

# IEO Learnings

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## EVALUATING GEF SUPPORT TO MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

This first independent evaluation of GEF support in this area assessed the overall performance and effectiveness of GEF biodiversity mainstreaming interventions.

### Key findings of evaluation

- Biodiversity mainstreaming gained momentum under the Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) third replenishment period, when conservation efforts were extended from protected areas to productive landscapes and seascapes. Since GEF-4, mainstreaming has been a specific objective of the biodiversity focal area, with a progressive move toward integrated approaches in tackling biodiversity loss.
- GEF projects have successfully mainstreamed biodiversity conservation to targeted sectors, institutions, policies, and territories with globally significant biodiversity.
- GEF support has contributed to legal, environmental, regulatory, governance, and socioeconomic additionalities going beyond incremental cost benefits. Capturing additionalities, however, is a challenge.
- The outcomes of 85 percent of biodiversity mainstreaming projects are rated in the satisfactory range.
- Mainstreaming biodiversity takes time, making the sustainability of institutional, financial, and human resources and longer time frames critical.
- Features that facilitate mainstreaming biodiversity include aligning interventions with national development objectives; long-term strategic partnerships with nationally recognized knowledge organizations; engagement with key stakeholder groups; and the presence of good governance, political will, and champions for change.



This evaluation assessed the relevance, performance, effectiveness, results, and additionality of GEF-supported biodiversity mainstreaming interventions and identified good practices and challenges.

## Relevance and project design

The GEF has been instrumental in supporting national policy reform and planning frameworks that promote biodiversity considerations across sectors and territories. The GEF's biodiversity mainstreaming portfolio has played a significant role in supporting implementation of the global convention for the Conservation of Biological Diversity and its member countries (figure 1).

**Projects are explicitly designed to address recognized threats to biodiversity.** GEF-supported projects include components and activities to address threats to biodiversity and/or mitigate adverse effects on biodiversity of global importance. Projects adopt diverse approaches such as the extension of landscape management practices, agroforestry, and sustainable production systems, and biological connectivity linking vulnerable forests to protected areas. Implementation strategies are integrative and multitiered. Findings of applied research, field demonstrations, and extension have been transferred to the sectoral and government levels to transform productive models and inform policy decisions.

## Performance

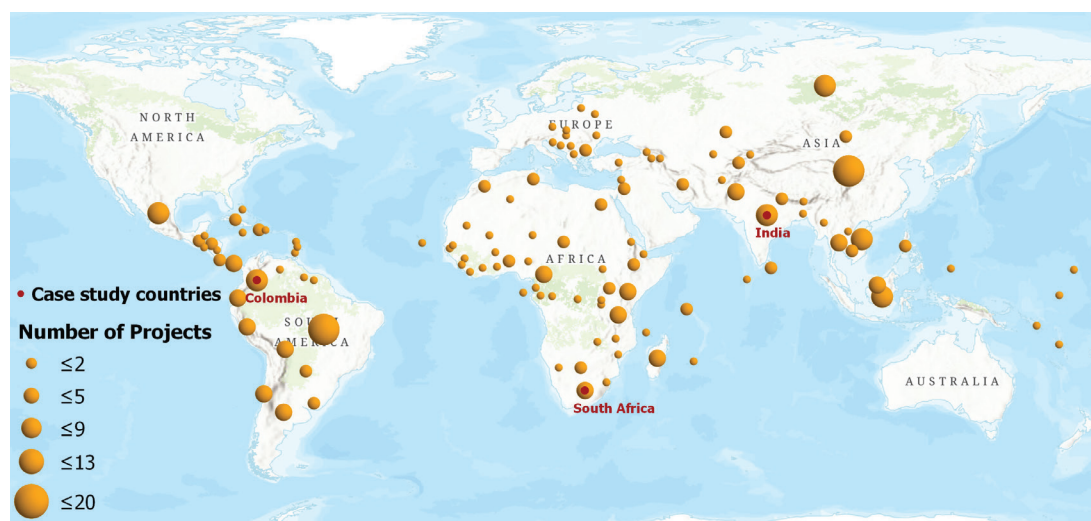
**Most of the GEF projects in this portfolio have successfully elevated biodiversity conservation to targeted sectors, institutions, policies, and territories with globally significant biodiversity.** A smaller number of projects and national partners are successfully accelerating biodiversity mainstreaming across sectors, institutions, and territories. There are fewer cases of accelerated mainstreaming, by which mainstreaming processes gain in scale and momentum and begin to affect systemic levels. The acceleration of mainstreaming to a broader range and scale involves incremental processes that build over time and exceed most projects' lifespan. External factors that fall outside most projects' influence—such as national partners' capacity and commitment, governance cycles and political context, resource availability, and competing sector priorities—affect mainstreaming. As a result, many projects may require continuity into successive cycles to

accelerate mainstreaming processes that enable expected outcomes. Practices such as silvo-pastoralism (figure 2) promoted by GEF-supported mainstreaming biodiversity projects are being significantly upscaled for biodiversity conservation.

**Similar positive influences and challenges affect outcomes in biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming projects across the three case study countries of Colombia, India, and South Africa.** While the challenges are primarily determined by specific national or landscape contexts, successful mainstreaming is ultimately influenced by the interaction of economic and environmental interests, institutional monitoring and enforcement capacities, and communications and outreach capabilities. Other positive features that facilitate mainstreaming include preconditions such as well-developed policy and regulatory frameworks for biodiversity conservation, recognized and capable scientific research institutions and expertise, and a favorable political environment. Mainstreaming efforts are more successful when there are strong government champions who cut across organizational silos.

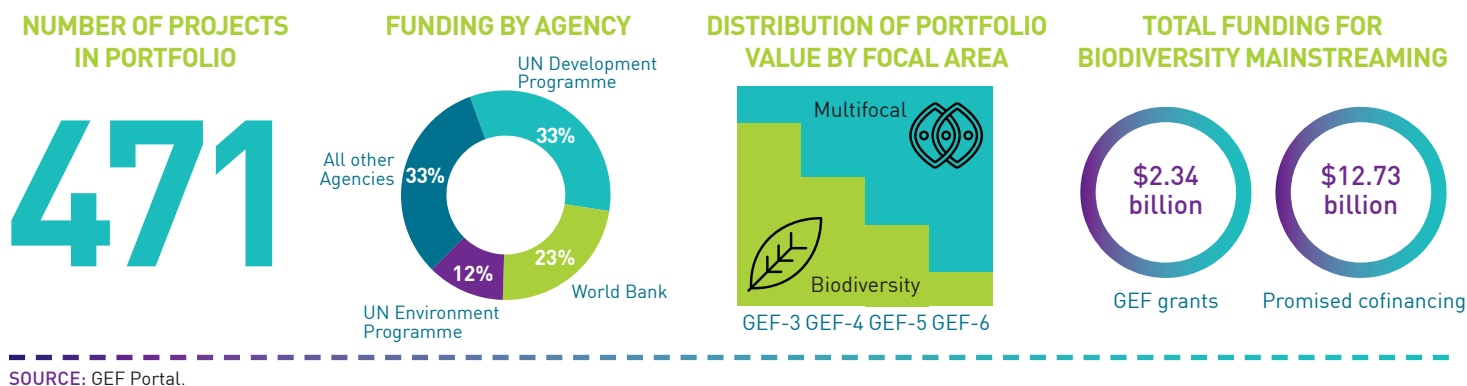
**The potential for biodiversity mainstreaming is primarily conditioned by intervening factors that encompass project effectiveness and efficiency, the commitment of national partners, and externalities outside the project's control.** The progress achieved in mainstreaming biodiversity is directly influenced by intervening factors that are *directly related* to the project's implementation performance—efficiency, timely output delivery, monitoring, and adaptive management—and to those *external* to the immediate project context—national capacities and institutional commitment, governance cycles, political and policy context. The implementation of several mainstreaming projects in the three countries was negatively affected by late approvals and start-up, recruitment delays, and low partner capabilities and responsiveness.

**FIGURE 1** Global distribution of GEF mainstreaming biodiversity projects

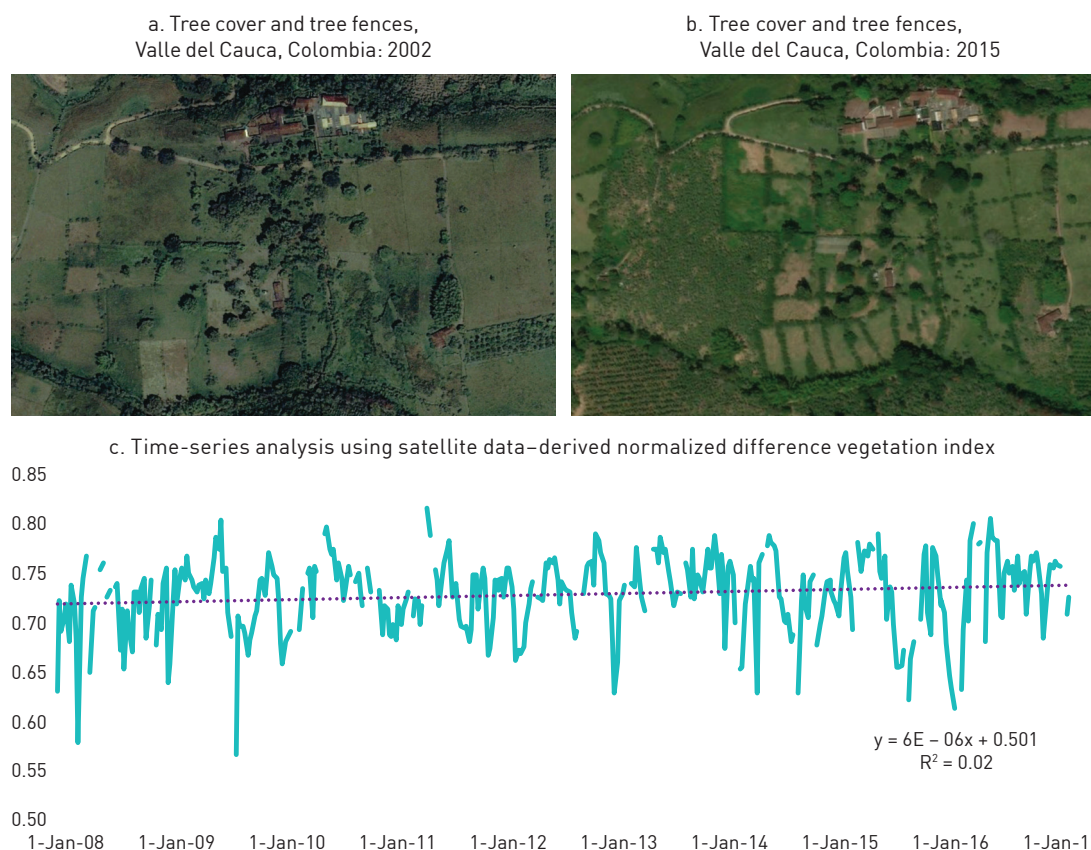


**SOURCES:** Esri, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N. Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community.

**NOTE:** The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the GEF or its partners.



**FIGURE 2** Increased vegetation productivity at a GEF silvo-pastoral project site, 2002–15



SOURCE: Satellite image from Digital Earth.

policy and legislative-regulatory reforms. Several projects have contributed to landmark biodiversity legislation; transformed core institutional/sector practices; and resulted in measurable conservation impacts in forest cover, pasture, and other biodiversity indicators. However, capturing other additionalities such as socioeconomic and environmental impacts deriving from the GEF's support for biodiversity mainstreaming in productive landscapes and seascapes is a challenge.

## Theory of change and M&E

The GEF's theory of change for mainstreaming biodiversity provides a sound conceptual basis for their design and evaluation. The GEF's theory of change model for biodiversity mainstreaming is vali-

## Additionality

The GEF biodiversity mainstreaming portfolio has contributed to legal, environmental, regulatory, governance, and socioeconomic additionalities going beyond incremental cost benefits. These include innovative approaches based on multi-stakeholder partnerships that link grassroots organizations to regional research institutions, advocacy platforms, and national environmental authorities. Landscape management practices are validated on the ground and elevated to influence national

dated by project experiences in diverse contexts and is reflected in programming trends over successive cycles. The underlying problems that were identified by the GEF Secretariat in collaboration with GEF partners and internal and external experts—such as loss of habitat in productive landscapes and seascapes and decline of globally significant biodiversity outside protected areas—have been addressed, with greater attention being given to (and resources invested in) biodiversity conservation in production landscapes and seascapes. The theory of change is further supported by the correspondence of its expected outcomes with those of the reviewed projects.

**The theory of change needs to be adapted during project implementation.** The GEF theory of change recognizes the dynamic and nonlinear process of mainstreaming. Projects need to account for this nonlinearity in implementation and acknowledge the need for dynamic adjustments. For example, projects with policy and regulatory change requirements need to be cognizant of changes in government legislative priorities or champions of reforms.

**The current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for GEF biodiversity projects does not appear to focus sufficiently on quantitative measures and outcomes and impacts.** Conventional project monitoring practices are generally limited in scope to measure changes in habitat quality, forest cover, vegetation productivity, land use, species richness and evenness, or other indicators that offer insight into the state of biodiversity. Longer-term effects are more difficult to track unless capacities exist at the country level once technical activities have been completed and the budget is closed. Although considerable effort has been invested in the design of M&E frameworks and SMART (specific,

measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) indicators, project indicators tend to remain qualitative instead of quantitative, with inconsistent baselines that often rely on secondary data or drawn from sources that apply different criteria and timelines, undermining reliable tracking of changes over time.

**The GEF-7 core indicators and subindicators are a move in the right direction but not adequate.** While the hierarchical indicators used are more efficient and relevant and in line with GEF Independent Evaluation Office recommendations, they are insufficient to capture the socioeconomic benefits, financial flows, and policy and regulatory reforms influenced by GEF interventions. The biodiversity mainstreaming indicators heavily rely on qualitative measurements and area estimates. There is ambiguity about the requirement for collecting spatially explicit boundary information. Also, there is a need to measure socioeconomic benefits influenced by GEF interventions and biodiversity-based indicators, since mainstreaming projects often entail balancing trade-offs between socioeconomic benefits and environmental impacts.

## Conclusions

- 1 GEF interventions are explicitly designed to address recognized threats to biodiversity, and most GEF projects have successfully elevated biodiversity conservation to targeted sectors, institutions, policies, and territories with globally significant biodiversity.
- 2 Similar positive influences and challenges affect biodiversity mainstreaming across the three case study countries—Colombia, India, and South Africa.
- 3 The potential for biodiversity mainstreaming is primarily conditioned by intervening factors that include project effectiveness and efficiency, the commitment of national partners, and externalities outside the project's control.
- 4 GEF support to biodiversity mainstreaming has contributed to legal, environmental, regulatory, governance, and socioeconomic additionalities beyond incremental cost benefits.
- 5 The current M&E framework for GEF biodiversity projects does not focus sufficiently on quantitative measures, outcomes, and impacts.

## Recommendations

- 1 Design mainstreaming interventions with a longer-term perspective and a resource envelope to ensure sustainability.
- 2 The GEF should continue to leverage its convening power to improve policy design and processes and strengthen interministerial and intersectoral collaboration.
- 3 Include a systematic analysis of associated benefits and trade-offs in project design.
- 4 Improve and strengthen M&E design and implementation.



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