

Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations

Reference Group Meeting – June 6, 2018

Attendees

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Note Taking: Sara el Choufi, GEF IEO

Introduction and welcome by the IEO Director

Thank you for joining the first Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations (SCCEs) reference group meeting. SCCEs were part of the first IEO workplan for the Council about three years ago and the Council thought it was a good idea and endorsed it, but we never got around to doing it because of OPS6.

We used to do country portfolio/program evaluations in the past, but we thought we should be more strategic about it and focus on commonalities between types of countries. We are starting by doing this with LDCs, SIDS, and a group of African countries in the Sahel and Sudan-Guinea Savannah biomes. These are groups of countries the Council is particularly interested in. There has been a lot of discussion during the replenishment about what the GEF is doing in the LDCs and SIDS, and several Council members have been interested in African countries, including the French Council member indicating that we have not done enough evaluative work in francophone Africa. We hope this will give us insight on outcomes and sustainability of GEF projects.

This is the first time we are meeting on this. You have seen the three approach papers. Although there are similarities between the three approach papers, we are going to tailor the evaluation questions to the country settings of each SCCE.

The reference group purpose is to consult with Agencies, STAP, and GEF SEC. We have also invited evaluation offices from other agencies to give inputs. It is important to get the questions of the evaluations right.

Stephen Hutton of the World Bank IEG will serve as a peer reviewer for the SIDS SCCE, while Michael Spilsbury, Director of UNEP Evaluation Office, will be the reviewer for LDCs and Africa SCCEs.

Discussion

GEF SEC: There are many LDCs in Africa, why two evaluations, and then SIDS? Can you explain?

GEF IEO: Correct. Most of the countries in the Africa SCCE are LDCs. They will also be covered by the LDCs SCCE. The criteria we use for covering the countries in the Africa SCCE is based on the biomes.

There are common countries that are covered by both biomes, and some LDCs are also SIDS. We start from a comparable overarching framework for the three evaluations.

GEF SEC: What are the main aspects covered in the evaluations?

GEF IEO: We start from what we know from OPS6 concerning weak sustainability in LDCs and Africa. We want to look more into sustainability factors and the reasons for low sustainability. This is a key aspect we want to get into. OPS6 reports weak financial support, weak institutions, and staff turnover as explanation for sustainability. We want to see if these are indeed the reasons or if there is more to it. We want to see if and how the nexus or tradeoff between development and environment objectives helps explain the lack of sustainability. This is the core of the SCCEs effort.

The other part, which we don't know enough from OPS6 is the relevance to countries' national priorities, so we are going to look at that. This would be in terms of correspondence with environmental priorities at the national level, but also in terms of services that are provided by the GEF through its support, through its network of Agencies and through different support modalities (integrated programming).

We are also looking at selected cross-cutting issues, including gender and resilience, and at how the performance of the GEF is affected in fragile contexts. We have fragile countries both in the Africa and LDCs portfolios.

GEF SEC: Beyond financial and institutional aspects, what are the additional elements of sustainability? Are you looking at resilience to climate shocks? And are you looking at the LDCF and SCCF portfolios? Because the resilience question has come into focus particularly in the new GEF-7 strategy.

GEF IEO: We will be looking at the LDCF portfolio. There are inter-linkages between the different aspects we will cover. We will look at environmental risk as well as political, socio-economic, and environmental shocks, and we might discover more. On the second key question on environment and development, are these conflicting objectives or is there a nexus? We like to think from this side of the partnership that it is a nexus, but from the countries' perspective often it's not the case: governments often chosen socio-economic and development objectives as priorities.

The idea to start from aggregate analysis to identify the extremes, where we will try to understand the factors. We will select case studies from the aggregate analysis that cover positive, negative change, and absence of change. The purpose is to deep-dive into factors rather than report on the overall portfolio.

GEF SEC: On the framing of conflict between environment and development, the GEF tries to mix the two and operate on top of development and make it '*greener*'. Is this question a challenge to that notion, or how is that being framed?

GEF IEO: No. We are very much aware of that. It is often a given that we want to make this work, but we see this difference in how it is seen from one end of the partnership to the other. And, also in the literature you see both positions. It is an opportunity to understand better and see if there is anything else that can be said and done. The environment-development nexus or tradeoff analysis as explainer of weak sustainability is something that we haven't yet seen discussed in the literature. We haven't spent enough time measuring socio-economic alongside environmental benefits, and would like to do more on that.

GEF IEO: You pointed out the commonalities between the portfolios. The interesting thing here is to pick out the specific factors that influence performance and sustainability in these sets of countries. We started with a set of francophone African countries, but realized that it doesn't make sense to just do those but rather to look at the biomes.

GEF IEO: We are still scoping to get to the final approach for these evaluations, but for SIDS specifically, it is often the financial situation of these countries: they are middle- to high-income countries that have difficulty landing both domestic and international investments. The other is the specific environmental challenges of small island states. We will test this in the scoping mission to Seychelles next week.

UNDP: There has always been a couple of issues we can unpack:

- 1) We always hear that the reason why longer-term impact is impeded is lack of financing – so co-financing always comes up. We don't have an understanding what that means, is it that co-financing isn't enough? Are we managing and spending it incorrectly? Do we spend it in an untimely manner? It's a big question on how we design projects better to overcome co-financing being a reason for lack of sustainability.
- 2) We also hear about capacity being an issue. What does that mean and whose capacity? Why are we still discussing capacity after 25 years of GEF? And is some of that related to how we manage the GEF portfolio? Will we have more impact if Agencies don't work in silos in these countries? More collaboration between Agencies? More empowered OFPs?

These are all questions we keep hearing and it would be good to unpack them. Maybe the Agencies need to work differently, but also maybe the way the GEF is organized at the country level could be changed.

On a logistical note. If we could get the list of countries you will visit for case studies, UNDP offices in countries will be able to help, but they need advanced warning to really be able to help and be there for you.

GEF IEO: In these exercises we would like to go into the co-financing and capacity issues. They pop up and APR uses them as explanatory factors, but we want to really understand those.

GEF IEO: This APR has a special section on sustainability. This time we couldn't do a deep dive, we primarily relied on data from terminal evaluations, some of the impact evaluations, a few interviews, and some geospatial work looking at sustainability of results past closure for projects that closed over four years ago. That has given us some insights into the projects. But Nancy you are right, co-financing and capacity are areas we want to explore.

An area we wanted to get your insights on is since the GEF is putting a lot of emphasis on private sector in the next strategy, how much attention should these country cluster evaluations give to this given that we know the shortcomings of private sector and limitations in LDCs and SIDS. We are looking for guidance here.

GEF SEC: That's a good point and I was thinking precisely about that when Nancy brought it up. As you know our donors (Council) are pushing us more to increase co-financing levels. What truth is behind the theory that if you expand the ambition of co-financing you ensure more outcomes and more sustainability. The evaluation office hasn't covered this in any detail. Since this focuses primarily on

LDCs and SIDS, these countries might not be able to provide insight into these questions. I wonder if and how you will look at this.

GEF IEO: We can do a different kind of study then, maybe not in this context.

GEF SEC: We are now embarking into a new impact program, it's going to take some time before it is up and running.

GEF IEO: The food security program had a specific focus on private sector and so far, there isn't much to be seen there. We are doubtful that we will find something to learn by looking at the private sector in these portfolios and we are discussing these issues among ourselves. We haven't included private sector for now in the Africa SCCE approach paper.

GEF SEC: The finding that this is not the right fit for raising the private sector financing ambition, that is a finding in itself.

GEF SEC: If we look at the LDCF and SCCF programming document, one of the things put on the table is what are the agents of change to make the interventions more meaningful and impactful. Perhaps it's private sector engagement, particularly by local agents. The assumption is that to have long term sustainability we need to have engagement of local players. Some of the reasons for lack of sustainability is that these players were not part of the design or part of the implementation setup. We wrote it into the strategy. It would be nice to get some insight into that.

GEF IEO: Yes, and recognizing that some of the player will be micro, small, and medium enterprises and explicit recognition to local players.

STAP: Can we get a snapshot of the timeline and some of the methods?

GEF IEO: Slightly different timeline. Africa is in spring 2019, SIDS and LDCs in fall 2019.

GEF IEO: The idea is to do aggregate analysis and use it to look where the case studies should be and visit with as much data and knowledge as possible. We will do portfolio and document analysis using a framework we derive from key questions, as we always do. We will do the same for geospatial analysis. We are dependent on the team supporting the office on geolocating project sites. Once it is done, we will be able to plan the case studies.

STAP: For the geospatial analysis, you are locating the projects, but what indicators are you measuring against?

GEF IEO: Forest cover, forest fragmentation, NDVI, vegetation productivity, as well as nighttime lights, infrastructure, distance from roads, etc. as proxy socio-economic indicators. We will test dyadic interviews.

GEF IEO: To answer your previous question Nancy, we haven't selected the countries for case studies. We will do that after the aggregate analysis is complete and the geolocation effort is done.

GEF IEO: For scoping we are doing three country visits: Bangladesh, Seychelles, and Senegal. The interesting thing in the LDC portfolio is that 70 percent is financed by LDCF and SCCF. One of the important questions in Bangladesh is graduation from the LDC status. We are looking at GEF-4 to GEF-6

cohorts, but for sustainability we are looking at project closed between 2007 and 2014, regardless of the start date.

GEF SEC: There are a number of LDCs that graduated and there are a few that are about to graduate (Sao Tome). How are you going to treat these graduating/graduated LDCs? Are you going to make the link between graduation and what we did and the overall status of the environment and sustainable development in this context? If so, we really would like to understand what you're going to do. It is interesting, but we are not sure how relevant the findings are going to be vis-à-vis the GEF. This is a big political issue. Some countries are eager to graduate, some others are not. It is not just graduation from LDC status that is on our minds but also if these countries will need continuous transitional support after they graduate. That is coming up in the context of the climate negotiations.

GEF IEO: We are not including the LDCs that have already graduated in the Africa and LDC SCCEs, but some will likely be covered by the SIDS SCCE.

GEF IEO: What the evaluation will point out is that these graduations are based on certain numbers, but the issues might still be there. We can highlight some of that, which is what calls for additional transitional support.

GEF SEC: I would suggest you look at the criteria for graduation.

Closing and next steps by the IEO Director

GEF IEO: Thanks for the rich discussion and useful inputs. We will consider them in finalizing the approach papers. Next steps are to conduct the scoping missions and revise the approach papers based on this discussion and be more specific in questions depending on the three country cohorts. We are happy to receive written comments in the coming two weeks. Following this, we will start the geospatial analysis. We will be in touch again and send out the revised or final approach paper. We will also discuss about the country case studies as well with Agencies.