

Evaluation overview

“Sustainable Small Islands Initiative” project

Multiple countries: Indian Ocean, West Africa, Mediterranean

Topic: **Biodiversity**

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Date of evaluation : November 2021 to June 2022

Key FFEM support data

Project name: Sustainable Small Islands Initiative

Project number : CZZ 2102

Amount financed by the FFEM: €1.65m

Project grant date : 12/05/2016

Duration : 5 years (2016-2021)

Context

The “Sustainable Small Islands Initiative” had the goal of supporting small islands (less than 150 km² in size and totally separated from the mainland at low tide) to preserve and sustainably manage their natural resources. The project aimed to respond to the need for support and dialogue between the leaders of these territories in order to initiate, promote and enhance approaches to the preservation and sustainable management of natural resources on small islands within a rationale of deepening the cooperation and solidarity between islands.

Participants and operating methods

During the “ project ” phase, project ownership together with the fundamentals of project management were assured by the Coastal Protection Agency, which usefully made available a technical assistant to coordinate the activities of the Initiative’s Secretariat. This assistant was supported by a Technical and Validation Committee, comprising technical and scientific partners. The SMILO association was created at the start of the pilot phase, to deliver the initiative. It gradually took over management of the project.

Supervision of project roll-out was under the control of a Steering Committee, involving representatives of the funding partners, including the FFEM, and elected members of the General Assembly of the Initiative (the future Board of the association).



Aims

The “Sustainable Small Islands initiative” has the goal of responding to the need for support and dialogue between the leaders of these territories in order to initiate, promote and enhance approaches to the preservation and sustainable management of natural resources on small islands within a rationale of deepening the cooperation and solidarity between islands.

Specific objectives:

- Implementing an “Initiative Bank”, specifically to share good practices that were adaptable and reproducible in island environments (OS1)
- Forming and running an international multi-actor network signed-up to the sustainable management of island territories (OS2)
- Implementing and testing the relevance of, the “Sustainable small islands” accreditation approach (OS3) to subsequently put this in place long-term (OS4).

Performance appraisal

Relevance

The relevance of the project as a whole is demonstrated and recognised by most of the participants interviewed. This has been reinforced during the course of the project by the implementation of several actions not originally planned (catalogue of concrete actions, mapping of actors, the SSPI system for calls for projects). Access to accreditation and the geographical scope of the project are also deemed relevant, but could benefit from re-examination (criteria, extending the area etc.).

Coherence

The different projects sponsored by SMILO are coherent among themselves in terms of topic and geography, and share the same rationale of improving the sustainable management of small islands. The 20 projects sponsored by SMILO today bring it a certain degree of medium-term financial sustainability, but the “small” projects (€4,000 to €50,000) do not appear appropriate to mobilise in terms of the ratio of benefit to time needed. The human and financial resources initially planned were on the correct scale.

Effectiveness

Overall, the project is effective with regard to the results expected. The Initiative Bank is well established, although some outputs are incomplete (videos, educational materials, some translations etc.). The network has been built and is operational. The accreditation has been tested on several pilot islands. The “Fund for the islands” (FPI) has successfully financed 11 actions, and the SSPI system has enabled a further 7 actions to be delivered. However, the monitoring mechanism could be improved.

Efficiency

Project efficiency is good, as a result of the governance put in place (AGM, Board, Secretariat, Evaluation commission) This governance is mainly provided by the SMILO Secretariat team, which has good ability to adapt activities to circumstances (finding financing during the pandemic, etc.). The increase in the number of islands taking part in the initiative should trigger further consideration of the monitoring and organization mechanisms.

Impact

The short time since the project's implementation makes it difficult to identify the project's impacts beyond the expected results, particularly in view of the still-limited number of islands involved with SMILO. However, certain impacts have been identified in terms of local capacity building and the enhancement of the association's image and influence at scale.

Viability/sustainability

While significant advances have been made in terms of long-term sustainability (stabilisation of the association's team, mobilisation of new funds, ownership by local actors etc.), the association founded at the launch of the project is still in its infancy and would require additional support in order to consolidate its development. Poor growth management in terms of SMILO's growth and the project's expansion generally threaten the project's sustainability, for both the economic model and adaptation to this possible change in scale.

Added value of FFEM support

The Sustainable Island accreditation remains little known outside the project. It is nonetheless recognised and appreciated by the island beneficiaries, for whom it represents real added value, both in terms of material support for the implementation of actions on the ground, and in terms of raising their profile when accessing other financing, for example. The FFEM financing has also been a definite lever through its ability to raise significant new funds, for both SMILO and the beneficiaries of the FPI/SSPI.

Recommendations

Routes for improvement when setting up future projects using the same methodologies are described below:

- Set objectives explicitly directed toward biodiversity protection and the sustainable development of small islands.
- Modify some of the criteria for accessing accreditation (minimum surface area, no bridges etc.) while also improving some key points in the process (validity period, Board validation of new island entry etc.).
- Define a project evolution strategy, allowing growth to be progressively managed, by intensifying action in the pre-existing intervention areas, then progressing to new areas.
- Strengthen experience-sharing between the islands in the network, particularly through the organisation of more frequent dialogues at sub-regional scale.
- Initiate adaptation of the accreditation arrangements through (i) improving certain key points in the process; (ii) simplification of the evaluation and certification arrangements; (iii) clarification of the rules governing the involvement of Evaluation Commission rapporteurs.
- Improve valorisation of information disseminated by the project.
- Improve governance of the project in the islands, in particular by ensuring that the Island Committee becomes the reference body for the island's sustainable management.
- Keep the project's administrative and personnel costs below 40% of the total budget.
- Provide sufficiently long-term support for this type of initiative on the financial, technical and institutional levels to enable change of scale (here, from the SMILO association).
- Improve monitoring arrangements for the islands through sub-regional mission policy officers, the definition of appropriate technical indicators or subsidy payment terms, and/or retention of accreditation through the provision of this data.