engagement with the site
4. More successful sites versus more challenging sites

The projects selected for site visits were the Revillagigedo National Park project in Mexico,⁴ implemented by Beta Diversidad, and the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea Basin (NACES) initiative implemented by Birdlife International (see Annex 6 for site visit itineraries). The NACES site visit entailed 2.5 days of intensive discussions at the headquarters of Birdlife International in Cambridge, UK (August 6-8, 2024). The Mexico site visit took place in La Paz, Baja California Sur over the period July 22-24. The site visit included participation in a stakeholder workshop on sustainable financing of Revillagigedo National Park. Additional meetings were held at CONANP and at Hotel Catedral.

Stakeholder review and input: Consultation with CI occurred regularly throughout the consultancy. In addition to update calls, dedicated calls/virtual workshops were held with CI and Executing Partners to launch the evaluation exercise (kick-off call and the Inception Workshop). Further input was solicited as feedback on the initial findings brief and the first draft of the Mid-Term Review Report.

Preparation of dissemination materials and final deliverables: Providing draft versions of materials to CI and its partners for review and feedback was essential to developing a final report that meets client needs and expectations. The Final Mid-Term Review Report will reflect feedback on the draft report, with adjustments made in response to feedback enumerated in a separate document.

1.2.4 Limitations of the Evaluation

⁴ During the Mexico site visit, Beta Diversidad and partners also took advantage of the evaluator's presence to present the Dos Mares project, which is part of the Blue Nature Alliance portfolio that is not supported with GEF funding.



As noted above, the scope of the project is enormous, encompassing a diversity of engagements all around the world. Given time and budget constraints, it was difficult for the MTR to do justice to the breadth and depth of the work that has taken place. Only two site visits were possible, and it was not possible to interview informants relating to each of the project's engagements and interventions.

A further challenge for the evaluation was that creating or expanding marine protected areas typically involves complex legal and political processes, which can be difficult to predict in terms of outcomes or timing. This complicated the assessment of progress and likelihood of eventual achievement of targets relating to new and expanded areas under protection.

Finally, assessing improved management effectiveness can be complicated by time lags between investment and results. For sites where changes in management effectiveness have not yet been formally assessed, the MTR was limited in its ability to identify progress.



2 Project Description and Background Context

2.1 Development Context

The ocean is the foundation for all life on earth. It covers over 71% of the Earth's surface and is the planet's largest biosphere, home to 50-80% of all life on Earth. The ocean also generates 50% of the Earth's oxygen, absorbs 25% of all CO₂ emissions and captures 90% of the additional heat generated from those emissions—making it the largest carbon sink on the planet and a vital buffer against the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, the ocean provides the main source of protein for over 3 billion people while directly supporting the livelihoods of over 10% of the world's total population via fisheries and aquaculture. However, the oceans are in extreme peril as biodiversity and habitat loss, collapsing fish populations, and unprecedented sea-level rise and dangerously warming waters caused by climate change are impacting both human and animal populations around the world. Scientific consensus holds that under a business-as-usual scenario, by the end of the century, much of the world's seas could be hot, acidic and struggling to support life, with catastrophic implications for marine life, Earth's climate, and the food security of billions of people worldwide.

- The United Nations has reported that 70% of the Earth's coral reefs are threatened: 20% have already been destroyed with no hope for recovery, 24% are under imminent risk of collapse, and an additional 26% are at risk due to longer-term threats. By 2030, half of all coral reefs are projected to be at “high” to “critical” risk, increasing to 80% by 2050.
- Approximately 20% of total global mangrove area was lost between 1980 and 2005 with declines continuing at an estimated 1% per year.
- In 2015, industrial fishing was occurring in 55% of the world's ocean while the proportion of stocks that are within biologically sustainable levels have decreased drastically from 90% in 1974 to 66% in 2015. Within LMEs globally, almost 50% of fish stocks are overexploited or collapsed.

Challenges associated with expanding marine conservation include political will, secure funding and effective management, as well as integrating human dimensions in marine conservation planning and management. Four reasons advanced by the Blue Nature Alliance for why it is necessary to account for and address human dimensions in efforts to advance large-scale ocean conservation are:

- The oceans are occupied and used by small-scale fishers, Indigenous peoples, women and coastal communities in developed and developing nations. An estimated 600 million people live along coastlines around the world, 60 million people working in fisheries and aquaculture, 775 million people worldwide with a high dependence on the oceans, and 525 million people who are highly dependent on the oceans for nutrition. Indigenous people are up to 15 times more reliant on seafood and fish for food security. Given that coastal populations often occupy and rely on coastal areas, most marine conservation actions will impact the wellbeing of local people in some way - from positive benefits garnered from ecosystem protections and fisheries



improvements to negative consequences derived from displacement and loss of access to fishing areas.

- It is an internationally accepted norm that local and Indigenous people have a right to participate in governance and in environmental decisions that affect their lives. Marine conservation decision-makers and practitioners must engage local people and manage social impacts in the planning and management of MPAs or any ocean conservation tool. The rights of local people (and indigenous peoples in particular, per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)) to participate more fully in decisions that affect their lives must be respected and afforded (the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent - FPIC).
- The long-term effectiveness and persistence of ocean conservation initiatives relies on good governance and equitable outcomes.⁵ Participation of stakeholders can lead to ocean conservation actions that are more socially acceptable and culturally appropriate, such that stakeholders are more likely to support the activities and comply with regulations. Long-term support from local people can also help ensure that ocean conservation measures are durable and persist, reducing the risk of downgrading or degazetting. Inclusive governance may also be more cost effective in the long term.
- Finally, global agreements and conservation policy mandate that terrestrial and marine protected areas and conservation areas be created and managed through inclusive and equitable governance processes, respect human and Indigenous rights, and produce equitable outcomes.

2.2 Problems that the Project Sought to Address

The project's ProDoc describes four anthropogenic pressures as key root causes of declining global ocean health:

- *Habitat Loss*: Drivers of habitat loss include coastal development, pollution, destructive fishing, and aquaculture. Climate change is causing significant loss of coral reef habitats. In addition to the direct impacts of fishing, certain fishing gears cause permanent and irreversible damage to benthic marine habitats, including seamounts and coral reefs. Additionally, overexploitation of mobile marine organisms—species including whales, sharks, tuna and billfish—disrupts the role of their structure-forming biomass that constitutes habitat in the open ocean.
- *Fishing Pressure*: Despite increasing effort, an expanding global fisheries footprint and new technologies, catch from global marine fisheries has not increased significantly since the late 1980s. Fisheries in developing countries appear to be significantly overexploited; and maintaining productivity increasingly comes at the expense of ecosystem and habitat health and preservation of non-target species. Illegal, underreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing further

⁵ Good governance refers to decision-making processes that are inclusive of and perceived to be legitimate by local stakeholders.



exacerbates these threats. Together, overfishing and IUU fishing are driving economic losses of up to US\$83 billion per year.

- *Climate Change:* The ocean is disproportionately harmed by the increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the atmosphere from human activities. CO₂ is altering the temperature and chemical composition of our ocean, leading to changes in ocean temperature and circulation, rising sea levels, coral bleaching and changes in the behaviors of species that call it home. By 2100, primary production in the ocean is expected to decline by 6% globally and by 11% in tropical zones.
- *Pollution:* The majority of pollutants entering the ocean come from activities on land. Excess nutrients, often a result of agricultural runoff, can result in hypoxic/dead zones while plastic pollution generated on land flows into the sea due to inadequate disposal facilities. Source-to-sea management approaches are necessary to manage these land-based pollutants. Ocean noise pollution from military sonar, industrial shipping and exploration for oil, gas and minerals is altering the underwater acoustic landscape, harming—and in some cases killing marine species.

Meanwhile the momentum and technology for seabed mining is growing, and so is the alarm that such mining could have long-lasting and unforeseen impacts on ocean health. While little is known about these deep-sea environments, potential impacts may include the physical destruction of habitats, large underwater sediment plumes and noise, and chemical and light pollution resulting from mining operations.

The Alliance highlights the following institutional barriers to expanding effective ocean protection:

- *Insufficient financial resources:* Philanthropic and public financing for area-based ocean conservation has failed to keep pace with the threats facing our ocean and the need for conservation, especially in less developed countries. Without a significant increase in funding and the design of innovative and blended financing mechanisms, momentum for ocean conservation will dissipate.
- *Insufficient management capacity and cost-effective tools:* The footprint of declared or designated large-scale MPAs (LSMPAs) is growing quickly, but the number of experienced LSMPA managers remains extremely limited. Capacity development for LSMPAs is needed. Technologies to surveil and enforce large remote ocean areas are burgeoning, but the large ocean states that most need these technologies have limited access.
- *Insufficient cross-sectoral collaboration:* Long-standing tensions between MPA and fisheries practitioners has generated siloed programs and projects, whereas communication and collaboration between these two groups could generate win-win solutions that benefit both biodiversity and people.
- *Insufficient scientific evidence on human benefits:* The true value of healthy ocean ecosystems to culture, resilience, food security, and blue economic growth are not fully understood or recognized when governments are making development decisions and evaluating economic



trade-offs. There is a need for additional evaluation and scientific evidence on the human dimensions of ocean protection, which can drive increased political will.

- *Insufficient regional cooperation and transboundary governance:* There are different and sometimes competing international and regional bodies for managing mobile and migratory marine species that traverse maritime borders, including a number of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Meanwhile, many species with transboundary migrations are unmanaged. And while there are many regional and global agreements in place (e.g., Voluntary Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines, the Global Program of Action for Land based Sources of Marine Pollution, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, Port State Measurement Agreement, Large Marine Ecosystems Strategic Action Programs and regional conventions and commissions), there is a lack of communication and coordination among these entities in addition to a lack of support for integrated ocean governance.

2.3 Project Description and Strategy

Table 1: Project Objective, Components and Outcomes

Objective: To catalyze the conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems, to safeguard biodiversity, help build resilience to climate change, promote human well-being and enhance ecosystem connectivity and function.		
Component	Outcome	GEF Contribution (USD)
1: Site Scoping	1.1: Engagement frameworks (i.e. new or existing ocean conservation areas) that meet the Alliance criteria have been collaboratively developed and endorsed.	375,128 (320,265 original CEO endorsed)
2: New Protection of Key Ocean Geographies	2.1: New or expanded ocean conservation areas legally recognized.	12,946,842 (11,236,026 original CEO endorsed)
3: Improved Protection of Key Ocean Geographies	3.1: Previously established ocean conservation areas have upgraded protections and/or improved management, as evidenced by the legal ratification for upgraded protection level, and/or for measurably improved management, as measured by the achievement of a site-specific target for improved management effectiveness.	5,686,731 (7,553,410 original CEO endorsed)
4: Global Enabling Conditions to Scale Up Ocean Conservation	4.1: By 2025, collaborative scientific research that advances the field of large-scale and/or	2,074,372



	transboundary ocean conservation developed and implemented. ⁶	(2,074,080 original CEO endorsed)
	4.2: Knowledge management and learning for the fields of large-scale and transboundary ocean conservation has been strengthened and expanded.	
5: Monitoring & Evaluation Plans Inform Adaptive Management	5.1: Monitoring and evaluation framework for the Alliance in place and used to facilitate adaptive management at both the portfolio and site level.	475,534 (374,825 original CEO endorsed)

The expected objective-level results presented in the project design were as follows:

- a. Ocean conservation areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use: 1,250,000,000 hectares (750M ha created; 500M ha under improved management)
- b. Level of engagement in IW: Learn: 4
- c. Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment: 20,000 direct beneficiaries (~ 50% women)⁷

These objective targets clearly contribute to GEF International Waters objectives of *Strengthening National Blue Economy Opportunities* and *Improving Management in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction* as well as commitments under the Aichi targets, SDG14, and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Based on project progress to date (see below), targets b. and c. are readily achievable. Target a. is ambitious and will require considerable acceleration of project progress. That said, as explained below, there is ample reason to believe that the project will reach this target, as site engagements are maturing and the Alliance's portfolio approach to selection of sites for engagement comprises a strategic selection of sites of different sizes and likelihoods of success (sites are assessed and identified as high, medium, or low likelihood of success, and the Alliance's engagement portfolio seeks a balanced combination of these site types).

To that end, the Alliance has highlighted the following considerations for selection of engagements, seeking in particular sites with attributes as follows:

- **Significant:** Ocean areas that are of vital importance to nature and people.

⁶ GEF funding under this component is directed to Outcome 4.2; work under Outcome 4.1 is supported with co-financing.

⁷ In the original project design the target was 2,467,000 direct beneficiaries (~ 50% women; ~ 50% men). This target was adjusted in FY24 using a new methodology intended to capture the number of people living in close proximity to ocean conservation areas and employed in the small-scale fisheries sector, better reflecting the project's focus on offshore ocean areas and high seas.



- **Catalytic:** Ideas and opportunities that will rapidly build momentum for durable protections, inspire innovative approaches or push conservation to unprecedented new scales.
- **Political Will:** Decision-making authorities of national, sub-national, or Indigenous communities have expressed a strong vision for ocean conservation; and these leaders are prepared to take action and partner with others, including the Alliance, to achieve this vision.
- **Local Engagement:** Local champions are ready to work with partners to drive towards impactful ocean conservation outcomes through engagement with their community.
- **Achievable:** The Alliance aims to engage partners working with clear outcomes and a high likelihood of success.
- **Leverage:** The presence of co-investment and match funding, which may include government revenues, private sector donations, public funding or other philanthropic giving to contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of a site.

The Blue Nature Alliance has sought to develop a portfolio of engagement sites that include:

- National or sub-national sites within in a GEF eligible country that meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - Located within a multi-country Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) that has a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) that includes goals for marine protection.
 - Located in one of the 14 Pacific Island countries that have adopted the Pacific Islands SIDS SAP.
- Transboundary Sites
- Sites in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, commonly known as the high seas.⁸

Table 2: Blue Nature Alliance Sites as of August 2024

Blue Nature Alliance Engagement Name	Classification	Eligible/ Utilizing GEF Funding	GeoName ID	Location Name	Type of Area
Antarctica's Southern Ocean	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	4036624	Weddell Sea	New Area
Australian Sub Antarctic Islands	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	12097293	Macquarie Island Marine Park	New Area & Upgraded Protections
Benguela Current	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3351663	Benguela	New Area & Improved Management

⁸ Note that the Alliance has taken a conservative approach with respect to using GEF funding to support such areas, recognizing that GEF is awaiting further developments relating to the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).



Canada's Arctic & Atlantic	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	5978134	Hudson Bay	New Area & Improved Management
Caribbean	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	7729891	Caribbean	New Area & Expanded Area & Improved Management
Chile Portfolio of MPAs	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	3886788	Archipiélago Juan Fernández	Improved Management
Clipperton	New in FY24 PIR		4020092	Clipperton Island	Expanded Area
Cocos Island, Costa Rica	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	3624182	Isla del Coco	Improved Management
Colombia	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3675570	Isla Malpelo	New Area & Improved Management
Cordillera de Coiba, Panama	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	3712093	Isla de Coiba	Expanded Area & Improved Management
Dutch Caribbean	New in FY24 PIR	No	7729891	Caribbean	New Area
Emperor Seamount Chain	New in FY24 PIR	No	2130876	Emperor Seamounts	New Area
European Union	Existing in FY23 PIR.	No	6255148	Europe	New Area & Upgraded Protections
Great Bear Sea, Canada	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	6115071	Queen Charlotte Sound	New Area & Improved Management
Gulf of Guinea	Existing in FY23 PIR.	Yes	2363255	Gulf of Guinea	New Area & Expanded Area & Improved Management
Indonesia	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	1643084	Republic of Indonesia	New Area
Ireland	Existing in FY23 PIR.	No	2963597	Ireland	New Area
Islas Diego Ramirez, Chile	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3892449	Islas Diego Ramirez	Improved Management
Lau Seascape, Fiji	Included at CEO Endorsement		4036132	Lau Province	New Area & Improved Management
Mariana Trench Marine National Monument	New in FY24 PIR	No	2113272	Mariana Trench	Improved Management
Natural Park of the Coral Sea, New Caledonia	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	2139685	New Caledonia	New Area & Improved Management
Niue	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	4036232	Niue	Improved Management



North Atlantic Current & Evlanov Seabasin (NACES MPA)	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3411923	North Atlantic Ocean	Upgraded Protections
Palau National Marine Sanctuary	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	1559582	Republic of Palau	Improved Management
Panama's Caribbean	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3715208	Volcan Bank	Expanded Area & Improved Management
Philippine Rise	New in FY24 PIR	Yes	1880100	Benham Plateau	New Area & Improved Management
Revillagigedo, Mexico	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3988751	Revillagigedo Islands	Improved Management
Ross Sea, Antarctica	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	4036625	Ross Sea	Improved Management
Salas y Gomez & Nazca Ridges	New in FY24 PIR	No	3948654	Nazca Ridge	New Area
Samoa	New in FY24 PIR	No	4034894	Samoa	New Area
Seychelles	Included at CEO Endorsement		241170	Republic of Seychelles	Improved Management
South Georgia & Sandwich Islands	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	3474415	South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands	New Area & Expanded Area & Improved Management
Tonga	New in FY24 PIR		4032283	Kingdom of Tonga	New Area
Tristan da Cunha	Included at CEO Endorsement	No	3370684	Tristan da Cunha	New Area
Two Seas, Mexico	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	4016118	Gulf of California	New Area
Uruguay	Existing in FY23 PIR	Yes	3439705	Oriental Republic of Uruguay	New Area
Pacific Remote Islands National Marine Sanctuary	Existing in FY23 PIR	No	7576242	Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument	Expanded Area & Improved Management
Western Indian Ocean	Included at CEO Endorsement	Yes	8426502	Mozambique Channel	New Area & Improved Management



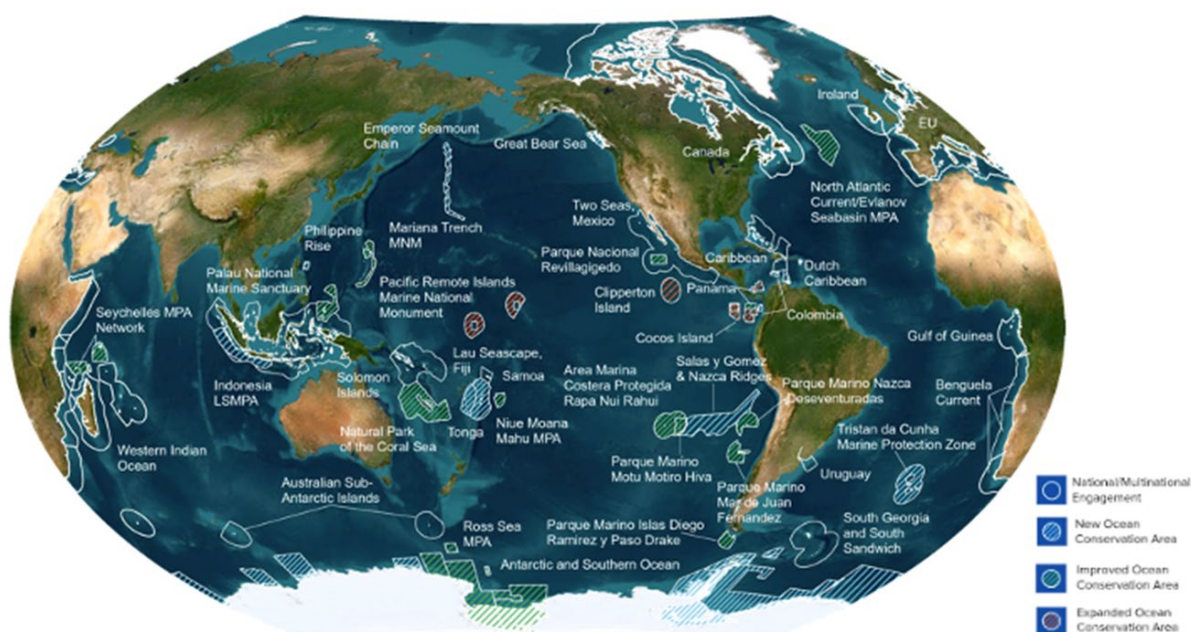


Figure 1: Map of Blue Nature Alliance Sites

In addition to engagement at individual sites, the Alliance also invests in global enabling conditions for ocean conservation at scale (Component 4). This global work engages relevant partners from anywhere in the world to produce and disseminate globally relevant science, tools or other innovations.

2.4 Project Implementation Arrangements

As the Implementing Agency for the project the **CI-GEF Project Agency** provides project assurance, maintains oversight of all technical and financial management aspects, and provides other assistance upon request of the Executing Agency. The CI-GEF Project Agency also monitors the project's execution and achievement of the project outputs, ensures proper use of GEF funds, and reviews and approves changes in budgets or workplans. The CI-GEF Project Agency will arbitrate and ensure resolution of any execution conflicts.

As the Executing Agency, the **Blue Nature Alliance** has established a two-tier governance structure with a Steering Council and a Management Team. Pew and CI are Executing Core Partners for Blue Nature Alliance with primary responsibility for the Alliance's management and day-to-day operations. The **Blue Nature Alliance Steering Council** consists of representatives from the Core Partners, which includes Executing Core Partners (CI and Pew) and donors who have committed US\$25,000,000 or more to the Alliance by way of a grant to an Executing Core Partner. In addition to CI and Pew, current Alliance



Steering Council members are: GEF, the Minderoo Foundation, and the Rob Walton Foundation.⁹ As a Core Partner and Steering Council member, the GEF is able to guide investments using GEF project funds to be consistent with the GEF's IW Focal Area Strategy and to prioritize Key Biodiversity Areas.

The Steering Council meets twice annually, with at least one of those meetings held in person if possible. Other ad hoc Steering Council meetings may be scheduled. The Steering Council provides oversight and guidance to the Blue Nature Alliance Management Team on annual workplans, budget and operations. The **Blue Nature Alliance Core Team** comprises senior staff from CI and Pew responsible for day-to-day operations and coordination of the Alliance activities. The management team is responsible for ensuring that project outputs and results are delivered as planned by overseeing design and execution of the annual strategic work-plan, budget, grant-making, and grant management (see Annex 7 for details on Steering Committee and Management Team roles). The Blue Nature Alliance Technical Director is a member of the management team and is responsible for day-to-day management of the project in concert with a project coordinator.

The Blue Nature Alliance has solicited participation of other NGOs, donors, and technical experts in the Alliance. Three types of partners in addition to Core Partners are:

- **Implementing Partners** such as local and international NGOs, private sector operators, the science and research community, and government institutions help achieve project outcomes.
- **Leverage Partners** fund or provide in-kind contributions directly for work that contributes to achieving shared site-level or global goals of the Blue Nature Alliance. Examples of Leverage Partners include national and sub-national governments, private foundations, multilateral/bilateral agencies, individual donors, NGOs, and private sector organizations.
- **Strategic Advisors** provide input and feedback on technical, regional, cultural, scientific and other issues as needed. These advisors may include scientists, regional experts, government officials, industry representatives and marine conservation practitioners. As needed, advisors may form part of technical working groups or advisory councils.

Core policies, procedures and systems of the Alliance are based on those of CI, as documented in the Blue Nature Alliance Operations Manual. The Alliance uses a detailed scoping process to identify opportunities for investment and has established an open mechanism to receive EOIs from potential implementing partners, as a step towards Grant Agreements. Once a site engagement has been approved, proposals are invited from potential implementing partners and evaluated through a fair and transparent process and subjected to capacity assessments to verify compliance with requirements of the Agreement as well as GEF policies and procedures, and to allow CI GEF Agency to ensure adherence to GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards. Executing Core Partners (CI and Pew) carrying out project specific work also can serve as Implementing Partners, subject to same selection criteria as other grantees, but

⁹ Although the Moore Foundation has not contributed \$25 million, a representative from the Moore Foundation also serves as a Steering Committee member with voting rights owing to their depth of experience and knowledge.



they must disclose any potential, real and/or perceived conflicts of interest and be approved by the Steering Council regardless of the grant amount.¹⁰

2.5 Project Timing and Milestones

The project was endorsed by GEF CEO on September 3, 2021, resulting in an implementation start date of October 5, 2021. Project completion is anticipated by April 30, 2028. Other milestones include:

Feb. 8 & 9, 2022 Project Inception Workshop

July 2023 First disbursement

May-August 2024 Mid-Term Review

2.6 Main Stakeholders

In addition to the stakeholders described above in the Project Implementation Arrangements, Blue Nature Alliance identified the following key stakeholder types in the Project Document:

Potential Blue Nature Alliance Stakeholder Group	Definition and Potential Role
Managers and Staff of MPAs and other ocean conservation efforts at scale.	This includes both active managers and staff and up and coming staff and managers that may still be pursuing their education or are early in their career.
Policy Makers	National and local law makers especially those relevant to decisions related to large scale management and budgets.
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	International and National NGOs that may become partners in implementation of Blue Nature Alliance sites, those that are pursuing ocean conservation at scale outside the Alliance and others that can provide resources and capacity-building support.
Rightsholders	Intergenerational or traditional owners of territory or natural resources and Indigenous leaders and communities that may or may not have resource tenure but are Indigenous rightsholders to a site and/or its resources.
Key stakeholders	Relevant communities of place and practice with a legitimate interest in the geography and/or its resources.
Private Sector	Commercial fishers, tourism, and other relevant operators. Potential corporate partners including those engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility, Payment for Ecosystem Services and other potential private sector finance mechanisms.
The General Public	The general public may be an audience for the Alliance in cases where their support is vital to establishment and/or long-term maintenance of a site.

¹⁰ CI programs selected as implementing partners are not eligible for GEF project funds.



Other Practitioners for Ocean Conservation at Scale	There are many programs and projects that are implementing ocean conservation at scale including the GEF Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) program and the Big Ocean network of more than 37 (and growing) Large- Scale Marine Protected Areas (LSMPAs). Some of these sites will receive investment from the Alliance. However, many that do not receive direct investment from the Alliance, can still benefit from sharing lessons and exchange of knowledge that is designed to improve management effectiveness.
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For a full listing of the Blue Nature Alliance’s current stakeholders, see Annex 8.



3 Findings

3.1 Project Strategy

3.1.1 Project Design

The stated objective of the Blue Nature Alliance GEF project is *catalyzing the conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems (approximately 3.5% of the global ocean) to safeguard biodiversity, help build resilience to climate change, promote human well-being and enhance ecosystem connectivity and function*. Noting that the GEF investment in the Blue Nature Alliance is nested within a larger strategy for the overall Alliance, the Theory of Change to achieve this objective as articulated in the Project Document reflects an effort to ‘retrofit’ the project logic in GEF terms. Overall, this succeeds, capturing the essential nature of the project as an alliance that supports a broad portfolio of site interventions and strengthens global enabling conditions for ocean conservation (see Theory of Change as presented in Annex 9). The causal chain from outputs (e.g., investing in MPA establishment or upgrading, development or improvement of management plans, preparation of financing plans, production of knowledge products) to outcomes and objective-level targets is clear, and captured succinctly in a general statement of the Theory of Change as follows (ProDoc p. 32):

Well-managed ocean conservation areas reduce key threats to the ocean and increase ocean resilience. Healthy oceans are better able to provide critical ecosystems services for people now and in the future. This project will address key barriers to ocean conservation through site-based and global investments in order to generate 1.25 billion hectares of new and improved ocean conservation areas and increased enabling conditions globally for large scale ocean conservation. The project will directly support ocean conservation areas covering 3.5% of the ocean, representing 35% of the global Aichi Target and SDG14 Target 5 of protecting 10% of the ocean. This significant contribution will build additional momentum towards the emerging global goal of protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030.

However, the assumptions that accompany the Theory of Change in the Project Document do not relate to the feasibility of activities and outputs, and how those lead to the outcomes and ultimate objective. Rather, the articulated assumptions are that if the global 30% target for ocean conservation and management is achieved, we will have healthier oceans and associated socioeconomic benefits as a result of reduced threats and enhanced resilience to climate change. The Theory of Change could have been strengthened by explicit enumeration of the assumptions that need to hold for the project activities to achieve their intended impacts, so that assumptions could be tested and project design responses planned in the event that they do not hold. Aspects for which this is the case include:

- Underlying the Theory of Change there is an implicit process for selecting sites over the course of project implementation and co-designing the site interventions. This in turn reflects



assumptions about the robustness of this process and its ability to result in a portfolio of projects with a high aggregated likelihood of success.

- Critical assumptions relate to the pace of project implementation, from site identification to grant negotiation to execution of activities intended to lead to intended outcomes, and whether these can achieve project objectives within the project timeframe. This is linked to the point above, particularly as likelihood of achieving objectives within the project timeframe is a consideration in site selection.
- Further assumptions that relate to the implied causal chain revolve around political will, and whether such political will where it exists or is cultivated can persist through changes in government, economic pressures, or other factors.
- The Theory of Change emphasises investment in capacity and capacity building; this implies assumptions about the feasibility of achieving the needed capacity improvements within the project timeframe, and the ability to ensure that such improvements endure despite turnover in staffing, agency reorganizations, and the like.
- Long-term sustainability of project outcomes hinge on a core assumption relating to financing. Given the scale of ambition of the project, the long-term financing requirements are enormous, such that the Theory of Change implicitly assumes a global willingness to pay that far exceeds the current amount of funding going to ocean conservation. This concerns not only management costs for new, upgraded, and improved areas, but also opportunity costs where conservation necessarily involves trade-offs with respect to some economic uses.

The underpinning for the Theory of Change prepared for the Project Document is the Alliance's concept of the *Blue Nature Alliance Conservation Journey* (see Figure 2 below). Among the points to note with respect to this concept are that different sites are at different points on this journey when they join the Alliance; the project's aim is to see progress along this journey for each site, while recognizing that it is not possible for every site to reach the final step during the project's implementation phase; and that sustainable financing is presented as the final step, but in fact work on financing happens throughout the journey.

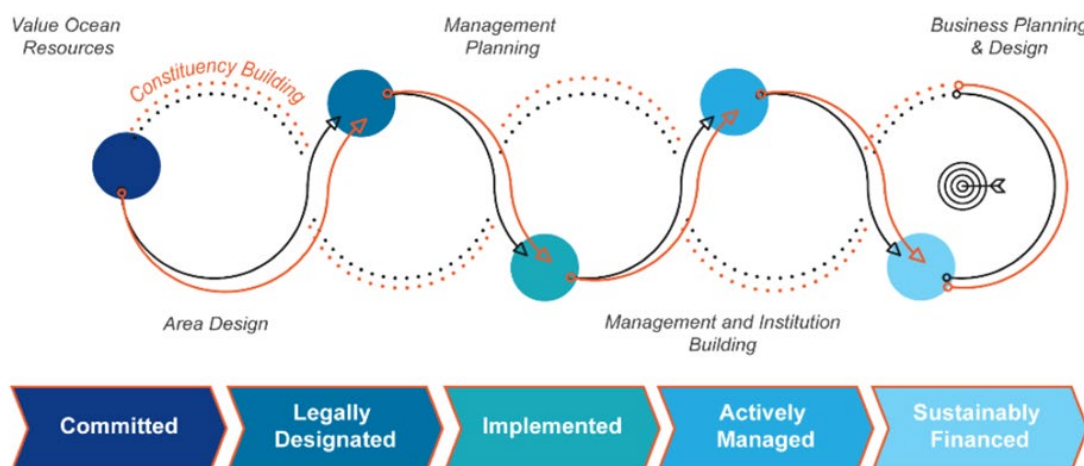


Figure 2: Blue Nature Alliance Conservation Journey



The Results Framework effectively captures the Project Document Theory of Change, providing a clear roadmap from site identification to engagement to planning and execution, as well as a clear set of knowledge management activities to contribute to global enabling conditions for ocean conservation (more on knowledge management below). The level of detail is appropriate to the nature of the project as a structure for building a portfolio of site interventions. The indicators in the Results Framework are logical and practicable, reflecting a stepwise progression of aggregate achievements within each Component based on advancements at each site.

One notable evolution from the Results Framework that has taken place over the course of project implementation is the perspective on site selection with respect to scale. The project design originally anticipated that engagement sites predominately would comprise large-scale ocean conservation areas (per the Project Document, “A significant, but not exclusive, focus of the Alliance will be on large scale marine protected areas (LSMPAs) as defined by the IUCN to be at least 15 million hectares in size).” A combination of factors including changing political conditions and updated understanding of the feasibility of engagement in potential sites (influenced in part by impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic) have led the Blue Nature Alliance to be open to a portfolio with a larger than anticipated share of ocean conservation areas that are not considered large-scale. While this has allowed the Alliance to invest in ocean conservation areas at a range of sizes, it also has meant that a higher number of engagements will be needed to meet project targets, which increases the overall level of effort required on the part of the Blue Nature Alliance team. This increased burden does not appear to have reduced the effectiveness of the team or the quality of engagements as experienced by site implementers (though there is some indication from regional leads that the burden may be untenable); perhaps the area where the strain on Blue Nature Alliance bandwidth is most apparent is on the ability to support site efforts relating to sustainable financing.

Risks and mitigation measures

The set of principal risks identified in the Project Document is complete and realistic (see Table 3 below), and the PIRs and annual work plans reflect ongoing monitoring of risks and implementation of mitigation activities. Over the course of implementation to date, the rating for Risk 1 (related to COVID-19) has decreased from moderate to low as of FY24 reporting, which is reasonable; Risk 7 (related to climate change) was rated moderate/substantial as of FY24 as impacts of climate change are becoming more pronounced. Other ratings remain unchanged.

The mitigation measures generally are appropriate and have been implemented as planned, constituting core elements of project design (versus separate risk mitigation measures). While some planned project activities were delayed by factors such as COVID-19 and changes in governments, the Blue Nature Alliance was able to maintain momentum towards its targets by adapting as needed. For example, the Alliance successfully negotiated the Revillagigedo engagement in Mexico despite significant changes in administrations and staffing.



Reliable financing for MPAs and conservation of other ocean areas remains a challenge beyond Risk 4 (funder appetite), and the Alliance's ability to assist with sustainable financing solutions may struggle to meet the demand for this type of support. This may amplify Risk 5 (capacity for effective management), though the extent to which this can be assessed is constrained by the fact that post-intervention capacity assessments are still pending.



Table 3: Identified Project Risks and Mitigation Measures

RISK DIMENSION and CATEGORIES**	RATING*	FEEDBACK ON STATUS/COMMENTS
CONTEXT		
Climate Risk 7: Global climate change negatively impacts MPAs.	Moderate / Substantial <i>(Originally rated Moderate)</i>	The site engagement team works with relevant experts to ensure climate considerations are factored in at the outset of Alliance engagement in each site and continued throughout Alliance assessment and investment. Climate risks have been assessed by the Alliance Site Engagement Team that scopes each potential site engagement. For all high-risk sites, and for other sites whenever feasible, the Alliance advises on Ocean Conservation Areas boundaries, zoning, management and monitoring to address climate change impacts. The Alliance’s partnerships with ocean conservation areas, regional institutions, and local organizations encourages sharing of experiences related to climate change adaptation programs, and the Alliance dedicates resources toward research and knowledge and towards communities of practice and learning, which could result in improved understanding of, and tools to address, climate change impacts. An increasing number of studies highlight the importance of the role of MPAs in climate change adaptation and mitigation, meaning that Alliance efforts directly support climate change adaptation and mitigation through new and improved ocean conservation areas. At the same time, a growing number of studies show increasingly severe impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems, such that the risk posed to MPAs also is growing.
Environment and Social Risk 8: Threat to marine ecosystems grow and thus demand higher investments.	Moderate	The Alliance has supported the development of robust monitoring and evaluation systems for sites and maintains regular communications with implementing partners to ensure that they are monitoring and taking necessary steps to address threats. The principal response to this risk is site-specific management plans, reinforced by partner support.
Political and Governance Risk 2: Government changes may lead to a reprioritizing and redirection of funding away from ocean conservation.	Moderate	Per its selection criteria, the Alliance has selected sites with existing political will and required stated interest – including a written commitment and financial co-investment when possible– by the decision-making authority. The Alliance Management and Delivery Team assesses the political landscape and power dynamics of site-based investments in each engagement framework and closely follows potential changes in governments to readily design and implement risk management



		strategies as needed. Site experience suggests that the Alliance's approach to managing and responding to this risk is effective, as demonstrated in Mexico.
INNOVATION		
Institutional and Policy Risk 3: A lack of alignment with local policy frameworks or support may hinder the success of long-term sustainable MPA investment	Moderate	The Alliance has cultivated local champions for site-based investments to ensure there is local support as well as an advocate for the engagement at local, regional, and national levels of government. Selection of sites to align with priorities in local policy frameworks, with explicit commitments from governments, significantly helps to mitigate this risk.
Technological	Low <i>(not assessed in project design)</i>	There is no material technological risk associated with the project. The Alliance's investment in "growing the field" and supporting the global community of practice can be expected to advance applications of technology to effective management of protected and conserved ocean areas.
Financial and Business Model Risk 4: Global economic and financial challenges may lead to reduced funding from international donors, causing leverage targets not to be achieved.	Moderate	The Alliance has set conservative leverage targets in the project design phase, believed to be achievable despite global economic headwinds. The Alliance has leveraged more than \$400 million from their site-based and non-site-based engagements (distinct from cofinance and not included in GEF cofinance totals). The Alliance is working on 5-year plans for reaching effective management and long-term financing for most sites and will support business planning and other long-term financing initiatives that will enable sites to achieve financial sustainability. The model of site-based support for developing and executing financing strategies has been welcomed by the site partners. The Alliance's ability to assist with sustainable financing solutions may struggle to meet the demand for this type of support.
EXECUTION		
Stakeholder Risk 6: Stakeholder involvement, including IPLCs, is not sufficient to ensure support for conservation activities.	Moderate	The Alliance has deployed a robust system to ensure appropriate stakeholder involvement, including gender and Indigenous peoples' safeguards and grievance mechanisms to ensure that engagements are properly assessed for risks they could pose to community members and that appropriate safeguard instruments or risk management controls are incorporated into project design. A stakeholder engagement plan is developed for each site, with attention to ensuring adequate involvement to secure stakeholder support.



Risk 1: Ongoing challenges associated with COVID-19 result in delays in implementation and challenging conditions in which to advance objectives	Low <i>(Originally rated Moderate)</i>	In 2020, the Alliance responded to the pandemic by conducting remote meetings and workshops, remote site scoping, and closely collaborating with in-region implementing partners to advance Blue Nature Alliance objectives and targets. The Alliance team has followed science-based guidance from national health authorities and CI's Health and Safety Officer in terms of health precautions and travel restrictions. The project's adaptive management in response to the pandemic achieved notable success in developing a portfolio of site engagements despite challenges.
Capacity for implementation Risk 5: Weak management capacities for planning, management, and governance reduce the effectiveness of site-based engagements.	Moderate	Engagements included assessment of capacity gaps and needs for each site. The Alliance addressed this risk by providing support for capacity building, planning, and other activities to improve or appropriately design management and governance, at both institutional (e.g., National PA agency) and local levels (MPA managers), as well as convening regional and global capacity-building and learning networks. Post-intervention capacity assessments are still pending.
Fiduciary	Low <i>(not assessed in project design)</i>	There is no material fiduciary risk associated with the project. Lead executing partners CI and Pew have robust financial management systems and the institutions have long track records of upholding fiduciary responsibilities.
OVERALL RISK RATING	Moderate	

**High, Substantial, Moderate, Low*

*** Numbered risks in this column are risks as articulated in the approved Project Document.*



Incorporation of lessons in project design

The Blue Nature Alliance GEF project design process benefited from early experiences accumulated following the launch of the Alliance in 2020, and application of these lessons clearly bore fruit:

- Meaningful partnership takes work, requiring considerable investment of time and effort in relationship-building. Interviews with site implementers and co-funders conveyed a clear sense of success on this front, with universal appreciation for the Alliance's openness, flexibility, and dedication to communication. Ongoing collaboration and partnership dynamics facilitated by regional contact leads were highlighted repeatedly as a strength of the Blue Nature Alliance.
- The ProDoc cited the importance of aligning around shared goals for sites and then flexibly executing. The Alliance has embraced this as a core operating approach by dedicating more upfront effort during the scoping process to alignment around a shared goal with a single or a few lead implementing partners and adjusting its site engagement strategy to maintain more flexibility during implementation. This flexibility was noted by several interviews as a significant advantage and strength of the Alliance.
- The ProDoc emphasized as a lesson the power of "Leading from Behind," providing support and managing communications in such a way as to highlight the successes of partners rather than promoting the Alliance itself. For example, Birdlife International noted this as a key factor in their ability to successfully engage governments and intergovernmental bodies in the NACES project.

However, the Project Document did not reflect analysis or application of lessons learned from other GEF projects. Although arguably this reflects the fact that the Alliance investment is somewhat unique, there have been a number of GEF investments in mechanisms involving support to portfolios of projects, with examples including support for Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, the Conservation Agreement Private Partnership Platform, and the Inclusive Conservation Initiative, as well as GEF's own Impact Programs and Integrated Programs, which might have been examined for lessons learned relating to site selection, safeguard requirements, reporting processes, and other aspects. That said, the Alliance has benefited from ongoing communication with initiatives such as the Inclusive Conservation Initiative and Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund over the course of the project to share best practices and lessons learned relating to grant making.

3.1.2 Project Outcomes

Overall outcome rating: Satisfactory

The project objectives respond directly to GEF priorities. The design of the project reflects a strong focus on delivery of the outcomes, providing a clear and rationally sequenced process. At mid-point, the project's processes effectively have delivered significant progress toward outcomes. The project already has exceeded most of the targets for its outputs, such that there is strong reason to be confident that it ultimately will achieve its objective-level targets. Several factors indicate that this project may set a strong benchmark to which others can be compared in the future: 1) securing \$115



million in co-financing upfront for the Alliance as a whole; 2) the ability of the project to leverage a further \$426 million across its site engagements worldwide; and 3) strong outperformance of the project in terms of targets for key outputs suggests significant efficiencies relative to expectations.

The Blue Nature Alliance has achieved marked progress on its Outcomes per the logic of its theory of change reflected in the project design: initiate a set of site engagements (Outcome 1.1) that lead to either new ocean conservation areas (Outcome 2.1) or upgraded protection and/or improved management of previously established ocean conservation areas (Outcome 3.1); reinforce these advances through scientific research (Outcome 4.1, supported with co-financing) and knowledge management and learning (Outcome 4.2); and verify execution with an effective M&E framework (Outcome 5.1).

Effective delivery of Outputs has directly contributed to each of these outcomes (see Section 3.2 below), in most instances exceeding targets. Moreover, explicit consideration of alignment of potential site engagements with national policies (e.g., national commitments to the 30x30 GBF target) in scoping and feasibility assessments under Outcome 1.1 ensured government support that contributes to achievement of Outcomes 2.1 and 3.1, and responsiveness to site-based demand for research, knowledge products, and learning opportunities contributes to success on Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2. Further contributing factors to successful Outcomes include the core functioning of the Alliance as a set of true collaborative partnerships, highly responsive regional engagement leads, targeted technical support, and ongoing adaptive management and process improvement, as discussed elsewhere in this report.

Concretely, Outcome 1.1 of the project design was critical to initiate implementation by developing a portfolio of site engagements. Despite the challenges of COVID, the Alliance team successfully advanced with desk assessments and scoping of potential sites, exceeding the project targets for these steps as well as subsequent preparation of engagement frameworks (27 versus a target of 25) and securing of Steering Council endorsement of engagement sites (27 versus a target of 20).

This means that the Alliance is, as of August 2024, actively engaged in work with implementation partners over an area of 1.06 billion ha for new ocean conservation areas (Outcome 2.1), as well as 1.06 billion ha for upgraded protection and/or improved management (Outcome 3.1). Considerable progress remains needed to achieve targets for Outcomes 2.1 and 3.1 (117M of 750M hectares [15.6%] and 87M of 500M hectares [17.4%] achieved to date respectively). However, this may be expected, as the first part of the implementation period focused on site identification and engagement leading to multi-year site engagements, with activities towards targets now advancing such that establishment, upgrading, and/or improved management of sites will be concentrated in the second half of the implementation period. As the project already is active over a total area of 2.12 billion ha, there is justified confidence in its ability to achieve its area targets.

The project already has substantially exceeded targets with respect to knowledge generation and dissemination (Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2), including for research projects supported, peer-reviewed



publications produced, learning participants reached, new tools and innovations disseminated, organizations engaged, and presentations delivered, as well as materials to be shared through IW:Learn. The project can be expected to outperform on these fronts even further during the remainder of implementation.

Finally, Outcome 5.1 relating to Monitoring & Evaluation is well on track, as detailed further below.

Relevance

The project objectives respond directly to GEF priorities. Ambitious area targets for new ocean conservation areas and for upgraded protection and/or improved management for existing ocean conservation areas offer clear and substantial contributions to GEF Core Indicators 2, 7 and 8. Given the inclusion of national, transboundary and high seas sites, combined with attention to sustainable long-term financing needs, these targets also contribute to GEF IW objectives of *Strengthening National Blue Economy Opportunities* and *Improving Management in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction*. Finally, as site selection criteria include political will and policy alignment, the interventions are contributing to national priorities as well as country commitments under Aichi targets, SDG14, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The design of the project reflects a strong focus on delivery of the outcomes, providing a clear and rationally sequenced process for selection of engagement sites, engagement to achieve new or improved conservation and management, and knowledge generation to catalyze further global consolidation and scale up of successful ocean conservation. The core nature of the project as an alliance with global scope open to a multitude of partners is especially relevant given that ambitious scale of the overall intervention. This approach offers synergies through partnership and alignment of strategies and efforts among a broad coalition of funders and implementers.

Relevance rating: Highly Satisfactory

Effectiveness

At mid-point, the project's processes effectively have delivered significant progress toward outcomes. The project already has exceeded most of the targets for its outputs, such that there is strong reason to be confident that it ultimately will achieve its objective-level targets, ambitious as they may be. By exceeding targets for the number of engagement sites and total area under engagements, the project has developed a portfolio of sufficient size and diversity that it is likely to meet targets for newly established ocean conservation areas and for areas under upgraded protection and/or improved management. The project's work on advancing the overall field of ocean conservation at a global level significantly has exceeded targets, contributing a rich array of knowledge, tools and lessons learned. Thus, the actual outcomes of the project to date are more than commensurate with expected outcomes. That said, the gap between objective level targets for the project and their achievement to date is



considerable; despite confidence that the project will be able to achieve the targets, this precludes a highly satisfactory rating.

Effectiveness rating: Satisfactory

Efficiency

The sheer scope and scale of the project precludes ready comparison to other initiatives in terms of cost effectiveness or achievements relative to input of time/effort. Nevertheless, several factors indicate that this project may set a strong benchmark to which others can be compared in the future. First, securing \$115 million in co-financing upfront for the Alliance as a whole has made possible site investments that otherwise would have been far more onerous to unlock if implementers were required to seek matching funds on a site-by-site basis. This can be presumed to have accelerated the pipeline of site engagements and maximized focus on project implementation. Second, the ability of the project to leverage a further \$426 million across its site engagements worldwide suggests highly effective multiplication of the impact of GEF's \$22 million investment. Third, strong outperformance of the project in terms of targets for key outputs suggests significant efficiencies relative to expectations articulated during project design. Finally, some implementers did note that early engagement and sub-project design processes took more time than ideal (though not necessarily in comparison to work with other funders or organizations); the project has internalized this feedback and streamlined various processes (e.g., safeguard planning, reporting) to pursue further efficiencies.

Efficiency rating: Satisfactory

3.2 Progress Towards Results

Table 4 below summarizes progress with respect to the Results Framework, drawing on the FY24 Project Implementation Report.

Table 4: Project Progress per the Results Framework

INDICATOR	PROJECT TARGET	STATUS	COMMENTS
Outcome 1.1: Engagement frameworks (i.e., new or existing conservation areas) that met the Blue Nature Alliance criteria have been collaboratively developed and endorsed.			
Output Indicator 1.1.1: Number of sites where the Blue Nature Alliance completes desktop assessments.	30 desktop assessments	Desktop assessments completed for 61 sites; 27 completed prior GEF project start (Oct. 2021), 34 completed during GEF project implementation.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 1.1.2: Number of sites where the	25 sites	Advanced scoping completed for 45 sites; 15	Project target exceeded.



Blue Nature Alliance completes advanced scoping.		completed prior to GEF project start, 30 completed during GEF project implementation.	
Output Indicator 1.1.3: Number of site-based engagement frameworks developed.	25 engagement frameworks	Engagement frameworks developed for 42 sites; 15 completed prior to GEF project start, 27 completed during GEF project implementation.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 1.1.4: Number of engagement sites endorsed for investment.	20 engagement sites	Steering Council endorsement received for 39 sites; 12 endorsed prior to GEF project start, 27 endorsed during GEF project implementation.	Project target exceeded.
Outcome 2.1: New or expanded ocean conservation areas legally recognized.			
Output Indicator 2.1.1a: Number of engagement sites that receive Blue Nature Alliance investment in order to achieve legal recognition of a new or expanded ocean conservation area.	10 engagement sites	24 engagement sites receiving investment.	Project target exceeded. Active sites (excluding Tristan de Cunha) total 1.06 B hectares (compared to project target of 750 M hectares of new or expanded ocean conservation area).
Output Indicator 2.1.1b: Percentage of engagement sites that achieve legal recognition of a new or expanded ocean conservation area.	75% of engagement sites.	Full or partial target reached in 29% of engagement sites, totaling 116.97 M hectares.	The Alliance will continue to advance activities in the engagements in implementation towards reaching the target goal of legal recognition in 75% of engagement sites by project close. It is anticipated that the project is on track to meet the area-based target of 750M hectares.
Output Indicator 2.1.2: Percentage of the engagement sites that achieve legal recognition that document a	100% of engagement sites that achieve legal recognition document their management	100% of engagement sites that have achieved legal recognition and are considered to have achieved full target reached have documented	While technically meeting the target, this captures only one site (Tristan de Cunha). Work to document management



management effectiveness baseline.	effectiveness baseline.	a management effectiveness baseline.	effectiveness baselines is underway at other sites with partial targets reached. Blue Nature Alliance notes that there is a lag between achieving a site target and the management effectiveness assessment, to allow management to actually take effect.
Output Indicator 2.1.3: For a subset of the engagement sites that achieve legal recognition, additional financial and/or technical support is provided to implementing partners in order to develop long-term sustainable financing plans.	50% of engagement sites that achieve legal recognition also have a plan for reaching long-term sustainable financing.	100% of engagement sites that have achieved legal recognition have a plan for reaching long-term sustainable financing.	While technically meeting the target, this captures only one site (Tristan de Cunha). An additional 4 engagements seeking new or expanded protections have developed long-term sustainable financing plans (Fiji's Lau Seascape, Colombia, Ireland, Solomon Islands) and efforts are underway to advance long-term financing at several other Alliance engagements.
Outcome 3.1: Previously established ocean conservation areas have upgraded protections and/or improved management, as evidenced by the legal ratification for upgraded protection level, and/or for measurably improved management, as measured by the achievement of a site-specific target for improved management effectiveness.			
Output Indicator 3.1.1: Number of engagement sites that receive Blue Nature Alliance investment with the aim of upgrading protections or improving management.	10 engagement sites.	15 engagement sites receiving investment.	Project target exceeded. Active sites currently total 1.06 B hectares of ocean conservation area.
Output Indicator 3.1.2a: Percentage engagement sites that conduct an assessments of management effectiveness before and after Blue Nature Alliance engagement.	100% of engagement sites.	0% of engagement sites have conducted before & after management effectiveness assessments; all existing sites have been assessed for a baseline.	Output is in progress. Blue Nature Alliance notes that there is a lag between achieving a site target and the management effectiveness assessment, to allow



			management to actually take effect.
Output Indicator 3.1.2b: Percentage of engagement sites that achieve their target for management effectiveness improvement and/or proposed status upgrade.	75% of engagement sites.	Full or partial targets achieved for management effectiveness improvement and/or proposed status upgrade in 20% of engagement sites, totaling 87.28 M hectares of ocean conservation area.	The Alliance will continue to advance activities in the engagements in implementation towards reaching the target goal of 75% of engagement sites achieving their targets; it is anticipated that the project is on track to meet the area-based target of 500 M hectares.
Output Indicator 3.1.3: Percentage of engagement sites with a plan for reaching long-term sustainable financing.	75% of engagement sites.	53.3% of engagement sites have a plan for reaching long-term sustainable financing.	9 sites have a long-term sustainable financing plan, and efforts to advance long-term financing are underway at several other Alliance engagements.
Outcome 4.1: Collaborative scientific research that advances the field of large-scale and/or transboundary ocean conservation developed and implemented.			
Output Indicator 4.1.1: Number of research projects that advance the field of large-scale ocean conservation.	5 research projects.	9 research projects supported, and additional research supported through site engagements.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 4.1.2: Number of peer-reviewed publications that advance the field of large-scale ocean conservation.	10 peer-reviewed publications.	232 knowledge products produced, including peer-review publications, reports, communications materials, and other products that advance the field of large-scale ocean conservation.	Project target exceeded.
Outcome 4.2: Knowledge management and learning for the fields of large-scale and transboundary ocean conservation has been strengthened and expanded.			
Output Indicator 4.2.1: Number of participants disaggregated by sex in learning initiatives supported by the Blue Nature Alliance.	500, of whom at least 33% are women.	1,159 participants (48.8% men, 39.2% women, and 12% unknown).	Project target exceeded (incl. gender target).



Output Indicator 4.2.2: Number of new tools, trainings, and innovations developed and disseminated.	5 tools, trainings, or innovations.	25 tools, trainings, and innovations developed and disseminated.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 4.2.3: Number of organizations and agencies participating in partner convenings, and meetings hosted by the Blue Nature Alliance.	At least 20 organizations/agencies.	243 organizations and agencies have participated in partner convenings and meetings hosted by the Alliance.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 4.2.4a: Number of presentations given by Blue Nature Alliance partners on results and lessons learned.	At least 100 presentations.	144 presentations on results and lessons delivered.	Project target exceeded.
Output Indicator 4.2.4b: Number of Experience Notes produced by the Alliance and shared with IW:LEARN.	At least 10 Experience Notes.	3 Experience Notes produced and shared with IW:LEARN.	Blue Nature Alliance notes that IW:LEARN itself was paused. Lessons learned and knowledge materials produced under the project will be transitioned to Experience Notes, such that the project readily will meet the target.
Output Indicator 4.2.4c: Number of Results Notes produced by the Alliance and shared with IW:LEARN.	At least 10 Results Notes.	4 Results Notes produced and shared with IW:LEARN.	Blue Nature Alliance notes that IW:LEARN itself was paused. Results Notes on project progress as well as notable knowledge materials will be prepared such that the project readily will meet the target.
Outcome 5.1: Monitoring and evaluation framework for the Blue Nature Alliance in place and used.			
Output Indicator 5.1.1: Alliance monitoring and evaluation plan at both the portfolio and site level implemented.	Alliance-wide monitoring and evaluation plan is implemented.	Monitoring and evaluation framework implemented per Project Document.	Project on track.
Output Indicator 5.1.2: Percentage of Alliance progress reports that include information from implementation of	100% of progress reports include information from implementation of	100% of required reports completed.	Project on track.



monitoring and evaluation plan.	monitoring and evaluation plan.		
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Outcome 1: the project has exceeded its targets under Outcome 1, and will place less focus on conducting additional desktop assessments or advanced site scoping, though it will respond to particularly promising opportunities as they arise. However, the project will continue to develop engagement frameworks and seek Steering Council endorsements for site engagements, so as to continue progress toward Objective-level targets for hectares achieved of new/expanded and upgraded/improved ocean conservation areas.

Outcome 2: although the work towards legal recognition of new or expanded ocean conservation areas shows notable progress, the project still is far from its target (117M of 750M hectares; 15.6%). This may be expected, as the first part of the implementation period focused on site identification and engagement, such that achievement of legal recognition will be concentrated in the second half of the implementation period. Significant progress on this target is anticipated and the one-year no-cost extension makes its achievement more feasible within the project time frame.

Outcome 3: although the work to upgrade protection and/or improved management of ocean conservation areas shows notable progress, the project still is far from its target (87M of 500M hectares; 17.4%). This may be expected, as the first part of the implementation period focused on site identification and engagement, such that achievement of upgraded protection and/or improved management will be concentrated in the second half of the implementation period.

Outcome 4: the project has exceeded its targets under Outcome 4 (Scoring a 4 for level of engagement in IW:Learn), noting that some outputs relating to IW:Learn are pending due to the pause in IW:Learn activities).¹¹ Moreover, there is a clear commitment to continue developing and disseminating knowledge products, such that by the end of the project the Alliance will have generated an outsized contribution to the field and reached a large global audience of practitioners, managers, and policy makers.

Outcome 5: the Blue Nature Alliance team displays exceptional efficiency, efficacy and professionalism with respect to project monitoring and evaluation, including both reporting and ongoing process improvements.

With respect to progress toward long-term impact, it is too early to assess at this stage, given the recency of site interventions. As noted above, the gap between Outcome-level targets and

¹¹ 1 = No participation, 2 = Website in line with IW:LEARN guidance active, 3 = As above, plus strong participation in training/twinning events and production of at least one experience note and one results note, 4 = As above, plus active participation of project staff and country representatives at International Waters conferences and the provision of spatial data and other data points via project website – with participation at conference pending/planned for FY25.



achievements to date remains substantial. Moreover, there is as yet no evidence of the long-term impact of those achievements in terms of biodiversity, climate resilience, other ecosystem functions and services, and human wellbeing. It is similarly not possible to assess the extent to which the key assumptions of the project's theory of change hold, as the assumptions relate only to how 30% of global ocean well managed in ocean conservation areas leads to healthier oceans able to provide ecosystem services. That said, the Alliance's support clearly is helping sites progress along their conservation journeys; over time as these sites apply their monitoring and evaluation systems, we may anticipate a growing evidence base of the degree to which this progress is contributing to positive impacts. Nevertheless, the project indicators map directly to GEF Core Indicators, and thus show the project's contributions to GEF objectives as below:

Table 5: Project Core Indicator Status at Mid-term

Indicator & Component Sub-indicator		Contextual Sub-indicator	Target CEO Endorsement	Achieved FY23
2	<i>Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (ha)</i>			
2.1	Marine protected areas newly created (ha)		750 M hectares	116,969,918 hectares
2.2	Marine protected areas under improved management effectiveness (ha)		500 M hectares	87,282,230 hectares
	<i>Total area under improved management (ha) (sum of indicators 1 through 5)</i>		1.25 B hectares	204,252,148 hectares
7	<i>Number of shared water ecosystems (fresh or marine) under new or improved cooperative management (number)</i>			
7.4		Level of engagement in IW:LEARN through participation and delivery of key products	4 (level of enagement w/ IW:LEARN)	4
11	<i>Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment (number)</i>			
11.1	Women		~ 10,000	4,464
11.2	Men		~ 10,000	7,935

3.2.1 Barriers to Achieving Project Objectives

As noted, progress to date under Outcomes 2 and 3 leaves substantial gaps between current status and the project targets. One factor noted by site implementers was the considerable time required for scoping, design of engagement framework, and grant negotiation, which means that actual site activities did not commence until well into the implementation phase. We may expect progress toward area targets to accelerate as the site interventions take hold, and also as the Blue Nature Alliance team applies ongoing process improvements (e.g., streamlining processes relating to development of safeguard plans). However, new designations, upgraded levels of protection, and improvements to management require collaboration with governments; such collaboration often can be challenging and time-consuming in and of itself, with delays exacerbated further by changes in administrations, staff or policy priorities.



Thus, inevitably, some of the sites will not fully achieve their targets by the end of the project timeline. However, the Blue Nature Alliance strategy of engaging a diverse portfolio of sites in terms of risks/likelihood of success, with a total area in excess of the targets, gives confidence that the overall project objective of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use remains well within reach (albeit potentially with different relative contributions to this total from new versus improved areas, compared to the sub-indicator targets). There is no reason to doubt the project's ability to achieve targets 7 and 11.

3.3 Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

3.3.1 *Management Arrangements*

Blue Nature Alliance project implementation benefits from effective and motivated leadership, and highly engaged and innovative staff. Interviews with project staff reflected a knowledgeable and committed team working through management arrangements that effectively facilitate communications and coordination between team members. While there are standing calls to ensure alignment, it appears that there is near continuous ongoing dialogue across the team, led by core management team leadership, to the benefit of all the site initiatives that it supports. Thus, the Alliance functions as a well-orchestrated mechanism.

A key aspect of the management arrangements is the role of the regional engagement leads, who serve as effective liaisons between site implementers and the Alliance as a whole. Without exception, site implementers in interviews emphasized how much they value these roles and the specific individuals in those positions for their respective regions.

Arrangements themselves reflect pragmatism and balance, ensuring coordination while avoiding 'meetings for the sake of meetings'. The Core Team convenes weekly, while Delivery Teams organized by subject area to deliver specific activities and outputs meet as needed (see Annex 7). Delivery Teams have been created for the following areas:

- Site Engagement
- Science & Research
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Conservation Finance Strategy
- Communications
- Finance and Operations
- Capacity Development and Learning
- Global Policy and Advocacy

The fact that the functioning of the Alliance management team requires coordination and integration between two large organizations (CI and Pew) makes its success all the more noteworthy. As discussed



with Alliance leadership and others, CI and Pew are quite different institutions in terms of organizational culture, strategic approaches, prioritization of objectives, and metrics of success. Blending aspects of these two institutions successfully has resulted in the Blue Nature Alliance as a new body with its own distinct culture and identity, allowing the Alliance to organically mature into its own effective management arrangements that enjoy strong institutional commitments from both CI and Pew.

3.3.2 Work Planning

The Project develops annual workplans on a fiscal year basis using CI-GEF's Project Annual Workplan & Annual Reporting Template. These GEF-project workplans are aligned with the Alliance workplans approved by the Steering Council. They are submitted to and approved by CI-GEF shortly after the start of each fiscal year; since the project start, three annual workplans have been developed, for fiscal years 2022, 2023 and 2024.,

Some of the planned project activities were delayed by factors such as COVID-19, changes in governments, and lags in contracting. The Alliance adapted its activities to maintain overall momentum and significant progress on this target is anticipated; the one-year no-cost extension keeps its achievement feasible within the project time frame. A one year no-cost extension was requested and approved, extending the project close date to April 30, 2028.

3.3.3 Implementation and Execution

Overall implementation and execution rating: Satisfactory

According to the Blue Nature Alliance, the Implementing Agency (CI-GEF) has been a constructive thought partner and has provided helpful guidance and support for the project. The Executing Agency (Blue Nature Alliance) has been effective in its role. Management of day-to-day activities is grounded in a strong Core Team, clearly defined operational roles, functional thematic working groups, and regular communications.

Implementation

The Blue Nature Alliance reports that their counterparts at CI GEF Agency have been very helpful and responsive, and that they have created an effective, collaborative culture and team dynamic. The relationship has been conducted more as a partnership than as one focused on oversight, with an open and supportive approach when issues or knowledge gaps have arisen. The CI GEF Agency team's ability to draw on a broad set of experiences with other projects to inform thinking on how to handle issues is a particular strength. Guidance and support during the project design process was extremely valuable, together working through the distinct aspects of GEF joining the alliance as a Core Partner (compared to the more typical instance of GEF supporting projects as the principal funding source) and navigating a project portfolio that includes both GEF-supported and non-GEF supported sites. Subsequently, CI GEF



Agency feedback and input on project reporting and adjustments have been constructive and helpful, for example in revisiting the target for number of direct beneficiaries of the project.

Notable areas where CI GEF Agency has been a constructive thought partner include Blue Nature Alliance's efforts to accommodate streamlined reporting and safeguards processes, though noting that safeguards remain a challenge at times. As also indicated by some implementing partners, GEF safeguard requirements are not well-aligned with the context of many ocean conservation sites. This can place CI GEF Agency in a difficult position when trying to maintain adherence to GEF requirements while helping the Alliance adapt safeguard processes to site realities. As Implementing Agency, CI has been an appreciated partner in exploring the scope for flexibility and modification of these safeguard processes.

Implementation rating: Satisfactory

Execution

The Blue Nature Alliance Core Team and supporting network (see Annex 7) have been effective in discharging their role and responsibilities. Management of day-to-day activities is grounded in a strong Core Team, clearly defined operational roles, functional thematic working groups, and regular communications amongst all parts of the management structure. Benefiting from time-tested processes and procedures of CI's finance, grant and contract administration structures, the Alliance has been well able to ensure appropriate use of funds and procurement of goods and services. This is confirmed through financial reporting as well as audit findings. Quality of Blue Nature Alliance execution further is reinforced through effective regional leads and dedicated attention to ongoing refinement of Alliance-wide progress tracking and monitoring and evaluation provisions.

Execution rating: Satisfactory

3.3.4 Finance and Co-finance

Project expenditures were lower than anticipated, particularly during the first year of the project. The planned in-person scoping activities in Component 1 were delayed due to COVID-19, and altered to virtual engagements. Scoping activities picked up considerably, and expenditures increased when travel became possible. Scoping activities will be limited in the second half of the project, with effort focused on Components 2 and 3. Spending on Component 2 has been lower than anticipated during the first half of the project, as efforts were shifted to Component 3 during COVID. Additionally, achieving new designations takes a considerable amount of time, therefore it is expected that Component 2 spending will increase substantially during the second half of the project. The project has been effective and on schedule with progress on Component 3 activities, and the expenditures reflect that. It should also be noted that while the project burn rate has appeared consistently low throughout the first half of the project, the funds have generally been obligated.



Table 6: Project Expenditure to Date

	Original CEO Approved/ Endorsed Budget (USD)	Total Approved Budget (USD) as of June 30, 2024	Expenditure (USD) as of June 30, 2024	Percent Spent as of June 30, 2024	Total Committed (USD) as of June 30, 2024	Percent Committed as of June 30, 2024
Component 1	320,265	375,128	308,762	82%	308,762	82%
Component 2	11,236,026	12,946,842	406,074	3%	6,651,342	51%
Component 3	7,553,410	5,686,731	2,981,553	52%	4,497,372	79%
Component 4	2,074,081	2,074,372	1,016,495	49%	1,749,492	84%
Component 5 (M&E)	374,825	475,534	128,526	27%	151,835	32%
Project Management Costs	1,077,174	1,077,173	539,188	50%	539,188	50%
Total	22,635,781	22,635,780	5,380,598	24%	13,358,802	59%

The cofinance amounts that have materialized appear low in the financial reports because 1) cofinancing comes in after the reporting period; and 2) project spending has been slower than planned. It should be noted that in addition to the cofinancing from the 7 donors, the project leveraged more than \$400 million from their site-based and non-site-based engagements. These amounts are akin to cofinance but are not included in GEF cofinance totals.

Table 7: Co-financing Materialized to Date

Donor	Type (Cash or In-Kind)	Investment Mobilized(G rant)/Recurr ent Expenditure	Total proposed co- financing (USD)	Amount materialized as of June 30, 2024 (USD)	Percent materialized
Conservation International	Cash	Investment Mobilized	23,028,913	2,952,887	13%
Pew Charitable Trust	Cash	Investment Mobilized	20,965,859	4,318,748	21%
Rob Walton Foundation	Cash	Investment Mobilized	20,032,065	13,565,705	68%



Mindaroo Foundation	Cash	Investment Mobilized	22,139,842	4,318,748	20%
Vulcan, Skylight ¹²	In-Kind	Recurrent Expenditure	25,000,000	709,208	3%
International Eco Fund	Cash	Investment Mobilized	3,846,400	5,085,823	132%
Antarctic and Southern Oceans Coalition	Cash	Investment Mobilized	482,539	1,600,000	332%
Total	Cash and In-Kind	Investment Mobilized and Recurrent Expenditure	\$115,465,618	\$32,551,119	28%

3.3.5 Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Overall M&E rating: Satisfactory

Overall, the ProDoc included a concrete and fully budgeted M&E plan. The Results Framework was logical and contained SMART indicators, and included GEF indicators on GEBs, socioeconomic co-benefits and sex-disaggregated indicators. However, indicator definitions and methodologies were not detailed enough to ensure consistency in reporting across partners. Additional process and performance indicators are tracked internally by Blue Nature Alliance. The Theory of Change had some shortcomings, particularly related to assumptions. Additionally, the outputs as identified in the Theory of Change were worded more like outcomes, and did not correspond to the outputs in the Results Framework. There is dedicated M&E capacity in place and operational; actively measuring indicators relative to baseline. There is continuous refinement of M&E processes and guidance, reducing the reporting burden on sub-grantees and increasing the quality of data. The midterm review has been undertaken as planned and all reporting has been submitted as required and on time. The M&E was slightly underbudgeted, and the budget was increased by 26% in FY 2024 to accommodate the increased cost of evaluations. As of FY24 Q4 (June 30, 2024), 27% of total approved M&E budget is spent. Recommendations for further improvement during implementation include reassessment of beneficiary gender target and determination of aggregated (project-wide) stakeholder targets.

The Alliance is responsible for initiating and organizing key monitoring and evaluation tasks, including the project inception workshop and report, quarterly progress reporting, annual progress and implementation reporting, documentation of lessons learned, and support for and cooperation with the independent external evaluation exercises.

¹² The co-financing amount is under review by Blue Nature Alliance.



The Blue Nature Alliance Steering Council plays a key oversight role for the project, with regular meetings to receive updates on project implementation progress and approve annual workplans. The Steering Council also provides continuous ad-hoc oversight and feedback on project activities, responding to inquiries or requests for approval from the Management Team.

The CI-GEF Project Agency plays an overall assurance, backstopping, and oversight role with respect to monitoring and evaluation activities.

The CI General Counsel's office with the Grants and Contracts Unit are responsible for contracting and oversight of the planned independent external evaluation exercises at the mid-point and end of the project.

The project M&E Plan is comprised of the following:

Type of M&E	Reporting frequency	Completion
Inception Workshop	Within six months of signing of Grant Agreement	February 2022
Inception Workshop report	Within 1 month of workshop	March 2022
Project Results Monitoring Plan	Plan included at CEO Endorsement submission Data collected annually/according to monitoring plan schedule	Ongoing
Core Indicator Worksheet	Worksheet included at CEO Endorsement submission Worksheet to be updated prior to MTR and TR	June 2024
CI-GEF Project Agency Field Supervision Missions	Annual Field visit report to be circulated within one month	May 2024
Annual Project Implementation Report (PIR)	Annually for year ending June 30	FY23 submitted FY24 submitted
Project Completion Report	Upon project operational closure	N/A
Independent External Mid-term Review	Approximate mid-point of project implementation period	October 2024
Independent Terminal Evaluation	Evaluation field mission within three months prior to project completion.	N/A

In addition to the items above, the Project Document indicated that Project Steering Council meetings are to be held semi-annually, with additional ad hoc meetings as appropriate. The Alliance has followed the planned schedule, with Steering Council meetings held during the following periods: 2022 (June), 2023 (January, April, July), 2024 (January, February, July).

An annual audit of financial statements was conducted for FY22 and FY23, as required. No material findings were reported.



The Alliance submits quarterly financial reports and meets quarterly with CI-GEF to discuss progress. CI-GEF is also provided with all the materials that get circulated to the Steering Council.

The plan at the point of CEO Endorsement was practical and sufficient, and included baseline data. The Project Results Monitoring Plan specified appropriate (SMART) indicators to track environmental, gender, and socio-economic results; monitoring methodology; schedule and responsibilities for data collection; and a budget for M&E activities. However, indicator definitions and methodologies were not sufficiently detailed to ensure consistency in reporting across partners, which has required subsequent correction.

According to the M&E plan, the M&E manager is responsible for providing data outputs to the Blue Nature Alliance Management Team and the Blue Nature Alliance Steering Council. The plan stated that the M&E manager would coordinate a monitoring and evaluation working group that would review the indicators and data collection methods on an at least annual basis to determine if changes are needed.

The M&E system has operated as per the M&E plan. In 2023, guidance was updated for several M&E indicators, including an updated measure of beneficiaries that better reflects GEF definitions. The proposed changes were previewed to CI-GEF in December 2023, followed by a soft launch with regional leads, followed by a full launch in February 2024. As planned in the Project Document, Blue Nature Alliance developed dashboards to show the trends of indicators across the portfolio. A pipeline tracker was developed and implemented in 2020 and an initial monitoring and evaluation framework was built in 2021 to help the Management Team and Steering Council track progress against portfolio-wide and site-specific indicators. With the hiring of a new Monitoring & Evaluation Manager in FY24, the Alliance has continued to build and improve reporting and evaluation systems, including a refined monitoring and evaluation dashboard to assist in the tracking of project progress and projecting for future targets. There was a period with a less active working group during a staffing change, but the current M&E manager is convening regular meetings with the working group.

Information on specified indicators was generally gathered in a systematic manner, however, as mentioned above, there may have been inconsistencies in partner reporting on indicators. The current M&E manager has initiated an indicator review and provided updated definitions and methodologies to ensure that all necessary indicators are accurately captured and reported. The manager is reviewing past reports for consistency and updating data as necessary. Reporting templates for grantees have been simplified and clarified. Additional improvements will continue to be carried out, and the CI-GEF Agency has been informed of all updates. An area of challenge noted by Blue Nature Alliance and partners is impact measurement, particularly the impact of capacity building activities. The Alliance reports that it will continue to reflect on this in the second half of the project. Additionally, a question faced by the Alliance (and MPA science in general) is how to relate improvements in management to improvements in outcomes of interest, such as habitat conditions, fish populations, and biodiversity. While undertaking ambitious research and data collection to resolve this question is clearly beyond the scope of the Blue Nature Alliance, the Alliance could consider monitoring the trends in key ecosystem indicators in sites receiving investment and conducting rigorous impact evaluation in some individual sites. It should be noted that the Alliance carefully has considered its metrics and measures of success,



evidenced for example by its *What Counts* methodology that determines what management changes the Alliance considers substantial enough to count towards area targets.

The M&E was slightly underbudgeted. In FY 2024, the M&E budget was increased by 26% due to increased cost of evaluations. As of FY24 Q4 (June 30, 2024), 27% of total approved M&E budget is spent. Staff time dedicated to M&E includes the M&E Manager at 46% time, and 10% time of the Project lead. The CI-GEF Agency reports in the FY23 PIR that Blue Nature Alliance project reporting is timely and efficient.

CI-GEF Agency recommended the following corrective actions in FY23:

- Over FY24, closely track direct beneficiaries and consider adjusting the project target if unrealistic.
 - The Alliance followed this recommendation and revised the definition of beneficiaries and the target number.
- Establish the missing ESMF targets for the SEP, now that sub-grantees have completed their SEPs.
 - The Alliance sets a target for all site engagements in implementation to develop a stakeholder engagement plan which outlines site specific targets for stakeholder engagement. As of the FY24 PIR, these targets are not aggregated across the portfolio.
- Now that the project has received safeguards screenings from sub-grantees and from other relevant partners, the Safeguards Manager needs to identify the ESS risks of the portfolio and communicate those to the Agency, and prioritize topics, geographies, or sub-grantees to provide support and supervision, accordingly.
 - This recommendation has been followed by the Alliance.

3.3.6 Reflecting Ongoing Lessons Learned During Implementation in Adaptive Management

Adapting to reflect lessons learned during implementation is a particular strength of the project. Informants also almost universally noted the flexibility of Blue Nature Alliance as a grantor or partner, open to working closely with project implementers or co-financing partners to tailor project designs, processes and arrangements to fit particular contexts and needs. This flexible approach has allowed implementers to respond to new opportunities or changing priorities on the ground, while maintaining the overall vision of Blue Nature Alliance. A notable feature of the Alliance has been the ongoing innovation of processes. Some of these include:

- New safeguard templates that depend on level of risk, and ability for partners to complete online versions
- New customized project management system and online grantee reporting tool
- Providing planning grants for project startup
- Updated theory of change and development of conservation journey framework
- Streamlined M&E indicators, new dashboards
- Call for Expressions of Interest to open engagement with new, smaller organizations



3.3.7 Knowledge Management

The Project Document provides a thorough presentation of provisions relating to knowledge management for the project, including the project description of Component 4 (Global Enabling Conditions to Scale Up Ocean Conservation), a dedicated section describing the knowledge management purpose and approach, and further elaboration in Appendix XI: Learning, Capacity Building, Knowledge Management and Collaboration framework. Knowledge management also is addressed through presentation of the project's provisions for communications. Overarchingly, the Alliance holds knowledge management, communications (including Knowledge Sharing (KS) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)) as essential project elements to facilitate learning, strengthen management effectiveness, and accelerate the application and adoption of ocean conservation at scale. This includes activities to provide information on relevant tools and approaches and practitioners, support exchange of knowledge, and capture and communicate important results, successes and lessons for ocean conservation at scale, as well as support for scientific research that contributes to the field of ocean conservation (funded through co-financing).

The project design considers each of the Alliance's stakeholder groups as distinct audiences relevant to knowledge management activities: MPA managers, policy makers, NGOs, rightsholders and communities of place and practice, the private sector, the general public, and other practitioners. To support the generation and dissemination of knowledge products relevant to each of these audiences, the Alliance has established a knowledge management system to manage information on key topics including:

- What the Alliance needs to understand related to the sites it supports, including the key characteristics of the sites, the main objectives of our engagement and progress as measured against key metrics of success during implementation.
- Capacity and learning needs of Blue Nature Alliance and other large-scale sites and tools, approaches and practitioners that can assist sites to build needed capacity to achieve their objectives.
- Results from research undertaken to support the Alliance sites and other efforts to expand ocean conservation at scale
- Progress and lessons learned from site implementation that may benefit other sites and the wider field of ocean conservation at scale.

In addition to collation of information on these topics (and lessons captured through the Alliance M&E system), the Blue Nature Alliance has generated in-depth Lessons Learned and Case Study summaries that explore specific successes, challenges and other site learning. The Alliance also has engaged with the IW:Learn platform as a venue for disseminating knowledge (recognizing that IW:Learn itself was paused for a time, such that intended contributions of Experience Notes and Results Notes to the platform will happen later in the project implementation period). Finally, site implementers and other partners made particular mention of the value of learning initiatives arranged by the Alliance. These



have included learning exchanges on key topics, providing direct technical assistance on specific needs, and convening side events at conferences such as the CBD COP.

The design of Knowledge Management strategies, as described in the Project Document, left room for greater attention to gender dimensions. The Gender Mainstreaming Plan included two gender-related activities in Component 4 (increase women's participation in learning initiatives; new tools will include gender-sensitive approaches and perspectives and aim to increase women's participation); including these and other strategies in the Knowledge Management Plan itself could better ensure that women contribute to and benefit from knowledge processes and products and further advance gender mainstreaming in the project. The Alliance reports that it is continuing to improve gender mainstreaming in the project, and has integrated gender into the knowledge management plan as follows: 1) tracking participation of men and women in learning initiatives, workshops, etc., and tracking the utilization of tools by men and women (where possible); 2) a gender component in the social equity and human dimensions research; 3. plans to capture gender lessons learned in IW results/experience notes.

Thus, the Knowledge Management Plan as presented in the Project Document thoroughly has been executed. A partial listing of products produced with Blue Nature Alliance support is as follows:

- [Kennedy & Rotjan 2022, The Impact of Geological Feature Shape on the Abundance and Diversity of Deep Sea Corals](#)
- [Bennett et al., 2021 Advancing Social Equity in and Through Marine Conservation](#)
- [Kennedy et al., 2023 Mind the gap: comparing exploration effort with global biodiversity patterns and climate projections to determine ocean areas with greatest exploration needs](#)
- [Baker et al., 2023 Improving human well-being outcomes in marine protected areas through futures thinking](#)
- [Sullivan-Wiley et al., 2023 Addressing human behavior in conservation design: Learning from program applications](#)
- [Claassens et al., 2023 First records of the Pacific sleeper shark *Somniosus cf. pacificus* in the western tropical Pacific](#)
- [Willis et al., 2023 The human cost of global fishing](#)
- [Kittinger et al., 2023 Balancing Protection and Production in Ocean Conservation](#)

3.3.8 Environmental and Social Safeguards

Overall Environmental and Social Safeguards rating: Satisfactory

Overall, the project has successfully designed and executed environmental and social safeguard plans. Limited Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs), safeguard screenings, stakeholder engagement plans, gender mainstreaming plans, and grievance redress mechanisms have been completed for all engagements in implementation. The project provides templates and manuals to project sites, accompanied by direct support and guidance to ensure effective implementation. While there were some challenges initially with a rigid one-size-fits-all approach to developing plans for the engagements, the Blue Nature Alliance has made a number of improvements to processes. Updates to



safeguard processes in early 2024 are poised to improve efficiency and reduce the administrative burden on sub-grantees, streamlining compliance while maintaining high standards of environmental and social accountability. Recommendations for further improvement during implementation include 1) continuing efforts to ensure the AGMs are socialized; 2) reassessing what additional actions might be required to achieve the beneficiary gender target; 3) incorporate additional gender mainstreaming into the project such as updating communications and knowledge management strategies with an eye to gender considerations; 4) documenting examples of best-practices and lessons learned related to gender; and 5) assessing performance of and satisfaction with revised safeguard processes.

The project was rated in the Project Document as Category B (The proposed project has the potential to cause adverse environmental and social impacts on human populations or environmentally or socially important areas. However, these impacts are site-specific; few if any of them are irreversible; and in most cases mitigation measures can be designed more readily than for Category A projects.). As the project involves protected area creation, expansion or management improvement, the project is required to complete a Limited ESIA for each project geography (i.e., site engagement) prior to the start of any project activities within the selected geography. The project adopted and put in place the CI-GEF ESMF to ensure that all grantees comply with the CI-GEF Environmental and Social Safeguard requirements. In addition, Blue Nature Alliance developed a Code of Conduct to help the Alliance and its partners to more fully understand and integrate human dimensions in the project.

The Blue Nature Alliance reviews all Engagement Framework documents to ensure that a Limited ESIA has been completed for each selected geography prior to the start of any project activities (including those supported by GEF funding as well as sites supported from other sources). All sites are required to complete the safeguard packet prior to the first disbursement of grant funding. To date, 39 safeguards packets have been completed or are in advanced stages of development (one for each engagement in implementation) and an additional 20+ safeguards screening forms have been completed by non-site-based partners under 'Global Enabling Conditions'. Any necessary mitigation measures are identified during the safeguard screening, and have been incorporated into the SEP, GMP, and AGM plans. No other safeguards plans have been triggered by the project.

A series of updates to the Alliance's safeguards process were proposed to and approved by the CI-GEF Project Agency in FY24. The most significant shift in process was to conduct the safeguard screening earlier in the project design process and assign a risk rating to each engagement (low, medium, high), based on the context of the individual site as well as planned project activities. Based on this rating, each project is provided with appropriate templates for stakeholder engagement and gender mainstreaming plans, allowing projects to complete a safeguards process that is fit-for-purpose for its specific context (ex. an offshore MPA which has limited stakeholder and gender considerations due to its remote nature receives a more streamlined packet while an coastal MPA operating in a coastal area with significant reliance on subsistence fishing receives the full templates and is flagged for more frequent follow-up by the Safeguards Manager). The safeguards screening form is now available for partners to complete online.



Grievance Mechanism

The Alliance requires all sites to develop a fit-for-purpose Accountability and Grievance Mechanism that establishes site-level mechanisms accessible to stakeholders on the ground in each site, and maintains a global-level mechanism. The global-level Blue Nature Alliance Accountability and Grievance Mechanism is coordinated by the Blue Nature Alliance Safeguards Manager who escalates grievances, as needed, to CI's Global Grievance Committee on which CI's Director of Risk Management sits. The site leads and Safeguards Manager works with the implementing partners to establish site-level mechanisms. Detailed guidance for the establishment and operation of the site-level and global-level mechanisms is included in the Blue Nature Alliance Accountability and Grievance Mechanism Manual. The manual contains templates for site-Level AGM manuals, grievance forms and communications products. The project's AGM is available on the project website - <https://www.bluenaturealliance.org/grievance-mechanism>, which also includes additional resources such as the Blue Nature Alliance Code of Conduct, CI-GEF Agency Environment and Social Management Framework, and, when the risk of gender-based violence is identified during screening, CI Guidelines for Recognizing & Responding to Gender-Based Violence. These materials are shared with all project partners through a kick-off meeting which includes the Safeguards Manager prior to the issuing of any subgrants.

The implementing partners are responsible for disclosing the AGM to key stakeholders, as detailed in the site-level AGMs. Compliance by sub-grantees to establish an AGM and disclose grievances received is monitored through regular reporting with the Safeguards Manager. This requires confirmation and review of the established AGM at the start of the sub-grantee project and periodic checks on whether any grievances have been shared during the project's implementation.

The Blue Nature Alliance annual workplans contain 4 activities related to the AGM:

- Ensure that all grants establish and disclose a grievance redress mechanism with appropriate local contact channels and transparent procedures for responding and addressing grievances.
- Monitor the grievance mechanisms of individual grants and the grievance email account.
- Communicate any grievances raised by affected communities or other interested stakeholders to the CI-GEF Project Agency within 15 days of receipt.
- Monitor and report on CI-GEF minimum indicators.

To date, the project has received one grievance through its AGM which was deemed to not necessitate redress as it pertained to the business practices of a donor to the Alliance which falls outside of the purview of the project. No grievances have been reported by subgrantees. The Alliance notes that the lack of grievances is not confirmation of good practices, as it is also possible that the lack of grievances is a result of ineffective AGMs. Although it was not possible to conduct a full review of all site AGMs and assess whether project stakeholders were aware of the grievance mechanism, given the scale and scope of the project, the reviewed AGMs suggested that reasonable and accessible channels and procedures have been established. Additionally, Blue Nature Alliance safeguards leads have undertaken a review of all sites to verify compliance, and in an effort to improve the implementation of AGMs, the Alliance has adopted the following measures:



1. Updating the bi-annual reporting template to specifically ask about disclosure and stakeholder knowledge of the AGM
2. Capacity building and education on the importance of AGMs with site/regional leads, and ensuring that site leads verify AGMs during site visits
3. Bi-annual meetings with site/regional leads to review their portfolio, including status of AGMs
4. Joining bi-annual meeting with Project Implementers (for medium/high risk projects only) to review safeguard status
5. Changing the language from 'Accountability & Grievance Mechanism' to other terminology including 'Project Feedback & Grievance Mechanism' has helped to improve perceptions of the AGM.
6. To help ensure that the AGM is accessible to all stakeholders, updates are being made to the Alliance's main AGM, including adding an intake questionnaire (instead of just an email) and better disclosure of the procedures for processing grievances.

Gender

The Alliance prepared a project-level Gender Mainstreaming Plan (GMP) with the Project Document, and all site engagements must prepare a site-level GMP. Blue Nature Alliance outlined three primary strategies for gender mainstreaming in the project:

1. Work with local partners that are deeply embedded in project sites and have close relationships with local stakeholders, and that are well-positioned to apply their in-depth knowledge of the specific geography to develop a quality Gender Action Plan and collect gender disaggregated data to monitor progress toward the gender goals.
2. Invest in capacity building for staff and implementing partners to raise awareness and understanding of gender and the importance of including women in marine resource management and conservation initiatives. Provide training to Alliance staff on how to complete gender assessments, as well as how to effectively support partners to develop and implement Gender Action Plans.
3. A Blue Nature Alliance Safeguards and Gender Manager will review and provide guidance on gender assessments and Gender Action Plans at multiple stages in the site development process.

The project level GMP and the reviewed site gender plans (as well as the annual workplans) indicate that gender considerations were taken into account in designing and implementing the project. All engagements are required to prepare a "right-sized" gender plan, i.e. the plan is more detailed if there are more risks and/or opportunities. Once site engagements are in implementation, partners report regularly on their progress through written reports or verbal reporting (verbal is new as of FY24) to the Safeguards Manager to provide an opportunity for project partners to ask questions, seek additional clarity, and discuss their project progress.



Alliance staff receive annual safeguards trainings that include gender. If GBV is indicated as a potential risk, Blue Nature Alliance will share and discuss CI's GBV response guidelines. Thus far, GBV risk has not been triggered. The Project M&E tracks gender indicators, and grant progress reports required gender disaggregated data. In addition to the minimum/standard indicators, projects were encouraged to provide additional gender indicators specific to their projects. Very few projects consistently monitored and reported these additional indicators, therefore, the current approach of Blue Nature Alliance is to focus on supporting projects to consistently report on the standard gender indicators. In FY24 the Alliance reviewed the gender mainstreaming plan and indicators to identify opportunities to ensure that Gender Mainstreaming Plans are a meaningful exercise for site engagement partners, and ensuring consistent reporting of gender indicators. This also included a commitment to switch from a binary man/woman sorting of beneficiaries, to be more inclusive of all genders.

The Blue Nature Alliance annual workplans contain 4 activities related to the GMP:

- Review and monitor portfolio of project sites in scoping and implementation phases to identify and plan for any high-risk situations such as social conflict or high rates of GBV. Keep record of all sites engaging with the Alliance to ensure each one has developed the required safeguard plans and implements
- Review Engagement Frameworks and Gender Mainstreaming Plans for each site to ensure that they include appropriate assessments/analyses and concrete actions and indicators that effectively minimize barriers and maximize opportunities for men and women to participate in and benefit from Blue Nature Alliance projects.
- Monitor compliance of grantees, including through semi-annual safeguard monitoring reports for each site and, when possible, site visits to high-risk grants.
- Monitor and report on CI-GEF minimum indicators.

The minimum indicators, targets, and current status for gender are as follows:

Indicator	Target	Current status
Number of men and women that received benefits (e.g. employment, income generating activities, training, access to natural resources, land tenure or resource rights, equipment, leadership roles) from the project	20,000 men and women receive benefits from the project, at least 50% of whom are women.	At the conclusion of FY24, a total of 12,717 people (35% women, 62% men, 2.5% unknown)
Number of strategies, plans (e.g. management plans and land use plans) and policies derived from the project that include gender considerations	All engagement frameworks and implementing partner workplans/strategies developed for the project include gender considerations.	At the conclusion of FY24, 42 engagement frameworks and 39 site engagement workplans/strategies include gender considerations



(this indicator applies to relevant projects)		
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The percentage of female beneficiaries is currently below the 50% target. The Alliance attributes this in part to the fact that targets were set before the specific engagements had been determined. The targets assumed more community-based projects (those with more ability to proactively and meaningfully engage women) than are actually in the portfolio. The Blue Nature Alliance suggests that most of the Alliance projects engage with government or fishing industry officials, academics, other policy makers, etc. who are already in place and thus does not allow for significant influence over specifically who participates (and does not want to require projects to involve more women just to reach a certain target). The Alliance does not plan to alter its gender strategies and will continue to support projects to design fit-for-purpose gender approaches. Given that the Alliance definition of beneficiaries recently changed, it may be prudent to reassess the corresponding gender targets. It is noteworthy that the stakeholder engagement target of at least 33% of persons involved in the project implementation phase are women is currently exceeded (39% women).

As mentioned in the prior section on Knowledge Management, the project could have been more ambitious in incorporating gender-responsive measures into the design of Component 4. For example, the project might have advanced strategies and targets for women's participation and leadership in research (Output 4.1.1), or targeted professional development opportunities for women (Output 4.2.1). It is not clear to what extent the project has enhanced women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes. If there are good examples or data on this, it would be worthwhile for Blue Nature Alliance to report them. There was no mention of gender or women in the Technical Reports, Impact Reports, Experience Notes, Results Notes, or Communications Plans. This suggests additional opportunity for gender mainstreaming across the Alliance. As stated earlier, the Alliance reports that it is continuing to improve gender mainstreaming in the project, and has integrated gender into the knowledge management plan as follows: 1) tracking participation of men and women in learning initiatives, workshops, etc., and tracking the utilization of tools by men and women (where possible); 2) a gender component in the social equity and human dimensions research; 3) plans to capture gender lessons learned in IW results/experience notes.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Alliance prepared a project-level Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) with the Project Document, and all site engagements must prepare a site-level SEP. The Blue Nature Alliance designed three strategies to meet the goals for stakeholder engagement:

1. Develop a Code of Conduct to guide and facilitate the integration of human dimensions into their activities, site engagement processes, and during ongoing implementation.
2. Work with local partners that have close relationships with key stakeholders and proven track record of inclusivity, and that are well-positioned to apply their in-depth knowledge to develop a quality Stakeholder Engagement Plan.



- Invest time and resources in site development processes that carefully considers the full spectrum of stakeholder groups, with a special focus on marginalized groups, primary rights holders, and Indigenous groups. The Alliance's Safeguards and Gender Manager will review stakeholder assessments and engagement plans at multiple points in the site development process and provide guidance and scoping trips and workshops will be conducted with stakeholders in project sites in order to develop workplans with the full engagement and input from key stakeholders.

The Blue Nature Alliance annual workplans contain 5 activities related to the SEP:

- Review and monitor portfolio of project sites in scoping and implementation phases to identify and plan for any high-risk situations such as social conflict or high rates of GBV. Keep record of all sites engaging with the Alliance to ensure each one has developed the required safeguard plans and implements safeguard actions appropriately during implementation.
- Review all Engagement Frameworks, proposals and Stakeholder Engagement Plans to ensure that stakeholders have been identified, informed, and provided with information regarding planned activities and that any potential adverse impacts have been mitigated.
- Where grants involve activities that are likely to generate adverse social or environmental impacts to local or indigenous communities, ensure that the applicant develops and implements an Indigenous Peoples Plan, either as a stand-alone plan, or incorporated into the documentation of the required Stakeholder Engagement Plan.
- Monitor compliance of grantees, including through semi-annual safeguard monitoring reports and, when possible, site visits to high-risk grants.
- Monitor and report on CI-GEF minimum indicators.

The minimum indicators, targets, and current status for stakeholder engagement are as follows:

Indicator	Target	Current status
Number of government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector, indigenous peoples and other stakeholder groups that have been involved in the project implementation phase.	The project sets a target for all engagement sites to complete a stakeholder engagement plan which outlines a project specific target for the number of stakeholder groups to be involved in the project implementation.	1,343 stakeholder groups involved
Number persons (sex disaggregated) that have been involved in project implementation phase.	The project sets a target for at least 33% of persons involved in the project implementation phase to be women.	8,297 people (55% men, 39% women, 6% unknown)
Number of engagements (e.g. meeting, workshops, consultations) with	The project sets a target for all site engagements in implementation to develop a stakeholder engagement plan	3,292 engagements with stakeholders



stakeholders during the project implementation phase.	which outlines site specific plans for the engagement and consultation of stakeholders during the implementation phase.	
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The project level Stakeholder Engagement Plan and the reviewed site stakeholder plans (as well as the annual workplans) indicate that stakeholders were consulted in project design and implementation. Given the nature of many of the Alliance's projects (i.e., remote MPAs) there are sometimes limited opportunities to engage with stakeholders and stakeholder engagement plans are adjusted accordingly to include with a fit-for-purpose and realistic stakeholder engagement approach. Given that aggregate targets have not been set for stakeholder engagement (apart from the gender target for persons involved in the project implementation phase), it is not possible to assess the total number of engagements, people, or stakeholder groups against a target. However, the numbers seem reasonable for the size and scope of the project at midterm. A full review of all site SEPs and assessment of progress towards targets was not possible under the scope of this MTR. Given that there have been no grievances put forth in project sites, and all persons interviewed for the MTR were predominantly positive about the project's stakeholder engagement, there is no evidence to date that stakeholder engagement is lacking. The level of satisfaction among stakeholders was deemed high, on the basis of interviews that probed stakeholder perspectives on what the Alliance has done well and any challenges encountered in their interactions with the Alliance; widespread desire for continued engagement and continued Alliance work beyond the current phase also can be taken as an indication of high satisfaction among stakeholders.¹³

3.4 Sustainability

Sustainability rating: Moderately Likely

The Blue Nature Alliance views sustainability as a combination of several factors, including financing, human capacity, and continued support for an enabling environment. A clear vision and corresponding strategy are built directly into the project approach. This is outlined in the Project Document and was further refined throughout implementation. The sustainability strategies that the Alliance employs cover the range of risks. For example, the project addresses institutional and governance risks by aligning with country goals (e.g. 30x30), institutionalizing training courses with local universities, and investing in existing peer-to-peer learning networks. Financial sustainability is addressed, for example, by convening conservation finance partners (e.g. funders roundtable), and site-specific assistance with design and

¹³ Per request from CI GEF Agency, the evaluators distributed a short survey to interviewed stakeholders. Although the response rate to the survey was within the norm for such exercises, the structure of the criteria and the nature of the scoring system do not lend themselves well to this type of survey. The results are presented in Annex 11.



implementation of conservation finance strategies. Socio-economic risks to sustainability are addressed by supporting the development of opportunities in the blue economy. Finally, environmental risks are addressed through assessing climate risk and ensuring climate considerations are factored in at the outset of site engagements, and by supporting research to better understand the implications of climate change on large-scale MPAs.

Remaining areas relating to sustainability that merit more explicit attention include the possible unmet demand for conservation finance support as well as the need for sustainable financing for non-site-based components of the project (e.g. regional networks and capacity building); and residual uncertainty regarding impacts of climate change on the portfolio of Blue Nature Alliance sites.

The Alliance’s “conservation journey” paradigm seeks to advance a site to the next phase of its conservation journey, while also pursuing interventions that build the enabling conditions for these sites to continue advancing through the phases after Alliance support has concluded. This is achieved through a combination of technical expertise, access to a network of partners, and flexible financial resources. In addition to considering the sustainability of site-based projects, Blue Nature Alliance invests in global opportunities to advance global unlocks, through capacity building and learning across practitioners, piloting and advancing innovative sustainable financing solutions, supporting collaborative scientific research that advances the field of ocean conservation at scale, and engaging with and building momentum across key global policy forums.

The Blue Nature Alliance thus views sustainability as a combination of several factors, including financing, human capacity, and continued support for an enabling environment. A clear vision and corresponding strategy are built directly into the project approach. This is outlined in the Project Document and was further refined throughout implementation. (e.g. see Growing the Field Capacity & Learning Delivery Team ToR).

3.4.1 Financial Risks to Sustainability

The main financial risk to sustainability is that site-level financing gaps persist due to a combination of insufficient government budgetary support, donors prioritizing other sites, and/or other financing solutions proving infeasible.

To address the financial risks to sustainability, the Project has explicit targets of ensuring that 50% of engagement sites from Component 2 (new protections) and 75% of the engagement sites from Component 3 (improved protections) have a credible plan in place for achieving long-term financing and management effectiveness. The strategy to achieve targets includes:

- Seeking opportunities to partner with other conservation finance partners (e.g. funders roundtable, various examples at site level)
- Assisting sites with design and implementation of conservation finance strategies (e.g. Niue Trust Fund)



- Supporting the work through pro-bono services from McKinsey & Company.

One observation regarding work on financing strategies for sites is that it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain growth in scale at speed when financial planning and support is conducted on a site-by-site basis. This suggests that financing for large scale ocean conservation will benefit from seeking opportunities to design financing mechanisms at regional levels, learning from precedents such as the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund and the Micronesia Conservation Trust. Thus, support for such an effort for the Western Indian Ocean is a notable contribution of the Blue Nature Alliance.

3.4.2 Socioeconomic Risks to Sustainability

The main socioeconomic risks are around failing to generate concrete socioeconomic benefits, thereby undermining local support for protection and sustainable resource use, and insufficient integration of local stakeholder rights and needs into the management approach. Finally, there is potential for outsiders or powerful elites to crowd out local resource users.

To address these risks, the Alliance's site scoping and engagement process includes identification of the interests of key stakeholder groups and how the project can generate benefits for stakeholder groups. Examples can include strengthening the sustainability of populations of economically important species so that stakeholders are able to more effectively generate food and income through sustainable harvesting, and supporting development of opportunities in the blue economy that can generate revenue while maintaining the integrity of the protected areas. The Blue Nature Alliance Code of Conduct and Safeguard Plans also provide protection to stakeholders.

3.4.3 Institutional Framework and Governance Risks to Sustainability

Risks to institutional sustainability include overlapping or conflicting agency mandates undermine effective management, conflicting needs and priorities undermine collaborative multi-stakeholder governance and management, and governments do not sufficiently empower MPA management authorities with mandates and resources for effective functioning.

Blue Nature Alliance's strategies related to institutional sustainability for its site investments, as well as for supporting global enabling conditions are as follows:

- Conducting capacity needs assessments and action plans and crafting interventions to generate enthusiasm and support from agencies, decision makers and the public.
- Conducting policy analysis and working with key local partners to promote policy interventions.
- Supporting MPA authorities to establish or strengthen management and administrative systems (standing up management in MPAs). For example, the project financed 2 additional rangers in Revillagigedo, Mexico, under the condition (which has now been met) that the government would finance the positions at the end of the project period.



- Providing training, mentoring, and direct technical assistance, as well as actions to institutionalize these efforts (e.g. institutionalizing training courses within universities (e.g. Colorado State University, Chile), investing in existing peer-to-peer learning networks such as Big Ocean, and arranging long-term mentoring from more advanced sites.

During the implementation period, Blue Nature Alliance adjusted its site scoping process to focus more effort upfront on alignment around a shared goal with a single or a few lead implementing partners. Additionally, the Alliance received requests from implementing partners to receive more in-depth support for navigating political transitions and developing political strategies and campaigns related to designating new ocean conservation areas, therefore, the Alliance is seeking additional campaign strategy expertise. Government engagement and support is crucial for the durability of Blue Nature Alliance investments, therefore the Alliance should continue to ensure that implementing partners are engaging deeply with the appropriate government agencies.

3.4.4 Environmental Risks to Sustainability

Environmental risks to sustainability are predominantly around climate change. For example, shifting climatic conditions as a result of wider global climate change may result in suboptimal placement of MPA boundaries, or destruction caused by extreme weather events may erode natural assets of MPAs, undermining socioeconomic benefits and financing options. Finally, negative impacts on migratory species in areas beyond MPA management authority jurisdiction can undermine the viability of local populations. The Blue Nature Alliance addresses these risks through assessing climate risk and ensuring climate considerations are factored in at the outset of site engagements, and supporting research to better understand the implications of climate change on large-scale MPAs. However, the Alliance acknowledges that there is significant uncertainty around to what extent these risks are mitigated.



Table 8: Evaluation Ratings and Achievements

Dimension	Rating	Achievements
Project Outcomes (overall)	Satisfactory	• Outcome 1.1: 27 engagement frameworks endorsed, versus target of 20. (All Output targets exceeded.) • Outcome 2.1: Full or partial target reached in 29% of engagement sites, totaling 116.97 M hectares, versus target of 750 M hectares. • Outcome 3.1: Full or partial targets achieved for management effectiveness improvement and/or proposed status upgrade in 20% of engagement sites, totaling 87.28 M hectares of ocean conservation area, versus target of 500 M hectares. • Outcomes 4.1 & 4.2: All Output targets exceeded (noting that targets for IW:Learn contributions readily will be met/exceeded following the resumption of IW:Learn activities). • 12,700 direct beneficiaries (35% women) reached, versus target of 20,000. • Sustainability of project outcomes benefits from alignment with country goals (e.g., GBF 30x30), existing networks and commitments (e.g., funders, MPA managers), and capacity building • Support for addressing financial sustainability at site level is tailored to the site's status along the conservation journey. • McKinsey & Company pro-bono support secured for site financing assessments and strategies.
Relevance	Highly Satisfactory	
Effectiveness	Satisfactory	
Efficiency	Satisfactory	
Sustainability	Moderately Likely	• Sustainability of project outcomes benefits from alignment with country goals (e.g., GBF 30x30), existing networks and commitments (e.g., funders, MPA managers), and capacity building • Support for addressing financial sustainability at site level is tailored to the site's status along the conservation journey. • McKinsey & Company pro-bono support secured for site financing assessments and strategies.
Project M&E	Satisfactory	• Outcome 5.1: Project M&E on track. • ProDoc included concrete, fully budgeted M&E plan, aligned with Results Framework and using SMART indicators, including GEBs, socioeconomic co-benefits, and sex-disaggregated indicators. • Dedicated M&E capacity in place and operational, actively measuring indicators relative to baseline. • Continuous refinement of M&E processes and guidance, reducing reporting burden on sub-grantees.
Implementation and Execution	Satisfactory	• Securing co-financing for GEF Alliance investment as a whole has been a significant value add from the perspective of supported sites. • GEF participation as a Core Partner and Steering Council member has facilitated ongoing alignment. • Structure of the Alliance as a new entity with support from Executing Core Partners CI and Pew has incubated an effective and efficient institutional culture, marked by responsiveness to site partner needs and openness to input and feedback. • Flexibility and adaptive ability of the Alliance management team permitted significant progress on Outcome 1.1 despite challenges of the COVID pandemic and has been instrumental to ongoing streamlining and refinement of processes (e.g., site safeguard plans, financial reporting).
Environmental and Social Safeguards	Satisfactory	• Templates and manuals provided to sites, accompanied by direct support/guidance. • Project-level GMP, SEP, and AGM developed. • As of FY24 PIR, Limited ESIA's, safeguards screenings, stakeholder engagement plans, gender mainstreaming plans, and grievance redress mechanisms have been completed for all engagements in implementation. (Accountability and grievance redress mechanisms are in the process of being strengthened for some engagements.) • Safeguard processes updated in early 2024 to enhance efficiencies and reduce burden on sub-grantees.



4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

During the first half of its implementation phase, the Blue Nature Alliance has built a strong institutional culture, refined its organizational processes, and exceeded expectations in developing a diverse portfolio of supported initiatives and contributing to the global knowledge base relating to marine conservation. These accomplishments have set the Alliance up for success in the remainder of the project period.

4.1.1 Value-added of the Blue Nature Alliance

The Blue Nature Alliance offers clear and considerable added value within the global marine conservation arena. Beyond serving as an important funding mechanism, it is uniquely impactful in terms of aligning the efforts of a large and diverse range of actors and strengthening the global community of practice. Specific contributions of the Alliance highlighted over the course of the evaluation include:

- Project implementers highlighted the engagement and reachability of their regional Blue Nature Alliance contact points, as a trusted source of input, guidance, and support. These interactions extend beyond those seen under a typical grant-making entity and embody a true partnership dynamic.
- Project implementers noted the value of access to Blue Nature Alliance's technical expertise, particularly in the area of innovative/sustainable financing, as well as surveillance (e.g., Skylight) and scientific expertise (e.g., baseline studies).
- Project implementers expressed the importance of networking and exposure facilitated by Blue Nature Alliance (including site exchanges, side-events at conferences, and access to other donors), and the overall strategic coordination and convening role that the Alliance plays (e.g., supporting regional networks and connecting them to each other, and convening donors to coordinate investments).
- Co-investors/leverage partners highlighted the combination of complementarity/alignment of missions (in the marine conservation space) with capacity to provide technical support of various kinds as well as effective networking.
- An important aspect of the Blue Nature Alliance is that it serves as a conduit to GEF financing without the sub-grantees having to secure co-financing (while recognizing that additional leveraged

funding is of course attractive); by having secured co-financing at the Alliance level, reducing that burden on implementers is a significant added value of the Blue Nature Alliance.

4.1.2 Strengths

- In addition to added value highlighted above, there was broad consensus among informants that the Blue Nature Alliance team is highly responsive and positive, strongly oriented towards collaboration. Communications are described as open and fluid, including both regular calls/check-ins and *ad hoc* interactions as needed. The Alliance is explicit about its culture and values in its Code of Conduct, and the Blue Nature Alliance team clearly holds itself to high standards and has created a culture of respect and collaboration.
- Related to this, informants also almost universally noted the flexibility of Blue Nature Alliance as a grantor or partner, open to working closely with project implementers or co-financing partners to tailor project designs, processes and arrangements to fit particular contexts and needs. This flexible approach has allowed implementers to respond to new opportunities or changing priorities on the ground, while maintaining the overall vision of Blue Nature Alliance. Informants expressed a great deal of appreciation for Blue Nature Alliance as a visionary and thought partner and for investing in their organization to expand (in time or space) the work they already do well.
- The Blue Nature Alliance has a clearly articulated theory of change in the form of the Alliance's concept of Conservation Journey. Different sites are at different points on this journey when they join the Alliance; the project's aim is to see progress along this journey for each site, while recognizing that Blue Nature Alliance will not be able to support sites through their entire journey. The Blue Nature Alliance thus serves as an accelerant and considers what meaningful things they can help advance in a site to leave lasting impact.
- High levels of technical capacity in a range of fields, plus extensive networks to leverage for additional capacity and support, are a particular strength of the Alliance. This was noted repeatedly with respect to innovative finance and access to funding sources; policy engagement and access to policymakers; communications/awareness-raising expertise; and core science.
- The Alliance has a clear vision of sustainability, which is built directly into the project approach. For example, the project aligns with country goals (e.g., 30x30), builds on existing networks (funders, MPA managers), uses a portfolio approach that allows for a blend of site investments with higher and lower risk, and provides support for assessing/addressing financial sustainability that is tailored to each site's location on the conservation journey. There remain opportunities to design sustainable financing strategies for other components of the project, such as regional networks and capacity building.



- Adapting to reflect lessons learned during implementation is a particular strength of the project. A notable feature of the Blue Nature Alliance has been the ongoing innovation of processes. Some of these include:
 - New safeguard templates that depend on level of risk, and ability for partners to complete online versions
 - New customized project management system and online grantee reporting tool
 - Providing planning grants for project startup
 - Updated theory of change and development of conservation journey framework
 - Streamlined M&E indicators, new dashboards
 - Call for Expressions of Interest to open engagement with new, smaller organizations

It is thus evident that the Alliance team is open to input and actively strives to improve processes on the basis of that input. This allowed the evaluation team to also reassure key informants in interviews that their feedback as reflected in the MTR would have meaningful impact on the initiative as it moves forward in the second half of the implementation phase under the GEF grant.

4.1.3 Challenges

- Most project implementers described the grant-making process as long (though not necessarily more onerous than for other comparable funders). Various reasons were suggested for the lengthy time frame, such as turnover in the grantee organization, changes in government, donor requirements, and time lags in communications due to time zones and holidays. Implementers that described processes as onerous also stated that Blue Nature Alliance was understanding and supportive (e.g., reflected in Alliance staff providing guidance and input on budget template, safeguards, etc.). Furthermore, multiple implementers indicated that while some of the requirements were cumbersome, they ultimately resulted in improvements to their internal management processes (e.g., development of Operations Manual, purchase of new financial system).
- Some implementers noted that reporting – particularly financial reporting – remains a burden. Issues raised included frequency of reporting, changes in reporting expectations and requirements over time (attributed to turnover in Alliance finance/admin staff), the budgeting process during project design, and scope for/requirements relating to grant extensions and renewals. Implementers indicated they believed these issues could be addressed through clearer and simpler templates and guidance documents that lay out timelines, processes and requirements. One implementer stated that the CI grants portal for reporting is very easy to use but involves a fair amount of duplication in the information that must be provided. It was recommended to further streamline or automate the transfer of information from one section/template to another.



- A few sources shared that they felt that the Alliance could benefit from more exchange with and input from other actors and/or a wider range of voices in the global marine conservation space. This could include, for example, other thought leaders in marine conservation. Respondents also suggested that a proactive mechanism for soliciting feedback from partners would be welcome (distinct from the grievance redress mechanism, which serves a different purpose).
- Some project implementers described a mismatch between social and environmental safeguard requirements and their project contexts. To these informants, preparation of (relatively) elaborate safeguard plans over multiple iterations to process reviews and feedback from Alliance safeguards staff did not seem like an optimal use of time and effort. It should be noted that these comments were from implementers of earlier projects, before significant changes were made to safeguards processes.
- The Alliance can offer a rich set of learning experiences through interactions between the many and diverse initiatives that constitute the Blue Nature Alliance's portfolio of supported projects. Although some informants highlighted specific exchanges that they much appreciated, others indicated that they experienced little in the way of cross-project fertilization. Some implementers did not seem entirely aware of the resources and support potentially available to them through the Alliance. It is possible that as they got on with the business of project implementation and absorbed in their day-to-day activities and challenges, they to some degree may have lost sight of potential benefits of being part of the Alliance. This suggests that periodic communication of the array of expertise and support available through the Blue Nature Alliance, and regular discussion with implementers focused on identifying where such support can be brought to bear, would be helpful.

4.1.4 Areas for Further Reflection

- A recurring topic of discussion, and one without clear resolution as yet, is the question of appropriate targets and priority setting. This relates to the value of ambitious total area targets for new and/or improved MPAs, versus a set of targets that better capture the quality of conservation management of such areas; the balance between strict protection and areas available for sustainable use; and the balance between pursuing large MPAs to achieve ambitious targets versus supporting small MPAs (and OECMs) in areas with particularly high biodiversity value and/or levels of threat. (It is worth noting that GEF has institutional targets to which it expects the Blue Nature Alliance to contribute, such that the project itself necessarily has to articulate some of its targets in those terms.) A related point of interest raised by a Blue Nature Alliance team member is that avoiding degazettement or weakening of management regimes also can serve as a worthwhile objective aligned with the mission of the Alliance, that perhaps should be captured in targets as well.
- Related to this point is the challenge of measuring the impact of capacity building. Several respondents indicated that it is challenging to convey the fundamental importance of their



capacity building work to funders that are focused on area targets. The Alliance clearly understands the value of this work and can play a role in articulating its impact.

- A great deal of discussion arose around optimal strategies for growing the field. For example, informants provided opinions about the relative importance of online courses for MPA managers versus peer-to-peer learning versus online courses for policymakers and funders, and how best to assess capacity needs and prioritize delivery. Some informants noted that the needs of MPA managers were not always at the forefront of Blue Nature Alliance's work and that products were more relevant for NGOs than MPA managers, while others stated that MPA manager voices were clearly at the table and products reflected these voices. Similarly, there were differing views of what kinds of tools would be most useful for Blue Nature Alliance to develop, and this clearly varied based on the intended users of the tools. There was discussion about the need for customized approaches for individual MPAs, but also a desire for simple, readily available tools, recognizing that managers are burdened with day-to-day operations. Blue Nature Alliance has a well-developed strategy around capacity and learning and builds on a variety of existing initiatives and tools. It seems there is an opportunity for Blue Nature Alliance to facilitate a shared vision in this space, bringing together what are currently seen as competing tools and strategies.
- As noted earlier, Blue Nature Alliance has innovated considerably in many areas. Given that many of these innovations have been established within the past 3-6 months (safeguards, M&E, project management, reporting), it is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes. It is expected that the value of these efforts will be observed in the second half of the project.

4.2 Lessons and Recommendations

4.2.1 Lessons

Project Design, Appraisal and Planning

- One lesson learned between the Blue Nature Alliance project design phase and implementation to date is that the conventional formulation of a Theory of Change in GEF projects may not lend itself well to ambitious scale programs with large and diverse project portfolios. The Theory of Change may have to be so broad and generic that it loses concrete meaning. The pivot of the Alliance to emphasizing the diversity of sites along a Conservation Journey, and the corresponding diversity in the kinds of support required, has proved to be an effective way to articulate the project logic.

Project Management

- A second lesson learned, again linked to the diversity of sites, is that while environmental and social safeguard screening and development of safeguard plans are crucial, the deployment of



the portfolio benefits from a streamlined process to tailor safeguard requirements to site contexts. Without such tailoring, implementers are forced to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort on safeguard processes and products that are not applicable.

- A third lesson is that an initiative like the Blue Nature Alliance fundamentally revolves around effective collaboration grounded in relationships. This places a premium on recruitment, training, and retention of relationship leads who bring not only skills and knowledge but also the interpersonal and other “soft skills” that are essential to effective relationship building and maintenance. In this, the Blue Nature Alliance clearly has been highly successful.

Communications and Outreach

- There is a need for greater understanding of how investment in capacity building advances global marine conservation objectives. Effective communication materials to explain the rationale for capacity building and to demonstrate concrete impacts to date of such investments can be an important key for unlocking additional support.

Sustainability

- Centralized, dedicated project capacity that is focused on supporting partners in developing and implementing strategies and plans for sustainable financing offers an enormous value added, highly appreciated by site engagement partners. The Alliance experience also shows that this role can attract high quality expertise as pro bono support, as illustrated by the enthusiasm with which team members from McKinsey & Co. have worked with CI finance team members and others to support sites on this theme.

4.2.2 Corrective Actions for the Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Project

The evaluators did not find a need for material corrective actions. The overall project design, including adaptations applied over the course of implementation, are appropriate to the aims of the project; the Blue Nature Alliance team is functioning effectively and site implementers are universally satisfied with their interactions with and support from the Alliance; and project monitoring and evaluation is effective and also is benefitting from ongoing refinement.

4.2.3 Recommended Actions to Follow up or Reinforce Initial Benefits from the Project

Project Management

- Noting that the Blue Nature Alliance has made great strides in adapting and evolving processes over the course of implementation, it should continue to identify opportunities to improve and



streamline, for example, grant-making processes and reporting requirements. In addition, significant value would be derived from documenting the gains/benefits from improvements to date, as a means to encourage learning and adoption by other actors (including GEF). This includes seeking out further opportunities for clearer and simpler templates and guidance documents that lay out timelines, processes and requirements. One specific area would be to prepare guidance on requirements and procedures for grant extensions and grant renewals. Another would be to explore ways to reduce the need to enter the same information multiple times for grant reporting (i.e., through the CI grants portal) by streamlining templates or automating the transfer of information from one section/template to another; duplication of information remains a point a raised by some implementers.

Knowledge, Collaboration, and Learning

- There was some indication that implementers were not fully aware of the various types of support that the Blue Nature Alliance can provide. This easily could be remedied by creating a short information packet (i.e., a simple factsheet or brochure) enumerating the types of technical support available to partners through the Alliance. Periodically running through the available types of support with implementers may reveal opportunities to further reinforce site work.
- While some implementers highlighted the value of exchanges and interaction with other projects that they had experienced, others indicated that they had seen little of this. The Alliance should explore ways to further increase the amount of cross-fertilization between projects and proactively seek to catalyze more and deeper project-to-project linkages. This can include exchanges as well as curated virtual interactions, in addition to facilitated side-events at major conferences.
- A few sources shared that they felt that the Blue Nature Alliance could benefit from more exchange with and input from other actors and/or a wider range of voices in the global marine conservation space outside the Alliance. This suggests that the Alliance should explore opportunities for more interaction and exchange with relevant outside actors, platforms, etc.
- To guide action on preceding recommendations, the Blue Nature Alliance team should reach out to solicit concerns, suggestions and other input from partners and implementers. Interviewees and respondents signaled that proactive efforts to collect feedback from partners would be welcome (this is distinct from the grievance redress mechanism, which serves a different purpose). For example, an organized effort (e.g., a survey and/or focus group discussions) to assess performance of and satisfaction with revised safeguard processes could inform further reflection on possible refinements.



Gender Equality

- Recognizing that the social context pertaining to high seas / open ocean conservation offers considerable contrasts with the typical GEF project setting, the Alliance nevertheless should document examples of best-practices and lessons learned related to gender, including how the project has enhanced women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes. Examples and data on this theme should be better reflected in Blue Nature Alliance reporting; greater emphasis on gender and safeguards in external project reporting, websites, and other communications may also help signal their importance to Alliance staff and partners.

Sustainability

- Recognizing that the Conservation Journey is not intended as a strictly linear process, as presented it can give the impression that financing is a later-stage concern. The Blue Nature Alliance should consider visibly putting greater emphasis on the value of considering (financial) sustainability as early as possible, for reasons including but not limited to: financing solutions may require long lead times; some financing sources prefer earlier involvement to help shape solutions; early attention to financing can enhance credibility in the eyes of policy makers; and notable difficulty in addressing financing needs can signal other problems and thus serve as an early warning regarding site feasibility.
- Assuming an intent to continue beyond the current phase, the Alliance should articulate a financial sustainability plan for the Blue Nature Alliance itself beyond the site level, to sustain the Alliance's ability to continue efforts relating to regional networks and capacity building as well as site support and growing the field. Given that: a) the need for additional global investment in ocean conservation remains enormous, and b) the Alliance has proven to be a highly effective platform for securing and channeling such investment, there is ample motivation for considering a second phase and explicitly laying out how the Alliance will sustain and scale up its work beyond the GEF project.

4.2.4 *Proposals for Future Directions Underlining Main Objectives*

Monitoring and Evaluation

- In addition to targets for areas under new protection and upgrading and/or improving management of existing protected areas, consider a target for improved management outside protected areas (corresponding, for example, to the Seychelles effort to apply Marine Spatial Planning throughout its entire EEZ, not just protected areas).



- It is not immediately obvious how one would set a target for avoiding degazettement or weakening of management regimes (per experience in Palau). Nevertheless, such work clearly is of great importance to overall ocean conservation objectives and should be captured in regular reporting. An alternative for consideration is to develop a form of early warning & response framework (along the lines of the Protected Area Downgrading, Downsizing and Degazettement tracker; previously available at padddtracker.org but now 'under construction'); success can then be measured against threats identified through this framework.

Communications and Outreach

- Noting that the importance of capacity building is not sufficiently recognized by (some) funders, the Alliance should consider including in its knowledge management and communications strategy a deliberate plan to articulate and demonstrate how investment in capacity building advances global marine conservation objectives. Effective communication materials to explain the rationale for capacity building and to demonstrate concrete impacts to date of such investments can be an important key for unlocking additional support. This links to a wider recommendation to prepare effective communication material that conveys how the Growing the Field component of Blue Nature Alliance's work is conceived and operates, targeting specific audiences and stakeholder groups.



5 Annexes

1. List of documents reviewed
2. MTR TOR
3. Ratings Scales
4. Interview Guide used for data collection
5. List of persons interviewed
6. Evaluation site visit itineraries
7. Blue Nature Alliance Steering Committee and Management Team roles
8. Blue Nature Alliance stakeholders
9. Theory of Change diagram
10. Survey results



Annex 1: List of Documents Reviewed

Project Documents

Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve the Conservation of 1.25 Billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems. GEF Project Document. June 2021.

Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve the Conservation of 1.25 Billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems. GEF-7 Project Identification Form.

Blue Nature Alliance + CI GEF Safeguards Updates March 2024

Blue Nature Alliance Code of Conduct

Blue Nature Alliance Communications Plan (FY22, FY23)

Blue Nature Alliance Core Indicators Worksheet June 2024

Blue Nature Alliance Project Inception Workshop Report

Blue Nature Alliance Report to the Steering Council (FY21, FY22, FY23, FY24)

Blue Nature Alliance Project Annual Workplan and Report (FY22, FY23, FY24)

Blue Nature Alliance Project Implementation Report (FY23, FY24)

Blue Nature Alliance Approved Budget (FY22, FY23, FY24)

Blue Nature Alliance Annual Audit (FY22, FY23)

Blue Nature Alliance Quarterly Financial Report (FY22, FY23, FY24)

Blue Nature Alliance Co-Finance letters

Blue Nature Alliance OFP Endorsement Letters

Blue Nature Alliance Operations Manual

Blue Nature Alliance Organizational Chart (original, 2024)

Blue Nature Alliance Team Structure (original, 2024)

Blue Nature Alliance TORs for Key Staff Persons

Blue Nature Alliance Steering Council Meeting Minutes (Feb 2021, July 2021, June 2022, Jan 2023, July 2023, Jan 2024, Feb 2024)

Blue Nature Alliance Stakeholder List

Blue Nature Alliance Site Engagement Frameworks

April 2023 Global Enabling Conditions Update to Steering Council Minutes

April 2023 Global Enabling Conditions Update to Steering Council Presentation

Growing the Field Capacity & Learning Delivery Team Terms of Reference

Conservation Finance Delivery Team Framework for the Blue Nature Alliance

Blue Nature Alliance What Counts Memo

Alliance Science and Knowledge (ASK) Year in Review: 2023

CI-GEF Supervision Mission Gabon Trip Report June 2024

Site Safeguard Screening and Plans (Dominican Republic, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands)

Blue Nature Alliance M&E Variables

Site Based M&E Indicators

Non-Site Based M&E Indicators

Scaling Global MPA Capacity: Cultivating a Systems Approach presentation

Trends and Emerging Instruments in Ocean Conservation Funding Results Note

Blue Nature Alliance Managers XChange Experience Note

Blue Nature Alliance Human Dimensions GEF Results Note

Blue Nature Alliance FY23 GEF Results Note

Blue Nature Alliance FY22 GEF Results Note

Blue Nature Alliance CoCOnet Experience Note



Blue Nature Alliance Big Ocean Experience Note

Other Documents

Bennett et al. 2021. Advancing Social Equity in and Through Marine Conservation.

CI GEF Agency ESMF Framework

Executing Agency and CI-GEF Project Manager Required Documentation

Favoretto, F., C. López-Sagástegui, E. Sala, and O. Aburto-Oropeza. 2023. The largest fully protected marine area in North America does not harm industrial fishing. *Science Advances* 9(22).



Annex 2: MTR Terms of Reference

(Available on request)



Annex 3: Evaluation Ratings Scales

The main dimensions of project performance on which ratings are first provided in Mid-Term Review are: outcomes, sustainability, quality of monitoring and evaluation, quality of implementation, and quality of execution. The CI-GEF Agency also includes ratings for environmental and social safeguards.

Outcome Ratings:

The overall ratings on the outcomes of the project will be based on performance on the following criteria:

- a. Relevance
- b. Effectiveness
- c. Efficiency

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:

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

The calculation of the overall outcomes rating of projects will consider all the three criteria, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. The rating on relevance will determine whether the overall outcome rating will be in the unsatisfactory range (MU to HU = unsatisfactory range). If the relevance rating is in the unsatisfactory range, then the overall outcome will be in the unsatisfactory range as well. However, where the relevance rating is in the satisfactory range (HS to MS), the overall outcome rating could, depending on its effectiveness and efficiency rating, be either in the satisfactory range or in the unsatisfactory range.

The second constraint applied is that the overall outcome achievement rating may not be higher than the effectiveness rating. 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.



Sustainability Ratings:

The sustainability will be assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, sociopolitical, 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.

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

Project M&E Ratings:

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

- Design
- Implementation

Quality of M&E on these two dimensions will be assessed on a six-point scale:

- Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation exceeded expectations.
- Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation meets expectations.
- Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation more or less meets expectations.
- Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.
- Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation substantially lower than expected.
- Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in M&E design/ implementation.
- Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design/implementation.

Implementation and Execution Rating:

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.

- Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation exceeded expectations.
- Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/execution met expectations.
- Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation more or less met expectations.
- Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.



- Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation substantially lower than expected.
- Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation
- Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation

Environmental and Social Safeguards:

The approved environmental and social safeguard plans will be rated according to the following scale.

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



Annex 4: Interview Guide Used for Information Collection

GEF Project Midterm Review

Blue Nature Alliance

to Expand and Improve Conservation of 1.25 billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems

A working list of interview questions is provided below, noting that they are intended to serve more as discussion prompts than as questions *per se*. Questions will be adapted where necessary for the country and stakeholder context.

Project Design, Implementation and Execution

- To what extent were lessons from other relevant projects incorporated into the project design?
- Have project activities been appropriate for addressing barriers facing global ocean conservation? Were there any surprises in how the project design did or did not lead to expected impacts?
- What have been the strengths and challenges of the project's implementation arrangements?
- To what extent did the project design adequately account for relevant gender issues? What are some examples of how the project has mainstreamed gender?
- Did any unanticipated environmental or social risks emerge? What were they? How did the project respond? What were the mitigation and management measures?
- Were perspectives of those who would be affected by project decisions, those who could affect the outcomes, and those who could contribute information or other resources to the process, taken into account during project design and implementation?
- What have been the most successful aspects of the project thus far? What have been the main challenges?
- Do you have any recommendations for changes to any aspects of the project? How could the project increase its impact or better meet your needs? (include monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management, safeguards)

Relevance:

- What are the main threats that the project seeks to address? Do the relevant stakeholders recognize these threats as priorities? How is the project addressing these threats?
- Are there any additional stakeholders and beneficiaries that have been or should be included in the project, beyond those originally considered in the project design?
- How have the project activities aligned with national development priorities and plans of participating countries?

Effectiveness:

- Are there any activities that have not been carried out as planned? Why? What effect did this have on the intended outcomes and impact of the project?
- Have anticipated impacts been observed?
- What have been some of the challenges with project implementation? How did the project adapt to these challenges? Are the project objectives likely to be achieved?



- How has the project responded to external factors (i.e. effects of climate change, global economic crisis, change in national situation etc.) relevant to the project strategy?

Efficiency:

- What are some of the activities that consumed more project resources than expected? How did the project adapt?
- What are some of the ways the project has coordinated with other initiatives with aligned objectives? How did this strengthen project outcomes?
- What major budget shifts, if any, took place over the first half of implementation?

Results:

- What have been the positive and negative impacts of the project? Any unforeseen impacts?
- To what extent have the targets set in the results framework been met? Where they have not been met, what do you think are the main reasons? How has the project adapted to make progress towards project impact and outcomes?

Sustainability:

- How likely is the project to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion? Which benefits are likely to continue and which will be more challenging?
- What is necessary to further embed project approaches and tools in target institutions and agencies, particularly once external financing ends?

Discussion Prompts for Implementing Partners

1. Engagement process

- How was your experience with the BNA engagement process?
- How did the Alliance contribute to the design of your project(s)?
- How long did the engagement process take (from start to approval of engagement framework to disbursement)? Is there anything that could have been done differently to make the process smoother/easier/more efficient?

2. Project implementation

- In what ways has the Alliance provided added value to your work?
- What have been the challenges in partnering with the Alliance on this work?
- Have you been involved in any capacity building activities provided by the Alliance?
- Have you been involved in any knowledge sharing activities provided by the Alliance?
- What has been your experience with the level of support on safeguards processes?
- How was your experience with the technical and financial reporting processes? Were there any issues?
- How are communications with the Alliance? Is it clear to you who you should reach out to for specific kinds of questions?
- Has the Alliance provided opportunities for collaboration and coordination with other programs/initiatives?



- What have been the main challenges that your project has encountered and has the Alliance been involved in assisting with these challenges?

3. Overall experience

- What were the most successful aspects of working with the Alliance? What were the main challenges?
- Do you have any suggestions for how the Alliance can be of additional value as a partner?
- Do you have any additional recommendations for the Alliance?



Annex 5: List of Persons Interviewed

Name	Institution
Maddie Beattie	Blue Nature Alliance
Daniel Bengtsson	BirdLife Sverige
Nathan Bennett	WWF
Arturo Bocos	ECO
Puri Canals	EU Ocean Governance Project
Gregg Casad	WildAid Marine
Daniela Castro	The MPA School/Mar Patagonico
Beth Clark	Birdlife International
Tammy Davies	Birdlife International
Bruno Discepola	Birdlife International
Jason Donofrio	The Ocean Foundation
Emma Doyle	MPA Connect
Ginny Farmer	Blue Nature Alliance
Susanna Fuller	Oceans North
Claude Gascon	Global Environment Facility
Jo Gilbert	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Mario Gomez	Beta Diversidad
Erendida Hernandez	CONANP-Revillagigedo NP
Wendy Higuera	DEPESCA
Duko Hopman	McKinsey & Company
Laure Katz	Blue Nature Alliance
Fabian Kyne	The Caribbean Biodiversity Fund
Joaquin Labougle	Blue Nature Alliance
Naia Lewis	Big Ocean
Laura Linde	Blue Nature Alliance
Shubash Lohani	Blue Nature Alliance
Michael McGreevey	Blue Nature Alliance
Marie-May Muzungaile	SeyCCAT-CEO
Heath Nero	Wyss Foundation
Lihla Noori	Blue Nature Alliance
Hector Ortiz	CICIMAR-IPN
Andrea Pacheco	Blue Nature Alliance
Brendon Pasisi	Niue Ocean Wide
Fasha Piña	Beta Diversidad
Cherie Prothro-Shea	Waitt Foundation
Eduardo Robelo	CONANP
Rosalind Skillen	BirdWatch Ireland
James Slogan	IUCN-Oceania Marine Director



Name	Institution
Carol Stork	Birdlife International
Chris Stone	Blue Nature Alliance
Kira Sullivan-Wiley	Blue Nature Alliance
Josine Tiavouane	CI-New Caledonia
Nora Torres	Beta Diversidad
Josue Villorin	CONANP-Revillagigedo NP
Shelly Wade	Blue Nature Alliance
Kame Westerman	Blue Nature Alliance
Oli Yates	Birdlife International



Annex 6: Evaluation Site Visit Itineraries

Projects: Revillagigedo National Park, Dos Mares Biosphere Reserve

Lead Implementer: Beta Diversidad & Partners

Location: La Paz, Mexico

Monday, July 22, 2024	
Meet with Beta Diversidad and Revillagigedo National Park staff	CONANP-RNP Office
Tuesday, July 23, 2024	
Attend stakeholder workshop on sustainable financing of Revillagigedo National Park	Hotel Catedral
Meet with Revillagigedo stakeholders	Hotel Catedral
Meet with Dos Mares stakeholders	Bismark Restaurant



Project: North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) Marine Protected Area (MPA)

Lead Implementer: Birdlife International & Partners

Location: Cambridge, UK

Tuesday 6th August Arrival to David Attenborough Building (Pembroke Street, CB2 3QZ). Tammy will meet you at the reception, contact on +44 7957 881137 if any issues. https://birdlife.zoom.us/j/86792245188?pwd=Uxd4d6OPONDxOGb92SbtYV0FVJv1d8.1		
9:00-10:00	Welcome and introduction to BirdLife International Partnership (Director of Conservation, Richard Grimmett); followed by tour of the David Attenborough building	Richards office / DAB
10:00-10:45	Overview of the work of BirdLife's Global Science Division (Chief Scientist, Stuart Butchart)	Baobab Room (1.39)
10:45-11:15	Overview of the work of BirdLife's Global Policy Division (Director of Policy, Nina Mikander)	(online) Baobab Room (1.39)
11:15-11:30	<i>Break</i>	
11:30-12:30	BirdLife Europe and Central Asia & Partnership engagement (BirdLife Europe Marine Coordinator, Daniel Michell & BirdLife Europe Marine Policy Officer, Cyrielle Goldberg)	(online) Baobab Room (1.39)
12:30-14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14-15:30	Q&As 1: BirdLife's experience with BNA Engagement process (Tammy Davies, Carol Stork)	Baobab Room (1.39)
Wednesday 7th August https://birdlife.zoom.us/j/86974480896?pwd=RQzScg7YBBlgVmbMw3vDbbfYB5sxnF.1		
09:45-10:15	Partner engagement: BirdWatch Ireland (Rosalind Skillen)	(online) Baobab Room (1.39)
10:15-10:30	<i>Break</i>	
10:30-12	Q&As 2: BirdLife's experience with BNA Project implementation (Tammy Davies, Oli Yates, Carol Stork, Bruno Discepola, Beth Clark)	Baobab Room (1.39)
12:00-14:30	<i>Lunch</i>	
14:30-15:30	Partner visit: RSPB overview and introduction (RSPB Conservation Director, Jo Gilbert, Oli Yates)	RSPB office (2 nd floor)
15:30-16:00	Partner engagement: BirdLife Sverige (Daniel Bengtsson)	(online) Baobab Room (1.39)
Thursday 8th August https://birdlife.zoom.us/j/84450334429?pwd=qJYRgyrnnv1b6Nk4QneCpIFi4IsbHNU.1		
09:30-10:30	Q&As 3: BirdLife's overall experience with BNA (Tammy Davies, Oli Yates, Carol Stork)	Berta Caceres Room (2.48)



Annex 7: Steering Committee and Management Team Roles (Implementation Arrangements)

The Steering Council's responsibilities shall include, but not be limited to the following:

- Represent and communicate the Alliance's objectives, and engagement strategy as necessary to help leverage and amplify our collective impact;
- On an annual basis, review and approve the Alliance's annual strategic work-plan, target outcomes, and budget.
- Review Alliance financial reports including, year-to-date and project-to-date expenditures, expected cashflows and expected commitments;
- Advise on Alliance site scoping to identify new site opportunities and approve new sites for Alliance investments;

Evaluate and provide input on operational effectiveness and progress towards goal achievement;

- Recommend new donors and support fundraising, including leverage funding; and
- Resolve disputes when the Alliance Management Team is unable to do so.

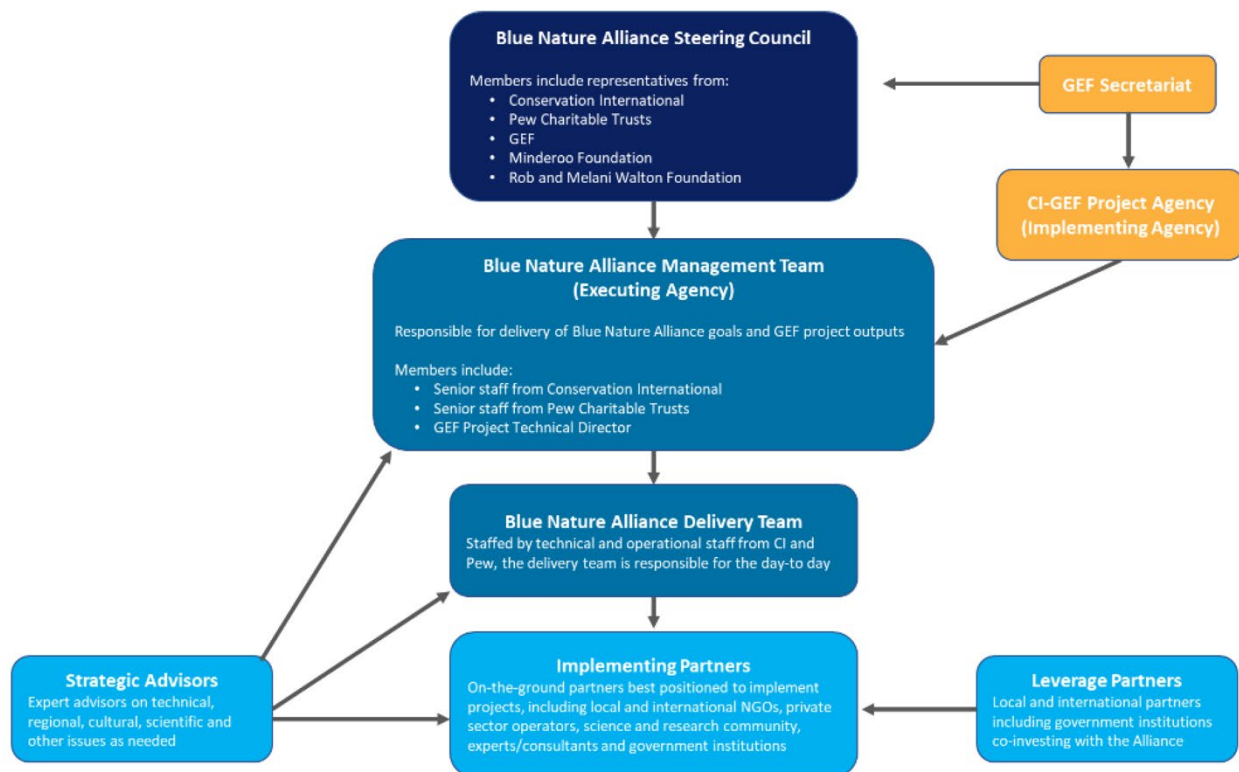
Responsibilities of the Alliance Management Team include:

- Oversee Alliance performance; measure, monitor, and report on Alliance performance to the Steering Council and other partners;
- Engage and inform the Steering Council of ongoing site-based engagements, key investments, and decisions;
- Present annual workplans and budgets, financial and programmatic progress reports, including Project Implementation Reports to CI-GEF for approval, and assuring compliance with CI-GEF's policies and procedures;

Scope new site-based engagement opportunities and co-design site-based engagement frameworks with stakeholders and relevant Alliance partners, including seeking co-investment and leveraged financing;

- Prepare site selection recommendations for the Steering Council's approval; if new site investment opportunities need rapid action, the Alliance Leadership and Management will have authority to make site investment decisions up to \$500,000;
- Manage and deploy Alliance resources in accordance with best practices and Steering Council guidance;
- Provide technical guidance on sites and manage implementing partners grants and contracts;
- Manage and coordinate Alliance partnerships; including engagement with the Core Partners;
- Ensure compliance with the annual budget and spending plan approved by the Steering Council;
- Resolve disputes where necessary and escalate disputes to the Steering Council if the resolution cannot be achieved; and
- Represent the Alliance globally and advocate for shared goals.





Blue Nature Alliance Core Team and Delivery Teams (rev. April, 2024)

Core Team

Purpose(s): Drive action, compliance and network team accountability; make and communicate decisions; foster team cohesion and model team culture. Meeting notes will be taken and posted in Microsoft Teams for record keeping and transparency.

Frequency: Weekly, 90-minutes, more as needed

Facilitator: Rotates weekly, responsible for setting the agenda and leading meetings

Coordinator, Members, and Core Lead, with others invited as “ad hoc members” based on agenda topics (e.g., we do not discuss a decision without the delegated lead joining and participating.)

Delivery Teams

Overall Purpose(s): Delivery teams are focused on specific tasks and ongoing responsibilities by subject area. They are set up to ensure workplan delivery of tasks and outputs assigned to each respective team; financial tracking and compliance of individual team deliverables; ensuring cohesion across program streams, other teams/task forces to avoid the siloed operating functions; creation and establishment of sub-teams, as needed. Delivery teams are led by a single person with set standing members.

Teams will meet at the discretion of the lead as needed to achieve the tasks and carry out the core responsibilities. Delivery Teams should avoid the pattern of holding standing meetings but be driven by need and clear objectives/agendas for meetings. Holding time on calendars for meetings makes sense



particularly for teams that will require more regular convenings, however it is important to hold meetings only when there is a clear agenda and set of outcomes/outputs. Meetings involving Management Team members (or others) can be called as needed. Meeting notes will be taken and posted in Microsoft Teams for record keeping and transparency.

Site Engagement

Purpose(s): Scope sites, manage site pipeline, implement sites, and refine our playbook

Science & Research

Purpose(s): Publish external-facing version of Alliance science framework document and oversee process for delivery; make recommendations on specific science projects to fund (both at the portfolio and the site level), including developing a process to solicit, review and vet science proposals; make recommendations on science partnerships to be pursued by the Alliance (both at the portfolio and site level); collaborate with external partners on execution of relevant science projects; as time permits, summarize relevant science with broader Alliance team.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Purpose(s): Design and implement a monitoring & evaluation (M&E) system for the Alliance; regularly review and update M&E framework and indicators; track and report on progress towards achieving Alliance goals, including portfolio-wide, site-specific, and growing the field goals; build in safeguards to ensure M&E data quality and integrity.

Conservation Finance Strategy

Purpose(s): Design and implement a conservation finance framework for the Alliance; define sustainable financing targets and track performance across the portfolio; develop methodology and standards for approaching conservation finance options at site-level; identify and recommend new and innovative ocean conservation finance models to be supported by Alliance; document lessons learned and share best practices.

Communications

Purpose(s): Set an overarching comms framework (update initial framework); coordinate with core partner comms leads; solicit external technical support; execute portfolio comms activities; liaison with partner and site level comms (as practicable).

Finance and Operations

Purpose(s): Creation and management of the Alliance budget, including annual and multi-year forecasting; consolidated financial reports; audits; budgeting of engagement frameworks. Schedule for delivery of these outputs is outlined in the Alliance operations manual and collaborative agreement.

Capacity Development and Learning

Purpose(s): Understanding capacity needs and opportunities across Alliance sites and the field of ocean conservation at scale overall; identify tools and practitioners that can support needs of sites and partners; systematically inventory and share tools; approaches, practitioners that can help advance Alliance sites and the field overall; identifying key partnership opportunities to both support individual sites to be as effective as possible by gaining access to needed capacity development opportunities and to share opportunities and lessons across the field of ocean conservation at scale overall.



Global Policy and Advocacy

Purpose(s): Help shape and support delivery of overall political strategy for the Alliance; leverage events for political strategy and accelerating progress in sites with Alliance members and partners; share knowledge and learning across the team for critical cross-cutting topics such as weathering political instability and change; identify priority policy areas for engagement; support regional leads, site leads, and partners in the development of political and campaign strategies.



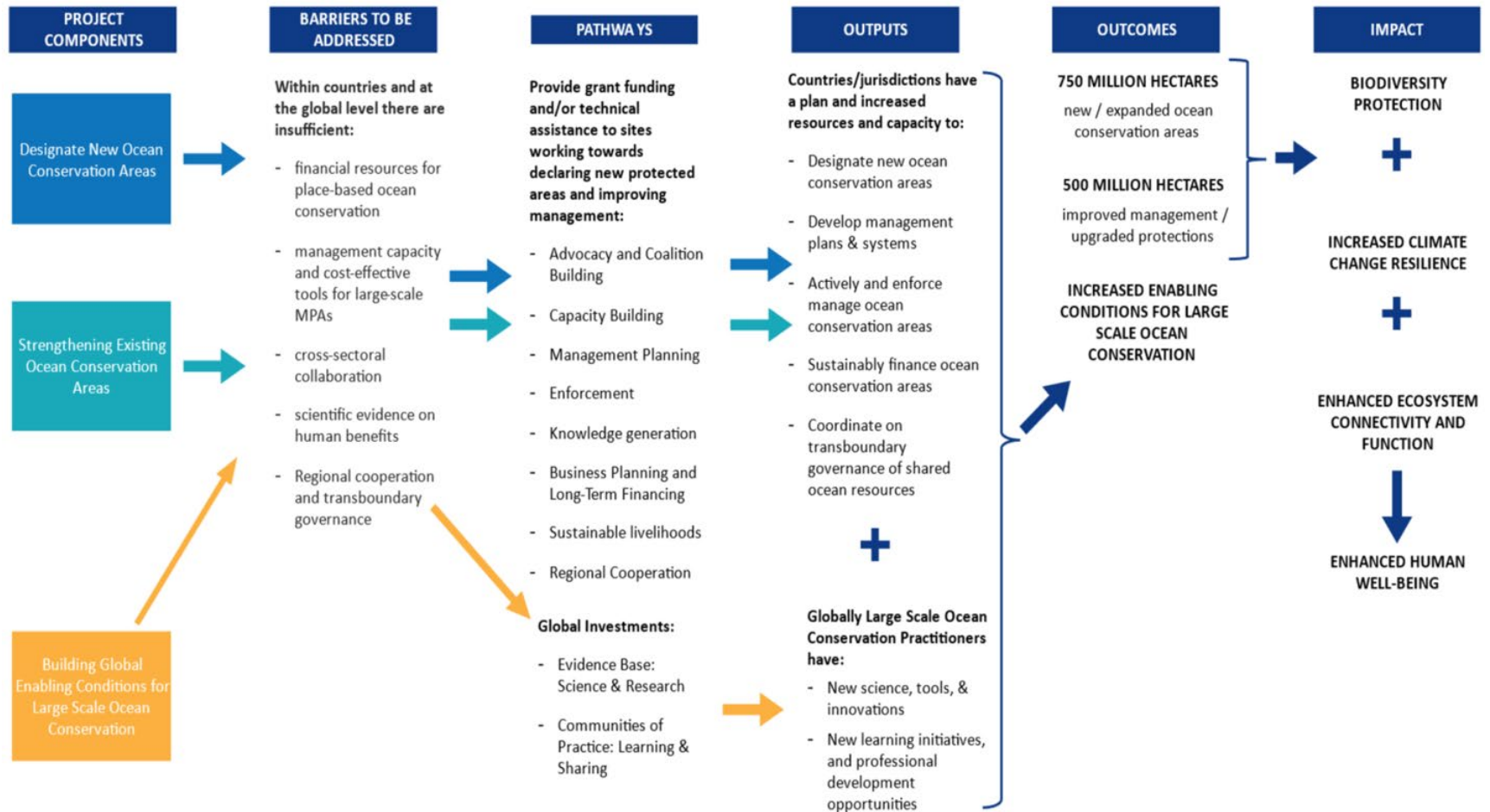
Annex 8: Blue Nature Alliance Stakeholders

Stakeholder Group	Institution
Co-financing Partner	International Eco-Fund
Communications Partner	Sea Legacy
Core Partner	GEF
	Minderoo
Global Enabling Conditions Partner	Big Ocean
	Boston University – Rotjan Marine Ecology Lab
	Bren School
	Colorado State University-Center for Protected Area Management
	EU Ocean Governance Project
	Forum for the Conservation of the Patagonian Sea
	Global Island Partnership
	Marine Conservation Institute
	MPA Connect
	MPA Management School for the Southern Cone
	Nekton
	Ocean Mind
	Pacific Islands Managed & Protected Area Community
	Peopled Seas
	Polynesian Voyaging Society
	Reef Resilience Network
	Samoan Voyaging Society
	Sea Education Association
	University of Victoria
Government Agency	Colombia National Parks
	PNMS Office
Implementing Partner	Pew Australia
	The Nature Conservancy
	Oceans North
	SeaBlue Canada
	Coast Funds
	Bahamas National Trust
	Fondo MARENA
	The Caribbean Biodiversity Fund
	Rapa Nui Local Sea Council
	Northern Marianas College
	CI-Costa Rica
	FAICO
	WWF-HECO
	Blue Marine Foundation
	Deep Sea Conservation Coalition
	Oceana
	Seas at Risk
	Wildlife Conservation Society
	Konservasi Indonesia
	Fair Seas
	Pew-Chile
	CI-Fiji

Stakeholder Group	Institution
	Coral Reef Alliance
	Birdlife International
	Customary Senate of New Caledonia
	CI-New Caledonia
	Tofia Niue
	National Ocean Protection Coalition
	PICRC
	Smithsonian Research Institute
	MigraMar
	WildAid Marine
	Zoological Society of London
	Beta Diversidad
	NOAA
	Coral Reef of the High Seas Coalition
	CI-Samoa
	SeyCCAT
	Seychelles Ocean Authority
	Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy
	Antarctica & Southern Ocean Coalition
	CI-China
	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
	Corporacion Nacional de Desarrollo
	IUCN
	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association
In-Kind Partner	ESRI
	McKinsey & Company
	Skylight
Leverage Partner	Global Fund for Coral Reefs
	Moore Foundation
	Murphy Family Foundation
	Oceans 5
	Ponant Foundation
	Tiffany & Co.
	Waitt Foundation
	Wyss Foundation
	Caribbean Challenge Initiative
	Pacific Blue Foundation
	NatGeo Pristine Seas
Multilateral Agency	Benguela Current Commission
Sub-grantee of implementing partner	Wild Ocean
	Holisticos
	Namibia Nature Foundation
	Noe
	CORDIO
Technical Partner	Joint Analytic Cell
	Parliamentarians for Global Action



Annex 9: Project Theory of Change



Annex 10: Survey Results

1. Please rate the project outcomes, based on extent to which project objectives were achieved (in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency)

	Number of responses	Percent
Highly Satisfactory: Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no short comings.	2	25%
Satisfactory: Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor short comings.	4	50%
Moderately Satisfactory: Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate short comings.	2	25%
Moderately Unsatisfactory: Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings.	0	0%
Unsatisfactory: Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major short comings.	0	0%
Highly Unsatisfactory: Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe short comings.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.	0	0%

2. Please rate the project sustainability taking into account the risks related to financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and environmental sustainability of project outcomes.

	Number of responses	Percent
Likely: There is little or no risk to sustainability.	5	62.5%
Moderately Likely: There are moderate risks to sustainability.	3	37.5%
Moderately Unlikely: There are significant risks to sustainability.	0	0%
Unlikely: There are severe risks to sustainability.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.	0	0%



3. Please rate the quality of project M&E in terms of design and implementation

	Number of responses	Percent
Highly Satisfactory: There were no short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation exceeded expectations.	3	37.5%
Satisfactory: There were no or minor short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation meets expectations.	2	25%
Moderately satisfactory: There were some short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation more or less meets expectations.	3	37.5%
Moderately unsatisfactory: There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.	0	0%
Unsatisfactory: There were major short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation substantially lower than expected.	0	0%
Highly unsatisfactory: There were severe short comings in M&E design/ implementation.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design/implementation.	0	0%

4. Please rate the quality of implementation. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF Agencies that have direct access to GEF resources.

	Number of responses	Percent
Highly satisfactory: There were no short comings and quality of implementation exceeded expectations.	2	25%
Satisfactory: There were no or minor short comings and quality of implementation meets expectations.	1	12.5%
Moderately Satisfactory: There were some short comings and quality of implementation more or less meets expectations.	5	67.5%
Moderately Unsatisfactory: There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation somewhat lower than expected.	0	0%
Unsatisfactory: There were major short comings and quality of implementation substantially lower than expected.	0	0%
Highly Unsatisfactory: There were severe short comings in quality of implementation.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation.	0	0%



5. Please rate the quality of execution. 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.

	Number of responses	Percent
Highly satisfactory: There were no short comings and quality of execution exceeded expectations.	4	50%
Satisfactory: There were no or minor short comings and quality of execution meets expectations.	2	25%
Moderately Satisfactory: There were some short comings and quality of execution more or less meets expectations.	2	25%
Moderately Unsatisfactory: There were significant shortcomings and quality of execution somewhat lower than expected.	0	0%
Unsatisfactory: There were major short comings and quality of execution substantially lower than expected.	0	0%
Highly Unsatisfactory: There were severe short comings in quality of execution.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of execution.	0	0%

6. Please rate the approved environmental and social safeguard plans.

	Number of responses	Percent
Highly satisfactory: There were no short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation exceeded expectations.	3	37.5%
Satisfactory: There were no or minor short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/execution met expectations.	4	50%
Moderately Satisfactory: There were some short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation more or less met expectations.	1	12.5%
Moderately Unsatisfactory: There were significant shortcomings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.	0	0%
Unsatisfactory: There were major short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation substantially lower than expected.	0	0%
Highly Unsatisfactory: There were severe short comings in quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation.	0	0%
Unable to Assess: The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation.	0	0%

