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**PROGRESS REPORT OF ONGOING WORK OF THE  
GEF INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE**

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

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## INTRODUCTION

1. This information document reports on progress of the work program of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) for fiscal year 2015 that was approved by the Council at its May 2015 meeting. This document contains an overview of ongoing work in the four evaluation streams of the Office—impact evaluations, country level evaluations, thematic evaluations, performance evaluations as well as the Second International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development.

## IMPACT EVALUATIONS

### Biodiversity Focal Area Impact Evaluation

2. The Joint Impact Evaluation of GEF Support to Protected Areas and Protected Area Systems aims to assess the impact of GEF support to biodiversity conservation through support to non-marine protected areas (PAs) and PA systems.<sup>1</sup> It fits within an ongoing set of impact evaluations covering each of its focal areas. The independent evaluation offices of the GEF and UNDP<sup>2</sup> are jointly managing this impact evaluation, with technical support from the IUCN WCPA-SSC Joint Task Force on Biodiversity and Protected Areas, and the University of Maryland Global Land Cover Facility. A Reference Group and a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) have also been convened to provide inputs on strategic and technical concerns. The Reference Group is composed of members of the GEF Biodiversity Task Force—of which biodiversity specialists of all GEF Agencies are members—and other relevant GEF stakeholders. The TAG is composed of six senior-level conservation scientists and evaluators. The evaluation approach paper was approved in June 2013.

3. The evaluation seeks to answer three main questions:

- 1) What have been the impacts and contributions of GEF and/or UNDP support (positive or negative, intended or unintended) in biodiversity conservation in protected areas and their immediately adjacent landscapes?
- 2) What have been the contributions of GEF and/or UNDP support to the broader adoption of biodiversity management measures at the country level through protected areas and protected area systems, and what are the key factors at play?
- 3) Which GEF- and/or UNDP-supported approaches and contextual conditions, especially those affecting human well-being, are most significant in enabling and hindering the

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<sup>1</sup> Assessing biodiversity protection impacts in marine protected areas is also important, and was done as part of the Impact Evaluation of GEF Support to International Waters in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas, which focused on the International Waters focal area. This has allowed the GEF IO to identify the critical factors that contribute to and hinder the achievement of impact in coastal and marine ecosystems.

<sup>2</sup> GEF funding constitutes the single largest earmarked source of income for UNDP since 1991, contributing approximately \$286 million per year, 50 percent of the UNDP budget for environmental programming and projects.

achievement of biodiversity management objectives in protected areas and their immediately adjacent landscapes?

4. The evaluation is comprised of three main components: the portfolio analysis, global analysis, and case study analysis. The portfolio analysis will characterize the 600 GEF projects that have been identified as supporting PAs and PA systems as of August 2014. Through desk reviews of terminal evaluations, completed projects in the portfolio are being analysed for environmental and socioeconomic outcomes, as well as for the extent to which GEF-supported initiatives have been adopted by stakeholders.

5. The global analysis component uses remote sensing data and global databases to determine changes in forest cover, species population trends, and management effectiveness. Changes will be compared between GEF-supported and non-GEF PAs, as well as before and after GEF support took place to assess the extent to which GEF support plays a significant role in producing positive outcomes. Contextual variables will also be tested for correlations with these biodiversity-related changes. A more in-depth propensity matching analysis is also being done for two countries to triangulate the global findings. In addition, areas of GEF support will be matched against species richness to assess the extent to which GEF is financing biodiversity-rich areas.

6. The case study analysis component involves field visits to 7 countries and 28 PAs. Of the 28, 17 have received GEF support and 11 have not. Qualitative information from interviews of government staff, NGOs, local communities and other stakeholders are being analysed primarily using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to identify combinations of factors that produce positive or negative outcomes at the PA system level and at the PA level. Analyses will also be done to assess the role of GEF support in contributing to these outcomes.

7. Preliminary results of these analyses were presented at the CBD Conference of Parties in the Republic of Korea in October 2014, and will be presented at the World Parks Congress in Australia in November 2014. The final report will be presented to the GEF Council in May 2015 and to the UNDP Executive Board in June 2015.

8. As part of this evaluation, a database of Management Effectiveness Tracking Tools (METTs) has been developed which will be turned over to the GEF Secretariat and the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Other databases developed as part of this evaluation, such as on forest cover change and species population trends, will also be turned over to the GEF Secretariat and made available for public use.

### **Mainstreaming of Impact**

9. The IEO is currently focusing on developing ways to enhance evaluation utility across the GEF by seeking to mainstream impact evaluation into other evaluation streams in the Office rather than have it as an isolated activity carried out by a single team. This is especially relevant for country-level evaluations. The Impact team has been providing support to the Country Portfolio Evaluation in the use of the impact databases of GEF completed projects. Currently the impact team is also exploring with the CPE team ways to address impact-related issues during CPEs. Methods being tested through the biodiversity impact evaluation have been introduced to

other evaluation streams to explore how these and remote sensing analyses already done might be used in other types of evaluations. Other innovative methods to be explored for data collection include mobile communication technology and the use of sensors and drones.

## **COUNTRY LEVEL EVALUATIONS**

10. The GEF-5 multi-annual cycle of country level evaluations is being completed with the last three Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs) during Fiscal Year 15. Two of them are presently ongoing in Russia and Morocco and one CPE is just being launched in Tajikistan, where a pre-evaluation mission will take place during the last week of October. These three CPEs will bring the final number of country level evaluations conducted during GEF-5 to a total of 16 across all GEF geographic regions.

11. Annual reporting on findings and recommendations emerged from country level evaluations continues to take place in the Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Reports (ACPERs), which are presented every year to Council at its May/June session. To date, three ACPERs have been completed during GEF-5, covering the three main GEF geographic regions:

- (a) ACPER 2012, summarizing the country level evaluations completed in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. This ACPER reports on four CPEs – Nicaragua, Brazil, Cuba and a Cluster CPE covering six Small Island Developing States (SIDS) members of the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)<sup>3</sup> – and two Country Portfolio Studies (CPSs), El Salvador and Jamaica;
- (b) ACPER 2013, summarizing the country level evaluations completed in the Asia and South Pacific region. This ACPER reports on three CPEs – India, Sri Lanka and a Portfolio Evaluation covering Vanuatu and the regional projects executed by the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) – and one CPS in Timor Leste;
- (c) ACPER 2014, summarizing the country level evaluations completed in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. This ACPER reports on two CPEs – Tanzania and Eritrea – and one CPS in Sierra Leone.

12. The ACPER 2015 will report to Council spring session in 2015 on the last three evaluations mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, two of which – Russia and Tajikistan – relate to the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region and one – Morocco – to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

13. Country level evaluations processes, methods and tools are constantly being updated and refined, and are being aligned with those developed and used by other evaluation streams in the Office to increase in-house synergies. Collaboration is ongoing with the Impact Team at two levels: (a) adaptation and integration in country level evaluations of the system-level Theory of Change (TOC) approach on broader adoption mechanisms for progress to impact analysis; and (b) use of GIS and Remote Sensing data for use in country level impact analysis. Further methodological work is ongoing on refining the assessment procedure for country ownership and

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<sup>3</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

driven-ness developed for the country ownership analysis conducted in the fifth GEF Overall Performance Study (OPS5).

14. Process-wise, efforts are being deployed to foster comprehensive in-depth stakeholder engagement and communication all along the evaluation, with the following objectives: (a) to ensure the evaluation process is transparent and participatory while at the same time independent; (b) to gather additional information and data that can be triangulated with more traditional data sources; and (c) to promote the utility of the evaluation once completed, by facilitating learning and dissemination of evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. These objectives are being pursued through a number of means including in-country stakeholder consultation workshops at the start and completion of the evaluation, webinars and an online stakeholder consultation platform moderated by the evaluation team. The platform and webinars are used to discuss key evaluation questions at scoping, share information on the evaluation process and fieldwork during the data gathering phase, and conduct due diligence on the draft evaluation products at completion. Two online stakeholder consultation platforms have been launched and are being tested in the two ongoing Russia and Morocco CPEs, with support from the Office's Knowledge Management Team.

15. Preparatory work on country level evaluation programming for GEF-6 is ongoing. In line with the recommendations of the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function, fewer country level evaluations will be planned during GEF-6. Furthermore, the country selection criteria will be revised with a view to make country selection more strategic. Measures being considered include the introduction of a minimum portfolio size and the prevalence of a focal area or theme in the portfolio. Other measures being considered include adding a final consultation workshop in the country to discuss the full draft report, to be held after the stakeholder consultation workshop where a concise aide memoire with key preliminary findings is discussed. Finally, consideration is given to adequately reduce the period covered in CPEs, presently going back to the start of GEF support in a country, to avoid problems of securing accurate and reliable data on project going back too far in time, while at the same time having a sufficiently mature portfolio, i.e. including a minimum amount of completed projects to be able to observe results.

16. Joint and/or coordinated evaluations with either the independent evaluation units of GEF Agencies, or the countries themselves (as was done with Sri Lanka) will continue to be pursued, with different aims. Joining with GEF Agencies' evaluation units reduces the evaluation burden to the country, generates cost savings and creates synergies among evaluation products. Conducting joint evaluations with those countries where the necessary conditions of institutional independence are in place enhance ownership of evaluation results and promote follow-up and utility of evaluations at country level. The use of national expertise for both the conduct of the evaluation and the peer review support to enhance credibility and use of evaluation results at country level will continue to be given priority in selected countries where adequate national evaluation capacities exist. In line with what was recommended by the Second Professional Peer Review, efforts on enhancing inclusiveness and in-depth engagement with GEF stakeholders at global as well as country level during the evaluations will continue to be deployed through online consultation platforms, webinars and production of specific knowledge products, in close collaboration with and support from the Office's Knowledge Management Team.

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

17. Performance evaluations provide feedback on the quality of the GEF portfolio, GEF policies and processes, and project M&E across the portfolio. They also assess efficiency and effectiveness of GEF supported activities and processes in delivering the expected outputs and outcomes.

18. During the GEF-5 period the IEO: prepared Annual Performance Reports (APR) for the period FY2010 to FY2013; undertook mid-term evaluations on System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR MTE) and National Portfolio Formulation Exercises (NPFE MTE); and, undertook targeted studies on performance related topics including a detailed analysis on multi-focal area projects, resource mobilization, co-financing, elapsed time in GEF project cycle, results based management, knowledge management, greenhouse gas (GHG) emission abatement and avoidance benefits of GEF projects, and progress towards achievement of GEF-5 corporate targets. Several of these studies were undertaken as an input to OPS5.

19. For the GEF-6 period, the Office will continue to prepare APR as an annual feature. An evaluation to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the process for expanding the GEF partnership under article 28 will be undertaken. The Office will also continue its consultations with the Agencies on revising the terminal evaluation guidelines. Although several iterations of the drafts of the guidelines have been shared and discussed with the Agencies, it has been difficult to arrive at a consensus. With start of the new replenishment period, the Office will resume its efforts on renewing the consultations and finalizing the guidelines.

20. The IEO has already started preparing for APR2014, which will be presented to the GEF Council during its meeting in summer of 2015. The approach paper for APR2014 is presently under preparation and will become available by the end of November 2014. The IEO is presently interacting with the Agencies to ensure timely submission of terminal evaluations that will be reported on in the APR. The APR will present independent assessments on project outcomes and risks to sustainability, factors affecting attainment of project results, and quality of M&E arrangements. The APR will also include a summary of management action record (MAR) and an agency performance matrix.

21. During the past year, the Office has tracked some 150 terminal evaluations of completed projects that were approved during the Pilot Phase to GEF-2 period. Most of these projects were completed before 2002, the year when the Office started tracking terminal evaluations systematically. The results of these projects have not yet been reported on through APR. The gap in coverage for early GEF replenishment phases has limited the extent to which the Office can present ratings based on the GEF replenishment period in which projects were approved. During the past year the Office has undertaken desk review of a sizable number of these terminal evaluations. A synthesis of the findings will be presented in APR2014. This will shed more light on the performance of the projects that were designed during the early years of GEF operation, and will facilitate comparisons with the projects approved in the subsequent years.

22. In its May 2011 meeting, the GEF Council decided to broaden the GEF partnership under the provisions of paragraph 28 of the GEF Instrument by approving the policies, procedures, and criteria for a pilot on accrediting new institutions to serve as GEF Partners for the

implementation of GEF projects. The Council also instructed the GEF IEO to initiate an evaluation on the pilot at the earlier of the two milestones: (a) two years after the first five agencies have been accredited or (b) January 2015. In its November 2013 meeting, the Council gave its approval to the progression of two agencies from Stage II to Stage III accreditation. In its May 2014 meeting the Council gave approval to two more agencies for graduation to Stage III of accreditation. Thus, to date, four agencies have achieved Stage III accreditation. Due to the slow progress, it is the second trigger that will be relevant for this evaluation. Given the delays in accreditation, the MTE will focus on efficiency and effectiveness of accreditation policies and procedures. It will be too early to assess the effects of the expansion of the GEF partnership.

## **THEMATIC EVALUATIONS**

23. Thematic evaluations conducted by the IEO assess topics of concern to all GEF activities and provide a basis for decision making and lesson learning on specific themes. These evaluations are organized in four levels: program, process, focal area and cross-sectoral evaluations. Topics range from strategies and policies to cross-cutting programs. In addition to the evaluative work for the GEF Trust Fund, the thematic evaluation team provides support at full cost recovery to the two adaption funds managed by the GEF: Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).

24. The thematic evaluations team launched the Good Practice Study on Indicators Development, Selection and Use Principles for Climate Change Adaptation Monitoring and Evaluation in August. The IEO hosts Climate-Eval, a community of practice, whose domain of work is to improve the evaluation of climate change. The IEO is undertaking the study on the behalf of Climate-Eval. The study aims to synthesize good practices in indicator development and selection principles, and use for climate change adaptation interventions. The terms of reference for the study were prepared and shared in a blog on Climate-Eval. The study team has completed an outline for the study and a literature review of the state-of-the-art on adaptation indicator principles towards the development, selection and use of these indicators, including an overview of categories of indicators, and their use and practical examples of how various programs and organizations develop, select and use indicators in climate change adaptation settings.

25. During the course of the study, the team is taking into account contributions made by the members of the Climate-Eval community of practice through on-line consultations. The draft report of the study will be present at the Second International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development to be held November 4-6, 2014 in Washington, DC. The final report of the study will incorporate discussions that take place at the Conference and comments from blog postings on Climate-Eval. The study will be completed by the end of January 2015.

26. The ongoing Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities is in its final phase. The evaluation aims to provide lessons learned from implementing Enabling Activities and evaluative evidence of the role of Enabling Activities in the overall catalytic effect of the GEF, as indicated through previous evaluations conducted by the Office. The evaluation will assess trends in the Enabling Activities portfolio, and explore capacity development and the efficiency and effectiveness of the Enabling Activities modality through in-depth case studies. The evaluation has compiled a portfolio database of Enabling Activities (GEF Agency, focal area, implementation status,

project cycle information), and the IEO is setting up channels to incorporate updated information into the PMIS.

27. For the case studies the team is developing a country case study protocol in consultation with GEF stakeholders. The team aims to engage stakeholders throughout the case study cycle in as recommended by the peer review of the GEF evaluation function. The protocol will take into account the findings of the study on the state-of-the-art of capacity development and the current paradigm termed “capacity development 2” (CD2) that fed into OPS5. CD2 focuses on new ways of interacting through social media and the Internet as well as new ways of organizing learning through communities of practice. Finally, the LDCF evaluation Review of the Implementation of NAPAs, complements the Enabling Activities Evaluation as NAPAs are financed through the enabling activities modality. Therefore, two of the Enabling Activities in-depth case studies will also focus on NAPA implementation projects.

28. The thematic evaluations team is continuing its work on gender mainstreaming and RBM. The IEO participated in the Gender Equality Action Plan Workshop held August 18-19, 2014 and provided comments on the draft action plan. In the coming year the team will focus on methodological development to include dimensions of gender in IEO evaluations, the M&E Policy, and guidelines. The thematic evaluations team is actively participating in the gender task force of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) to be abreast of international best practices.

29. Regarding RBM the performance team of the IEO is participating in the GEF-6 RBM working group. The thematic evaluation team together with the performance team undertook a mapping exercise to assess links between the GEF-6 results framework and the GEF-5 focal area tracking tools. A summary of the finds were shared with the working group. Both evaluation teams will continue to provide the working group with analysis and assessments for the development of the GEF-6 RBM.

30. During this reporting period, the IEO submitted the first LDCF/SCCF Annual Evaluation Report to the LDCF/SCCF Council in May 2014 to report on the performance of the LDCF and SCCF as well as on ongoing evaluation issues. This report presented: an assessment of the terminal evaluations of completed LDCF/SCCF projects that were submitted during the fiscal year 2013; and findings of a quality-at-entry review of LDCF projects approved to implement National Adaptation Plans of Action (NAPAs) to assess the extent to which they respond to key issues identified by NAPAs and project design quality. The review found that a large majority of the projects is aligned with their NAPA. Fifty-eight percent of projects in the portfolio show a very high alignment and address the highest priority identified in the relevant NAPA. The report also reports on the progress of the SCCF and a Management Action Record (MAR) reporting on the follow up on the implementation of LDCF/SCCF Council decisions on recommendations of the SCCF Evaluation.

31. This year as the portfolios mature the Office expects submissions of additional terminal evaluations for LDCF/SCCF projects (10-15 terminal evaluations) that will be assessed in the second Annual Evaluation Report. Potential evaluation issues to report on in FY15 are gender and private sector in LDCF/SCCF projects. An approach paper will be developed for the 2015 Annual Evaluation Report in consultation with LDCF/SCCF stakeholders.

## **SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EVALUATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT**

32. Climate-Eval is an online community of practice hosted by our Office and which overarching goal is to establish standards and norms, support capacity development, and share good practices in evaluations of climate change and development and most recently natural resource management. Climate-Eval members form a global network of monitoring and evaluation practitioners in government and development cooperation agencies, civil society organizations, and academia.

33. This Conference is a follow-up of the 2008 International Conference on Evaluation of Climate Change and Development in Alexandria, Egypt and it aims to create space for evaluation professionals and a selected group of policy makers to collectively assess how different methods and approaches to evaluate climate change, sustainable development and natural resources management have worked, and how these can handle emerging issues.

34. The Conference focuses on how development can be made more sustainable through effective and sustainable natural resources management, at global, regional, and local levels. Increasingly, policies and interventions have as an objective to manage the dynamics between economic arrangements, societies and their interactions with natural resources, supporting the emergence of sustainable practices.

35. Two main outcomes are expected: 1) the improvements of policies and interventions on climate change and natural resources management, and 2) the strengthened evaluation capacity to evaluate climate change and natural resources. Both outcomes are significantly important for countries in the South.

36. Abstract proposals were received covering the three major streams of the conference: 1) policy and program level evaluations; 2) evaluating climate change adaptation; and 3) evaluating climate change mitigation. Of more than 200 abstracts received, 82 abstracts have been selected to be presented at the conference, 32 are focus on adaptation; 15 on mitigation; 25 on policy and program level; and 10 on other areas of interest.

37. Among the expected output are:

- A briefing note as input into policy level climate change discussions;
- A publication on best practice papers and studies that assembles and disseminates updated approaches and interventions, as well as natural resources management information;
- Innovative learning and knowledge sharing strategies, policies and interventions;
- Evaluation capacity strengthened, especially in the South, through best practices shared among peers, networking and collaboration opportunities identified during the conference.

38. The Conference will take place on November 4–6, 2014 at the International Finance Corporation headquarters in Washington, D.C.