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Agenda Item 7

GEF EVALUATION OFFICE: ANNUAL COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION REPORT - 2009

(Prepared by the GEF Evaluation Office)

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having reviewed document GEF/ME/C.35/1, “*Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report – 2009*,” document GEF/ME/C.35/2, “*Management Response to the Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation – 2009*,” and having taken note of the three Country Portfolio Evaluations in Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria (GEF/ME/C.34/Inf. 3 and GEF/ME/C.35/Inf. 2-3) requests the Secretariat to:

- (1) Explore within the GEF partnership modalities to address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon.
- (2) Conduct a survey of countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to GEF partner International Financial Institutions, like Syria.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This second Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report provides a synthesis of the main conclusions and recommendations coming from three country portfolio evaluations finalized in fiscal year 2009:¹ Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon. The Cameroon Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted between September 2007 and June 2008 (the publication was finished in October 2008) whereas the ones for Syria and Egypt were conducted between September 2008 and April 2009. Drafts of the three reports were presented and discussed and comments were received from GEF stakeholders at consultation workshops in each country. All three countries have provided responses to the evaluations, which are included in the reports. The full reports are presented on the website of the Evaluation Office and their first chapters with main findings and recommendations have been made available as information documents.

2. GEF support to these three countries started during the pilot phase of the GEF for Egypt and Cameroon and after the GEF restructuring (1994) for Syria.

Table 1.1 Project Coverage of each Country Portfolio Evaluation

Country	GEF funding (US mil.) ²	Number of projects included in the evaluation				National completed projects
		National FSPs and MSPs	SGP	Enabling activities	Regional/global projects	
Egypt	92.19	13	Yes	7	8 of 24	9
Syria	12.72	10	Yes	5	8 of 13	13
Cameroon	25.55	10	Yes	5	11 of 19	5

3. This synthesis report focuses on: the relevance of the GEF support to the GEF and to the countries; the efficiency of GEF support; the role and responsibilities of GEF stakeholders and the result and sustainability of GEF support, particularly at the global environmental benefits level.

Conclusions

4. The following conclusions were reached on the results of the GEF support:

- 1) GEF support to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use has been of strategic importance and has generated some impacts.
- 2) It is difficult to quantify direct GHG emissions reduction or avoidance from GEF support to climate change but GEF has introduced the topic in these countries and has influenced markets, particularly in energy efficiency.

¹ July 2008 to June 2009.

² GEF funding is for nationally implemented full- and medium-size projects plus the total support through the GEF Small Grants Programme, provided between 1992 and February 2009.

- 3) Results in the other focal areas have been limited to setting up the foundation for national and regional action plans, policy development, and enhancing national capacity.
 - 4) Long-term sustainability of achievements is still a challenge.
5. On relevance of GEF support the following conclusions should be noted:
- 5) GEF support is relevant to national environmental priorities and to the conventions the GEF serves as their financial mechanism although there is no GEF country framework or vision.
 - 6) Country ownership of the GEF portfolio varies, with many project ideas driven by GEF Agencies and other external factors, including global issues. This is particularly true in the case of regional and global projects.
6. The efficiency of the GEF support was assessed as follows:
- 7) The potential benefits of the new project cycle have not reached the country level yet.
 - 8) Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank and the regional Banks do not have programs in Syria.
 - 9) The efficiency of the focal point mechanism has a direct correlation to the size of the GEF portfolio.

Recommendations

- 1) The GEF should address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon.
- 2) The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to International Financial Institutions, like Syria.

Observations

- 1) Databases of GEF activities at the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies or national focal points are still not accurate.
- 2) As requested by the Council, the GEF will continue to monitor the results of the Forest and Environment Support Program (FESP) budgetary support approach to see whether this approach could be followed in other countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

7. This second Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report provides a synthesis of the main conclusions and recommendations coming from three country portfolio evaluations finalized in fiscal year 2009:³ Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon. GEF support to these three countries started during the pilot phase of the GEF for Egypt and Cameroon and after the GEF restructuring (1994) for Syria. These three countries were selected through a process established by the Evaluation Office in 2006, and used for the previous Country Portfolio Evaluations, which included a random selection of countries at the regional level and then a selection according to a number of criteria, such as: size and diversity of GEF support, type of participation in the Resource Allocation Framework (that is, group or individual allocation), availability of evaluative information (that is, number of completed projects and terminal evaluations), linkages with other evaluations under implementation (that is, OPS4), etc. As described below, the three Country Portfolio Evaluations included extensive consultations with all major GEF stakeholders, particularly those residing in country and several visits to project sites, particularly projects that have been completed.

8. The three Country Portfolio Evaluations were conducted following the standard TOR for this type of evaluations (approved in 2006) and adapted to each country as appropriate. The Evaluation Office has prepared separate publications for each evaluation and these are provided as Council information documents: *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Cameroon*, *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Egypt*, and *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Syria*. These documents present the main conclusions and recommendations (which are summarized in annex A) and the responses to the evaluations by the respective governments. The full reports for each of the Country Portfolio Evaluations are provided on the GEF EO Web site and will be published at a later date. These evaluations build on and supplement the country evaluations conducted in 2006, 2007, and 2008: Costa Rica, Samoa, The Philippines, Benin, Madagascar, and South Africa, and are direct inputs into the Fourth Overall Performance Study (OPS4) of the GEF, presently being conducted by the Evaluation Office.

9. As established in the first Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report, this synthesis report focuses on three key areas:

- 1) The relevance of GEF support to the GEF mandate (that is, the generation of global benefits) and to national sustainable and environmental policies and priorities.
- 2) The efficiency of GEF support as reflected by the time and effort it takes to prepare and implement a GEF project and the role and responsibilities of, as well as the synergies among, GEF stakeholders
- 3) The result and sustainability of GEF support, particularly at the global environmental benefits level.

³ July 2008 to June 2009

10. The evaluation teams found high levels of interest and substantial participation in the respective Country Portfolio Evaluations from the GEF stakeholders.

1.1 Methodology

11. The Cameroon Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted between September 2007 and June 2008 (the publication was finished in October 2008). The original intention was to include the Cameroon evaluation in last year's Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report but the final evaluation was not completed until after the April 2008 Council meeting. The Syria and Egypt evaluations were conducted between September 2008 and April 2009. Staff of the GEF EO and consultants with extensive experience in each of the individual countries conducted the Country Portfolio Evaluations. The evaluations included quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and standardized analytical evaluation tools following the standard TOR for Country Portfolio Evaluations.

12. The qualitative aspects of the evaluations are based on the following sources of information:

- At the project level, project documents, project implementation reports, terminal evaluations or closure reports, and reports from monitoring visits
- At the country level, documents relevant to the broad national sustainable development and environmental agenda, priorities, and strategies; specific policy, strategies, and action plans relevant to focal areas; GEF-supported strategies and action plans relevant to the global conventions; and national environmental indicators
- At the GEF Agency level, country assistance strategies and frameworks and their evaluations and reviews
- Evaluative evidence at the country level from national evaluations
- Statistics and scientific sources
- Interviews with GEF stakeholders, including relevant government departments, national executing agencies; nongovernmental organizations, presently active GEF Agencies; and the GEF Small Grants Programme.
- A number of field visits to project sites, including interviews with GEF beneficiaries at the community level where appropriate and possible. Projects were selected for visits based on whether they had been completed and on their geographic clustering (which made a visit to a number of projects in a particular geographic area within limited time frames a possibility).
- Information from the national consultation workshops held to enable comment and discussion on the draft report before it was finalized, as well as written comments

13. The quantitative analysis used indicators to assess the efficiency of GEF support using projects as the unit of analysis (that is, time and cost of preparing and implementing projects and so on). The evaluation teams used standardized tools and protocols for the Country Portfolio Evaluations. These tools included:

- a project matrix outlining the information relevant to the evaluation and expected sources;
 - project review protocols to conduct the reviews of GEF national, regional and global projects; and
 - an interview guide for interviews with different stakeholders.
14. The three main phases of the Country Portfolio Evaluations included:
- initial visit and consultation with GEF focal points by the Evaluation Office to present the TOR, launch the evaluation, interview key GEF stakeholders, and identify consultants.
 - conduct the evaluation, including data collection and analysis through extensive interviews and several field visits, with the participation of Evaluation Office staff for all or part of the field visits; and
 - presentation of the draft report to key GEF stakeholders, to discuss preliminary findings and possible recommendations.

1.2 Scope

15. The evaluation focus primarily on a review of all of the national projects supported by the GEF, under all stages: preparation (with a PIF or PPG approved), under implementation, completed or cancelled. The Small Grants Programme (SGP) in the three countries is assessed against its national strategy and not by each of the SGP projects. Project concepts in the government's or GEF Agencies' pipelines were not included. Table 1.1 presents the portfolios included in the three Country Portfolio Evaluations. Therefore, the GEF portfolio assessed in the three Country Portfolio Evaluations are the aggregate of the national projects plus a selection of regional and global projects. The stage of the project determines the focus in the evaluation: for example completed projects are assessed according to the three dimensions of the evaluation, projects under implementation are assessed from the point of view of relevance and efficiency and projects under preparation (PPGs or PIFs) are assessed particularly from the point of view of relevance (and limited efficiency).

Table 1.1 Project Coverage of each Country Portfolio Evaluation

Country	GEF funding (US mil.) ⁴	Number of projects included in the evaluation				National completed projects
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1.3 Limitations and Challenges

16. The Country Portfolio Evaluations have certain limitations that have been identified in previous cases. The three Country Portfolio Evaluations presented here had similar limitations:

- GEF does not operate through country programs that specify expected achievements through programmatic objectives, indicators, and targets. Therefore, Country Portfolio Evaluations entail some degree of retrofitting of frameworks to be able to judge the relevance of the aggregated results of a diverse portfolio of projects. Accordingly, the evaluation frame proposed for Country Portfolio Evaluations was adapted to national relevant policies, strategies, and planning frameworks, as a basis for assessing the results and relevance of the GEF portfolio.
- Attribution is another area of complexity. GEF support within any area is one contribution among others and provided through partnerships with many institutions. Country Portfolio Evaluations do not attempt to attribute development or even environmental results directly to the GEF, but assess the contribution of GEF support to overall achievements.
- The assessment of results is focused, where possible, at the level of outcomes and impacts rather than outputs. Project-level results are measured against the overall expected impact and outcomes from each project. Expected impacts at the focal area level are assessed in the context of GEF objectives and indicators of global environmental benefits. Outcomes at the focal area level are primarily assessed in relation to catalytic and replication effects, institutional sustainability and capacity building, and awareness.
- Evaluating the impacts of GEF-funded initiatives is not straightforward. Many projects do not clearly or appropriately specify the expected impact and sometimes even the outcomes of projects. Often the type of information provided by project

⁴ GEF funding is for nationally implemented full- and medium-size projects plus the total support through the GEF Small Grants Programme, provided between 1992 and February 2009.

reports and terminal evaluations is limited to outcomes or even just outputs and does not contain an evaluation of impacts. The project documents do not always provide clear, consistent formulations of objectives, indicators, and targets or baselines from which progress can be assessed. The absence of information on project impacts is also attributed to the time frames of evaluation cycles; evaluations are usually conducted before measurable impacts can be expected. As Country Portfolio Evaluations are restricted to secondary sources, it did not have scope for conducting primary research to supplement project reports or identify impact and outcomes.

- Limited visits to projects sites, although in most cases, a large portion of the GEF portfolio was visited. In all cases, the projects visits involved only a few days at best of contact with project beneficiaries and opportunities to verify results.

2. CONCLUSION

17. The conclusions presented here are based on three Country Portfolio Evaluations, Cameroon, Syria, and Egypt. These countries were not selected to be representative of any particular group of countries but their experience could be applicable to other countries. In addition, these three new Country Portfolio Evaluations add to the conclusions and recommendations from previous ones. The Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009 acknowledges experiences and conclusions from previous Country Portfolio Evaluations and thus, tries to bring to Council new conclusions. The particular Country Portfolio Evaluations for each of the three countries present more specific conclusions and recommendations. Not all of them are presented in the Annual Country Portfolio Evaluations Report since they are not considered representative enough of a broader context for the Council. Nevertheless, each of the Country Portfolio Evaluations have been discussed with national stakeholders, assessed against the local and national context, and these stakeholders have proposed actions, as they see appropriate and are presented in the government responses.

18. The conclusions are presented according to the three dimensions of the evaluations: that is, in terms of the results of the GEF support, its relevance, and efficiency.

2.1 Results

19. The results are presented in terms of outcomes and impacts, of the various GEF supported projects. As discussed earlier, achievements are presented as the GEF contribution toward solving global and national environmental issues and improving capacities, coming both from GEF funding and other national/international cofinancing.

20. Results were measured by focal area using the following parameters:

- Impacts: changes in environmental status, especially those of global significance as well as reductions in threats to the globally significant resources.

- Outcomes: catalytic and replication effects; policy changes and institutional sustainability; and capacity building and awareness.

Conclusion 1: GEF support to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use has been of strategic importance and has generated some impacts.

21. The GEF has provided foundational support through enabling activities and other projects regarding the preparation of biodiversity strategies and action plans, capacity building, awareness raising, and institutional strengthening. For example in Syria and Egypt, the GEF contributed to developing the institutional capacity within national and local authorities. GEF support has also contributed to raising awareness on biodiversity issues of decision makers outside the environmental circles, the awareness of local administration, the media and the public at large. This has resulted in a situation where the issue of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use is currently higher on the political agenda and more visible, and it has allowed some biodiversity projects to generate considerable cofinancing from line ministries, NGOs and the private sector.

22. GEF support has been instrumental in the planning, expansion, and management of protected areas systems, with the potential to secure and sustain global environmental benefits in the three countries. For example, in Cameroon, GEF support contributed to the creation of more than 24,000 square kilometers of protected areas, including 5 national parks, 44 community-based natural resource management units and 39 community forests.

23. GEF support has put in place various local incentives and provided alternatives to reduce threats to biodiversity resources. For example, GEF projects have attempted to deliver an approach that balances restricting access to resources and compensatory measures for livelihoods.

24. The only CPE that provides actual impacts in biodiversity is the one for Syria in which GEF support has increased the number of migratory birds flying into the protected areas.

Conclusion 2: It is difficult to quantify direct GHG emissions reduction or avoidance from GEF support to climate change but GEF has introduced the topic in these countries and has influenced markets, particularly in energy efficiency.

25. Only in the case of Egypt there was quantitative information available about CO₂ equivalent emissions reduction or avoidance coming from GEF support. It is estimated that, through energy efficiency the GEF has been able to contribute in Egypt to the cumulative reduction of 16.8 million tons of CO₂. On the other hand, the Country Portfolio Evaluations provided evidence that market transformations have taken place in the energy efficient lighting, energy services companies (ESCOs), energy efficiency appliances and efficiency management systems for power generation plants. The Egyptian and Syrian governments are now considering laws dealing with energy

efficiency standards and codes. The SGP provided alternatives to communities for energy generation, particularly through projects in biogas.

26. The topic of climate change was introduced through GEF support in the three countries, particularly through the enabling activities and projects in the area of energy efficiency.

27. Egypt is the only one of these three countries that has received GEF support for adaptation through a recently approved project funded by the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).

Conclusion 3: Results in the other focal areas have been limited to setting up the foundation for national and regional action plans, policy development, and enhancing national capacity.

28. GEF support in international waters was substantial in Egypt while very limited in Cameroon and Syria. International waters projects in Egypt (about 15 national and regional projects) have laid the foundation for collaboration between countries and demonstrated innovative technologies and approaches for water conservation. For example, the national projects piloted and stimulated research in the areas of wetlands engineering and groundwater resources. GEF support has reached all of the main transboundary water bodies in Egypt: Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Nile River and Nubian aquifer. These regional projects have initiated a dialogue between countries of the region on a very strategic, political sensitive and important issue for the region and Egypt: water resources management, which might not have taken place otherwise. On the other hand, Egypt's Country Portfolio Evaluation found that these regional initiatives have shown weakness in coordination among national institutions, have limited information dissemination and utilization among them, and highly variable local capacities which makes implementation more complex.

29. In the case of POPs, the three countries received funding from GEF to prepare their National Implementation Plan (NIP) allowing the countries to conduct the initial collection, verification, and analysis of the POPs situation and options that can inform decisions at all levels. The GEF support has managed to put this important environmental issue on the governments' agendas. In the three cases, the NIPs have not started implementation.

30. Combating land degradation is a key national priority in these three countries, but GEF support has been limited to Cameroon as of the end of December 2008. Even so, the support to Cameroon (one national project (sustainable management of Silvo-Agriculture) and participation in a regional support project to develop a national plan) has not produced direct environmental impacts yet. Furthermore, Cameroon is not participating in the Sub-Sahara regional program, TerraAfrica.⁵ Egypt is a member of the recently approved MENArid program but as of this date there is no national component

⁵ SIP PROGRAM: Strategic Investment Program for SLM in Sub-Saharan Africa (SIP).

or activities approved in this country.⁶ Syria is not participating in this project and no projects in this focal area have been supported by the GEF in this country. There was also a national land degradation proposal supported by the government that was not approved by the GEF. The limited support to this focal area has been explained by a couple of reasons: GEF received guidance from UNCDD to prioritize Sub-Sahara Africa, worldwide demand for GEF resources has exceeded the available resources and there were not sufficient funds within the GEF (given the shortcomings in the GEF4 replenishment). IFAD and FAO, both GEF Agencies with comparative advantage in this focal area, have substantial programs in these countries with no GEF components.

Conclusion 4: Long-term sustainability of achievements is still a challenge.

31. The three Country Portfolio Evaluations found several factors that affect the sustainability of achievements so far:

- Inadequate planning and insufficient resource allocations at all levels.
- Involvement of the private sector to mobilize financial resources has been insufficient due to lack of engagement and/or development of appropriate mechanisms to meaningfully leverage or interest the private sector.
- Exit strategies, including handover of project results to their final national institutions destinations, take place too late in the project cycle.
- National counterpart resources are introduced too late in the project cycle.
- Dissemination of project outcomes and outputs to policy makers, executive bodies and the public does not receive adequate attention. Short operational lifetime of a project often limits the degree of dissemination that can be achieved.
- The potential for replicability needs to be better incorporated into project design in order to reap the full benefits of the knowledge and experience generated by projects.
- Important changes to national policies that require much time to be changed, for example, in the case of Syria, financial instruments to sustain the achievements in biodiversity present challenges and requires additional institutional reforms.
- Risks as a consequence of insufficient management capacity and oversight
- Insufficient local benefits and/or incentives for communities to support conservation and environmental protection

32. The three Country Portfolio Evaluations also provided good examples of sustainability. For example, in Egypt, there has been a shift from a portfolio largely driven by technological approaches to one which today involves more community oriented mechanisms. Furthermore, in both Egypt and Syria, the development and passing of the energy efficiency laws will provide necessary legal framework for the sustainability of the achievements on that topic. In Cameroon, the long-term budgetary support approach (FESP) provides an opportunity for the government, civil society, the private sector, and communities to collectively engage in an effort to address environmental governance and underinvestment in the sector. Furthermore, the

⁶ A national project under MENArid was initially planned but had not materialized at the time of the Egypt Country Portfolio Evaluation.

Cameroon CPE identified the potential for significant economic displacement risks associated with enhanced enforcement of environmental laws as capacities to manage the protected areas systems.

2.2 Relevance

33. Relevance of GEF support is assessed against the country's national development and environmental agendas, the GEF mandate, and the country's responsibilities and obligations towards the conventions.

Conclusion 5: GEF support is relevant to national environmental priorities and to the conventions the GEF serves as their financial mechanism although there is no GEF country framework or vision.

34. As concluded in previous Country Portfolio Evaluations, GEF support was found to be directly relevant to the national environmental priorities of these three countries. The relevance can be found in different ways: either the GEF support provides the funding to develop the national priorities (for example, through prioritization and inventories exercises funding by enabling activities) or the GEF support provides the funding to implement an already established national priority or are developed within an existing framework (that is, funding for protected areas, energy efficiency, etc.).

35. One additional finding from these three Country Portfolio Evaluations is that since bilateral support to environmental issues has decreased over the years, GEF support has become more relevant than in the past. At least the GEF has increased its share of ODA for the environmental sector.

36. Although GEF has been relevant to national priorities not all national priorities have been prioritized by the GEF, in particular Land Degradation (in all three countries with very limited support) and freshwater resources management, particularly in Syria.

37. Finally, the three Country Portfolio Evaluations found that these countries still do not have a clear GEF country framework that reflects and draws a roadmap for GEF activities in the countries. Even if the GEF does not require such a framework, the Country Portfolio Evaluations found that the relevance, country ownership (see below) and integrated impacts of GEF supported activities could be enhanced if they were developed within a national GEF framework rather than responding to GEF strategies, global conventions, and sectoral national strategies.

Conclusion 6: Country ownership of the GEF portfolio varies, with many projects ideas driven by GEF Agencies and other external factors, including global issues. This is particularly true in the case of regional and global projects.

38. As found in previous Country Portfolio Evaluations, country ownership of GEF support varies by focal area. An additional dimension found in the three Country Portfolio Evaluations is that the ownership seems to vary also according to modalities, in

particularly related to the scope of the GEF support. The evaluations found that ownership seems to decrease from SGPs projects, which seem to present full ownership at the local and national level to national projects (which vary by focal areas) to regional and global projects, which ownership becomes less apparent (particularly in biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation projects).

39. There is also an issue of perception between global versus national priorities and issues. While biodiversity and climate change issues are considered to be responding more to a global or international agenda, the other two focal areas related to water and land management are fully national priorities.

2.3 Efficiency

40. The efficiency of the GEF support is assessed against the time, effort, and financial resources necessary to prepare and implement GEF projects, the different roles, responsibilities, and synergies between projects and different GEF stakeholders (national, international and local), and the particular role of the GEF focal point mechanism.

Conclusion 7: The potential benefits of the new project cycle have not reached the country level yet.

41. The GEF is still perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect project proposals and implementation processes. The findings from the three Country Portfolio Evaluations confirm the findings of previous evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office. Project preparation, particularly project document writing, is often delegated to GEF Agencies by governmental authorities. The new project cycle guidelines and benefits, particularly the 22 month project cycle established for GEF-4 have not materialized at the country level yet. Any streamlined processes established by the GEF have been overshadowed by the multiple project proposal revisions (both in substance and of form). It is perceived that these long project preparations does not have a value added to project design and implementation, but are merely procedural.

42. One issue of concern, raised also by other evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office, in particular the Annual Portfolio Report, is that many projects set unrealistic objectives for the project duration and thus, project completion dates have to be changed. In Syria, project extensions vary from 60 to 120 percent of planned project durations.

Conclusion 8: Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank and the regional Banks do not have programs in Syria.

43. This is a particular conclusion applicable only to Syria from the three Country Portfolio Evaluations but may be applicable to other countries in this and other regions. Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies compared to other countries in the region and the world. The only one in which Syria participates is IFAD since the World

Bank has not had a lending program or a country strategy since 1986 and Syria does not belong to the Asia Development Bank.

Conclusion 9: The efficiency of the focal point mechanism has a direct correlation to the size of the GEF portfolio.

44. The three Country Portfolio Evaluations present differences in the size of the GEF portfolio, from Egypt with the largest to Cameroon and Syria with the smallest. The establishment of the GEF Unit and a National Steering Committee in Egypt has improved the approval process of GEF projects, becoming more systematic, following clear priorities, and more country-driven.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The GEF should address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon.

45. The possibility of additional allocations for activities in the field of sustainable land management should be further explored by all main partners in the GEF. There is widespread demand in Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon for activities in the area of combating land degradation. GEF supported projects have concentrated on biodiversity and climate change, with land degradation receiving basically no support despite being high national priority.

Recommendation 2: The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to International Financial Institutions, like Syria.

46. Syria is an exception since it has limited access to GEF investment agencies. Other countries may be facing similar circumstances like Syria. The GEF should conduct an inventory of such countries and develop proposals on how these countries could be supported through other institutions.

Observations:

1. Databases of GEF activities at the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies or national focal points are still not accurate.
2. As requested by the Council, the GEF should continue to monitor the results of the FESP budgetary support approach to see whether this approach could be followed in other countries. The FESP is still not sufficiently mature to enable clear judgment on its results. The CPE recognized that the program offers a potentially beneficial alternative to the short time horizons of traditional project-based approaches in terms of providing greater flexibility for financial,

institutional and individual capacity development; catalytic changes in behavior, and harmonization of donor efforts in the long term.

Annex 1. Main conclusions and recommendations to the GEF Council from the three Country Portfolio Evaluations included in the Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009

Conclusions			Recommendation
Results	Relevance	Efficiency	
Cameroon			
• The GEF portfolio has the potential to generate global environmental benefits in biodiversity conservation. Although local benefits are visible, these are not yet able to provide substantial incentives to support conservation activities. • The GEF is enabling Cameroon to address other environmental issues, particularly in the international waters and land degradation focal areas. • The results of the GEF portfolio in Cameroon are at risk because of weak financial, institutional, and socioeconomic sustainability.	• GEF support is relevant to Cameroon's national and international environmental agenda. • Although the GEF portfolio is relevant for national and international priorities, project identification and preparation are externally driven, and enhancing country ownership is challenging.	• The findings of the Joint Evaluation of the GEF Activity Cycle and modalities were confirmed in Cameroon: the complexity and inefficiency of the GEF Activity cycle have presented barriers to project development. • Knowledge management and lesson learning are weak, and there are opportunities for enhancement.	• The GEF should continue to monitor the results of the Forest and Environment Sector Program (FESP) budgetary support approach to see whether this approach could be followed in other countries. • The GEF should develop a strategy to improve capacities to address global environmental issues in Sub-Saharan Africa. • The GEF should consider further supporting trust funds as an approach to improving the sustainability of global environmental benefits.
Syria			
• GEF's support to biodiversity conservation has shown some impacts but has specifically contributed to the formal protection of globally significant biodiversity and strengthened management systems. • There is no data to estimate the direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but GEF support has influenced national energy efficiency laws with potential long lasting impacts.	• GEF support addressed national priorities in the biodiversity and climate change focal areas, however, other national priorities have not, such as in-land international waters and land degradation. • Outcomes of SGP projects are more likely to be sustained by local communities. • Country ownership of the GEF	• The GEF is perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect the projects proposals and implementation. • Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank does not have a program and Syria does not belong to any of the regional banks with direct GEF	• GEF should increase its funding for land degradation and water management issues, both high priorities for countries such as Syria. • The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to GEF investment agencies.

• Results in other focal areas are limited to establishing the foundation for national action plans and policies and develop national capacities. • Long-term sustainability of achievements continues to be a challenge.	portfolio is strong for national projects and to a lesser extent for regional and global projects.	access. • The focal point mechanism is overly centralized within the MSEA with no clear mechanism for developing and approving GEF supported projects.	
Egypt			
• GEF support to biodiversity in Egypt has been of strategic importance. • Climate change activities have achieved results, particularly in energy efficiency. • International waters projects have laid the foundation for collaboration between countries and demonstrated innovative technologies and approaches for water conservation. • GEF support to Egypt in the areas of land degradation and persistent organic pollutants has been limited. • The long term sustainability of achieved results remains a challenge.	• In general, GEF projects and activities address national priorities and coincide well with the environmental agenda in Egypt. • The GEF support in Egypt has been of particular strategic importance as compared to other donors in the field of the environment.	• In line with earlier findings of the evaluation of the project cycle, the project preparatory phase in Egypt is often too long, running the risk of altered country priorities as well as GEF priorities by the time of approval and implementation. • Project supervision and/or steering committees need to be more proactive and responsive to address problems and facilitate implementation in a timely manner. • The delivery of functions of the focal point mechanism in Egypt has improved since the establishment of the GEF Unit and the GEF National Steering Committee. •	• The GEF Council should address the significant gap of available resources in land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Egypt.