

GEF Council Meeting  
October 28 - 30, 2014  
Washington, DC

Agenda Item 12

**PROGRESS REPORT OF THE  
GEF INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE DIRECTOR**

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

**Recommended Council Decision**

The Council, having reviewed document GEF/ME/C.47/01, “*Progress Report of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office Director,*” takes note of the directions outlined in the document and authorizes the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office to further develop the work program with guidance from the Council and in consultation with GEF stakeholders for approval by the Council in its first meeting in 2015.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Progress Report of the Director provides the Council with a critical reflection on the work program and products of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office. It has been informed by the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function conducted by an independent panel of experts convened under the auspices of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

Progress of ongoing work of the Office is provided in the information document GEF/ME/C.47/Inf.01 “*Progress Report of Ongoing Work of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office.*”

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. This Progress Report of the Director is provided at the time when the sixth replenishment period of the GEF is just beginning, the 5<sup>th</sup> Overall Performance Study (OPS5) has recently been completed, and there is a new Director in the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). All of these factors allow for critical reflection on the work program and products of the IEO. At the same time, there is a new focus in the GEF based on the GEF2020 Vision and related restructuring in the GEF Secretariat and the network. Consequently, the present report provides preliminary directions on IEO's work program. A more definite IEO work program will be provided for Council approval in its first meeting in 2015.

2. The Progress Report has been informed by the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function conducted by an independent panel of experts convened under the auspices of the United Nations Evaluation Group. The Peer Review Panel submitted its final report to the Council in May 2014. The Peer Review commended the achievements of IEO over the past decade and its Director in establishing and protecting a strong and independent GEF Evaluation Office. The Panel recommended that, in the future, IEO should focus more on utility, through (a) the engagement with stakeholders, (b) the evaluation products and the evaluation work program, and (c) the tension between accountability and learning, noting that these three areas are closely related.

3. Progress on the current work, including the various evaluations, is provided in the information document "*Progress Report of Ongoing Work of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office*" GEF/ME/C.47/Inf.01 made available to the Council in parallel with this report.

## **PRINCIPLES**

4. The functional independence of IEO must be guaranteed at all levels. It is through credible evaluations conducted utilizing the most robust methods to collect and analyze data that the IEO can fulfill its mandate to provide verifiable and unbiased evaluative evidence on the results and performance of the GEF. This is essential for building confidence in the Council and amongst other stakeholders that the GEF is contributing to its goals of protecting the global environment. To this end, IEO will continue to build upon its past successes and to further strengthen its approaches and methodologies according to the highest international evaluation standards.

5. While recognizing the Council as the primary client, IEO will endeavor to enhance its utility to other stakeholders, including the GEF Secretariat and Agencies. This is essential in order to ensure that the accountability-oriented evaluations of IEO also effectively contribute to improved performance and learning in the GEF network. It is vital to ensure that evaluations are conducted in an independent manner and reported upon without any interference from any GEF partner. At the same time, IEO's work program should not be designed and implemented in isolation.

6. Utility can be enhanced on many levels without compromising independence. First of all, the Council remains the primary client for the work of IEO, the purpose of which is to provide reliable information for strategic decision-making on the performance of the GEF and lessons for

performance improvement. It is also important to gauge the demand for evaluative evidence amongst the partners, including the GEF Secretariat, Agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that the IEO be responsive to the information needs of the partners. I have already initiated a consultation program with the network partners in order to gauge such demand for evaluative evidence and allow for IEO to devise a work program that will provide critical evaluation coverage for GEF-6 for accountability, learning, and performance improvement. The final selection of evaluations to be conducted and the overall work program of IEO will be developed with guidance from the Council and in consultation with other stakeholders. The work program is then submitted to the Council for its approval.

7. A second dimension of enhancing utility pertains to the timing of evaluations. They need to be timely in order to be able to feed into decision making processes at critical junctures. Yet another important aspect pertains to the guaranteeing adequate space and time for the stakeholders to absorb the results of evaluations. For this purpose, the various categories of evaluand must be provided sufficient time to review draft evaluation reports for factual errors and any possible errors of interpretation or omission. This needs to be built into the evaluation process and communicated in advance. Similarly, the evaluand must have adequate time to prepare a management response to any evaluation. It appears important that the management response is not prepared by the GEF Secretariat without consultation with different partners who may include the Operational Focal Points in the countries, specific or all Agencies, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, the NGO network, and others.

8. The evaluations IEO conducts will continue to present recommendations to different parts of GEF. These will be evidence-based. Depending on the nature of the issue, the recommendations may be prescriptive or outlining options for the Council and management to reflect upon. The intent of IEO is not to make policy and strategy for the GEF, but to analyze the implications of different courses of action in light of best available evidence. The Council will receive the evaluation reports with recommendations together with a management response to allow for the Council to make strategic decisions. The agreed management actions following deliberation by the Council should form the basis for measuring compliance with evaluation recommendations in the management action record.

## **EVALUATION STREAMS**

9. The work program of IEO is currently organized in four broad streams: impact evaluations, thematic evaluations, country portfolio evaluations, and performance. I intend to keep this structure initially, while assessing the changes that are taking place in the GEF programming. These include notably the operationalization of the GEF2020 Vision and of integrated approaches to programming (such as commodity-based programs and platforms). Consequently, I would like to ask the Council's permission to sharpen my vision on this as the GEF strategies are being operationalized and to present an updated and more specific work program to the Council in its first meeting in 2015. What follows are some observations and initial ideas regarding each of the existing streams.

10. There is no doubt that IEO will need to continue and further expand its work program on impact evaluations. The goal here is to be able to evaluate the actual impact of GEF operations on the ground to the state of the global environment. This is very important for the Council and

other stakeholders to be assured that GEF has impact. Three such evaluations, on ozone depleting substances, climate change mitigation, and on GEF investments around the South China Sea, have been completed; and a fourth, on protected area effectiveness, is underway. IEO has been and continues to be a leader in the international community on expanding the frontiers of rigorous impact evaluation. We have pioneered techniques, such as remote sensing and geographical information science, in impact evaluation. We will continue doing so and further developed such approaches and methodologies. On a concrete level, we propose to conduct an impact evaluation of multi-focal area projects. We believe it will contribute to strengthening the integrated approaches that are at the heart of GEF-6.

11. While impact evaluations are important, they are costly and time consuming. We will continue conducting thematic evaluations of important crosscutting topics pertinent to the GEF. Such evaluations may focus on intermediate results and outcomes of the GEF, such as GEF success in influencing policy in specific areas. Thematic evaluations will have immediate utility for the Council and other partners by providing evaluative evidence of GEF results and lessons learned to feed into critical discussions about strategy and programming.

12. Country portfolio evaluations (CPE) play a central role in the current IEO work program. There are, nevertheless, clear questions regarding their utility that need to be answered. The most important relates to accountability and to whom are these evaluations addressed. As the GEF does not operate on the basis of country programs, it is important to clarify how the conclusions and recommendations of CPEs are fed into country programming and how are lessons absorbed for the particular country and the GEF more broadly. This may require some rethink regarding the process of preparing the management response, with a more central role for the country Operational Focal Point. IEO will work further on this and report back to the Council with concrete proposals in the first meeting in 2015. A second dimension pertains to the selection of countries for CPEs to maximize GEF-wide learning and broader adoption. Also, given the number of countries benefiting from GEF funding and the capacity of IEO, there is an unequivocal need to streamline the CPE process.

13. The performance stream of IEO appears to be fully on track, credible, useful, and highly appreciated by the network partners. I do not foresee any need for major changes. It is nevertheless very important for the IEO to be fully cognizant of the strategic directions and changes taking place in the GEF. Therefore, the IEO shall participate in the GEFSEC working groups on results-based management and indicators, as well as knowledge management. IEO participation will be in a purely advisory role, especially with regard to future evaluability of GEF results and performance. To avoid conflict of interest, IEO will not get involved in design any GEF policy or strategy.

14. There must also be flexibility and scope for conducting specific evaluations beyond the regular streams, as prioritized by the Council based on identified needs. One such evaluation that is imminent pertains to the Broadening of the GEF Partnership under Paragraph 28 of the GEF Instrument. The 40<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in May 2011 in deciding to implement the GEF-5 Pilot on broadening the GEF partnership, directed the IEO to initiate an evaluation on the pilot at the earlier of either: (a) two years after the first five agencies have been accredited or (b) January 2015. IEO intends to initiate such an evaluation in early-2015 to establish a baseline for a full evaluation of the Pilot.

## **SIXTH OVERALL PERFORMANCE STUDY**

15. Most importantly, IEO work must contribute to the replenishment process. There are some considerations that need to be resolved and the Council's guidance is sought in this regard. A formal Council decision on OPS6 will be sought at a later Council meeting in 2015.

16. OPS5 was a comprehensive study of GEF results and performance on various fronts. It was a demanding exercise that stretched the capacity of IEO to deliver and forced a tight timeline upon the GEF network. It was noted in the peer review that the 21 sub-studies feeding into OPS5 were unnecessarily many. Based on these lessons, there is a need to streamline OPS6.

17. Conducting overall performance studies of a replenishment is a major challenge due to the rolling nature of the GEF work program. While each replenishment sets its own targets and provides further guidance to GEF programming, there is a time lag in our ability to evaluate these. OPS5 found that the average time from project concept to the beginning of project implementation was more than two years. As most projects have implementation periods of up to five years, this means that a project developed under GEF-6 guidance and approved early in the replenishment period, would only reach mid-term during the third year of GEF-6. Most projects would be behind this schedule and all completed projects with evidence of impact would have been approved in GEF-5 and earlier replenishments.

18. My initial proposal would be that OPS6 will build upon all evaluation streams and products that are produced between now and the completion of OPS6. The emphasis may be on updating what has happened since OPS5 and hone in on the new strategies and collecting data on how they have influenced GEF performance. This will avoid the overload of evaluative activities and their summaries towards the end of the period. A more specific proposal for OPS6 will be presented to the Council in 2015.