



ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT:
***Implementing a Monitoring and
Evaluation Framework for the Global
Fund for Coral Reefs***
January – December 2024

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]: Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)	

Executive Summary

UNEP leads on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Strategic Communications for the 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. Strategic Communications is critical for awareness raising on the plight of coral reefs, the solutions through GFCR, the need to continue capitalization and to provide the rationale to support resource mobilization through building confidence amongst the international and donor communities.

In 2024, substantial progress was made in software development, tool production, M&E, training, media coverage and content creation. UNEP collaborated with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to finalize the development of the Marine Ecological Research Management Aid (MERMAID) software for reporting, storing and analyzing M&E data sets across the GFCR, and to report the data against the GFCR M&E framework and its global targets. The software was tested with convening agents through several meetings with the software developers, and is expected to roll out during the 2025 reporting period. Furthermore, UNEP collaborated with WCS to update the existing M&E toolkit, a guide for convening agents to implement the GFCR M&E Framework. In June 2024, convening agents provided mid-year reports on the status of the GFCR M&E indicators, the first time that quantitative data was submitted to the GFCR across all Fund indicators. UNEP reviewed the global M&E Framework and made adjustments based on feedback from convening agents and following discussions with the UN Global Team and GFCR Executive Board, adding data to indicators 2.1 and 2.2, and removing indicator 6.2.

In October 2024, UNEP co-organized a regional M&E/Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN)/REEF+ workshop for the Caribbean region in Puerto Morelos, Mexico. The workshop was co-organized with the Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (SPAW-RAC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and served as the blueprint for future regional workshops. The workshop advanced capacity-building on M&E and MERMAID, and deepened collaboration with the GCRMN. The workshop also provided synergies with the REEF+ knowledge management platform, with a parallel and synergistic workshop taking place on reef-positive business solutions. Furthermore, UNEP collaborated with WCS to deliver three online webinars on capacity-building for M&E and MERMAID.

UNEP provided strategic engagement and communication leadership for the GFCR with substantial wins and accomplishments including successful amplification and excellent convenings of high-level ministerial officials, decision-makers, stakeholders, and public figures, demonstrating and increasing the credibility of the GFCR brand. UNEP has provided strong organizational and event management support at key global events and milestones throughout the year, including the sixth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA6) (Nairobi, Kenya), the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (New York, USA), and the 16th Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (CBD COP16) (Cali, Colombia).

Looking ahead to 2025, key ambitions include beginning the process of carrying out mid-term reviews for all eligible GFCR programmes, as an important milestone in M&E for the GFCR. To support M&E programmes, regional M&E/MERMAID trainings will continue, in collaboration with the GCRMN and UNDP/REEF+. A M&E and knowledge management workshop for the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is planned for February 2025 in Zanzibar. Regional workshops are envisaged for the East Asia region, the Pacific, the Red Sea, and South Asia for 2025, and a global scientific summit for all convening agents is also envisaged for 2026. UNEP's responsibilities in 2025 are expected to increase with additional programmatic oversight of the GFCR Indian Ocean portfolio of programmes, including Kenya-Tanzania (Wildlife Conservation Society), Pemba (Blue Alliance), Sri Lanka (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), and the Seychelles (Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust). Increased integration between the M&E system and REEF+ will also be a priority, with M&E data sets feeding directly into the REEF+ knowledge management system to showcase the effectiveness of GFCR solutions. UNEP will be onboarding several positions to support communication, advocacy, event management and technical support for both the GFCR, as well as and Pathway 5- *Demonstration to Scale* ; ensuring strong engagement in the lead up and during UNOC3 across Member States, philanthropies, industry leaders, and private sector.

I. Programme Objectives

UNEP provides the following support to the GFCR by working closely with the GFCR UN Global Team, GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity Fund partners on the following key roles:

- Making recommendations to the GFCR UNGT on GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity Fund proposals and their alignment with intended GFCR outcomes ToC to avoid unintended negative consequences and ensure that GFCR UN Grant Fund and Equity Fund programmes are consistent in their proposed use and implementation of the GFCR M&E Framework.
- Advising the GFCR Secretariat (led by UNCDF) 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 GFCR 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 GFCR 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 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity

Framework (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 GCRMN, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN Decade on Ocean Science, the Race to Resilience, and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

- Working with the GFCR UNGT, GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity 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, 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 UN Grant Fund and Equity 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 2024, UNEP provided oversight and capacity-building support for M&E activities of GFCR UN Fund programmes, ensuring consistency and alignment across the GFCR. This has included the following activities:

- **In collaboration with WCS, UNEP updated the existing M&E toolkit as guidance on the GFCR M&E Framework.** The 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 GFCR ToC. This helps to demonstrate success in delivering the desired outcomes for coral reefs, social wellbeing and financial returns. M&E is required to measure progress towards meeting the ambitious goals of the GFCR. Training, support and capacity-building have been provided to convening agents in developing their programmatic M&E frameworks, including baseline assessments and targets across the programmes, as well as first level reporting on progress made on GFCR indicators in 2024. Convening agents provided mid-year reports in June 2024 on the status of the GFCR M&E indicators.
- **UNEP collaborated with WCS to finalize the development of MERMAID as a software for reporting and analyzing M&E data for the GFCR.** The software was tested with convening agents through several meetings with the software developers and is ready for roll out during the 2025 reporting period.

- **UNEP organised a M&E, GCRMN and REEF+ workshop in Puerto Morelos, Mexico in October 2024.** UNEP, in partnership with SPAW-RAC and UNDP, organized for a regional meeting for the Caribbean on 1st - 4th October 2024 with the aim of initiating the development of a GCRMN status report for the Caribbean as well as to create a community of practice for the reef positive business community in the Caribbean region through the GFCR REEF+ network. UNEP facilitated the training of all GFCR convening agents from Colombia, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and the Bahamas on using MERMAID as an open-source tool for storing and analyzing M&E data for the GFCR fund indicators. UNEP and WCS have provided additional guidance and training on MERMAID to all GFCR programmes through online webinars. Three online webinars have been conducted with over 100 participants introduced to the M&E toolkit and trained on how to use MERMAID for GFCR reporting. UNEP will continue with capacity building and collecting data through MERMAID to other regions including the Western Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and Southeast Asia in 2025.
- **At CBD COP16 in Cali, Colombia, UNEP supported the convening of an Emergency Special Session on Coral Reefs by H.E. Ambassador Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Oceans; as well as ICRI and the GFCR.** The session featured representatives of coral states, leaders in coral reef action, community representatives and scientists in response to the fourth mass global bleaching event in 2024 that affected more than 75% of coral reefs globally. The session served as an urgent call for action and increased funding to protect coral reefs. The Governments of New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, and France, as well as UBS Optimus Foundation, pledged initial anchor funding to catalyse additional commitments from other governments, philanthropists, and private investors toward the capitalisation of the GFCR.
- **UNEP presented M&E data collected from convening agents and end-of-year achievements highlighting the progress and impact of the different GFCR programmes at the fourteenth GFCR Executive Board meeting held in Geneva.** UNEP is currently in the process of streamlining the M&E reporting process using MERMAID to ensure standardization of data and strengthen documentation and reporting of project impacts.

Overall, progress made towards a global M&E Framework for the GFCR has been significant and moving forward, UNEP expects to create closer synergies with the GFCR Equity Fund and ensure consistency in M&E Frameworks. Targets for 2025 include:

- Collect M&E data for the ten fund indicators using MERMAID – analyse the data and report it.
- Training convening agents from other regions including WIO, Red Sea and Asia-Pacific on using MERMAID.
- Conduct Mid-Term Reviews of relevant GFCR programmes, in collaboration with the UN Global Team.

UNEP has actively led and planned Strategic Communications and Global Engagement at global forums, provided communication products featuring global public figures and influencers and conceptualized GFCR engagement for 2025. UNEP provided organizational and event management support at key global events, including the sixth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA6) in Nairobi, Kenya, the UN General Assembly in New York, USA, and the Biodiversity Conference of the Parties in Cali, Colombia (CBD COP16).

For Strategic Communications and Global Engagement in 2025, UNEP will support key milestones, including the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France in June, the UN General Assembly in

September, and the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2025. Furthermore, based on effective implementation of Strategic Communications and global engagement activities in the UNEP project document, it is expected that UNEP's responsibilities will increase to include leading all GFCR communications, including social media and story-telling gleaned from the solutions that are now being reported on through the M&E Framework.

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. Advise the GFCR Secretariat on the alignment of all proposed and ongoing GFCR M&E activities for the GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity Fund. Coordinate online GFCR scientific exchange across the GFCR Secretariat, UNEP, ICRI, GCRMN, CORDAP, AIMS, the GFCR STAG, GFCR implementing partners (GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity 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. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>UNEP as the M&E lead have provided ongoing support to the GFCR Secretariat in reviewing programme documents and proposals for technical merit, and through field visits to areas of proposed implementation to ensure alignment of proposals with the overall GFCR M&E framework. 13 programmes have been reviewed and analysed. This work is ongoing and will continue as long as the GFCR is active.</p> <p>- A GFCR-GCRMN workshop was organised for the Caribbean in coordination with GCRMN focal points from the region. There is currently ongoing coordination with focal points from the WIO region and Southeast Asia to organize similar workshops. The workshops 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 Q1 and Q3 of 2025</p>
Component 2. Capacity building and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct annual review of the GFCR M&E Framework, its 	Ongoing	The GFCR M&E Framework was adopted in June 2023, but there were some minor reviews on the M&E Framework during this

oversight	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build the capacity of GFCR UN Fund and GFCR Equity Fund implementing partners to operationalize the M&E plans, carry out baseline assessments, and implement methodologies for measuring impact made through GFCR interventions/ investments. ● 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 UN Fund and GFCR Equity Fund programs are equipped with appropriate safeguards aligned with the GFCR's environmental and social sustainability safeguards. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>reporting period. Suggestions have been made to edit Fund indicators 2.1 and 2.2, to include both total areas of MPAs, OECMs and LMMA's, as well as total coral reef area within the management areas, and also to remove Fund indicator 6.2 on number of people with increased income/nutrition. These changes were reflected in an updated version of the GFCR M&E Toolkit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing capacity-building has been provided to Convening Agents to operationalize the M&E framework through online workshops, webinars, field visits, MERMAID training workshops and one-on-one meetings. 13 programmes have so far submitted their M&E frameworks. Convening agents provided mid-year reports on the status of their M&E frameworks and indicators in June 2024 - Further capacity-building has been provided for Convening Agents through the updating of the M&E Toolkit that 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 FAQs sheet has been prepared for dissemination and to provide guidance to convening agents on reporting especially for financial indicators. - 3 online webinar have been organized with REEF+ and UNDP to present the Toolkit to the Convening Agents and trained on how to report for the GFCR fund indicators. - Oversight on field level activities continued in 2024, with a field mission by the M&E Lead the Philippines in January 2024, Kenya in March 2024, Tanzania (Zanzibar and Pemba) in March 2024, Bahamas in April 2024, and Mexico in October 2024. The mission allowed for relationship building with convening agents, and to meet stakeholders of the programme and see proposed project interventions (Reef+ business/solutions) to assess the scientific credibility of programmes and to provide advice to the UN Global Team.
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	<p>GFCR annual summit/conference and developing 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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1.2 Promotion of agreed global GFCR targets for key M&E indicators 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>Support to Component 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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>Component 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Pending</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Biodiversity COP16 (Cali, Colombia), the UN Ocean Conference.</p> <p>- During the 6th session of the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in February 2024, UNEP was able to secure the highest level of profile and visibility for the GFCR in the main events. Youth advocate “Grace Catapang” spoke at several high-level events, including two ILeadership dDialogues, on the need for action to protect vulnerable communities and vulnerable ecosystems.</p> <p>UNEP made significant strides in increasing media outreach and uptake on the GFCR. Some notable publications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A spotlight on UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, Ellie Goulding in Elle Magazine; A spread on the GFCR in New Scientist on World Ocean Day penned by former head of UNEP’s Marine and Freshwater Branch, Leticia Carvalho; A feature in Xinhua on GFCR’s blended finance mechanism. GFCR was prominently covered on UNEP.org, including an explainer web story on blended finance, the fourth mass coral bleaching event and its consequences, reef-positive businesses implementing community-based solutions aimed at protecting coral reefs while mitigating climate change, and the need to support and allocate small grant funds to promote local coral reef initiatives. UNEP undertook film shoots in Providencia and San Andres, Colombia and Quintana Roo, Mexico to produce comprehensive demonstration videos to promote GFCR at Biodiversity CBD COP16. The Prospectus video offers an opportunity for GFCR to visually showcase progress in the field and illustrate to donors how their investments have been utilized in the protection of local coral reef
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	<p>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>	Ongoing	<p>ecosystems. The long-form donor prospectus video, narrated by SDG 14 Advocate Jason Momoa and Dia Mirza, features projects from around the world, to support current and future resource mobilization/capitalization efforts. A shorter version of the donor prospectus video was also developed for distribution on UNEP's social media channels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sargassum initiative led by Carbonwave was featured in the UNEP Nature Action Series. This initiative is part of the wider pipeline of reef-positive solutions under the GFCR Mesoamerican Reef Programme. <p>The #ForCoral Champions network remains informal, however, advocates have meaningfully engaged for a number of media articles, social media posts, video narrations and recordings, and events for 2024.</p>
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C. Gender Mainstreaming

The GFCR work towards gender inclusion has been central to the development of the M&E Indicators and meeting UN SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The GFCR UNEP team received ten country programmes reporting excel data sheets in mid-2024 that were framed based on the GFCR M&E Core Fund Indicators.

Data for fund indicators related to numbers of individuals and beneficiaries requires disaggregation by gender, youth and indigenous peoples. The data disaggregation related to fund indicators was based on notes given by convening agents with their quantitative data in their 2024 mid-year report and from the qualitative data in the 2023 annual reports. Country programmes that reported gender disaggregated data: Bahamas, Colombia, Fiji, Jordan, Kenya-Tanzania, Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) Region, Micronesia, Pemba, and the Philippines.

Based on this reporting experience, there is a clear need for future reporting to request from programmes further disaggregation of data sets on key Fund indicators, especially related to numbers of beneficiaries and individuals. Some progress has been made on receiving data sets disaggregated by gender, but this is not across the board, and no data sets were received for disaggregation by youth or indigenous peoples. It is recommended that training on data disaggregation is provided to the convening agents. Implementation of the MERMAID software as the standard M&E reporting and analysis of the GFCR will hopefully improve disaggregated reporting of data too. It is proposed that gender-specific training is carried out by the UNEP team to support the reporting on gender disaggregated data in 2025.

Gender Action Report of the GFCR Core Global Team

Required Action	Means of verification	Responsibility	Timing	Reported Progress
A. Governance				
A3. Strive for gender parity amongst Global Team staff as well as Technical Groups, Executive and Advisory Board members, and promote gender diversity within CA teams	Number and percentage of m/f staff and Board members Baseline: as assessed in early 2022.	Executive Board/ UN Global Team	Annually	Approved and distributed.
A4. Strive to increase its own gender expertise and understanding of gender and its relevance in coral reef socio-ecological systems	Number and percentage of m/f staff and Board members with gender expertise. Baseline: as assessed in early 2022.	Executive Board/ UN Global Team	Annually	The Executive Board and Advisory Board have achieved 50% or more female representation. Recruitment and selection processes for multi-agency UN Global Team is underway with consideration of gender parity aims, but currently exceeds 50% female representation.
A6. Provide gender technical support to CAs and co-implementers to improve gender responsive programme design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation	Number and percentage of CAs requesting gender related financial support	UN Global Team/ CAs	Ongoing	Virtual meetings with convening agents to provide feedback on the M&E framework and mid-year reports on disaggregation data of gender, youth and indigenous
C. Capacity development				
C1. Strengthen the gender capacity of the Fund and its partners through gender trainings and other resources including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At minimum annual gender training for UN Global Team staff 	Number of Fund stakeholders (staff, Board members, CAs) receiving gender trainings (tracked annually)	UN Global Team	Ongoing	UNEP attended several gender trainings per mandatory UN Secretariat gender trainings. UNEP is planning to provide gender trainings to the convening agents to ensure gender inclusion in project development, implementation and reporting.

Required Action	Means of verification	Responsibility	Timing	Reported Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender training for the Executive Board Convening Agents Increased attention to gender considerations (format and content) in all events, webinars and knowledge/communications materials 				
D. Resource allocation and budgeting				
C1. GFCR systematically requires CAs to submit funding proposals that include a gender analysis and a gender action plan with an implementation budget	100% of approved programmes proposals have articulated gender analysis and action plan with corresponding budget	UN Global Team	Ongoing	All GFCR proposals submitted in Q3-2022 onwards have included a Gender Analysis and Action Plan, as prescribed in the new proposal templates.
E. Knowledge management and communications				
E2. Document and share good practice and lessons learned on the integration of gender in GFCR-financed programmes	Number of analytical pieces issued or shared and actively communicated with Fund partners	UN Global Team	Ongoing	UNEP reports gender numbers to donors using the M&E mid-year report data and internally communicates gender inclusion targets to Member States and partners.
E3. Support and actively participate in knowledge exchange fora/opportunities on gender and coral reef conservation initiatives	Number of gender fora/opportunities with GFCR participation	UN Global Team	Ongoing	UNEP provides and engages on gender trainings and online webinars for knowledge exchange where gender opportunities are provided to GFCR participants.

III. Programme Governance & Management

In 2024, UNEP continued its collaboration with the GFCR as an integrated member in the UN Global Team. The UNEP M&E lead works in close collaboration with the GFCR Portfolio Management Working Unit, with regular bi-weekly meetings. Further integration is now envisaged, as the UNEP M&E lead will also become the programmatic lead for the GFCR Indian Ocean portfolio in 2025. UNEP also works closely with the GFCR Strategic Engagements & Communications Working Units. UNEP is collaborating closely with WCS as the main technical partner supporting M&E. WCS provides technical support in developing the MERMAID software and training convening agents in its application.

During this reporting period, changes to the work plan were enacted:

- The activity “Creating new guidelines for standardized coral reef monitoring to support the GFCR programmes” was not carried out. It was determined that this was not a necessary activity, 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.
- The activity “Convene two GFCR M&E workshops at international coral reef science/policy events to ensure coordination and partnerships with other coral reef efforts” has changed in scope to organising regional workshops in collaboration with the GCRMN.
- The activity on “Convening a global science summit” has also been postponed to later in 2025 or 2026, as the priority is organizing regional workshops before a global summit can be organized.

Two important changes in UNEP programme governance and management that are envisaged for the remainder of the GFCR operational period, set to effect in January 2025:

- UNEP will be responsible for programmatic oversight of the GFCR Indian Ocean programmes, given geographic proximity and a management decision taken at the UN Global Team retreat in December 2024 to distribute responsibility for programmatic oversight between agencies.
- UNEP will be responsible for leading the communications Working Unit of the GFCR, and will hire an expert consultant to lead on this.

IV. Resource Mobilisation

UNEP's convening role in environment-related major forums enabled the UNEP team to plan and curate events, discussions, exhibitions, campaign launches and media content at several large conferences i.e. UNEA-6, SIDS4, COP16. UNEP's attendance and influence at these large global and regional forums also provided the UNEP team opportunities to brief country delegations, ministers and other stakeholders on the GFCR programme and how the Fund supports broader environment policy initiatives.

The newly developed donor prospectus video was showcased at CBD COP16, both within the ICRI #ForCoral Pavilion, at a number of side events, and at the GFCR high-level emergency session to launch the GFCR replenishment. The video was designed to be a "pitch" that directly supports the GFCR capitalization strategy, showcasing an alignment to the GFCR narrative. The video captures the critical need to safeguard coral ecosystems as one of the most biodiverse and valuable ecosystems on earth in the face of increasing climate change impacts and increased the understanding of GFCR's financing mechanism and blended finance approach. The video showcases a pipeline of projects spanning more than 20 coral nations that are ready for further investment to grow and further develop over 400 reef-positive enterprises and financial mechanisms in order to achieve the 2030 targets. This should be an evergreen piece that should be used for long-term targeting and broad marketing efforts for prospective donors.

V. Communications & Visibility

UNEP supported Strategic Communication and advocacy of GFCR M&E results and communication-related activities across the other components. This included:

- GFCR communication/event management of UNEP M&E activities at GFCR annual summits/conferences.
- 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.
- Promotion of agreed global GFCR targets for key M&E indicators for credibility and broad uptake as gold standard (possibly helping with goal setting for GBF).
- Managed 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.
- Communicate M&E successes and lessons learned to the GFCR Secretariat; additional focus on the promotion of technology/innovation (once developed).

UNEP's delivery against the first phase of the project document has enhanced Strategic Communications efforts to raise awareness for the threats to and benefits from urgent action to protect coral reefs, build the GFCR brand, explain the innovation and blended finance model, and demonstrate the success of the projects that GFCR is funding; increasing understanding and credibility of the fund to external stakeholders, partners and media, and elevating the topic of coral reefs across events and UNEP corporate channels in support of #ForCoral advocacy efforts. UNEP's strategic placement of influencers, from Goodwill Ambassadors to the UNEP Head, in high level events and on media and outreach platforms has yielded the highest level of visibility possible for GFCR through UNEA's Leadership Dialogues, an opinion editorial in New Scientist by UNEP Head of Marine & Freshwater, and massive reach of over 35 million with strong engagement, e.g. views in the millions for video message posts that refer to GFCR by Jason Momoa. Dozens of articles, posts and videos have brought the topic of coral reefs to the fore.

UNEP has actively and consistently participated to increase coordination efficiency and effectiveness on regular meetings of the GFCR communications and global team convenings. However, UNEP was not able to deliver on event management for the GFCR annual summit and on promotion of agreed global targets for key M&E indicators due to delays in these deliverables on the programme side. These activities are now built into the Phase 2 work pending summit development and the availability of data-driven and well-articulated case studies that can be made available to the communication team. To replace these outputs, the UNEP team amended the project document to include the production of a Donor Prospectus Video and UNEP #Nature Action Series film on the MAR Fund supported Carbon Wave sargassum project for CBD COP16.

UNEA6

During UNEA6 in Nairobi, Kenya in February 2024, UNEP was able to secure the highest level of profile and visibility for the GFCR in the main events. Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) Frontline Youth Ambassador, Grace Catapang, spoke at several high-level events, including one Leadership Dialogue - *Alive and Kicking: Environmental multilateralism is a beacon of hope but is it delivering fast enough?* - attended by all Member States to UNEP, in a bilateral session with the UNEP Executive Director on the need for action to protect vulnerable communities and vulnerable ecosystems. She received a standing ovation following her passionate plea to delegates to remember the faces and voices of those who depend on the decisions being considered in the negotiating rooms.

"In my short lifetime, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating injustices inflicted on the environment and communities," she said, in a powerful speech. "Let us not forget that behind every statistic, behind every target... there is a human being." She also directly promoted the solutions through the GFCR, "while the MEAs are powerful words on paper and tools for cooperation, their impact is only realized when programs are implemented, and they deliver tangible, real-world results. With the support of Global Fund for Coral Reefs, our project through Blue Alliance could be transformative for MPAs, and set a precedent for impact investment in marine conservation and economic development. Through GFCR's blended finance mechanism, we can ensure that we have enough capacity on the ground to access this funding and have genuine positive impact to create a bright future for our ocean."

This leadership dialogue provided important contributions from UNEA-6 to the Summit of the Future and other ongoing multilateral processes relevant to the three planetary environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. It supported and strengthened the ongoing efforts for achievement of the environment related targets of the SDG's. The dialogue also linked to the other two

leadership dialogues on science and finance, given the centrality of these two topics in effective environmental multilateralism. Denmark's intervention recognized Grace's speech as a "wake up call for negotiations" and Netherlands thanked Grace for "reminding parties that multilateralism is about people."

Grace was also a panelist in the event: *Raising Ambition for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Ocean and Seas by 2030 by accelerating action at global, regional, and national levels on biodiversity, pollution and climate change*. The event was opened by Ms. Elizabeth Mrema, the Deputy Executive Director, UNEP who gave her opening remarks followed by a high-level ministerial session on raising ambition for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean and Seas by 2030 by accelerating action and finance at global, regional, and national levels on biodiversity, pollution, and climate change. The panel members included H.E. Hervé Berville, Minister of State for Marine Affairs and Biodiversity (France); H.E. Giovanna Valverde, Ambassador of Costa Rica to Kenya and Permanent Representative to UNEP and UN Habitat and Mr. Travis Sinckler, Head of Policy Research, Planning and Information, under the Ministry of Environment, National Beautification and the Blue and Green Economy, Barbados.

The second session focused on a road map to the third UN Ocean Conference and included Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division, UNEP; H.E. Giovanna Valverde, Ambassador of Costa Rica to Kenya and Permanent Representative to UNEP and UN Habitat; Mr. Ashok Adiceam, Deputy Ambassador and Head of International Mobilization for UNOC- 3, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs; Nicola Pochettino, Director of Environment and Natural Resources, European Investment Bank (EIB); and Grace Catapang— GFCR Front Line Youth Champion, Blue Alliance – Philippines

UNEP identified another area for high-level intervention on blended finance and its significance in tackling the SDG14 funding gap. Ambassador Thomson delivered a two-minute intervention in Leadership Dialogue 2 - *Show Me the Money: Can the global financial system really tackle climate change, nature loss and pollution* - capturing the need to mobilize resources, and the essential role finance will play in stopping the decline of health of the Ocean. It was emphasized that the resources are available in many forms and now, more than ever, there are excellent projects and programmes where capital can be injected, including the Global Fund for Coral Reefs. "The Ocean's health is currently, measurably in decline. SDG 14, part of the Sustainable Development Goals of the Paris Agreement, which in 2015, wrote up humanity's survival plan for existence on this planet. SDG 14 is the least funded of the SDG's. Finance is essential to stopping the decline of the health of the Ocean. Ever since starting out as a development officer 50 years ago, I have heard the same phrase: "we have all the money you need, we just don't have the projects... There exist excellent places for capital to put their money. Coral makes up 30% of the biodiversity of the Ocean. We have the **Global Fund for Coral Reefs**, a blended fund, and other great places where the money can go."

All these calls ended in solidifying these undertakings through adopting timely resolutions in many important issue areas. During the closing plenary, Member States adopted 15 resolutions, including on "Strengthening *Ocean* efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution", and two decisions, as well as the UNEA-6 Ministerial Declaration to ensure UNEP fulfils its mandate as the leading UN agency to facilitate "effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution." The Ocean Resolution asked Member States to, amongst other things:

- Improve the health, productivity, sustainable use and resilience of the ocean and its ecosystems

- To adopt, ratify and implement the relevant Regional Seas Conventions, protocols and Action Plans for the protection and development of the marine and coastal environment
- Signing and ratification of the BBNJ Agreement
- Fully and effectively implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
- To support the ongoing process to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment
- Ratify, accept, approve or accede to the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes

Also at UNEA- 6, UNEP organized an exhibition composed of 18 images photographed underwater of real people in Fiji to dramatize the climate – ocean nexus and the plight of SIDS due to rising sea levels. Alongside the images UNEP also included a centrepiece photograph to draw attention to the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, showcasing the GFCR logo, #ForCoral, and a QR code for interested viewers to access further information on the Fund. The exhibition – SINK RISE - is part of *The Day May Break* series by world-renowned photographer Nick Brandt. Alongside the exhibition, the Marine and Freshwater Branch co-hosted by Barbados, held a reception event moderated by Leticia Carvalho, who emphasized the urgent need for finance, to give a voice to Ministers from several SIDS - Barbados, Fiji, Seychelles, St. Nevis & Kitts, Grenada) with the UNSG Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson. The President of the General Assembly also gave closing remarks in the context of his homeland, Trinidad & Tobago. UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors Antoinette Taus and Dia Mirza supported the ribbon cutting on the official opening and Goodwill Ambassador Rocky Dawuni performed a song. Under the dedicated GFCR display, a quotation from **UNEP's Executive Director Inger Andersen** explained that *"Small Island Developing States know only too well the devastating impacts of living with climate change. These communities continue to fight – to protect their people, their heritage, and the vital ecosystems including the world's coral reefs that we all depend on. As humanity seeks to navigate to safer shores, we need the public and private sector to step up and join this fight to help save an entire ecosystem in our lifetime. The **Global Fund for Coral Reefs** is an example of how we can work together to seek safer ground for people everywhere."*

CBD COP16

To support the CBD COP16, UNEP produced a field shoot to develop [a global GFCR Prospectus video](#) to bring the GFCR demonstration case to life. The film was shot in Providencia and San Andres, Colombia, and Quintana Roo, Mexico, highlighting strong GFCR case studies as well as footage from other projects around the world. Narrated by UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, Dia Mirza and UNEP SDG Advocate for Life Below Water, Jason Momoa, the film provided a curtain-raiser for [the high-level GFCR Coral Emergency Session at COP](#); also supported by UNEP's Director of Ecosystems, Susan Gardner. Additionally, UNEP included in its COP16 corporate film series, *#Nature Action*, [a film on MAR Fund activities](#), featuring the Carbon Wave sargassum project.

Media Outreach

Finally, UNEP made significant strides in increasing media outreach and uptake on the GFCR. Some notable publications include a spotlight on [UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, Ellie Goulding](#) in Elle Magazine mentioning GFCR, a spread on the [GFCR in New Scientist on World Ocean Day](#) penned by former head of UNEP's Marine and Freshwater Branch, Leticia Carvalho, and a feature in [Xinhua on GFCR's blended finance mechanism](#). GFCR was also prominently covered on UNEP.org, including [an explainer web story on blended finance](#), the [fourth mass coral bleaching event](#) and its consequences, [reef-positive businesses](#)

[implementing community-based solutions](#) aimed at protecting coral reefs while mitigating climate change, and the need to support and allocate small grant funds to promote local coral reef initiatives.

VI. Risk Management and Mitigation

Event / Risk	Cause	Impact/s	Risk Category	Risk Level	Mitigation / Management Measures	Remarks
Convening agents do not report appropriate data sets for M&E	Low capacity in convening agents	Lack of appropriate data to understand the impacts of the GCFR and of solution that are invested in by the GCFR	• Operational	Medium	Capacity building workshops and webinars are organized by UNEP and WCS UNEP staff and experts are in regular communication with convening agents	New risk identified (no previous risk matrix in place)
Data sets and indicators are not sufficient to show clear linkage between GFCR activities and solutions and improved coral reef resilience	High complexity in drivers of coral reef resilience and health	Lack of appropriate understanding and evidence that GFCR solutions are improving coral reef resilience and health	• Operational	High	Convening agents are encouraged to develop sectoral project-specific indicators that track the reduction of stressors on the coral reef ecosystem. UNEP supports the convening agents in developing these. Convening agents are encouraged to monitor control sites where GFCR is not intervening. UNEP can support the design.	New risk identified (no previous risk matrix in place)
Insufficient integration between M&E of UN Grant Fund and Investment Fund activities/investments	Lack of capacity in Investment Fund investment partners to monitor all GFCR Fund indicators	Lack of appropriate data to understand the impact of Investment Fund activities	• Operational	Medium	Technical assistance has been sought from Catalytic to support the Investment Fund in delivering on the M&E Framework	New risk identified (no previous risk matrix in place)

VII. Adaptive Management

During this reporting period, some adaptive management decisions have been made based on experiences gained from M&E reporting.

Based on feedback from convening agents, and in discussion with the UN Global Team and the Executive Board, slight changes were made to the GFCR M&E Framework. The review of the M&E Framework includes changes to Fund indicators 2.1 and 2.2 to include both the total areas of marine protected areas (MPAs), other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) that are being supported by the GFCR, as well as total coral reef area within the management areas, as well as the removal of Fund indicator 6.2 on number of people with increased income/nutrition. Indicator 6.2 was removed as there is no standardized methodology used to monitor this indicator, and relevant data for this indicator is already captured by indicators 6.1 and 7.2. These changes were also reflected in an updated version of the GFCR M&E Toolkit that was published in November 2024, as well as in the updated MERMAID software iteration. The MERMAID software also went through adaptations, based on user feedback and target contact group discussion between the convening agents and the software developers.

Another adaptive management decision that has been made is the postponement of a global science summit on M&E for the GFCR. During this reporting period, the priority has been focused on organizing regional workshops to support M&E and capacity-building with convening agents, as well as making connections between the GFCR and the GCRMN.

Annexes

- **Annex A: Updated GFCR Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit**
 - Link to the [Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit February 2025](#)
- **Annex B: MERMAID software platform**
 - Link to the [MERMAID software platform](#)