

International Waters Program Study 2004



Every four years, coinciding with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) replenishment cycle, the GEF Evaluation Office conducts

a round of evaluations and studies on all GEF programs. These independent studies provide GEF stakeholders with an assessment of how the focal areas (biodiversity, climate change, and international waters) are performing and recommendations on how to continue their development.

The International Waters Program Study had three major objectives:

- an assessment of the impacts and results of the international waters focal area on the protection of transboundary water ecosystems;
- an assessment of the approaches, strategies, and tools by which results were achieved; and
- identification of lessons learned and formulation of recommendations to improve GEF international waters operations.

Findings

The international waters portfolio now extends to almost every GEF-eligible large catchment and large marine ecosystem. The GEF has an impressive portfolio of well-managed international waters interventions and increasing success at leveraging collateral funding, including investments. The leveraging ratio is currently 1:2, and the total portfolio exceeds US\$2 billion. It is the largest effort in history to support sustainable use and protection of transboundary waters. Moreover, the study found clear evidence that the international waters focal area is contributing to the enhancement of regional security—a role that can only increase in importance over time.

This focal area has already generated some impressive achievements, including new policy tools such as the legal

regime for avoiding the transfer of opportunistic species in ships' ballast water, the Caspian Sea Convention, the Dnipro Basin Agreement, the Protocol for Sustainable Development of Lake Victoria Basin, the Lake Ohrid Treaty, and the Pacific Tuna Treaty (the first under the 1995 Fish Stocks Agreement). It provided the practical support necessary for actions such as successfully combating water hyacinth overgrowth in Lake Victoria, the creation of protected areas as part of several integrated management projects, capacity building for hundreds of public officials worldwide, and opportunities for nongovernmental organizations to assume a greater role in resource management.

Most of its work provides a basis for sustainable development: providing evidence, developing strategies and innovative solutions, improving awareness, promoting stakeholder dialogue, helping build new institutions, testing new approaches through demonstration projects, and creating opportunities for investment. Put another way, the GEF international waters focal area "seeks to simplify complex situations into manageable components for action" (GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Working Paper 10). Because such work is a gradual process of stepwise change toward shared goals, progress is often difficult to assess.

To address this difficulty, the study paid particular attention to examining the overall performance (as measured by outputs and outcomes) of projects classified as foundational, demonstration, or implementation.

- Progress on **foundational projects** was encouraging, and there have been clear improvements between each iteration of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis/Strategic Action Program (TDA/SAP) process. Difficulties sometimes occur when projects make a poor distinction between global and local benefits, do not identify social and economic root causes of transboundary problems, or fail to identify and incorporate stakeholders. A particularly difficult challenge has been the development

of sustainable transboundary institutional mechanisms and inter-ministry committees at the national level with high-level participation of all relevant sectors.

- **Demonstration activities** have been very successful in generating local participation and home-grown solutions to problems. The GEF international waters focal area has more than 10 years of experience in their development and growing success in replication (indeed, there are now examples of self-financed demonstration projects). The early success of one of the global demonstration projects (GloBallast) to catalyze an international agreement is a particularly noteworthy achievement. There are some limitations with the approach: attempts to upscale demonstration projects have met with difficulties, because each scale requires a different solution and policy framework. The study concludes that projects combining TDA/SAP activities are most likely to succeed; they maintain stakeholder confidence while endeavoring to ensure longer term sustainability of local and global benefits.
- Of the SAP **implementation projects**, the study paid special attention to the Black Sea Strategic Partnership. This initiative represented a concerted attempt to integrate the comparative advantages of all Implementing Agencies and counterpart donors to prevent the return of devastating eutrophication to the Black Sea during the economic recovery of countries in its basin. The project's first phase has resulted in several very successful large demonstration projects that are incremental to national development initiatives (for example, agricultural reform). One difficulty is that the initial partnership concept underestimated the interagency coordination needs and the measures required to enhance government buy-in to joint institutional arrangements in the Black Sea. This has led to some fragmentation of the overall effort and diminished momentum.

The study found evidence of steady improvement of Implementing Agency cooperation within projects (some 20 percent of all new full-sized projects are co-implemented). On the other hand, it noted continued shortcomings

in regional cooperation among projects in all case study regions—particularly among Implementing Agencies and across focal areas.

Recommendations

- The GEF should produce and use an accessible international waters focal area manual to clarify the concepts, tools, and processes that are giving rise to recurrent difficulties in project design and implementation.
- The GEF should develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for international waters projects that ensures an integrated approach to information gathering and assessment throughout a project's lifespan.
- The GEF should incorporate a regional-level coordination mechanism for its international waters projects to increase the synergies between these projects within defined natural boundaries and their focus on global benefits, enable communication and coordination with relevant projects in other focal areas, enhance feedback between projects and the International Waters Task Force, and facilitate implementation of the monitoring and evaluation strategy at the regional level.
- The GEF should redefine the focal area's task force to enhance its role in the definition of technical guidelines and policies, ensure the optimum use of comparative advantages of the Implementing Agencies within each intervention, and examine the selection of executing agencies in accordance with agreed-on criteria.

The GEF Evaluation Office is an independent entity reporting directly to the GEF Council, mandated to evaluate the focal area programs and priorities of the GEF.

The *International Waters Program Study* (October 2004) is available on the GEF Evaluation Office website at thegef.org (in the Publications section under Program Evaluations and Thematic Studies). The GEF Management Response is presented in annex 4. For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.