

Eighth Steering Committee
18-19 June 2024

Update on Inclusion of Cook Islands
as SOFF Beneficiary with SIDS Status

Decision 8.6

Systematic Observations
Financing Facility

**Weather
and climate
data for
resilience**



Decision 8.6: Adoption of “Update on Inclusion of Cook Islands as SOFF Beneficiary with SIDS Status”

The SOFF Steering Committee

Recalls [Decision 7.5](#) “Inclusion of Cook Islands and Niue as SOFF beneficiaries with SIDS status” that made inclusion of Cook Islands as SOFF beneficiary country eligible for Readiness, Investment and Compliance support subject to ODA eligibility of the country.

Acknowledges

- that according to the SOFF Terms of Reference and the SOFF Operational Manual, SIDS per the UN classification are SOFF beneficiary countries eligible for Readiness, Investment and Compliance support.
- that the SOFF beneficiary countries list includes seven high-income SIDS eligible for SOFF Readiness, Investment and Compliance support.
- that according to the OECD DAC, eight SIDS are not included in the list of ODA eligible countries as they are classified as high-income countries and territories.
- the importance of all SIDS closing the GBON gap for local, regional, and global benefits.

Notes

- that according to the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States, SIDS are a distinct group of 39 States that face unique social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities.
- the renewed request from Cook Islands to be included in the list of SOFF eligible countries for Readiness, Investment, and Compliance support.
- that a SOFF funder may request an exclusion for its contribution for high-income SIDS.

Decides to include Cook Islands in the list of SOFF beneficiary countries, eligible for SOFF Readiness, Investment and Compliance support.

[Purpose of this Document](#)

At its 7th SOFF Steering Committee meeting through Decision 7.5 decided to update the SOFF beneficiary countries list to include Niue as SIDS eligible for Readiness, Investment and Compliance support and subject to confirmation of ODA eligibility also to include Cook Islands. This document updates the information relevant to the eligibility of the Cook Islands and recommends that Cook Islands be included among the list of countries eligible for full support despite not being ODA eligible.

Table of contents

1. Request from Cook Islands.....	4
2. High-income SIDS	4
3. Benefits from supporting high-income SIDS.....	5
4. UNMPTF Standard Administrative Arrangement	5
5. Proposed decision.....	5
Annex 1: Letter by Cook Island	6
Annex 2: Cook Islands Prime Minister Office communication with the SOFF Secretariat, 17 May 2024.....	8

Update on inclusion of Cook Islands as SOFF beneficiary with SIDS status

1. Request from Cook Islands

In the original list of SOFF Small Island Developing States (SIDS) beneficiary countries Cook Islands was not included, given that it is not a member of the United Nations. On 20 September 2023, the Steering Committee of the UNEP's Green Climate Fund (GCF)-supported Pacific regional program, which includes Cook Islands, requested Cook Islands access to SOFF resources to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the GCF-funded programme (Annex 1).

On 21 March 2024, the SOFF Steering Committee decided to make inclusion of Cook Islands contingent on its ODA eligibility status. On 17 May 2024, the Office of the Cook Islands Prime Minister approached the SOFF Secretariat providing arguments for the country's inclusion as SOFF beneficiary eligible for full support (Annex 2).

This document updates the information relevant to the eligibility of the Cook Islands and recommends that Cook Islands be included among the list of countries eligible for full SOFF support despite not being ODA eligible.

2. High-income SIDS

According to the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States, SIDS are a distinct group of 39 States that face unique social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. The OECD DAC list of ODA recipients does not include eight high-income SIDS: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Cook Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, Singapore, and Trinidad and Tobago that are home to 8 million people. The SOFF Terms of Reference and Operational Manual include all high-income SIDS among SOFF eligible countries, except Cook Islands, since Cook Islands is not a member of the United Nations as noted in [Decision 7.5](#).

The GBON-compliance rate of the eight high-income SIDS is 26% for surface land stations, and 38% for upper air stations, and only two countries are currently GBON compliant (Barbados and Singapore). An estimated USD 14 million is required to close the GBON gap in the high-income SIDS. So far, the SOFF Steering Committee has allocated USD 831,974 for Readiness support to six high-income SIDS (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, and Trinidad and Tobago). No funding has been allocated for the Investment phase in any of these countries. The remaining funding gap to close the GBON gap in the high-income SIDS (needs versus funds already allocated) is estimated to correspond to USD 13 million (including Cook Islands).

3. Benefits from supporting high-income SIDS

The benefits from supporting the high-income SIDS, based on the SOFF programming criteria, are clear: they represent critical data gaps in the provision of basic weather and climate observations as a global public good. They also are important countries for developing a meaningful regional approach, for the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. Moreover, their high-income status does not adequately reflect their exposure to weather- and climate related disasters, which – when they occur, as they do with some frequency – create severe dislocations and damage in claiming human lives and long-term loss of critical economic and social assets.

4. UNMPTF Standard Administrative Arrangement

The Standard Administrative Arrangement for UN Multi-Partner Trust Funds (UNMPTF), the legal basis for donors' contributions to UNMPTFs, does not prevent funding non-ODA-eligible countries. All 12 initial contributors to the SOFF UNMPTF have signed this SAA, based on the SOFF Terms of Reference.

If a SOFF funder requested a high-income SIDS exclusion for its contribution, the UNMPTF Office would directly discuss with the funder the best way to make this happen. Given the fungibility of financial resources, such an exclusion would not be a problem for SOFF's ability to support high-income SIDS, if there are enough resources available from other funders without such exclusion.

In any case, any funding decision for a high-income SIDS requires a decision from the SOFF Steering Committee.

5. Proposed decision

Based on the points made above and in response to the request of Cook Islands, it is proposed to include the country among the list of countries eligible for SOFF Readiness, Investment and Compliance support.

Annex 1: Letter by Cook Island



Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for resilience in 5 island countries of the Pacific Ocean: UNEP CIS-Pac5

Date: 20 September 2023
Reference: UNEP/GCF/FP147/PSC/04/01

Re: Statement on the eligibility of Cook Islands and Niue for the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF) for the sustainability of the GCF-funded programme on “Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for resilience in 5 island countries of the Pacific Ocean”

The Programme Steering Committee (PSC) of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) “Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for resilience in 5 island countries of the Pacific Ocean” programme, hereinafter referred to as UNEP CIS-Pac5, funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF), is a consensus-based decision-making body within the Programme governance structure that provides high-level oversight, strategic leadership, and guidance for the implementation of the Programme. The PSC is composed of the GCF National Designated Authorities (NDA) from the Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, and a representative from the Accredited Entity UNEP.

The PSC recognizes that UNEP CIS-Pac5 will strengthen weather observation networks and support the five beneficiary countries (Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu) to achieve GBON compliance. The programme was designed in consultation with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) with the expectation that the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF) would support the maintenance of GBON standards in the five Small Island Developing States (SIDS) after the programme’s lifespan. This is reflected in the approved Funding Proposal as part of the sustainability strategy. This is in line with SOFF’s mandate to provide long-term finance and technical assistance to developing countries to achieve and maintain GBON compliance and data sharing at the global level, which will in turn translate to better weather forecasts, early warnings, and climate information products essential for effective climate action. The PSC highlights that the observations from SIDS are of high value for the global observing network, with the SOFF having previously reported that optimal observations data in the southwest Pacific are estimated to account for 17% of global forecast improvements. The Pacific SIDS are unique in that they have small land masses and vast marine areas (the land area of Cook Islands, 240 km², constitutes just 0.012% of its EEZ, 1,947,760 km²).

The PSC notes that Cook Islands and Niue are currently ineligible to access SOFF, as they are not United Nations Member States. However, the PSC also notes that Cook Islands and Niue both maintain full and independent membership of WMO, its affiliates and their programmes and projects.

Given these circumstances, the PSC is concerned that sustainability of the UNEP CIS-Pac5 interventions intended to be supported by SOFF is now unable to be accessed by two countries beyond the programme implementation period. The concern creates an inequality amongst and between country partners that requires addressing, at a range of levels, including this PSC, and the SOFF Steering Committee.

Acknowledging these circumstances, the PSC requests the SOFF Steering Committee to urgently consider the special circumstances and eligibility criteria for the Cook Islands and Niue to access the SOFF.

This statement is adopted unanimously by the PSC members at the 4th meeting of the Programme Steering Committee held virtually on 20 September 2023.

Annex 2: Cook Islands Prime Minister Office communication with the SOFF Secretariat, 17 May 2024

“We have put together some summary points below that are relevant to programming of the Cook Islands to SOFF.

1. The Cook Islands is recognized by the United Nations as a Small Island Developing State, and is acknowledged as such within the UN List of SIDS referenced in the SOFF *Operational Manual*. This indicates eligibility for support from SOFF across the Readiness, Investment and Compliance phases, consistent with the *Operational Manual*.
2. The Cook Islands maintains full membership of the World Meteorological Organization and other UN Specialized Agencies.
3. The Cook Islands is a participating country and national-level implementing partner of the WMO Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) Initiative targeted at LDCs and SIDS, through the CREWS-funded project “*Strengthening Hydro-Meteorological and Early Warning Services in the Pacific 2.0*” (CREWS Pacific SIDS 2.0).
4. The Cook Islands is one of five Pacific SIDS participating in the GCF-funded programme “*Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for Resilience in 5 Island Countries of the Pacific*” (UNEP CIS-Pac5). This programme is making significant investment in weather and climate observation infrastructure to achieve GBON compliance within participating countries. UNEP is the Accredited Entity for this programme, and the SOFF is identified within the approved Project Document as the primary mechanism for sustainability of the programme investments within all 5 participating countries.
5. The Cook Islands is able to access funds from the UNFCCC financial mechanism, such as the Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Fund, despite its removal from the DAC ODA eligibility list. Unlike traditional development assistance (ODA), Climate Finance aims to support developing countries in combating and adapting to climate change. OECD DAC Rules eligibility does not take into account a country's vulnerabilities and given the Cook Islands' vulnerability to climate change as a Small Island Developing State, the Cook Islands qualifies for support from the “Climate Finance Mechanism”.
6. In 2022 the Asian Development Bank examined the relevant factors to determine the Cook Islands' country classification. In 2023 the Cook Islands was re-classified from Group C to Group B under the ADB's Graduation Policy.”