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Agenda Item 07

**SEVENTH COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE GEF (OPS7)
APPROACH PAPER**

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having reviewed Document GEF/ME/C.58/02, “Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7): Approach Paper,” approves this approach paper. The Council requests the Independent Evaluation Office to conduct the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation (OPS7) and to provide the evaluation reports to the replenishment process and to the Council according to the schedule presented.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The eighth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) will take place in an international context that is very difficult to predict and navigate. The global environment continues on a downward trend, and more than a decade after the financial crisis of 2008, the world economy is still struggling with slow growth and constrained government budgets. The current global pandemic will place additional pressure on budgets at all levels of country governments, possibly contributing to another global recession. The pandemic has also brought home the fact that haphazard expansion of human activities and destruction of natural habitats can lead to severe, unexpected negative consequences.
2. Several other global challenges exist that will require significant public-private cooperation to address (World Economic Forum 2020). These challenges include a global population increase of 2 billion by 2050, accompanied by a rapid increase in the global middle class—3 billion in the next two decades—rapidly growing unemployment, income and wealth inequality within and across countries, and agrarian stress. These trends will require the world to meet increased demands for food, energy, human habitat, transportation, and more—all placing direct pressure on the global environment. Further, the international environmental architecture of conventions, funds, programs, and donors continues to show increasing fragmentation, making it more difficult to coordinate and harmonize funding for the implementation of environmental activities globally.
3. The response to these global environmental challenges has increased significantly in recent years, mainly in the area of climate change. Annual tracked climate finance flows in 2017 and 2018 reached \$579 billion,¹ a 25 percent increase from 2015/16 (Buchner et al. 2019). Approximately \$253 billion of global climate finance was committed by the public sector, with development finance institutions providing the majority (84 percent). Multilateral climate funds, including the GEF, increased annual financing to \$3.2 billion in 2017-18, up 43 percent from 2015-16. The private sector provided, on average, \$326 billion during 2017 and 2018, a 31 percent annual increase over 2015-16. While climate finance has reached record levels, action still falls far short of the estimated funding required to meet mitigation as well as adaptation requirements.² Other environmental priorities such as biodiversity have received even less attention.
4. The GEF continues to occupy a unique space in the global environmental financing architecture by delivering global environmental benefits across multiple domains. Its uniqueness derives from its role in financing the major multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Minamata Convention on Mercury. In addition, the GEF provides funding to support economies in transition in phasing out ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol. The GEF also funds projects in international waters and sustainable forest management that support the implementation of several global and regional multilateral environmental agreements.
5. The 2020 vision for the GEF aimed at positioning it as a champion of the global environment, building on its role as the financial mechanism of several multilateral environmental agreements,

¹ All dollar amounts are U.S. dollars unless otherwise indicated.

² At the low end, \$1.6 trillion is needed between 2016 and 2050 under a 1.5 °C global warming scenario (IPCC 2018); the costs of adaptation are estimated at \$180 billion annually from 2020 to 2030 by the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA 2019).

supporting transformational change, and achieving global environmental benefits on a larger scale through integrated approaches (GEF 2015). Integrated and systems-based approaches (i.e., those that simultaneously consider multiple benefits) enable cross-linkages to be explored and systemwide effects to be managed. In this way, policies can support a number of social, economic, and environmental goals aimed at human well-being, ensuring that various preconditions are in place (UN Environment 2019). To achieve this vision, the GEF 2020 Strategy was focused on designing interventions that would address the drivers of environmental degradation, support innovative and scalable activities, and deliver the greatest impacts cost effectively.

6. During the GEF-7 negotiations—and in addition to the focal area strategies—there was broad support for building on the innovative programming directions introduced in GEF-6 (GEF Secretariat 2016). Replenishment participants agreed that the impact programs (IPs) could keep the GEF on the cutting edge of innovation and improve its responsiveness to regional and global issues, building on the lessons and experience of the integrated approach pilots (IAPs).³ The GEF-7 programming strategy does so, and includes IPs focusing on food systems, land use, and restoration; sustainable cities; and sustainable forest management. These IPs have been designed with the objective of helping countries pursue holistic and integrated approaches for transformational change in these key systems in line with their own national development priorities. The IPs also seek to engage the private sector, thereby improving knowledge sharing and learning, and ensuring more effective use of GEF resources (GEF Secretariat 2018).

7. To implement its strategy and achieve its overall objective of delivering global environmental benefits, the GEF has a network of implementing partners. This network has expanded from an initial three Implementing Agencies (the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Bank Group) to 18 Agencies today. Other important institutional reforms include the GEF resource allocation system—initially the Resource Allocation Framework in GEF-4, followed by the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) from GEF-5 onwards. The STAR was designed to provide predictable funding to recipient countries, contribute to country ownership, enhance country engagement, and promote flexibility in programming. At its 54th meeting in June 2018, the GEF Council approved a new policy for the STAR that introduced modifications as agreed by the participants to the seventh replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund. The policy and associated guidelines were effective as of July 1, 2018.

8. The negotiations for GEF-8 will be informed by an overall comprehensive evaluation of the GEF conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Assuming the schedule of the seventh replenishment is followed for the upcoming GEF-8 replenishment, it is expected that the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7) will be presented at the replenishment meeting in October 2021; subsequently as a working document to the GEF Council in December 2021; and finally presented at the next GEF Assembly to be held in 2022.

9. This approach paper presents a roadmap for OPS7. The purpose is to guide the preparation of the inputs into OPS7 and facilitate constructive dialogue in the GEF and among its partner Agencies. OPS7 will cover two closely interrelated main themes: GEF strategy, institutional issues, and programming; and GEF

³ The three IAPs in GEF-6 were the Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa IAP, the Sustainable Cities IAP, and the Taking Deforestation out of Global Commodity Supply Chains IAP. They were all designed with the objective of addressing global environmental issues more holistically, within a broad and complex set of development challenges.

performance, impact, and sustainability. At the strategic level, OPS7 will assess the results and lessons learned from implementation of the GEF 2020 Strategy, progress on recommendations made in OPS6, and design and progress on implementation of the GEF-7 programming strategy. OPS7 will address issues core to the GEF 2020 Strategy including the GEF's performance in reducing environmental stresses and enhancing global environmental benefits, promoting transformational change through innovation, and scaling up impacts through integration and systemic approaches with efficiency. OPS7 will analyze the institutional policies that have supported implementation of the GEF 2020 Strategy through assessment of GEF progress in achieving gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment; increasing the role of the private sector; implementing policies on safeguards and stakeholder engagement, including of civil society and indigenous peoples; and strengthening results-based management and knowledge sharing. OPS7 will draw on evidence for (1) the achievements, results, and performance of the GEF—both in focal areas as well as in multifocal projects and programs, with a special focus on sustainability; (2) the performance of the IAPs and design elements of the IPs with an emphasis on innovation, transformational change, scaling-up, and additionality; and (3) progress on implementation of the GEF's operational policies and programs that support implementation of the GEF strategy.

10. This paper begins with a brief discussion of the conclusions of previous GEF overall performance studies (OPSs). This is followed by a summation of the key areas of focus and the evaluation questions for OPS7, the sources of evaluative evidence, and methodological considerations and limitations. Issues to be addressed are also presented, based on preliminary discussions with GEF partners, participating Agencies, and members of the GEF Council and GEF Secretariat.

11. In preparing this approach paper, the IEO has initiated a consultative process with a variety of stakeholder groups including GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and country focal points. The draft approach paper for OPS7 will be posted on the IEO website, inviting comments and suggestions from GEF constituencies and partners until August 2020. A five-member external review panel will advise the IEO throughout the evaluation process in addition to providing quality assurance.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Evolution of the GEF's Overall Performance Studies

12. The first study of the restructured GEF was requested by the Council in 1996. The study concluded that, in general, the GEF had performed effectively in creating new institutional arrangements and approaches to programming its resources in the four focal areas of its work and had been quite successful in leveraging cofinancing for GEF projects, with some positive impact on policies and programs in recipient countries (Porter et al. 1999). The study further concluded that good stakeholder involvement and participation in GEF projects was one of the key strengths of GEF operations.

13. The Second Overall Performance Study (OPS2) was designed to assess the extent to which the GEF had achieved its primary objectives as specified in the 1994 restructuring and GEF policies of subsequent years. The evaluation concluded that GEF-supported projects were able to produce significant results that address important global environmental problems (GEF 2002). It was clear around 2002 that the GEF had produced a wide array of project results considered important in achieving future positive environmental impacts.

14. OPS3 evaluated the results of GEF activities; the sustainability of results at the country level; the GEF as a catalytic institution; GEF policies, institutional structure, and partnerships; and GEF implementation processes (GEF IEO 2005). It concluded that, while there had been substantial progress in the GEF system with a much better informed stakeholder group as well as better functioning processes than four years before, there was a need for “constructive dialogue” in defining baselines in the face of a moving target—for example, as additional species were catalogued or as abandoned stockpiles of persistent organic pollutants were uncovered.

15. The effort to determine progress toward results within the GEF continued in OPS4. The study concluded that the GEF was relevant both to the conventions and to regional and national priorities (GEF IEO 2010). GEF projects were assessed to be effective in producing sustainable outcomes. Seventy percent of completed projects were expected to make progress toward global environmental benefits. However, follow-up actions from national partners were key impact drivers that required attention. The study recommended improving the GEF's efficiency with an emphasis on programming, reducing the period for project identification, improving project formulation, and enhancing the fee structure. It also recommended more integrated learning and a results-based management framework to provide the basis for measuring progress toward impact.

16. OPS5 concluded that the GEF was achieving its objectives and had played a catalytic role in supporting countries in meeting their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements and in tackling global environmental issues (GEF IEO 2014). As a network, OPS5 noted that the GEF continued to search for ways to function as smoothly as possible. The report argued that network interactions had been scaled back, and effective interaction was adversely affected. Delays in the project approval process, which had often occurred in the past, were reduced but the process was still not efficient. The report questioned the appropriateness of the GEF's organizational and business model and concluded that there was a need for the GEF to reflect and find appropriate solutions in the sixth replenishment period. These issues were specifically addressed in the OPS6.

17. OPS6 assessed GEF relevance, performance, and impact, and its institutional and governance issues in detail (GEF IEO 2017). The evaluation noted the GEF's strong track record in delivering overall good project performance, being catalytic, and driving transformational change. Progress was noted in programs, policies, and systems, with recommendations for further improvement.
18. OPS6 found the shift toward programmatic approaches and integration across focal areas to be relevant in addressing drivers of environmental degradation; but noted that complex designs had implications for outcomes, efficiency, and management. The IAPs were relevant to the environmental issues they addressed, had been designed coherently in terms of alignment of program and child project objectives, results-based management frameworks, and monitoring and evaluation systems. They also had innovative knowledge components. However, the evaluation noted that improvements were needed on several fronts in these pilots: targets needed to be better specified and measured, and there was a need to demonstrate program additionality over a set of discrete projects. There were inefficiencies caused by delays in designing and launching the IAPs. Also, the management of these complex programs was resource intensive, involving implementing and government agencies and countries. The selection process of countries and agencies was not always transparent.
19. The evaluation highlighted that GEF policies on gender mainstreaming, safeguards, and indigenous peoples had clearly advanced the GEF's efforts in these areas, but gaps existed in the frameworks relative to good practice in partner agencies and in implementation. Operational restrictions and lack of awareness of the GEF resulted in not fully realizing the potential for successful engagement with the private sector. The GEF's Project Management Information System, as well as its results-based management system and knowledge management system, had improved but failed to keep pace with the needs for real-time project information, monitoring data for decision making, or knowledge sharing to improve project design and implementation.
20. The OPS6 recommendations highlighted
- (a) the need for strategically positioning the GEF in the changing landscape for environmental finance;
 - (b) enhancing transformational change;
 - (c) the importance of a continued focus on the integrative principle in GEF programming with an emphasis on improving efficiency, transparency, innovation, and additionality;
 - (d) improving financial risk management;
 - (e) strengthening the GEF's operational governance;
 - (f) designing a strategy for greater private sector engagement;
 - (g) promoting gender equality;
 - (h) developing policies and implementation guidelines on safeguards and engagement with indigenous peoples; and
 - (i) improving systems for project management data, monitoring, and knowledge sharing.

These recommendations were endorsed by the GEF Replenishment Committee and included in the GEF-7 policy recommendations. The upcoming OPS7 comprehensive evaluation will, among other tasks, assess the GEF's progress in addressing the gaps identified in OPS6.

B. Context and Coverage of OPS7

21. The GEF-8 replenishment will take place against a background of a world economy recovering from a global pandemic, declining environmental trends, and continue pressures on people and the environment. The GEF becomes even more important within the context of this pandemic. The scientific literature highlights how destroyed habitats provide perfect conditions for such viruses to thrive. “We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbor so many species of animals and plants—and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses,” David Quammen, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic*, recently wrote in *The New York Times*. “We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.” Further, financing still falls far short of the estimated requirements for mitigation, adaptation and environmental priorities such as biodiversity. It is also possible that the strategic context for OPS7 will shift further over the next 18 months – both in terms of the economic context, but also in terms of completely new/different opportunities for environmental conservation, protection and re-vitalization, be this through government programs or public-private partnerships. Against this backdrop, the GEF plays a very important role in reducing environmental stresses, improving biodiversity, and reducing deforestation.

22. The overall purpose of OPS7 is to provide solid evaluative evidence to inform the negotiations for GEF-8. As the GEF 2020 Strategy draws to a close, consistent with the objectives of the previous OPSs and the GEF Instrument, OPS7 will assess the extent to which the GEF is achieving its objectives of enhancing global environmental benefits as set forth in the GEF Instrument, in reviews by the Assembly, and as developed and adopted by the GEF Council in operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities, with a view to identify potential areas for improvement going forward. OPS7 will assess the GEF's progress on implementation and achievement of the GEF 2020 Strategy against the objectives of addressing the drivers of environmental degradation and reducing environmental stress; greater integration, innovation, and scaling-up; and achieving transformational change and impacts with greater efficiency.

23. The four-year work program and budget of the IEO present the strategy, programming, and other knowledge work for the GEF-7 period (GEF IEO 2019, and annex A). This was discussed and approved by the GEF Council in June 2018. The work program builds on OPS6 and was designed to provide evaluative evidence on the performance of GEF projects from earlier replenishments and on the major strategies and programs approved in GEF-7. As such, all evaluations conducted between 2018 and 2021 and approved in the work program will feed into the comprehensive evaluation; additional studies that are required to address specific questions and issues relevant for the replenishment process will be carried out over the 2021 fiscal year. All approach papers and concept notes for the evaluations are [available](#).

24. The OPS7 work program broadly relates to two themes: (1) GEF strategy, institutional issues, and programming; and (2) GEF performance, impact, and sustainability. Key evaluation criteria such as relevance, impact, performance, and the catalytic role of the GEF that were investigated in earlier OPSs are now part of the regular work program of the IEO. Since OPS6, the IEO has also explored factors affecting the sustainability of GEF interventions and has focused on GEF innovation and additionality.

25. Within these two broad themes, the evaluation of implementation of the GEF 2020 Strategy and progress on GEF-7 will be based on the following areas of focus:

- (a) GEF performance, additionality, longer-term impacts, and sustainability at the portfolio and country levels
- (b) GEF modalities, including the performance of the small grant, medium-size project, and enabling activities
- (c) The IAPs and the IPs
- (d) Focal area assessments, limited to specific themes such as the Cleantech Programme and a review of GEF support to sustainable transport within the climate change focal area, GEF support to freshwater and fisheries in international waters, the Artisanal Gold Mining Program in chemicals, the GEF's sustainable forest management initiatives, and biodiversity mainstreaming
- (e) GEF support to innovation and scaling-up
- (f) Private sector engagement through specific attention to GEF support to small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in the energy efficiency, renewable energy, and artisanal gold mining sectors
- (g) The GEF Country Support Programme
- (h) The GEF stakeholder engagement policy, and evaluation updates on implementation of the GEF policies on safeguards, gender, and engagement with indigenous peoples and civil society
- (i) GEF policies to improve operational efficiency, the redesigned results portal, and knowledge management initiatives

26. In light of the current pandemic, OPS7 will also include [studies](#) that relate to lessons learned from the successes and failures of GEF programs following other crises. This will provide insights into the GEF's ability to be flexible and adapt to rapidly changing situations.

27. The audience for OPS7 comprises replenishment participants, the GEF Council, the GEF Assembly, members of the GEF partnership, and external stakeholders. Relevant findings will be presented to stakeholders and partners in the GEF, including the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, the GEF-CSO Network, operational and political focal points in countries, civil society groups including private and public sector entities, as well as the academic community. Findings will be shared through existing channels such as the Expanded Constituency Workshops, the IEO website, webinars, and GEF-CSO Network meetings. The evaluation will also be distributed to the multilateral environmental agreement secretariats and their conferences of the parties.

III. APPROACH TO PREPARING THE SEVENTH COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

A. Issues, Questions, and Scope

28. The IEO GEF-7 work program broadly relates to two main strands of work: (1) GEF strategy, institutional issues, and programming; and (2) GEF performance, impact, and sustainability. These two areas provide a good evaluative framework to assess the effectiveness of the GEF 2020 and GEF-7 strategies and the policies and institutional framework that support their implementation. The two strands are also consistent with well-established evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

29. The work program (GEF IEO 2019) was developed to assess the progress of the GEF against the key strategic priorities included in the GEF-7 Programming Directions (GEF Secretariat 2018), and progress in implementation of policies designed to support the effective functioning of the GEF. The overall approach of IEO evaluations in the GEF-7 period addresses performance, impact and sustainability, drivers of environmental degradation, additionality, innovation, and scaling-up through various thematic and focal area evaluations. Results at the country level are assessed through evaluations of strategic country clusters, and GEF support in fragile and conflict-affected situations. The performance of the GEF partnership in terms of relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness will be assessed through the annual performance reports, terminal evaluations, and post-completion verifications. In addition, evaluation of the IAPs and IPs will provide evidence against the GEF 2020 Strategy for greater integration. The implementation of GEF policies on safeguards; gender; engagement with stakeholders, civil society, the private sector, and indigenous peoples; and GEF systems to support effective results management and knowledge sharing will be assessed based on the roll-out timelines of the respective policies. The Country Support Programme, designed to help channel GEF funding to countries, will be evaluated after 10 years. Institutional governance issues will be addressed through evaluations of the IAPs and the IPs; and of the small grant, medium-size project, and enabling activity modalities. Besides the evaluation work of the GEF Trust Fund, evaluations of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) constitute part of the body of work that will contribute to this comprehensive evaluation of the GEF.

30. The individual evaluation reports and an overall comprehensive OPS7 report will inform the GEF-8 replenishment process. The OPS7 report will draw on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of all the component evaluations conducted as part of the IEO GEF-7 work program, along with evidence from evaluations commissioned by the evaluation units of the GEF Agencies. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate how the individual evaluations implemented as part of the work program will address the two main themes. Assuming a similar schedule as the GEF-7 replenishment cycle, the reports will be timed to support the GEF Council's eighth replenishment, with the OPS7 report submitted to the December 2021 meeting.

B. Strategy and Institutional Issues: Relevance and Global Contribution of the GEF

31. Themes related to strategy and institutional issues that will be addressed in OPS7 include the following:

- a. Relevance of the GEF (to global environmental challenges, countries, conventions)
- b. Results and lessons from implementation of the GEF 2020 Strategy

- c. Design and implementation of the GEF-7 programming strategy
- d. Implementation of GEF policies including gender; safeguards; and engagement with stakeholders, civil society, the private sector, and indigenous peoples
- e. Institutional processes including results-based management and knowledge management
- f. The GEF Country Support Programme
- g. The GEF's flexibility to adapt and respond to crises

32. Table 1 details in a matrix format the key questions related to these themes, identifies the evaluation and other sources of information, and clarifies the scope of the studies.

Table 1: Strategy and Institutional Issues: Relevance and Global Contribution of the GEF

Key issue	Evaluation question	Sources of evidence	Scope and evaluation processes
Relevance of the GEF Looking ahead to a future GEF: how is the GEF positioned to strengthen the environmental agenda and enhance socioeconomic benefits in a post-COVID-19 world?	To what extent is the GEF relevant globally and how could its global relevance be enhanced? What Is the comparative advantage of the GEF in the changing landscape? How relevant is the GEF to the guidance of the conventions, as emerging from evaluations in the period 2018–21? Do the IAPs and IPs align with the focal areas and the objectives of the conventions?	Environmental/scientific literature Patterns of government spending Interviews with governments and international development agencies, conventions, and research institutions Focal area studies, terminal evaluations, evaluations of enabling activities and the Country Support Programme Independent evaluations of other organizations involved in global environmental financing	Relevance and coherence will be assessed in terms of both alignment with the global context (including the Sustainable Development Goals) and external environmental funding, and alignment with the conventions. Issues related to relevance will also be synthesized from focal area studies, the enabling activities evaluation, project-level evaluations, and the IAP/IP evaluations.

GEF 2020 Strategy	What are the results and lessons learned from implementation of the GEF 2020 Strategy, particularly with respect to the objectives of addressing the drivers of environmental degradation, greater integration through a systemic approach, scaling-up, and delivering impacts with efficiency?	GEF 2020 Strategy, OPS6, SCCEs Scaling-up study, IAP and IP evaluations Value-for-money analysis of sustainable forest management, biodiversity, and land degradation interventions Ability of the GEF to be flexible and adapt to crises	The GEF 2020 Strategy will be assessed against the objectives of addressing the drivers of environmental degradation through integration, impacts, scaling-up, and efficiency. Additionality and innovation of the IAPs and IPs will also be assessed, along with lessons learned from previous crises on the GEF's ability to respond to crisis situations.
GEF-7 programming strategy	To what extent is the GEF-7 programming strategy on track to achieving its objectives? What does the early evidence suggest on the IPs? To what extent are GEF programs systemic in driving sustainable practices? Are the concepts behind the IAPs and IPs the right ones to achieve integration, or should others be explored further going forward? What were the best “vectors” toward integration, and should others be explored?	GEF-7 Programming Directions Special studies on focal areas SCCEs Review of the GEF results-based management architecture and its core indicators Evaluation of the Country Support Programme IP formative evaluation and IAP midterm evaluation	Progress on the GEF-7 programming strategy will be assessed through a formative and quality-at-entry analysis of the design elements of Chief Executive Officer–endorsed projects. Governance issues and the appropriateness of the business model will also be addressed.

	Does the GEF business model support the strategy and its implementation?		
GEF policies on safeguards; gender; and engagement with stakeholders, indigenous peoples, the private sector, and civil society	To what extent have the policies been implemented and mainstreamed into GEF projects since their respective development? How has engagement with civil society, indigenous peoples, and the private sector been reflected in GEF projects; and what are findings and lessons? Are there any unintended consequences?	GEF policy documents and IEO evaluations, including benchmarks of good practice in design of policies Evidence of inclusion of gender, civil society, the private sector, and indigenous peoples from IEO thematic and focal area evaluations and SCCEs Quality-at-entry assessment of projects for compliance with policies since Council approval	The IEO has conducted in-depth evaluations of the gender, safeguards, stakeholder engagement and indigenous peoples policies and of the GEF-CSO Network. This evaluation will build on completed evaluations and include evidence from recent projects to assess the extent to which the recommendations from the previous evaluations have been implemented in light of recent experience. The stakeholder engagement policy will be a first comprehensive assessment.

C. GEF Performance, Impact, and Sustainability

33. The evaluation of performance, impacts, and sustainability will consider the following key themes, with the primary objective of assessing the GEF's contributions to addressing drivers of global environmental degradation.

- (a) Trends in performance: outcomes, sustainability, and progress toward impact; quality at entry, cofinancing
- (b) The catalytic role of the GEF as characterized by projects that focus on innovation and scale-up
- (c) Impacts and sustainability of GEF support to countries through the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations (SCCEs) in small island developing states, African Sudan and Sahel-Guinea savanna biomes and the least developed countries; GEF outcomes in fragile and conflict situations; GEF impacts through small grants, medium-size projects, and enabling activities; and program evaluations of the LDCF and SCCF
- (d) GEF engagement with the private sector with a special focus on the GEF's impacts on SMEs
- (e) Performance, impact, and sustainability in focal areas: special themes on fisheries and freshwater in international waters, clean technology and sustainable transport, the Artisanal Gold Mining Program in chemicals and waste, sustainable forest management, and biodiversity mainstreaming

34. A major exercise was undertaken in both OPS5 and OPS6 to assemble, clean, and validate a database of GEF interventions through exchanges with the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, and the GEF Trustee. The OPS6 database will serve as a starting point for conducting the meta-analysis for OPS7. Updates will produce two lists of projects: (1) completed projects, and (2) projects ongoing after OPS6 closed. These databases will be used to conduct a meta-analysis of trends in GEF support in terms of modalities, focal areas, countries and regions, and performance (results and impact) for closed projects. Table 2 presents a matrix of issues to be considered in the meta-analysis. It includes key evaluation questions and the sources of evaluative evidence.

Table 2: GEF Performance, Impact, and Sustainability

Key issue	Evaluation question	Sources of evidence	Scope and evaluation processes
Performance (outcomes, longer-term sustainability of outcomes) Does the GEF encourage an appropriate level of risk taking?	What are the environmental (and socioeconomic outcomes) and sustainability ratings of completed GEF projects for which terminal evaluations are available (2018–21)? What are the trends in cofinancing, quality of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and efficiency of the activity cycle?	Terminal evaluations of projects Project implementation reviews Project midterm reviews Project Management Information System GEF Portal SCCEs Impact evaluations of SMEs Annual performance reports LDCF/SCCF Annual Evaluation Report	Performance trends will be observed from portfolio analysis, focal area studies, and IAPs and IPs.

Innovation, transformational change, and scaling-up (catalytic role of the GEF)	What is the evidence on the GEF record for supporting innovation? What are some of the factors that have influenced innovation and scaling-up in the GEF? Does the GEF support risk taking to encourage innovation? What are the lessons from “productive failures”?	Innovation and scaling-up evaluations IEO framework on additionality Post completion and quality-at-entry analyses SCCEs Thematic and focal area evaluations Evaluations of GEF support to SMEs	The innovation evaluation will develop a framework for innovation that will be applied to determine the GEF’s contribution to supporting innovation through projects and programs. The scaling-up study also develops a framework assessing factors that influence scale-up and demonstrates the importance of these factors through case studies.
GEF performance and impact	What are the impacts of GEF support in countries? How sustainable are GEF interventions over the long term? Do GEF projects adequately plan for the context in operating in fragile and conflict situations?	The SCCEs in LDCs, African biomes, and small island developing states Evaluation of the GEF in fragile and conflict-affected situations Evaluation of enabling activities, small grants, and medium-size projects Focal area studies Terminal evaluations Post-completion evaluations	This theme cuts across all the thematic evaluations that focus on impacts, additionality, and sustainability. Cross-cutting themes of gender, safeguards, and engagement with civil society and indigenous peoples will also be addressed.

Focal area results (special themes)	What are the impacts, additionality, and sustainability of GEF interventions in specific thematic areas? Do the IAPs and IPs align with the focal areas and the objectives of the conventions? Do the focal areas align meaningfully with the objective of supporting integrated solutions?	Focal area special theme evaluations Evaluations of IAPs and IPs	Special topics include evaluation of the fisheries and freshwater portfolio, the Planet Gold Program, sustainable forest management, biodiversity mainstreaming, sustainable transport, and the Cleantech Programme.
GEF engagement with the private sector	How has the GEF supported the large proportion of SMEs in the private sector in client countries? How is the GEF effectively leveraging the private sector through the IAPs and IPs?	Impact evaluation of GEF support to SMEs in the artisanal gold mining, energy efficiency, and renewable energy sectors Evaluation of the Cleantech Programme Evaluation of private sector participation in IAPs and IPs and supply chains	A comprehensive review of the GEF's engagement with the private sector was completed in OPS6; this study will focus on GEF support to SMEs and GEF engagement through the IAPs and IPs.

D. Methodological Notes

31. OPS7 will draw on the findings and conclusions of the evaluations conducted over the 2018–21 period and is methodologically designed to provide strategic lessons and recommendations to the GEF. It will also indicate the different contexts to which the lessons and recommendations apply, noting what works within each context. There is some variation in the methods used for the cohort of evaluations and studies that feed into the comprehensive evaluation, depending on the objectives of the individual evaluation. These methods are detailed in the respective approach papers/concept notes; these are available on the IEO [website](#). Regardless of their individual variation, the specific methods used to design the evaluations, collect data, conduct analysis, and validate findings follow international good practice standards. Most use a mixed-methods approach. These methods include review of the relevant scientific and evaluation literature, development of a theory of change, document reviews, portfolio analysis, structured and semi-structured interviews, surveys, the use of geographic information system (GIS) and remote sensing methods, rapid impact evaluations, stakeholder consultation, country case studies and related field verification, statistical analysis, qualitative analysis, and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings. The IEO is also drawing on the rich existing evidence base of previously conducted country visits. The approach papers/concept notes clearly reflect the limitations of each study.

32. The IEO has developed methodologies for post-completion verification and quality-at-entry analysis of projects. These technical approaches will be applied consistently in the various thematic evaluations for GEF and LDCF/SCCF projects. This will facilitate comparisons and aggregated reporting on several parameters. Post-completion verification will be conducted on projects to evaluate outcomes and sustainability approximately three years after project closure. The quality-at-entry analysis will be applied to projects that have been endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer. Under the current circumstances and travel restrictions, several of our ongoing evaluations will be affected as IEO staff will not be able to complete some post-verification assessments or case studies. To mitigate this, the IEO is drawing on online data-gathering efforts and will be working with local consultants for field work, while providing detailed guidance and the frameworks for conducting analyses. The IEO is also applying more geospatial analysis to measure environmental outcomes. Approach papers and concept notes for all the component evaluations have been completed and review meetings conducted.

33. The full portfolio of GEF projects and activities will be analyzed. The process of identifying impact pathways and specifying impact drivers and assumptions for modeling progress toward impact—the outcome-to-impact pathway applied in earlier OPSs—will be used. This method, beyond providing ratings based on a project’s context, identifies the specific areas of GEF contribution toward achievement of impacts or of intermediate states. Evidence on progress toward impact will be gathered from completed projects between January 2018 and January 2021. GEF-supported interventions are implemented by partner Agencies; as such, impacts in the GEF are often determined through analysis of what GEF-supported interventions have contributed to, without distinguishing the results of activities supported by GEF funding alone from the activities of cofinanciers. Credible claims of contribution will be made if (1) the intervention is logically and feasibly designed to directly or indirectly result in the desired benefits as outlined in the theory of change; (2) the intervention is implemented as designed; (3) the immediate results occur as expected in the causal chain; and (4) other rival explanations for the results have either been considered and rejected, or their relative role in making a difference to an observed result has been adequately

recognized. Whenever possible, the analysis will attempt to determine the added value of the GEF's contributions in light of the roles played by other actors at different times and locations.

34. The GEF theory of change is presented in annex B. While this does not constitute the theory of change for OPS7, it does provide the general framework for GEF interventions and links to the broader outcomes that are assessed in the individual evaluations. OPS7 will also reflect on the appropriateness of this theory of change based on the GEF shift toward integrated programming. For example, given the major focus in the GEF 2020 Strategy on “influencing,” OPS7 will analyze which organizations and actors within the institutional capacity component of the theory of change play a role in influencing.

35. In the current circumstances, several evaluations will be affected by data limitations. For example, terminal evaluations and midterm reviews for several projects will be delayed or not available. We also recognize that limited evidence will be available on the implementation of recently enacted GEF policies. The individual evaluations will clearly reflect these limitations and will make every effort to gather inputs remotely, to the extent feasible. Field studies for the ongoing evaluations will be limited, and we may have to select cases strategically. Fortunately, several evaluations in the GEF-7 program are already completed and offer substantial evidence that will inform OPS7. OPS7 will clearly highlight the data limitations where they exist, as well as ensure that findings appropriately reflect the context and limitations of the findings.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

A. Stakeholder Consultations

36. The OPS7 report will be prepared between July 2020 and December 2021, with component evaluations submitted to the GEF Council throughout the GEF-7 period. OPS7 will be an in-depth evaluation using a consultative approach characterized by regular stakeholder consultation and involvement throughout the evaluation process. This will involve consultation and outreach during the preparation of this approach paper through reference groups, during the conduct of the evaluation, and in dissemination and outreach to key stakeholders. Sub-regional meetings of GEF focal points and Expanded Constituency Workshops are an important means through which the IEO will interact with key stakeholders; these offer a tremendous learning opportunity for the IEO to obtain valuable insights from country stakeholders on issues of high relevance to them. Further, these meetings provide an opportunity for the IEO to gather feedback from countries on a variety of issues related to GEF projects and processes. The current pandemic has limited our ability to engage in consultations at Expanded Constituency Workshops or through other stakeholder workshops. We are thankful to the broad group of stakeholders who have provided feedback to the draft approach paper. We will continue to engage remotely with various groups throughout the development of the OPS7 report to ensure its relevance and use.

B. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

37. Five external quality assurance advisers from the developed and emerging economies have been appointed. The external review panel consists of the following experts: Hans Bruyninckx, Paula

Caballero, Osvaldo Feinstein, Vinod Thomas, and Monika Weber-Fahr. These individuals are recognized international development professionals in the fields of the environment, development, and evaluation and will provide quality assurance through all stages of OPS7 preparation. They will provide guidance throughout the evaluation process, including conceptualization of the evaluation, interpretation of the findings, and framing of the recommendations. Hans Bruyninckx and Osvaldo Feinstein were members of the OPS6 panel and as such will provide continuity. We have already benefited from the panel's feedback in the development of the approach paper. Another key component of the quality assurance process is review of the individual evaluations and studies. Peer reviewers and reference groups continue to provide quality feedback and inputs for the individual evaluations. At this stage, every component evaluation is currently under way, and quality review meetings with internal and external reviewers have been held for all evaluations.

C. Deliverables

38. We are currently planning the delivery of OPS7 based on the timelines of the previous replenishment. The component evaluations will be presented at the Council meetings during the June 2020–June 2021 period. The OPS7 report will provide clear insights into the strategy and institutional issues and the performance and impacts of the GEF based on evaluations conducted by the GEF IEO and the GEF Agency evaluation units. OPS7 will also provide a summary of the main conclusions and strategic recommendations for consideration by the replenishment group.

39. The individual evaluations will be shared with the GEF Secretariat and the Agencies for comment and discussion of recommendations. They will be published as evaluation reports and uploaded to the IEO website as they are endorsed by the Council. Early summaries of the individual component evaluations will be made available for the March 2021 replenishment meeting and will be shared with the GEF Secretariat and the Agencies in February 2021. The draft comprehensive report will be shared with the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, country stakeholders, and civil society in September 2021 for comment and will inform the GEF-8 replenishment meeting in October 2021; the final report will be delivered to the Council in December 2021. Besides the GEF Council and replenishment participants, the OPS7 report and component evaluations will be distributed widely to GEF partners, stakeholders, and civil society, and will be uploaded to the IEO website.

D. Schedule and Budget

40. Assuming a similar timeline as the seventh replenishment, all evaluation reports and the draft OPS7 report will be completed and made available by October 2021. The final draft report will be available in December 2021 for Council approval and presented in final form for the replenishment proceedings in March 2022. Below is the tentative schedule for the comprehensive evaluation. Several component evaluations have already been completed in FY19 and FY20 and have been presented to the Council.

Task	Year	
	2020	2021
OPS7 approach paper Summaries of all component evaluations	June	March
Completion of all component evaluations (with time for comment and discussion of recommendations) Delivery of draft OPS7 report Delivery of final OPS7 report		July 20-July 21 October December

41. The Council approved the four-year budget and work plan for the IEO during the GEF-7 replenishment. OPS7 will be adequately resourced through this approved budget.

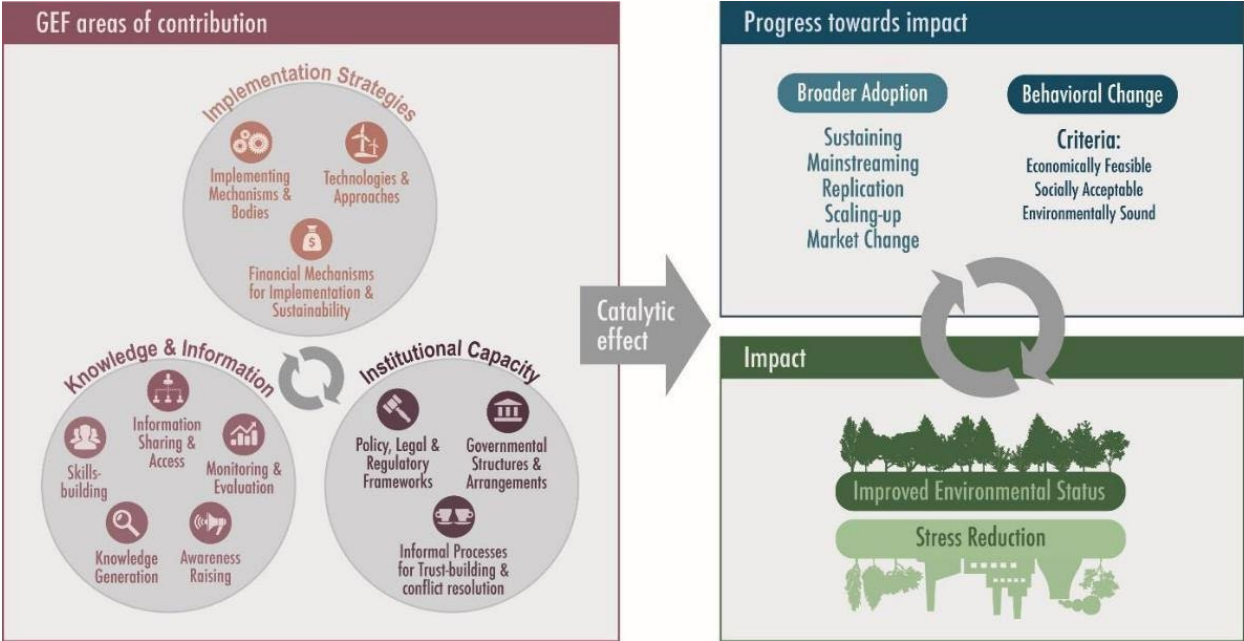
ANNEXES

Annex A: Approved IEO Evaluation Program FY19–22 (Status)

FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
Evaluation of GEF Support to Mainstreaming Biodiversity (completed)	Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: Africa Sudano-Sahelian Biomes (completed)	The Gold Program (concept note completed; evaluation ongoing)	Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7)
Evaluation of the GEF-UNIDO Cleantech Innovation Programme (completed)		Evaluation of the Implementation of the GEF's Policies on Gender, Safeguards, and Stakeholder Engagement (approach paper completed)	
Value for Money in Sustainable Forest Management Interventions (completed)	Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: LDCs (ongoing)	Evaluation of the GEF's Impact on Small and Medium Enterprises in Gold and Renewable Energy (concept note completed)	
Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling Up Impact (completed)	Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: SIDS (completed)	Evaluation of the GEF Country Support Programme	
		Review of GEF Agency Self-Evaluation Systems (approach paper completed)	
		Sustainable Forest Management (concept note completed)	
		Evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Programme (approach paper completed)	

		Follow-up studies on the evaluations of results-based management and knowledge management (concept notes completed) Evaluation of the IAPs/IPs (concept note completed)	
Annual Performance Report (APR) 2019: focus on sustainable transport (completed)	APR 2020 (ongoing)	APR 2021	
LDCF/SCCF Annual Evaluation Report (LDCF/SCCF AER)	LDCF/SCCF AER (ongoing) LDCF program evaluation	LDCF/SCCF AER SCCF program evaluation	LDCF/SCCF AER
Understanding Additionality in the GEF (completed)	GEF in Fragile and Post-Conflict Environments (ongoing)	Review of Medium-Size Projects (approach paper completed)	
Evaluation Policy (completed)	OPS7 Approach Paper (panel selected)	Review of GEF Enabling Activities Innovation in the GEF (concept note completed) Special studies in fisheries and freshwater, health co-benefits of the chemicals portfolio (all concept notes completed)	

Annex B: The GEF Theory of Change



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