



GLOBAL FUND FOR
CORAL REEFS

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT:
***Implementing a Monitoring and
Evaluation Framework for the Global
Fund for Coral Reefs***
January – December 2023

Report submitted by:

United Nations Environment Programme



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Programme Overview

Programme Title & Project Number	Programme Duration
Programme Title: Implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Global Fund for Coral Reefs Programme Number: 00140152, 00126260	Start Date: April 2023 End Date: March 2025
Total Approved Budget	
Total GFCR Budget: USD 2,600,989	
Organisation: UNEP	
Sub-grantees, if applicable: Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)	

Executive Summary

UNEP is responsible for leading the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) component of the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR). GFCR activities and interventions require careful M&E to measure progress towards meeting the ambitious goals of the GFCR's theory of change (ToC), to avoid unintentional negative consequences of interventions and investments, and support demonstration and learning across the portfolio to inform replication and scaling up of successful investments.

The GFCR M&E Framework provides a structured approach for programme Convening Agents to assess and measure the progress, outcomes, and impacts of activities and interventions outlined in the ToC. Specifically, the M&E Framework provides measurable indicators that enable Grant Fund and Investment Fund programmes to translate their activities and interventions into measurable progress against the ToC. A standardized M&E Framework will allow the GFCR to systematically track progress to achieving the Fund's desired outcomes over time, and this information will help programmes to improve their activities, outcomes and impacts for coral reefs and coastal communities. A core focus of the GFCR M&E Framework is its alignment with global climate and biodiversity goals (e.g., the GBF) and supporting implementation of the global goals by GFCR programmes at national and regional levels.

2023 has been a pivotal year for the development of the GFCR M&E framework. Important progress and several key achievements and deliverables have been attained, especially related to the final development and approval of the GFCR M&E Framework itself, composed of 10 Fund Indicators. The Fund Indicators will be used to monitor programmes and the GFCR M&E team will conduct outreach and training for Convening Agents to ensure alignment of results frameworks across the GFCR programme portfolio with the overall GFCR M&E Framework.

UNEP worked with consultants as well as experts from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to develop a robust set of indicators that define the M&E results framework for the GFCR. Ten (10) Fund Indicators, made up of 36 sub-indicators, were developed and presented to the Executive Board at the 9th Executive Board Meeting in March 2023. Following review by the Executive Board, a revised and final set of indicators was presented at the 10th Executive Board meeting in June 2023, where the proposed M&E Framework was approved as the standard results framework for the GFCR. The indicators represent a mix of ecological, social, and financial indicators that provide a comprehensive and detailed set of metrics to measure and understand the impacts that GFCR programmes will have on both coral reef ecosystems and dependent human communities. In addition, a demonstration set of

project or sector level indicators were defined that programmes can pick and choose from to monitor activities or investments specific to the sectors the programmes are investing in. For example, this could include a set of indicators specific to water quality or wastewater treatment that are not mandatory indicators to monitor across the entire GFCR, but which programmes can choose to monitor if they are investing in wastewater treatment solutions.

To support Convening Agents in developing M&E frameworks for their respective programmes, UNEP collaborated with WCS to produce the GFCR Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit, published in October 2023. The M&E Toolkit provides practical guidance to GFCR Programmes on how to implement the M&E Framework. The Toolkit provides definitions of each of the mandatory Fund Indicators and sub-indicators, as well as examples of methodologies used to monitor the indicators, and guidance on developing baselines, frequency of monitoring, and data collection, management and reporting. A practitioner discussion webinar was conducted in November 2023 with REEF+ and UNDP to present the Toolkit to the Convening Agents and stimulate discussion on the M&E Framework and its indicators. The Toolkit was presented through a joint effort between WCS and UNEP experts.

During the 2023 reporting period, the M&E lead for the GFCR was recruited (Gabriel Grimsditch, P4). He reported in July 2023. The M&E lead has been coordinating M&E activities of the GFCR, including one-on-one support and capacity-building to Convening Agents on developing results frameworks for individual programmes. The M&E lead has so far organized support meetings and capacity-building for 12 programmes across the GFCR, advising on the development of results frameworks and reviewing them before submission to the GFCR UN Global Team (UNGT). This has included a mission to Fiji in September 2023 to visit the UNDP/UNCDF/UNEP programme, “Investing in Coral Reefs and the Blue Economy”, a collaboration between GFCR and the Joint SDG Fund. During the mission, the M&E lead met with stakeholders and reviewed progress on the M&E results framework.

Another significant achievement has been the signing of a legal agreement between UNEP and WCS to develop Mermaid (<https://datamermaid.org/>) as a digital platform for M&E reporting across the entire GFCR portfolio. Mermaid is currently widely used as a tool for entering and analyzing coral reef ecological data, and the Mermaid development team will work to include a specialized portal for GFCR Convening Agents to report on all core Fund Indicators. Ultimately, this system and reporting tool will be integrated into the REEF+ platform under the Impact section.

UNEP also collaborated with WCS to develop a project document for ‘Implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Global Fund for Coral Reefs’, which serves as the guiding document for UNEP’s M&E support to the GFCR. The project document outlines guiding principles for the M&E framework, roles and responsibilities, activities, and budget and includes targeted support by UNEP to deliver strategic communications and advocacy to the GFCR. The project document came into effect in April 2023.

Ambitions for 2024 include rolling out the Mermaid software platform for M&E data input and analysis across all programmes of the GFCR and integrating it into the REEF+ Impact platform, training GFCR staff and programme staff on using Mermaid, organizing regional workshops in at least two regions that synergize the work of the GFCR with the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), continued visits to GFCR programmes to support development of their M&E Frameworks, working towards overall alignment of M&E Frameworks between the Grant Fund and the Investment Fund, and reconvening the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) to support the work of the GFCR.

I. Programme Objectives

UNEP provides the following support to the GFCR by working closely with the GFCR UNGT , Grant Fund and Investment Fund partners on the following key roles:

- Making recommendations to the GFCR UNGT on Grant Fund and Investment Fund proposals and their alignment with intended GFCR outcomes (Theory of Change) to avoid unintended negative consequences and ensure that Grant Fund and Investment Fund programmes are consistent in their proposed use and implementation of the GFCR M&E Framework.
- Advising the GFCR Secretariat on the latest advances in coral reef conservation and restoration science, including providing due diligence of the latest technologies and innovations as related to the GFCR's outcomes.
- Strengthening and building capacity of Grant Fund and Investment Fund programmes to develop program-specific M&E plans aligned with the GFCR M&E Framework, develop baseline conditions of Fund and Project Indicators, track change over time with regular and appropriate monitoring, and communicate programme progress and results against the GFCR ToC.
- Providing oversight by analyzing and evaluating M&E results of Grant Fund and Investment Fund activities. This involves coordinating annual review, mid-term reviews, and final program evaluations to measure progress towards GFCR Outcomes, summarize lessons learned and share best practices including recommendations for replication and upscaling of GFCR programmes and investment types.
- Ensuring GFCR M&E activities are aligned and coordinated with other leading global coral reef monitoring efforts, including ICRI, the GCRMN, the GBF and UN Decades on Ocean Science and Ecosystem Restoration. This will involve elevating the international presence of the GFCR impact through coordination and partnership building, e.g., with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), GBF, UN Decade on Ocean Science, the Race to Resilience, and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
- Working with GFCR UNGT, Grant Fund and Investment Fund to develop global M&E targets and new guidelines for standardized coral reef monitoring to support GFCR programmes to deliver on global biodiversity and climate goals (e.g., the GBF).
- Assisting the GFCR Secretariat in reporting to global goals, including (but not limited to) the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), Race to Resilience, UN Decade on Ocean Science, and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
- Leveraging existing technology and innovations to build a GFCR M&E data workstream to support REEF+ Impact that is aligned with best practices in coral reef data and digital technologies (e.g., Allen Coral Atlas, MERMAID, Reef Cloud) and can support implementation tracking of the GBF targets. Support the implementation of the M&E Framework by adapting MERMAID for data collection, management, and reporting by GFCR Grant Fund and Investment Fund programmes aligned with the UNDP's development of the REEF+ Impact platform.
- Supporting the GFCR strategic communications workstream that amplifies key successes, progress and identifies and shares key findings of GFCR programme M&E activities to key stakeholders (GFCR Executive Board, Partner Networks, Key Opinion Leaders and investors), and engages influencers/UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors (and media where appropriate) to increase GFCR demonstration, awareness, credibility and support to greater coral action and fundraising efforts through high-level strategic advocacy.

II. Programme Implementation & Results

A. Programme Results Overview

During 2023, UNEP provided oversight and capacity-building support for M&E activities of Grant Fund programmes, ensuring consistency and alignment across the GFCR.

This has included the following activities and outputs:

- Selection and approval of 10 Fund indicators, comprising 36 sub-indicators, first presented at the 9th Executive Board meeting in March 2023 in Monaco, and finally approved at the virtual 10th Executive Board meeting in June 2023. The indicators were developed with technical support of the WCS. The indicators represent a mix of ecological, social, and business-oriented indicators that provide a comprehensive and detailed set of metrics to measure to understand the impacts that GFCR programmes will have on both coral reef ecosystems and dependent human communities.
- To support Convening Agents in developing M&E frameworks for their programmes, UNEP collaborated with WCS to produce the GFCR Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit, published in October 2023. The M&E Toolkit provides practical guidance to GFCR Programmes on how to implement the M&E Framework.
- A practitioner discussion webinar was organized in November 2023 in collaboration with REEF+ and UNDP to present the Toolkit to the Convening Agents and stimulate discussion on the M&E framework and indicators. The Toolkit was presented through a joint effort between WCS and UNEP experts.
- One-on-one support and capacity-building has been provided to Convening Agents on developing results frameworks for individual programmes. The M&E lead has so far organized support meetings and capacity-building for 12 programmes across the GFCR, advising on the development of results frameworks and reviewing them before submission to the GFCR Secretariat.
- A mission to Fiji in September 2023 to visit the UNDP/UNCDF/UNEP programme, a collaboration between GFCR and the Joint SDG Fund, to meet with stakeholders and review progress on the M&E results framework.
- Signing of a legal agreement between UNEP and WCS to develop Mermaid (<https://datamermaid.org/>) as the platform for M&E reporting across the entire GFCR, and which will be integrated into the REEF+ platform.

Overall, progress made towards a global M&E Framework for the GFCR has been significant. The overall framework for the GFCR has been established, and training materials as well as capacity-building activities have begun and will continue into 2024. Steps have been taken to begin the development of a standardized approach to using a common software platform/database for M&E across the GFCR. Partnerships have been critical for this progress, especially technical support from WCS, close collaboration with UNDP and the REEF+ team on developing strategies for sharing learning across programmes, and close collaboration with UNCDF on programmatic aspects of implementing the M&E results framework. An ongoing aspiration will be to create closer synergies with the Investment Fund and ensure consistency in M&E Frameworks.

Targets for 2024 include:

- Rolling out the Mermaid software platform for M&E data across all programmes of the GFCR and integrating it into the REEF+ Impact platform.
- Training GFCR staff and Convening Agents staff on using Mermaid.

- Onboarding of P2 Programme Management Associate to conduct M&E data analysis
- Regional workshops in at least two regions that synergize the work of the GFCR with the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN).
- Capacity-building on M&E for Convening Agents with continued visits to GFCR programmes.
- Aligning overall M&E Frameworks between the Grant Fund and the Investment Fund.
- Reconvening the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) to provide technical support to the GFCR.
- Active engagement and support to elevate GFCR success and innovative blended finances approaches across high-level events and conferences.

B. Indicator-Based Performance Assessment

OUTPUT / ACTIVITY	INDICATORS	TARGET COMPLETION	IMPLEMENTATION STATUS AND ACTUAL COMPLETION DATE
Component 1. Advisory service to the GFCR Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advise the GFCR Secretariat on new scientific and technological developments in coral reef conservation, management, resilience and restoration that can deliver on the objectives of the GFCR ToC. 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNEP and the M&E lead have provided ongoing support to the GFCR Secretariat in reviewing programme documents and proposals for technical merit and to ensure alignment of proposals with the overall GFCR M&E framework. 12 programmes have been reviewed and analyzed. This work is ongoing and will continue as long as the GFCR is active. - There has been ongoing coordination with GCRMN focal points in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia to organize GFCR-GCRMN workshops. The workshops will serve as opportunities for GFCR Convening Agents and data sets to contribute to global reporting on the status of coral reefs. The workshops will also provide capacity-building opportunities for Convening Agents on data collection and analysis on coral reefs. Regional workshops are being planned for Q3 and Q4 of 2024.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advise the GFCR Secretariat on the alignment of all proposed and ongoing GFCR M&E activities for the Grant Fund and Investment Fund. 	Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinate online GFCR scientific exchange across the GFCR Secretariat, UNEP, ICRI, GCRMN, CORDAP, AIMS, the GFCR STAG, GFCR implementing partners (Grant Fund and Investment Fund) and other scientific partners to inform best practices in coral reef science, restoration and M&E for wider sharing and learning against the GFCR ToC, e.g., an annual science summit for the GFCR. 	Ongoing	
Component 2. Capacity building and oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct annual review of the GFCR M&E Framework, its indicators, and the GFCR programmes under implementation. UNEP will update the M&E Framework as required in consultation with the GFCR Secretariat and Executive Board. 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The GFCR M&E Framework was adopted in June 2023, so there was no need to review the M&E Framework during this reporting period. No changes to the M&E Framework are expected in 2024 either. - Ongoing capacity-building has been provided to Convening Agents through one-on-one sessions to review and develop M&E frameworks. The M&E lead has interacted with 12 programmes so far to provide support to
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build the capacity of Grant Fund and Investment Fund implementing partners to operationalize the M&E plans, 	Ongoing	

	<p>carry out baseline assessments, and implement methodologies for measuring impact made through GFCR interventions/ investments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide oversight on field-level GFCR monitoring activities to ensure they are aligned with the GFCR M&E Framework by developing relationships with the implementing partners' M&E focal points. ● Ensure GFCR Grant Fund and Investment Fund programs are equipped with appropriate safeguards aligned with the GFCR's environmental and social sustainability safeguards 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>understanding indicators and developing M&E frameworks for programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further capacity-building has been provided through the development of an M&E Toolkit for Convening Agents. UNEP collaborated with WCS in producing the Toolkit, published in October 2023. The M&E Toolkit provides practical guidance to GFCR Programmes on how to implement the M&E Framework. The Toolkit provides definitions of each of the mandatory Fund indicators and sub-indicators, as well as examples of methodologies to use to monitor the indicators, and guidance on developing baselines, frequency of monitoring indicators, and data collection, management and reporting. - A practitioners discussion webinar was organized in November 2023 with REEF+ and UNDP to present the Toolkit to the Convening Agents. - Oversight on field level activities has begun, with a field mission by the M&E lead in September 2023 to Fiji. The mission allowed for relationship building with the M&E team in Fiji, and to meet stakeholders of the programme.
Component 3: Coordination and Partnership Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop global M&E targets for key indicators and standardized coral reef monitoring guidelines that can be recognized and reflected across scientific partners and can be used for strategic communications at events and with donors. ● Convene two GFCR M&E workshops at international coral reef science/policy events to ensure coordination and partnerships with other coral reef efforts 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNEP led the selection of 10 Fund indicators, comprising 36 sub-indicators, first presented at the March Executive Board meeting in Monaco, and finally approved at the virtual Executive Board meeting in June 2023. The indicators were developed with technical support by WCS. The indicators represent a mix of ecological, social, and business-oriented indicators that provide a comprehensive and detailed set of metrics to measure to understand the impacts that GFCR programmes will have on both coral reef ecosystems and dependent human communities. Overall M&E targets for the GFCR will be further developed in 2024. - See Component 2 on convening of GFCR-GCRMN regional workshops in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia
Component 4: Promote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adapt the MERMAID platform for the GFCR and integrate into a 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In December 2023, a legal agreement was signed between UNEP and WCS to develop Mermaid

Innovation and Technology use	prototype tool for REEF+ platform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build technical capacity for GFCR programmes, the UNEP M&E team and the GFCR Secretariat to use and integrate the data system in implementation of the M&E Framework. 	Ongoing	(https://datamermaid.org/) as the platform for M&E reporting across the entire GFCR, and which will be integrated into the REEF+ platform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of the Mermaid software platform for GFCR reporting, and the building of technical capacity of UNEP staff and Convening Agents, will take place in 2024.
Component 5: Strategic communications and advocacy	<p>Support to Component 1</p> <p>5.1.1 Support GFCR communication/event management of UNEP M&E activities in a GFCR annual summit/conference and develop collateral communications products for regular updates on coral reef conservation, restoration and resilience science to the GFCR and stakeholders to help identify and secure new opportunities.</p> <p>Support to Component 3</p> <p>5.1.2 Promotion of agreed global GFCR targets for key M&E indicators</p> <p>5.1.3 Manage a shared calendar of coral reef/finance/GFCR events across GFCR Coalition partners to ensure coordination and partnership building. Identify strategic communications partnerships to support GFCR/UNEP activities.</p> <p>Support to Component 4</p> <p>5.1.4 Communicate M&E successes and lessons learned to the GFCR Secretariat; additional focus on the promotion of technology/innovation (once developed).</p>	<p>TBD</p> <p>Commenced and on-going</p> <p>Plan by June 2024 and on-going</p> <p>Commenced and on-going</p> <p>Pending</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently there is no annual summit planned; this activity will support regional meetings or other, where identified/requested. Collateral Materials in the form of press releases, webstories, videos and social media posts have been developed to support a number of events, including the Coral Reef and Ocean Breakthroughs (details in narrative); collaterals/assets* to provide updates on reef and resilience science and project effectiveness through the established M&E indicators will commence once Mermaid System (M&E software) is up and running. Targeted year end. A plan to promote the M&E targets and indicators will be developed now that M&E Grant Fund targets are developed and agreed. UNEP and GFCR Comms Teams are currently managing a shared calendar of events and closely collaborating on engagement with coalition partners to ensure high level UNEP strategic engagement and support for all events where GFCR is visible. Timing for development of collateral/assets* will be predicated on available field reports and case studies that have utilized new M&E Framework.

	<p>Component 5 Support strategic communication of GFCR M&E results and communication-related activities across the other components. Position the GFCR as a best practice global demonstration initiative for public-private biodiversity finance, promote its innovative and cutting edge technology and data platforms as a brand builder for the GFCR.</p> <p>#ForCoral Champion Initiatives</p>	<p>Commenced and on-going</p> <p>Commenced and on-going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GFCR showcased at several strategic events, including Our Ocean conference in March 2023, ICRI 37th General Meeting in September 2023, World Reef Day in June 2023, World Ocean Day in June 2023, Africa Climate Summit in September 2023, and the UNFCCC COP in December 2023 (details in narrative); milestones supported through UNEP corporate channels via PRs, technical updates, webstories and global media outlets with wide reach. - UNEP has been leveraging the power of influencers (high level UNEP leadership and influencers/ Goodwill Ambassadors since the launch of the GFCR. The #ForCoral Champions Initiative will bring a more strategic approach through identifying different groups of influencers, their niche of influence and roles on awareness-raising, public or political advocacy resource mobilization etc. It will be presented to GFCR team w/o April 8 and upon approval <p>*Assets will include a combination of data visualisations/infographics with key findings/results identified by UNEP M&E programme team that will be used as informative assets and be promoted through GFCR.</p>

C. Gender Mainstreaming

Gender considerations have been central to the development of the M&E indicators and framework for the GFCR. It is critical to determine the impact that GFCR programmes are having on gender-related issues and gender dynamics in the areas where the programmes are active. Livelihoods and business indicators were designed to specifically capture data related to gender. It is recognized that M&E should not exacerbate or reproduce any form of discrimination or bias, including on the basis of “race, colour, ethnicity, gender, age, language, sexual orientation, religion, political or other opinion, national, social or geographical origin, disability, property, birth or other status as established by human rights standards.” This requires, inter alia, a commitment to data disaggregation. Indicators to measure the impact of the GFCR should allow for disaggregation by, for example, indigenous peoples, local communities, gender, income, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics identified as appropriate to the local context by local partners.

For example, indicators F6 on ‘Number of people supported through livelihoods, direct jobs, income, and nutrition’, and F7 on ‘Number of people supported to better adapt, respond and recover to the effects of climate change and major external shocks as a result of GFCR’ both require disaggregation by gender to ensure the programmes are capturing the impact of relative activities on men, women, and others.

Furthermore, indicator F10 on ‘Number of gender-smart investments’ is specifically about understanding the impact of GFCR investments on women in business. The indicator tracks the number of GFCR investments qualified as 2X Challenge standards. The 2X Challenge was launched at the G7 Summit 2018 as a commitment by DFIs to collectively mobilise investments that provide women with improved access to leadership opportunities, quality employment, finance, enterprise support, and products and services that enhance economic participation and access. Businesses qualify for the 2X Challenge by fulfilling one of the following criteria: at least 51% ownership by women or the business is founded by a woman, at least 30% women in senior leadership or 30% women on the board or investment committee, at least 30-50% share of women in the workforce, and products or services that specifically or disproportionately benefit women.

As UNEP continues to implement and oversee the M&E framework for the GFCR, it will ensure that gender considerations are taken into account and that the software that will be used as the platform for M&E data analysis will allow for data disaggregation by gender.

III. Programme Governance & Management

UNEP is integrated in the UN Global Team. The UNEP M&E lead works in close collaboration with the GFCR Programme Team, with regular weekly meetings and mutual support on reviewing of programme documents. The UNEP Communications team also works closely with the GFCR Strategic Engagement and Partnerships Team. There is a high level of integration between the UNEP staff members and the GFCR Global Team.

UNEP is also collaborating closely with WCS as the main technical partner supporting the M&E work. WCS provided technical support and leadership in selecting and reviewing Fund indicators and will continue playing a leading technical role in developing the software architecture for the M&E Framework across the GFCR, and building the capacity of GFCR staff and Convening Agents to collect, input and analyze the M&E data using the Mermaid software platform.

During this reporting period, some changes to the work plan were suggested, and these will officially be actioned in 2024. Some of the main changes that have been discussed are related to the following activities:

- Engaging experts to review GFCR Grant Fund and Investment Fund programme proposals. It was determined that UNEP would not be responsible for this activity as external experts have already been engaged by the UN Global Team to review programme documents, and UNEP consultancies may not allow for the flexibility needed in reviewing programme proposals
- Working with GFCR UNGT, Grant Fund, and Investment Fund to undertake an annual review and update of the M&E Framework, and communicate changes to Grant Fund and Investment Fund programs. It was determined that there is no need for a review of the GFCR M&E Framework, as it was recently approved and is currently being rolled out across all programmes.
- Creating new guidelines for standardized coral reef monitoring to support GFCR programmes. It was determined that this was not a necessary activity for UNEP to carry out, as different programmes in different regions already have their standard methodologies for coral reef monitoring, and it may cause unnecessary complications to try and apply a standard methodology across all programmes. Rather the M&E team can ascertain the robustness of the coral reef monitoring programmes and data to understand the capacity-building needs at programme level.

IV. Resource Mobilisation

A key aim of UNEP's strategic communications, advocacy and global engagement mandate is to increase the understanding, visibility and credibility of the fund, and therefore trust, to attract more public and private donor funding. The urgency of these efforts are underpinned by a landscape in which SDG 14 is the least funded of all SDGs; recent reports suggest that **\$175 billion per year** is needed to achieve SDG14 by 2030; and yet, between 2015 and 2019, just below \$10 billion was actually invested (WEF, 2022).

UNEP executes this approach through a content plan that leverages creative storytelling based on strong GFCR case studies (increasingly this will be linked to the success of the M&E indicators), as well as opportunities where GFCR can gain efficiencies through dovetailing with events, press moments and activities that UNEP undertakes related to blue ecosystems and coral reefs. The content plan is disseminated through a variety of both GFCR and UNEP corporate channels, including social media and website, as well as targeted media opportunities.

Several occasions in 2023 provided the opportunity for UNEP high profile influencers, both high level leadership and those from the Goodwill Ambassadors Programme, to profile the success of the fund and advocate for continued and new funding support.



On the occasion of the ***Our Ocean Conference in March 2023***, GFCR and UNEP announced through a joint [Press Release](#) new commitments from the UK Government and Minderoo Foundation, as well as UNEP's role as Co-Chair. The announcements were featured at the plenary session of the Our Ocean Conference in Panama as well as through the *Future of Reefs* side-event hosted by the Global Fund for Coral Reefs and partners including the UN Decade of Ocean Science, International Coral Reef Initiative, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Race to Resilience, and UNEP.

Building on UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Ellie Goulding's strong support in 2022, where she called for increased funding from public sector, business and philanthropies to fund GFCR, she provided these remarks to the Press Release:

"Coral reefs globally are facing increasing pressures from climate change, pollution, and other threats. The window of time to save these ecosystems is closing rapidly. I saw for myself what is at stake late last year when I visited the Red Sea in Sharm El Sheikh with UNEP, and in support of the Fund. This is why I am proud to see the UK taking urgent action to protect coral reefs and aid developing nations in climate-resilience efforts. I urge other nations, philanthropies, and investors to join the Global Fund for Coral Reefs to help secure a future for these vital ecosystems."

GFCR Executive Board Co-Chair, Leticia Carvalho, added "UNEP is keen to increase our role in this important fund, in collaboration with the UK Government and Blue Planet Fund. Coral Reefs and related marine ecosystems are amongst the most vulnerable habitats to climate change, compounded by local stressors. We must make the world aware of the threats and generate the necessary funding to activate solutions through blended finance. That's what the Global Fund for Coral Reefs is all about."

In June 2022, both [Jason Momoa](#), UNEP Global Advocate for SDG14 Life Below Water, and UN Assistant Secretary General and [UNEP Deputy Director](#) represented UNEP through video messages addressing potential donors on the occasion of the **World Ocean Day Roundtable** that aimed to mobilise greater investment for SDG 14.

The UNEP DED highlighted the need to accelerate innovative finance to support nature positive solutions on a grand scale; and added that she was "delighted that the Global Fund for Coral Reefs is already driving public-private collaboration and financing actions to scale solutions in all 23 coral reef island nations." In his role as UNEP SDG 14 Advocate, Jason asked stakeholders to join him in supporting the GFCR.

The launch of the Climate Champion Breakthroughs is also bringing increased rigor to the push for adequate resources to finance globally agreed targets and goals related to SDG14. The Coral Reef Breakthrough, launched at UNEP's COP28 Pavilion in November 2023 (more below), calls for specific spatial and funding targets with investments of at least US\$12 billion to support the resilience of more than half a billion people globally by 2030. UNEP is putting its full support behind the Ocean, Mangrove and Coral Reef Breakthroughs to advance successful implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework. As a key architect of the Coral Reef Breakthrough, GFCR stands to benefit from the halo effect of this support.

V. Communications, Advocacy and Outreach

Communication, advocacy and outreach are key strategic elements to support GFCR targets and results, and to position the GFCR as a best practice global demonstration initiative for public-private biodiversity finance. Leveraging UNEP's strategic communication expertise, including, advocacy, campaigns, media and social media, influencers, events and networks, UNEP is developing strategic communication assets and identifying strategic opportunities to build the GFCR brand across special events, media and press opportunities, champion & influencer endorsements and social media initiatives; many of which are rooted in the UNEP machinery.

These brand-building efforts are designed to both elevate the visibility and reinforce the credibility of the GFCR's impact, expertise, tools and achievements, across its network and with other high-level ocean partnership networks that can advocate for the importance of protecting and restoring coral reefs and the unique role GFCR plays in this mission. In turn, elevating the importance of the GFCR's role and the crisis facing coral reefs. These activities align GFCR results and progress with global messaging on biodiversity, climate, pollution and coral reefs to ensure the GFCR is relevant and top of mind in environmental initiatives, boosting credibility and fundraising capacity.

In 3rd quarter 2023, a communications consultant from UNEP Communication Division team was recruited by UNEP. Stephanie Gerretsen's contract (1/3 of time) commenced in January 2024. The consultant will be responsible for working closely with both GFCR and UNEP comms teams to implement the various activities outlined in the project document, including development of e.g., data visualizations, data-based impact snapshot reports, videos, infographics and webstories and the #ForCoral Champions plan, under the supervision of the P4 Strategic Communications and Global Engagement Expert at UNEP.

March

As mentioned in section IV, on the occasion of the ***Our Ocean Conference in March 2023***, GFCR and UNEP announced through a joint [Press Release](#) new commitments from the UK Government and Minderoo Foundation, as well UNEP's role as Co-Chair. The announcements were featured at the plenary session of the Our Ocean Conference in Panama as well as through the *Future of Reefs* side-event hosted by the Global Fund for Coral Reefs and partners including the UN Decade of Ocean Science, International Coral Reef Initiative, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Race to Resilience, and UNEP.

UNEP also featured the Technical Highlight, [New Framework Launched to Track Progress on Coral Reef Biodiversity](#) on its website.

April

UNEP increased advocacy and visibility for the plight of coral reefs through its choice of Abu Dhabi's coral reef rehabilitation project as a Decade of Restoration Flagship; and [featured the story](#) on the main UNEP website. Leticia Carvalho noted that: "Restoring habitats gives nature a chance to adapt, and hopefully recover, from the climate change impacts we sadly can no longer avoid. Understanding the resilience of Gulf corals, and other heat-tolerant reefs, may unlock secrets that can help us better protect and restore ecosystems of all kinds to deliver huge benefits for people and the planet. However, we must not lose sight of the need to urgently meet the commitments of the Paris

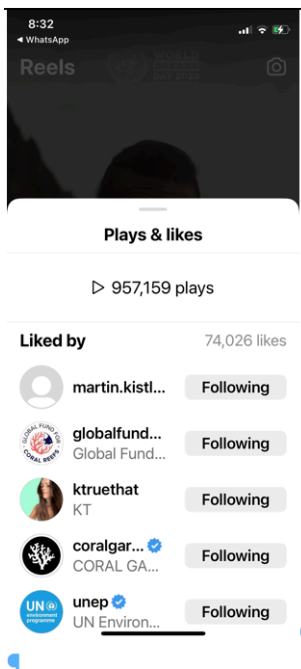
Agreement and Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as tackle local stressors, to ensure nature can continue to function.”

June

UNEP used its June 5 **World Environment Day** platform and June 8 **World Oceans Day** event to raise awareness for the plight of corals and the on the ground solutions offered through the GFCR. UNEP partnered with *Elle Magazine* to produce a *Make Peace with Our Planet issue* that featured several UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors. Ellie Goulding recalled her trip to the Red Sea, called for more protection for coral reefs and highlighted GFCR in her interview. The feature appeared in editions in the US, UK, Italy, Spain, Greece and Argentina.



Also on **World Ocean Day**, UNEP Advocate for Life Below Water, Jason Momoa recorded a [keynote speech](#) that highlighted a range of ocean issues, including coral reef protection that played at the opening event at UN Headquarters in New York. [Jason’s World Ocean Day post](#), prominently featuring GFCR, calling it a game changer in financial solutions, received 82,644 likes and one million views.



September

From 4-6 September 2023, the African Union and the Government of Kenya co-hosted the inaugural **Africa Climate Summit** to discuss sustainable solutions to global climate challenges under the theme *Driving Green Growth and Climate Finance Solutions for Africa and the World*. UNEP had a prominent role in several high level events and both the UNEP Executive Director and Ecosystems Deputy Director promoted the GFCR in their keynotes and interventions.

On the inauguration day of the **Summit**, GFCR in partnership with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), UNEP and International Union For Conservation Of Nature (IUCN), held the [Bankable Coral Reef-Based Resilience Solutions for Kenya & Tanzania](#) event, to showcase reef-positive enterprises and opportunities for private sector partnerships, as well as reinforce the potential of collective action in preserving the coral reef ecosystems of Kenya and Tanzania.

The **Malta/Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Webinar** on Coral Reef Restoration / Invasive Alien Species used UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Ellie Goulding’s [Red Sea Climate Coral Nexus film](#) as its curtain raiser, where Ellie states: “Humanity has never been on the doorstep of losing an entire ecosystem before, but nor have we had the opportunity to save one.”

For the **UN Governing Council**, Jason narrated a curtain raiser video for the **High Ambition Coalition** event and shared on a [social post](#) asking the world to get behind the Global Biodiversity Framework to protect life on land and life below water, garnering half a million views.

In September, [Jason Momoa](#) and [Ellie Goulding](#) also lent their support to the **International Coral Reef Initiative’s 37th General Meeting** in Hawaii, and GFCR, with a video message to stakeholders.

October

Ellie Goulding lent her voice to raising awareness for the climate-coral-ocean nexus with a [Climate Coral Explainer](#) garnering 3,500 likes and 458,000 views.

December

For the first time in nearly three decades of climate change negotiations, through the 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28), countries signaled a “beginning of the end” of the fossil fuel era. As part of emphasis on the need to limit anthropogenic warming to help preserve ecosystem function, and the key role marine ecosystems hold in supporting coastal community resilience, coral reefs were featured throughout the COP. COP28 offered a valuable platform for strategic engagement between UNEP and the GFCR, enabling GFCR Coalition members to accelerate greater collaboration for coral ecosystems.

UNEP highlighted this ecosystem and the solutions offered through the GFCR through events on Blue Ecosystems Day, including the high level Ministerial [launch of the 2030 Coral Reef Breakthrough](#), in partnership with the [High-Level Climate Champions \(HLCC\)](#) and the [International Coral Reef Initiative \(ICRI\)](#). UNEP also hosted the [Blue Ecosystems Waterside Chat](#) with UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors, Dia Mirza, Rocky Dawuni, GFCR Frontline Youth Ambassador Grace Catapang and UNEP’s Division of Ecosystems Director. UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Ellie Goulding again supported efforts with a [video message](#) in support of the Breakthrough and GFCR.

VI. Risk Management and Mitigation

The complexity of the GFCR leads to several risks associated with M&E for the Fund. There are a large number of indicators to measure, and a diverse range of programmes and convening agents with varying degrees of capacity for M&E and data collection/analysis. There are risks associated with CAs not having sufficient capacity or technical expertise to collect data sets, especially ecological indicators related to coral reef health as these require a special set of skills. This risk is mitigated by ensuring that CAs that traditionally do not have the expertise develop partnerships with NGOs or academia that have the

necessary expertise in coral reef monitoring and ecology. These CAs will also need support in site selection for monitoring and the selection of control sites. Furthermore, tools are being developed and trainings are provided to support CAs in understanding indicators and developing methodologies. There are further risks associated with CAs not allocating enough budget to data collection of M&E indicators, given the relatively large number of indicators that data are being requested for, but this risk can be mitigated through budget revisions and analyses for allocations as M&E frameworks and data collection strategies are further developed.

Another risk that is particularly related to M&E on coral reefs and marine ecosystems is the complexity of the drivers of change for these ecosystems. Coral reefs are impacted by various drivers of change that can be driven by anthropogenic activities, for example water quality (e.g. nutrient pollution and sedimentation), increasing sea surface water temperature, ocean acidification, overfishing, and destructive fishing. These stressors are often synergistic in nature, and it can be difficult to fully understand the full impacts that each driver is having on the overall health of the ecosystem. Furthermore, many drivers themselves can be driven by a range of anthropogenic activities and natural processes. For example nutrient input into coral reefs from land-based sources can be perfectly natural, but can be exacerbated by agricultural activity upstream. With such diverse drivers of change, determining the causes of ecological changes and shifts can be extremely challenging. Thus determining the impact of any investment or reef positive business on the health of a coral reef (e.g. live coral cover) can also be extremely challenging, and maybe close to impossible. To mitigate this risk, three strategies can be employed. Firstly, control sites can be selected in areas where GFCR interventions or reef positive businesses are not active. Control sites should be as similar to the intervention site as possible, and should also be tracked and monitored over time to understand if there are measurable differences in ecological outcomes. Secondly, drivers can be monitored as well as ecological indicators. For example, if a business is building a sewage treatment plant, then output of nutrients and water quality can be monitored in addition to the coral reef ecological indicators in order to understand the changing drivers of change, even though ecological impacts may not be immediately apparent. Thirdly, monitoring ecological indicators to measure whether the ecosystem retains a minimum level of health using key thresholds (e.g. 20% coral cover and 500 kg/ha fish biomass) can show that at least ecosystems are not collapsing in areas where the GFCR is intervening. Even though this may not be totally attributable to GFCR investments, at least this information can show that coral reefs continue to thrive and that the GFCR is at least partially contributing to this.

Finally, an important risk is climate change. Coral reefs are particularly sensitive to increases in sea surface temperature, and repeated mass coral bleaching events are expected, especially related to El Nino Southern Oscillation and Indian Ocean Dipole events. The impacts of coral bleaching events are beyond the control of GFCR interventions, however the M&E framework should allow programmes to track recovery from these potential mass mortality events, and also allow better understanding of the resilience of the ecosystem and the role that GFCR interventions can play in increasing resilience.

VII. Adaptive Management

An important challenge that the M&E team has experienced during this reporting period is that the M&E Framework and Indicators for the GFCR were only finally approved during the Executive Board meeting in June 2023, with the M&E lead recruited in July 2023. Many of the programmes had already been approved by this point and were already advancing into the first phase with M&E frameworks and indicators already developed at the programme level. This necessitated an exercise in 'retro-fitting'

existing programme M&E frameworks and indicators to comply with the approved overall GFCR M&E framework and indicators. This exercise was carried out through an adaptive management process with the M&E lead and the M&E focal points and programme managers. It is an ongoing process, but one which is currently being carried out successfully. Regular communication between the M&E lead and the programmes, as well as the development and dissemination of capacity-building tools such as the M&E Toolkit, have been critical for this adaptive management process.



Annexes

Annex A: Expenditure Report

Annex B: GFCR M&E FRAMEWORK: FUND INDICATORS

Annex C: Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit