

Review of the GEF Approach to Results-Based Management



The ongoing review on RBM is an input to the Sixth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS6).

FINDINGS

1. Compared to GEF-5, the RBM system has improved in response to the GEF-6 policy recommendations.

The GEF Secretariat developed an RBM work plan for GEF-6 and has made progress in its implementation. As a result, capacities of the RBM team have been enhanced and corporate results reporting strengthened. Overall progress in aligning and streamlining the results framework and tracking tools, upgrading the GEF's information technology platform to support RBM, and data quality has been moderate.

2. The GEF RBM system is considered essential for the partnership.

The importance of, and need for, RBM to promote accountability, decision making, and learning is well recognized across the GEF partnership. Stakeholders such as the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, and the conventions acknowledge that it is important for tracking and reporting on results of GEF activities to its stakeholders—especially reporting to the Council and the conventions. The present RBM system is perceived to be

underserving the decision-making and learning-related needs of the GEF partnership.

3. The effectiveness and efficiency of the GEF RBM system is weak. The GEF RBM system primarily tracks inputs, outputs, and short-term outcomes of GEF activities. It gives less attention to tracking long-term impact. Despite improvements, the tracking tools for biodiversity focal area and multifocal area projects continue to be complex. There are gaps in the submission, management, and quality of information provided by tracking tools. Limited use of the RBM system for decision making and learning has led to lower cost-effectiveness.

4. Information from the RBM system is used primarily for reporting. The information is used to prepare the corporate scorecard, the annual monitoring reports (AMRs), and reports to the GEF conventions, and is shared through the GEF website. However, results-related information is not readily available to the GEF stakeholders for learning, and the extent of its use for informing GEF strategies varies by focal area. Information on

PURPOSE AND METHODS: The review of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approach to results-based management (RBM) assesses the role of RBM in the GEF partnership; the extent to which the GEF RBM system is relevant, effective, and efficient; utilization of information generated through the RBM system; and the extent to which the concerns noted in the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5) and GEF-6 policy recommendations have been addressed. The review draws on information from primary and secondary sources, including review of relevant documents, websites, databases, and semi-structured interviews of key informants. This brief presents emerging findings of the review.

WEB PAGE: <http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/results-based-management-rbm-gef>

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resource availability, utilization, and corporate efficiency is more readily available and finds greater use in guiding management decisions.

5. The GEF Project Management Information System (PMIS) is not keeping pace with expectations. Since it was first operationalized in 2001, the GEF PMIS has improved. However, these improvements have not kept pace with the needs of the GEF partnership. Concerns related to data quality, low user friendliness, and limited use for decision making remain. Its potential to promote learning and aid real-time decision making is not being adequately realized.

HISTORY

During GEF-3, tracking tools were introduced to monitor the results of biodiversity focal area projects focused on protected areas. For GEF-4, results indicators were developed for all GEF focal areas. In 2006, with the transfer of the monitoring function from the GEF IEO to the Secretariat, an RBM team was established in the GEF Secretariat. In 2007, an RBM framework was approved by the GEF Council. The aim of the framework was to improve management effectiveness and accountability through specification of realistic expected results, tracking achievement of results, providing support for management decisions, and reporting on performance. The RBM framework also specified the AMR as the principal instrument for RBM-related reporting.

The Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS4, 2010) noted the progress made through the establishment of the GEF RBM framework and the introduction of tracking tools for all focal areas. However, it also reported that the framework had not been integrated into GEF strategies and policies. It called for further work on integration of the RBM framework for the GEF-5 replenishment period.

The GEF-5 programming document accordingly included a corporate results framework that specified results and targets for GEF activities approved during GEF-5. The focal area strategy documents specified the results of the supported activities and the indicators to track results. OPS5 found that the GEF RBM system was overly complex and burdensome for the GEF Agencies. Taking note of the OPS5 findings, the GEF-6 policy

recommendations called for improvement in the GEF RBM system.

In October 2014, the GEF Council approved an RBM Action Plan, which outlined the key actions to be undertaken during the GEF-6 period. This plan was revised in 2016 and its scope broadened to include additional activities for GEF-6.

RESULTS

Action on GEF-6 policy recommendations. The RBM Action Plan for GEF-6 is under implementation and has been updated to reflect the evolving needs of the GEF partnership. Of the activities listed in the revised plan, substantial progress has been made in enhancing the Secretariat's capacity for RBM. A Lead RBM Specialist was brought on board to lead the RBM team; this, along with increased resources for implementation of the work plan, has enhanced the Secretariat's capacity in this area. Corporate results reporting has also been strengthened through publication of a succinct corporate scorecard, which summarizes progress on corporate environmental results and utilization of GEF resources, and tracks indicators on corporate effectiveness and efficiency.

There are other areas, however, where progress has been moderate. Although focal area tracking tools were aligned and streamlined during GEF-6, the tools for the biodiversity focal area and the multifocal area are still complex and burdensome. Upgrade of the PMIS has still not materialized, despite more than two years of delay. In June 2012, the GEF Council assigned the task of upgrading the PMIS to the GEF Trustee. After delays in the upgrade, the Secretariat took the lead on improving the PMIS. Although some features have been rolled out, a full upgrade of the PMIS has not yet materialized. During the GEF-6 period, the RBM team undertook an exercise to assess the quality of data on project results. It found weaknesses in terms of gaps in information availability and the quality of available data.

Relevance of the RBM system. RBM is considered relevant for the GEF partnership. It is essential for systematic reporting on GEF accomplishments to the GEF Council and to the environmental conventions the GEF serves. Its role in making information on results of GEF projects available to a wider range

of stakeholders is also appreciated. Secretariat and Agency staff find the RBM system relevant in meeting their information needs for decision making. They are able to draw on the PMIS for information on resource utilization, inputs, and outputs, which is useful for their programming decisions. While the importance of information on long-term results is also recognized, this information becomes available after a considerable time lag—and by the time it becomes available, it may not be as relevant for programming decisions, as funding priorities may have shifted. Although the potential of the RBM system to provide a platform to share experiences from GEF Agencies and to provide real-time information to aid decision making is recognized, the present system is deemed to be weak in these areas.

Effectiveness and efficiency. At the corporate level, although outcomes, outputs, and inputs of GEF activities are tracked, long-term results do not receive adequate attention. The impact of GEF activities on the drivers of environmental degradation that the GEF seeks to address are not tracked systematically. The impact evaluations prepared by the GEF IEO do provide insights on long-term impacts, but these cover only a few selected activities. The indicators on corporate environmental results primarily track the outcomes and outputs of GEF activities. The targets set for several of these results are either too high or too low, and are often not informed by the experience during GEF-4 and GEF-5. Further, reporting on these indicators is primarily restricted to promised results of the GEF-6 period and does not cover progress on promised results for the GEF-5 period. Most of the other indicators tracked by the RBM system pertain to corporate effectiveness and efficiency. Overall, these provide a good indication of how efficiently GEF resources are being converted into outputs.

As noted in the GEF 2015 Annual Performance Report (APR 2015), the focal area tracking tools for GEF-6 have been streamlined and show improved alignment with the focal area results framework. However, biodiversity focal area tracking tools still remain complex, and a lighter approach to tracking results of multifocal area projects has yet not been developed. The GEF Agencies find the burden of reporting on tracking tools for other focal areas to be reasonable.

Less attention has been given to timely submission and completeness of tracking tools, and to ensuring that this information is utilized and made readily accessible to the GEF Agencies and other stakeholders. APR 2015 noted significant gaps in the submission of tracking tools by the Agencies as well as concerns linked to gaps in the retrieval, storage, and management of tracking tools. Even when tracking tools are submitted, the quality of data provided by the tracking tools is a concern. During 2015–16, the RBM team of the GEF Secretariat undertook an internal review to assess the extent of tracking tool submission and information quality. The assessment confirmed the gaps that had earlier been reported by the GEF IEO. An interesting finding of the RBM team's assessment was that it showed that, despite being complex and burdensome, the quality of information and the submission rate were better for the biodiversity focal area due to sustained effort by the focal area team on follow-up with the Agencies. The Secretariat has recently developed a dashboard to facilitate tracking of project implementation progress and tracking tool submission. This measure might facilitate the Secretariat in monitoring submission of tracking tools and improving compliance.

Utility. The information gathered through the RBM system is used for reporting through the AMRs, the corporate scorecard, reports to the GEF conventions, the GEF website, and analysis that may be requested by the GEF Council. Of these reporting tools, the corporate scorecard introduced during the GEF-6 period is perceived as useful by a wide array of GEF stakeholders. Compared to attention to reporting, less attention has been given to the use of RBM to facilitate decision making and learning.

Use of tracking tools varies across focal areas. Focal areas such as biodiversity and international waters use it for aggregation and analysis. The biodiversity

focal area team reported some use of the tools in tweaking its programs. The chemicals and waste focal area found the tools useful in tracking intervention costs over time, enabling it to develop cost benchmarks. The international waters focal area team prepares a portfolio review on an annual basis, which is then shared with the focal area task force and Agencies to foster learning.

The internal review undertaken by the RBM team on tracking tool data confirmed concerns related to data completeness and quality, which limits their usefulness. One of the missing pieces has been the level of resources devoted to follow-up with the Agencies to ensure timely submission of completed tracking tools.

PMIS. The GEF Secretariat, the GEF IEO, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), and the GEF Agencies rely on the PMIS for much of their information needs on GEF projects. While the system's usefulness in providing information on GEF projects and programs is appreciated, many feel that the PMIS is not serving the partnership as well as it should. Most users raised concerns about the quality of PMIS information, found it difficult to use, and felt that it has so far played a limited role in providing real-time information useful for decision making. While the PMIS has certainly improved compared to 2001 when it was first operationalized, it has not kept up with the evolving needs of the GEF partnership. One of the reasons for this has been a delay in delivery of a system upgrade, which had been approved by the GEF Council in June 2012. The GEF Trustee was tasked with the upgrade, which was expected to be delivered by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2014. Among other things, the upgrade was expected to automate the workflow and facilitate easy self-service reporting. Delivery of the full upgrade was delayed. In May 2015, the GEF Secretariat reported that it had assumed responsibility for the upgrade. Work on system upgrading is still in progress.

ISSUES TO ADDRESS

1. The analysis conducted so far underscores the need to update the RBM framework so that environmental trends and long-term impacts of GEF activities on the drivers of environmental degradation are tracked systematically. So far, the

focus has been on the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of GEF activities. These are important, but there also needs to be systematic tracking of long-term impacts so that whether, and the extent to which, the GEF delivered on the GEF 2020 strategy may be ascertained.

2. The GEF Secretariat needs to streamline the tracking tools for biodiversity and multifocal area projects.

For the biodiversity focal area, alternative approaches such as the use of remote sensing information to track changes on the ground need to be explored. As noted by OPS5, tracking tools for multifocal projects need to be streamlined so the total reporting requirement is much less than the sum of the tracking tools of all focal areas covered by a given project. While tracking tools for multifocal projects need to be pared down in terms of the number of individual focal area results that ought to be reported on, they need to better capture the results of targeting multiple focal areas together. Attention also needs to be given to follow-up on and better management of, and easy access to, information from tracking tools.

3. Reporting on results needs to give adequate attention to past results.

While the AMR performs a role, instead of focusing on the results of the cohort of projects completed and those that had a midterm review during the preceding year, the results of GEF activities should be reported on by replenishment period based on cumulative information from terminal evaluations, tracking tools, and midterm reviews. This outlook also needs to be reflected in reporting on results through the corporate scorecard.

4. PMIS upgrading has been delayed by several years. This work needs to be completed with a sense of urgency.