



1. Project Data

Project ID P172339	Project Name CS Partnership Facility for Resilience	
Country St Maarten	Practice Area(Lead) Social Protection & Jobs	
L/C/TF Number(s) WBTF-B3014	Closing Date (Original) 28-Jun-2024	Total Project Cost (USD) 7,027,221.78
Bank Approval Date 26-Jun-2020	Closing Date (Actual) 31-Mar-2025	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	0.00	7,200,000.00
Revised Commitment	0.00	7,027,221.78
Actual	0.00	7,027,221.78

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

As stated in Schedule 1 (p. 5) of the “Sint Maarten Hurricane Irma Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Grant Agreement between the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), acting as administrator of the Sint Maarten Hurricane Irma Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Program Single-Donor Trust Fund (TF B-3014),” co-signed in October 2020 to support the Sint Maarten Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience Project, the objective of the Project was “... to improve the capacity of civil society organizations and **provide them with grant resources to implement** reconstruction and resilience



sub-projects at the community level. The design document (Project Appraisal Document/PAD, pp. 1, 8 and 21) presents a slightly different wording, "...to improve the capacity of civil society organizations and **support implementation of** reconstruction and resilience sub-projects at the community level."

The ICR (p. 4) noted the discrepancy between the Grant Agreement and the PAD in the articulation of the second objective and its intention to use the PAD's statement, which it considered to be more expansive and reflective of the project intent and more outcome-oriented. In keeping with ICR Guidelines, this ICRR will refer to the PDO statement in the legal document (the Grant Agreement) but will draw on all evidence presented in the ICR that reports on outcomes. This ICRR assesses the project against two objectives: (1) to improve the capacity of civil society organizations; and (2) to provide CSOs with grant resources to implement reconstruction and resilience subprojects at the community level.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

Original Components:

Project support was delivered through three components. Original and actual costs are drawn, respectively, from the PAD (pp. 9-11) and the ICR (Annex 3, p. 33).

Component 1: Small Grants to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for Reconstruction and Resilience (original estimate: \$4.66 million; actual cost: \$4.00 million): This component was designed to provide an estimated \$4.0 million in small grants to CSOs, with the remaining amount of \$0.66 million supporting grant management and administration, including intensive coaching and mentoring. Beneficiary CSOs were to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), youth organizations and other CSOs in Sint Maarten that would fulfill requirements for participating in the program. Subprojects were to focus on reconstruction and resilience activities to support community services. Eligible activities included: (a) rehabilitation and equipment of facilities (e.g., recreational facilities and centers, playgrounds, soccer pitches, community centers, track fields, neighborhood beautification); (b) environmental protection (e.g., cleaning neighborhoods, tree planting, recycling subprojects, clearing drainage systems); (c) social care services (homes for the elderly, chronically ill, disabled, and prevention and mitigation of gender-based violence [GBV]); (d) youth skills development and employment generation; and (e) supporting basic needs of communities during the COVID-19 crisis. Two calls for "Quick Wins" subproject proposals were planned for the first year to generate early lessons on the feasibility of this component's implementation. A ceiling of \$50,000 per subproject was established for these initial rounds to be reviewed and reassessed during the course of project implementation. Eligible subproject expenditures included material requirements, labor costs, operational costs, consulting and non-consulting services and others acceptable to the Bank. Ineligible expenditures included: major civil works or new construction, land acquisition and displacement of populations. The subproject cycle comprised: initial outreach and awareness creation; calls for proposals and readiness support; selection and award of funding (including pre-disbursement training to prepare



CSOs for management and use of resources and reporting); implementation; and completion, reporting and closing.

CSO eligibility criteria, defined in the PAD, were to be further detailed in a Grant Manual: (a) registration in Sint Maarten as a nonprofit entity; (b) holding an account in a financial institution; and (c) recognition as representing a community or neighborhood. Technical criteria for subproject screening included: (a) clarity of community need or vulnerability, which the subproject sought to address in line with the PDO; (b) compliance with applicable World Bank social and environmental requirements; (c) reasonableness of budget for proposed activities; and (d) likelihood of achieving the stated objective.

Component 2: Capacity Building and Technical Assistance for Local CSOs (original estimate: \$1.08 million; actual cost: \$1.10 million): This component aimed to support (a) training in key technical skills critical to subproject implementation; and (b) systematic needs-based capacity development (periodic training of CSO staff in skills such as reporting, proposal writing, among others). The former was to include start-up training for CSOs in subproject design to enable them to participate in the grants program and additional training for grantees, once they were awarded financing, to strengthen their capacity for financial management and reporting, subproject management, supervision, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and reporting on progress. The latter (CSO capacity development and knowledge sharing) was to include the development, implementation, and annual updating of a Capacity Building Plan, based on an initial needs assessment undertaken during preparation, information collected at training and outreach activities and lessons from the performance of grantees under the Quick Wins rounds. The Plan was to outline detailed modules for each training component and their sequencing. Knowledge sharing events and the preparation and implementation of coaching programs for eligible CSOs was to ensure that low capacity CSOs would be included.

Component 3: Project Management and Coordination (original estimate: \$1.46 million; actual cost: \$1.92 million). This component was designed to support: (a) daily operations; (b) administrative tasks; (c) fiduciary and safeguards oversight and management; (d) planning and M&E, including the design and undertaking of qualitative and quantitative evaluations, such as beneficiary assessments); (e) knowledge management, including reporting and documenting good practices; and (f) coordination and communication activities. This component also aimed to support the work of the Project Technical Committee (PTC). Chaired by the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB), with representatives also drawn from the Chamber of Commerce and the Social Economic Council, the PTC was to provide advice on project implementation and undertake efforts to promote coordination among CSOs and between CSOs and other stakeholders.

Revisions to Components

The one project restructuring exercise, approved on June 18, 2024, did not change the project's activities, outcome targets and indicators, or the allocation of resources. The only two changes it introduced were: (1) the extension of the closing date by nine months; and (2) revisions to several intermediate results indicators. These are detailed in Section 2.e

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Cost. The total cost of the project at completion was \$7.02 million, or 98 percent of the original estimate of \$7.20 million. Actual component costs were fairly close to the original estimates, with Component 1 (small



grants to CSOs) totaling \$4.00 million, or 85 percent of the original estimate, Component 2 (capacity building and CSOs) totaling \$1.10 million or 102 percent of the original estimate, and Component 3 (project management and coordination) totaling \$1.92 or 128 percent of the original estimate.

Financing and Borrower Contribution. The project was 100 percent financed by the Sint Maarten Hurricane Irma Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Program Single-Donor Trust Fund (TF B-3014), established by the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), for which the World Bank was administrator. Of the total trust fund amount of \$7.20 million, an amount of \$7.02 million (or 98 percent) was disbursed. No Government contribution was planned or delivered.

Key Dates. The project was approved on June 26, 2020, became effective only one month later, on July 28, 2020, and its mid-term review was completed on July 18, 2022. The project's only restructuring was approved on June 18, 2024. Changes to the project included: (1) a nine-month extension to the closing date (from June 30, 2024 to March 31, 2025), with accompanying changes to the implementation and disbursement schedules, primarily to facilitate activities related to the closure of completed subprojects; and (2) minor adjustments to the results framework. Specific adjustments to the results framework were as follows. *First*, two intermediate results indicators (IRIs) were reduced: (i) the number of CSOs benefiting from the project was adjusted from 80 to 50 because more CSOs than anticipated applied for and received funds for multiple subprojects, resulting in some organizations being counted more than once; and (ii) the number of subprojects was also lowered from 100 to 80, reflecting the decision to increase the maximum financing per subproject after lessons learned from the two QWs rounds. Beginning with round 3 of subproject proposals, the ceiling was raised from \$50,000 to \$90,000 for a proposal from a single CSO and \$120,000 for a joint proposal from two CSOs. By the end of the project, nine CSOs received three rounds of funding and 11 CSOs received two rounds of funding. Twenty-seven subprojects received financing that exceeded \$50,000. These adjustments did not affect the overall scale or impact of the project, as the total financing for subprojects remained unchanged and the number of beneficiaries more than doubled from the original target of 10,000 to 20,365 people by the project's end. *Second*, one intermediate results indicator (share of CSO proposals accepted after a second stage review) was dropped because the project's continuous coaching and mentoring process, responding to the CSOs' need for ongoing support to improve their proposals, made the concept of a formal "second stage" review redundant (ICR, para. 15).

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The PDO was highly relevant to country conditions at the time of project design and remains highly relevant today. As stated in the PAD, the full effects of 2017 Hurricane Irma on poverty, vulnerability and service delivery were significant, causing damages and losses estimated at US\$2.7 billion affecting 90 percent of infrastructure and large parts of the natural environment. Sint Maarten's GDP fell by an estimated 16.9 percent between 2017 and 2018 and was estimated to contract sharply again due to the COVID-19 crisis, which ultimately came to pass. The poorest and most vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and informal and casual labor workers in service sectors, were expected to be disproportionately affected. Hurricane Irma also affected the delivery of basic services and facilities, including health, education, and community and recreation services. The direct damage to education, culture, youth and sports public facilities alone was estimated at US\$60 million and losses at US\$1.7



million. Investments in both physical and staff capacity were required to restore facilities and assure their full functionality and some of these investments continue to be implemented under existing trust-funded projects. COVID-19 was expected to compound weak pre-existing conditions in Sint Maarten, in terms of public health and the socio-economic impacts on households and the economy. The PAD also pointed to pockets of poverty and vulnerability, with 27 percent of households living on an income at or below the minimum wage in 2017, with high unemployment, especially for youth and women, and over one-third of households in the country headed by women. Vulnerability of the elderly was also evident in their poor nutrition and health, substandard housing and substantial unmet needs for their social care. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and COVID-19, these vulnerabilities and needs became more acute and the public sector's capacity was limited to undertake needed reconstruction and community-based services. Civil society organizations held and continue to hold the potential to complement public sector capacity and comparative advantage to address some of the unmet needs of vulnerable populations at the community level. But they required and continue to require capacity building and funding in order to fulfill their potential to contribute.

The PDO was highly relevant to Sint Maarten's national priorities at the time of design and remains highly relevant today. Sint Maarten's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), issued in 2018, supported two main objectives in the wake of Hurricane Irma: (1) to restore economic, community and governance infrastructure; and (2) to restore and enhance service delivery. Aligned with the NRRP, the first Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund Strategic Framework (2019-2025), agreed during the design stage, guided reconstruction efforts post-Hurricane Irma focusing on three pillars: (1) promoting sustainable economic recovery; (2) supporting citizens and resilient communities; and (3) building the foundations to improve long-term resilience and good governance, particularly at the community level. The current Strategic Framework for the Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund (2025-2028), approved in April 2025, continues to support the NRRP and the same three focus areas of the first Strategic Framework. The project contributed to all three continually relevant focus areas, with a particular emphasis on the second focus area (investing in citizens and resilient communities). The ICR (para 16) notes in particular contributions to social safety nets strengthening, employment promotion, and the strengthening of services, including hospital and mental healthcare services, education, and sports services.

The PDO is also highly relevant to the Bank's strategy for Sint Maarten. There is no Country Partnership Framework for Sint Maarten. The island continues to rebuild with the help of the Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund, financed by The Netherlands, managed by the World Bank, and implemented by Sint Maarten, which supports the two above-cited sequential Strategic Frameworks for Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience, developed and agreed by the three parties. In the absence of a CPF, the Bank's agreement with and support to the Strategic Frameworks provide a reflection of the Bank's strategy for Sint Maarten.

While IEG rates relevance to country conditions, national priorities, and Bank strategy as **high**, it does point to a weakness in the articulation of the second objective in the PDO, "...to provide CSOs with grant resources to implement reconstruction and resilience subprojects at the community level." In support of Objective 2, the project's theory of change (ICR, p. 4) defines **activities** (CSOs prepare proposals and implement subprojects financed by project grants), **outputs** (fully implemented and functional community subprojects), and **outcomes** (benefits to community members from subprojects, good utilization, and satisfaction among users). The PDO's statement of Objective 2, however, is pitched to the **activities** level,



rather than to the *outcomes*. Given this weakness, overall relevance of objectives is assessed as substantial.

Rating

Substantial

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve the capacity of civil society organizations

Rationale

In support of Objective 1, and as laid out in the PAD's theory of change (reproduced in the ICR, p. 4), the following key **activities** were envisaged: the assessment of CSO capacities in subproject proposal writing, implementation, performance reporting, financial management and subproject completion, and the development of CSO capacity-building plans and training modules designed around the needs identified. These actions were expected to support the delivery of **intermediate results**, particularly the delivery of training and other capacity building support (technical assistance, coaching and mentoring) focused on addressing the identified needs of CSOs. The delivery of capacity strengthening interventions was expected, in turn, to culminate in the **outcome** of CSOs' improved capacity in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of community-level subprojects. The theory of change articulated two assumptions linked to this outcome: (1) that CSOs would have the capacity to participate virtually in capacity building activities, given COVID-19 related constraints; and (2) that CSOs would have the capacity to acquire knowledge from capacity building activities.

Outputs and intermediate results

- Based on the Quick Wins lessons, the PIU developed an Annual Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Plan (CBTAB), which was continuously and dynamically implemented, through a process of regular updating, based on lessons of experience, and regular submission to the World Bank for review.
- Implementation of the CBTAB boosted the grantees' capacities and brought in multiplier benefits for the quality of subprojects throughout the subproject cycle. Local CSOs displaying weaker capacity benefitted from intensive periodic coaching and mentoring sessions provided by the PIU with the support of the VNG International team, based in The Hague. In complement to coaching and mentoring activities, PIU task teams often visited CSOs' workplaces to help them work through their systems and governance arrangements, which were critical to fulfilling grants' compliance requirements.
- From a baseline of zero, 67 training sessions were delivered to CSOs, **exceeding the target** of 16 by a factor of four (IRI 2). Of these:



- Twenty-four sessions provided core training related to the grant mechanism, including general information, pre-disbursement training and learning benchmark training. The ICR (para. 21) notes that the original target of 16 was set specifically for training on the grant mechanism. This indicates that **that target for this specific type of training was also exceeded** (150 percent achieved).
- The remaining 43 training sessions consisted of workshops on topics including proposal writing, communications, data analysis, project management, CSOs institutional governance, and information technologies (further detailed in the ICR's Annx 1.B). In addition to grant recipient CSOs, these workshops were open to CSOs that did not receive grants. One hundred CSOs benefited from training even though they did not access the grant mechanism, expanding access to capacity building to more CSOs than initially planned. During the course of implementation, and especially following the mid-term review, training increased in scope and quantity, with the PIU's annual refinement of the capacity building plan based on implementation progress and lessons.

Outcomes

As detailed below, CSOs' capacities improved across a number of disciplines, including: project proposal writing, implementation coordination and management, performance reporting, and fiduciary management.

- The ICR (para. 19) notes that capacity development activities for CSOs contributed to several of them being successful in winning more than one grant, while others were able to implement larger and more sophisticated subprojects, compared to the Quick Wins phase. As reported in more detail under Objective 2, a total of 58 local CSOs benefited from the project's grant scheme, defined as the number of CSOs, which formulated subproject proposals for consideration by the PIU, which were subsequently endorsed for funding.
- From a baseline of zero, 91 percent of CSOs participating in the project had improved capacity for grant management and implementation, as measured by improvements in the timeliness of subproject implementation, and in timeliness, quality and completeness of their reporting on subproject performance. The ICR (para. 18) notes that seven initial subprojects required an extension of between 1-6 months, whereas subsequent rounds were fully implemented within the original timeframe in the grant agreements between VNGI and the grantees. These improvements were achieved through continuous needs assessment and expert recommendations from implementation support missions. This achievement **exceeded the target** of 70 percent. (PDOI 1)
- From a baseline of zero, 88 percent of CSOs participating in the project had increased capacity for fiduciary management of subproject grants, **exceeding the target** of 67 percent. The PIU's assessment of fiduciary management capacity was based on interim financial management reports and annual audit reports at each reporting cycle and on the monitoring of trends in related performance. Overall, all project external audits, including those for the project preparation facility (provided to VNG International for frontloading of preparation of fiduciary, social and environmental safeguards compliance documents for fast-tracked approval), were assessed as unqualified and acceptable to the World Bank. Moreover, all Interim Financial Reports were completed and submitted on time and were accepted by the Bank (ICR para. 20) (IRI 1).
- Four rounds of surveys of CSO grant recipients, each survey covering different rounds of subprojects, provided the following information:



- Between 50-60 percent of CSOs reported that they had built capacity either very significantly or significantly through courses and training provided under the project.
- About half of CSOs responded that one of the project's impacts was improved skills to serve their target beneficiaries.
- Between 20-40 percent reported that their participation in the grant mechanism served to improve internal procedures and administration.
- Specific results reported through CSOs' responses included: improved administrative capacity, improved CSO budgeting, enhanced knowledge of financial audits, learning by doing through large project implementation, motivation of CSOs legal formalization, training opportunities for volunteers, strengthened bookkeeping, improved monitoring of CSOs' activities thanks to project reporting requirements, and a CSO's reorganization, prompted by participation in the project, which rendered that CSO more efficient.
- In 2022 the project extended capacity building support to 100 CSOs, who were not grant recipients. These CSOs attended one or more workshops offered under the project, which were in high demand. This expanded access to training in key project design, management and implementation skills is likely to have contributed to institutional strengthening of the broader CSO network in the country.
- The ICR (paras. 25 and 33) also notes that the PAD's commitment to establish a mechanism to channel resources to local CSOs was met and has nurtured pathways for alternative financing arrangements for CSOs and contributed to sustainability. Investments in CSOs strengthened participating organizations' potential and capacities for resource mobilization using alternative funding outside the project, especially where CSO grants focused on existing sources of employment. For example, subprojects enabled young people's clubs (e.g., Karib Swim Club) to train children and youth in marine skills, which subsequently attracted corporate social responsibility resources from maritime companies, leading to additional financing for existing subprojects or investment in other skills development initiatives.
- Through its activities, the project became a hub for support to CSOs on Sint Maarten. Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR) became the project brand and a platform to deliver support, both formal and informal, to CSOs on the island. The PIU was the "face" of R4CR (ICR, para. 36). Other organizations providing training and other services to CSOs were co-located in the R4CR office, helping it to become a vehicle for CSO empowerment and knowledge exchange, promoting network effects and cohesion in the sector.

Rating

High

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Provide CSOs with grant resources to implement reconstruction and resilience sub-projects at the community level

Rationale

According to the theory of change (ICR, p. 4), and in support of Objective 2, project **activities** were essentially focused on supporting CSOs in the preparation and implementation of community subprojects,



through the provision of small grants, coupled with intensive coaching and mentoring for CSOs to this end. The subproject cycle included: initial outreach and awareness creation; call for proposals and readiness support; selection of successful CSOs and award of grants; subproject implementation; and completion, reporting and closing. An initial “Quick Wins” phase was designed to launch a first crop of subprojects that would inform the finetuning of approaches through lessons of early implementation. Activities supporting CSOs’ subproject preparation and implementation were expected to lead to the **outputs or intermediate results**, defined in the theory of change as the full implementation and functionality of community subprojects, which in turn were expected to culminate in the **outcomes** of community benefits from these subprojects through their good utilization and measures of satisfaction among users. The theory of change articulated two assumptions linked to this outcome: (1) that the project’s outreach and communication strategies would promote demand for subprojects from communities; and (2) that the context would remain conducive for project implementation and monitoring. The first assumption was proven to be correct, as outreach activities did generate demand. The second assumption was challenged with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the outset of the project. But the project overcame this challenge and was able to maintain momentum even in the face of COVID-related restrictions.

Outputs and intermediate results

- A total of 58 local CSOs benefited from the project’s grant scheme, defined as the number of CSOs, which formulated subproject proposals for consideration by the PIU, which were subsequently endorsed for funding, **falling short of the initial target** of 80, but **exceeding the revised target** of 50, set during the 2024 restructuring (IRI 4). Of these 58 CSOs, 37 received one round of financing, 11 received two rounds of financing, and 10 received three rounds of financing.
- By the project’s end, a total of 91 subprojects were funded for implementation, fully implemented, and (as detailed below) assessed as functional to users, **falling slightly short of the original target** of 100 (91 percent achieved) and exceeding the revised target of 80 (114 percent achieved) (IRI 5).
- A total of 95 percent of respondents to the beneficiary assessments expressed satisfaction with the outputs from the subprojects implemented in their areas with funding from the project, **exceeding the target** of 70 percent (IRI 3).
- From a baseline of zero, 84 percent of grievances received by the project were resolved within three months after they were formally registered, **exceeding the target** of 80 percent. This measures the efficiency of grievances (complaints and appeals) management system for the project.

Outcomes

- In total, 98 percent of approved subprojects were fully implemented and functional to users, **far exceeding the target** of 75 percent. Full implementation implies that CSOs successfully achieved technical and fiduciary requirements of grants following guidelines provided by the PIU (PDOI 2). The 91 financed subprojects covered a wide range of activities in a post-crisis context.
 - Twenty-three subprojects supported basic needs, including food banks, services for the elderly and other vulnerable populations (people with disabilities, homeless), and adult literacy courses.
 - Twenty subprojects supported education, most supporting the upgrading or repairing of infrastructure (schools, playgrounds and daycare centers) and others supporting, inter alia, meals and services for daycare centers, school gardens and other services and transportation.



- Twelve youth engagement subprojects supported arts, training and employment, and sports (facility remodeling and repairs, equipment and transportation).
- Eleven environment subprojects supported disaster response training and equipment, animal control, and nature sites and clean-up.
- Eleven health subprojects covered treatment for AIDS patients, mental health counseling and health outreach.
- One subproject supported art and culture (not related to youth engagement).
- Subprojects were acknowledged, in particular, for their focus on low-income, vulnerable beneficiaries (ICR, para. 35) and on women beneficiaries (ICR, para. 32).
- Subprojects were assessed to have fulfilled the requirements for completion and to be functional to users. Two assessments confirmed these achievements: (1) periodic technical verification through monthly field visits by the PIU grant management team; and (2) a financial and functionality audit undertaken by an independent external auditor (the BDO, St. Maarten). All subprojects underwent these two assessments in order to be considered fully functional to users and before a formal handover to the users (e.g., elders/seniors associations, women’s associations) or to local authorities or boards (e.g., public schools, sports facilities, day care centers).
- Ninety-seven percent of beneficiaries expressed satisfaction that subprojects reflected their communities’ needs, as expressed in the prioritization stage, **exceeding the target** of 75 percent (PDOI 3). The ICR Results Framework notes that 100 percent of respondents (at CSO and individual levels) reported satisfactory or highly satisfactory ratings on this front. The ICR also qualifies that, while CSO-level responsiveness to the beneficiary surveys was consistently high, responsiveness at the individual level was low.
- Against a cumulative target of 10,000 direct beneficiaries of services provided by investments supported through subprojects implemented by CSOs, the ICR reports a total of 20,365 beneficiaries by the project’s end, **more than double the target**. Of these, 11,200 were female and 9,164 were male, **more than doubling the targets** of 5,500 and 4,500, respectively (PDOI 4).
- The ICR’s economic analysis states that the project generated significant benefits through the subprojects, categorizing benefits as anticipated in the PAD’s analysis of positive impacts of community-driven development programs around the clustering of actual subprojects delivered around sectors. Table 3 of the ICR (p. 12) indicates that: health subprojects likely contributed to improved health practices; neighborhood and environmental clean-up subprojects likely contributed to improved neighborhood environment; investments in youth training, jobs and enrichment likely contributed to youth development and engagement; investments in education likely contributed to improved aspects of education quality; and investments in the poor and vulnerable likely enhanced efforts to address their basic needs. However, the ICR does not provide evidence of these benefits through an independent/third party verification.

Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY



Rationale

Objective 1 (improve civil society capacity) was fully achieved, with many outcome targets exceeded. Achievement of Objective 2 (provide CSOs with grants to implement community-level subprojects) was substantial, based on the evidence provided. Additional evidence on the uptake and benefits of subprojects, such as an independent/third party verification to assess these, would have provided an important complement to the evidence provided on beneficiary satisfaction and the tally of direct beneficiaries.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

An economic analysis was not undertaken at the time of design due to the inadequacy of the available data for the envisaged subprojects, because of their demand-driven nature. Nevertheless, based on an analysis of experience in the design and delivery of community-driven development (CDD) approaches, the PAD predicted positive impacts of community-based subprojects on poverty reduction and increased access to services, as well as positive outcomes for cost-effectiveness and rates of return, when compared to other modes of service delivery. An estimated \$4.0 million in grant support for community reconstruction and resilience subprojects was expected to generate about 100 subprojects at the community level, which were expected to provide direct benefits to an estimated 10,000 inhabitants, of which 5,500 would be female. The PAD identified several benefits that could be expected from the variety of the subprojects for the target communities.

Minor rehabilitation of day care centers, pre-schools, elderly care facilities, service delivery facilities, and communal spaces was expected to have a positive impact on the quality of life and resilience of the most vulnerable populations and to reduce temporarily the burden on the public sector. Improvements to community spaces and environmental activities were expected to boost healthy practices, support youth development and engagement, and contribute to better neighborhood environments. Increased awareness of good environmental habits and activities had the potential to improve the quality of life for communities. Rehabilitation and repair of preschools and daycares was expected to facilitate enrollment of vulnerable children, enabling women to be more productive and participate more actively in the workforce. More functional, accessible and attractive pre-schools had the potential to better equip children to enter the school system and achieve better learning outcomes. Support to community services was expected to improve service delivery to citizens and revitalize local communities, increasing social cohesion, empowerment, trust, voice and agency. These predicted benefits were based on CDD program results, including: increased participation of poor and marginalized citizens in decision-making, mechanisms that channel benefits to the poor, provision of short-term job opportunities, and the meeting of basic needs of the poor and vulnerable. Furthermore, about 80 CSOs were expected to benefit from training and skills transfers coupled with grant funding to build their capacities to: design and implement community subprojects, manage and use funds appropriately, and benefit from improved coordination and information sharing among CSOs.

The ICR's efficiency analysis revealed that anticipated benefits envisaged at the time of appraisal were significantly achieved. An estimated grant support close to the original estimate of \$4.0 million for community reconstruction and resilience subprojects generated 91 community level subprojects (vs the target of 100),



ultimately providing direct benefits to 20,365 people (more than double the original estimate of 10,000), of which 11,200 (more than double the original estimate of 5,500) were female. Table 3 of the ICR (p. 12) compiles the expected benefits flowing from the various clusters of subproject activities. Subproject investments in health and wellbeing likely contributed to improved health practices; subprojects supporting environment and clean neighborhoods likely improved neighborhood environments; jobs, training and enrichment for youth likely enhanced youth development and engagement; investments in daycare, pre-schools and schools likely contributed, or are poised to contribute, to better learning outcomes and women's enhanced access to the labor market; and the provision of basic needs for vulnerable populations likely enhanced their wellbeing. Extremely high levels of satisfaction expressed in beneficiary assessments point to the plausibility of these benefits, though no impact evaluation independently verified these benefits.

Implementation was efficient thanks to a sound design and a flexible approach of close supervision, learning, and ongoing refinement during the course of implementation. Selection of subprojects was guided by criteria that included grantees' administrative status, organizational capacity, subproject technical feasibility and financial feasibility. These criteria were clearly laid out in the Grant Manual and grantees were well trained to ensure their strict application. Governance, capacity, technical and financial criteria ensured that: grantees implemented subprojects that would generate envisaged benefits, CSOs' internal governance was sufficient to receive and utilize funds, and checks on the technical feasibility as well as the financial viability of the subprojects were designed to support and enable their proper completion and full functionality for the beneficiaries. The PIU accompanied CSOs to monitor and continually improve their capacity. A well-defined subproject cycle and manuals provided critical preparation and implementation steps for CSOs. Periodic field visits, beneficiary assessments and observed evidence during implementation support missions monitored and ensured that subprojects were fully implemented and became functional to users and generated benefits. Annex 4 of the ICR (pp. 34-35) provides details.

Despite COVID-19 related restrictions, project launch was not delayed. The Quick Wins phase generated lessons on preparing and implementing successful subprojects, with 24 Quick Win subprojects financed in the first two rounds in a little over a year. Strong outreach and information sessions mobilized interest and helped CSOs to prepare subproject proposals. PIU staff provided timely assistance, answered questions, supported subproject preparations which enhanced and accelerated the preparation and approval processes. Average disbursement rate across the seven rounds was 90 percent and the share of CSOs receiving the grant within one month of funding improved from slightly less than half over the first two rounds to 85-100 percent thereafter. Within the same resource envelope training reached 100 CSOs that did not participate in the grant mechanism, in addition to CSO grant recipients. Stability of staffing in VNG International management, in the local PIU, and in the World Bank task team leader also significantly contributed to operational efficiency. The PIU was quick to address and overcome initial challenges related to opening a local project bank account and funds flows related to the new NGO mechanism of funding. Reductions in two targets under the restructuring were minor technical adjustments to initial estimates related to subproject amounts and CSO interest in executing more than one subproject proposal, and not a sign of inefficiency.

The Trust Fund was 98 percent disbursed and the actual costs to components remained reasonably close to the original estimates. While the closing date was extended by nine months, the subprojects financed in the last round of proposals were fully completed four months after the original closing date.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial



a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The relevance of the PDO is rated as **substantial**. While the PDO was and remains highly relevant to country conditions, Sint Maarten’s current national priorities, and the World Bank’s strategy for Sint Maarten, there was a weakness in the statement of Objective 2. Overall efficacy is rated as **substantial**. Objective 1 (to improve capacity of CSOs) was highly achieved. Objective 2 (to provide CSOs with grant resources to implement reconstruction and resilience subprojects at the community level) was substantially achieved. Efficiency is rated as **substantial**, with subprojects delivering benefits to a range of diverse target groups, including children, the elderly, and those lacking basic necessities. The project was implemented efficiently, with capacity building expanded to include 100 additional CSOs, which did not access the grant mechanism. Project design features (clear definition of subproject cycle, rigorous training and guidelines on subproject proposals and implementation, the Quick Wins phase) and project implementation features (staff stability, close monitoring and support of CSOs, an evidence-based learning and finetuning approach) positively contributed to efficiency. The Trust Fund was 98 percent disbursed and the project was fully implemented with one nine-month extension, despite a difficult context.

a. **Outcome Rating**
Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The risk to the CSO capacity building outcome is considered to be low. Capacity gained through the training and workshops provided under the project and reinforced by the applied experience of these skills through subproject design and implementation, have culminated in high success: 88 percent of CSOs that received grants under the project were able to complete subprojects according to the stipulated requirements, including a final audit. In short, the training provided was effectively put into practice. Moreover, training (covering planning, financial management, monitoring, report writing, communications, media, proposal writing, governance) is highly relevant to other opportunities and endeavors. A number of other factors prompted by the project are likely to promote sustainability, particularly, facilitated networking and collaboration among CSOs, the maintenance of the information platform used for the project, the continuation of activities of local partners, who were heavily involved in



training delivery, and the collaboration between the PIU and the Sint Maarten Development Fund, an organization established by government, which provides financial and non-financial support to CSOs geared towards poverty reduction and sustainable social development.

The risk to the development outcomes of the subprojects financed by the project is also considered to be low, overall. Several positive factors suggest likely sustainability. Many participating CSOs had a long history of providing services and used subproject financing to undertake needed renovations/upgrading of infrastructure. Some subproject investments enabled CSOs to reduce their operating costs and/or expand service provision, some of which are fee-based. Nearly half of CSOs responding to four rounds of surveys of CSO grantees rated the chance of sustainability as either 80 percent or 100 percent. Also, prospects for CSOs to access other funding are likely to improve because: their participation in the grant mechanism improved their capacity and skills and brought them media attention; and the improved economic situation of the island and the confirmation of CSOs' financial management skills by a financial audit may improve prospects to mobilize funding from public and private sources.

However, sustainability may be fragile on some fronts. It may be difficult for CSOs with subprojects supporting the poor and vulnerable, especially those involving the purchase of consumables, such as food and drugs, to fully maintain their operation. Even in these cases, most CSOs did not depend fully on grant financing under the project, indicating that activities may continue, even if, in some cases, at a reduced level.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project had strong strategic relevance. It responded to a specific request by the Sint Maarten Trust Fund Steering Committee for a project that would support civil society-driven reconstruction and resilience activities. It was highly relevant to the country's needs, national priorities, and the Bank's strategy in Sint Maarten (Section 3). The theory of change and results framework were comprehensive, well aligned, sound and measurable. While the PDO statement for Objective 2 was pitched to the level of activities laid out in the theory of change, rather than to the outcomes, this did not undermine the tracking and assessment of outcomes, which were embedded in the theory of change and results framework (Section 9). The project's design, which focused on a particular set of sectors and activities, generated strong subproject support benefiting women and the poor and vulnerable. Support for early childhood facilities, afterschool activities, and elderly services responded to women's needs as caregivers thus freeing up their time to pursue employment and other income earning opportunities. Other subprojects strengthened services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence through mediation services and communications and outreach. Indeed, ultimately, most activities supported through subprojects addressed gender, directly or indirectly. (ICR para. 32). A number of subprojects were targeted to low-income and vulnerable populations (ICR para. 35).

Thanks to substantial upfront work to define the small grants subproject cycle and to develop an approach that was well-tailored to the challenges of supporting local CSOs in the design and delivery of community projects in a challenging context, project activities were launched quickly. Project selection criteria and procedures, supported by manuals, tools, and instruments, and the idea of piloting Quick Win subprojects, were critical design elements that enhanced project's effectiveness and efficiency. Pay-offs included the financing of 24 subprojects within a year, as well as the establishment of the project brand,



Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR), and its credibility to support CSOs. The ICR (para. 37) provides details on the preparation work, which enabled both VNGI and the Bank to collaborate on project design and supported early outreach and training activities for CSOs to promote their buy-in. Implementation arrangements and the complementary roles of the VNGI and the PTC were clearly defined and workable. The role of VNGI as the implementation agency, an institution with prior experience working in Sint Maarten and on similar projects in other countries and with substantial expertise, ensured sufficient capacity on technical and financial aspects. VNGI HQ and the in-country PIU worked together effectively and had the necessary logistical support to deliver project activities. Another positive element of project design was the comprehensive approach to CSO capacity building, encompassing a needs assessment, design of training, mentoring and coaching and the provision of tools and guidelines based on identified needs, frequent and in-depth field visits undertaken by the PIU, CSO coordination and networking support, and adequate measures of enhanced capacity.

Risks were adequately assessed, with most mitigation measures incorporated into the project design and implementation arrangements. The high risk for institutional capacity for implementation and sustainability was mitigated mainly by making VNGI responsible for project management, implementation and coordination and by incorporating CSO capacity development into the project design. VNGI's apolitical and highly technical status was a mitigating measure for the substantial political and governance risks identified, complemented by the transparency of the grant selection process, CSO training, and the responsibilities of the PTC. Outreach and sharing of information about subproject selection mitigated the substantial stakeholder risk. CSOs' fiduciary risk was appropriately mitigated by the Grant manual, requirement for audits of all subprojects, annual audits for the overall program, backed by VNGI's substantial capacity.

Quality-at-Entry Rating

Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

Supervision missions were proactive in responding to operational challenges and focused on development impact. VNGI and World Bank coordination meetings initially focused on fast-tracking project implementation and on the provision of advice and support as needed. After starting with virtual implementation support missions due to COVID-19 restrictions, from late 2021 (when restrictions were lifted), the Bank undertook in-person implementation support missions to Sint Maarten twice each year. These missions were complemented by bi-weekly and monthly joint coordination meetings during the first half of the implementation period until a good pace of implementation was achieved. Performance reporting was candid, with detailed discussion of substantive issues and recommendations for their resolution. The 2022 mid-term review provided an opportunity to identify areas for further improving project performance, including the annual updating of the capacity building and technical assistance plan to intensify coaching, mentoring and awareness creation to improve access to grants, especially for low-capacity small CSOs.

Key staff in the World Bank team covering fiduciary and safeguards aspects were available, including in-country, to address initial implementation issues. Close supervision of fiduciary aspects, particularly during the start-up phase in the case of financial management, supported the setting up of the bank account and the completion of the FM manual and provided technical support to VNGI. Safeguard aspects were also



closely supervised, especially at the outset, supporting the completion of the full set of environmental and social standard (ESS) instruments, templates and screening tools and reporting on compliance. Safeguards support also identified some potential risks with subprojects and resolved the in a satisfactory and timely manner. Continuity of the World Bank task team leader facilitated consistent follow-up on issues and dialogue with VGNI and the PTC and ensured stability in project supervision.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

M&E design was comprehensive for the most part and appropriate given the unique project context. The theory of change systematically laid out activities, outputs/intermediate results, and outcomes for each component, and included reasonable assumptions. The results framework was well aligned with the theory of change, providing clearly defined and measurable indicators for tracking progress and results. This was a formidable undertaking, given that: this was a new, innovative project design, never tried in Sint Maarten; it was a community-based, demand-driven project, covering a multiplicity of implementers, sectors, target beneficiaries and anticipated benefits; and capacity-building objectives are typically challenging to measure. Targets were set for all indicators, with some, in retrospect, considered to be conservative in light of the unique and complex nature of this project and the low levels of CSO capacities at the outset. The ICR cites in particular: outcome indicators 1, 2 and 4, and intermediate results indicators 1 and 2.

Institutional arrangements gave VNG International the responsibility for monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Most of the data for monitoring project outcomes was to come from CSO progress reports and be compiled and analyzed by VNGI, supplemented by beneficiary assessments to be conducted at the start, mid-point and end of the project. The operations manual included a detailed M&E plan to ensure adequate information flows among stakeholders and timely and effective documentation of project progress and impact. CSOs were to receive training on planning, M&E and reporting, providing the basis for VNGI progress reports that would update all RF indicators and provide other qualitative and quantitative information as described in the operations manual.

There were a few design shortcomings, all assessed as minor. *First*, while the theory of change and results framework were well aligned with each other, the PDO statement of Objective 2, “to provide civil society organizations with grant resources to implement reconstruction and resilience subprojects at the community level,” was pitched at the input or activity level of the theory of change and results framework and not at the outcome level. This is considered to be a minor shortcoming because the outcome orientation of the theory of change and results framework ensured attention to and measurement of outcomes. *Second*, initial issues on the M&E front (alignment of measurements with PAD definitions and late development of data collection instruments and other arrangements for a baseline survey, which lead



to reporting delays and quality issues) were initially delayed because of the priority attention paid to accelerate the subproject cycle and grant awards and subsequently resolved. *Third*, the complexity of designing the beneficiary assessment may have been underestimated, particularly in light of: the multiplicity of actors and activities supported under the project, the initial, urgent focus on delivering capacity building support and grants to local CSOs, and the lack of knowledge and experience, among local CSOs and beneficiaries, related to the beneficiary assessment tool, requiring time for information and training. *Fourth*, while the PIU, through frequent field visits, was poised to assess, support and ensure the functionality and utility of subprojects, there was no independent study planned to assess benefits flowing from subprojects, as a complement to beneficiary perspectives.

b. M&E Implementation

Once all instruments were in place the PIU and World Bank performance on reporting and analyzing results was strong. The PIU systematically monitored and reported in implementation progress across components and interventions. Consistent with the Grant Agreement requirements, the PIU consolidated monitoring information and submitted a detailed Progress Report every six months, providing: information on technical and physical progress, updates to the results framework, reporting on Environmental and Social Commitment Plan, and an assessment of grievances management. The reports were aligned with Annual Work Plans approved by the World Bank; and all nine Progress reports were submitted on time for feedback and subsequently finalized.

While delayed in their launch, beneficiary assessments, once initiated, were conducted more frequently than originally planned, with four implemented versus the three originally planned. This effort displayed a commitment by the project for a more rigorous monitoring and feedback mechanism, which informed subsequent grant cycles with the perspectives of beneficiaries. Of the two types of beneficiaries targeted in these assessments, responsiveness to the surveys was consistently high among CSOs that received the questionnaires, while the response rates for individual beneficiaries were low, despite follow-up efforts undertaken by the PIU. The ICR (para. 45) notes that, on the one hand, there may have been scope for adjusting the methodology and approach to improve the response rate of individual beneficiaries. On the other hand, stakeholders perceived that, in light of the participatory nature of intensive training and communication interventions delivered by the project, much appreciated by the beneficiaries, they may not have understood the importance of participating in the surveys. Not all CSOs disaggregated data on subproject beneficiaries by gender, leaving the PIU to report results using population parameters for Sint Maarten. The ISRs reported on indicators in the RF, with some delay on indicators dependent on beneficiary surveys. The disaggregation of subprojects into reconstruction and resilience was ultimately not reported as all subprojects met both criteria.

c. M&E Utilization

Utilization of M&E data was highest for the monitoring indicators related to CSO participation. The issue of insufficient uptake by new CSOs, which had not participated in the first rounds of calls for proposals, led to a decision to intensify CSO training efforts during the MTR which culminated in an expansion of interest from more CSOs. Monitoring data also indicated that subproject amounts on average were higher than initially estimated and that there was interest among some CSOs in implementing more than one subproject. This information was facted into project restructuring. M&E data, collected from CSO reports, beneficiary assessments, and PIU field visits, also provided evidence of achievement of



outcomes. An independent/third party verification of subproject benefits would have provided a valuable complement to the data on beneficiary satisfaction.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project's Environmental and Social Risk Category was rated Moderate at appraisal. During project preparation, VNGI developed an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) with environmental and social screening criteria to help assess site-specific risks and impacts, and specific mitigation measures to be implemented as part of the subproject grants. The ESMF followed the relevant Environmental and Social Standards (ESS) identified at the project concept stage, notably: ESS1. Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts, ESS2. Labor and Working Conditions, ESS3. Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management, ESS4. Community Health and Safety, ESS6. Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources, ESS8. Cultural Heritage, and ESS10. Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure. The ESMF also included provisions on how to address project workers under the project's Labor Management Plan (LMP). Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), GBV, and sexual exploitation and abuse prevention measures were also to be included in the small grants for subprojects. Implementation was to be guided by the Environmental and Social Standards of the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework. Consultations were held virtually prior to appraisal and a revised ESMF, Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP), and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) were submitted and found to be adequate for appraisal and negotiation. The ESRS, ESCP and SEP were initially disclosed on the World Bank's website on May 21, 2020, with updated versions re-disclosed on June 25, 2020, just prior to Board approval.

Given the nature and intent of the project, its overall social impacts were expected to be positive. The project was to screen out major civil works and any activities requiring involuntary resettlement. As an integral part of the operational manual, the VNGI prepared screening tools and social safeguards guidelines to support CSOs in the screening of subprojects and in the management of subproject impacts. The social risks from this project were to be mitigated by ensuring that all stakeholders would be informed and able to engage in the screening and oversight process, and that the grant recipients were equipped with appropriate strategies and capacity to identify risks and advise civil society partners on how to mitigate them. Additionally, the importance of managing stakeholder expectations was acknowledged.

The project complied with all applicable environmental and social standards (ESS) cited above, with ratings in the satisfactory range within the first year of implementation. As reported in the first (October 2020) ISR, the absence of instruments related to ESS2 (Labor and Working Conditions) led to moderately unsatisfactory ratings for ESS2 and for ESS1 (Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts), and an unsatisfactory rating for overall ESS performance. Thereafter, while appropriate instruments were put in place, the challenge was to apply the ESF requirements, such as the environmental and social screening tool, in subprojects, and report. The PIU addressed the challenges by: (1) supporting CSOs to develop plans to address OHS issues, using standard templates, hands-on advice and training;



and (2) interventions, which improved the timeliness and completeness of reporting. By mid-2022, all ratings were assessed as satisfactory. A temporary downgrading of overall ESS performance to moderately satisfactory was issued in the January 2023 ISR due to shortfalls in reporting, lack of clarity on the handling of waste material and debris and arrangements to monitor and supervise risk mitigation for ESS1. Thereafter, all applicable ESS ratings were assessed as satisfactory. Ratings for ESS3-10 were satisfactory throughout the duration of the project.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Standard templates and close supervision by the PIU helped to ensure that CSOs complied with fiduciary procedures during subproject implementation.

Financial Management. During preparation in October 2019, the Bank conducted a financial management (FM) assessment (updated in January 2020) to evaluate the adequacy of VNGI's FM system (planning, budgeting, accounting, internal controls, funds flow, financial reporting, and auditing arrangements) to: (a) correctly and completely record all project transactions and balances; (b) facilitate the preparation of regular, timely, and reliable financial statements; (c) safeguard the project's assets; and (d) undergo auditing arrangements acceptable to the World Bank. The assessment found that VNGI meets the criteria for receiving World Bank-managed funds. It was agreed to finalize FM arrangements for the provision of grants to CSOs and reflect them in the operational manual. Work to implement these steps and to recruit project auditors was funded under a project preparation grant. Given that an estimated 80 CSOs were expected to benefit from grants and in light of the inherent risks of the country context at appraisal, residual FM risk was assessed as Substantial.

Fiduciary compliance ratings were in the satisfactory range throughout project implementation. Initial minor issues encountered centered on the location of project accounts, finalizing needed revisions in the operational manual, and some gaps in internal control procedures for subprojects and the keeping of records to support completely the Interim Financial Reports. From the July 2023 ISR through the project's end (as reported in three subsequent ISRs), a satisfactory FM rating was maintained. Positive actions included the refunding of a small amount of ineligible expenditure (\$6,456) due to the bankruptcy of a CSO and the implementation of audit recommendations.

Procurement. During preparation, the Bank's assessment of VNGI procurement capacity, found that the institution possessed the capacity and systems required to implement and guide procurement activities, considering its experience implementing projects for the European Commission, World Bank, and numerous bilateral donors and in Sint Maarten for the Netherlands government and for the Netherlands Red Cross. Moreover, the Sint Maarten-based PIU was to be equipped with requisite procurement skills.

Procurement performance was rated satisfactory throughout the project's duration. About 80 percent of the project amount supported non-procurement activities, essentially the provision of grants and the support of training and operations. Standard templates and close supervision by the PIU helped ensure that CSOs complied with requirements.



c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

No unintended positive or negative impacts to report.

d. Other

No unintended impacts.

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The following lessons are a subset of lessons drawn from the ICR, slightly reworded by IEG to be more succinct.

The organization of a grant mechanism into multiple rounds of calls for proposals and grant approvals facilitates a learning-by-doing approach. Such an approach can stimulate improvements in monitoring and evaluation, enhance fiduciary and safeguards compliance, intensify supervision and support of ongoing subprojects, and expand CSOs' knowledge and opportunities to access grants. The piloting of Quick Wins facilitated a quick launch of the subproject cycle and provided the space to adjust periodically the grant manual and other operational and compliance instruments, based on implementation experience. Key improvements included the introduction of a financial assessment tool, implementation of E&S recommendations from Quick Win subprojects, and the launching of multiple beneficiary assessments to inform successive rounds. The multiple rounds also ensured that the size of the subproject portfolio at any point in time allowed for close PIU support and supervision, allowing more intensive attention and support to individual subprojects. Multiple rounds also helped to manage CSO expectations of funding. Even if denied funding, CSOs had the opportunity to strengthen their proposals and apply again. Multiple rounds also helped the project to reach more CSOs, through progressively broader outreach, and the sharing of systematic learning and knowledge with new and existing grantees.

A combination of proactivity and openness to provide a wide range of hands-on support to CSOs are critical for the building of CSOs' capacities and for lowering the barriers to smaller, lower-capacity CSOs' participation in the grant mechanism. Facilitated by a manageable set of subprojects to supervise and support, the PIU was proactive in supporting CSOs through all stages of the subproject cycle, from preparation through closure and audits. CSOs expressed a high



opinion of the PIU's support, with 84 percent of CSOs surveyed in the four survey rounds rating support as excellent. In practical terms, the PIU functioned as a "help desk" lowering the barriers to participation in the grant mechanism. It became in essence a CSO hub. The PIU's efforts to facilitate the participation of a few smaller, lower-capacity CSOs are evidenced in their availability and willingness to directly handle payments to suppliers, reducing the burden on CSO staff and avoiding the need in those cases for a financial audit after subproject completion.

The efficient functioning of government bodies serving as project advisory committees can be achieved through the clear and appropriate definition of its roles and responsibilities, the complementarity of its roles and responsibilities with those of the PIU, and the appointment of capable and committed leadership and members. Operations advisory committees often confront challenges, including maintaining the commitment of its members, ensuring the right level of participation and meeting when needed. In the case of this project, the role of the PTC was defined to focus on issues, which were high level (approval of subproject funding decisions), strategic (decisions to raise the ceiling and maximum implementation period for subproject proposals) or related to special circumstances (bankruptcy of a CSO, replacement of a CSO that abandoned a subproject). The PTC thus served a visible "check and balance" function for the grant award process, contributing in an important way to its reputation for objectivity. The role of the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB), as chair of the PTC was critical, as it is a well-respected institution in Sint Maarten, involved in all Trust Fund programs.

Once a project has successfully established a grant facility to support CSOs in the design and implementation of community-level subprojects and in the strengthening of local CSO capacity, there is potential to enhance prospects for the sustainability of activities and outcomes through the establishment of a CSO network. The project built a network of local CSOs, the Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR), which became synonymous with the project and continues to advance sustainability pathways created by the project. R4CR was created as the local name for the project in the early stages of implementation and quickly became a household name in Sint Maarten, once project results on the ground started to become visible. For CSO beneficiaries, R4CR became a mechanism for collaborative networking and a means for sustaining project objectives beyond its life by collating and sharing knowledge (tools, reports, templates) and helping to forge collaboration around coordinated CSO action. At the end-of-project conference, senior government leadership commended continued collaboration with government. Foresee Foundation, a local partner for VNGI and other CSOs are now collaborating on retaining the project offices as a space for continued engagement and a R4CR website, acting as a repository of all the project knowledge materials, has been retained as a resource for local CSOs with GI and Foresee Foundation websites.

13. Assessment Recommended?

Yes

Please Explain

It would be insightful to assess more closely and several years after closing the quality and sustainability of the benefits to the various target groups and some of the expected impacts anticipated in the PAD. Such an



assessment could also explore more in depth the success and sustainability of CSO capacity building, which appeared to be grounded in a sound design and a flexible, learning-by-doing approach during implementation, and whether their newly created network and other institution building continue to function and serve CSOs. There is potential to glean more experience relevant to other countries on the complementarity of public, private and community roles in post-disaster support at the community level.

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

Quality of Evidence. The ICR was clear in explaining the three main sources of evidence: project data, prepared and submitted by implementing CSOs; a series of four beneficiary assessments soliciting opinions of both CSOs and individual beneficiaries; and field visits by the PIU, which collected qualitative information and lessons and validated completion, functionality and use of subprojects by beneficiaries. It was also candid in assessing data quality. Though with some flaws, the data was sufficient to assess project results. As indicated in Section 9.a (M&E Design), an independent/third party verification of subproject benefits would have strengthened the evidence base considerably.

Quality of Analysis. ICR was both analytical and concise, providing a compelling storyline of the design and implementation of this project in a very difficult context. It was also systematic in assessing all elements of the theory of change and results framework, clearly linking evidence to findings.

Quality of Lessons. The lessons presented in the ICR were clearly drawn from the evidence and analysis and provided good insight on the experience of this innovative operation that could be relevant to other countries and other projects supporting NGOs in the design and implementation of community-based projects. The lessons were well linked to the ICR's narrative and ratings.

Results Orientation was strong, as the efficacy was analyzed and presented to link activities and outputs with outcomes. It would have been helpful for the assessment of project attribution and the counterfactual to know what other partners and projects were supporting post-hurricane and post-COVID projects at the community level at the time of this project's design and implementation and after its closing.

Internal Consistency/adherence to guidelines. The ICR followed the guidelines and was internally consistent.

a. Quality of ICR Rating Substantial

