



# Global Environment Facility

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GEF EVALUATION OFFICE:  
COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION:  
SYRIA (1994—2008)

**(Prepared by the GEF Evaluation Office)**

The following document contains two sections:

- 1) Key conclusions and recommendations from the Country Portfolio Evaluation conducted by the GEF Evaluation Office, including a small introduction describing the GEF support to Syria and the methodology. This summary is chapter 1 of the full report of the Country Portfolio Evaluation which is available on the GEF Evaluation Office Web site.
- 2) Response from the government of Syria to the evaluation.

## BACKGROUND

1. This document presents the main conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation conducted by the GEF Evaluation Office in Syria. It is presented to the GEF Council, as a Council information document, for discussion at the Council's June 2009 meeting. A full detailed report is available on the GEF Evaluation Office web site ([www.gefeo.org](http://www.gefeo.org)).

2. Syria has received support from the GEF through national, regional, and global projects since 1994. GEF funding in Syria is estimated at about \$12.7 million for 10 national projects (5 biodiversity, 2 climate change, 2 POPs, 1 multifocal) in addition to the national implementation of the global, GEF corporate Small Grants Programme (SGP). Climate change and biodiversity constitute the largest focal areas in terms of funding accounting for 42 and 36 percent of GEF financing, respectively. POPs and multifocal areas account for about 13 percent of GEF funding. There are no national projects in the land degradation focal area. Syria has participated in one international waters project, a regional project along the Mediterranean coast. In total, Syria has participated in 7 regional and 6 global projects, half of which are in the biodiversity focal area.

GEF Support to Syrian National Projects by Focal Area

Focal area	Million \$	Percentage of total
Climate change	5.360	42
Biodiversity	4.564	36
POPs	1.444	11
Multifocal	0.200	2
SGP	1.149	9
Total	12.717	100

3. Based on the overall purpose and terms of reference of the GEF country portfolio evaluations (CPEs), the evaluation of GEF support to Syria has the following objectives:

- Independently evaluate the **relevance and efficiency** of GEF support in a country from several points of view: national environmental frameworks and decision-making processes, the GEF mandate and achievement of global environmental benefits, and GEF policies and procedures.
- Assess the **effectiveness and results** of completed and ongoing projects in each relevant focal area.

- Provide additional **evaluative evidence** to other evaluations conducted or sponsored by the GEF Evaluation Office.
- Provide **feedback and knowledge sharing** to (1) the GEF Council in its decision-making process to allocate resources and to develop policies and strategies, (2) the country on its participation in the GEF, and (3) the different agencies and organizations involved in the preparation and implementation of GEF support.

4. Syria was selected for this year's CPE through a stratified randomized selection first among all countries in the region. In addition, Syria was considered a good choice because of the country's individual allocation for climate change under the Resource Allocation Framework and group allocation for biodiversity, and the country's relatively small GEF portfolio, compared to other similar countries in the region.

5. An evaluation team consisting of staff of the GEF Evaluation Office and a national consultant based in Syria, subcontracted by a regional environmental firm, conducted the Syria CPE between October 2008 and April 2009.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

### Results and Effectiveness

**Conclusion 1: GEF's support to biodiversity conservation has shown some impacts but has specifically contributed to the formal protection of globally significant biodiversity and strengthened management systems.**

6. The two GEF national projects in the biodiversity focal area supported improvements in the management of protected areas and assisted their expansion. At the level of impacts, biodiversity projects supported by the GEF introduced alternative livelihoods practices, which decrease the threats to biodiversity, such as dependency of local communities on biodiversity resources (medical and aromatic plants). In addition, these national projects have supported activities that have increased the number of migratory birds flying into the protected areas. However, the financial instruments to sustain these improvements upon project completion present challenges and require additional institutional reforms as presented in conclusion 4. On the institutional side, GEF's support to biodiversity projects was able to influence the institutional setup amongst Syrian government institutions, particularly by providing stronger coordination between the former Ministry of Local Administration and Environment<sup>2</sup> and the Ministry of Agriculture that led to improved management practices of protected areas.

7. The regional project for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dry Land Agro-Biodiversity was crucial in disseminating over 16 target varieties of wild relatives of fruit trees and native species, in addition to wild relatives and land races of wheat, barley, and legumes. The project promoted alternative land-use practices through collaboration with farmers that started to rehabilitate these species. These practices are being replicated to other agricultural lands across the country. The project provided the resources needed for

the establishment of a Genetic Resources Unit (GRU) in the General Commission for Agricultural Scientific Research and a herbarium for targeted species. These institutions are currently being financially supported by the government.

8. The national enabling activities in the biodiversity focal area prepared the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan which provided a nationally owned strategic basis for setting the policies for sound decision making and future investments in biodiversity protection. On the other hand, the global enabling activity supporting the development of a biosafety framework strengthened national capacity to develop draft regulatory biosafety framework for import and export of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs).

9. GEF's support in the biodiversity focal area has been quite successful in capacity building and awareness-raising which targeted government institutions, in addition to academic and local communities. Specifically, projects provided access to information on best practices, and increased awareness by local populations of lessons and best practices on the importance of preserving biodiversity and protected areas. In particular, the SGP continues to provide good opportunities for local communities, households, and NGO groups to learn and replicate results in relation to alternative livelihoods and new approaches for sustainable use and management of biodiversity resources.

**Conclusion 2: There is no data to estimate the direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but GEF support has influenced national energy efficiency laws with potential long lasting impacts.**

10. The project Supply-Side Efficiency and Energy Conservation and Planning set up a target to reduce national energy consumption by 1.83 percent and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 765.5 tons by the year 2008. However, there are no factual data to support this result. The project however introduced efficiency management systems (EMS) and maintenance management systems (MMS), which have been replicated to a number of power generation plants around the country. The project also created the National Energy Research Council (NERC); an official institution within the Ministry of Electricity mandated with researching new alternative energy resources and energy efficiency initiatives. The NERC was equipped with the necessary expertise to undertake energy audits. Furthermore, the project prepared two energy efficiency laws which have been recently enacted; the first is "efficiency standards for consumption of electrical energy in the domestic, service and commercial sectors," while the second is the "energy conservation law."

11. The SGP also contributed to GHG reduction through projects in biogas which offer good opportunities for a number of communities and NGO groups to learn and replicate results in this focal area.

**Conclusion 3: Results in other focal areas are limited to establishing the foundation for national action plans and policies and develop national capacities.**

12. **International waters.** The project Determination of Priority Actions for the Further Elaboration and Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Mediterranean brought to the attention of policy makers the negative impacts of land-based sources of pollutants on the coastal zone and marine environment. As a result, the Syrian Government adopted in 2008 the National Action Plan for Reduction of Pollutants from Land Based Sources which was prepared as part of this project. The plan was reflected into national policies and socio-economic development plans. The project also generated potential funding for several related projects to protect the global environment of the Mediterranean Sea through external investment institutions.

13. **Persistent organic pollutants.** The Enabling Activities for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants prepared the National Implementation Plan for Syria. The NIP has already enabled the initial collection, verification, and analysis of the situation and options that can inform decisions at all levels. As a result, the Government has allocated budgets for actions to eliminate POPs in Syria. The project also helped creating a system for data management of hazardous chemicals imported into Syria, and assisted government agencies in strengthening national capacities to manage POPs and chemicals, particularly with regard to proper management and disposal of solid hazardous wastes.

14. **Multifocal area.** The National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) project enabled the government institutions to develop new project concepts in biodiversity, land degradation, and climate change, and to coordinate between the requirements of the three relevant conventions. In addition, the project provided capacity building to government institutions and their staff, and highlighted the gaps present in existing capacities for determining needs and coordinating priorities in the three GEF thematic areas.

15. **Land degradation.** No projects in this focal area have been supported by the GEF, although there was a proposal supported by the government that was not approved by the GEF. This happened for several reasons: the UNCDD indicated that Africa was the priority for the GEF; there were not sufficient funds within the GEF; and it was decided that the Middle East and North Africa region would receive a program (MENArId). IFAD, one of the GEF Agencies, has financed an extensive rural development program in Syria since 1982 with components in land degradation, but with no support from GEF.

**Conclusion 4: Long-term sustainability of achievements continues to be a challenge.**

16. Long-term sustainability of GEF project results is a challenge in Syria. In that respect, two issues were identified during project implementation. The first is related to the ability of the government to introduce policy changes that reflect on the institutional and legal frameworks. In this domain, the government's response to changes in the areas of biodiversity and climate change has been sometimes slow, but often forthcoming. The second issue relates to allocation of the necessary financial resources to implement the

required measures. Due to the general financial framework law in Syria, executing agencies have faced many difficulties in acquiring the necessary funding for implementing the recommended measures in the GEF projects. Recurrent budgets are usually set based on the number of permanent employees, whose number cannot be changed without the issue of a special decree (meaning that it is not simple to increase human resources for implementation of the recommended measures), and the collection of additional funds as part of new financial instruments is not possible either due to the fact that government agencies are not entitled to play this role, which is foreseen only for the Ministry of Finance.

## **RELEVANCE**

**Conclusion 5: GEF support addressed national priorities in the biodiversity and climate change focal areas, however, other national priorities have not, such as in-land international waters and land degradation.**

17. The GEF portfolio in biodiversity protection and climate change constituted about 84 percent of GEF funding in Syria. These two focal areas were addressed in the last three five-year development plans that coincide with the period the GEF has worked in Syria. However, Syria has also equally pressing national priorities in integrated water resources management and sustainable land management but has not received support from the GEF. Due to fresh water scarcity in the region and the fact that Syria shares a number of important surface water bodies with its neighbors, one may point out to missed opportunities for the GEF to be involved in projects that directly affect the quality of life of the peoples of the region. Similar arguments may also be applicable to desertification and degradation of agricultural lands as food scarcity is becoming a problem of regional significance with the population explosion in the area.

18. There is the issue of global versus national priorities. While biodiversity and climate change projects are considered to be responding more to a global or international agenda, the other two focal areas related to water and land degradation are fully national priorities.

**Conclusion 6: Outcomes of SGP projects are more likely to be sustained by local communities.**

19. In agreement with the recently completed Joint Evaluation of the GEF-SGP, the evaluation in Syria found that the outcomes of the SGP projects are more likely to be sustained by local groups because project outcomes benefit them more directly in comparison to medium- or full-size projects, which require government funding in order to sustain these outcomes. The SGP provides access to GEF funds for local communities and NGOs responding to their priorities and needs within the GEF mandate and focal areas.

**Conclusion 7: Country ownership of the GEF portfolio is strong for national projects and to a lesser extent for regional and global projects.**

20. Concepts for national projects are typically proposed by the General Commission for Environmental Affairs (GCEA) in consultation with GEF implementing agencies (mainly UNDP) based on previously identified national priorities. The projects are fully locally “owned.” Consequently, when these projects are completed, the relevant governmental executing agencies attempt to integrate their outcomes into their mandate, and typically request additional budget allocations, although there are some shortcomings as presented in conclusion 4. Concerning regional and global projects, these are typically initiated by GEF Agencies, and communicated to national government counterparts, which in turn consult the GCEA to coordinate with relevant governmental agencies for approval to join the project. Government support at project completion is forthcoming to sustain project outcomes, however, to a lesser extent compared to national projects. This is evident in government cofinancing which has been found to be more significant when projects’ objectives are directly in line with national priorities for socio-economic development.

**EFFICIENCY**

**Conclusion 8: The GEF is perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect the projects proposals and implementation.**

21. The Syria CPE confirms the findings of previous evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office. National executing agencies consider GEF processes and procedures in the project preparation phase as overly complicated and inefficient. For that reason, project preparation is often delegated to GEF Agencies by governmental authorities. A key frustration is the long time delays in project approval and completion. Time period from project entry into GEF pipeline to Council approval may vary from 3 months to 4 years, and from Council approval to project start-up from 1 to 2 years. The time period for the entire processes (entry into GEF pipeline to project start-up) varied from 1.2 year to 5.4 years.

22. Another issue of concern is related to expected and actual completion dates. As many projects set unrealistic end dates to complete their very ambitious objectives; managerial and organizational problems arise, and executing agencies lose track of a firm timetable for incorporating their findings and conclusions into their institutional structures. Project extensions for medium- and full-size projects vary from 60 to 120 percent of planned project durations. Extensions for enabling activities vary from 27 to 100 percent.



**Conclusion 9: Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank does not have a program and Syria does not belong to any of the regional banks with direct GEF access.**

23. Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies. The only one in which Syria participates is IFAD. The World Bank has not had a lending program or a country strategy since 1986, although more recently, there has been support through technical assistance. Furthermore, Syria is not a member of any of the regional development banks which can manage GEF projects such as the Asian Development Bank and the African Development Bank.

**Conclusion 10: The focal point mechanism is overly centralized within the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs with no clear mechanism for developing and approving GEF supported projects.**

24. In Syria there is no clear and systematic mechanism such as a national committee for setting priorities, developing and approving GEF supported projects. The role of the GEF focal point is assigned to the Deputy Minister of State for Environmental Affairs (MSEA). The Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs is the primary executing agency for GEF projects in Syria. The Ministry oversees the work of the General Commission for Environmental Affairs (GCEA) which consists of a number of environmental directorates. The MSEA and the GCEA assume the responsibilities of the focal points for relevant international conventions in the GEF focal areas (for example, CBD, the UNCCD, the UNFCCC, and the Stockholm Convention). Line ministries relevant to GEF work such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Electricity are not represented in the focal point mechanism. In selecting priority areas for allocation of GEF funds, the GEF focal point consults with the conventions' focal points and national executing agencies using management tools such as project committees and priority setting workshops.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations to the GEF Council**

**Recommendation 1: GEF should increase its funding for land degradation and water management issues, both high priorities for countries such as Syria.**

25. GEF projects focus mostly on biodiversity and climate change, with land degradation and inland international water receiving no support despite being high national priorities. As mentioned earlier, there are no projects to combat land degradation. The only GEF supported international waters project in which Syria has participated is a regional action program for the Mediterranean Sea. This project did not address important shared surface water bodies and fresh water scarcity issues in the region. This is a particularly difficult situation for a country like Syria where land degradation and fresh water are major challenges in the environmental sector.

26. The possibility of additional allocations for activities in the field of sustainable land management and integrated water resource management should be further explored. In the future, GEF's support should include:

- Increased support to national projects combating land degradation and desertification; and
- Increased support to regional projects on international inland waters. In particular, the GEF should provide support to the government of Syria based on the extensive experience it has acquired in this field from other parts of the world.

**Recommendation 2: The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to GEF investment agencies.**

27. Syria is in an exceptional situation in regards to having limited access to GEF investment agencies. Other countries may be facing similar circumstances. The GEF should conduct an inventory of such countries and develop proposals on how support can be provided through other institutions.

#### **Recommendations to the Syrian Government**

**Recommendation 1: Adopt a proactive role in creating appropriate financial instruments, and in setting-up necessary legislative and institutional frameworks that support the sustainability of GEF projects results.**

28. Financial instruments should be developed by the government in order to ensure sustainability of projects outcomes. Applicable examples in the Syrian legal and institutional contexts include:

- Private sector participation in the management of protected areas. In this respect, the involvement of the local community which has a clear interest in the sustainability of this natural resource for their livelihood is crucial for the success of this instrument.
- Application of special fees to cover costs of implemented measures recommended by GEF projects. Syrian legislation provides for the creation of government establishments of economic nature which are expected to achieve cost recovery and can maintain their profits for further development. Such a mechanism may be considered in order to provide adequate financial support for the implementation of the management plans generated by the GEF supported projects for protected areas.
- Providing necessary resources to government agencies to train their personnel in a system that ties training budget allocations to their ability to implement the measures recommended by the GEF projects.

- Introducing a system of registration fees for newly introduced living modified organisms in Syria that supports the implementation of the regulatory requirements of the Cartagena biosafety protocol.

**Recommendation 2: Syria should establish a permanent GEF national coordination committee.**

29. The focal point mechanism should be strengthened through the establishment of a permanent GEF national committee. The GEF committee should be linked to existing government development plans and strategies such as the 10<sup>th</sup> five-year development plan and the NEAP. Committee members would involve convention focal points from the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs and the GCEA; a broad range of ministerial partners involved in GEF work (for example the Ministries of Agriculture Agrarian Reform, Electricity, and Irrigation); the SGP; NGOs; the private sector; and academia. Such a committee would set the priorities for programming and implementation of GEF resources. Approaches to consider include the following:

- Use the NCSA enabling activity to identify capacity required to implement the strategy and plans for meeting the requirements of each convention.
- Establish priority plans and budgets to act on the identified country needs for future GEF support. As there are very little funds left in GEF-4, there is a need to consider GEF-5.
- Actively seek cooperation with other GEF implementing agencies such as the World Bank, IFAD, and FAO.
- Expand the roles of national executing agencies in projects preparation process to include stakeholder government institutions, NGOs, and the SGP.
- In coordination with neighboring countries, consider applying for projects in land degradation and inland international waters through funds allocated for GEF-5, and attempt to benefit from the experience of GEF in international water basins with political sensitivity.
- Use the national dialogue initiative to involve a wide range of stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation team led by Anna Vigg, Evaluation Officer, and Claudio Volonté, Chief Evaluation Officer of the GEF Evaluation Office. The team's lead consultant was Mohamad Kayyal subcontracted by a regional environmental company, EcoConServ Environmental Solutions.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs was reinstated on 23 April 2009 based on Presidential Decree No. 25 (2009).



Damascus, 26 May 2009

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**Subject: GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation-Syria  
(1994-2008)**

Dear Ms. Barbut

Reference to the Country Portfolio Evaluation for Syria which was conducted between September 2008 and April 2009, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation for the time and effort exerted by the GEF evaluation office for undertaking this evaluation, particularly with reference to assessing results, impacts, relevance and projects' efficiency.

The results of the Country Portfolio Evaluation which included 10 national projects with an estimated GEF investment of \$12.7 million have provided us with significant information on the results and outcomes of these projects and will assist us in developing future proposals in the GEF focal areas.

We are pleased of the conclusion reached by the GEF evaluation team that country ownership of the GEF portfolio is strong for national projects; concur that GEF support did not address the national priorities relevant to in-land international waters and land degradation; and strongly agree with the recommendation that GEF should increase its funding for land degradation and water management issues.

We also support the GEF evaluation team conclusion that Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies and the recommendation that GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to GEF investment agencies.

Finally, we agree about the need to strengthen the national focal point mechanism and to establish a permanent GEF national coordination committee. We also support the need to adopt a proactive role in creating appropriate financial instruments, and in setting-up necessary legislative and institutional frameworks to ensure the sustainability of GEF projects results.

In summary, the Syrian Government concurs with the GEF evaluation team conclusions and recommendations. The Syrian Government will further undertake the necessary measures to implement these recommendations, and looks forward to a fruitful cooperation that addresses its national priorities with the Global Environmental Facility in the upcoming GEF phases.

Yours truly;

Imad Hassoun  
Deputy Minister of State for Environmental Affairs  
GEF National Focal Point for Syria