

OPS3: Progressing Toward Environmental Results

The impression that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on its own would be able to solve global environmental problems needs to be qualified immediately. The world community spends approximately US\$0.5 billion a year on solving global environmental issues through the GEF. The problems are immense. Any solution would need the strong involvement of many other actors. The amount of greenhouse gas emissions continues to increase. Extinction of animal and plant species continues. Pollution and waste treatment pose enormous challenges. Access to safe water is not ensured and is even endangered for many people. Land degradation is a huge problem in many countries across the world. The only global environmental problem that is almost solved is that of the elimination of ozone-depleting substances. For all of these problems, the GEF contribution needs to be seen in its proper perspective as a catalyst or innovator rather than as the direct purveyor of international public goods.

The GEF is replenished by donors every four years. Ideally, such replenishment should be based on achievements so far and the problems that need to be addressed in the coming years. The fourth replenishment was informed by the achievements of the GEF as reported in this Overall Performance Study (OPS), which is the third of its kind. The purpose of OPS3 was to assess the extent to which the GEF has achieved, or is on its way toward achieving, its main objectives. It provides an overview of the results in dealing with global environmental problems and looks at how the GEF functions as a network and partnership of institutions and organizations.

At the request of the GEF Council, the OPS3 was conducted by an independent consulting firm: ICF Consulting and its international partners. The GEF Evaluation Office provided oversight of the process, ensuring the Council that its Terms of Reference were followed. A High Level Advisory Panel was established as part of the technical backstopping.

The study's scope covered five main themes: results of GEF activities; sustainability of results at the country level; the GEF as a catalytic institution; GEF policies, institutional structure, and partnerships; and GEF implementation processes.

Findings

Focal Areas Results. The GEF has achieved significant results, particularly at the outcome level, in the biodiversity, climate change, international waters, and ozone depletion focal areas, and is well positioned to deliver important results in the newer focal areas of land degradation and persistent organic pollutants. The report provides a presentation of major achievements in each focal area.

Strategic Programming for Results: Focal Area Level. While OPS3 observed positive steps in GEF's attempt to shift from an approval focus to a results and quality orientation, and although significant results have been achieved, much remains to be done to focus on and manage results. In particular, strategic guidance in the GEF has been mixed: it is abundant in some areas but notably absent from others. For example, the development of GEF-3 strategic priorities in the biodiversity program has brought increased strategic direction to this program, but this has not been the case for the climate change program. Meanwhile, in the international waters focal area, the new strategic priorities have identified the need to move from short- to long-term measures.

Strategic Programming for Results: Country Level. GEF projects are often developed in an ad hoc and sometimes opportunistic manner, rather than developed systematically to contribute to an overall country strategy. Consequently, because coherent portfolios are not always developed for countries, results may not always be maximized or achieved in the most cost-effective manner.

Responsiveness to Conventions. The GEF has been responsive to guidance from the conventions it serves.

Information Management within the GEF Network. The GEF systems for information management, which encompass knowledge management, management information systems, and infrastructure are inadequate and should be improved.

Network Responsibilities and Administration. Given its structure and division of roles and responsibilities, the GEF is a network organization with independent—or at least semi-autonomous—entities working together to achieve a common result. This structure is an appropriate institutional form to enable the GEF to meet its mandate and operations.

Small Grants Program. The Small Grants Program has been well received by recipient countries and increases the GEF's visibility. The program's flexibility has allowed for innovative thinking and for the design of activities to meet country needs and capacities in small island developing states and least developed countries.

Recommendations

- **Programming for Results: Focal Area Level.** The strategic direction and coherence of each focal area program should be clarified and improved. To measure GEF results and evaluate whether the GEF is programming optimally to achieve results, indicators should continue to be developed and refined in all focal areas to allow aggregation of results at the country and program levels.
- **Programming for Results: Country Level.** In countries with robust GEF portfolios, the GEF should move toward a stronger country program. With regard to the proposed Resource Allocation Framework, the GEF should continue to develop hierarchies of priorities and incorporate important concepts into any eventual Resource Allocation Framework scoring system. Operational definitions and indicators are needed for sustainability and the mechanisms of catalytic effects.

- **Responsiveness to Conventions.** Robust, collaborative, and regular two-way communications between the GEF Secretariat and the convention secretariats should be fostered to enable dialogue on priority setting, streamlining of strategies, and institutional capacity sharing.
- **Information Management within the GEF.** The GEF should establish a formal function for information management in the GEF Secretariat to be responsible for both knowledge management and management information systems.
- **Network Responsibilities and Administration.** As the central administrative office, the GEF Secretariat should administer and coordinate network activities more comprehensively and strategically as it performs the following organizational functions: communication, coordination, and outreach; management information and policy; clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all GEF partners, especially Implementing and Executing Agencies; clarification and strengthening of the role of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel; fostering of monitoring and evaluation at all levels; and launching of a private sector initiative.
- **Small Grants Program.** Additional resources should be allocated to the Small Grants Program, and the new focal areas and strategic priorities (land degradation, persistent organic pollutants, and adaptation) should be integrated into the Small Grants Program.

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.

OPS3: Progressing Toward Environmental Results (June 2005) and its supporting documents are available on the GEF Evaluation Office website at thegef.org (in the Publications section under Overall Performance Studies). For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.