
Atoll Ecosystem Conservation Project
Terms of Reference
National Consultant – Conservation Specialist

No of Posts: 1 National Consultant (Retainer Basis)
Duration of contract: 2 Years (Agreement renewed every 12 Months)
Duty Station: Male', Maldives (with significant time on Baa Atoll)
Advertised on:
Deadline:

Background to the AEC project

The Government of the Maldives is undertaking a project on the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant biological diversity in the Maldives' Baa Atoll. The "Atoll Ecosystem Conservation (AEC) project" is co-financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented through UNDP. In the Maldives, atoll ecosystems literally provide the basis for the country's existence as well as life-supporting services such as shoreline protection and goods upon which the economy entirely depends such as fish and tourism. However, social and economic change is altering consumptive behavior and livelihood strategies, outpacing institutional capacity and sectoral programs to adequately manage it. This in turn is threatening the natural endowment that is essential to maintaining the structure and function of atoll ecosystems, the viability of globally significant biological diversity, and the livelihoods and environmental security of the people.

Most important policy decisions affecting biodiversity are taken at the level of individual sectors, such as infrastructure, fisheries, and tourism. Government initiatives to manage change and mitigate the impacts caused by it are rooted in sector-by-sector approaches, resulting in narrow, sectoral institutions, policies, and interventions. The project's three-pronged strategy is to:

- mainstream the ecosystem approach to biodiversity conservation objectives into sectoral policies and programs and reinforce multi-sectoral institutional fora;
- establish a model system on Baa Atoll to conserve biodiversity "in the water" and "on the ground" through innovative national-local and public-private partnerships; and
- relieve livelihood-related pressure on biodiversity on Baa Atoll by enhancing reef fishery property rights and enabling local people to pursue more sustainable, alternative livelihoods.

By the end of the project, modified sectoral policies and programs will enable institutions to more effectively manage biodiversity. Government, local communities, and the private sector will be partnering to secure the long-term conservation of Baa Atoll ecosystems. And, local people will be applying new knowledge and accessing new sources of financing in pursuit of alternative livelihoods. Baa atoll will be a world class model for atoll ecosystem management (with the ultimate aim of Baa atoll being declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve).

The 7th National Development Plan for the Maldives states that 5% of all reefs shall be protected by 2010. 30 Protected Areas have so far been designated (25 marine, 3 islands, 1 mangrove, 1 marine/terrestrial). Given the challenging commitment of NDP7, there is an urgent need to designate and bring into good management more (marine) protected areas.

Purpose of this consultancy

The key aim is to support the establishment of a Baa Atoll Conservation Programme (BACP) – a model system for conserving atoll ecosystem biodiversity, which can be replicated across other Maldivian atolls. The BACP will focus on applying the CBD Ecosystem Approach, at the heart of which is the principle of sustainable use. Conservation activity will be driven by a programme of prioritised strategic actions to address the most important threats to atoll ecosystems (eg. Shark-finning, development planning, etc.). The programme will also establish zoning systems and codes of practice across the atoll to provide better management and sustainable use of biodiversity resources, as well as establishing protected areas to safeguard or restore the most sensitive features. The BACP will be established with maximum participation of all related stakeholders, particularly local communities and resorts.

Description of tasks and expected outputs

The consultant will provide targeted support to the establishment of the Baa Atoll Conservation Programme through the following activities, based on the project log-frame and existing work plans and consultancies:

1. In close coordination with relevant stakeholders, design and stimulate the implementation of a series of strategic actions to address the most significant threats to atoll ecosystem conservation. This will require consultations to determine the most relevant actions, preparation of plans to address each main threat according to a simple template, securing the support of stakeholder groups to implement the agreed actions, monitoring and reporting.
2. Support the development of a zoning system for Baa Atoll which will identify the most sensitive areas where human use should be carefully controlled, and those areas where multiple uses is possible. Promote awareness and understanding of these zones among key stakeholders, particularly local communities.
3. In close cooperation with user groups, develop codes of practice for different forms of use, to ensure that such uses are sustainable; support awareness raising and adherence to these codes of practice.
4. In consultation with relevant stakeholders, support establishment of priority (marine) protected areas for Baa Atoll, including the preparation of the necessary documentation.
5. *Work with local stakeholders, and national officials to progressively phase in management of protected areas, based on the progress in developing local stakeholder conservation agreements. Undertake appropriate training of stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of management plans for reef and other biodiversity resources in these areas.*
6. Support establishment of a data storage and management system for Baa. Reinforce the ability of institutions and key decision-makers to access, analyze, and apply this information to support conservation activities through hands-on practical demonstrations.
7. Provide support to declare Baa Atoll as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve
8. Train and support MRC, ERC, NGOs, resorts and local communities to develop a sustainable monitoring program for coral reef and MPA condition, which will result in practical “state of the Atoll” reports covering biodiversity assessments, environmental resource use, and socio-economic conditions.
9. Give presentations and interactive workshop(s) to national stakeholders, atoll and island officials in order to show how the integration of conservation and development practice can contribute to economic development in Baa Atoll and Maldives.

10. Support the MRC and MEEW in preparing and implementing atoll-level species conservation plans and implementing conservation measures for threatened species. Develop one of these plans and establish a workplan for the remaining plans to be finalized over the course of the project.
11. Support other project activities, as requested by the PMU, such as policy development and education initiatives.

The consultant will closely work with MHTE staff, the atoll administration and the staff of the Project Management Unit (both in Male' and on Baa atoll), and other national and international consultants. In particular, the national consultant will be "paired" with an international consultant who will provide "home-based" and short "on-mission" support and advice. Government co-financing will support staff of relevant Ministries and their institutes to work with the national Consultant. Co-financing will also be provided for training courses, workshops and materials.

Qualifications and skills required

The consultant should have a minimum qualification of MSc in ecology or conservation biology or related discipline, and be able to demonstrate significant high-level experience (minimum 10 years) in the following areas:

- Atoll / reef conservation and ecology
- Marine Protected Areas designation and management
- Community-based participatory management
- Relevant biogeographical and international experience
- Training and high level presentations
- Good inter-personal skills and ability to work independently and in a team
- Excellent report-writing skills
- A highly strategic approach to working
- MS office and GIS capability
- Diving qualifications and experience are advantageous.
- Candidates from Baa Atoll, and women, are especially encouraged to apply

Detailed work plans will be agreed on a quarterly basis between the Project Management Unit and the consultant. The consultant will be paid according to the work done / outputs achieved against these plans.