

57th GEF Council
December 17-19, 2019
Washington, D.C.

Agenda Item 9

**SEMI-ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT OF THE
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE: DECEMBER 2019**

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

Recommended Council Decision

Regarding the Semi-Annual Evaluation Report of the Independent Evaluation Office.

The Council, having reviewed the “Semi-Annual Evaluation Report of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office: November 2019,” acknowledges the progress made by the Independent Evaluation Office in the reporting period.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This Semi-Annual Evaluation Report provides an update on ongoing evaluations and knowledge management activities of the Independent Evaluation Office during the reporting period of June 2019 through November 2019. The report on the Strategic country cluster evaluation of the small island developing states and the methodological approach developed for post-completion verification are presented as separate working documents.

GEF/ME/C.57/02, The Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Small Island Developing States

GEF/ME/C.57/03 A Methodological Approach for Post-Completion Verification.

2. The Semi-Annual Evaluation Report also includes an update on the stakeholder engagement and knowledge management needs assessment survey results included in the information document:

GEF/ME/C.57/Inf. 01, The IEO Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge Needs Assessment: Survey Results

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Semi-Annual Evaluation Report provides an update on ongoing evaluations and knowledge management activities of the Independent Evaluation Office during the reporting period of June 2019 through November 2019. The reports on the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Small Island Developing States and the Methodological approach for Post-Completion Verification are presented as separate working documents. This report also includes an update on the peer review of the office, ongoing evaluations, and the results highlights of the stakeholder engagement and knowledge management needs assessment survey.

Completed Evaluations

1 Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Small Island Developing States

The SCCE on the SIDS is complete and is included as a working document. The overarching objectives of this evaluation are to provide a deeper understanding of the determinants of sustainability of the outcomes of Global Environment Facility (GEF) support in SIDS, and to assess the relevance and performance of GEF support toward SIDS' main environmental challenges from the countries' perspective. Evaluative evidence is based on the SIDS portfolio, the terminal evaluations of completed projects, and field visits to 10 countries. The evaluation is presented as a working document to the Council (GEF/ME/C.57/02).

2 A Methodological Approach to Post-completion Verification

This methodology approach is in response to a request from the Council in its 56th meeting for the IEO to conduct more post-completion verification. The paper presents the various instruments used within the IEO and across a variety of agencies who conduct post-completion verifications several years after project closure. This study reviews the current practices and the limitations and develops a comprehensive approach. It also highlights the role of geospatial analysis as a tool that can be applied in the post-completion verification process. This is presented as a working document to the Council (GEF/ME/C.55/03).

II. PEER REVIEW OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FUNCTION

2. The third peer review of the IEO commenced in June 2019, based on the terms of reference approved by the Council in June 2019. The terms of reference were updated by the peer review panel at the first meeting held in June 2019, to focus on three priority areas for in-depth analysis. The revised terms of reference are included in Annex A. The peer panel has launched stakeholder surveys and conducted interviews within the GEF partnership (GEF Secretariat, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, Trustee, GEF Agencies and projects, GEF country operational and political focal points, GEF Civil Society Organization [CSO] Network, secretariats of international environmental Conventions) and the IEO staff. The peer review will be presented by the panel chair to the Council in June 2020.

III. EVALUATION WORK IN PROGRESS

1 Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: African Biomes

3. A desk-based study on the sustainability of GEF project benefits was presented to Council as special focus on the 2017 Annual Performance Report (IEO 2018). Building on that analysis, the African Biomes SCCE aims at providing a deeper understanding of the specific factors—either project or context related—contributing to and/or hindering the sustainability of GEF outcomes in two Sub-Saharan Africa biomes (Sahel and Sudan-Guinea Savanna), comprising 23 countries. This SCCE also assesses the relevance of the GEF toward the targeted countries' main environmental challenges, from the countries' perspective. The most common challenges in these two biomes are deforestation, land degradation, desertification, and biodiversity loss. These challenges are compounded by the pressing socioeconomic needs of a rapidly growing population. Gender, resilience and fragility of the operational context, and engagement with the private sector are also being assessed.

4. The African Biomes SCCE has entered its completion phase. Desk review and portfolio analysis has been conducted on 67 projects completed between 2007 and 2014 (constituting the sustainability cohort) and 358 projects in various stages of the project cycle (constituting the relevance cohort). Country case studies have been conducted in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Uganda. A sample composed of 5 to 10 projects was reviewed in each country. These projects were purposively selected from the sustainability and relevance cohorts based on the aggregate portfolio analysis, geospatial analysis, and review of project and program documents. Triangulation of the evidence collected leading to the identification of findings is ongoing. A draft report will be shared for comments with stakeholders early next year. Main findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

2 Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: Least Developed Countries

5. The least developed countries (LDCs) SCCE covers 47 countries currently classified as LDCs in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. LDCs are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainability. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks, and almost half of the LDCs are countries in fragile situations. The LDCs' SCCE, like the African Biomes SCCE, builds on the analysis of the desk study on sustainability of GEF project outcomes and focuses on the factors influencing sustainability. The LDCs' SCCE is also assessing the extent to which GEF support is relevant to the main environmental challenges of the countries. Today's LDCs are confronted with a myriad of environmental challenges of which the most common are deforestation, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and threats to freshwater and marine environments. Gender, resilience and fragility of the operational context, and engagement with the private sector are also being assessed as crosscutting issues in the SCCEs.

6. LDCs' SCCE is in the data analysis phase. The desk review and portfolio analysis have been carried out on 124 projects completed between 2007 and 2014 (the sustainability cohort) and 623 projects in various stages of the project cycle (the relevance cohort). Country case studies have been conducted in Bhutan, Cambodia, Mozambique, and Tanzania. The LDCs' SCCE

will also draw from country case studies conducted for the African Biomes SCCE in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Uganda and for the SIDS SCCE in Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, and Vanuatu. A small sample of completed and ongoing projects has been reviewed in each of these countries, purposively selected from the sustainability and relevance cohorts based on the aggregate portfolio analysis, geospatial analysis, and review of project and program documents. Triangulation of the evidence collected leading to the identification of findings is ongoing. A draft report will be shared for comments with stakeholders early next year. Main findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the LDCs' SCCE will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

3 Evaluation of GEF Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations

7. The main objective of this evaluation is to assess conflict sensitivity in GEF strategy, project design, and implementation. Based on an assessment of the GEF programming directions and GEF projects in conflict-affected settings, the evaluation will consider the overlap of conflict situations and areas of conservation importance, the extent to which GEF projects in conflict-affected situation considered the conflict context in their design and implementation, the extent to which GEF strategy and projects reflected Convention guidance on conflict, the factors that influenced whether the project proponents considered the conflict context, and the implications of considering (or not considering) the conflict context in designing and implementing GEF projects on the stated objectives of the projects.

8. The approach paper of the evaluation has been circulated to the GEF partnership for soliciting comments. The evaluation will draw primarily upon project identification forms, project proposals, midterm reviews, final evaluations, and interviews with project staff, partners, and relevant stakeholders. Ongoing portfolio analysis and documentation review will be completed in December 2019. The portfolio analysis will enable country selection for in-depth case studies. The evaluation report will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

4 Annual Performance Report 2020

9. Consistent with the earlier issues, Annual Performance Report (APR) 2020 will include an assessment of project outcomes, risks to the sustainability of outcomes, the quality of monitoring and evaluation design and implementation in completed projects, the quality of project terminal evaluation reports, and an assessment and record of the degree to which GEF Council decisions have been adopted by the GEF management through the management action record. The reporting on completed projects will be based on data on approximately 1700 completed projects. Of these, approximately 170 projects would be covered for the first time. The IEO will also pilot three post-completion evaluations to assess the extent that GEF projects achieve their expected outcomes and are sustainable four to five years after implementation completion. APR 2020 will also include a review of the GEF's System for Transparent Allocation of Resources for the GEF-7 period and will focus on the major changes made in the framework for the GEF-7 period and the effects of the update of data for the Global Environment Benefit index. APR2020 will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

5 Innovation and Risk Management in the GEF: Evaluative Findings and Lessons

10. The GEF2020 Strategy and GEF-7 Programming Directions call for the GEF to continue to be an innovator while actively seeking to effect transformational change. The Sixth Global Environmental Outlook (2019) and other recent milestone reports recognize innovation as a key component for systemic transformations essential to achieving environmental goals. The GEF has a history of promoting frontier environmental technologies and approaches; however, as evidenced from an IEO paper, *An Evaluative Approach to Assessing Additionality* (GEF/ME/C.55/Inf.01), only a small number of projects consider innovation as an area of their additionality.

11. Whereas previous evaluations, including overall performance studies, examined innovative investments of the GEF, there has been no systematic assessment of GEF experience in fostering innovation and managing risks. The purpose of this study is to understand the GEF's processes in promoting innovation and risk-taking to safeguard the global environment through its interventions and to identify lessons for the future. The study will assess the evolution of innovation and risk-taking in the GEF partnership, factors affecting success and failure of innovation and risk-taking, and will identify lessons for the GEF to encourage innovation for the achievement of global environmental benefits. The study will use a mixed-methods approach, will draw on structured literature and document review, key informant interviews, synthesis of evidence from the portfolio review, and case study analysis. The final report will be presented to the 59th Council meeting in December 2020.

6 Evaluation of GEF Support to the Sustainable Forest Management and REDD+ projects

12. The main purpose of the evaluation is to provide insights and lessons on the GEF support for future forest-related interventions, based on evidence from an analysis of sustainable forest management (SFM) and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) interventions supported by the GEF. The study will employ a mixed-methods approach. This study will complement the value-for-money analysis of GEF support to SFM interventions that was presented to the 56th Council. The evaluation is currently being designed and will involve assessing the relevance, effectiveness, results, and impacts of SFM/REDD+ initiatives, and will synthesize the results and progress toward the impact of SFM/REDD+ projects. It will also include evaluating the multiple benefits and co-benefits from SFM projects, identification of good practices and lessons, appraising the approach of the GEF partnership toward SFM/REDD+ interventions, and assessing the role of the private sector in forestry/SFM. The approach paper will be circulated by June 2020.

7 Evaluation of GEF Medium-Sized Projects

13. The GEF medium-sized project (MSP) modality has provided an expedited mechanism for execution of smaller projects by simplifying processing steps together with review and approval procedures, thereby shortening the project cycle relative to GEF full-sized projects. MSPs have allowed a broader representation of stakeholders to directly access GEF funds, including government agencies, international nongovernmental organizations, national

nongovernmental organizations, academic and research institutions, and private sector companies, among others.

14. The last MSP evaluation took place in 2001 as an input into the Second Study of GEF's Overall Performance (OPS2). This evaluation will provide evidence on the recent GEF experience (GEF4–GEF6) in designing and implementing MSPs as well as the impact of MSP projects. The evaluation will draw on key informant interviews and surveys, portfolio and case study analysis, and field visits. Countries for the field visits will be identified following a synthesis of stakeholder interviews/surveys and portfolio analysis, which has begun. The approach paper will be shared with the GEF partnership in January 2020. The final report will be presented to the Council at the June 2020 meeting.

8 Evaluation of GEF's Enabling Activities

15. The GEF enabling activities are foundational modalities that are specifically designed to prepare plans or strategies or both, and to help countries fulfill their obligations under the Conventions to which the GEF is the financial mechanism. During GEF-5, the GEF introduced a direct access modality for enabling activities and National Portfolio Formulation Exercise, allowing national entities to request up to \$500,000 of direct financing to meet their objectives under the Biodiversity, Land Degradation, and Climate Change Conventions. In 2013, the GEF was chosen as the financial mechanism for the Minamata Convention within which the GEF is providing support for countries to ratify and meet their obligations under the Convention. The enabling activities were last evaluated as part of OPS5. At the time, the direct access modality for enabling activities had just started implementation and was thereby not included in the evaluation. This evaluation will look at enabling activities as a funding modality, the efficiency of the direct access mechanism, and the importance of enabling activities for the Conventions and their role in helping countries meet their Convention obligations. The evaluation will additionally look at the role of enabling activities in preparing national plans and strategies. This evaluation will provide evidence on the past GEF experience in designing and implementing enabling activities as well as the effectiveness of enabling activity projects. The evaluation will be presented to Council at the 2020 fall meeting.

9 The Least Developed Countries Fund Program Evaluation

16. In addition to evaluative work for the GEF Trust Fund, the IEO provides support to the two adaptation funds managed by the GEF: the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). As part of the four-year work program of the IEO approved by the LDCF/SCCF Council at its 26th meeting in June 2019, the IEO is conducting an update of the 2016 LDCF program evaluation presented to the 20th LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting in June 2016. Since the 2016 evaluation, the number of completed projects has increased from 11 to 48, the LDCF has become part of the operating entity of the financial mechanism for the Paris Agreement, and the new GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF/SCCF and Operational Improvements (July 2018 to June 2022) was approved at the 24th LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting in June 2018. The IEO will evaluate the LDCF focusing on performance and progress toward LDCF objectives and results in the four years since the 2016 evaluation. This evaluation will follow up on conclusions and recommendations of the 2016

evaluation and will provide the LDCF/SCCF Council with evaluative evidence of the Fund's relevance and emerging results. The draft approach paper has been shared with stakeholders for comment in November 2019. The final update of the LDCF evaluation will be presented at the 28th LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting in June 2020.

IV. UPDATES ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

1 Knowledge Products

Sustainable Fisheries

17. A review of GEF experience in promoting sustainable fisheries is ongoing. As pointed out in the most recent international waters focal area study (2016), marine fisheries are the dominant theme for interventions in this focal area. However, the relevance and effectiveness of GEF's investments in fisheries management has yet to be reviewed. This knowledge product aims to present a synthesis of GEF's continuous support for global fisheries based on a review of the terminal evaluations of completed fisheries projects. This review will identify contributing and hindering factors that affect the magnitude and quality of project outcomes to inform better design and implementation of future interventions. This will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

A review of the GEF Freshwater Portfolio

18. Freshwater plays a significant role in sustaining life on earth and the findings from OPS6 indicated a slight imbalance between marine/ocean and freshwater projects in the international waters portfolio. Possible reasons include the relatively lower complexity of transboundary agreements and the short-term economic and social benefits in the marine portfolio. OPS6 did not examine the freshwater portfolio in depth. This study will provide evidence the effectiveness and impacts of the GEF freshwater portfolio based on a desk review. This will be presented to the Council in June 2020.

Country Evaluation Notes

19. The IEO has started preparing country evaluation notes that provide details on the performance of GEF projects in the country and progress toward impact, as well as summarize relevant evaluation findings from other IEO evaluations. These will draw on existing evaluation evidence. Country notes have been prepared for Peru and Mexico and three additional notes will be prepared by June 2020. These notes will be accompanied by data visualizations of the portfolio and performance and this will also be demonstrated in June 2020.

2 IEO Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge Management Needs Assessment: Survey Results

20. During the reporting period, IEO conducted a Stakeholder Survey and Knowledge Needs Assessment to obtain feedback on the quality and use of IEO evaluations and knowledge products. The previous needs assessment was done in 2015 (GEF/ME/C.49/inf.01), prior to OPS6. In response to the previous survey, IEO prepared and shared focal-area studies and meso-level evaluations, such as the Review of GEF Support for Transformational Change. In

response to stakeholder preferences on the modes of communication, IEO introduced learning briefs, prepared tailored communications for the country constituency meetings during the GEF Assembly, and revamped the website, among other enhancements and activities.

21. The 2019 needs assessment aims to improve the quality of evaluations going into OPS7; inform the future IEO knowledge management, learning, and outreach activities; and provide information to the peer review of the IEO. A confidential survey in English, French, and Spanish was administered to the GEF Council from September 25 to October 9, 2019, which sought feedback from the GEF partnership and broader stakeholder groups. There was a total of 1114 responses, covering all parts of the GEF partnership and all stakeholder groups.

22. **Eighty-two percent of the respondents were familiar with the IEO work.** The Council and the GEF partnership are the most familiar with IEO reports (97 and 86 percent of respondents respectively), external stakeholders at 74 percent were relatively less familiar. Within the GEF partnership, the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies, GEF CSO Network, as well as staff from the secretariats of the international environmental Conventions were the main users of IEO reports. (Between 93 percent and 68 percent of respondents from these groups reported that they had read at least one IEO evaluation during the past four years.) GEF country operational and political focal points are less aware of IEO evaluations, with 57 percent of respondents who had read at least one IEO evaluation report in the past four years. The most commonly read reports across all groups were thematic and program evaluations, followed by performance, corporate, and country evaluations.

23. **More than eighty-five percent of the respondents rated the evaluations planned for GEF-7 as relevant, with the Comprehensive Evaluation as being the most relevant.** Across all stakeholder groups, the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF was rated as the most relevant, followed by evaluations of impact programs, APRs, and institutional evaluations. There was some variation in how various stakeholder groups assessed the relevance of GEF-7 evaluations. The GEF Council's respondents almost unanimously favored the Comprehensive Evaluation, APRs, evaluations of policies, evaluations of institutional issues and implementation of GEF policies, review of the non-grant instrument, as well as the evaluation of the country support program. The members of the GEF partnership regarded the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF, APRs, evaluations of impact programs, and institutional evaluations, as well as the innovation and risk management review, as the most relevant. External stakeholders rated the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF, the strategic country cluster evaluations, the evaluation of the Small Grants Programme, and the evaluations of implementation of GEF policies as the most relevant.

24. **Ninety-six percent of respondents were satisfied with the quality of evaluation reports.** In addition, more than 90 percent of respondents were satisfied with the relevance, usefulness, ease of understanding, transparency and clarity of methodology, objective analysis and findings, the strong link between conclusions and evidence, and timeliness. Ninety percent of respondents were also satisfied with the process of stakeholder engagement. The percentage of respondents with a high level of satisfaction (very satisfied and satisfied) was 65 percent and above in all categories, with the exception for the stakeholder engagement (59%). The GEF Council members and alternates, GEF Agencies, GEF operational and political focal

points, as well as the GEF CSO Network members were most satisfied with the evaluations; the GEF Secretariat staff were the least. The total percentage of respondents who reported a high level of satisfaction with the overall quality of reports and timeliness has increased by eight percentage points since the last survey, while the high level of satisfaction with the usefulness of conclusions and recommendations has increased by 10 percentage points.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with the overall quality of reports



25. **In terms of use, 80 percent of respondents reported using the evaluations to some extent.** More than 75 percent of the respondents reported using the evaluations as reference material, in designing and modifying projects and programs, for assessing the performance and results of GEF-supported initiatives, as well as for providing advice to others in the GEF partnership and beyond. Council members and alternates use the evaluations to support their assessment of GEF performance and to make a case for a specific course of action. Members of the GEF partnership, such as the staff of the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies, GEF operational and political focal points, and GEF CSO Network, reported using IEO evaluations to design and modify programs and projects, as reference material, to share with others, and to design and modify policies and strategies. External stakeholders, mainly CSOs as well as national and local governmental agencies, use evaluation reports as reference material and for sharing with others, as an input into the design and modification of their own initiatives.

26. **Evaluation briefs, IEO presentations and workshops, the IEO website, and email announcements were rated as the most effective knowledge-sharing channels across stakeholder groups.** Multimedia, newsletters, and social media were rated as relatively less effective. Stakeholders note that the most useful forms of learning about evaluations in the future are the evaluation briefs (99 percent), email announcements (97 percent), the website (96 percent), synthesis notes with lessons across evaluations (96 percent), as well as IEO presentations and workshops (94 percent).

27. The survey asked stakeholders directly which themes would be useful to synthesize evaluation knowledge, especially for those who design and implement GEF interventions. The most useful content areas for IEO knowledge management activities were identified as lessons on design and implementation of environmental programs and projects (90 percent), scaling-up (88 percent), sustainability of outcomes (87 percent), good practices in monitoring and evaluation design and implementation (87 percent), and guidance in conducting terminal

evaluations (84 percent). The implementation of the IEO knowledge management, learning, and outreach activities during GEF-7 will be based on the findings of this assessment.

3 Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development

28. During October 2–4, 2019, the IEO and the Earth-Eval Community of Practice held the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development in Prague, Czech Republic. The conference was held jointly with the Global Assembly of International Development Evaluation Association and was supported by the Czech Evaluation Society. The theme of the two conferences focused on bringing experiences of the global south to the global north by looking at Evaluation for Transformative Change. In particular, the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development focused on six themes: (1) Transformational Change: Processes and Impacts; (2) Drivers of Sustainability; (3) Adaptation: Lessons from Recent Experience; (4) Evaluation Approaches for Assessing Environmental and Socio-economic Co-benefits; (5) Blending Quantitative with Qualitative Analysis in Understanding Change; (6) Formative and Real-time Evaluation. The role of the Earth-Eval Community of Practice and other similar networks was discussed in their contributions to finding solutions, sharing of new ideas, and promoting good practices. Session highlights are available at <http://www.gefio.org/events/third-international-conference-evaluating-environment-and-development>.

29. More than 12 preconference workshops were offered before the start of the conference. The IEO developed and delivered a full-day workshop on challenges and opportunities when evaluating at the nexus of development and environment. The workshop discussed evaluating in a complex context, application of innovative approaches to evaluation, GEF support for transformational change, and more. Over 35 attendees participated in the workshop coming from various sectors (multilateral development banks, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private sector).

30. The conference focused on several important themes, with the most important being the need for recognizing and integrating the important role of environmental sustainability in evaluating transformative change, and development interventions. To achieve this, the nexus between natural and human systems needs to be evaluated better, using a broader systems approach, with investment in new capacities. Adaptation and mitigation would need to be better integrated. A theme resonating throughout the week was on increasing the utility and influence of evaluations to influence policy through timely availability of results, through the application of practical approaches such as real-time and formative evaluations, while balancing these demands against natural constraints wherein it takes time for environmental change to take place. Managing for longer term sustainability of outcomes through financing and institutional capacity building, while encouraging appropriate levels of innovation and risk-taking, was recognized as a challenge. The conference ended with the adoption of the “Prague Declaration on Evaluation for Transformational Change,” which focused on the role and tremendous opportunity for evaluation in promoting learning and systemic and transformational change. A book drawing on the major contributions of the conference will be published in 2020.

4 Other Communication and Dissemination

31. The IEO website contains information related to the latest evaluations, events, knowledge products, data, and methods. Aside from the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development, the IEO participated in six events since the June 2019 Council: the Evaluation Cooperation Group meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece, in June; the Asian Evaluation Week in Kunming, China, in September; UNCCD COP14 (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Conference of the Parties) in New Delhi, India, in September; National Evaluation Capacities Conference in Hurghada, Egypt, in October; the Energy Evaluation Asia Pacific 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, also in October; and the Shanghai International Program for Development Evaluation Training in China, November. In addition to a few minor updates on the IEO website, conference materials related to the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development have been added to the Earth-Eval website. Panel presentations on the six sessions of the Third International Conference are also available on the website. The IEO twitter account generated over 16,000 tweet impressions during the week of the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development (September 30–October 4, 2019).

V. ANNEX: PROFESSIONAL PEER REVIEW OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FUNCTION OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY - REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE, JULY 2019

I. INTRODUCTION

The Professional Peer Review of the Evaluation Function is conducted in line with the Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organizations, and the Good Practice Standards of the Evaluation Co-operation Group. The last such peer review of the IEO was conducted in 2014.

This document sets out the key elements of the Third Professional Peer Review (“the Review”) of the evaluation function of the GEF. It describes the background of the Peer Review, the objective, the scope and general approach and methods, the composition of the Peer Review Panel (“the Panel”) and the timing. This document is a revised version of the terms of reference which was presented to the Council in June 2019, and the revisions incorporate clarifications based on the first meeting with the Panel held on June 21-22, 2019.

II. BACKGROUND

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) operates in 183 countries in partnership with international institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector to address global environmental issues while supporting national sustainable development initiatives. Since 1992, the GEF has provided over \$17 billion in grants and mobilized an additional \$88 billion in financing for more than 4000 projects in 170 countries. An independently operating financial organization, the GEF provides grants for projects related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, the ozone layer, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), mercury, sustainable forest management, food security, and sustainable cities. Projects and programs are implemented by 18 Agencies comprising UN organizations, Multilateral Development Banks, National Agencies and International CSOs.

The GEF also serves as financial mechanism for the following conventions:

- CBD Convention on Biological Diversity
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
- Minamata Convention on Mercury

The GEF, although not linked formally to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (MP), supports implementation of the Protocol in countries with economies in transition.

III. THE EVALUATION FUNCTION IN THE GEF

Evaluation in the GEF is intended to enhance accountability, to learn what works and in what context, and to inform the formulation of GEF's programming directions, policies and procedures, and focal area strategies. GEF Agencies are responsible for monitoring, mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations of projects and programs. Evaluation offices in the Agencies review the terminal evaluations and submit these to the IEO.

The IEO is an independent unit within the GEF. IEO's mandate is to independently assess the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of GEF programs and activities, and their contribution to Global Environment Benefits. The IEO validates terminal evaluations of projects and programs to ensure that the ratings are consistent with the evidence and the methods applied are consistent with the guidelines, and conducts performance, corporate, thematic and country evaluations. The IEO reports directly to the GEF Council ('the Council'), which decides on the IEO work program and budget and oversees IEO's work.

IV. PURPOSE AND USE OF THE REVIEW

The main purpose of the proposed Review is to enhance the evaluation function in the GEF partnership, by reviewing IEO's mandate, role and performance. The objectives are to clearly identify IEO's main strengths and those areas where improvement is necessary.

The Review will provide the Council with information on issues core to the effective performance of the independent evaluation function within the GEF, and with findings that may apply more broadly to the evaluation function of the GEF. .

The final report of the Review, including its recommendations, will be presented at the GEF Council meeting in June 2020, for the Council's consideration of any proposed change in the mandate, direction or structure of the IEO and/or of the evaluation function. A response to the report and its recommendations will be prepared by each responsible entity in the GEF.

The findings of the Review will also be discussed with the evaluation units of the GEF Agencies to improve the quality of evaluations across the GEF partnership and presented to the ECG and UNEG members as feedback on the quality of evaluation in one of the multilateral organizations.

V. SUBJECT AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Review will build on the findings of the 2009 and 2014 Reviews of the IEO, including an assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of that review. The Review will cover the time period 2014-2019 and will provide a snapshot of IEO's performance against evaluation good practice standards, drawing on the Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organizations and the ECG Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in

Multilateral Development Banks and other relevant assessment frameworks as appropriate. The Review will assess performance against the 2010 Policy, as well as review the recently approved 2019 Policy.

VI. CORE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Consistent with good practice standards, the core assessment criteria which will be applied to all dimensions of the Review presented above include:

- A. **Independence** of evaluations and the evaluation system(s). The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process concerned with the policy making, the delivery, and the management of assistance. A requisite measure of independence of the evaluation function is a recognized pre-condition for credibility, validity and usefulness.
- B. **Credibility** of evaluations. The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators, on the degree of transparency and inclusiveness of the evaluation process and on the quality of the evaluation products. Credibility requires that evaluations should report successes as well as failures. Recipient countries should, as a rule, fully participate in evaluation in order to promote credibility and commitment. Whether and how the organization's approach to evaluation fosters partnership and helps building ownership and capacity in developing countries merits attention as a major theme.
- C. **Utility** of evaluations. As in most organizations, IEO's aim is to encourage the active application and use of evaluations at all levels of management, while ensuring that objectivity and impartiality is maintained throughout the evaluation process. To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way and should fully reflect the different interests and needs of the many parties involved in development co-operation. Also, evaluation topics must be aligned with institutional priorities and reports must be timely. Importantly, each review should bear in mind that ensuring the utility of evaluations is only partly under the control of evaluators. It is also critically a function of the interest of managers, and member countries through their participation on governing bodies, in commissioning, receiving and using evaluations.

The core assessment criteria will be applied in the following thematic areas of focus for this review, which are based on the outcomes of a rapid self-assessment conducted within the IEO. The themes below, in addition to others identified by the Panel in its preliminary discussions, will be included in the final Normative Framework of the Peer Review.

Relevance of the Evaluation Program to the GEF (Credibility and Utility)

Strategic direction of the IEO, with special attention to the alignment and relevance of IEO's work to the GEF's vision and strategic priorities and engagement across the partnership and other key stakeholders (including GEF Agencies, Political Focal Points, Operational Focal Points, clients and other stakeholders);

IEO's contribution to the field of environmental evaluation and whether it applies state-of-the-art approaches.

Evaluation Policy (Independence, Credibility and Utility)

The recently re-designed evaluation policy of the GEF, as well as other policies and procedures which have a bearing on IEO and its work, in particular the extent to which the evaluation policy is consistent with international good practice standards.

The Stakeholder Engagement Process (Independence, credibility and utility)

The role and choice of reference groups

Consultation throughout the evaluation process and after

Interactions with Agencies, Council, OFPs in countries, STAP

The Evaluation Process (Independence, credibility and utility)

Design of approach papers and concept notes and their consistency

Evaluation team structures (team leadership, use of consultants, etc.)

Data management and processing and efficiencies in the process

Country case studies

Quality of evaluations (methods, clarity of writing, evidence for conclusions)

Management response and follow-up

Dissemination and knowledge management

The Work Program (credibility and utility)

Number of evaluations and the balance across products

Selection of topics

Office Structure and Budget

Office staffing structure

Staff profiles, skills and responsibilities

Budget management (overall and evaluations)

Delegation in the use of resources

VII. PROCESS

Selection of the Panel

The Review will be conducted by a Panel of three independent members, supported by an Adviser, who have been selected by the IEO in adherence to the criteria outlined below. The Panel members will be chosen for their high international professional stature, evaluation expertise, and deep knowledge of environmental issues.

The selection criteria for the Panel will include a combination of the following:

- High international professional stature and deep knowledge of environmental issues and challenges on the ground;
- Knowledge of the context and use of independent evaluation in multilateral organizations;
- Professional evaluation expertise and standing in the evaluation community, or high-level experience and expertise in an oversight discipline;
- Senior-level expertise in the management and conduct of evaluations in peer organizations;
- Representation from the UN Agencies and Multilateral Development Banks.

Panel Composition

A number of important considerations are taken into account when composing the Panel membership: (i) relevant professional experience; (ii) independence – to avoid any potential or alleged conflict of interest or partiality, the panel members don't have any close working relationship to GEF that might influence the Panel's position and deliberations; and (iii) balanced regional and gender representation. The selected Panel members will have no financial or other relationships with the GEF or IEO over the last five years that might influence their assessments, deliberations and conclusions.

The Panel will be assisted by a lead Adviser responsible for data collection and information gathering; preliminary assessment of the collected information which is to form the basis for more detailed information gathering through structured and semi-structured interviews. The Adviser will provide the Panel with a consolidated information base, specifying the sources. With the benefit of the information assembled by the Adviser, its examination by the members of the Panel, and observations provided by GEF on the information gathered, the Panel will canvass the views of IEO staff, senior Secretariat staff, other senior staff in the Agencies and partner organizations, and a selection of Council Members, through a variety of tools. The Adviser will also be responsible for drafting the report of the Review.

Responsibility of IEO

IEO serves as the main contact point within GEF for the Panel and its Adviser. IEO will provide requested information and data, including:

- the names and details of contact persons whom the Panel or its Adviser wish to contact, including contact points in GEF Agencies,
- the complete list of IEO's evaluations,
- an e-library accessible via internet: and
- any other information as appropriate.

VIII. REPORTING

IEO will provide periodic updates to the Council.

The Panel will discuss its draft report with the IEO and will be fully responsible for the content of the report. The Panel's Chair will present the final report to the GEF Council.

Follow-up on accepted recommendations will be reported upon by the responsible entity within the GEF.

The Panel and the IEO will provide the UNEG and ECG with feedback on the experience of the Peer Review to enable the members of both groups to learn from IEO's experience.

IX. REVIEW PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

Activity	Responsibility	Period/deadline
Kick-off meeting	IEO and Panel	20-21 June 2019
Updated version of ToR	IEO	20 July
Advanced Normative Framework, check list interviews IEO staff	Adviser and Panel	20 July 2019
Feedback from IEO on data sources and facilitate access to documents	IEO	20 July 2019
Desk review and interviews with IEO staff	Adviser	July-August 2019
Advanced notes with key issues and check-lists	Adviser	10 September 2019
IEO self-assessment, light version	IEO	September 2019
Discussion of the advanced notes and issues identified through the desk review and interviews	Panel and Adviser	30 September 2019
Additional tools preparation	Adviser and Panel	Mid-October 2019
Attendance of Earth-Eval 3	Michael Spilsbury	30 September-4 October 2019
E-surveys to Agencies and Focal Points	Adviser and Panel	October 2019
Visit to GEF and World Bank headquarters in Washington, and to UNDP headquarters in New York to conduct interviews	Panel and Adviser	13-23 October 2019
Interviews with Partner Agencies and Conventions	Adviser and Panel members	November 2019
Country visits for cluster evaluations tbd	Adviser, Panel members?	November 2019-January 2020
Panel Chair and Members to meet with GEF Council Members; panel wrap-up	Panel and Adviser	15-21 December 2019

Draft report to Panel	Adviser	20 January
Panel discussion first draft	Panel and Adviser	3 February 2020
First draft to IEO	Adviser and Panel	20 February
Comments to Panel	IEO	1 March
Second draft to IEO and Secretariat	Adviser and Panel	15 March
Comments to Panel	IEO and Secretariat	30 March
Final report	Adviser and Panel	15 April 2020
Presentation of the final report to the Council by Panel Chair	Panel chair	10 June 2020

Annex: Panel Composition

Mrs. Saraswathi Menon, former Director of UNDP Independent Evaluation Office and past-Chair of UNEG (panel Chair)

Mr Marvin Taylor- Dormond, Director General of Independent Evaluation, Asian Development Bank Mr. Michael Spilsbury, Director, Evaluation Office, United Nations Environment (UNEP)

Ms. Tullia Aiazzi (Adviser)