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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

Evaluation of GEF Food Systems Programs

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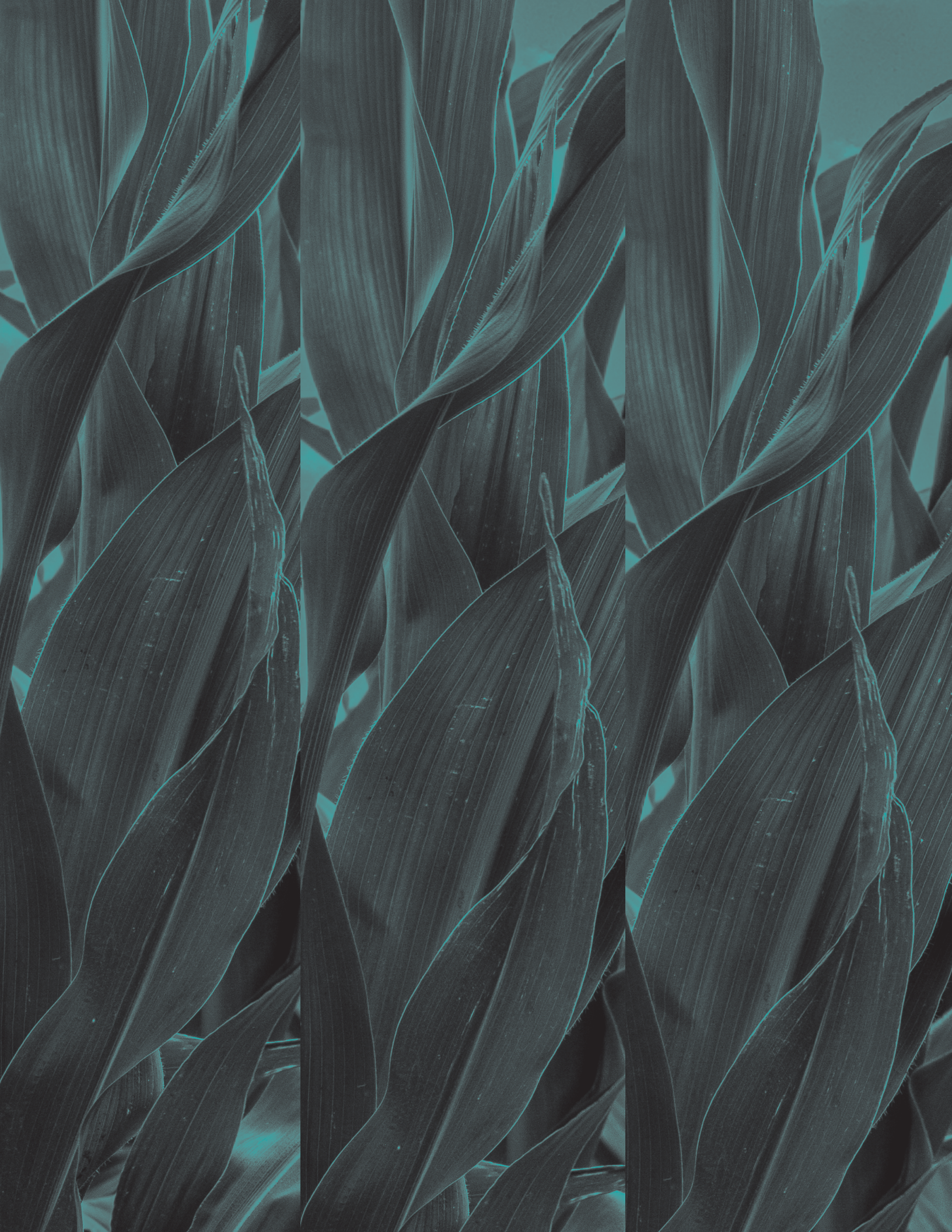

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Evaluation Report No. 182
June 2026

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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

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Foreword

Food systems are complex, interconnected webs that touch every aspect of our lives, from the food on our plates to the health of our planet and the prosperity of our communities. As food systems emerge as a central nexus for environmental, socioeconomic, and climate challenges, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has increasingly invested in integrated, multicountry programs intended to drive systems-level change. With multiple food systems programs now completed or under way across GEF-6 to GEF-8, this evaluation examined whether—and how—these investments have operationalized a comprehensive food systems approach across design and implementation, from local landscapes to global value chains.

The evaluation provides country-level evidence on the performance of GEF interventions focused on environmental issues related to food systems. It assessed the relevance and coherence of GEF programmatic investments in food systems, as well as GEF results and sustainability in terms of environmental benefits and associated socioeconomic co-benefits. Gender, resilience, and private sector were assessed as cross-cutting issues.

The analyses for this evaluation contributed to the findings of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office's Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation (OPS8), together with which it was presented to the GEF Council in December 2025. The Council took note of its conclusions and endorsed its recommendations. Through this report, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office intends to share the lessons from the evaluation with a wider audience.

Geeta Batra
Director, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

Acknowledgments

This evaluation was a collaborative effort. It was led by Carlo Carugi, Senior Evaluation Officer of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), with oversight and support from the Director, Geeta Batra, and the Chief Evaluation Officer, Fabrizio Felloni (since September 2024). Core evaluation team members included consultants Jessica Kyle, Katarzyna Jaskiewicz, Isabel Momford-Cheibub, and Detlev Puetz (ICF International). Peixuan Zhou, IEO Evaluation Analyst, conducted the quality-at-entry analysis and the online survey. Consultants Anna D. Linden and Pietro Tornese carried out project document and portfolio reviews. Consultants Ataa-Asantewaa Martha, Ali Imron, Wienke Heinrichs, and Boniface H. J. Massawe (ICF International), respectively, helped with interviews and data gathering for the Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, and Tanzania case studies.

Quality assurance for this evaluation was provided by a senior independent expert in food systems, Neeraja Havaligi, who reviewed and advised on the approach paper, the evaluation component analyses, the country case study reports, and the draft and final evaluation reports.

Administrative support was provided by Marie-Constance Manuella Koukoui, Senior Executive Assistant. IEO Senior Operations Officer Juan Jose Portillo provided overall operational and administrative oversight. Karen Holmes edited the report, and Nita Congress designed and laid out the publication and provided editorial quality control.

The GEF Secretariat, as well as many of the GEF Agencies, provided information, data, and insights during interviews and meetings. Critical information was provided during the country case study work by the GEF focal points, national and local government staff, GEF Agencies, and civil society organizations in the four case study countries.

The GEF IEO is deeply grateful to all these individuals and institutions for their contributions, which were critical to the success of the evaluation. Final responsibility for this report remains firmly with the Office.

Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFI	Coastal Fisheries Initiative
COFCO	China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation
EOI	expression of interest
ESG	environmental, social, and governance
FACS	Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems
FoKSBI	Indonesia Sustainable Palm Oil Platform
FOLUR	Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program
FSIP	Food Systems Integrated Program
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GGP	Good Growth Partnership
GHG	greenhouse gas
GIS	geographic information system
ha	hectares
IAP	integrated approach pilot
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
PFD	program framework document
PIF	project identification form
PPP	public-private partnership
RFS	Resilient Food Systems
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-FI	United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Executive summary

Food systems significantly affect global health, food security, and economic and social development. They also have important environmental impacts, as major drivers of global forest and biodiversity loss, land degradation, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. Unsustainable practices occur at every stage, from the production and use of agricultural inputs, to harvesting, storing, processing, packaging, distribution, retail, consumption, and waste generation. As the global population approaches 8 billion, the urgency to improve efficiency and sustainability throughout food systems is increasing.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been engaged in shaping food systems since its first replenishment period. In GEF-6, the GEF began emphasizing the need for a radical transformation of global food systems in its programming directions. During this phase, the Resilient Food Systems (RFS) Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) and the Good Growth Partnership (GGP) IAP addressed sustainability challenges in dryland agriculture and deforestation in commodity supply chains, respectively. Another GEF-6 program, the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI), complemented these efforts by addressing governance in artisanal fisheries. In GEF-7, the integrated programming model was expanded through the global Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR). The GEF-8 Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP) builds on previous lessons to reinforce a systems transformation agenda. Collectively, these programs account for $822 million in GEF financing and more than $6 billion in cofinancing.

With several GEF-funded food systems programs now completed or under way, and as the GEF begins shaping its GEF-9 programming, this is an opportune time to evaluate the GEF's performance in food systems. As outlined in the approach paper, this evaluation assessed the extent to which these programs and their component projects adopt a comprehensive food systems approach in their design and implementation. The evaluation also analyzed the added value of using a programmatic approach for food systems interventions. The evaluation covered the five GEF food systems programs from GEF-6 to GEF-8 and their 84 child projects, along with 21 stand-alone food system projects included for comparison. A systems thinking perspective and mixed-methods design guided the work, drawing on two theoretical frameworks to structure the analysis of integrated and programmatic benefits. Methods included existing evidence synthesis; structured reviews of program and project documents; interviews and surveys to gather stakeholder perceptions; and country case studies in Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, and Tanzania.

Findings and conclusions

GEF food systems programs are highly relevant to addressing environmental challenges within food systems. At the global level, they have responded to the growing international recognition on the links between food systems, environmental degradation, and climate change. They have also contributed to reducing the significant financing gaps for sustainable food systems transformation. Demand for participation in GEF food systems

programs has been high, exceeding available funds. These programs have provided countries with the flexibility to design interventions tailored to national needs, while also introducing innovative themes where appropriate. Child projects have aligned with countries' environmental needs, priorities, and policies in the agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sectors. GEF Agencies and countries have enhanced relevance in project design through analyses of country policies and priorities, baseline assessments of target sectors and intervention areas, and stakeholder consultation and validation. As projects move into implementation, they have often applied adaptive management to stay relevant in response to evolving policy landscapes and global disruptions, although some opportunities were missed.

GEF food systems programs—and stand-alone projects—address many of the most significant environmental challenges in food systems through integrated approaches. They have designed activities to address multiple environmental challenges, most frequently focusing on combating land and soil degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Other concerns, such as maintaining capacity of natural systems to sequester carbon and avoiding pollution from use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, were less commonly addressed by project activities. Both child projects and stand-alone projects adopt integrated approaches that address multiple environmental issues;, target synergies between environmental and socioeconomic benefits; work across local, landscape, and national scales; promote multistakeholder engagement; and pilot innovations.

Food systems programs have concentrated on reducing the environmental footprint of agricultural and fisheries production at community and landscape levels. By design, the five GEF programs vary considerably in how comprehensively they cover food systems value chains. For example, RFS intentionally focused more on productive capacities and ecosystem services for smallholder farmers, reflecting its emphasis on resilience and food security. FOLUR focused primarily on sustainable production within commodity-specific landscape systems. GGP stands out for its innovative and explicit supply chain approach, with separate projects addressing production, demand, and finance for beef, soy, and palm oil in four countries. Across all programs, however, most interventions have centered on environmental impacts in the production stage, with comparatively fewer activities targeting postproduction segments, such as storage, processing, and distribution, or sustainable demand and consumption. FSIP demonstrates emerging program-level attention to the roles of markets and consumers in stimulating demand for sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious foods, though the evaluation could not assess how fully these elements are reflected in child project designs.[1]

While programs comprehensively describe drivers of food systems change, child projects have given limited consideration to political and sociocultural drivers. The program framework documents for all five programs describe the systemic drivers of food systems transformation, including environmental, political, economic, sociocultural, and science and technology drivers. However, as these intentions translated into child project design, attention to these drivers has varied. Environmental drivers are emphasized in 90 percent of child projects, consistent with the GEF's mandate; and economic drivers also feature relatively prominently (79 percent). Case studies and interviews highlighted tensions stemming from whether GEF food systems initiatives are perceived as environmental or agricultural projects, often shaped by which ministries lead these efforts. Limited analysis of political economy dynamics or trade-offs among competing objectives has constrained projects' transformational potential. In GEF-8, FSIP intends to strengthen engagement with policy as a lever for transformational change, reflecting

[1] Child projects were not yet endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer at the time that data collection and analysis for this evaluation closed.

the programming period's emphasis on policy coherence. Sociocultural dynamics that influence behavior and behavioral change have not been frequently and consistently identified or targeted in GEF projects and programs. Similarly, reducing food loss and waste and promoting healthy diets have been infrequently addressed, despite their importance for food systems' transformation.

Food systems programs have become increasingly internally coherent over time; external coherence has varied both in its approach and intensity. Child projects are more closely aligned with program components and objectives, creating a stronger foundation for interaction and learning. In FOLUR, all child projects (100 percent) explicitly incorporated program-level guidance or knowledge during design, compared with far lower levels in RFS (15 percent) and GGP (20 percent). This guidance contributed to stronger alignment between child projects and their parent programs, as reflected in Agency interviews, country survey responses, and country case study findings. Interviewees widely agreed that the FSIP design process has best supported internal coherence, largely because the global coordination project was approved early, enabling it to support countries in child project formulation. Regarding external coherence, GEF food systems interventions often planned to engage with other initiatives, but actual coordination varied. Although 77 percent of child projects planned to engage in knowledge sharing or joint activities with other donor-funded initiatives, only 30 percent reported implementing these activities. Some GEF Agencies have effectively linked GEF interventions with their own broader country programs and project portfolios, and successful examples of collaboration among GEF Agencies were identified in all three GEF-6 programs—in some cases generating useful spillover effects.

Food systems programs have delivered substantial—though uneven—environmental benefits. The GEF-6 programs account for most of the global environmental gains reported to date, with early outcomes beginning to emerge from FOLUR. The most significant results relate to improved land management, biodiversity conservation, and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. These outcomes have largely been achieved through a combination of policy reforms and dialogue, strengthened land use and marine planning and management, and community-level activities that promote sustainable agricultural and fisheries practices. Despite this strong overall picture, contributions to outcomes have been uneven across child projects. Some projects fell short due to overly ambitious or unclear objectives, implementation delays, or unclear causal pathways linking activities to measurable environmental outcomes. Several GGP and CFI child projects did not report global environmental benefits. Although the GEF-6 food systems programs produced strong results, none fully realized the broad ambitions set out in their program designs. Achieving these ambitious goals would require engagement that extends beyond a single programming cycle.

GEF food systems programs have generated important food production and socioeconomic outcomes, including benefits for women, youth, and vulnerable groups. All GEF-6 programs contributed to more sustainable agricultural practices and strengthened natural resource management. Increased agricultural productivity was the most frequently reported outcome, observed in 70 percent of projects. In CFI and RFS, increases in household income were common; RFS also demonstrated food security and nutrition outcomes consistent with its emphasis on reducing food insecurity as a driver of environmental degradation. Approximately half of the child projects reported at least one gender-related outcome—most often improved skills and increased participation of women—and more than half reported inclusion outcomes, involving youth engagement in agriculture and support to vulnerable smallholders. However, as noted earlier, most programs placed less emphasis on nonproduction activities of the value chain, such as improving farmers' market access and processing and storage practices, which limited the breadth

of socioeconomic outcomes. Findings from fieldwork revealed a mix of promising practices and ongoing challenges in achieving gender and inclusion results. Robust project design and early integration of gender considerations emerged as key factors shaping positive outcomes.

GEF programs advanced policy and governance, although results varied due to design and institutional constraints. The GEF-6 programs contributed to establishing or strengthening commodity platforms and policies aimed at reducing deforestation in supply chains, promoted integrated planning through multistakeholder platforms, and helped align fisheries governance with ecosystem-based management principles. Policy coherence was a recurring goal but partly achieved in most cases. Vertical coherence—alignment between national policies and subnational implementation—was evident in several RFS and GGP projects. Horizontal coherence—alignment across government agencies and sectors—was less common, though notable successes occurred in Indonesia, Liberia, and Paraguay. Although still early in its implementation, FOLUR builds on these earlier efforts, particularly in promoting jurisdictional planning and national and subnational policy coherence. Interventions that built on existing policy agendas and embedded multistakeholder platforms into existing institutions were more successful, benefiting from enhanced legitimacy and government ownership. However, the sustainability of policy and governance outcomes was frequently constrained by design and institutional constraints. Limited attention to political economy dynamics in design led to unrealistic assumptions that increased support for coordination would naturally lead to alignment. Changes in political leadership also undermined policy coherence efforts, especially where governance platforms lacked legal status or were not institutionally anchored.

Across GEF food systems programs, performance metrics have often fallen short of capturing the complex, multidimensional nature of transformational change. Most annual monitoring efforts by child projects and coordination projects have remained output-focused. Although midterm reviews and terminal evaluations provide more quantitative and qualitative analysis, the lack of standardized formats and of a set of common indicators has limited the ability of program lead Agencies and the GEF to aggregate findings across countries and programs. The GEF experience highlights the need for more sophisticated and adaptive metrics that can meaningfully track progress along transformation pathways. Recent GEF Secretariat guidance on program evaluation and updated monitoring templates may help address these gaps by better capturing qualitative outcomes and institutional change.

GEF programs are generating substantial knowledge and technical support, but there is limited evidence that countries are applying program-facilitated learning. The creation of a broader knowledge management ecosystem is widely perceived as a substantial added value of GEF food systems programs. Programs have effectively generated and disseminated knowledge and technical resource offerings to participating countries and wider audiences, as evidenced through program reporting, interviews, and country-level survey results. Despite these successes, the evaluation found few concrete examples of countries applying this knowledge to adapt their child project activities. Limited visibility and insufficient targeting of knowledge products, along with country resistance to adaptive management, have hindered knowledge uptake by child projects. Inadequate staffing for knowledge management in both coordination and child projects has also hindered application. Programs have attempted to address these challenges through adaptive management, and stakeholders report positive experiences with efforts to promote peer exchange and shift from global events toward more region- and commodity-specific learning opportunities, such as regional commodity dialogues.

Challenges in aligning country needs with program technical support have constrained countries' benefits. Effective

"docking"—the process of matching program knowledge and technical services with country child projects—was one of the most frequently cited issues in interviews. Three factors have undermined this process: timing mismatches between when support is offered and when countries are ready to use it; a top-down matching approach that does not fully reflect country priorities; and limited resources for localized, hands-on technical assistance. GEF-7 and GEF-8 programs are beginning to address these constraints, but it is too early to assess the results.

Programs have achieved some notable private sector results, but continue to face challenges in linking private sector engagement across global and child projects—limiting their transformational potential. GEF food systems programs have engaged the private sector in multiple ways, ranging from global commodity supply chain initiatives to localized market interventions. These efforts have generated important results, including significant investment in sustainable commodities like soy and palm oil and strengthened capacity among financial institutions to provide sustainable financing. However, many of these achievements stem from FOLUR's coordination project and GGP's unique program structure, as integrating private sector engagement across global and child projects has proven difficult. A perceived advantage of integrated programming for food systems is the potential to support vertical value chain engagement, especially in commodity supply chains, where production and demand may be in different geographies. Yet, so far, there has been limited progress in connecting global value chains with country-level child projects. Child project designs have not been well suited for this type of integration, and challenges have been compounded by timing issues, siloed implementation structures, and an underestimation of the collaborative effort required.

Program governance has adapted and improved over replenishment cycles, even as operational complexity remains a challenge. Country and Agency selection processes for food systems programs improved in GEF-7 through clearer criteria and processes, which were carried forward into GEF-8. Roles and responsibilities between child projects and the coordination project have also become clearer over time. Overall, food systems programs have generally been well and adaptively managed, with most midterm reviews urging coordination projects to improve integration across partners and child projects, and closed programs showing evidence of improvements. Endorsement and implementation timelines for food systems programs are broadly comparable to, if not more efficient than, those of stand-alone projects. However, the inherent complexity of programs and the food systems agenda presents trade-offs between efficiency and inclusive, robust design, and has contributed to implementation delays, consistent with findings from previous evaluations by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office.

Despite their critical role in enabling effective programmatic collaboration, coordination budgets have not kept pace with the expanding scope of food systems programs. A key lesson from GEF-6 is that the time and effort required for effective collaboration should not be underestimated. Yet, coordination project budgets for food systems programs have been decreasing across programming periods, in contrast with the overall trend in GEF integrated programming, where an increasing share of funding has been allocated to global coordination projects. In food systems programs, coordination budgets have decreased from 10 percent of total program cost in GEF-6 to 7 percent in GEF-8. In GEF-8, the FSIP coordination project also has a smaller budget than FOLUR in absolute terms ($18 million compared to FOLUR's $29 million), even though FSIP will be responsible for coordinating with more country child projects (32, compared to FOLUR's 27) and a wider range of commodities. This growing gap between program expansion—in both size and scope—and shrinking coordination resources risks undermining the programs' value proposition. Lower coordination budgets reduce the ability to provide contextualized, hands-on support to countries—an

issue that many Agencies and partners believe may weaken overall impact.

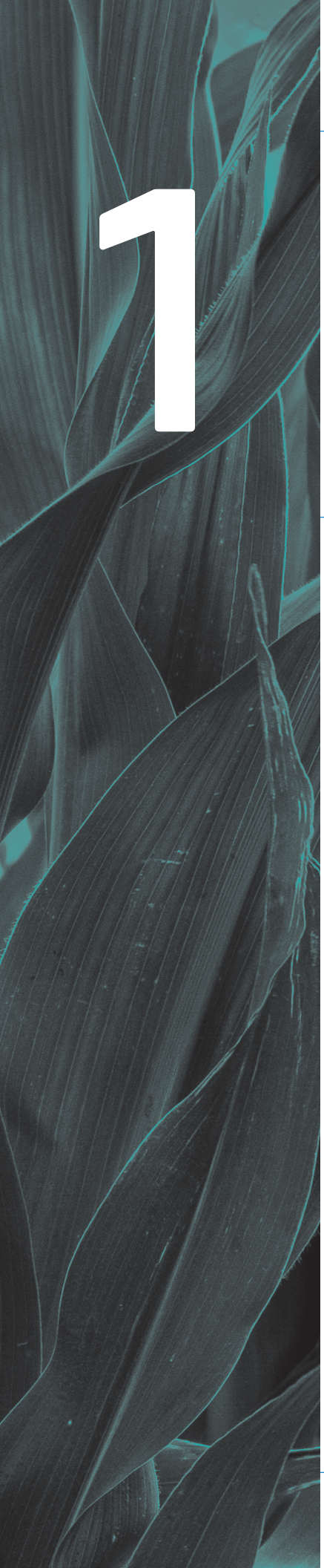
Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Sharpen program focus and phasing across GEF replenishment periods. The GEF Secretariat should establish clearer boundaries and priorities in program design to better reflect regional and commodity-specific dynamics. This may involve concentrating on a smaller number of targeted commodities, geographies, or biomes. The Secretariat should also consider adopting a phased approach to food systems programming. Such an approach would recognize the longer time frames required for food system transformation and the need to align coordination mechanisms and country project schedules. Phased implementation would enable the GEF to strengthen readiness—such as through policy development, governance improvements, capacity building, and pilot investments—before progressing to larger-scale investment alignment and expansion.

Recommendation 2: Expand focus on value chain segments beyond production and on vertical value chain integration, in order to fully realize the benefits of an integrated program approach. Future food systems programming should extend engagement beyond the production segment of the value chain when broader GEF support can (1) generate substantial environmental or socioeconomic benefits; and/or (2) ensure the long-term sustainability of environmental outcomes from production-oriented activities, recognizing the interdependencies across value chain segments. The GEF Secretariat should also strengthen the performance of GEF food systems programs in both vertical and geographic value chain integration. This includes developing more targeted and effective approaches on the demand and financing side, supporting activities related to national and international standards, and fostering stronger linkages between supply and demand actors across countries.

Recommendation 3: Increase attention to political economy dynamics and behavioral change in food systems transformation at design and during implementation. The GEF Secretariat should require more comprehensive and structured political economy and risk analyses to inform the design and implementation of program framework documents and child projects. Agencies should be encouraged to incorporate mechanisms that mediate trade-offs and balance short-term incentives with long-term sustainability objectives. The GEF Secretariat should also prioritize engagement with countries demonstrating commitment to the policy and institutional reforms needed to address food systems challenges and work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to co-develop solutions. To enhance the potential for lasting transformation, greater emphasis should be placed on understanding and influencing behavior change throughout program design and implementation.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen country docking to enhance the knowledge value of country engagement with the global coordination project. The GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with lead Agencies, should intensify efforts to improve country docking and knowledge uptake. These efforts should ensure that (1) the coordination project—and its relevant partners and service providers—remains active and able to engage with child projects when they are ready to receive support; and (2) learning is continuously generated, captured, and shared throughout implementation. These efforts should also involve a more participatory and ongoing process to identify country needs for knowledge and technical services and align program offerings accordingly.



1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Food systems (box 1.1) significantly affect various facets of our world, including global health, food security and nutrition, economic and social development, and, importantly, the quality and status of the natural environment and the critical ecosystem services it provides. In fact, food systems are major drivers of global forest and biodiversity loss, land degradation, water pollution, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As the world's population nears 8 billion people and continues to grow, pressure is building to increase efficiency and sustainability in food production, processing, and distribution, as well as reduce food loss and waste.

Over its last three replenishment periods, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has in its programming directions advocated the need for a radical transformation of global food systems, affirming that the achievement of this transition will require a holistic, systemwide approach that integrates both horizontal (land and natural resources) and vertical (food value and supply chain) dimensions, and includes consideration of women's role in health and nutrition.[1] This approach was first tested and then fully introduced through a series of dedicated food systems programs from GEF-6 onwards.

With multiple food systems programs in implementation or closed and another in advanced design, and as the GEF turns its attention to GEF-9 programming, the time is opportune to evaluate the GEF's performance in food systems. This evaluation assessed the degree to which food systems programs and their constituent projects supported by the GEF take a comprehensive food systems approach, in both their design and implementation. It focused on both processes and results. The evaluation also paid particular attention to the added value of taking a program approach in GEF food systems interventions. More details

[1] The GEF-6 Programming Directions (GEF 2014) recognize that women are primarily responsible for food consumption choices and family health in addition to their roles in agriculture.

Box 1.1 Food systems

As established in the approach paper for this evaluation, food systems are understood to encompass the whole array of activities along the food chain, ranging from the use of agricultural inputs such as germplasm and agrichemicals, through harvesting, storing, processing, packaging, distributing, and retailing food, to consuming food and generation of food waste. Food systems are intricately dependent on natural capital at every stage of agricultural production and downstream operations along the agricultural value chains. Food systems are also dependent on rich sociocultural capital held in the form of knowledge and skills of diverse players, particularly rural and Indigenous Peoples—the original custodians of the biodiversity that sustains food systems.

and a comprehensive account of the evaluation design and approach are provided in the evaluation's approach paper. Quality assurance for this evaluation was provided by a senior independent expert in food systems, Neeraja Havaligi, who reviewed the approach paper and the draft evaluation report (annex A). In addition, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) circulated the draft report to GEF stakeholders for feedback on factual and analytical errors and the feasibility of recommendations, and considered and responded to all feedback received.

The GEF embraces a learning approach to its food systems programming, including through the GEF-8 strategic commitment to build on previous efforts to bolster sustainable food systems. This evaluation of GEF food systems programs contributes to the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8) evidence base by producing findings and recommendations on the performance and impact of GEF interventions in food systems thus far. The evaluation's findings also contribute to a growing global body of evidence suggesting that achieving food systems transformation requires addressing structural barriers, including political economy constraints, consumption patterns, and institutional incentives that current programming approaches often overlook (Winkler et al. 2025).

1.2 Scope, methods, and limitations

The evaluation covered five GEF food systems programmatic interventions from GEF-6 to GEF-8: two integrated approach pilot (IAP) programs and a third program from GEF-6, one impact program from GEF-7, and one integrated program from GEF-8. It also covered 21 stand-alone food system projects that were included for comparative purposes[2] (annex B). Across these food systems programs and projects, the evaluation sought to address 13 evaluation questions grouped around five areas of inquiry: design, relevance and coherence, performance and results, programmatic value addition, and efficiency. It assessed the quality of design and achievement of results, as well as how the GEF has adapted to changing contexts and incorporated lessons learned into the design of subsequent programs in GEF-7 and GEF-8. The evaluation took a summative approach to assessing GEF-6 programming, while the assessment of GEF-7 and GEF-8 programming was largely formative given their active implementation status.

The evaluation took an integrated, dynamic, and systems thinking approach, consistent with the framing set out in the approach paper. It involved multiple quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methods and analyses selected to support the assessment of interrelated components within food systems. To guide this assessment and to operationalize key concepts from the approach paper, the evaluation team developed two

[2] As noted in the approach paper, these projects were identified based on a keyword search for "food systems" in GEF-6 to GEF-8 project titles, objective, and/or components on the GEF Portal. Additional stand-alone projects were added at the suggestion of the GEF Secretariat.

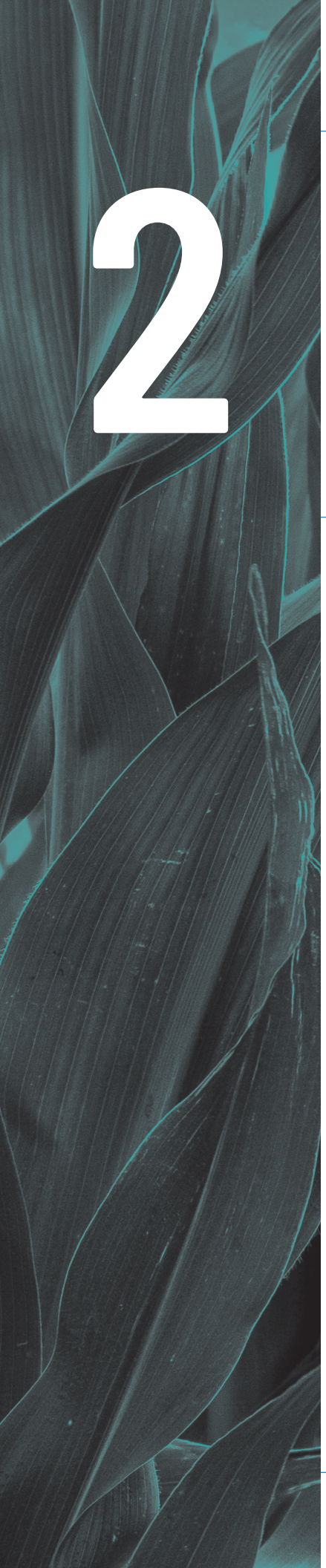
theoretical frameworks. These frameworks enabled a structured exploration of complex dynamics within the food systems portfolio. Each was built around a set of evaluative claims, supported by associated pathways or assumptions, allowing the evaluation team to apply the frameworks systematically across methods and analyses.

- The **food systems framework** (presented in subsection 3.1 and detailed in annex C) establishes a theoretical understanding of food systems and the expected benefits of integrated food systems programming. It was developed based on a literature review, as well as a review of GEF programming directions and food systems program framework documents (PFDs), including program theories of change.
- The **programmatic value addition framework** (presented in subsection 3.3 and detailed in annex D) defines expected benefits of a food system's programmatic approach compared to a nonprogrammatic baseline. Developed in the absence of counterfactual analysis—due to the limited number of completed child and stand-alone projects—it draws on GEF programming directions, PFDs, past IEO evaluations, and IEO guidance for evaluating programs.

Document and portfolio reviews included a structured implementation document review (contained in volume 2 of this evaluation report) of 15 terminal evaluations, 3 reviews of terminal evaluations, 7 midterm reviews, and 18 project implementation reports (40 child projects and 3 stand-alone projects). A quality-at-entry analysis (annex F) was done for 69 GEF project proposals (52 child projects and 17 stand-alone projects). Perception gathering included 44 key informant interviews at the central level (annex I) and an online survey (annex G) for national stakeholders (163 responses). The evaluation also built on available evaluative evidence on GEF food systems programs generated by previous GEF IEO evaluations, including the Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs and the GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation (GEF IEO 2018, 2022).

Country case studies provided a more in-depth exploration of the evaluation questions. Field missions were conducted in four countries: Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, and Tanzania (see volume 2 for the case study reports). These countries were purposively selected based on the presence and maturity of child projects of food systems programs across GEF-6, GEF-7, and GEF-8, enabling analysis of how newer interventions build on prior learning (annex H). The selection also reflects diversity in geographic regions, GEF Agencies, and sectors (e.g., commodities, livestock, and aquaculture). Each week-long country visit involved interviews with national stakeholders, field visits, and validation of preliminary portfolio-level findings, with a total of 133 interviews conducted across four countries.

The main limitation encountered was the relatively early stage and consequent lack of information on outcomes of GEF-7 and GEF-8 interventions. In terms of individual projects and programs, the evaluation assessed completed GEF-6 projects, while many GEF-7 activities are still under way, and GEF-8 activities are mostly at either the design stage or an early stage of implementation. Those projects that have been endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or have just started implementation were mainly assessed in terms of the quality of their design. Most GEF-8 child projects had not yet received CEO endorsement at the time of this writing, and therefore the evaluation was not able to assess the quality of their design. In addition, the global coordination project for the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Program (FOLUR) was undergoing its midterm review concurrently with this evaluation, and the results were only made available after this report was drafted, limiting its use. The evaluation takes appropriate account of these limitations when discussing related findings.



2 GEF support to food systems

2.1 Evolution of GEF food systems programs

The GEF has been engaged in shaping food systems since its first replenishment period. Many projects from GEF-1 to GEF-5 addressed critical dimensions of food systems but were spread across focal areas without an overarching framework. For example, the GEF-2 SIP: Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project II (GEF ID 3399) strengthened co-management of fisheries to sustain a vital protein source for millions in East Africa; the GEF-4 Conservation and Sustainable Use of Cultivated and Wild Tropical Fruit Diversity: Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods, Food Security and Ecosystem Services (GEF ID 2430) project safeguarded indigenous fruit varieties for nutrition and livelihoods; and the global GEF-4 Conservation & Management of Pollinators for Sustainable Agriculture through an Ecosystem Approach (GEF ID 2123) project highlighted the importance of ecosystem services for crop yields. Collectively, these efforts demonstrated how environmental investments could deliver both global environmental benefits and food systems outcomes. However, they remained fragmented, raising concerns about diminished impact in the absence of an integrated, programmatic approach.

GEF-6 marked the shift toward food systems transformation with the introduction of dedicated integrated approach pilot programs to address the drivers of environmental degradation and value chain dynamics. The Resilient Food Systems (RFS) IAP and Good Growth Partnership (GGP) IAP tackled sustainability in dryland agriculture and deforestation in commodity supply chains, respectively. Another program, the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI), complemented this work by addressing artisanal fisheries governance.

GEF-7 scaled up this integrated programming model and transitioned to a more ambitious and globally focused Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program. FOLUR is a $339.9 million, seven-year initiative currently ongoing and led by the World Bank. With a

broader global reach and a stronger focus on transforming major commodity value chains—like palm oil, soy, coffee, and cocoa—FOLUR expanded the GEF's efforts across 27 countries with large coalitions of partners.

The GEF-8 Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP) was built on lessons learned and recommendations from previous phases to reinforce a systems transformation agenda, which emphasizes sustainability in production, resource efficiency, and demand-side measures to reduce agriculture's environmental footprint. With $281.5 million in GEF funding and $2.2 billion in cofinancing, FSIP is the second-largest GEF program in this cycle, involving 32 countries. Targeting GHG reduction, improved water and nutrient use, and ecosystem conservation, the program solidifies the GEF's leadership in promoting integrated, cross-sectoral food system reform at global scale. The GEF-8 FSIP design reflects the urgency of food systems challenges, when 3.1 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, and food inflation has been higher than nonfood inflation, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations (Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2024). The program's emphasis on resource efficiency and sustainability aligns with the growing recognition that economic accessibility and environmental sustainability of food systems are interconnected challenges requiring integrated solutions.

The GEF's integrated programs (also see box 2.1) feature three key aspects: incentive funding for country participation, a dedicated funding envelope for a coordination or platform project to act as the knowledge hub for selected countries, and a competitive selection process through the preparation and evaluation of expressions of interest (EOIs). The coordination (or hub) project is expected to play a crucial role in extending the program's impact beyond the selected countries and ensuring the overall delivery of the program achieves transformational change. While CFI is not an integrated program, it does share similar features, such as the global coordination project. Nonetheless, each of these food systems programs is very different from one another, in terms of their objectives, approaches, and intervention areas.

Box 2.1 Integrated programs

The GEF's integrated programs are multicountry, cross-sectoral initiatives designed to address the systemic drivers of environmental degradation while generating multiple global environmental benefits. Unlike stand-alone projects, integrated programs offer a set of coordination projects for the child projects of a given integrated program, under a shared strategic framework to enable synergies across GEF focal areas for greater impact. These programs are structured around major environmental and economic systems such as food, land use, and cities; and aim to deliver transformational change by linking environmental objectives with sectoral priorities, enhancing multistakeholder engagement, and mobilizing private sector investment.

2.2 GEF food systems portfolio

The evaluation identified a total of 105 food systems-related projects during the last three GEF replenishment periods, comprising 84 child projects implemented under the food systems programs (table 2.1), as well as 21 stand-alone projects.[1] Approximately 87 percent of child projects are national in scope ($n = 73$), accounting for 84 percent of total GEF financing to food systems programs. Only 1 child project is regional, while 10 child projects are global, receiving 12 percent of GEF financing.

The GEF's programmatic investment in food systems has grown over time. The number of child projects (including coordination projects) under food systems programs increased steadily from 23 in GEF-6 to

[1] All child projects of the food systems programs are funded by the GEF Trust Fund. Of the 21 stand-alone projects included in the evaluation, 12 are GEF Trust Fund projects, 4 are funded by the Least Developed Countries Fund, 2 are funded by the Strategic Climate Change Fund, and 3 are multitrust fund.

Table 2.1 Overview of GEF food systems programs

Program	GEF Agency	Country	Objective
		GEF-6	
Resilient Food Systems (GEF ID 9070)	**IFAD**, FAO, UNDP, UNIDO, World Bank	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda	Improving agricultural sustainability and productivity for smallholder farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa
Good Growth Partnership (GEF ID 9072)	**UNDP**, World Bank, WWF-US	Brazil, Indonesia, Liberia, Paraguay	Reducing deforestation in commodity supply chains
Coastal Fisheries Initiative (GEF ID 9060)	**FAO**, UNDP, World Bank, WWF-US	Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Indonesia, Peru, Senegal	Bolstering small-scale coastal fisheries governance while securing environmental, social, and economic benefits for local communities
		GEF-7	
Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (GEF ID 10201)	**World Bank**, CI, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, WWF-US	Brazil, Burundi, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nigeria, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam	Transforming production landscapes and value chains for eight major commodities to influence regional and global food systems
		GEF-8	
Food Systems Integrated Program (GEF ID 11214)	**FAO**, **IFAD**, IUCN, UNDP, World Bank	Angola, Argentina, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Grenada, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Türkiye, Uganda	Improving sustainable food production and reducing adverse environmental impacts from agriculture

Source: Program documents.

Note: Lead Agency indicated in boldface. CI = Conservation International; FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; IFAD = International Fund for Agricultural Development; IUCN = International Union for Conservation of Nature; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme; UNIDO = United Nations Industrial Development Organization; WWF-US = World Wildlife Fund-US.

28 in GEF-7 and 33 in GEF-8 (table 2.2). GEF financing for food systems programs peaked in the GEF-7 FOLUR program ($339.9 million), showing a 70 percent increase from GEF-6 programs, and declined to $281.5 million in GEF-8. GEF-7 FOLUR and GEF-8 FSIP together account for over 80 percent of total expected cofinancing leveraged by food systems programs, with the promised cofinancing ratio reaching 8.4 and 7.8, respectively. Together, the 84 child projects account for about $821.8 million in GEF financing and an additional $6.33 billion in cofinancing. The 21 stand-alone projects account for about $132.2 million in GEF financing and an additional $542.6 million in cofinancing.

The growing investments in Asia and Latin America suggest an expanding geographic scope of GEF food systems support beyond Africa. Table 2.3 shows the top five country recipients among food systems child projects from GEF-6 to GEF-8. By region, Africa received the highest overall allocation throughout GEF-6 to GEF-8, totaling $343.8 million across 40 child projects. Asia saw a sharp increase in funding after GEF-6, growing from

Table 2.2 Overview of food systems programs financing, GEF-6 to GEF-8

Period and program		No. of child projects	Total GEF financing (mil. $)	Total cofinancing (mil. $)	Avg. size of child project (mil. $)	Promised cofinancing ratio
GEF-6	Coastal Fisheries Initiative	5	37.8	208.0	7.6	5.5
	Good Growth Partnership	5	44.7	263.5	8.9	5.9
	Resilient Food Systems	13	117.9	786.2	9.1	6.7
	GEF-6 subtotal	23	200.4	1,257.7	8.7	6.3
GEF-7	Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program	28	339.9	2,869.3	12.1	8.4
GEF-8	Food Systems Integrated Program	33	281.5	2,201.6	8.5	7.8
Total		84	821.8	6,328.7	9.8	7.7

Source: GEF Portal.

Note: Number of child projects includes coordination projects. Total GEF financing includes GEF grant, Agency fee, and project preparation grant and fee.

Table 2.3 Top country recipients among child projects, highest to lowest

GEF-6	GEF-7	GEF-8
Ghana	Brazil	China
Indonesia	Indonesia	Benin
Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Indonesia
Niger	India	Ghana
Burundi	China/Peru/Mexico	India/Peru

Source: GEF Portal.

$11.4 million in GEF-6 to a total of $242.5 million across 25 projects in GEF-8. Latin America and the Caribbean follows with $187 million for a total of 22 projects, while Europe and Central Asia has received the lowest financing across the three phases ($33.9 million), with minimal funding in GEF-8. GEF financing for regional and global projects declined progressively in GEF-7 and GEF-8 compared to GEF-6, indicating a shift toward more country-specific investments in the integrated programs.

The food systems programs show growing country coverage. The number of participating countries has increased continuously from GEF-6 to GEF-8 (table 2.4). Thirteen countries participate in both FOLUR and FSIP, while

Table 2.4 Participating countries in food systems programs

Period and program		No. of countries	LDC	SIDS
GEF-6	Coastal Fisheries Initiative	6	1	1
	Good Growth Partnership	4	1	
	Resilient Food Systems	12	8	
	Unique count	22	9	1
GEF-7	Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program	27	7	1
GEF-8	Food Systems Integrated Program	32	9	3

Source: GEF Portal.

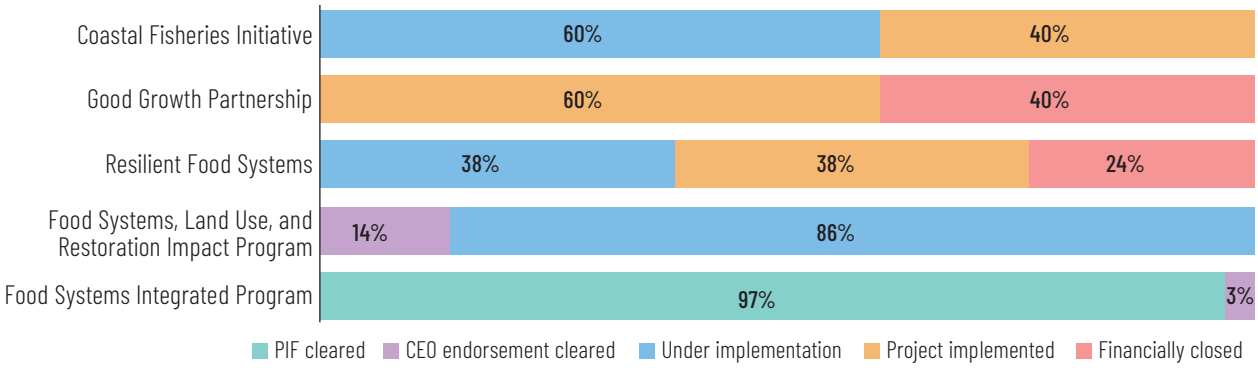
Note: LDC = least developed country; SIDS = small island developing states.

14 countries participate exclusively in FOLUR, and 19 new countries joined FSIP, indicating broader country engagement in the recent GEF phase. With regard to special country groupings, GEF-8 FSIP features the greatest number of least developed countries and small island developing states. Across the three replenishment periods, least developed countries account for 30 percent of projects and 27 percent of funding, while

SIDS account for 6 percent of projects and 4 percent of funding.

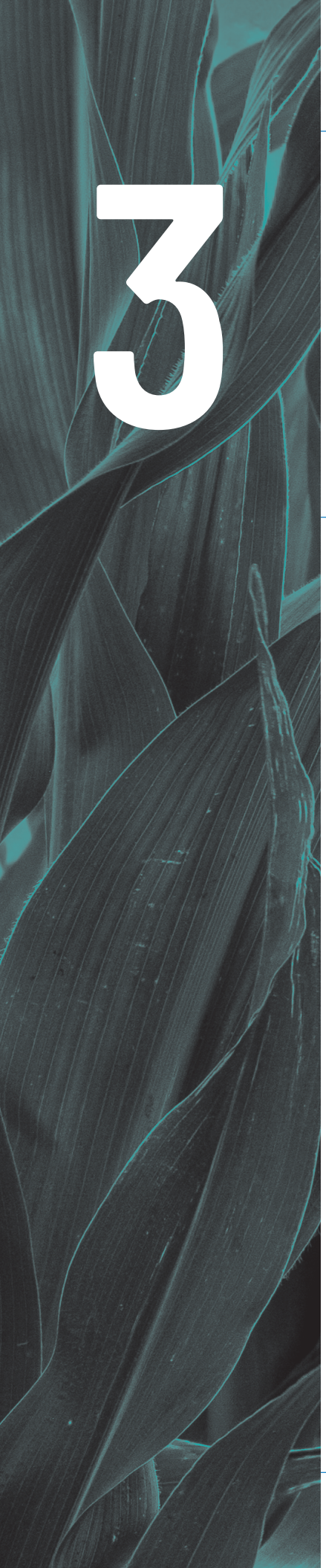
Implementation progress varies by GEF replenishment phase and program. At the time of analysis, 37 projects (44 percent) were under preparation—that is, project identification form (PIF) or CEO endorsement cleared—32 projects (38 percent) were under implementation, and 15 projects (18 percent) were either implemented or financially closed. Implementation progress varies by program (figure 2.1), with FSIP having the largest share of projects under preparation, and CFI and FOLUR having the largest share of ongoing projects. GGP has reached full completion, with all child projects implemented or financially closed.

Figure 2.1 Implementation status of child projects by program



Source: GEF Portal.

Note: CEO = Chief Executive Officer; PIF = project identification form.



3 Key findings

3.1 Relevance and coherence

Relevance to needs, policies, and priorities

GEF food systems programs are highly relevant for broader global efforts to make food systems more sustainable, ensuring environmental protection while protecting benefits for the people who depend on them. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Zero Hunger and Responsible Consumption and Production, in 2015 coincided with the GEF-6 replenishment period, and the launch of the RFS, CFI, and GGP programs. As attention to the interconnectedness of food systems, environmental degradation, and climate change has increased, the GEF has kept pace with this global movement through dedicated food systems programs in GEF-7 and GEF-8. The continued relevance of GEF food systems programming is underscored by initiatives like the 2021 United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit and subsequent stocktakes, which highlight persistent challenges in transforming food systems globally (UN SDG 2023). Moreover, recent reports have drawn attention to significant gaps in environmental and climate financing for food systems in developing countries, reinforcing the urgency of the GEF's contributions to driving transformational change (Díaz-Bonilla 2023; Kirchherr et al. 2024). Recent economic analysis demonstrates that food systems transformation could generate net benefits of $5–$10 trillion annually while current systems impose $15 trillion in hidden costs, reinforcing the urgency of the GEF's contributions to driving transformational change (FAO 2023; Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2024).

Food systems programs also address the objectives of multiple conventions and in an integrated manner. GEF funding for food systems programs has come from the focal areas associated with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Child projects show good alignment with convention objectives by addressing climate mitigation and resilience, land degradation, and biodiversity

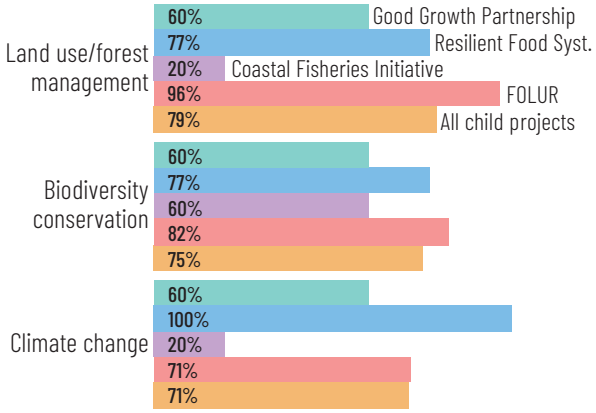
conservation within agricultural landscapes (GEF IEO 2022). (Also see discussion later in this subsection on specific environmental concerns targeted by food systems programs.)

The relevance of GEF food systems programs has been validated through both formative and retrospective geospatial analyses conducted by the GEF IEO. GEF IEO (2022) developed spatial relevance indexes that retroactively confirmed the alignment of selected countries in the GGP and RFS programs with key drivers of environmental degradation, with few exceptions. Additionally, during FOLUR's program design, a formative multicriteria spatial analysis approach was used to identify countries with high environmental, agricultural, and socioeconomic relevance, ensuring that the program strategically targeted priority food systems challenges (Sidman and Carugi 2023).

These initiatives are well aligned with countries' environmental needs, consistent with the GEF's mandate. Across programs, child projects have frequently described the relevance of project design to environmental policies, strategies, and programs, including biodiversity conservation, climate change, and land use and/or forest management (figure 3.1). Nearly all country-level survey respondents (95 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that child projects align with their country's environmental priorities and needs. All country case studies found evidence of child projects contributing to national environmental and development goals relevant to agriculture, livestock, and fisheries. Child projects with terminal evaluations were almost universally rated as highly relevant or relevant.[1] RFS, for example, was well matched to beneficiary needs, country policies, and regional priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic only increased the relevance of RFS's objectives,

[1] One project was deemed moderately relevant due to design flaws (e.g., unclear logical framework, lack of consideration of socioeconomic dimensions in site selection). Source: terminal evaluation for Food-IAP: Agricultural Value Chains Resilience Support Project (GEF ID 9134).

Figure 3.1 Child project alignment with environmental policies, strategies, and programs at design



Source: Project documents.

Note: FOLUR = Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program.

given heightened concerns about resilience of smallholder farming systems and household food security in rural Africa. According to the terminal evaluation, RFS also helped African drylands farmers adapt to climate change through adaptive innovations, increased ecological awareness, and enhanced extension services. While GGP projects were not designed as national projects, terminal evaluations still found that projects aligned with environmental concerns and priorities at the national level.

GEF food systems interventions have generally described alignment with country policies and priorities in the agriculture, livestock, and fishery sectors. Most child projects (70 percent) describe alignment with country policies, strategies, and/or government programs in agriculture, livestock, and fishery sectors, with nearly all other projects aligning with land use/forest management priorities. Systematic review of project implementation documents supports this trend, finding that all but one child project remained relevant to country needs in these sectors during implementation. The country survey also shows strong agreement of relevance among government counterparts and in-country GEF Agency staff (94 percent). Some variation is noted,

however, between RFS and FOLUR. A higher proportion of RFS child projects are executed by ministries of agriculture, and a higher proportion of RFS projects explicitly demonstrate relevance to agricultural policies (85 percent). In contrast, a lower proportion of FOLUR projects are executed by ministries of agriculture, and a lower proportion of FOLUR projects explicitly demonstrate relevance to agricultural policies (61 percent). See box 3.1 for additional examples.

Relevance in project design was enhanced through analyses of country priorities, baseline assessments of target sectors and intervention areas, and stakeholder consultation and validation. GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects consistently identified key national challenges and linked planned interventions to specific policies, priorities, and programs. Some project design documents included annexes demonstrating comprehensive assessments of national priorities.[2] When describing the selection of intervention areas, activities, and partners, most child project design documents (75 percent) highlighted analyses conducted during the project preparation grant phase, including problem tree analyses, economic and financial analyses, and analyses of potential benefits for target communities; or referenced external analyses, such as those used in a country's nationally determined contribution/national adaptation plan development or other development projects. Exceptions included eight projects that planned to conduct such analyses early in project implementation. Stakeholder consultations played a key role in validating analytical findings and shaping project design (figure 3.2). Child projects often engaged individuals and organizations representing the perspectives of local communities.

[2] Such as for the FOLUR child projects in Ethiopia (GEF ID 10243, United Nations Development Programme) and Uzbekistan (GEF ID 10601, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]) and the stand-alone project Building Climate Resilient Livelihoods in Vulnerable Landscapes in Bangladesh (GEF ID 10207, FAO).

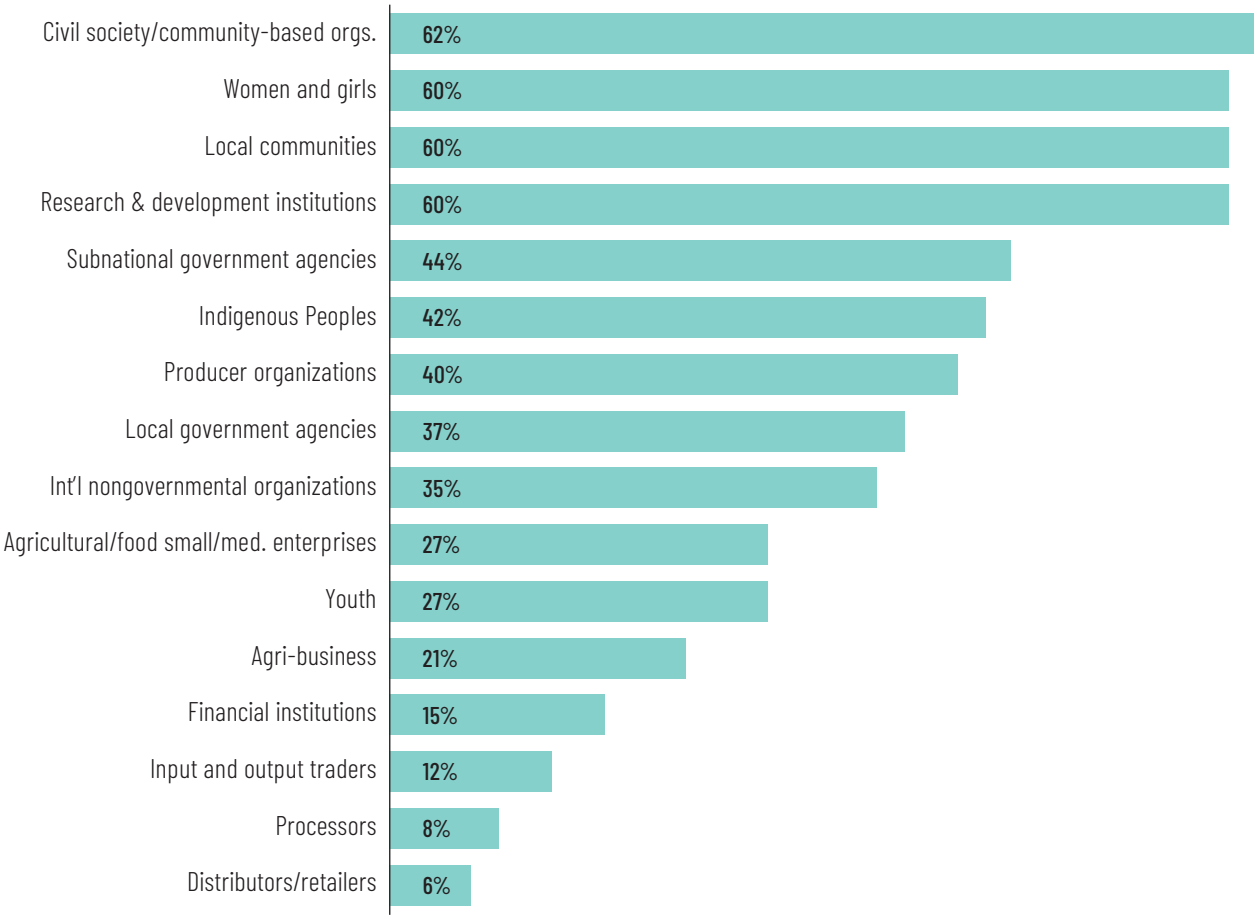
Box 3.1 Attention to environmental footprint of food systems and systemic design in case study countries

Case study results in all four countries demonstrate explicit attention to environmental footprints in their theories of change and results frameworks. In **Tanzania**, this is evident across Resilient Food Systems (RFS), Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR), and Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP) projects, which prioritize land use planning, climate-sensitive practices, and biodiversity conservation. **Indonesia** exhibits strong integration of environmental concerns, with attention to deforestation-linked commodity supply chains (FOLUR, Good Growth Partnership), marine ecosystem management (Coastal Fisheries Initiative [CFI]), and sustainable livestock production (FSIP). **Ghana**'s projects all focus on climate-smart agriculture and land restoration, but maintain a narrower emphasis on production-related impacts. **Peru**'s projects also incorporate environmental objectives, especially through biodiversity conservation (CFI) and deforestation reduction (FOLUR, FSIP).

The process of developing and socializing theories of change has helped to broaden thinking, yet systemic design has sometimes been constrained by siloed institutional mandates and rigid project structures. In Ghana, while the FOLUR project design reflects efforts to move beyond the production-centric focus of RFS, it lacks specificity in how it will engage private sector downstream food systems actors. Similarly, Peru's FOLUR project plans to address food systems linkages through partnerships and market access efforts, but lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of the diverse actors involved undermines coordination and limits the project's ability to operationalize its systems-oriented ambitions.

Private sector and downstream value chain actors were less frequently involved during the design phase, reflecting a broader tendency to prioritize production over postproduction value chain elements (see also

Figure 3.2 Stakeholders consulted during child project design



Source: Project documents.

figure 3.5). Engagement with input and output traders, processors, distributors, and retailers at design was primarily driven by GGP projects, while RFS child projects rarely involved postproduction value chain actors during the design phase, consistent with their programmatic priorities. FOLUR projects tended to focus on consultation with agricultural and food small and medium enterprises and/or agribusinesses (over 40 percent), while just over 20 percent engaged with financial institutions.

GEF food systems programs have provided sufficient flexibility for countries to focus on national needs, while using common components to enhance program coherence. The high relevance of GEF food systems projects, along with interview and case study evidence, indicates that program designs have allowed sufficient flexibility for countries to design interventions that address their national needs. Over time, programs have shown stronger internal coherence (see discussion later in this subsection)—aligning project designs with core components—while interviews and case studies suggest that these components are not limiting countries from focusing on their needs. At the same time, ad hoc evidence suggests that programs are introducing innovative topics that some countries had not yet identified as a strategic focus. In Peru, for example, the GEF Agency introduced regenerative livestock management

as a focus for FSIP, an idea initially met with skepticism by the ministries of environment and agriculture. However, over time, these ministries have begun to embrace the opportunity, recognizing the potential to pilot a new approach to addressing ecosystem degradation. The relevance of program components to countries' needs is also demonstrated by the strong interest in GEF food systems programs. Demand for participation in FOLUR and FSIP far exceeded available funds; 48 EOIs were submitted to FOLUR, compared to 27 country child projects selected; and 38 countries applied for FSIP funding, compared to 32 chosen.

Some concerns were raised about limited time for project preparation, given the multisectoral approach needed for food systems transformation. At the same time, a concern that the design of some GEF-8 projects was more Agency- than country-driven emerged in interviews with multiple GEF Agencies and program partners. This was largely attributed to scheduling pressure exerted by the GEF Secretariat in response to an important lesson from GEF-6 and GEF-7, where discrepancies in child project timelines—both among child projects themselves and between child projects and the coordination project—created coordination challenges (also see also discussions in subsection 3.3 on program governance and efficiency).

In response to evolving policy landscapes and global disruptions, GEF food systems interventions have often employed adaptive management to stay relevant, albeit with some missed opportunities. A notable change was the passage of the European Union Regulation on Deforestation-free Products while most FOLUR projects were in early implementation, changing the global policy landscape for five out of eight FOLUR commodities.[3] Interviews and case studies highlighted how projects are adapting. For instance, the FOLUR Deforestation Free Commodity Supply Chains in the Peruvian Amazon project (GEF ID 10307, United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]) revised its policy analysis and is promoting compliance with the European Union's deforestation regulation through an existing policy mechanism to secure land use rights for smallholders. In both Peru and Indonesia, projects also maintained relevance by adapting during COVID-19, with CFI in Peru introducing financial support through credit unions to mitigate income loss—a driver of illegal fishing—while GGP in Indonesia adjusted strategies to meet its market transformation targets despite pandemic-related obstacles.

There are also examples of missed opportunities for more effective adaptive management. In Indonesia, the GGP transactions project—Enabling Transactions: Market Shift to Deforestation Free Beef, Palm Oil and Soy project (GEF ID 9696, World Bank)—was not able to engage smallholder palm oil producers in line with the government's priorities, leading to the reallocation of GEF funds for other purposes. Similarly, the CFI Eco-system Approach to Fisheries Management in Eastern Indonesia project (GEF ID 9129, World Wildlife Fund-US [WWF-US]) has struggled to adapt implementation activities to more effectively achieve behavior change. The RFS program terminal evaluation also highlighted that child projects faced challenges with adaptive management due to limitations in their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, which limited feedback loops for rapid adaptation in response to changing policy environments.

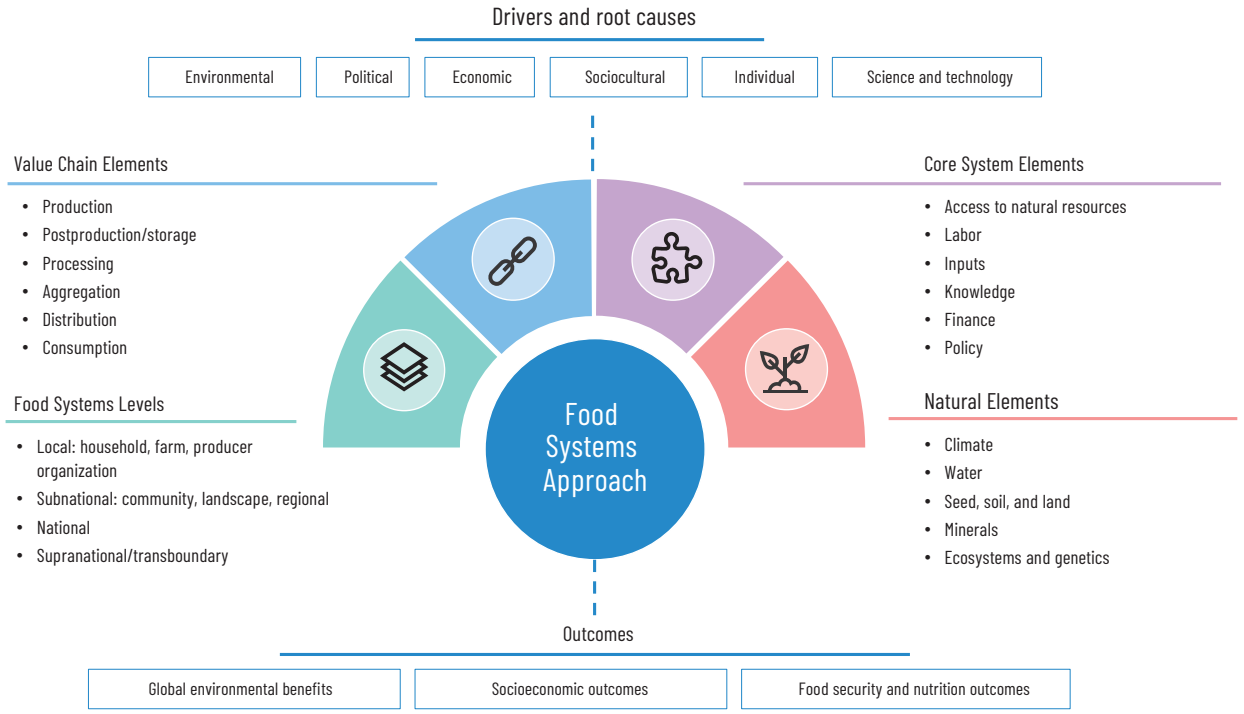
[3] The regulation was passed in May 2023 to ensure that products sold in European Union (EU) markets or exported from the EU are not linked to deforestation or forest degradation. It applies to seven commodities, five of which FOLUR covers: cattle, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, soy, rubber, and wood. While the regulation could encourage more sustainable agricultural practices and deforestation-free supply chains, it also may influence market access and investment decisions, with potentially negative implications for smallholder producers in areas with high deforestation risk. See more at the European Commission's Regulation on Deforestation-free Products web page.

Designing for food systems change

This evaluation considered whether GEF integrated programming applies a comprehensive systems approach to its food systems interventions, as well as how the design of GEF programs has evolved over time in response to lessons learned. To do this, the evaluation developed a framework understanding of food systems, identifying the drivers and root causes of food systems change, the value chain, core, and natural system elements, nested levels, and outcomes, as shown in figure 3.3. This framework guided the systematic review of food systems programs and projects, as discussed below (see annex E for a heatmap showing the framework's application at the program level). In particular, the evaluation considered the benefits of taking a food systems thinking approach in four key areas:

- **Addressing multiple drivers and their root causes.** A key principle of systems thinking is the identification and systemic resolution of drivers and root causes of food systems challenges, including environmental degradation, social inequities, and economic vulnerabilities. The evaluation focused on whether project designs are informed by multidimensional analyses and aim to tackle underlying issues. In-country data collection further explored the actual effectiveness of these interventions in reducing drivers and their root causes and whether the project components reinforce one another to yield sustained impact.
- **Integrated solutions across elements.** Systems thinking recognizes the linkages and interactions among different value chain, core system, and natural elements, leading to the design of integrated solutions to environmental, social, and economic challenges within food systems. The evaluation looked for evidence that programs and projects addressed

Figure 3.3 Food systems approach



multiple global environmental benefits and socioeconomic outcomes across relevant food systems elements, including different parts of the food systems value chain. The evaluation also sought evidence that programs and projects promote food systems sustainability at multiple levels, from local to national to transnational.

- **Stakeholder engagement and multilevel governance.** Effective food systems require the engagement of diverse stakeholders. The evaluation looked for evidence of inclusive and strategic engagement across multiple levels—local to international—and actors—from producers to policy makers and including private sector and civil society actors. The evaluation also looked for evidence of thorough stakeholder analysis and facilitating multistakeholder dialogue and coordination.
- **Synergistic outcomes across food systems dimensions.** Finally, a food systems approach emphasizes the importance of achieving positive and complementary outcomes across the food system, including environmental sustainability, socioeconomic resilience, food and nutrition security, and health. The evaluation explored the extent to which projects demonstrated layered, integrated activities designed to produce cross-sectoral environmental and other benefits and were designed to produce synergistic effects and effective management of trade-offs.

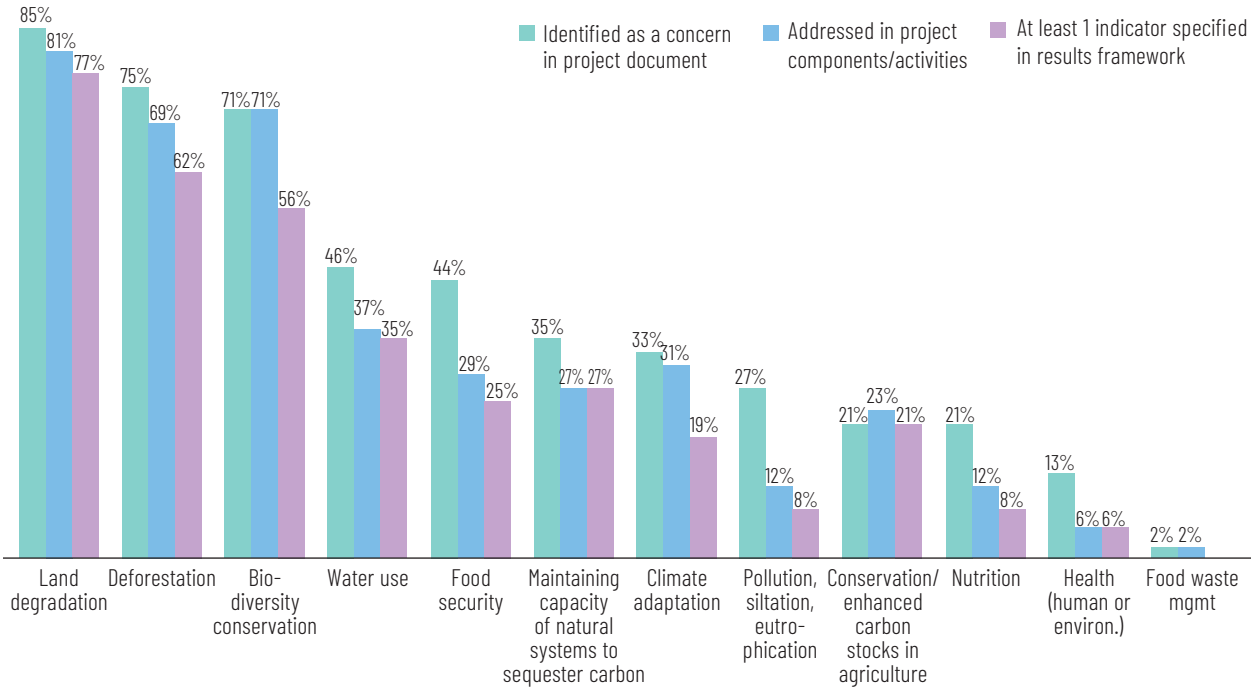
The interpretation of this framework was nuanced to recognize that a food systems approach is not equivalent to a holistic or inclusive approach that engages all elements or stakeholders indiscriminately. Systems thinking is expected to demonstrate strategic thinking and governance, such as by identifying and acting on the most influential levers of change. Ultimately, a food systems perspective means working strategically within complex systems to enable targeted, scalable, and adaptive interventions that have the potential to drive transformation. This framework was used as a proxy for assessing the potential of GEF interventions to contribute to transforming food systems, in the absence of a clear definition or metrics for what constitutes food systems transformation in GEF programming.

An integrated approach to environmental challenges

GEF food systems programs address many of the biggest environmental challenges in food systems in an integrated way. Across GEF food systems programs, environmental benefits remain central, in line with the GEF's mandate. PFDs emphasize biodiversity conservation, land restoration and GHG emissions reduction—demonstrating an integrated approach to environmental sustainability. FSIP stands out by additionally targeting chemicals and waste reduction, while CFI is unique in its strong contribution to transboundary water management and marine biodiversity. Country and Agency survey respondents widely agree (94 percent) that food systems programs address multiple environmental benefits in an integrated way. Country child projects designed activities to address multiple environmental challenges—most frequently combating land and soil degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss (figure 3.4). Other concerns, such as maintaining capacity of natural systems to sequester carbon and enhancing carbon stocks in agriculture, were less commonly addressed by project activities (27 percent and 23 percent, respectively), but still present in the portfolio nonetheless. Stand-alone projects similarly addressed multiple environmental issues, although with relatively more emphasis on water use (65 percent) and climate adaptation (71 percent) and less on land degradation (65 percent) and deforestation (53 percent). Most child projects (94 percent) and stand-alone projects (100 percent) also describe plans to create synergies between environmental and socioeconomic benefits.

Reducing food loss and waste, avoiding pollution, and promoting healthy diets have been infrequently addressed in GEF food systems programs, although attention is now emerging. In GEF-6 and GEF-7, few child projects addressed food waste management or pollution, such as from the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Similarly, few projects identified nutrition or health as a key concern

Figure 3.4 **Environmental challenges identified and addressed in child project designs**



Source: Project documents.

and even fewer included relevant activities. The limited focus on healthy diets partially reflects the GEF's mandate to deliver global environmental benefits, with improved nutrition seen as a co-benefit. Several interviewees noted that food systems levers like promoting alternative proteins and reducing food loss and waste have not been a focus of GEF programs. Interviewees were also unaware of any analysis comparing the environmental impact of these levers to production-focused ones in GEF countries. These findings reflect broader patterns identified in food systems interventions globally. Research has shown that food systems transformation efforts disproportionately focus on linear production-side interventions while underemphasizing critical downstream challenges such as food waste reduction and pollution prevention. This linear production-centric bias limits the transformational potential of food systems interventions, as achieving global food security and environmental sustainability requires integrated approaches across the entire food value chain (Winkler et al. 2025).

More attention to pollution and nutrition in food programs is emerging. In GEF-8, FSIP has started to recognize food waste, pollution, and nutrition aspects in its program theory of change and technical papers.[4] Another GEF-8 program, Financing Agrochemical Reduction and Management Plus (FARM+), also intends to support countries in transitioning toward sustainable agricultural practices that reduce soil and water pollution. It is not yet known whether these activities will be linked with FSIP ones in the few overlapping countries. The relevance of these efforts is validated by

[4] The FSIP theory of change explicitly promotes "sustainable, regenerative, and inclusive food systems that are nature-positive, resilient, and pollution-free," and a briefing paper provides guidance on enhancing nutrition co-benefits in child projects.

concerning global trends in malnutrition[5] and research underscoring that failing to integrate food waste and pollution dimensions risks undermining the long-term sustainability and resilience of food systems (FAO et al. 2025; Winkler et al. 2025). Looking forward, the GEF-9 Programming Directions aim to deepen the focus on nutrition by introducing it as a subcriterion in project selection, encouraging the use of nutrition-related indicators like dietary diversity and yields of biofortified crops, and promoting measures to reduce postharvest losses of nutrient-dense foods (GEF Secretariat 2025).

Food systems value chain elements

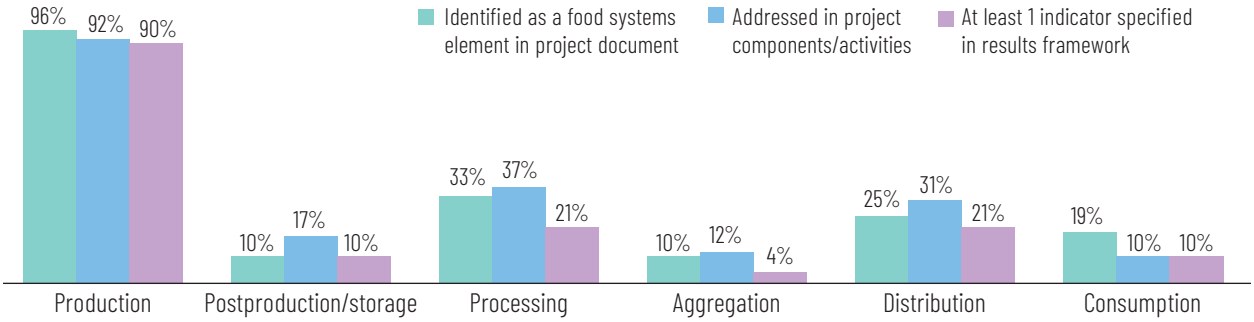
GEF programs differ considerably in their coverage of food value chains, although their primary emphasis remains on the production side. Country child projects focus heavily on agricultural and fisheries production, followed by processing and distribution, based on the quality-at-entry analysis (figure 3.5). Child projects' treatment of sustainable demand, market, and consumer-facing elements is uneven. Stand-alone food systems projects show similarly high rates of focus on production (94 percent), with slightly higher proportions of projects addressing postproduction/storage, processing, distribution, and consumption.

GGP took an innovative and explicit commodity supply chain approach to its program design, with separate projects focused on the production, demand, and finance transactions for beef, soy, and palm oil across four countries. A key lesson from GGP's approach was the need to better design for integration of value chain elements, which led to challenges during implementation (see section 3.3). Due to its focus on resilience and food security, RFS intentionally focused more on productive capacities and ecosystem services for smallholder farmers, with less prominent downstream value chain support. CFI is also not seen by program stakeholders as a value chain program, with its focus on governance and sustainable management of production. The original program design did not focus on connecting production and demand, although some interviewees saw CFI's lack of attention to the demand side as a potential risk for sustainability and a stronger environmental focus of fisheries. FOLUR has primarily emphasized sustainable production within commodity-specific landscape systems, targeting upstream components such as land use planning, crop inputs, and farming practices in its country projects. Value chain development has mostly focused on midstream actors like processors and off-takers to date, while downstream demand-side components—including retail, consumer behavior, and market incentives—have received limited attention. FOLUR's global platform is intended to play a key role in engaging with vertical value chains and the demand side, to add programmatic value to child projects (see section 3.3).

While FSIP remains focused on productive aspects—as evidenced by the program documents and Agency interviews—the program is also attempting to support financial needs in the supply chain and leverage the role of markets and consumers to stimulate demand for sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious foods. Interviewees acknowledge, however, that operationalizing these demand-side components remains challenging. While few FSIP child projects have reached CEO endorsement yet, early interviews indicate that the focus remains largely on production, with room for greater attention on consumption and downstream

[5] Only one-third of children ages 6–23 months and two-thirds of women ages 15–49 meet minimum criteria for dietary diversity, while adult obesity has risen from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 15.8 percent in 2022 (FAO et al. 2025). This "double burden of malnutrition"—the coexistence of undernutrition with overweight and obesity—highlights the complex nutritional challenges that food systems interventions must address beyond environmental objectives. The continued relevance of GEF food systems programming is further validated by the latest global data (FAO et al. 2025) showing that despite modest improvements in global hunger levels, stark regional disparities persist, with Africa accounting for 60 percent of projected hungry people by 2030, while overlapping crises, such as conflict, climate shocks, and inflation, continue to expose the fragility of food systems.

Figure 3.5 Value chain elements in child projects



Source: Project documents.

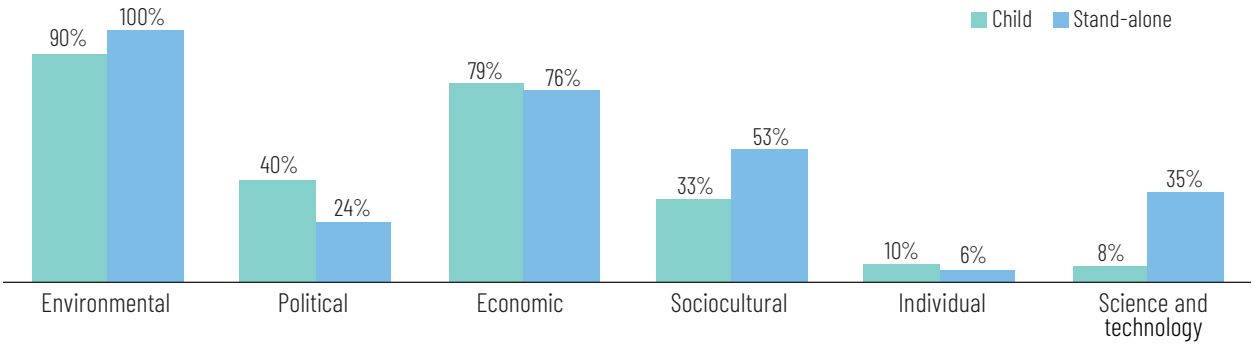
behavior. The GEF's continued focus on production-side interventions, while important, reflects a broader pattern in food systems programming that systematically underweights demand-side interventions, food waste reduction, and consumption pattern changes that could deliver significant environmental benefits. This imbalance limits the potential for achieving the scale of transformation needed to address global food systems challenges within planetary boundaries (Winkler et al. 2025).

Drivers and root causes of food systems change

GEF food systems programs comprehensively describe the systemic drivers of food systems transformation at the PFD level, while child project designs largely focus on environmental and economic drivers. All five programs' PFDs describe the systemic drivers of food systems transformation, including environmental, political, economic, sociocultural, individual, and science and technology drivers. An innovation of the FSIP design is addressing how systems change through key levers of transformation: governance and policies, finance, multistakeholder dialogue, and innovation. Yet, as program intentions have been translated into child projects, the level of attention to these drivers has varied. Environmental drivers are central in child projects—given the GEF's mandate—and economic drivers also feature relatively prominently (figure 3.6); stand-alone projects show similar rates of attention to environmental and economic drivers. Root causes such as poverty and income inequality are touched upon through efforts to improve food security, market access, and financing for producers.

Political drivers have received less but growing attention, reflecting the increased emphasis on policy coherence in the GEF. Political drivers affecting food systems are only described in 40 percent of child project designs, although the proportion is higher among GEF-7 than GEF-6 projects. This finding aligns with recent global evidence highlighting political economy dynamics, including corporate dominance and the financialization of food systems, as crucial but often neglected drivers of unsustainable food systems outcomes (Resnick and Swinnen 2023; Winkler et al. 2025). Higher proportions of projects (71 percent of child projects and 88 percent of stand-alone projects) describe how policy misalignment affects food systems, even if policy coherence is not identified as a key driver of food systems transformation. Projects most frequently identify misalignments between production policies (e.g., subsidies, price incentives) and environmental and climate goals, as well as trade-offs between short-term gains and long-term sustainability in agriculture. In Paraguay, for example, one stakeholder explained that taxes on unproductive land can incentivize landowners to convert forest land to productive land to avoid taxes, illustrating how embedded economic and policy

Figure 3.6 **Percentage of project documents discussing impact drivers of food systems change for child versus stand-alone projects**



Source: Project documents.

systems can discourage environmental stewardship. The quality-at-entry analysis provided further examples of policy misalignments identified at the design stage (box 3.2). Nearly all child projects (95 percent) that identified policy misalignments also designed interventions to address them. As noted above, FSIP is explicitly incorporating policy coherence and enabling regulatory environments as transformation levers, although the extent to which these are reflected in child projects is not yet known.

GEF food systems programs increasingly use multisector and multistakeholder coordination platforms—adopted by 73 percent of GEF child projects—to improve policy coherence.[6] FOLUR projects lead this trend (90 percent of projects) compared to GEF-6. This approach underscores the need for whole-of-government action to align different interests for food systems transformation. GEF projects, however, rarely tackle deeper issues like agricultural subsidies or regulatory contradictions because they are often executed by environmental ministries that lack influence over subsidy policies and are often small scale relative to subsidies.

Variable attention to political economy dimensions of the food systems agenda at design has possible implications for transformational potential, according to interviews and case studies. Scholarship on food systems transformation emphasizes that "disagreements and competitions—over ideas, facts, interests, values, and desired outcomes—are inherent to the process of food systems transformation" and that "true transformation cannot occur without contention of the underlying social, political, and economic arrangements that had created and maintained the existing status quo" (Béné and Abdulai 2024). GEF projects show variable attention to analyzing and addressing these political dimensions. In Peru, for example, some government agencies with key responsibilities for food systems were only consulted once the project was nearly fully designed. Conversely, in Ghana and Tanzania, environmental ministries have successfully engaged agriculture ministries in design, raising awareness of environmental issues within food systems. The Indonesia case study pointed to an emerging challenge as governments pursue ambitious food sovereignty, agricultural growth, and export targets that can be difficult to reconcile with environmental sustainability objectives. National strategies may show apparent policy alignment across sectors, but fail to

[6] While stand-alone projects also emphasize coordination mechanisms (67 percent of projects), they more frequently emphasize policy review and improving the policy framework as expected results in project design.

Box 3.2 Attention to policy coherence in food systems project design

Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration in Tanzania's Forest Landscapes (GEF ID 10262, World Wildlife Fund). In Tanzania, the current pricing mechanisms for domestic and irrigation water use in the project's target landscapes do not reflect the true environmental costs of managing, conserving, and restoring water catchments. Many users are unregistered and access water at no cost, creating incentives for overuse and mismanagement, and prices are not aligned across agencies. This Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR) project aims to promote better alignment of land use planning and water management through establishing a multisectoral coordination mechanism and institutional capacity building.

Enabling Transactions—Market Shift to Deforestation Free Beef, Palm Oil and Soy (GEF ID 9696, World Bank). Low commodity prices for sustainable products pose an ongoing disincentive for farmers, noted particularly in Paraguay (beef) and Indonesia (palm oil). This Good Growth Partnership child project sought to address temporal policy coherence by developing immediate financial and policy tools, such as targeted guidance for financial institutions and regulators and country analyses on fiscal incentives, that support long-term goals for reducing deforestation in target supply chains.

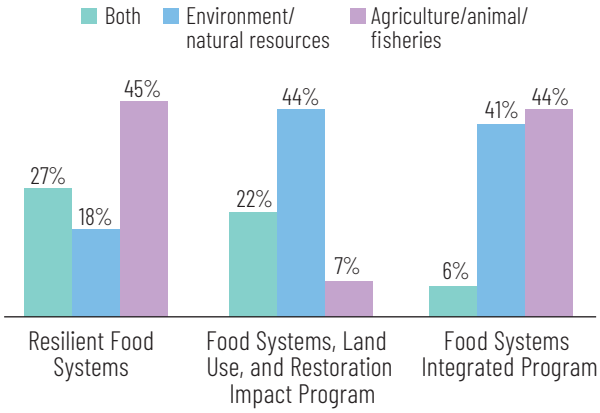
Scaling up Cocoa-based Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration (GEF ID 10247, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]). This FOLUR child project in Côte d'Ivoire seeks to achieve horizontal policy coherence by coordinating the implementation of various existing policies at the landscape and community levels to resolve contradictions and conflicts. Specifically, it aims to balance forest conservation policies with agricultural development policies, reconcile policies encouraging tree cover on farms with logging practices, and address the conflict between prioritizing lowland for food crops versus cash crops.

Support for Sustainable Food Production and Enhancement of Food Security and Climate Resilience in Burundi's Highlands (GEF ID 9178, FAO). Natural resource management in Burundi has been hindered by fragmented planning, underresourced coordination bodies, and the absence of coherent land use frameworks across governance levels. This Resilient Food Systems child project was designed to tackle both vertical and horizontal policy coherence by strengthening the technical and managerial capacity of existing multisectoral platforms; and ensuring regular engagement, action planning, and inclusive participation from ministries, local governments, and communities. GEF financing also sought to support integrated planning at the national, provincial, and landscape levels by enhancing the Agriculture and Rural Development Working Groups and establishing knowledge-sharing systems to align stakeholders around common goals.

reflect subnational priorities, capacities, and governance realities, leading to significant incoherences in practical policy implementation and vertical misalignments. Recent research highlights the systematic neglect of political economy analysis in global food systems interventions as a critical barrier to achieving transformational change (Winkler et al. 2025). This aligns with the GEF experience, where projects often assumed that coordination would lead to alignment without adequately assessing the political constraints that influence real-world outcomes (see also the discussion under subsection 3.2).

Agency interviews also highlighted tensions between the perception of GEF food systems projects as "environmental" or "agricultural" projects, influenced by which ministries lead these efforts. This challenge has been heightened in GEF-7, as project execution shifted from agricultural ministries to environmental ones (figure 3.7). The tensions between agricultural and environmental ministries observed in GEF programming reflect broader challenges in food systems governance where the inherent complexity and diversity of food systems requires integrated approaches that often exceed traditional sectoral boundaries (Gaitán-Cremaschi et al. 2019). As Farmery et al. (2025) observe, "agriculture

Figure 3.7 Child project executing agency



Source: GEF Portal.

Note: The Coastal Fisheries Initiative and Good Growth Partnership are excluded due to the global and regional nature of their child projects.

departments may be limited in their ability and capacity to deliver on a broad range of areas outside their technical areas of expertise, requiring capacity support in systems integration and cross-sectoral planning." Interviews also point to fundamental challenges in reframing GEF interventions to ensure local buy-in, by focusing on improving productivity to strengthen livelihoods, while improving efficiency and environmental sustainability of production.

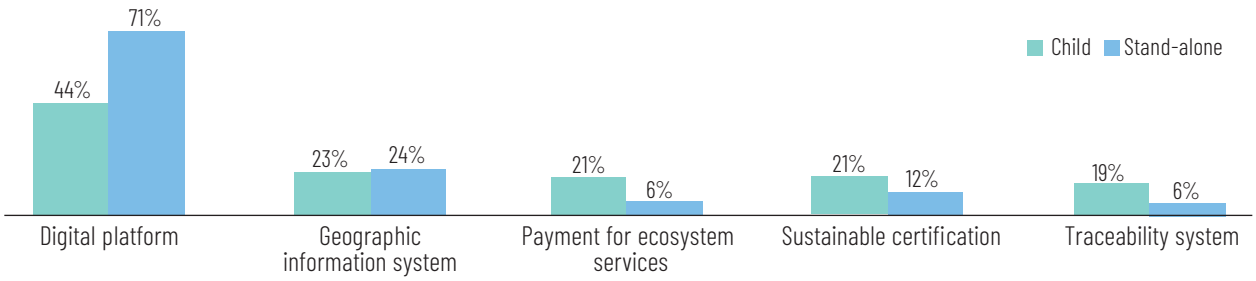
Sociocultural drivers—such as dietary preferences, social norms, and food traditions—are largely underaddressed in most GEF programs. Sustainable food systems transformation requires understanding and addressing the complex socioecological relationships that shape food choices and practices (Winkler et al. 2025). With a production-centric lens, GEF programs have rarely directly tackled harmful sociocultural practices and changing consumption and demand patterns. Exceptions include the GGP project in Indonesia that promoted deforestation-free palm oil through national consumer campaigns; in Ghana, the Women in Agriculture Development Unit of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture has pushed soybean-based meals to improve nutrition. In its program design, FSIP references promoting healthy diets and changing consumption patterns, but it is too early to see whether these aspects are consistently translated into actionable components in child projects. Individual-level drivers, including behavior change and capacity development, are touched upon in project designs to some extent, especially through training, extension, and awareness activities.

While projects rarely identified science and technology as key drivers of food systems change, they often included innovative approaches or technologies in design. Technologies and the digital revolution have an important role to play in transforming food systems, including through resource optimization, enhanced productivity, improved decision-making, and reduced waste. Digital platforms are the most identified innovation in child project design (figure 3.8), while stand-alone projects show similar, and sometimes greater, planned use of innovative approaches or technologies. Some GEF programs have emphasized innovative agricultural research and technologies, especially RFS, which focused on science-research-technology linkages in child projects and attempted to generate a science and policy interface in the coordination project. Many projects (69 percent) have planned to involve research and development institutions. FSIP aims to deepen the focus on scaling up transformative technologies, with strategic guidance for child projects on how to promote the adoption and dissemination of agritech. (See subsection 3.2 for findings on the use of innovation in generating results.)

Working across scales and actors

The evolution from GEF-6 through GEF-8 demonstrates a broadening of scope with programs increasingly working across multiple levels in food systems. Literature on food systems recognizes that they are multidimensionally nested, with systems and elements at lower levels nested in higher levels (Bustamante, Vidueira, and Baker 2024; Olofsson et al. 2021; Schneider, Salvate, and Cassol 2016; van Bers et al. 2019). The quality-at-entry analysis showed that child and stand-alone project activities alike targeted food systems at several levels,

Figure 3.8 Most common innovations in food systems project design



Source: Project documents.

with the greatest share of child projects intervening at the landscape level (83 percent), and individual/household level (81 percent). FOLUR's focus on integrated landscape management partly explains the landscape emphasis, as far fewer stand-alone projects (47 percent) plan to engage at this level. Given the levels targeted, food systems projects appropriately engage a range of subnational and local actors, including subnational and local government agencies (62 and 60 percent of projects), civil society organizations (83 percent), and local communities (79 percent). Food systems programs show variable focus on the national level, from RFS and CFI's strong emphases (85 and 80 percent of projects, respectively) to a more tempered focus in FOLUR (43 percent). Looking forward, FSIP is aiming to combine landscape-level work with policy, finance, and supply chain considerations at national and regional scales.

The integrated program modality remains largely national in focus, limiting the ability of child projects to engage meaningfully with regional markets, trade dynamics, or international policy environments—except where such engagement is facilitated by the coordination project. The integrated program architecture, while effective for aligning interventions with national priorities and enabling country ownership, tends to limit attention to transboundary or regional food systems dynamics.[7] GEF food systems programs have begun to focus on regional and commodity groupings, but typically through the lens of technical learning and knowledge sharing (see also the discussion in subsection 3.3 on knowledge and learning), rather than as attempts to conceptualize or intervene in food systems at the regional scale. There is also limited evidence across all four case study countries that child projects are integrated in a way that reflects systems thinking across national boundaries. In Ghana, for example, planned cocoa-related activities do not connect with supply chain dynamics in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, missing the chance for cross-national systems approaches. Still, the majority of FOLUR projects intend to engage with sector-based platforms, roundtables, or coalitions, which can help link national efforts to regional ones (see also discussion under subsection 3.2 on the private sector).

Notably, not all GEF food systems programs follow this integrated program model. For instance, GGP was structured by supply chain components, with most projects working across multiple countries. CFI

[7] This is echoed by the country-level survey, which showed higher levels of disagreement that GEF programs support food systems across national boundaries. While disagreement was generally low across survey questions (1–4 percent), disagreement was higher for this statement (9 percent overall, 17 percent for FOLUR, and 26 percent for FSIP).

is a programmatic approach with regional child projects, such as in West Africa and Latin America. Yet, these programs have also struggled to enable stronger regional cooperation and governance alignment across shared ecosystems. For example, GGP and CFI projects in Indonesia initially aspired to link global and national efforts across deforestation-linked value chains and marine ecosystems, but these goals were only partially realized due to coordination and implementation challenges. In Peru, the Coastal Fisheries Initiative-Latin America project (GEF ID 9124, UNDP) operated in a transboundary ecosystem but did not design for cross-border collaboration to address illegal fishing—an opportunity for systems integration that remained unfulfilled.

GEF programs focus on empowering women as key food systems actors, but fall short in addressing the gender gap on access to resources and underlying power dynamics. Consistent with GEF policy requirements, all GEF-7 child projects have gender action plans, and nearly all have gender mainstreaming strategies. The World Bank's 2025 FOLUR midterm review found that countries that have shown leadership in gender mainstreaming, such as Ghana, Indonesia, and Mexico, have pursued participatory gender analysis, dedicated budgets, and accountability mechanisms for gender results. Nearly all GEF-6 and GEF-7 child projects (96 percent) include measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as key food systems actors (see examples in box 3.3). Notably, more than half of RFS child projects (53 percent) seek to increase women's participation in landscape and regional resource governance mechanisms. Many child projects also aim to strengthen women's capacities on the farm and in agrifood business, as well as to improve women's employment opportunities and access to finance in the agrifood sector (figure 3.9). Far fewer projects address women's ownership of land and livestock, access to inputs and resources, or decision-making related to food consumption or within the household/farm. Few projects (10 percent) also consider the potential unintended consequences of changing gender dynamics through project activities, underscoring a critical area for improvement. Stand-alone projects show similar trends in designing gender-responsive measures, although a somewhat larger proportion of projects aim to increase women's skills and employment in the agrifood sector, agricultural productivity, and access to finance and markets.

Entrenched operational and structural barriers continue to hamper gender-transformative and inclusive design. Only 23 percent of food systems child projects included a gender expert during the design phase. Positive examples, like Indonesia's Strengthening Sustainability in Commodity and Food-Crop Value Chains, Land Restoration and Land Use Governance through Integrated Landscape Management for Multiple Benefits in Indonesia project (GEF ID 10238, UNDP), where a gender specialist was embedded from the outset, set a benchmark for replication in other countries. Interviews also underscored persistent challenges rooted in the typical project design process—consultant-led, followed by delayed team formation—which disconnects project intent from on-the-ground execution. This delay can limit the effectiveness of participatory, inclusive design. Interviewees shared examples where project teams redid gender analysis or retrofitted gender actions.

Moreover, gender integration across government levels, agencies, and the public-private divide remains complex and inconsistently addressed. Without early alignment and institutional coordination, even well-conceived gender strategies risk marginalization—especially in male-dominated implementation teams and government agencies, as interviewees explained. Opportunities to engage women and other vulnerable groups have also been constrained at times by the choice of commodities and project design decisions, as the FOLUR midterm review and case studies illustrated. In FOLUR, many child projects have worked on gender entry points outside of the focus commodities.

Box 3.3 Examples of gender-responsive and inclusive measures in child project design

Delivering Sustainable Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits in West Africa through Good Governance, Correct Incentives and Innovation (GEF ID 9126, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). This Coastal Fisheries Initiative child project in West Africa aims to strengthen tenure and access rights for women fish workers, recognizing that insecure access limits their ability to benefit from project activities. By facilitating access to raw materials and land, the project seeks to ensure women can participate in fish handling and processing initiatives. Gender analysis identified these barriers as critical to address. The design explicitly links resource access to empowerment. As a result, land and materials are positioned as enablers of inclusion and economic benefit for women.

Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in Nigeria (GEF ID 9143, United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]). This Resilient Food Systems child project in Nigeria included a dedicated outcome for improved youth involvement and reduced gender disparities in agricultural production for enhanced food security. In partnership with the Women Farmers' Advancement Network, it sought to enhance access to finance, inputs, and training for women smallholders in rice and groundnut value chains. The project also promoted food and nutrition awareness and employed information and communication technology tools developed by youth to support inclusive community monitoring.

Inclusive Sustainable Rice Landscapes in Thailand (GEF ID 10268, United Nations Environment Programme). This Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR) child project in Thailand addresses gender inequalities with targeted support for women environmental defenders and Indigenous groups. Guided by gender consultants, it includes comprehensive gender-sensitive policies, methodologies, and a tailored monitoring and evaluation system. A strong focus is placed on inclusive data collection and evidence-based policy responses to environmental and health threats. The design links gender empowerment to ecosystem resilience and sustainable rice value chain transformation. By embedding gender-responsive tools and safeguards, the project aims to generate long-term benefits for vulnerable women and girls.

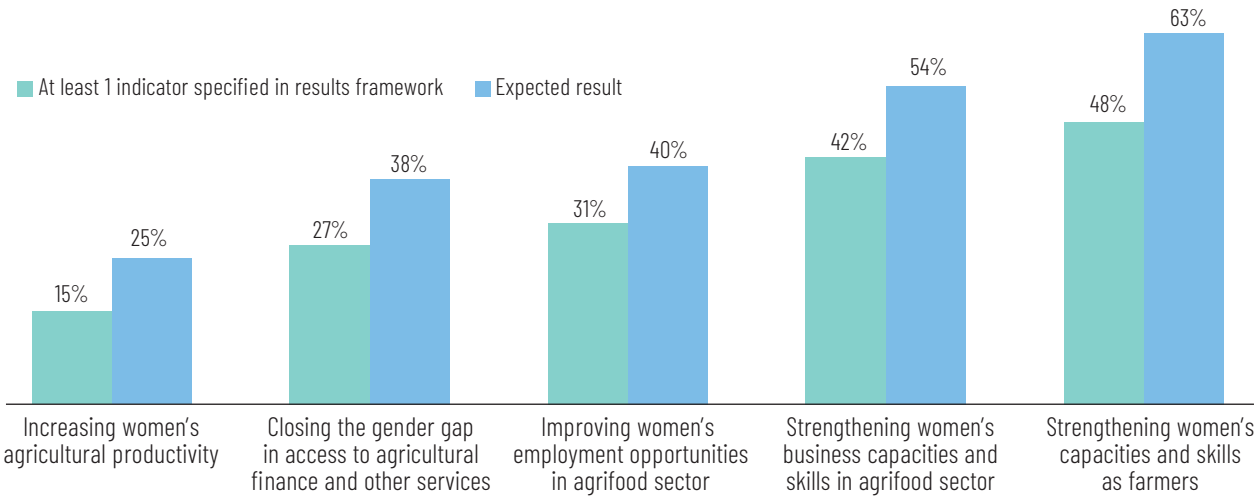
Deforestation Free Commodity Supply Chains in the Peruvian Amazon (GEF ID 10307, UNDP). This FOLUR child project in Peru aims to promote inclusivity by supporting Indigenous communities, particularly the Shawi in Alto Amazonas and the Awajun in Amazonas. The project focuses on incorporating integrated landscape management into Indigenous Peoples' life plans and territorial development plans, with the dual goals of reducing deforestation and boosting sustainable livelihoods. Through partnerships with Indigenous organizations, the project provides tailored technical assistance, supports the implementation of community life plans, and promotes deforestation-free production methods like sustainable cocoa cultivation.

In Peru, for example, women traditionally play a limited role in production of the shellfish and livestock that CFI-LA and the Regenerative Livestock Farming to Promote Sustainable Landscapes project (GEF ID 11221, FAO) chose to focus on, and neither project has specific activities designed to address barriers to women's participation in production.

Coherence of food systems interventions

The internal coherence of food systems programs has increased over time. In programs, internal coherence means consistency between child project and program design, including in terms of components and objectives, coverage of similar focal areas and landscapes, and results management systems (GEF IEO 2022). More child projects explicitly incorporated guidance and/or knowledge from the program level at the design phase

Figure 3.9 Expected child project gender-related results



Source: Project documents.

in FOLUR (100 percent), compared to RFS (15 percent) and GGP (20 percent), based on the quality-at-entry analysis. Nearly all FOLUR child projects incorporated program-level guidance on results framework indicators (96 percent), project components (86 percent), and knowledge management (89 percent). FOLUR country government and Agency survey respondents from the 2022 Formative Evaluation of the GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation widely agreed (88 percent) that they received guidance and information during design and startup to align child project objectives and components with overall program-level objectives (GEF IEO 2022).

Interviewees widely agreed that the FSIP design process has best supported synergies between child projects and the global program. This was mainly due to the earlier approval of the global coordination project, which then supported countries in their child project formulation. For instance, the FSIP coordination project team developed briefing papers for designing child projects and facilitated country attendance at FOLUR regional commodity events, enabling in-person design consultations. However, resource constraints have limited the depth of review and follow-up by the coordination project team to ensure that child projects reflect program guidance, according to Agency interviews. Some activities are also being postponed until after CEO endorsement. For example, although transformation metrics are expected to be emphasized in the child projects—as explained in the PDF and underscored by GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel feedback (GEF STAP 2024)—the global coordination project team has not yet produced guidance on them.

With regard to external coherence, GEF food systems interventions often planned to engage with other initiatives, but actual coordination at the child project level varied in approach and intensity. While 77 percent of child projects planned for knowledge sharing or joint activities with other donor-funded initiatives, only 30 percent reported execution of such activities. In Tanzania, for example, the FOLUR project builds on learning from a World Bank project and intends to align with a Republic of Korea–funded sustainable rice initiative, while the FSIP Food Systems Transformation in Usangu Landscape project (GEF ID 11230, FAO) is seen as a pilot to inform a proposed $200 million Green Climate Fund initiative. The

RFS program terminal evaluation also highlighted collaboration with major regional initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Union Development Agency's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Plan, and the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry's Stakeholder Approach to Risk-Informed and Evidence-Based Decision-Making (SHARED) Decision Hub.

Some GEF Agencies, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, have effectively linked GEF interventions with their own country programs and projects. Successful examples of collaboration among GEF Agencies were also identified in all three GEF-6 programs. For instance, UNDP partnered with the WWF under CFI-Latin America in Peru to launch a traceability app; while UNDP and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) collaborated to engage technicians trained under a previous IFC project to support palm oil farmers in Indonesia under GGP's production project—Reducing Deforestation from Commodity Production (GEF ID 9180, UNDP). In Ghana, the World Bank has implemented, and continues to implement, three consecutive projects across GEF-6 to GEF-8 food systems programs as part of the Bank's broader operations in the cocoa sector. These efforts have included linking World Bank financing to the FOLUR project to address related environmental challenges associated with artisanal small-scale mining. The RFS Enhancing the Resilience of Agro-Ecological Systems project (GEF ID 9138, IFAD) in Malawi also benefited from coordination among IFAD, World Bank, and UNDP projects to build watershed development capacity among local institutions. Some of these instances of collaboration led to spillover effects, as discussed in subsection 3.3.

In crowded landscapes, some projects sought to carve out a niche, while maintaining light coordination with other actors through existing multistakeholder platforms to ensure distinct contributions. For instance, Peru's FOLUR project selected San Martin as its first intervention landscape but, given the presence of many other donor initiatives focused on cocoa and coffee in the area, the FOLUR project is exploring gender as a niche entry point to ensure added value and avoid duplication. This includes working with women producer networks, particularly by strengthening their representation at the regional level; and helping women to benefit from agroforestry concessions through targeted training and inclusion on land use titles. Meanwhile, some projects missed opportunities for greater collaboration with other development partners. The Indonesia CFI project's midterm review highlighted missed opportunities for stronger collaboration with similar programs supported by the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development. Similarly, the Ghana case study found that some major food sector development partners had negligible engagement with GEF interventions.

3.2 Performance and effectiveness

This subsection reviews the performance and results of four GEF food systems programs, three of which are completed or nearing completion (RFS, GGP, CFI), along with emerging findings from the ongoing FOLUR program. Following a brief overview of performance ratings, the analysis explores key dimensions of food systems transformation, including environmental and value chain outcomes, socioeconomic inclusion and gender, policy coherence and governance, and private sector contributions. It also considers innovation and the role of M&E systems. Broader insights into results from programmatic value addition and global commodity supply chains are addressed in the following subsection.

Overall performance

Almost all food systems child projects and programs with terminal evaluations have achieved satisfactory outcomes and

performed similarly well on other dimensions to the overall GEF-6 portfolio. Only 9 of the 23 GEF-6 food systems child projects have ratings in the IEO terminal evaluation database, but these projects demonstrate good performance across all dimensions (table 3.1). Food systems projects performed comparably to the overall GEF-6 portfolio on outcomes and outperformed the broader GEF-6 average on quality of implementation and execution.[8] Review of additional terminal evaluations that did not have ratings also showed satisfactory performance among closed GEF-6 projects. A comprehensive self-assessment done by IFAD management of the RFS program found that its 12 country child projects generally had overall satisfactory performance at completion, either documented through terminal evaluations or latest project implementation reports.

Table 3.1 Share of GEF-6 projects with performance ratings in the satisfactory/likely range

Performance	Food systems	Overall portfolio
Outcome	89	89
Quality of implementation	100	94
Quality of execution	100	91
Quality of M&E implementation	100	79
Quality of M&E design	88	89
Likelihood of sustainability	75	77
Quality of terminal evaluation	78	90

Source: GEF IEO terminal evaluation data set.

Note: M&E = monitoring and evaluation. Quality ratings are based on a six-point scale; likelihood of sustainability is based on a four-point scale.

Sustainability and M&E design and implementation were, however, often only moderately satisfactory in RFS. Food systems child projects have shown satisfactory outcome achievement in areas such as policy support and implementation, governance, sustainable agricultural practices, support to farmer organizations and community development, land use and marine area management, and the protection or restoration of high-value ecosystem areas. Effectiveness ratings also generally improved from midterm to terminal evaluations, highlighting the slow but steady progress of performance in these complex initiatives.

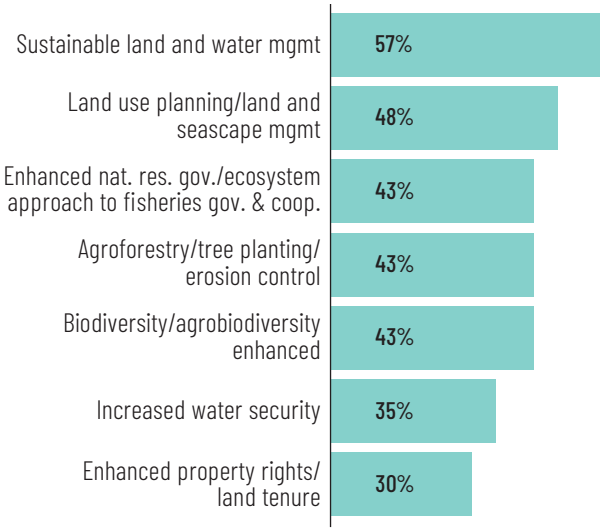
Environmental results

Food systems programs have reported delivery of substantial environmental benefits, particularly in improved land area management, biodiversity conservation, and GHG emissions mitigation. Environmental outcomes were primarily reported across the GEF-6 programs, with emerging data from the GEF-7 FOLUR.[9] Across child projects, sustainable land and water management outcomes were the most commonly reported (in 57 percent of projects), followed by land use and landscape planning (figure 3.10). Child projects also showed positive outcomes in enhanced natural resource management (43 percent), reported most frequently in GGP and RFS child projects (see volume 2 for results by program). Other contributions to different environmental outcomes reflect the nuances of individual program design. For example, agroforestry, increased water

[8] With only one stand-alone food systems project from the comparator data set closed, a valid comparison of the performance of child projects to stand-alone projects is not possible.

[9] The evaluation's implementation document review applied a structured methodology to assess outputs and outcomes reported in terminal evaluations and other progress documents across the three major GEF-6 food systems programs (RFS, GGP, and CFI), the GEF-7 FOLUR program, and three stand-alone projects, using common indicators to ensure comparability. This report only summarizes and analyzes the results from the programs, as only one stand-alone project was sufficiently advanced to show some results. Of the 17 FOLUR projects reviewed, many were not mature enough to evaluate progress toward results. Some occasional early results were observed in country projects in Indonesia, China, Ukraine, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Nigeria, Thailand, and Liberia. For an overview of FOLUR progress in the evaluation case study countries, see volume 2.

Figure 3.10 Environmental outcomes and outputs of child projects across GEF-6 and GEF-7 programs



Source: Project documents.

security, and land tenure results were primarily generated by RFS, with agrobiodiversity also strong in RFS due to support to child projects by the hub biodiversity partner. Similarly, CFI had meaningful contributions associated with the implementation of its ecosystems approach for fisheries.

Two closed programs, RFS and GGP, have made notable contributions to global environmental benefits:

- **RFS** achieved or exceeded targets in core indicators related to terrestrial protected areas (57,000 ha, 100 percent), biodiversity landscapes (613,000 ha, 144 percent), and GHG emissions avoided (88.4 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, 137 percent), but fell short on land restored (350,000 ha, 77 percent) and production landscapes under sustainable management (478,000 ha, 78 percent).
- **GGP** exceeded its target for land benefiting from improved natural resource management and practices for biodiversity (28.4 million ha, 123 percent), and reported avoiding 29.4 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions programwide.[10] Most gains in improved land management were reported in the GGP production project in Paraguay (24 million ha) and Indonesia (3.2 million ha), and in the Brazil child project—Taking Deforestation Out of the Soy Supply Chain (GEF ID 9617, UNDP)—(81,099 ha). Major gains in terms of high conservation value/high carbon stock area protection (846,672 ha preserved) were driven by peatland in Indonesia.

With implementation still at an early stage, FOLUR's 2024 annual report by the World Bank noted limited global environmental benefits—typically well below 5 percent of end-of-program targets—mainly concerning forest protection, land under improved practices, forest restoration, and GHG mitigation. While initial progress reflects groundwork in sustainable commodity value chains in some child projects, the scale remains nascent, and most FOLUR projects have not yet reached midterm where global environmental benefits are usually first reported.

Despite this strong overall picture, contributions to environmental outcomes were uneven across child projects, and issues of attribution and data verification limited the credibility of some results claims. While several child projects exceeded environmental outcome targets, others fell short due to overly ambitious or unclear objectives, delays in implementation, or a lack of clarity on how specific activities would lead to measurable environmental outcomes. In RFS, for example, achievements were uneven across countries, with inconsistencies between reported outcomes and funding scope. Issues of data quality and verification methods (e.g.,

[10] Source: GGP Workshop 2024, Indonesia. Due to different tools used to calculate data on carbon dioxide (CO_2) emission reductions for the GGP production and Brazil projects, those projects report significantly higher GHG emission reductions in their own terminal evaluations (129 million tons of CO_2 emissions, or 217 percent of target, with Indonesia alone responsible for 110 million tons, in the production project, and the Brazil project accounting for 39.3 million tons of CO_2 emissions). These figures are included in volume 2.

lack of ground-truthing) also limited the credibility of some results. The GGP transactions project and its demand project—Generating Responsible Demand for Reduced-Deforestation Commodities (GEF ID 9182, WWF)—as well as several CFI projects lacked global environmental benefits reporting[11] (see also discussions later in this chapter on private sector and monitoring and reporting). Only the CFI-Latin America child project has so far reported a global environmental benefits contribution—covering 973,000 ha of marine surface under spatial planning and 119,902 ha of marine and coastal areas under conservation. In contrast, the 2024 midterm review for the Indonesia CFI project flagged weak progress toward global environmental benefits, citing unclear links between policy support and environmental outcomes, and no measurable behavioral change in fisheries.

Global environmental benefits were achieved through a combination of policy reforms and dialogue, land use and marine area planning and management, and local activities promoting sustainable agricultural practices and marketing standards. However, attribution challenges were common, particularly where outcomes relied on indirect or long-term changes, such as policy implementation and enforcement, the adoption of sustainable practices by extension services and farmers, or behavioral shifts at the community level. In the GGP production project, core biodiversity management indicators were supported through policy reforms, regulatory tools, and improved mapping. Nonetheless, concerns remain due to institutional fragility, limited clarity around the link between activities and global environmental benefits outcomes (as in Paraguay), and weak postproject sustainability and uptake of improved agricultural practices.

[11] For example, the GGP transactions terminal evaluation emphasized financial outcomes, noting $488.9 million in additional transactions (versus $400 million planned), but direct environmental targets were not considered relevant for these components.

Food production and value chain results

GEF food systems programs have delivered important food production and value chain results, particularly by enhancing sustainable agricultural and fisheries productivity at the community level and directly supporting farmers' and fishers' access to markets. While the scope and depth of results varied, all three GEF-6 programs contributed to more sustainable agricultural practices, enhanced market access, better land and marine resource management, and stronger engagement of farmers and fishers in governance processes. These local-level achievements, when combined with programs' and projects' policy engagement and upstream work along commodity supply chains, contributed significantly—and in synergy—to the environmental results reported above.

The **RFS** program delivered substantial results through integrated natural resource management, climate-smart agriculture, and enhanced market access. Sustainable land and water management practices—including erosion control, agroforestry, and conservation farming—were tailored to diverse ecosystems and local needs. Infrastructure improvements, notably for irrigation in Burkina Faso, Malawi, and Niger, enhanced climate resilience and food security. Participatory extension models—such as farmer field schools and lead farmer approaches—accelerated knowledge diffusion in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Malawi. The program also effectively supported value chains in Burundi, Eswatini, Nigeria, and Senegal, with attention to women's empowerment, processing, and marketing.

The **GGP** production, transaction, and Brazil child projects achieved important outcomes at the community level, although mostly moderate in scope and geared towards proof of concept. In Liberia, smallholder palm oil producers adopted more sustainable practices, while in Paraguay's Chaco region, ranchers improved grazing and traceability. In Indonesia, nearly 2,700 farmers were trained in sustainable intensification, with 89 percent adoption. The project supported protection of high conservation value/high carbon stock

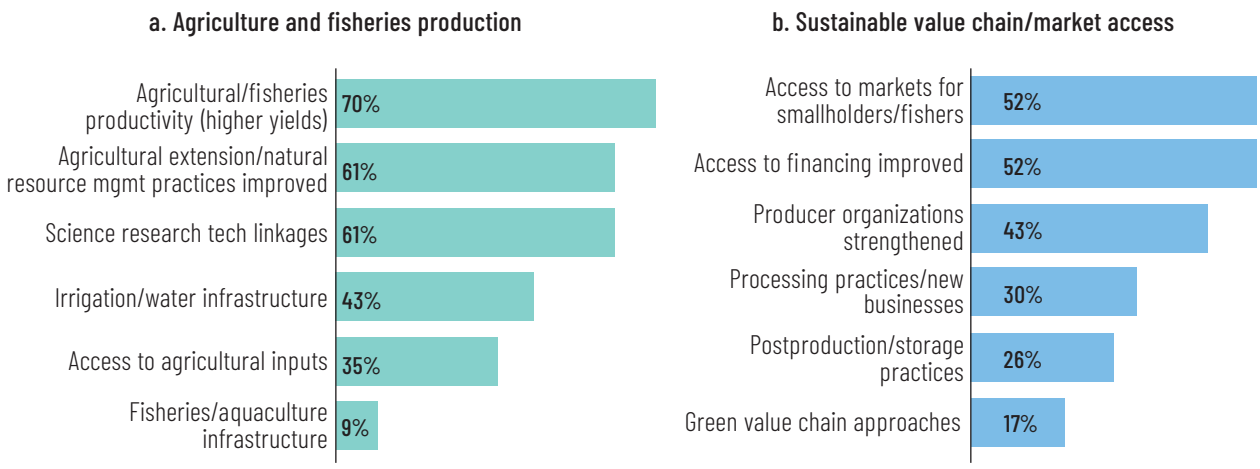
areas, alongside land certification and collective farmer action. In Brazil's Matopiba region, land use planning, tenure regularization, and technical support for soy producers fostered zero-deforestation commitments and multistakeholder dialogue.

CFI presented more varied outcomes. In West Africa, modest progress was made in cold chain and market access improvements in Cabo Verde, while Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal focused on preparatory work with fisheries cooperatives. More tangible results emerged in Indonesia and Peru, reflecting more mature implementation. In Indonesia, traditional *sasi* marine governance was revitalized, empowering local fishers and women entrepreneurs. In Peru, support to fisher organizations helped strengthen co-management of marine protected areas and expand livelihood opportunities through processing and savings initiatives.

These qualitative patterns are mirrored in programwide project data. Across all food systems programs and child projects, increased agricultural productivity was the most frequently reported outcome, cited by 70 percent of projects (figure 3.11; see volume 2 for program-level detail). RFS stood out, with 92 percent of its child projects reporting productivity gains, supported by significant cofinancing from IFAD, UNDP, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). GGP reported field-level productivity increases in half of its child projects. CFI showed fishery productivity improvements in only one child project (CFI-Latin America), though infrastructure upgrades were noted in another (The Coastal Fisheries Initiative Challenge Fund: Enabling Sustainable Private Sector Investment in Fisheries, GEF ID 9125, World Bank). Improved extension and natural resource management practices—especially sustainable land and water management—were reported in 61 percent of child projects, again led by RFS (92 percent), followed by GGP. Science and technology linkages were strengthened in 61 percent of child projects across all three programs. Irrigation and input access improvements were exclusive to RFS child projects.

Around half of child projects (52 percent) across the three GEF-6 programs reported improvements in farmers' and fishers' market access as a key value chain outcome, particularly in RFS and CFI. RFS led due to its dedicated value chain component, though the RFS terminal evaluation noted uneven performance across child projects on this indicator. In CFI, three of five child projects (Challenge Fund, Latin America, and Delivering

Figure 3.11 Food production and value chain outcomes and outputs of child projects across GEF-6 programs



Source: Project documents.

Sustainable Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits in West Africa through Good Governance, Correct Incentives and Innovation [GEF ID 9126, FAO]) reported improved market access, with notable efforts in processing and small enterprise development in Latin America and West Africa. For GGP, only the production project worked directly with farmers at this level but did so in several countries. Results on access to finance emerged in about half of child projects across all programs, with particular emphasis in GGP through its transactions project. Forty-three percent of projects included outcomes on farmer producer organizations and were most common in RFS (62 percent), while postproduction and processing results appeared in 30 percent and 26 percent of all child projects, respectively. Green value chains received some niche attention (17 percent), mainly present in RFS and GGP.

Although this subsection highlights several outcomes related to nonproduction value chain elements, most programs have devoted limited attention to these activities and outcomes, such as improving farmers' market access, storage facilities, price formation mechanisms, and rural roads (also see discussion under subsection 3.1). Approaches to meso-level outcomes have also varied widely, addressing different aspects and segments of vertical value chains (see private sector discussion later in this subsection). Several programs placed greater emphasis on macro- and meso-level governance and policy issues, for instance by convening commodity stakeholders through multistakeholder platforms, supporting regulatory reforms (e.g., commodity traceability), promoting coherence across governance levels, and expanding private sector participation and integration in areas such as product aggregation and rural finance. The corresponding findings are discussed in more detail in other sections of this chapter addressing policy and governance, private sector engagement, and innovation. There are also notable limitations in both the quantity and quality of outputs and outcomes concerning nonproduction value chain elements, as neither the GEF nor most Agencies systematically monitor these aspects—particularly through qualitative indicators. Such indicators are often treated primarily as output or process measures (see discussion on monitoring and reporting).

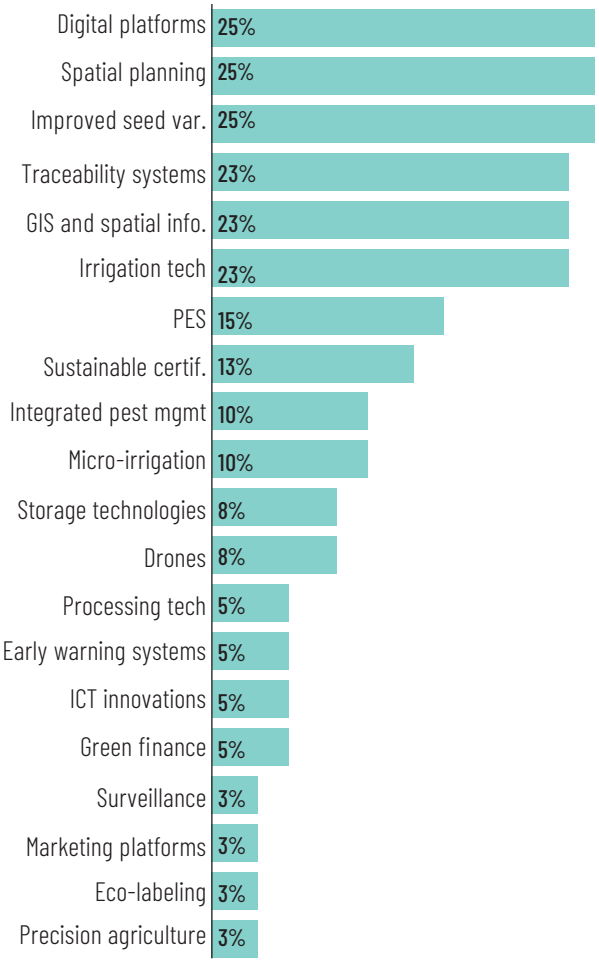
Innovation

Innovation was a defining feature across GEF-6 and GEF-7 food systems programs, with nearly all projects adopting new technologies, practices, or governance models tailored to diverse landscapes, programs, and contexts. Diverse innovation approaches are essential for food systems transformation, requiring not only technological advances but also supportive governance models and systemic changes to achieve sustainability at scale (Herrero et al. 2020). Innovation took on distinct forms across GEF programs (see volume 2). RFS was strongest on improved seeds, irrigation and micro-irrigation, geographic information system (GIS) applications, and digital platforms. GGP stood out for its inclusion of digital platforms, GIS for spatial planning, sustainability certification, and traceability. CFI also introduced meaningful spatial planning and sustainable certification in marine contexts. FOLUR, still in early stages, prioritized jurisdictional planning, traceability, payments for ecosystem services, and digital platforms.

The most frequently adopted innovations across programs included digital platforms, spatial planning, improved seed varieties, GIS applications, and traceability systems—each captured through the results indicators of approximately a quarter of all projects (figure 3.12). Digital innovations ranged from the RFS knowledge portal and Caribbean soil maps shared via the Caribbean Soil Information System (CARSIS), to GGP support for Trase's global supply chain transparency platform[12] and FOLUR Indonesia's national

[12] Trase is a not-for-profit initiative founded in 2015 by the Stockholm Environment Institute and Global Canopy to bring transparency to deforestation and agricultural commodity trade.

Figure 3.12 Frequency of innovations in child project results indicators across all programs



Source: Project documents.

Note: GIS = geographic information system; ICT = information and communication technology; PES = payment for ecosystem services. Surveillance covers pest and disease tracking.

traceability dashboard and farmer land registration linked to sustainable oil palm cultivation. Spatial planning innovations were particularly prominent in FOLUR (e.g., integrated landscape management incorporated into Indonesia's district plans) and GGP (e.g., landscape planning and tenure mapping in Brazil's Matopiba region). GIS tools supported integrated landscape management and M&E across programs, such as in Ghana, Indonesia, and Paraguay. Agricultural technology innovation was strong in RFS. In Uganda's Karamoja region, high-yield, drought-resistant crops were piloted alongside demonstration gardens with drip irrigation. Burundi distributed improved seed varieties and established community seed banks. Burkina Faso integrated agroforestry seedlings with nursery training. Irrigation technologies (e.g., treadle pumps in Nigeria) and payment for ecosystem services (Ghana) also featured in some countries.

The country case studies further highlighted context-specific innovations. In Indonesia, CFI reactivated traditional *sasi* marine conservation systems, linking them with digital planning tools and women-led branding. Tanzania's village land use planning work helped formalize land tenure and introduced village-level governance structures for shared natural resources. Ghana advanced farmer-led ecological innovations and community finance (village savings and loan associations). In Peru, innovations included community-based mussel repopulation, women's cooperatives for crab processing, and village-based microfinance systems, which helped buffer households against COVID-era shocks.

Private sector involvement (see discussion later in this chapter) also played a role in some innovation efforts, such as when the GGP's demand project engaged over 130 firms through tools including the Palm Oil Buyers Scorecard and RESPOND environmental, social, and governance (ESG) benchmarking system, which promoted sustainable sourcing. Unilever's engagement in supply and demand sides as a global buyer and field collaborator was also cited as a good way to build up innovative models, such as the West Kalimantan oil palm platform in Indonesia's Sintang District.

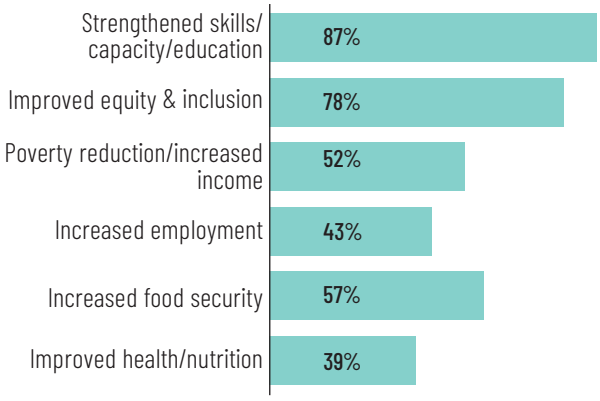
Socioeconomic, gender equity, and inclusion results

Six main socioeconomic outcomes are reflected across GEF-6 food systems project reports. The most common achievements were strengthened skills and capacities

and gender equity and inclusion (figure 3.13). All food systems programs performed strongly on these outcomes, especially GGP on skills and capacity and RFS and CFI on inclusion (see also performance by program in volume 2). About half of child projects reported increased income/reduced poverty and/or increased employment, with variation by program. Notably, 80 percent of CFI projects reported both outcomes, while no GGP projects reported these outcomes since the program focused more on policy and governance. Among projects with terminal evaluations, the share was even higher, with 71 percent reporting increased income from agricultural productivity. A higher proportion of closed projects also reported increased food security results (65 percent). Food security and nutrition results were most evident in RFS, given its focus on reducing food insecurity as a major driver of environmental degradation. Research has demonstrated that nutritional outcomes are closely intertwined with ecological, socioeconomic, and food system dynamics, underlining the importance of integrated interventions (Winkler et al. 2025).

The number of people benefiting—and the proportion of those beneficiaries that are women—varies significantly across food systems programs. With 4.7 million beneficiaries (111 percent of target), RFS far outpaced the other GEF-6 food systems programs. Importantly, 47 percent of beneficiaries were women, exceeding gender targets by 10 percentage points partly due to more inclusive outreach. In contrast, GGP reached a smaller number of beneficiaries, though the exact count is unclear due to inconsistencies in program- and project-level reporting. Program-level reporting indicates that more than 10,000 farmers, producers, and community members directly benefited from agricultural training and community conservation agreements.[13] The GGP production project far exceeded its beneficiary target but was 5 percentage points below its gender target (achieving 37 percent female beneficiaries); the GGP Brazil project achieved only 18 percent female beneficiaries, well below the 50 percent planned. As of this writing, no consolidated results on beneficiaries were available for FOLUR. The program aims to reach 7.3 million people, with an intended female share of 49.6 percent. Beneficiary data for CFI remain vague and inconsistent across countries. While the CFI-Latin America project has shown tangible marine area impacts, gender-disaggregated and total beneficiary figures have not yet been systematically reported across the child projects, as most terminal evaluations have not yet been submitted (see volume 2 for details).

Figure 3.13 Percentage of child projects reporting socioeconomic outcomes across GEF-6 programs

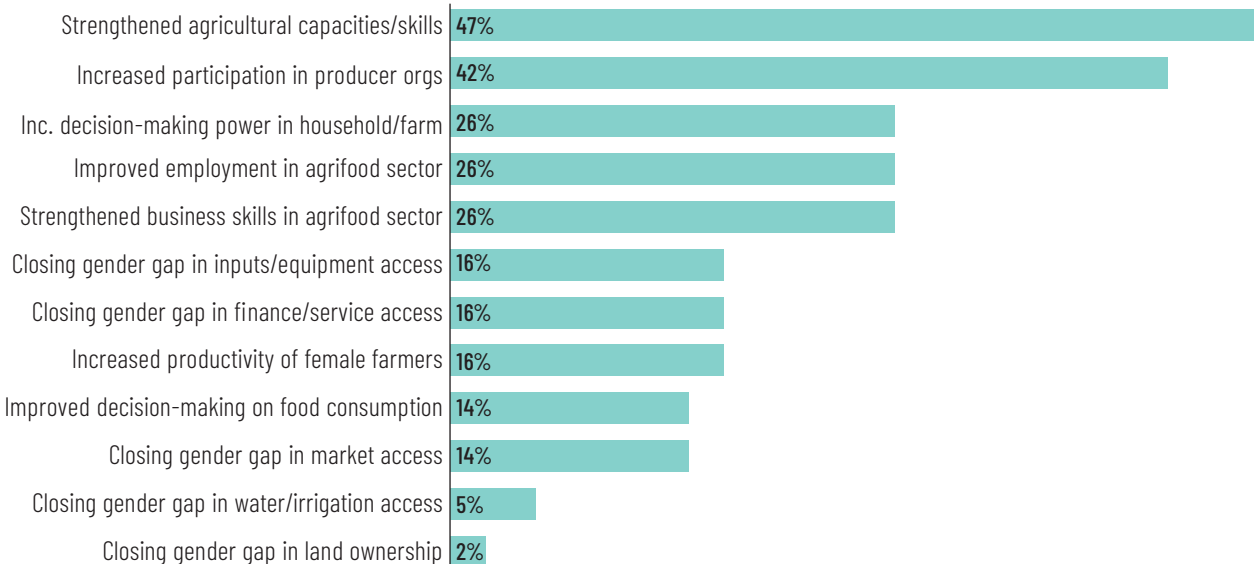


Source: Project documents.

About half of GEF food systems projects report at least one gender-related outcome, with a focus on women's skills development and increased participation. Overall, about half of projects (53 percent) reported at least one gender-related outcome (figure 3.14). The highest rates of reporting (13 out of 13 child projects) were observed in RFS, reflecting the program's emphasis on gender mainstreaming since early in program design. Variable performance was found among GGP and CFI child projects, each with 60 percent of projects reporting gender

[13] In individual child project terminal evaluations, the GGP production project reported reaching 10,496 beneficiaries (175 percent of its target), and the GGP Brazil project reported reaching 22,526 beneficiaries (66 percent of target).

Figure 3.14 Percentage of child projects reporting gender-related outcomes across GEF-6 programs



Source: Project documents.

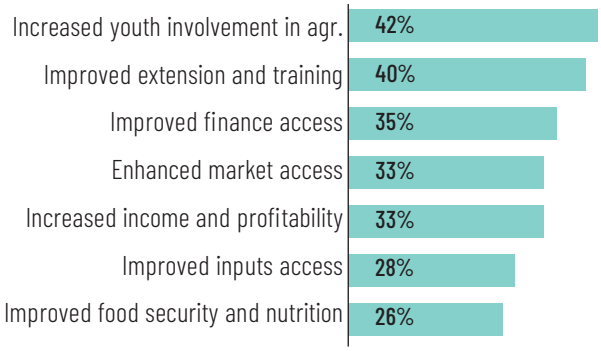
results.[14] The most reported gender outcomes highlight a focus on women's skills development and increased participation. Nearly half of the projects (47 percent) reported strengthened capacities and technical skills among women in agriculture, while 42 percent documented women's increased participation in producer organizations.

Additional results included enhanced intrahousehold and on-farm decision-making roles, improved employment opportunities in the agrifood sector, and strengthened business acumen in value chains—each mentioned in roughly a quarter of the projects. In RFS, for example, most child projects supported women through value chains and alternative income-earning activities that were mostly dominated by women, such as nontimber forest products and beekeeping. Seasonal cereal banks and participatory village savings and loan associations were an additional basis for women's empowerment, improved food security, and nutrition. Few food systems projects, however, have reported results related to closing the gender gap in women's access to agricultural inputs, finance, markets, and land—which represent many of the structural barriers to transformative gender action.

More than half of projects report inclusion outcomes, with a focus on youth involvement in agriculture and vulnerable smallholders (figure 3.15). RFS and GGP projects performed well, with inclusion outcome reporting across all child projects. However, inclusion outcomes have been less explicitly reported in CFI (40 percent of projects), pointing to a broader challenge of capturing outcomes for socially or economically marginalized groups. The most frequently reported inclusion-related outcomes include increased youth involvement in agriculture (42 percent) and improved access to training and extension services for vulnerable smallholders (40 percent). Other outcomes—such as enhanced access to finance (35 percent), better market linkages (33 percent), and increased incomes and profitability (33 percent)—signal

[14] Gender outcome reporting among FOLUR child projects was markedly lower, with only 12 percent of projects providing such data; this is likely explained by the early stage of implementation of many of the FOLUR projects.

Figure 3.15 Inclusion outcomes reported by child projects across GEF-6 programs



Source: Project documents.

Note: First bar represents an outcome for youth; all others are outcomes for vulnerable smallholders/households.

growing attention to socioeconomic equity within food systems interventions.

Findings from field work show a mix of promising practices and ongoing challenges in achieving meaningful gender and inclusion outcomes, with project design and early integration of gender considerations playing a key role in shaping results. Collectively, these examples reveal that while isolated successes are present, especially in projects with robust gender design and early integration, deeper structural changes and comprehensive equity outcomes remain inconsistent.

- In **Tanzania**, gender was actively mainstreamed across interventions, with women comprising roughly 40 percent of beneficiaries and engaging in training related to agriculture, goat rearing, business, and leadership in the RFS child project. These activities created tangible income opportunities for women and strengthened their role in production sectors. However, while participation and skill-building outcomes were well documented, there is limited evidence so far on deeper empowerment outcomes—such as shifts in decision-making authority or control over assets.
- **Indonesia** presents contrasting examples. In the GGP production project, where gender was embedded from the design stage, outcomes were notably stronger. Approximately 39 percent of trained farmers were women, and the training scope included both agricultural and household financial management. Conversely, the GGP demand project, which incorporated gender only during implementation, achieved limited results due to its reactive and fragmented approach.
- In **Ghana**, interventions under the RFS Sustainable Land and Water Management Project, Second Additional Financing (GEF ID 9340, World Bank), facilitated some economic gains for women, who began to earn income from project-supported activities. However, the project did not address preexisting gender norms or intrahousehold power dynamics, resulting in reported tensions around income management. This highlights how economic empowerment alone, when not paired with social norm transformation or gender-sensitive design, may trigger unintended consequences.
- **Peru**'s CFI project similarly illustrates both limitations and achievements. Women's participation was largely concentrated in the village-based microfinance systems' savings and credit initiatives, with minimal engagement in fisheries or regional capacity-building efforts. Nonetheless, the project significantly exceeded its target for economic autonomy outcomes among women, with 393 women improving their conditions compared to a target of 129. This suggests that while broader gender inclusion objectives were not met, focused livelihood interventions—when well implemented—can still yield meaningful results for economic empowerment.

Policy implementation, coherence, and governance results

GEF programs advanced policy and governance through commodity-focused platforms (GGP), integrated natural resource management and food systems planning (RFS), and ecosystem-based fisheries management (CFI), with FOLUR

frequently building on these foundations in countries with program overlap. Programwide, GGP helped establish, strengthen, and/or support 22 commodity platforms and forums for targeted commodities in countries including Brazil, Indonesia, Liberia, and Paraguay. GGP also supported 38 policies or action plans to enable reduced deforestation supply chains, 35 of which have been adopted or proposed for adoption (UNDP 2022b). RFS made strong contributions to integrated natural resource management, food security, and food systems policy in Africa's semiarid and mountainous regions in general, rather than for specific commodities. RFS supported national and district-level planning frameworks in countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Niger, often linked to national food security strategies (e.g., Niger's 3N Initiative).

Multistakeholder platforms were used to foster integrated planning in RFS, such as the Nairobi Water Fund (Kenya) and district integrated natural resource management committees in Ethiopia. CFI mainly focused on aligning fisheries governance, policies, and regulations with ecosystem-based management, with notable policy advances in Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal. Indonesia developed and partially implemented fisheries management plans, though local enforcement and fisher adoption were limited. In Peru, marine resource management plans and new protected areas were established, although lack of funding and regional coordination (e.g., with Ecuador) constrained broader outcomes. FOLUR is still in early stages but builds on these previous efforts, particularly in promoting jurisdictional planning, national and subnational policy coherence, and private sector integration.

Despite being a frequent goal across GEF food systems programs, policy coherence was realized unevenly, with stronger results in RFS and GGP. Policy coherence, or the alignment of goals, incentives, and actions across sectors and levels, was a recurring goal in policy and governance support interventions but was more often aspirational than fully realized. Across programs, coherence was supported through interministerial committees, cross-sectoral platforms, and vertically aligned planning processes. None of the reviewed projects explicitly identified policy misalignment as having influenced the achievement of environmental or co-benefit outcomes, suggesting that such constraints are likely underreported or unrecognized in reporting.

RFS showed the strongest policy coherence results: 10 of 13 child projects reported horizontal and vertical coherence, supported by national coordination committees and decentralized structures (see volume 2). RFS also performed strongly on governance results, with 8 of 13 child projects achieving expected results, particularly through local resource management committees and planning bodies. Three of the five child projects each in GGP and CFI showed some coherence results. FOLUR projects have not yet reported policy coherence outcomes, largely due to their early implementation stage.

Horizontal coherence—working toward aligned policy actions across government agencies and sectors—was often pursued through interministerial committees and shared policy frameworks. While commonly referenced in project reports, few projects described national-level interministerial engagement as having yielded concrete positive outcomes. Exceptions included significant results that were achieved in Indonesia, where the GGP production project supported the Indonesia Sustainable Palm Oil Platform (FoKSBI) and the development of national and provincial palm oil action plans, with involvement from the agriculture, environment, and planning ministries. In Liberia, GGP support for the National Oil Palm Platform aligned partners around sustainability guidelines that followed the global Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. Paraguay's Platform for Sustainable Beef strengthened regulatory coherence and multistakeholder dialogue. CFI's Challenge Fund in Ecuador's Galápagos aligned fisheries and environmental institutions under a unified ocean governance approach. However, in several Latin American and West African

countries, competing mandates and weak linkages across ministries hindered progress.

Several instances of vertical coherence, marked by alignment between national policies and subnational implementation, were observed, particularly in RFS and GGP. Projects in Burundi, Ethiopia, and Kenya decentralized planning and agreed on memorandums of understanding with local authorities that aligned national frameworks with district action.[15] In Ghana, the Ministry of Environment led the RFS steering committee, fostering effective cross-agency coordination from the national down to the field level. GGP Indonesia's national palm oil policies were initially poorly implemented at the district level until the GGP production project supported the rollout of subnational action plans. Implementation of these plans reached 60 percent in the targeted provinces by 2023. Brazil's GGP project also achieved some success in institutionalizing the Produce, Conserve, and Include strategy at the state level and supporting land tenure regularization and local compacts in line with national policies.

The strength and sustainability of policy coherence and governance outcomes across GEF programs were shaped by deeper enabling conditions, such as national alignment, institutional embedding, and scientific partnerships. Programs that built on existing policy agendas—such as Ethiopia's decentralized integrated natural resource management planning (RFS) or Liberia's national palm oil development strategy (GGP)—were better able to integrate new platforms and strategies. This alignment enhanced legitimacy and increased the likelihood of government participation. Similarly, multistakeholder platforms were more effective when they were embedded in existing institutions or supported by broader policy initiatives. For example, Indonesia's FoKSBI and related subnational planning mechanisms contributed to enhanced coherence by coordinating across ministries and provincial authorities. In Burundi and Kenya, RFS-supported planning bodies benefited from strong ties to government decentralization frameworks. GGP and FOLUR also promoted spatially explicit (jurisdictional), multilevel planning approaches—such as the Matopiba compact in Brazil or subnational palm oil plans in Indonesia—that created clearer entry points for coordination and coherence. Lastly, collaborations with research institutions and technical networks helped ground policy processes in evidence. In RFS, partnerships with national and regional research bodies and universities informed land and resource planning; in Brazil's GGP project, coordination with the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) lent credibility to land use mapping and monitoring efforts.

Despite these positive examples, persistent political and institutional constraints consistently hindered policy effectiveness and coherence. These constraints included the following.

- **Weak or ambiguous policy mandates and institutional fragility.** In several cases, governance platforms lacked formal legal status or institutional embedding, which weakened their ability to influence decision-making. For example, Paraguay's Platform for Sustainable Beef—while inclusive and widely recognized—lacked a clear legal identity and formal policy mandate, making it vulnerable to dissolution after the production project's closure. Similarly, in Liberia, although the National Oil Palm Platform facilitated alignment during the production project, weak ministerial coordination and limited institutional support meant that policy gains were difficult to sustain or enforce. Lessons for successful policy implementation learned in Indonesia are summarized in box 3.4.
- **Absence of political economy and risk analysis.** A critical weakness across programs was the insufficient attention to political economy dynamics, as noted

[15] These projects were, respectively, Support for Sustainable Food Production and Enhancement of Food Security and Climate Resilience in Burundi's Highlands (GEF ID 9178, FAO), Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience (GEF ID 9135, UNDP), and Establishment of the Upper Tana Nairobi Water Fund (GEF ID 9139, IFAD).

Box 3.4 Blueprint for successful policy implementation in Indonesia

Based on the Good Growth Partnership Indonesia experience, a blueprint for effective policy design and implementation emerged.

- A win-win policy proposal, developed through a participatory process that responds to genuine demand
- Strategic communication to build and sustain momentum
- Targeted advocacy and stakeholder engagement at all levels
- Timely communication to support policy passage through political and bureaucratic systems
- Clear action plans linked to policies to guide implementation
- A visible and trusted policy champion to foster credibility and facilitate decision-making
- Tailored capacity-building and planning support to prepare stakeholders for implementation and enable structured dialogue
- Adequate technical assistance for policy formulation and multistakeholder engagement at all stages.

Source: Terminal evaluation of GGP production project.

in subsection 3.1. Many interventions assumed that coordination would lead to alignment, without adequately assessing the power asymmetries, institutional resistance, or economic interests that shape real-world policy outcomes. For example, in Latin America, agricultural and environmental mandates often reside in separate ministries with conflicting priorities, yet projects rarely engaged these dynamics systematically. In FOLUR, staff interviews noted that in some countries, project positioning within the government was determined more by political expediency than strategic alignment, resulting in coordination gaps and bureaucratic competition.

Across all programs, the lack of early risk analysis led to overly optimistic assumptions about stakeholder cooperation, underestimating the resistance of entrenched interests or the capacity shortfalls in target institutions. Research confirms that "food systems transformation requires strategic attention to political economy" and that technical interventions, regardless of their quality, cannot achieve transformation without explicit attention to power structures, competing interests, and institutional dynamics (Resnick and Swinnen 2023).

- **Fragmentation across ministries and turf conflicts.** Interministerial competition slowed progress in many countries, particularly in Brazil, Paraguay, and parts of West Africa. Turf wars emerged when multiple ministries claimed overlapping mandates for land use, agriculture, or environmental planning. These conflicts often surfaced during project inception—suggesting insufficient participatory engagement during project design—and were not always resolved during implementation, particularly when no senior coordination body existed.
- **Disconnection across the policy cycle.** Many projects lacked mechanisms to link implementation feedback to policy adaptation. Even where multistakeholder platforms or technical committees were active, their role in monitoring, learning, and revising strategies was limited. In RFS, for example, local planning bodies sometimes operated in isolation from national ministries, creating a disconnect between grassroots priorities and formal policy processes.
- **Institutional turnover and political transitions.** The sustainability of policy coherence was often undermined by changes in political leadership. In Brazil, shifts in federal and state administrations disrupted continuity in GGP-supported platforms, while in Indonesia, staff turnover weakened institutional memory around the National Action Plan for Sustainable Palm Oil. In the absence of durable institutional frameworks, policy commitments often stalled or reversed with leadership changes.

Private sector engagement and contributions

Across GEF food systems programs, the role of the private sector has varied significantly in ambition, form, and scale—from globally connected commodity supply chain strategies to localized market engagement. GGP had a strong private sector focus from the outset, most visibly through its transactions and demand projects. The program also intended to build connections between local, national, and, to some extent, global public-private actors through its production and Brazil projects. In comparison, FOLUR has a broad mandate with explicit objectives for private sector engagement—particularly through its global value chain and sustainable finance work. Building on GGP experience, FOLUR retained IFC, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), and the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI) as program partners at the global and national levels, with emphasis on sustainable finance and systems alignment. In CFI, private sector engagement was supported mainly through the World Bank–led Challenge Fund project, which offered technical assistance to mobilize private sector investments.[16] Meanwhile, RFS targeted the private sector primarily through improved farmer and other beneficiary access to value chains, often focused on nontimber forest products, horticulture, and women's entrepreneurship, and mobilizing private finance for environmental goals. While RFS introduced green value chain concepts, implementation remained limited beyond initial trainings. In summary, GGP and FOLUR have emphasized private sector engagement across commodity value chains—including market systems and finance—while CFI and RFS focused more on early stage value chain development, local investment opportunities, and connecting producer or community organizations, especially women-led, to domestic markets.

Building on earlier food systems programs, FSIP aims to catalyze private sector co-investment through de-risking tools like blended finance, with a focus on strengthening small and medium enterprises and farmer organizations by improving access to sustainable finance and markets. The program plans to support policy reforms that promote green investments and encourage private sector engagement in multistakeholder platforms. FSIP also aims to engage private firms in developing innovations such as digital tools, climate-smart technologies, and sustainable inputs. Detailed mechanisms and partners are yet to be finalized but build to some extent on GGP and FOLUR experience, such as through engaging the WBCSD.

A diverse array of private sector actors spanning different levels and sizes has contributed to GEF food systems interventions and results through varied forms of participation. Private sector engagement ranges from global corporations to community-based microenterprises. GGP and FOLUR focused on engaging large-scale firms, given their potential to shift commodity procurement, demand, and financing practices across global supply chains. Multinationals such as China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO), Unilever, McDonald's, Nestlé, and Louis Dreyfus participated in supply chain reform, traceability pilots, and sustainability platforms like the Consumer Goods Forum. In Indonesia, for example, national-level companies—including Wilmar, Musim Mas, and PT ANJ—have supported production and certification efforts through platforms such as FoKSBI. At subnational levels, platforms such as district forums in Indonesia and the Matopiba Coalition in Brazil enabled regional coordination. RFS and CFI, by contrast, often worked with local-level actors, such as micro, small, and medium enterprises (e.g., small processors), and women-led enterprises and producer cooperatives, such as those involved in community fisheries in Indonesia and Peru or beef production in Paraguay. These

[16] Child projects in Latin America, West Africa, and Indonesia also contributed, including through a $2 million grant to Conservation International's Blue Abadi Fund and through aiming to generate market partnerships.

actors are essential for inclusive development and often face investment barriers and weak market linkages.

Private actors have played diverse roles and been engaged through diverse strategies. For example, value chain operators (e.g., Wilmar, COFCO, Neuland) participated in production, sourcing, and certification efforts across palm oil, soy, beef, cocoa, and fisheries. Retailers like Super Indo and IKEA/Hero Group were targeted on the demand side, resulting in the launch of a sustainable cooking oil line by Super Indo and encouragement to use sustainable cooking oil in IKEA/Hero Group restaurants, according to WWF's 2021 terminal evaluation of the GGP demand project. Blended finance models—especially under the GGP transactions project and FOLUR—helped leverage private co-investment (e.g., for soy in Brazil). IFC's dual advisory-investment role, notably in beef and soy, enabled it to mobilize significant private finance.

Private sector actors were also engaged in national or regional coordination platforms or forums, often to co-develop sustainability visions and standards. Platforms like FoKSBI (Indonesia), Matopiba Coalition (Brazil), and beef roundtables in Paraguay enabled joint planning, policy alignment, and sector dialogue. Projects also supported jurisdictional planning (e.g., Sintang, Indonesia) and national dialogues to embed sustainability goals, although enforcement and institutional follow-through varied.

Financial institutions such as Cooperative and Rural Development Bank Tanzania and Bank Negara Indonesia supported or piloted ESG-linked lending and investment models, often with technical assistance from GEF projects. Under GGP, UNEP-FI strengthened awareness of deforestation risks, internal guidelines and policies, capacity to use risk management tools, and financial product offerings for zero-deforestation commodity production among around 200 financial institutions. Training materials were deeply adapted to national needs and, through intensive support, significant outcomes were achieved in countries like Paraguay. This work has continued under FOLUR, although in a more limited way (box 3.5). Also under GGP, WWF-Singapore led efforts to build the capacity of financial institutions to influence palm oil buyer companies toward deforestation-free portfolios. This included workshops and bilateral training sessions that showcased how leading asset managers are integrating deforestation considerations into their investment strategies.

Strategic partners—including Proforest, Agrosatélite, Smithsonian, and Incabiotec—helped develop traceability tools, mapping systems, and investment cases to guide private decisions and public policy alignment. For example, the GGP demand project developed widely used tools—such as the Soy Toolkit, the Palm Oil Buyers Scorecard, and RESPOND ESG benchmarking—that helped companies and investors shift internal policies. Trase further advanced soy supply chain transparency.

GEF programs have employed a range of strategies to engage the private sector, with capacity building, knowledge sharing, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) among the most used. Overall, 63 percent of projects reported some form of private sector engagement—primarily through capacity development, knowledge sharing, and PPPs (figure 3.16). Incentives for sustainable practices and market-based solutions were planned in 30 percent of projects, typically involving input subsidies and improved market access for farmers. However, actual implementation has thus far fallen short of expectations, reflecting in part FOLUR's early implementation stage.

Private sector engagement strategies varied by program: GGP consistently employed sustainable supply chain models (100 percent), CFI prioritized PPPs (80 percent), RFS focused on capacity building (46 percent), and FOLUR relied most on incentives (64 percent). Examples include FOLUR Papua New Guinea's collaboration with the Cocoa Board and milling firms to train smallholders; and market-oriented partnerships in RFS countries such as Eswatini and Niger that involved input suppliers, processors, and financial institutions.

Box 3.5 Notable private sector results

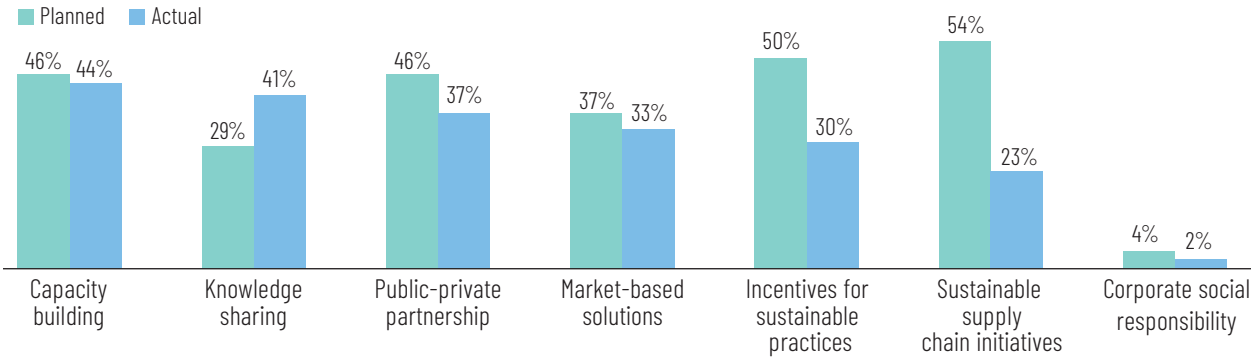
- In Latin America, the Good Growth Partnership (GGP) transactions project—Enabling Transactions: Market Shift to Deforestation Free Beef, Palm Oil and Soy (GEF ID 9696, International Finance Corporation [IFC]) showed strong firm-level results.
- In Brazil, collaboration with the China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation and Louis Dreyfus helped mobilize close to $0.5 billion for sustainable soy finance, backed by traceability systems, degraded land suitability maps, and trade finance pilots.
- In Paraguay, partnerships with Minerva Foods and local producer organizations led to the development of a national sustainability seal and the rollout of monitoring tools like SAGAS and Assist-Chaco, aimed at deforestation-free beef intensification.
- In Indonesia, the GGP production project—Reducing Deforestation from Commodity Production (GEF ID 9180, United Nations Development Programme)—enabled national and district-level platforms engaging companies such as Unilever, Wilmar, and Musim Mas to support sustainable palm oil practices and land use planning, while the GGP demand project—Generating Responsible Demand for Reduced-Deforestation Commodities (GEF ID 9182, World Wildlife Fund)—supported the launch of sustainable palm oil sourcing guidelines for downstream companies like retailers, hotels, and restaurants. The Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program project builds on this foundation through co-investment mechanisms and sustainability strategies in the palm oil, cocoa, and coffee sectors.
- Through the GGP transactions project, IFC adapted its Global Trade Supplier Finance tool for the soy sector, linking financing to sustainability standards like the Round Table on Responsible Soy and Proterra in Brazil. It secured interest from six companies, including a $30 million investment in Barry Callebaut to support compliant sourcing of soy, sugar, and dairy. IFC developed customized models of the tool for the remaining five companies, which focus on animal nutrition, aquafeed, food production, food processing, and coffee.
- The Coastal Fisheries Initiative Challenge Fund, while not mobilizing significant investment during its lifetime, succeeded in preparing 26 investment-ready cases across six countries. This work laid an early foundation for sustainable fisheries finance in Ecuador, Indonesia, and Peru.

See volume 2 for more details on private sector results by program.

In Uganda and Nigeria, RFS child projects—respectively, Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Karamoja Sub Region (GEF ID 9137, UNDP) and Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in Nigeria (GEF ID 9143, UNDP)—brokered value chain agreements and contract farming models. FOLUR's Inclusive Sustainable Rice Landscapes in Thailand project (GEF ID 10268, UNEP) attracted private actors through blended green loans and incentive funds. In China, FOLUR's Innovative Transformation of China's Food Production Systems and Agroecological Landscapes project (GEF ID 10246, FAO) secured private partners to contribute to on-farm demonstrations promoting sustainable practices. These experiences illustrate that, when backed by credible tools, strong platforms, and financial innovation, private sector engagement can deliver meaningful environmental outcomes (see box 3.5).

Despite these advances, scaling and transformation have been hindered by insufficient enabling conditions, a lack of long-term commitments, and an unclear business case for sustainability—especially for global buyers and investors whose decisions shape entire supply chains. Projects faced significant barriers in the enabling environment that were beyond their direct influence, such as regulatory uncertainty, limited readiness among financial institutions, and fragmented value chains. For example, while GGP demand project tools were widely adopted, they rarely translated into shifts in sourcing and procurement.

Figure 3.16 Strategies for GEF programs to engage the private sector, planned and actual



Source: Project documents.

Note: Planned engagement strategies are drawn from the quality-at-entry assessment; actual engagement strategies are from the implementation document review.

In Brazil and Paraguay, traceability and sustainability uptake in the GGP production and transactions projects lagged due to weak producer incentives and limited regulatory pressure. In Paraguay, for instance, scaling the project outcomes is constrained by the lack of strong market demand for sustainable Paraguayan beef, combined with continued, legally allowed land clearing in the Chaco and lack of legislative enforcement. In Brazil, land clearing remained more profitable than restoration, despite sustainability pilots. Engagement with major buyers in Europe, the United States, and China yielded few fundamental sourcing reforms.[17] Strengthening private sector engagement in equitable and sustainable food systems requires effectively aligning political economy factors—such as investor influence, transparency, and supply chain accountability—with regulatory, governance, and market reforms at both national and global levels (Clapp 2023).

Market and finance dynamics also limited private sector successes. For example, in Paraguay and Brazil, private sector actors in soy and beef continue to have access to commercial finance that does not have strong ESG requirements, which makes using finance as a lever for systemic change challenging. Even with incentives, ESG finance is struggling to compete with conventional lending terms.[18] In other countries, strong private sector engagement was limited by a fragile financial sector (Liberia) or concerns about differences in public and private sector priorities and a lack of established institutional relationships to facilitate collaboration and trust building (Peru).

GEF programs have mobilized notable levels of cofinancing and parallel finance from the private sector, particularly through IFC. GGP demonstrated strong results in mobilizing private sector financing, particularly through IFC and the

[17] These findings are supported by a growing body of evidence showing that short-term, market-driven food systems and corporate dominance are shaping incentives, practices, and outcomes across supply chains—further reinforcing unsustainable practices and pollution externalities in the absence of adequate governance (Winkler et al. 2025).

[18] According to the literature, systemic innovations in financial instruments and disclosure requirements are needed to better align private sector contributions to global environmental benefits with stronger regulation, transparency, and accountability—helping to shift current market incentives away from short-term profits toward the sustainable transformation of food systems that promotes sustainability, equity, and health (Winkler et al. 2025).

transactions project. IFC facilitated nearly $489 million in deforestation-free finance in Brazil's soy sector, including a $288 million COFCO prefinancing facility and a $200 million green loan to Louis Dreyfus. These achievements were grounded in direct client transactions, technical assistance, and targeted risk mitigation. FOLUR initially committed to leverage a total of $2.7 billion, including $405 million from the private sector. Achievements so far include $507 million mobilized by IFC through the FOLUR global coordination project[19] for 11 livestock-related investments that were facilitated by the FOLUR-funded Practices for Sustainable Investment in Livestock Operations in 2022, much of it in Latin America. IFC (with FOLUR funds) has also supported the government of Brazil's new sustainable land project, which is expected to mobilize another $50 million, and IFC's FOLUR-funded Nespresso advisory services in Uganda generated another $4.5 million private loan. The WBCSD has also mobilized $7.2 million from agro-traders in Brazil.

RFS fell short of expectations in private sector mobilization. While there were some contributions—such as $1.21 million from Coca-Cola Foundation, Frigoken, and a US donor to the Kenya Water Fund under the RFS Kenya project—this was well below the $7.5 million target. Much of the private sector contribution was earmarked or in kind and directly disbursed to project activities. Additional attempts under RFS child projects led by the Alliance for a Green Revolution (e.g., in Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Malawi) involved small grants to stimulate private sector engagement, but outcomes remain unclear. CFI presents the least available data. While there was potential for mobilizing finance through the Challenge Fund and a $2 million GEF contribution to Conservation International's Blue Abadi Fund in Indonesia, no concrete investment outcomes have been documented to date. Key informant interviews highlighted that there was little information on the profitability of investments identified in the prospectuses prepared under CFI, and that limited attention was given to whether there would be sufficient demand for the products and services being developed.

[19] FOLUR Global Knowledge to Action Platform to Support Transformational Shifts in Food and Land Use Systems (GEF ID 10306, World Bank).

Synergies between food systems dimensions

Across the GEF food systems programs, synergies between food production—particularly agricultural and fisheries productivity—and environmental sustainability emerged as the most evident and recurring pattern. These linkages were visible in all programs, such as where sustainable land or marine management was combined with improvements in productivity, through better farming or fishing practices. However, synergies between environmental objectives and enhanced incomes or broader food security and nutrition goals were less consistently demonstrated and often remained aspirational or undermonitored.

In RFS, several country projects (e.g., Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria) linked climate-smart agriculture and land management to improved productivity and, in some cases, market access and income diversification. GGP production project activities in Indonesia and Paraguay illustrated how sustainable agricultural practices could align with value chain improvements and enhanced producer incentives. The CFI Indonesia project demonstrated synergies between customary marine governance (*sasi*) and local economic empowerment—particularly for women—through branded enterprises and livelihood diversification. Synergies often hinged on implementation-level policy coherence—that is, effective governance mechanisms that integrated sustainability into planning and resource use. Multistakeholder platforms and governance arrangements supported coordination, but their impact depended on being well resourced and institutionally embedded.

Still, trade-offs and their management were rarely identified or monitored systematically. There was little evidence and robust analysis, for example, of how short-term beneficiary income or agricultural input support might affect long-term environmental integrity, or of how competing objectives were balanced in decision-making, at the community as well as the policy level. In addition, few projects tracked whether incentives such as conditional input provision or support for income generation actually resulted in durable behavioral shifts or structural transformation or included the private sector to facilitate the shifts.

Several enabling and limiting factors that are closely related to the degree to which GEF food systems programs were able to generate and sustain synergies across environmental, socioeconomic, and other food systems outcomes emerged from country case studies and interviews. They offer both explanatory factors for where synergies did emerge—particularly between productivity and sustainability—and insights into why such synergies often remained partial or undersustained.

The Indonesia country case study underscored a key constraint to operationalizing synergies: overly ambitious, multiobjective designs without adequate time, decentralization, or operational realism. When projects tried to simultaneously pursue environmental, socioeconomic, and market transformation goals—especially across diverse geographies and value chains—implementation fell short, weakening the integrated outcomes synergies depend on. The political and institutional trade-offs governments can face between expanding food security and environmental protection were especially highlighted in the Indonesia and Tanzania case studies. Where national goals prioritized staple food sovereignty or agricultural expansion, projects struggled to achieve environmental gains. Structural trade-offs, if not proactively addressed and navigated, can block or reverse synergies.

Case studies in Tanzania, Ghana, and Indonesia pointed to bottom-up approaches as an important enabling factor to operationalize synergies, including farmer- and community-driven approaches, participatory extension, and participatory adoption of locally relevant technologies. These factors supported win-wins between productivity, income, and environmental stewardship—although sustainability and scaling were not always ensured due to inadequate long-term support. Across all programs, the most durable synergies were observed when environmental objectives were directly tied to effective income generation or food security benefits, backed by ongoing policy incentives and market engagement. Examples from Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Peru show that when projects backed technical innovations and good governance—with aligned incentives and institutional support—synergies had greater traction. Sustained behavioral change and long-term adoption of conservation-linked practices—both critical to lasting synergies—proved particularly difficult to achieve. CFI Indonesia's limited shift in destructive fishing practices illustrates this gap. Trust, committed local actors, and time-intensive engagement were all seen as preconditions for behavioral shifts that support synergies across ecological and socioeconomic dimensions.

Program monitoring and reporting

Across the GEF food systems programs, performance metrics have often fallen short of capturing the complex, multidimensional nature of transformational change. Most annual monitoring efforts by child projects and coordination projects have remained output-focused, tracking easily quantifiable elements such as events or participation, while offering little insight into deeper behavioral, institutional, or systemic shifts. Although midterm reviews and terminal evaluations provide more quantitative and qualitative analysis, the lack of standardized formats and of a set of common indicators limits the ability of the program lead Agency and the GEF to aggregate findings across countries and programs. This reflects a broader structural challenge in the GEF's corporate target setting, which relies heavily on a narrow set of core indicators for child projects and programs—like

global environmental benefits and cofinancing—that are weak proxies for the intricacy of integrated food systems outcomes. Moreover, child projects by different implementing Agencies use their own monitoring systems and indicators, even as projects under the same program, creating the possibility of further misalignment with GEF priorities—as illustrated by IFC's difficulties in GGP aligning its reporting with the GEF's framework. The RFS program made a deliberate effort to overcome these challenges by developing a harmonized monitoring and assessment system, introducing shared indicators and tools to track and assess resilience and biodiversity. Yet uptake was limited, in part due to inadequate technical support and in part because many child projects and their implementing Agencies preferred to retain their original metrics as identified in their logical frameworks.

The challenge of measuring food systems transformation extends beyond GEF programs (Winkler et al. 2025), reflecting a wider recognition that traditional monitoring frameworks inadequately capture the complex, multidimensional nature of systems change, including behavioral, institutional, and political shifts. The GEF experience further highlights the need for more sophisticated and adaptive metrics to track transformation pathways, introduced early in program design and supported by ongoing technical assistance to ensure meaningful tracking of progress. In the absence of such alignment, key dimensions of food systems transformation—such as policy implementation, value chain development, and behavioral change—remain poorly monitored, especially across programs. To address these gaps, among other efforts, the GEF Secretariat has developed guidance for evaluating programs and is now developing a new program monitoring template aimed at moving beyond basic output tracking to more effectively capture qualitative outcomes, knowledge contributions, and institutional change.

Sustainability of results

Given the relatively early stage of many food systems child projects, there is little evidence of sustained food systems results, though some factors affecting sustainability are beginning to emerge. Only eight completed projects with terminal evaluations have sustainability ratings.[20] Due to the limited sample size, the evaluation could not draw generalizable findings across the wider portfolio. According to the RFS terminal evaluation, at least four child projects were able to sustain and scale activities through confirmed follow-up projects. The hub project's sustainability is supported by the involvement of well-established agencies that are likely to continue many of the activities. The sustainability of the knowledge, communication, and community-of-practice platform is uncertain, as no partners have committed to maintaining it without additional resources.

Across the eight completed child projects, financial sustainability at completion was supported by cofinancing arrangements that helped ensure postproject continuity. For example, the GGP demand project supported the development and expansion of the Trase online platform to provide comprehensive data and analytics on supply chain transparency. At project completion, Trase secured 96 percent of the funding required to sustain operations as a result of the success of this platform and catalytic initiative.

Institutional sustainability was demonstrated through strong ownership by executing partners and the integration of project outcomes into existing systems. In the case of the Uganda RFS child project, sustainability was reinforced through the integration of project implementation in the national implementation modality and active involvement of government actors at both national and subnational levels. Environmental sustainability was promoted through the adoption

[20] These projects are the CFI-Latin America project; three RFS child projects in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Uganda; and all but one (the transactions project) of the five GGP projects.

of sustainable practices such as climate-smart agriculture, sustainable fishing practices, and digital monitoring systems, which led to achievement of global environmental benefits including carbon sequestration and land restoration.

Despite these contributing factors, recurring challenges were identified that may threaten long-term sustainability. Financial sustainability was often undermined by continued reliance on donor funding and the absence of formal financial models. Sociopolitical risks included complex political climate, high turnover of government officials, and uncertainties around ownership and control after project closure. For example, the terminal evaluation for the Nigeria RFS child project raised concerns about the operational sustainability of agricultural centers due to unclear ownership arrangements, which could potentially limit access for smallholder farmers.

3.3 A programmatic approach to food systems: added value, costs, and governance

Added value of an integrated program approach

This evaluation considered the added value of taking a programmatic approach—including through integrated programs—to transforming food systems, compared to nonprogrammatic (i.e., stand-alone) project interventions. Core to the integrated program modality is the relationship between country or thematic child projects and a coordination project led by a lead Agency, which focuses on program coordination and governance. In the GEF, program-level coordination is posited as critical for advancing transformative change, and ensuring coherence and consistency, so that the whole of each program is greater than the sum of its parts (GEF Secretariat 2022).

To assess this added value, the evaluation developed a theoretical framework (annex D) drawing on program documents[21] and the GEF's own guidance around program additionality and evaluating programs, as well as expert peer reviewer input (figure 3.17). This framework envisions food systems programs' potential added value through four main pathways, as shown in the figure, while recognizing that not all GEF food systems programs have equally emphasized each pathway. The findings below analyze programmatic value addition according to each pathway.

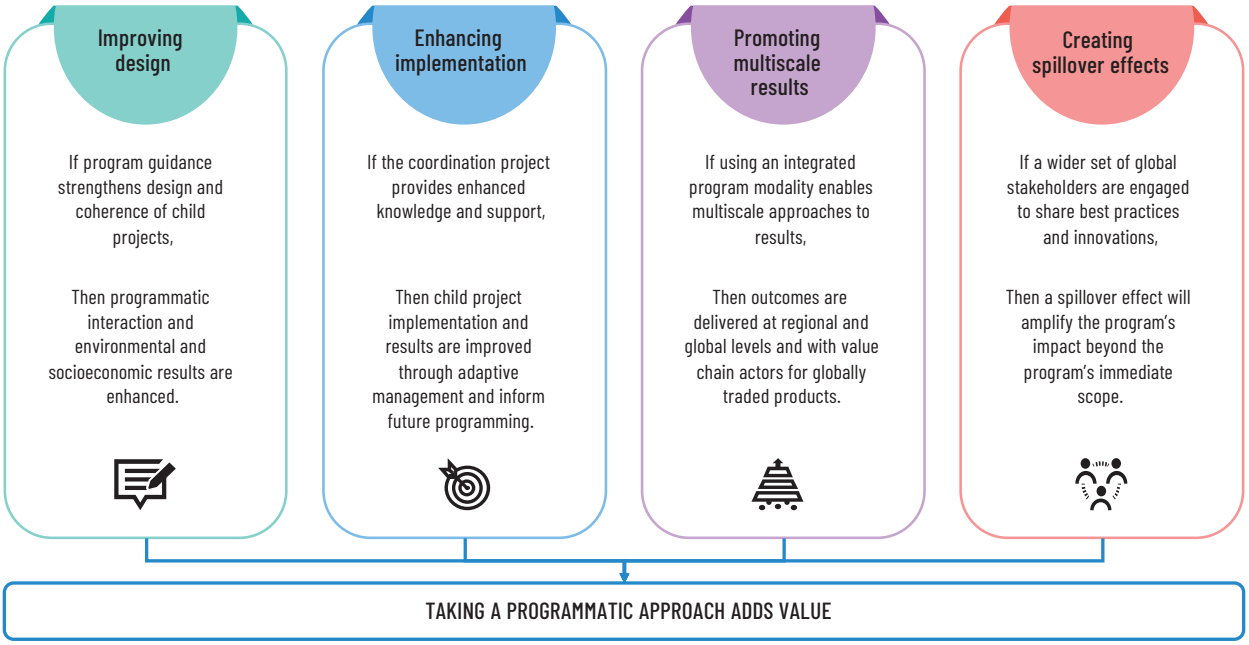
Improving design

Coordination project support has increasingly strengthened the basis for interaction and learning. Guidance from food systems coordination projects has improved the design and coherence of child projects within the overall programs (also see discussion earlier in this chapter), as evidenced through Agency interviews, country survey responses, and country case studies. In Tanzania, for example, country officials perceived that FOLUR and FSIP projects benefited from robust technical design support from the global coordination project teams. In Indonesia, the FOLUR project was designed with strong programmatic additionality in mind, by aiming to engage in global communities of practice, learn from other FOLUR country experiences in Asia, and connect to international buyer networks and certification bodies.

Yet, evidence is weak that individual food systems child projects are better designed to deliver impact than stand-alone projects. Food systems child projects and stand-alone projects alike are taking integrated approaches (see discussion under subsection 3.1). Nonetheless, the important influence of food systems programs can still

[21] The documents reviewed included food systems PFDs and program evaluations (e.g., the RFS terminal evaluation); the review was conducted in line with GEF IEO guidance on how to evaluate integrated programs; see, for example, GEF IEO (2023).

Figure 3.17 Programmatic value addition framework



be observed in the design of child projects. For example, GEF-7 child projects show a greater emphasis on landscape-level interventions than stand-alone ones, reflecting FOLUR's emphasis on this. Stand-alone food systems projects largely emerged in GEF-7, possibly influenced by RFS and GGP experiences. The evaluation did not find concrete evidence that Agencies are improving the design of their stand-alone projects based on lessons learned through food systems child projects, although interviews suggested that tacit learning is happening but not documented. While most stand-alone projects referenced lessons learned from previous GEF interventions (75 percent), none specifically referenced RFS, GGP, CFI, or FOLUR projects or programs.

Enhancing implementation

All GEF food systems programs have included dedicated knowledge management components. These components have involved general knowledge functions such as producing global knowledge products and holding learning events, as well as specialized ones like providing technical support services directly to child projects. This evaluation considered both.

Creating a broader knowledge management ecosystem is perceived as a substantial added value of GEF food systems programs. This was achieved primarily through knowledge generation, dissemination, and exchange. Coordination projects for GGP and RFS generally met or exceeded targets related to numbers of people trained on good practices, knowledge products developed, events held, and platforms established. GEF-6 terminal evaluations found knowledge products to be generally of high quality, and FOLUR's coordination project has reported production and dissemination of 263 diverse knowledge products to FOLUR child projects. Some programs have also provided technical service offerings directly to child projects. For example, FOLUR's customized support has included pilot testing of FAO's Participatory Integrated Landscape Approach (PILA) in four child

projects, implementing UNDP's economic assessment tool in two child projects, and holding a workshop on effective collaborative action with five child projects, among other activities. FOLUR's Gender Learning Programme has also been considered highly useful by child project gender experts surveyed.

Building on this foundation of knowledge generation and dissemination, GEF food systems programs have fostered active knowledge exchange. Facilitating a two-way flow of knowledge, whether generated by the program or another source, is one of the most significant values added by GEF food systems programs, according to interviewees and program documents. Country participants value knowledge sharing through food systems knowledge platforms; they widely agree that country child projects have learned from each other's experiences (86 percent) and that the coordination projects have used effective strategies to generate, capture, and/or share knowledge with country child projects (90 percent). Participants have been largely satisfied with program communities of practice, with three-quarters of GGP and FOLUR participants satisfied with the Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems (FACS) community (UNDP 2025a).

Despite these successes, the evaluation found limited tangible, verifiable examples of countries applying program-facilitated learning. Much program reporting has been at the output level, as noted in the discussion on monitoring and reporting, which may not capture actual knowledge application. The benefit of knowledge sharing and technical support to child projects is also not yet evident in terminal and midterm evaluations. Only 5 of the 21 child project terminal evaluations (24 percent) mentioned engagement with the hub project.[22] Across all project implementation reports, about half of child projects reported participation in global program-related forums, meetings, or workshops to share results and bring back lessons. Fewer than 10 percent explicitly mentioned undertaking adaptive management or adopting new strategies or policies, citing learning or support from the global program. Program partners often struggled to identify concrete examples in evaluation interviews, and case studies also largely failed to surface tangible examples of converting new knowledge to action. Moreover, available information is largely insufficient to appreciate the significance or on-the-ground benefit of examples identified.

The limited evidence available of country participants using learning from program-level activities presents a mixed picture. For example, a recent assessment found that 74 percent of practitioners participating in FACS reported applying learning that contributes to better project outcomes;[23] and a GGP survey found that 64 percent of respondents changed their programs, practices, or policies based on GGP learning.[24] The FOLUR midterm review found that the global coordination project has made limited progress so far in driving country-level implementation and policy change, with few countries having adopted new policies or strategies due to FOLUR knowledge or tools.[25] This is partly due to knowledge products delivered ahead of country readiness, given the early stage of implementation of many child projects, as well as other design issues discussed below. Despite these shortcomings, tangible and verified examples of knowledge uptake do exist (box 3.6).

[22] The two hub projects were excluded from this question in the analysis. Nineteen of the 23 projects (83 percent) reported that the child project describes how the project-level results framework aligns with the global program.

[23] Based on an annual consultation conducted by FACS. Eighty-three percent of FOLUR practitioners reported learning about at least one strategic theme or practice through FACS—most commonly multistakeholder collaboration, gender, and farmer support systems.

[24] Note that the terminal evaluation questioned the means of verification of these GGP survey findings, given that the survey was administered to conference participants right after the conference.

[25] The FOLUR CEO-endorsed document planned for 5 countries by Year 3 and 10 by Year 4, making FOLUR well behind its planned targets.

Box 3.6 Examples of benefits to countries from knowledge exchange and technical services

- After participating in a Good Growth Partnership (GGP) conference, a Liberian producer modified its practices for rural oil palm development, based on learning from a GGP Indonesia presentation.
- After participating in a Resilient Food Systems (RFS) workshop, the RFS Uganda team requested a follow-up visit to learn more about sustainable land management and climate-smart agriculture technologies and practices presented by the RFS Kenya team. The Uganda team visited Kenya for six days and applied their learning to their own projects. After the same workshop, the RFS Nigeria team adopted the composting approach presented by the RFS Ghana team.
- Through an event on the Effective Collaborative Action methodology, a staffer with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) working on the Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program's (FOLUR's) Promotion of Sustainable Food Systems in India through Transforming Rice-Wheat Systems in Punjab, Haryana, Odisha and Chhattisgarh project (GEF ID 10480, FAO) learned about farmer extension services and innovative sustainable practices. This learning has reportedly been applied in the project to solve issues with receding water levels that were causing soil deterioration in rice and wheat systems.
- A FOLUR project manager in the Ministry of Planning & Development in Ethiopia attended four FOLUR events in 2024 and learned about private sector engagement. The ministry team has drawn on this learning to produce a training report and action plan for private sector engagement.
- As a result of coordination between the World Resources Institute (WRI) and Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency through the FOLUR Landscape Restoration and Ecosystem Management for Sustainable Food Systems (GEF ID 10348, World Bank) and WRI's TerraFund program, 14,985 ha of land have been brought under restoration in Ghana. These restoration projects are expected to create 29,841 jobs for local communities. FOLUR funding helped WRI engage with the government of Ghana on project funding criteria and selection.
- Support from the FOLUR Gender Learning Program, as well as direct technical gender support to child projects, helped shift a handful of countries' approaches to more gender-responsive ones, according to interviews. In FOLUR's Connecting Watershed Health with Sustainable Livestock and Agroforestry Production project (GEF ID 10735, World Bank) in Mexico, for example, gender briefs inspired innovations like childcare provisions during trainings, enhancing women's participation. FOLUR's Promoting Integrated Landscape Management Approach for Conservation of the Mount Elgon Ecosystem in Eastern Uganda (GEF ID 10463, United Nations Environment Programme) team took ownership of the gender agenda by developing a context-specific gender action plan, prioritizing practical and targeted gender interventions.

Sources: Program terminal evaluations and annual reports and interviews. Note that not all examples could be triangulated.

Limited visibility and targeting of knowledge products, as well as adaptive management capacities, have hindered knowledge uptake by child projects. In FOLUR, for example, many of the global platform's knowledge resources are not being accessed by countries. Reasons include a lack of targeted promotion, a fragmented approach to knowledge management across core partners, and inadequate staffing for knowledge management in both coordination and child projects. Multiple food systems programs have not had dedicated knowledge management staff, despite the centrality of knowledge to the coordination projects' theory of change. One FOLUR partner lamented that most of the effort goes toward producing the knowledge product rather than its practical application or uptake.

A key consideration is whether knowledge is appropriately targeted for its intended audiences' needs and interests. While programs have increasingly tailored knowledge exchange to country contexts, evidence is less positive for knowledge generation. Several program partners responsible for major knowledge products expressed concern that the suite of knowledge products and technical services was being driven more by the interests and capacities of partners than by demand from countries (see also discussion on country docking). FOLUR's recent capacity needs assessment suggested interest in more tailored technical support and targeted capacity building, as well as demand for resources and support in multiple languages to overcome linguistic barriers (UNDP 2025b). The FOLUR midterm review also pointed to language barriers and a lack of locally adapted materials as constraining country-level engagement.

Resources and willingness to adapt can also be barriers to knowledge uptake by country child projects, according to Agency and country informants. For example, one country survey respondent explained that some countries show a lack of willingness to consider modifying their project approaches based on lessons learned from other countries during global and regional knowledge exchanges. Multiple Agencies noted that innovative solutions emerged through programmatic knowledge exchange, but the country executing agencies did not embrace those new solutions due to a lack of resources in the project plan and a tendency to comply with the original project planning documents. Some GEF and Agency interviewees shared the view that resistance toward adaptive management reflected more of a perceived than actual GEF policy constraint. In other words, the processes for adaptive management exist, but they are not well understood or embraced.

Programs have adaptively managed to shift from global exchange to target regional- and commodity-specific issues and facilitate peer-to-peer learning. As food systems programs have expanded to cover more commodities and countries, global exchange has become less relevant. Interviewees stressed that the context-specificity of food systems challenges and solutions is better aligned with targeted exchanges. FOLUR, for example, has pivoted away from global exchange toward regional commodity dialogues—a strategic direction that interviewees consistently commended. Regional dialogues have now been held in Africa focused on coffee and cocoa value chains, in Asia on low-emission rice, and in Central Europe on sustainable maize and wheat. These events have served to share lessons from country projects as well as promote tools and offerings the global platform can provide to country projects. FSIP countries and partners have also begun to attend these dialogues, facilitating continuity and early learning for FSIP child projects. An oft-raised example of valuable contextualized learning was IFC's technical training on agricultural lime to reduce soil acidity and restore degraded lands, which addressed a localized challenge for specific FOLUR commodities in West Africa.

Additionally, GGP and CFI adaptively managed to support more peer exchange. GGP increased the number of in-country exchanges over the program lifetime, to build connection and trust among country teams and promote country-led collaboration and learning. After CFI's midterm review found that the Coastal Fisheries Initiatives Global Partnership (GEF ID 9128, FAO) had failed to facilitate significant programwide exchange and learning beyond its global consultation meetings, the global project ramped up efforts, including by launching communities of practices across CFI national research institute partners that promoted South-South learning. FOLUR is showing similar signs. Some countries wanted FOLUR to enhance connection and collaboration across child projects more so than with external initiatives, highlighting a desire for more focused regional engagement (UNDP 2025b). Feedback from FOLUR practitioners on the FACS community echoed this sentiment, with only 33 percent of respondents satisfied with the digital program's effectiveness

in facilitating South-South knowledge exchanges (UNDP 2025a).

Country docking—matching country needs with program technical support—has been one of the most significant programmatic challenges. The need to improve country docking in GEF food systems programs was one of the most frequently raised issues in interviews. Ineffective docking undermines both the relevance and uptake of global knowledge and technical service offerings by country child projects—and is therefore critical to ensuring the added value of a programmatic approach. Effective docking has been undermined by misaligned timing, top-down approaches, and insufficient resourcing, as detailed below.

- **Misaligned timing.** Technical offerings have generally been identified early in the program lifetime—before country child projects are operational—based on the program design and partners' review of child project documents, leading to widespread perceptions of top-down support despite intentions to be demand driven. In RFS, early workplans constrained efforts to reallocate resources to meet emerging needs. FOLUR consequently shifted annual work planning and conducted a capacity needs assessment, but service offerings were still largely determined before the project management units for child projects were established. FSIP is learning from these experiences by designing its coordination project to retain more flexibility in determining its service offerings over time. In addition, a timing discrepancy is emerging between when program partners are available to provide support and when child projects are ready to receive it. For example, many FOLUR partners' agreements are set to terminate this year, even though most child projects are still in early implementation, and some have not yet established a project management unit. CFI faced similar challenges, with the key program tool expected to benefit child projects completed only after some child projects had closed. FSIP is reflecting these experiences in its design, with the coordination project expected to run alongside child projects until close to completion—although resource constraints for the coordination project may still result in earlier closure unless additional funding is secured.
- **Top-down engagement approaches.** Food systems programs are also learning the importance of proactive support for country docking. Early efforts to connect countries with technical support were largely passive. In RFS, high transaction costs were experienced for the child projects to familiarize themselves with the many different hub partners and their services. FOLUR's early approach, for example, was to disseminate the global offer to country counterparts, who were expected to follow up for technical services. This approach was not successful, according to interviewees, particularly for countries that were not ready to absorb the support. This approach also created inefficiencies as many partners reached out to child projects individually. As noted, through the new capacity needs assessment, FOLUR has evolved to a more proactive approach to matchmaking, but it is too early to assess the success of this strategy.
- **Insufficient resources.** Limited partner resources have constrained the scope and customization of technical support. Global partners typically have budget to support only a few countries per tool (e.g., 2 to 6 out of 27 FOLUR countries), and child project funds are generally preprogrammed and not available to finance these services. Countries express more interest in customized—and likely on-the-ground—support than broader exchanges, which is also more resource intensive. In RFS, the lack of designated budgets for country collaboration on the ground and continued technical support from hub partners limited the effectiveness of this support. For instance, the Nigeria child project team worked with an RFS partner on several tools but found them too technically complex to implement without continued support.

Promoting multiscale results

While some food systems programs have added value by facilitating vertical or multiscale engagement, integrating value chain support has proved highly challenging. A perceived advantage of integrated programs is the potential to engage with different value chain actors than might be possible in the context of a stand-alone project. This includes vertical partnerships linking national actors to regional and global platforms and value chain actors for globally traded products (e.g., demand side). This is especially important in commodity supply chains, where demand and supply may be in different geographies. Both FOLUR and FSIP, for example, aim to create a leverage effect on buyers and producers by connecting sustainable sourcing efforts across supply and demand. However, country child projects have often focused efforts on supporting sustainable production, with only about a quarter expecting to engage buyers and traders, and even fewer planning to work with retailers or financial institutions.

Interviewees explained that an integrated program approach can help align these production-focused country efforts with global ones to advance commitments toward sustainable sourcing and financing—actions that are difficult to undertake in the context of stand-alone projects. Vertical value chain development features more prominently in GGP, FOLUR, and FSIP than in CFI and RFS (see also earlier discussion of food systems design). Despite the ambition, GEF food systems programs have faced practical challenges to integrate value chain development across scales and geographies. Interviewees widely agree that the ambition of integrating value chains would be difficult to accomplish without a programmatic modality. When integration has been more successful, as in Paraguay (box 3.7), results have been notable.

Food systems programs have encountered challenges in channeling demand and financing toward the target landscapes where child projects are operating. For example, the GGP demand and transactions projects, while individually

Box 3.7 Benefits of the GEF's integrated program modality in Paraguay

Through the Good Growth Partnership's (GGP's) systems-oriented design, three child projects targeting, respectively, production, demand, and transactions achieved results in the sustainable beef value chain in Paraguay. The production and demand child projects were implemented in a coordinated manner, establishing a platform to work toward a common vision of sustainable beef both nationally and in the Chaco region. Paraguay's Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR) child project will continue to support this platform and build on past successes.

Similar continuity of support has been provided to the financial sector in Paraguay. The GGP transactions project provided substantial training and policy support to the Paraguay Central Bank, including the development of a law requiring financial institutions to disclose their impact on deforestation (Resolution 8). Through the GGP experience, GEF partners learned that additional support was needed for secondary financial institutions that provide finance at the landscape level. Cooperatives are now receiving training through FOLUR's global coordination project.

A programmatic approach also delivered value chain results, including the establishment of a traceable supply chain connecting farmers with a slaughterhouse responsible for supplying beef to McDonald's. However, FOLUR's early implementation has revealed challenges in scaling these gains. Building trust and agreement with value chain actors—especially around sustainability indicators for beef and soy—has proven difficult. Several producer cooperatives have raised concerns about the proposed project approach and requested revisions to its strategy, slowing the formation of strategic alliances. The project now plans to launch a new consultancy to co-develop a sustainable meat production standard that aligns with national law and market expectations.

successful, were not well designed to route demand or financing toward the target landscapes where the production project operated. In both GGP and FOLUR, interviewees explained that the mainstream financial institutions that the programs originally targeted are not the same institutions that finance sustainable production at the landscape level. This design flaw is being addressed now, partway through FOLUR implementation, by focusing more on microfinance institutions, impact investors, and other niche market players that are closer to primary production. In the recent FOLUR capacity needs assessment, some child projects expressed unmet needs related to financing mechanisms and linking finance stakeholders with smallholders. Institutional ways of working have also limited partners' abilities to channel financing to specific geographies. For example, IFC must have an existing client or a strong pipeline of potential investments to undertake technical work in a specific country and commodity context.

There has been limited integration between value chain work with global and, to some extent, national private sector companies and country child projects to date. The FOLUR midterm review found that the coordination project was not designed to work through direct country entry points, and thus has done less well in linking private sector global support to child projects. For example, in Uganda, FOLUR-funded advisory services to ensure smallholder farmers have sustainable production practices helped unlock a $4.5 million IFC loan with Nespresso to open a small processing facility. This investment, however, is in a different subregion than the Uganda child project, and there has not been collaboration between the activities. Similarly, in Brazil under the Sustainable Multiple Use Landscape Consortia–Vertentes Project (GEF ID 10468, World Bank), the WBCSD's work with six main agro-traders on soy in Brazil has preceded development of a country platform through the child project, creating questions on how to integrate the latter. Although it did not focus on a value chain approach, CFI similarly struggled to link private sector Challenge Fund projects to country child projects, which sometimes worked in different subregions. Similarly, RFS's catalytic grants to engage in PPPs through the coordination project were implemented separately from the child projects in those countries.

Timing issues, siloed implementation, and underestimating the collaborative efforts needed contributed to the programs' challenges in value chain integration. Sequencing the timing for demand, production, and financing support has not been entirely feasible in five- to seven-year programs. Demand is typically a driver of production change, and then private financing enters at the end. Interviewees expressed frustration with the timing challenges in GEF programs, explaining that private finance has tended to align best with public sector efforts only after those initiatives are complete and farmers are prepared; this rarely happens early enough in a five-year program. Similarly in GGP, interviewees explained that the expectation that sustainable finance mechanisms would be ready to support emerging production needs did not match reality. Developing tailored financial facilities can take more than five years, far exceeding the duration of most program cycles.

Partners responsible for value chain work with the global and national private sector have also tended to work separately. For example, the IFC and UNEP-FI components of the GGP transactions project were executed independently, although some exchange at the country level (e.g., in Brazil and Indonesia) occurred that would not taken place without the GEF project. Similarly, the FOLUR global partners responsible for value chain work described limited cross-fertilization, despite working in similar countries (e.g., Brazil) and commodities (e.g., rice, soy). CFI's Challenge Fund was also implemented separately from the other CFI child projects. As a result, food systems programs have missed potential opportunities for leveraging impact, according to interviews and terminal evaluations. Food systems programs have also underestimated the level of collaboration and sustained engagement needed for

value chain integration (see also discussion later in this subsection on program governance). For example, a key lesson from GGP is that the program misjudged the need for sufficient time, resources, mechanisms, and incentives to establish effective coordination that can lead to integrated value chain impact.

Creating spillover effects

By engaging with a broader set of global stakeholders, food systems programs are sharing their learning and influence beyond the boundaries of the child projects. One key pathway for broader influence is through program partners themselves. For example, in CFI, World Bank staff who worked on the Challenge Fund project have replicated good practices in subsequent lending programs, such as in Indonesia, according to one interviewee. Global knowledge sharing through CFI ignited the development of some new project concept notes by FAO, UNDP, and UNEP, which draw on good practices and initiatives started under CFI. In FOLUR, interviewees referred to a wider influence through "FOLURization"—namely, leveraging FOLUR funding to influence World Bank project design and frameworks for client country engagement. Program reporting indicates that FOLUR has provided technical assistance to World Bank projects with collaboration between Bank global departments responsible for agriculture and environment, including in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ukraine. Similarly, one interviewee explained that FOLUR and FSIP have enabled FAO to integrate support across its technical divisions, breaking down silos.

Food systems programs have catalyzed some partnerships that continue to yield results after the program ended. For example, IFC's partnerships with WWF and Conservation International in Brazil and Paraguay, established through GGP, have continued to advance. Program partners described how they are still using the business cases for restoration of degraded lands developed under GGP to try to implement them with soy farmers, as well as working in partnership to develop biodiversity corridors in the Amazon, Chaco, and Cerrado regions.

Some programs are expanding the reach of their learning through leveraging partners' existing broader networks such as FACS and the Global Landscapes Forum, participating in global high-level events, and implementing multifaceted communications strategies. These efforts have reached large numbers of people (e.g., more than 15,000 for FOLUR), although the extent of influence or uptake of GEF food systems program knowledge is largely unknown.[26] Most survey respondents (70 percent) agreed that engaging with a wide set of partners has enabled food systems programs to generate benefits beyond the program boundaries. There is a long theory-of-action chain, however, from sharing FOLUR knowledge through global events to the ultimate goal of "transform[ing] global thinking, policy options, and actions related to food systems" (GEF 2024, 4).

Program governance and delivery

Country and Agency selection for food systems programs improved in GEF-7 through clearer criteria and processes, which were carried forward into GEF-8. The GEF Secretariat introduced a competitive, criteria-based selection process for participation in GEF-7 programs through preparation and evaluation of expressions of interest, which improved the transparency of country selection. This EOI process was continued in GEF-8. Across all food systems programs, about two-thirds of country stakeholders agreed that the process for selecting countries and child projects was transparent (only 8 percent disagreed for GEF-6 and GEF-7 programs and 11 percent disagreed for GEF-8). Acceptance rates were higher in GEF-8 than in GEF-7, when a smaller number were accepted in the first round due to poor

[26] A recent FACS report provides a few examples of impact stories from broader FACS community members who have benefited from FOLUR knowledge exchanges, including a GEF Secretariat staffer and a project officer for the Global Landscapes Forum in Liberia (UNDP 2025a).

quality.[27] A key difference is that the large majority of EOIs in GEF-8 were from the co-lead Agencies (29 of 35 submissions and 26 of 32 accepted EOIs); in GEF-7, the lead Agency implemented a minority of country child projects (4 of 27).

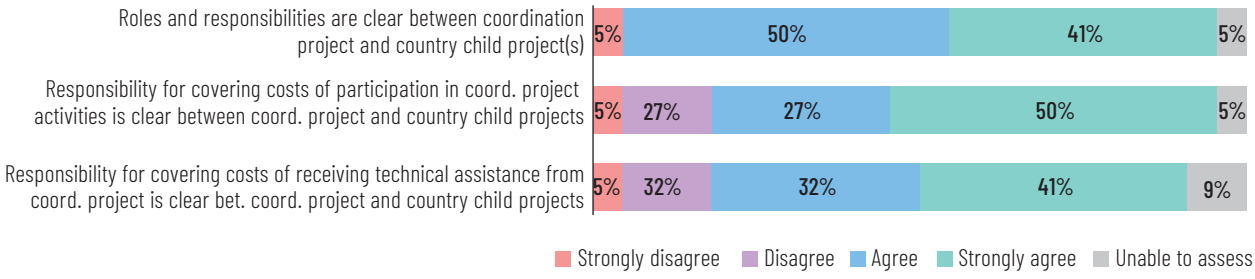
Interviewees raised two main considerations for future country selection processes. First, country continuity across replenishment periods was viewed as potentially beneficial for progress toward transforming food systems, as demonstrated in Ghana and Indonesia. Second, some stakeholders believed that country selection could be used more assertively to ensure that participating countries are committed to transformation and meaningful engagement with other ministries.

Roles and responsibilities between child projects and the coordination project have become clearer over time. Since GEF-7, the lead Agency role has included terms of reference with well-defined roles and responsibilities, building on a lesson from the IAPs that clarity between global or regional coordination projects and country child projects is critical to good program governance. In both the RFS and GGP, budgetary responsibility for programmatic engagement was less clear at design, leading in part to some resistance among child projects to engage in programmatic activities or no staff assigned in the child project with whom the coordination project was to interact. The design of GEF-7 and GEF-8 food systems programs reflects this lesson, with clearer articulation of the responsibilities of the coordination project and child projects in relation to programmatic support. Country stakeholders widely agreed that roles and responsibilities are clear between the coordination project and country child projects (figure 3.18). Challenges associated with the lack of authority or leverage of the lead Agency over child projects, as raised in previous IEO evaluations, however, have not been directly addressed.

Food systems programs have generally been well and adaptively managed. RFS and GGP lead Agencies received positive evaluations on program management and coordination, and country survey respondents widely agreed on their strong performance. Continuity of Agencies, partners, and individual staff has been a supportive factor for robust and adaptive program governance, particularly when staff and organizations have been involved in multiple programs and carry lessons and experiences into new program design. Interviewees also praised FOLUR for leveraging partners and capacities built through previous programs, rather than reinventing new processes and structures. Coordination projects also show effective adaptive management. In FOLUR, for example, the coordination

[27] In GEF-7, only 18 of the 48 EOIs submitted in the first round were accepted, in part due to poor quality. In GEF-8, 22 of 25 EOIs were accepted in the first round and 10 of 10 in the second round.

Figure 3.18 Responses to online survey from government child project points of contact



Source: Online survey (n = 136).

project has adaptively managed to close gaps between itself and the country projects, as well as to respond to emerging policy priorities, such as the European Union's deforestation regulation. Midterm reviews have consistently urged coordination projects to improve integration across partners and child projects, while terminal evaluations have noted relevant improvements in the latter part of implementation. Adaptive management has also been supported by the GEF Secretariat, which has made efforts to push lead Agencies and core partners for impact and integration.

Coordinating across multiple executing partners remains a persistent program governance challenge. RFS highlighted the complexity and high transaction costs of multi-Agency implementation, with seven executing partners in the coordination project, IFAD as lead Agency, and five Agencies implementing child projects. Thematically overlapping responsibilities among partners and extensive subcontracting arrangements further contributed to operational complexity. FOLUR faces similar issues, involving numerous partners and unwieldy coordination that has tended toward bilateral channels at times, limiting visibility. Thematic working groups (e.g., on private sector, gender, and other topics) support coordination but have varied in level of activity. Information sharing among multiple partners has remained a challenge as well, leading to some partners feeling inadequately informed about developments in in-country projects; FOLUR's recent capacity needs assessment aims to help rectify this coordination gap (see also discussion on country docking).

FSIP design reflects lessons from RFS and FOLUR by adopting a more centralized model. Co-lead Agencies (FAO and IFAD) work with three core executing partners in the global coordination project, without any indication of further subcontracting and a smaller budget share for these partners (e.g., less than 15 percent in FSIP versus 65 percent in FOLUR). Interviews indicate that FSIP partners consider their roles more marginal than in previous food systems programs, although partnerships are still evolving.[28] FSIP is also more concentrated in terms of child project implementation. Just four Agencies implement the 32 child projects, with 26 implemented by lead Agencies FAO or IFAD. FSIP's centralization may improve lead Agency oversight, although its impact on administrative complexity is yet to be seen.

Efficiency

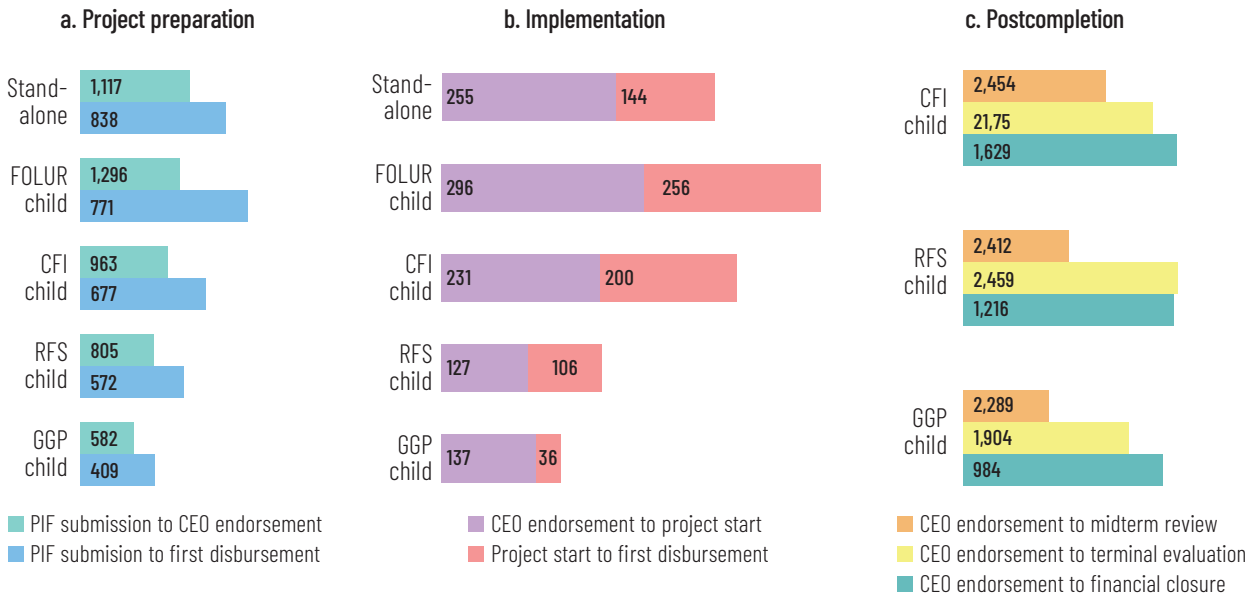
Endorsement and implementation timelines for food systems programs are broadly comparable to, if not more efficient than, stand-alone projects. GEF-6 food systems child projects demonstrated relatively shorter average preparation times from PIF approval to CEO endorsement compared with GEF-7 FOLUR[29] (figure 3.19). FOLUR child projects took longer for preparation, an average of 24.7 months, which is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When compared with stand-alone projects in each GEF replenishment period, programmatic child projects achieved CEO endorsement in a shorter time.

For an agenda as complex as food systems, however, programs are contending with potential trade-offs between efficiency and inclusive and robust design. Interviewees raised concerns that the short time frame for preparing EOIs and concept notes in GEF-8 led to some approved submissions without meaningful input from key government ministries. These trends work against principles of effective collaborative action for systems change by undermining the potential for cross-sectoral coherence and ownership. Interviews also point to tensions between the time needed to align

[28] The itemized budget in the global coordination project document suggests that less than 15 percent of the budget is currently allocated for named core executing partners and service providers (e.g., UNDP, the Nature Conservancy, the WBCSD, and the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development).

[29] In GEF-8, only one FSIP child project has reached CEO endorsement so far (the global coordination project); it took 9.1 months from PIF approval.

Figure 3.19 Elapsed time (number of days) between project milestones by program



Source: GEF Portal.

Note: CEO = Chief executive Officer; CFI = Coastal Fisheries Initiative; GGP = Good Growth Partnership Integrated Approach Pilot; FOLUR = Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program; FSIP = Food Systems Integrated Program; PIF = project identification form; RFS = Resilient Food Systems Integrated Approach Pilot.

different partners around an agenda as complex and multisectoral as food systems transformation and the relatively short time available to prepare project documents. This tension echoes the lesson from GGP that time pressures and competing demands during the preparation phase meant that opportunities for integration between projects were not explored in depth or sufficiently embedded in the structure of the program.

Moving into implementation, delays are frequently related to the increasing operational complexity of programs and the food systems agenda. In FOLUR, delays are often linked to the complexity of coordinating across multiple stakeholders (36 percent), staff capacity to implement integrated programming (45 percent), and difficulties in managing financial transfers between Agencies (36 percent). Cross-case study observations and interviews raised concerns about the time needed to start country projects involving multiple commodities and Agencies, each with different food systems priorities. This includes the time needed to meaningfully engage a range of relevant stakeholders, establish platforms, and refine objectives and activities within the broader food systems agenda. As noted previously, some child projects have faced tensions around institutional leadership for GEF food systems projects, especially between environment and agriculture ministries, that have contributed to delays. Related to this is navigating the challenge of identifying the most critical and value-adding entry points across countries, institutions, diverse ecologies, and commodities while maintaining common programmatic priorities—without overextending resources or reducing the number of communities that could be piloted and served.

Coordination projects are the main added cost of an integrated program approach, yet they also deliver results. Determining the incremental cost of using an integrated program approach is not straightforward. Food systems coordination projects have represented 7–10 percent of total

program costs, or between $4 million and $29 million in absolute cost. Coordination project budgets are mostly allocated for capacity strengthening, technical assistance, policy engagement, global and regional value chain engagement, and knowledge exchange. Accordingly, these projects have delivered knowledge, policy, and financing results, and sometimes contribute to environmental and co-benefit outcomes. They also help position the GEF as a leader on a global agenda. Coordination project budget allocations for overall program management and administration are much smaller. For example, the component of FOLUR's coordination project focused on program management, operations, and M&E is budgeted at $3.6 million, representing about 1 percent of the total FOLUR program value. For FSIP, the project management cost plus M&E is equivalent to $2 million, or 0.7 percent of the total program value. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity cost for these resources (e.g., country or other programming), and the GEF Secretariat may incur additional costs to oversee these complex programs.

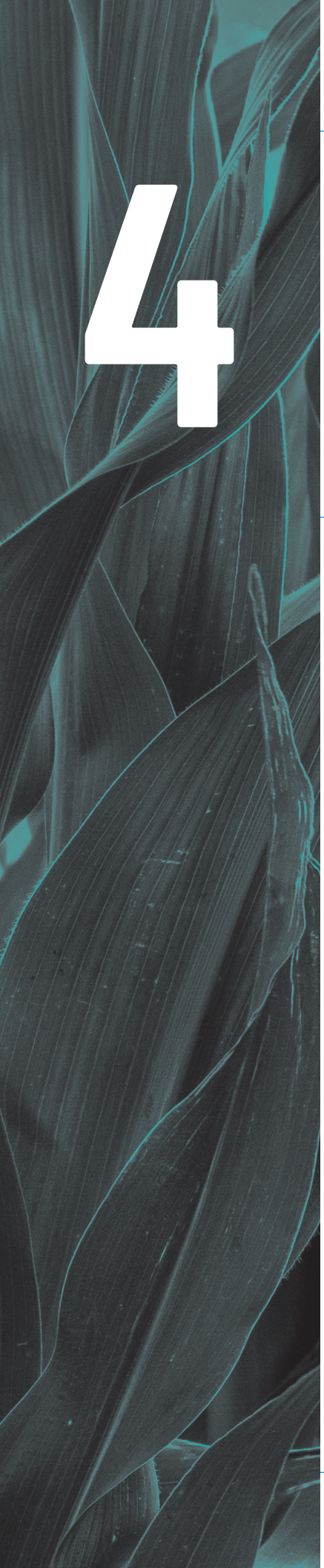
Despite their importance for effective programmatic collaboration, coordination budgets have not kept pace with expanding program scope. Terminal evaluations, interviews, and GEF documentation of programmatic lessons learned all indicate that GEF-6 coordination budgets were not sufficient for this purpose. In RFS, for example, neither child projects nor coordination project partners budgeted for in-country and field program interactions, which later proved to be a critical gap. While the share of funding allocated to global coordination projects has increased across all integrated programming from GEF-6 to GEF-8, in food systems programs, coordination project budgets have been decreasing over GEF replenishment periods. This decrease has happened even as programs have increased in scope and size, posing a risk to program viability. In the GEF-6 programs, the coordination project represented 10 percent of the total program cost. In GEF-7, the FOLUR coordination project represents 9 percent of the total program cost. Moving into GEF-8, the FSIP coordination project has a smaller GEF budget than FOLUR in both absolute and percentage terms ($18 million compared to FOLUR's $29 million, representing 7 percent of the total FSIP program budget). Yet, FSIP will be responsible for coordinating with more country child projects (32, compared to FOLUR's 27) and more commodities than FOLUR.[30] Agency interviewees expressed concerns about delivering greater added value with fewer resources. Several interviewees who have been involved in multiple GEF food systems programs also opined that programs have reached their limit, becoming too large and overstretched, diluting programmatic value addition.

While program stakeholders widely agree that an integrated program approach to food systems adds value that exceeds its costs, systematic evidence is not yet available to make this comparison. GEF, Agency, partner, and country interviewees—including those who have been involved in multiple GEF food systems programs—consistently shared the view that an integrated program approach to food systems adds value compared to a nonprogrammatic approach. At the country level, 28 percent of survey respondents strongly agreed, and 61 percent agreed, that the value addition of using an integrated program approach is greater than the cost of the coordination project.

As described above, food systems programs have added value, albeit sometimes implicit, through knowledge

[30] There are some indications that budgetary responsibilities for engagement with the coordination project are shifting to country child projects to help overcome this gap. In FSIP, the budgetary responsibilities of child projects with respect to engagement with the global platform are intended to include meeting their capacity and technical support needs, gathering and sharing information on lessons learned, and participating in regional and global platforms. As noted earlier, FSIP child projects were advised to set aside 10 percent of their budget for these (and other) programmatic functions, although Agencies reported some resistance from countries to do so. CEO-endorsed project documents are not yet available to assess the extent to which this directive was followed.

and learning pathways, while evidence of converting knowledge to action remains limited. Stakeholders view aligning country-level, production-focused initiatives with global commitments on sustainable sourcing and financing as a unique and transformative added value of program approaches. Yet despite successful global and regional engagement, programs have struggled to link these efforts with child projects. A common refrain in interviews was that an integrated program approach can deliver outcomes and transformation that would not be feasible through a stand-alone project. However, integrated programs are not yet systematically tracking progress toward food systems transformation, and evaluative evidence is not yet available comparing the outcomes and global environmental benefits of child projects to stand-alone ones, making it difficult to weigh the balance of added value to costs.



4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Relevance and coherence

Conclusion 1: GEF programs have contributed to global and national agendas by taking integrated approaches to address environmental challenges in food systems. At the global level, GEF programs have kept pace with the growing discourse around the interconnectedness of food systems, environmental degradation, and climate change, and the significant financing gaps for sustainable food systems transformation. Programs allow sufficient flexibility for countries to design relevant interventions, while sometimes introducing innovative topics that countries had not yet identified as a strategic focus. Child projects align with countries' environmental needs and sectoral policies and priorities related to agriculture, livestock, and/or fisheries. Programs and projects feature integrated approaches that address multiple environmental issues; target synergies between environmental and socioeconomic benefits; work at local, landscape, and national levels; and promote multistakeholder engagement.

Conclusion 2: Food systems projects have concentrated on the production segment of the value chain, although attention to postproduction segments has emerged more recently. The five GEF programs vary considerably in how comprehensively they cover food systems value chains. Some programs made deliberate design decisions to focus more on objectives such as resilience for communities and ecosystems and less on value chain elements. Overall, however, program interventions have concentrated on the environmental footprint of agricultural and fisheries production at community and landscape levels, tackling issues like land and soil degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Programs feature fewer activities targeting postproduction segments, such as storage, processing, distribution, and consumption, and related challenges like food loss and waste, pollution, and health and nutrition. FSIP shows emerging attention in its program design to the role of markets and consumers

in stimulating demand for sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious foods. The GEF-9 Programming Directions further integrate nutrition, moving beyond commodity-focused approaches.

Conclusion 3: Food systems projects have focused on environmental and economic drivers of food systems change, devoting less attention to political and sociocultural drivers. GEF interventions have struggled to adequately identify and address political economy dynamics, such as resistance from sector interests, power asymmetries, insufficient policy buy-in, and policy misincentives. Trade-offs among competing objectives have not always been addressed, limiting the transformational potential. FSIP plans to engage more strongly with policy as a lever of transformational change, reflecting the added emphasis on policy coherence in GEF-8. Sociocultural dynamics that influence behavior and behavioral change have not been frequently and consistently identified or targeted in GEF projects and programs.

Performance and effectiveness

Conclusion 4: GEF programs have delivered substantial, but uneven, environmental benefits, enhanced food production, and advanced food systems policy and governance. A key challenge was to deliver the full set of objectives in a single replenishment cycle. Improved land management, biodiversity conservation, and GHG emissions mitigation are the main environmental outcomes reported by GEF programs. These have been largely achieved through a combination of policy reforms and dialogue, support for land use and marine area planning and management, and activities that enhance sustainable agricultural and fisheries productivity at the community level. Contributions to outcomes have been uneven across child projects, however. Some projects fell short due to overly ambitious or unclear objectives, delays in implementation, or a lack of clarity on how specific activities would lead to measurable environmental outcomes.

Despite strong results, none of the GEF-6 food systems programs fully delivered on the broad ambitions set out in their program designs. While coordination and child projects achieved positive results, they often focused on upstream or process-related outcomes—such as policy engagement, stakeholder coordination, or investment analysis—without yet reaching the scale or depth needed for systemic transformation. As noted, programs and projects are largely focused on the production and community side without adequately integrating sustainable value chains and demand-side elements needed to drive change. Across all programs, many promising results would require more time and further investment to mature into tangible transformation. The current model of short, time-bound programs within a single replenishment cycle is poorly matched to the complex, long-term nature of food system transformation.

Operationalizing programmatic value addition

Conclusion 5: GEF programs are generating substantial knowledge, but there is still limited evidence of country uptake. Food systems programs have successfully generated and shared substantial knowledge both with program participants and a wider audience, as well as supported coherent child project design that establishes a strong basis for intra-program learning. Yet, there are few tangible examples of countries applying this knowledge to adapt their project activities. Challenges like limited visibility and insufficient targeting of knowledge products, as well as country resistance to adaptive management, have hindered knowledge uptake by child projects. Nonetheless, programs' ongoing adaptive measures to encourage peer exchange and address specific regional- and commodity-related issues are positively received by country stakeholders.

Conclusion 6: GEF food systems program governance has improved across replenishment cycles, although matching country needs with support remains a

challenge. Program governance has strengthened over time. Country selection is now more transparent and criteria based, and roles between coordination and child projects are clearer and better codified. The GEF Secretariat and Agencies have further improved program operations by streamlining the number of partners and aligning technical support more closely with country needs. However, this "country docking" process remains a persistent programmatic hurdle that limits the potential for countries to benefit fully from their participation in integrated programs. This is largely driven by three issues: (1) misaligned timing between when programs offer support and when countries are ready to absorb that support; (2) a passive, top-down matching approach; and (3) limited resources for context-specific and hands-on technical support. GEF-7 and GEF-8 programs are recognizing these issues and evolving to address them, although it is too early to evaluate their efforts.

Conclusion 7: Programs have yet to fully realize the value of an integrated program approach for transforming food systems, including vertical value chain integration. Programs have delivered some notable results through private sector engagement, resulting in significant investments in sustainable commodities and strengthened capacity of financial institutions to provide sustainable financing. Many of these results have been delivered outside of country child projects, however, such as through FOLUR's coordination project and GGP's unique program structure. Linking private sector support from the global project to the child projects has proved challenging. Some of the areas where programs have struggled to make these linkages—such as integrating value chain support across levels and geographies and strengthening incentives for sustainable sourcing—are key for enabling transformational change and reaching scale. Food systems programs have not been well designed to channel demand and financing toward the target landscapes where child projects are operating. Challenges have been partly due to a lack of designing for vertical linkages in child projects, siloed implementation, and an underestimation of the collaborative efforts needed to support integration. Sequencing the timing for stimulating sustainable demand, improving production practices, and engaging private financing to scale have proven difficult within programs operating over a single replenishment period.

Conclusion 8: The growing mismatch between program expansion—in both size and scope—and lower-resourced coordination projects risks undermining programs' value proposition. Program expansion is creating a potential trade-off between depth and breadth, with food systems programs attempting to cover more objectives, commodities, and countries, but with sometimes diluted efforts. A key lesson from GEF-6 is that the time and efforts required for effective collaboration should not be underestimated, and yet GEF-7 and GEF-8 food systems programs feature declining budgets for these efforts—contrary to the upward trend in the rest of GEF integrated programming. Lower coordination project budgets also mean less contextualized and hands-on support to countries, which many Agencies and partners believe will weaken impact. As programs expand, some operational complexity is also reemerging as programs seek to create regional and commodity clusters within global programs. At the country level, overly ambitious project designs spanning multiple goals, value chains, and subregions have led to subpar implementation and outcomes.

4.2 Recommendations

This evaluation makes four recommendations specifically linked to the key findings and numbered conclusions (C2-C9). These recommendations cover both strategic and operational programmatic adjustments to enhance food system impacts, as well as cross-cutting considerations for improving design and implementation.

Recommendation 1: Sharpen program focus and phasing across GEF replenishment periods (linked to C4, C7, C8). The GEF Secretariat should establish clearer boundaries and priorities in program design to better reflect regional and commodity-specific dynamics. This may involve concentrating on a smaller number of targeted commodities, geographies, or biomes. The Secretariat should also consider adopting a phased approach to food systems programming. Such an approach would recognize the longer time frames required for food system transformation and the need to align coordination mechanisms and country project schedules. Phased implementation would enable the GEF to strengthen readiness—such as through policy development, governance improvements, capacity building, and pilot investments—before progressing to larger-scale investment alignment and expansion.

Recommendation 2: Expand focus on value chain segments beyond production and on vertical value chain integration, in order to fully realize the benefits of an integrated program approach (linked to C2, C7). Future food systems programming should extend engagement beyond the production segment of the value chain when broader GEF support can (1) generate substantial environmental or socioeconomic benefits; and/or (2) ensure the long-term sustainability of environmental outcomes from production-oriented activities, recognizing the interdependencies across value chain segments. The GEF Secretariat should also strengthen the performance of GEF food systems programs in both vertical and geographic value chain integration. This includes developing more targeted and effective approaches on the demand and financing side, supporting activities related to national and international standards, and fostering stronger linkages between supply and demand actors across countries.

Recommendation 3: Increase attention to political economy dynamics and behavioral change in food systems transformation at design and during implementation (linked to C3). The GEF Secretariat should require more comprehensive and structured political economy and risk analyses to inform the design and implementation of PFDs and child projects. Agencies should be encouraged to incorporate mechanisms that mediate trade-offs and balance short-term incentives with long-term sustainability objectives. The GEF Secretariat should also prioritize engagement with countries demonstrating commitment to the policy and institutional reforms needed to address food systems challenges and work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to co-develop solutions. To enhance the potential for lasting transformation, greater emphasis should be placed on understanding and influencing behavior change throughout program design and implementation.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen country docking to enhance the knowledge value of country engagement with the global coordination project (linked to C6). The GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with lead Agencies, should intensify efforts to improve country docking and knowledge uptake. These efforts should ensure that (1) the coordination project—and its relevant partners and service providers—remains active and able to engage with child projects when they are ready to receive support; and (2) learning is continuously generated, captured, and shared throughout implementation. These efforts should also involve a more participatory and ongoing process to identify country needs for knowledge and technical services and align program offerings accordingly.

Annex A

Independent reviewer statement

This evaluation of the Global Environment Facility's Food Systems Programs (GEF-6 through GEF-8) presents a rigorous assessment at a pivotal moment. Food systems are now the major contributors to the breach of five critical planetary boundaries—land system change, biosphere integrity, freshwater use, biogeochemical flows, and climate change. These systems impose an estimated $15 trillion in annual hidden costs through health impacts, environmental degradation, and social inequities. This highlights the urgent need for transformation, which could unlock $5–$10 trillion in net annual benefits, showcasing the global significance of this evaluation.

Using a multilayered mixed-methods approach, the evaluation analyzes 84 child projects representing $821.8 million in GEF financing and $6.33 billion in cofinancing across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Central Asia. Quantitative metrics demonstrate improved management of 28.4 million hectares, avoidance of 88.4 million metric tons of CO_2-equivalent emissions, and socioeconomic benefits for over 4.7 million beneficiaries. These findings are validated by qualitative insights from 133 stakeholder interviews across country case studies, providing strong thematic rigor and ground-truthing of reported outcomes.

Systems thinking principles guide a nuanced analysis of transformation pathways, distinguishing the value of integrated approaches versus stand-alone projects across environmental, economic, social, and governance domains. The report documents significant advances in multistakeholder governance models, sustainable land and water management, and public-private partnership development. The evolution from GEF-6 to GEF-8 reveals a progressive shift toward policy coherence and strengthened collaborative platforms, reflecting deepening institutional learning.

Innovations including digital traceability platforms, spatial planning tools, and geographic information systems have been integrated into the interventions. Case studies from Ghana, Indonesia (with particular attention to the revival of traditional Sasi marine conservation), Peru, and Tanzania highlight notable context-specific governance innovations. These examples demonstrate how programs have effectively combined traditional knowledge systems with contemporary technologies to achieve context-appropriate solutions.

Significant opportunities for improvement remain, particularly in four areas: vertical value chain coordination involving demand-side actors, including consumer behavior, market incentives, and food loss reduction; political economy analysis to effectively navigate institutional power dynamics and incentivize cross-sectoral reforms; adaptive management practices through mechanisms that enable iterative learning and real-time adaptation; and country docking and knowledge management platforms to align technical assistance with implementation readiness.

The evaluation process included independent review of the draft approach paper, conceptual framework, initial and final reports, as well as detailed analysis of field

case studies and stakeholder interviews. This iterative process, together with the evaluation team's dedication, has resulted in a robust, evidence-based analysis that balances accountability with forward-looking learning.

The report transparently acknowledges data maturity and attribution constraints, enhancing the credibility of its nuanced conclusions. The resulting evidence base offers practical guidance for positioning the GEF's ninth replenishment cycle to address the complexities inherent in food systems transformation.

In conclusion, this evaluation presents a critical milestone in advancing understanding and strategic action toward sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems. Its rigor and policy relevance provide a solid foundation for the GEF's ninth replenishment cycle, enabling the GEF to decisively advance its leadership in food systems transformation amid escalating environmental and social pressures.

Neeraja Havaligi
October 31, 2025

Annex B

Food systems project portfolio

Table B.1 Child projects

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
GEF-6: Resilient Food Systems							
9141	GEF-IAP: Participatory Natural Resource Management and Rural Development Project in the North, Centre-North and East Regions (Neer Tamba project)	Burkina Faso	MF	IFAD	7.27	35.90	UI
9178	Food-IAP: Support for Sustainable Food Production and Enhancement of Food Security and Climate Resilience in Burundi's Highlands	Burundi	MF	FAO	7.40	45.05	UI
9133	Food-IAP: Climate-Smart Agriculture for Climate-Resilient Livelihoods (CSARL)	Eswatini	MF	IFAD	7.21	48.00	UI
9135	Food-IAP: Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience	Ethiopia	MF	UNDP	10.24	144.97	C
9340	Food-IAP: Sustainable Land and Water Management Project, Second Additional Financing	Ghana	MF	WB	12.77	22.00	C
9139	Food-IAP: Establishment of the Upper Tana Nairobi Water Fund (UTNWF)	Kenya	MF	IFAD	7.20	61.05	C
9138	Food-IAP: Enhancing the Resilience of Agro-Ecological Systems (ERASP)	Malawi	MF	IFAD	7.16	87.40	UI
9136	Niger: Food-IAP: Family Farming Development Programme (ProDAF)	Niger	MF	IFAD	7.64	60.32	UI
9143	Food-IAP: Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in Nigeria	Nigeria	MF	UNDP	7.14	57.00	C
9140	Food-IAP: Cross Cutting Capacity Building, Knowledge Services and Coordination Project for the Food Security Integrated Approach Pilot Program	Regional	MF	IFAD	10.83	85.06	UI
9134	Food-IAP: Agricultural Value Chains Resilience Support Project (PARFA)	Senegal	MF	IFAD	7.21	28.54	C
9132	Food-IAP: Reversing Land Degradation Trends and Increasing Food Security in Degraded Ecosystems of Semi-arid Areas of Central Tanzania	Tanzania	MF	IFAD	7.16	52.96	UI

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
9137	Food-IAP: Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Karamoja Sub Region	Uganda	MF	UNDP	7.14	58.00	UI
GEF-6: Good Growth Partnership							
9617	Taking Deforestation Out of the Soy Supply Chain	Brazil	MF	UNDP	6.60	28.20	C
9179	Adaptive Management and Learning for the Commodities IAP	Global	MF	UNDP	3.98	5.27	C
9180	Reducing Deforestation from Commodity Production	Global	MF	UNDP	14.58	164.70	C
9182	Commodities-IAP: Generating Responsible Demand for Reduced-Deforestation Commodities	Global	MF	WWF-US	8.75	42.33	C
9696	Enabling Transactions—Market Shift to Deforestation Free Beef, Palm Oil and Soy	Global	MF	WB	6.41	22.96	C
GEF-6: Coastal Fisheries Initiative							
9126	Delivering Sustainable Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits in West Africa through Good Governance, Correct Incentives and Innovation	Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal	MF	FAO	6.43	45.55	UI
9124	Coastal Fisheries Initiative- Latin America	Ecuador, Peru	MF	UNDP	6.59	65.56	C
9125	The Coastal Fisheries Initiative Challenge Fund: Enabling Sustainable Private Sector Investment in Fisheries (CFI-CF)	Global	IW	WB	7.87	33.00	C
9128	The Coastal Fisheries Initiatives Global Partnership	Global	IW	FAO	2.65	11.85	UI
9129	Eco-system Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in Eastern Indonesia (Fisheries Management Area (FMA)-715,717 &718)	Indonesia	MF	WWF-US	10.18	52.07	UI
GEF-7: Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program							
10232	Reducing deforestation from palm oil and cocoa value chains	Liberia	MF	CI	7.14	67.00	UI
10237	Integrated Landscape Management of Heart of Borneo Landscapes in Sabah and Sarawak	Malaysia	MF	UNDP	7.37	65.11	E
10238	Strengthening Sustainability in Commodity and Food-Crop Value Chains, Land Restoration and Land Use Governance through Integrated Landscape Management for Multiple Benefits in Indonesia	Indonesia	MF	UNDP	16.21	132.51	UI
10239	Establishing System for Sustainable Integrated Land-use Planning Across New Britain Island in Papua New Guinea	Papua New Guinea	MF	UNDP	10.71	50.57	UI
10243	Preventing forest loss, promoting restoration and integrating sustainability into Ethiopia's coffee supply chains and food systems	Ethiopia	MF	UNDP	20.34	208.48	UI
10245	Integrated Sustainable Landscape Management in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam	Vietnam	MF	FAO	5.35	77.95	E

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
10246	Innovative transformation of China's food production systems and agroecological landscapes	China	MF	FAO	13.46	402.19	UI
10247	Scaling up Cocoa-based Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration/Transformative Innovations in Côte d'Ivoire (SCOLUR-CI)	Côte d'Ivoire	MF	FAO	5.35	65.23	UI
10262	Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration in Tanzania's Forest Landscapes	Tanzania	MF	WWF-US	7.37	72.69	UI
10263	Promoting sustainable landscapes in the Motagua River watershed	Guatemala	MF	UNDP	11.16	60.01	E
10264	Promoting sustainable livestock management and ecosystem conservation in Northern Ukraine	Ukraine	MF	UNDP	6.76	67.39	UI
10265	Promotion of sustainable food systems and improved ecosystems services in Northern Kazakhstan Landscape	Kazakhstan	MF	UNDP	10.47	132.31	UI
10268	Inclusive Sustainable Rice Landscapes in Thailand	Thailand	MF	UNEP	5.54	67.30	UI
10306	FOLUR Global Knowledge to Action Platform to Support Transformational Shifts In Food and Land Use Systems	Global	MF	WB	29.13	44.50	UI
10307	Deforestation Free Commodity Supply Chains in the Peruvian Amazon	Peru	MF	UNDP	13.56	112.15	UI
10348	Landscape Restoration and Ecosystem Management for Sustainable Food Systems	Ghana	MF	WB	12.76	129.50	UI
10463	Promoting integrated landscape management approach for conservation of the Mount Elgon ecosystem in Eastern Uganda	Uganda	MF	UNEP	9.43	82.01	UI
10464	Paraguay FOLUR	Paraguay	MF	UNEP	8.19	47.57	UI
10468	Sustainable Multiple Use Landscape Consortia—Vertentes Project	Brazil	MF	WB	24.58	172.00	UI
10480	Promotion of Sustainable Food Systems in India through Transforming Rice-Wheat Systems in Punjab, Haryana, Odisha and Chhattisgarh	India	MF	FAO	20.37	378.69	E
10481	Promoting Integrated Landscape Management and Sustainable Food Systems in the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria	Nigeria	MF	FAO	5.35	67.74	UI
10594	Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project	Burundi	MF	WB	6.00	31.00	UI
10598	Integrated Landscape Management for conservation and restoration of the Mt. Elgon Ecosystem in Western Kenya	Kenya	MF	FAO	5,354,587	46.51	UI
10599	Transforming Food Systems and Reducing Deforestation in the Protected Areas and Biological Corridors landscapes from the Southern Caribbean Coast and San Juan River autonomous region	Nicaragua	MF	FAO	5,354,587	44.69	UI
10600	Integrated management of degraded landscapes for sustainable food systems and livelihoods in Guinea Forest Region and Upper Guinea	Guinea	MF	FAO	9.50	43.40	E

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
10601	Food System, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program in Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	MF	FAO	6.00	72.75	UI
10735	Connecting Watershed Health with Sustainable Livestock and Agroforestry Production	Mexico	MF	WB	13.77	99.01	UI
10750	Integrated Landscape Management for a zero-deforestation coffee and rice value chains in the Central South and Eastern coast of Madagascar	Madagascar	MF	FAO	9.87	28.88	E
GEF-8: Food Systems Integrated Program							
11370	Sustainable aquaculture in the northern region of Angola	Angola	MF	FAO	3.44	30.50	P
11219	Sustainable Livestock in the forest region of the Argentine Parque Chaqueño through Forest Management with Integrated Livestock (MBGI)	Argentina	MF	FAO	4.74	35.00	P
11217	Sustainable food systems for greater resilience and food & nutrition security in Benin	Benin	MF	FAO	5.97	20.00	P
11223	Productive and Sustainable Food Systems in Bhutan for Environmental Benefits and Gross National Happiness	Bhutan	MF	FAO	9.59	49.54	P
11222	Promoting Nature Positive Food Systems in Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso	MF	IUCN	10.71	65.00	P
11224	Integrated production of rice and secondary crops using an agroecological approach in the Tandjilé province	Chad	MF	UNDP	3.83	23.00	P
11220	Scaling-up regenerative practices for the recovery and improvements of soils, biodiversity, and associated ecosystem services in the Chilean agricultural sector	Chile	MF	FAO	5.97	30.12	P
11225	Ecological and Low-Carbon Food Systems in China	China	MF	FAO	18.05	140.00	P
11218	Child Project Food Systems Integrated Programme	Costa Rica	MF	UNDP	5.84	31.10	P
11369	Promoting the mainstreaming of biodiversity and protection of ecosystem services through regenerative and deforestation-free livestock in provinces of Manabí, Pichincha and Morona-Santiago	Ecuador	MF	FAO	2.35	4.80	P
11226	Catalyzing transformation to sustainable food systems in Eswatini	Eswatini	MF	FAO	3.52	31.54	P
11235	Participatory Agriculture and Climate Transformation Programme	Ethiopia	MF	IFAD	9.59	78.20	P
11375	Ghana Sustainable Food System and Forest Management	Ghana	MF	WB	13.94	240.00	P
11215	Global Coordination Project	Global	MF	FAO	18.23	200.00	E
11374	Advancing Transformative Agricultural Systems in Grenada through the Promotion of Integrated and Resilient Ecosys-tem approaches throughout the cocoa value chain (ASPIRE)	Grenada	MF	IFAD	15.20	10.00	P
11228	Transforming Andhra Pradesh aquaculture to a sustain-able, reduced footprint and climate resilient food system	India	MF	FAO	13.16	224.20	P

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
11229	Sustainable Livestock Production to Support Resilient Food Systems, Environment and Rural Livelihoods in Indonesia	Indonesia	MF	FAO	14.38	150.00	P
11373	Transforming Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture in Kazakhstan to Ensure Environmental Sustainability	Kazakhstan	MF	FAO	2.35	0	P
11216	Integrated land and water management for food, water and climate security in the dairy food system	Kenya	MF	IFAD	7.14	120.00	P
11367	Sustainable Agriculture and Plantations in Peatland Landscapes in Malaysia (SAPPLIM)	Malaysia	MF	IFAD	5.35	20.50	P
11372	Food systems, indigenous peoples and biodiversity	Mexico	MF	FAO	4.62	28.13	P
11371	Circular Integrated Aquaculture-Horticulture Systems for Climate Resilience in Namibia (NamiGreen)	Namibia	MF	UNDP	7.45	51.70	P
11368	Transforming Nauru's Food Systems through Climate Smart Agriculture	Nauru	MF	UNDP	5.92	24.25	P
11236	Transformation to sustainable crops, livestock and aquaculture food systems in Nigeria	Nigeria	MF	FAO	7.14	61.20	P
11231	Sustainable and regenerative management of rice production in Pakistan	Pakistan	MF	FAO	6.89	30.50	P
11221	Regenerative livestock farming to promote sustainable landscapes	Peru	MF	FAO	13.16	100.40	P
11237	Transforming Agricultural Landscapes in Island Ecosystems and Key Biodiversity Areas towards Sustainable Food Systems and Climate Resilient Communities	Philippines	MF	FAO	9.58	73.22	P
11232	Revitalizing and transforming Solomon Islands' food system through sustainable agriculture and livestock production for enhanced environmental and community benefits	Solomon Islands	MF	FAO	4.74	15.50	P
11227	Catalyzing sustainable aquaculture systems for South Africa	South Africa	MF	FAO	4.74	30.00	P
11233	Sustainable, regenerative and resilient rice-based food systems to strengthen community and ecosystem health in three river basins of Sri Lanka1	Sri Lanka	MF	FAO	4.74	21.00	P
11230	Food Systems Transformation in Usangu Landscape	Tanzania	MF	FAO	0.84	85.25	P
11234	Increasing the sustainability and resilience of agriculture/ food system through nature-based solutions	Türkiye	MF	FAO	4.80	30.00	P

Source: GEF Portal.

Note: *focal area:* IW = international waters, MF = multifocal area; *GEF Agency:* CI = Conservation International, FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, IFAD = International Fund for Agricultural Development, IUCN = International Union for Conservation of Nature, UNDP = United Nations Development Programme, UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme, WB = World Bank, WWF-US = World Wildlife Fund-US; *status:* A = Council approved, C = completed and/or financially closed, E = Chief Executive Officer (CEO) endorsement technical review completed/cleared, P = CEO project identification form (PIF) cleared, UI = under implementation.

Table B.2 Stand-alone projects

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
GEF-6							
9194	Strengthening Adaptative Capacities to Climate Change through Capacity Building for Small Scale Enterprises and Communities Dependent on Coastal Fisheries in The Gambia	Gambia, The	CC	UNIDO	2.20	9.62	UI
GEF-7							
10195	CSIDS-SOILCARE Phase1: Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) multicountry soil management initiative for Integrated Landscape Restoration and climate-resilient food systems	LAC	MF	FAO	7.52	16.00	UI
10866	Comprehensive land management in forestry and agri-food systems of three water basins in Argentina to contribute to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and to mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Argentina	LD	CAF	2.62	24.97	E
10694	Integrated Landscape Management for Addressing Land Degradation, Food Security and Climate Resilience Challenges in The Bahamas	Bahamas	LD	UNEP	5.72	15.09	UI
10207	Building climate resilient livelihoods in vulnerable landscapes in Bangladesh (BCRL)	Bangladesh	CC	FAO	8.93	47.46	UI
11011	Mainstreaming Sustainable Marine Fisheries Value Chains into the Blue Economy of the Canary Current and the Pacific Central American Coastal Large Marine Ecosystems	Global	IW	UNDP	10.73	47.57	E
10511	Crop Diversity Conservation for Sustainable Use in Indonesia	Indonesia	BD	FAO	6.19	92.82	UI
10362	Resilient, productive and sustainable landscapes in Mali's Kayes Region	Mali	MF	FAO	6.83	27.88	UI
10862	Sustainable food systems and integrated land/seascape management in the Marshall Islands	Marshall Islands	MF	FAO	2.10	6.03	E
10867	Towards Sustainable and Conversion-Free Aquaculture in Indonesian Seas Large Marine Ecosystem (ISLME)	Asia	IW	ADB	4.45	112.17	E
10857	Strategies, technologies and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries (REBYC-III CLME+)	LAC	IW	FAO	5.33	30.34	UI
10919	Enhancing capacity for the adoption and implementation of EAF in the shrimp and groundfish fisheries of the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem (EAf4SG)	LAC	IW	FAO	1.78	7.81	UI
10517	Integrated Agro-ecosystem Approach for enhancing Livelihoods and Climate Resilience in Tuvalu	Tuvalu	LD	FAO	2.64	6.77	UI

GEF ID	Title	Country	Focal area	GEF Agency	GEF grant (mil. $)	Cofi-nancing (mil. $)	Status
GEF-8							
11270	Barbados—Accelerating transition to climate-resilient agrifood systems (BATCRAS)	Barbados	CC	FAO	3.50	19.95	A
11453	Promoting social and ecological resilience in land-water-food systems in blue economy sectors in Benin	Benin	CC	AfDB	9.78	41.12	A
11100	Climate change adaptation of Cabo Verde's agri-food systems for improved food security and livelihoods	Cabo Verde	CC	FAO	2.64	15.00	A
10980	Enhancing Land Management and Strengthening Ecosystem Resilience for Integrated Landscape Restoration and Climate-Resilient Food Systems in Carriacou, Grenada	Grenada	LD	UNEP	0.86	2.30	UI
11411	A Holistic Approach to Food Systems Resilience and Adaptation in Maldives	Maldives	CC	FAO	2.64	3.00	A
11401	Climate resilient transformation of rice-based farming and food systems in central Nepal (CRAFT Nepal)	Nepal	CC	FAO	9.78	10.00	A
11390	CSIDS SOILCARE Phase 2—Caribbean Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) multicountry soil management initiative for integrated Landscape Restoration and climate-resilient food systems	LAC	LD	FAO	17.97	26.50	A
11066	Yield Lab Opportunity Fund I: Accelerating technology and local innovation for sustainable and decarbonized food systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.	LAC	MF	IDB	6.00	27.28	E

Source: GEF Portal.

Note: *Country:* LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean: *focal area:* BD = biodiversity, CC = climate change, IW = international waters, LD = land degradation, MF = multifocal area; *GEF Agency:* ADB = Asian Development Bank, AfDB = African Development Bank, CAF = Development Bank of Latin America, FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNDP = United Nations Development Programme, UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme, UNIDO = United Nations Industrial Development Organization; *status:* A = Council approved, E = Chief Executive Officer (CEO) endorsement cleared, UI = under implementation.

Annex C

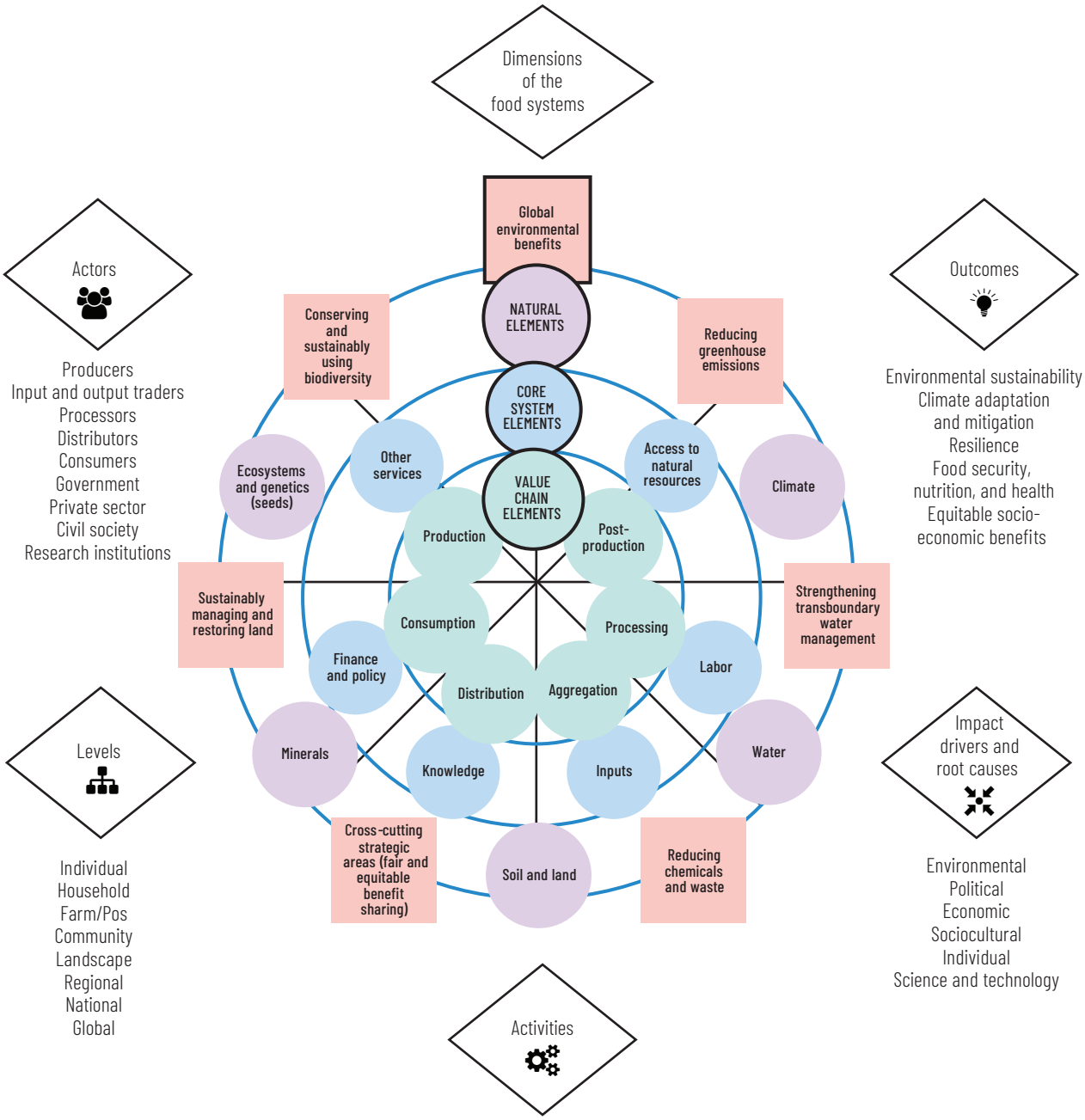
Food systems analytic framework

This analytic framework establishes the expected benefits of using an integrated food systems approach compared to a nonfood systems baseline approach. Each food systems approach claim has been developed based on a review of food systems programs' program framework documents and evaluations (e.g., the Resilient Food Systems terminal evaluation). This framework informed the design of the evaluation's quality-at-entry tool, the implementation document review, and interview topic guides.

The evaluation adopted a holistic food systems approach (figure C.1 and table C.1) by emphasizing systems thinking and integrated solutions to environmental, social, and economic challenges within food systems. It is structured around four core claims, each linked to specific pathways or assumptions and accompanied by clearly defined evaluation criteria across multiple sources such as project documentation, stakeholder interviews, and case studies.

- **Systems integration and alignment with national goals.** Programs and projects are expected to address multiple global environmental benefits across all relevant food system elements—natural, core, and value chain. The evaluation sought evidence of alignment with country-specific food systems challenges and broader national development goals. Emphasis was placed on cross-boundary integration, including transboundary trade and science-policy coordination. The evaluation looked for evidence of integrated project designs that reflect systemic interdependencies and promote sustainability at both national and transnational levels.
- **Addressing root causes through integrated design.** A key principle is the identification and systemic resolution of root causes of food systems challenges, including environmental degradation, social inequities, and economic vulnerabilities. The evaluation focused on whether project designs are informed by multidimensional analyses and whether interventions are interlinked, aiming to tackle underlying issues from diverse perspectives. Data collection in the field further explored the actual effectiveness of these interventions in reducing root causes and whether the project components reinforce one another to yield sustained impact.
- **Stakeholder engagement and multilevel governance.** Effective food systems require broad stakeholder engagement. The evaluation looked for evidence of inclusive and strategic engagement across multiple levels—local to international—and actors—from producers to policy makers. Projects should be designed based on thorough stakeholder analysis and facilitate multistakeholder platforms for dialogue and coordination. The evaluation assessed the quality and sustainability of these engagement mechanisms and their role in fostering long-term governance structures.
- **Synergistic outcomes across food systems dimensions.** Finally, the evaluation approach emphasized the importance of achieving positive and complementary outcomes across food systems, including environmental sustainability, food and nutrition security, economic resilience, and health. Projects

Figure C.1 Food systems evaluation analytical framework



should demonstrate layered, integrated activities designed to produce cross-sectoral benefits. The evaluation approach sought tangible evidence of outcomes in multiple areas, synergistic effects between them, and effective management of trade-offs. Beneficiary perspectives were crucial in validating the actual synergies achieved.

Overall, this evaluation approach aimed at rigorously testing whether food systems interventions embody systems thinking, promote multisectoral integration, and lead to sustainable, multidimensional improvements in food system outcomes.

Table C.1 Holistic food systems: claims, assumptions, and sources of evidence

Holistic food systems approach claim	Pathway/assumption	What to look for
Programs/projects ultimately aim at achieving mutually reinforcing environmental benefits across all relevant elements of the food system with projects integrated in a way that reflects systems thinking, including across national boundaries	• Programs/projects address multiple global environmental benefits in each relevant element of the entire food system (natural elements, core system elements, value chain elements) • Programs/projects have overarching objectives well aligned with the main food systems challenges in the country that contribute to broader national goals • Programs/projects have components and activities that consider and support food systems across national boundaries (e.g., transboundary trade and commodity supply chains) • Programs/projects include design elements that support stronger integration of policy and science aspects across scales in the food system, including cross-sectoral relationships	Quality at entry: • Evidence of programs/projects addressing multiple global environmental benefits • Evidence of programs/projects addressing multiple dimensions of the food system, guided by country challenges • Evidence of program/project components supporting cross-boundary issues • Evidence of program/project components supporting better food system integration in terms of policy and science linkages
Programs/projects adequately identify and appropriately address the root causes of environmental, social, and economic challenges in the food system in an integrated manner	• Programs/projects show an understanding of the different drivers of environmental, social, and economic challenges in the food system and the relationships between them • Programs/projects have design elements that address the root causes of food systems challenges in an integrated way and address systemic issues • Programs/projects have components that are linked and build on each other to tackle the underlying challenges from multiple angles/perspectives	Quality at entry: • Evidence of programs/projects informed by a robust analysis of the multiple drivers • Evidence of program/project design elements aimed at addressing root causes Interviews: • Extent to which programs/projects are addressing root causes • Extent to which program/project components are linked and build on each other • Extent to which programs/projects achieved to positively contribute to diminishing root causes of food system challenges

Holistic food systems approach claim	Pathway/assumption	What to look for
Programs/projects engage with various actors in the food system at different levels in a coordinated way, facilitating sustainable governance mechanisms that support such interactions	• Programs/projects show design elements that adequately identify various actors in the food system including operational value chain actors (such as farmers, traders, and processors) and supporting or enabling actors (such as government or science) • Program/project activities target multiple food systems actors at different levels of intervention (individual, household, farm, PO, national and regional, etc.) • Programs/projects engage with the various actors in an integrated and coherent way at all levels through dedicated and inclusive mechanisms such as multistakeholder platforms	Quality at entry: • Evidence of program/project design informed by robust stakeholder mapping and analysis • Evidence of program/project components aimed at facilitating multistakeholder engagement Implementation document review: • Number of stakeholder groups (e.g., farmers, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private sector) actively involved in project planning, implementation, and monitoring Interviews: • Evidence of multilevel coordination platforms, meetings, or forums bringing together actors from local, national, and international levels to collaborate on food systems challenges • Evidence of project activities that involve multilevel partnerships, where actors from different levels of the food system work together to achieve common goals • Evidence of purposeful, sustainable (well-resourced), and inclusive platforms
Programs/projects achieve positive, complementary, and synergetic outcomes in all relevant outcome areas of the food system	• Programs/projects have design elements showing relevant outcomes in environmental management and sustainability (including relevant GEF focal areas and global environmental benefits), food security, nutrition and health, resilience, and other socioeconomic benefits • Programs/projects show a level of synergies between outcome areas (where improvements in one area lead to benefits in other areas) • Programs/projects have layered and integrated activities that are clearly designed to lead to positive changes across different elements of the food system	Quality at entry: • Evidence of expected key program/project outcomes in all relevant areas • Evidence of integrated project activities designed in multiple sectors and related outcomes Implementation document review: • Evidence of projects achieving outcomes and/or having clearly defined targets in more than one area of the food system showing improvement within a specific time frame as a result of project activities • Evidence of synergies between program/project outcomes Interviews: • Evidence of synergies between program/project outcomes • Evidence of managing trade-offs between the different outcome areas Case studies: • Evidence of beneficiaries reporting multiple benefits across different outcome areas • Evidence of beneficiaries reporting engagement in integrated project activities in multiple sectors

Annex D

Programmatic value addition framework

Given that the limited availability of completed child and stand-alone food system projects makes counterfactual analysis impossible, this framework establishes the expected benefits of using a programmatic approach, compared to a nonprogrammatic baseline approach. Each programmatic value addition claim has been developed based on a review of food systems' program framework documents and program evaluations (e.g., the Resilient Food Systems terminal evaluation). It also reflects GEF IEO guidance on how to evaluate integrated programs.

The framework was developed to inform the design of the programmatic value addition–focused online survey administered to GEF Agency and country project teams as a component of this evaluation (annex G). It also informed the design of the two templates developed to review food system project documents, namely the quality-at-entry template (annex F) and the implementation document review template covering project implementation reports, midterm reviews, and terminal evaluations (volume 2). The framework also informed the design of central-level interview guidelines as well.

Table D.1 Programmatic value addition: claims, assumptions and sources of evidence

Programmatic value addition claim	Pathway/assumption	What to look for
Program guidance strengthens the design of child projects to enhance results and interaction	• Programs generate and share guidance and knowledge (e.g., best practice, innovation) with child projects early in the design process • Agencies and governments use this guidance and knowledge to inform design because they recognize its value (rather than it being imposed) • Child projects have common components/themes that support relevance of interaction, learning, and experimentation • Child projects include design elements that support stronger integration, including addressing relationships among system elements across scales	Quality at entry: • Evidence of incorporating guidance and/or knowledge from program level • Common components to enable interaction and learning • Activities and budget for engagement with the global hub project • Activities designed to work across higher scales (e.g., regional, global) Interviews: • Extent to which knowledge and innovation (and approaches to be tested) shared by the parent program flowed into child projects: Why/why not? • Extent to which multiscale elements are reflected in child projects: Why/why not? • Whether countries perceived value for design in the knowledge and innovations shared by the parent programs: Why/why not?

Programmatic value addition claim	Pathway/assumption	What to look for
Enhanced knowledge and support improve implementation of child projects through adaptive management and inform future programming	• Programs use effective tools/techniques to generate, capture, and disseminate knowledge (e.g., websites, global versus regional events, communities of practice, peer-to-peer learning) to country representatives involved in child projects and similar programming • Hub projects provide direct technical support to child projects to manage the complexity of an integrated approach, including helping them engage with policy makers and science partners; and child projects want and demand this support • Effective feedback loops are established that facilitate timely course correction • Child project and hub project implementation is adaptively managed based on knowledge gained to increase effectiveness and results • Lessons and best practices learned inform subsequent projects/programs and policies/strategies in child project countries	Implementation document review: • Evidence of (1) adaptive management that (2) is linked to programmatic learning or support • Explicit references to knowledge products, solutions, or tools generated by the program • Evidence of strategies designed to create synergies between global environmental benefits and social and economic co-benefits Interviews/survey: • Examples of adaptive management based on learning from program participation and hub project support during child project implementation: Why/why not? • Examples where integrated program best practices have been mainstreamed into new projects/programs and policies/strategies: Why/why not? • Examples of solutions and tools that were not explicitly planned but emerged through collaboration and delivered value • Compelling examples of success in pursuing (1) synergies between global environmental benefits and social and economic co-benefits; and (2) solutions and tools that were not explicitly planned but emerged through collaboration and delivered values, and their challenges/pitfalls if any
Using an integrated program enables a multiscale approach that delivers outcomes at regional and global levels and with value chain actors for globally traded products	• Programs establish vertical connections—i.e., partnerships linking national actors to regional and global platforms and coalitions, as well as value chain actors for globally traded products (linking venture capital actors in countries with demand side)—that would otherwise not be possible in a single country project • A critical mass of engaged child projects provides a leverage effect for value chain actors, investors/financers, and global policy forums/institutes working at multinational scale, motivating and influencing those actors to adopt more responsible and sustainable practices	Implementation document review: • Evidence of child project activities implemented (1) that involve vertical engagement with value chain actors, investors/financers, and global policy forums/institutes working at multinational scale and (2) that this engagement is linked to environmental benefits • Evidence of vertical engagement through governance to ensure that the expected global environmental benefits and financial returns are both delivered, especially when impact pathways are longer • Evidence of support from global hub project for vertical engagement Interviews/survey: • Extent to which programs are successfully linking venture capital actors in countries with demand side: Why/why not? • Whether mass of child projects has been sufficient to motivate venture capital actors to engage and change practices: Why/why not?

Programmatic value addition claim	Pathway/assumption	What to look for
Engaging with a wider set of global stakeholders (e.g., other development and technical partners, networks of civil society and private sector organizations) results in a greater impact beyond the immediate scope of the program by spreading best practices and innovations and inspiring replication	• The learning value of the integrated program extends within and beyond the program actors themselves • A broader set of global stakeholders participate in global programming activities and are exposed to program-generated knowledge, which is convincing enough to motivate them to act • Participating global stakeholders apply something they have learned to their own practices/policies • Partners and stakeholders work together to develop or consolidate approaches or methods	Implementation document review: • Evidence in hub projects of influencing the practices or policies of global stakeholders • Evidence of finance mobilized for food systems investment through program implementation Interviews/survey: • Examples of program partners and global stakeholders using knowledge gained through participation in program activities • Additionality of the GEF in linking up with existing Agency-led platforms and efforts • Other examples of inspiring replication of best practices or innovation • Enhanced or intensified collaboration within or beyond the integrated program

Annex E

Program framework document analysis heatmap

Table E.1 presents a heatmap summarizing the program framework document analysis conducted for this evaluation to determine whether the GEF takes a comprehensive systems approach in its food systems interventions, as set out in figure 3.3. It presents ratings for each GEF food systems program—the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI); the Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR); the Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP); the Good Growth Partnership Integrated Approach Pilot (GGP); and the Resilient Food Systems Integrated Approach Pilot (RFS)—on key system elements as described below and captured in the table.

- **Food system elements.** Food system elements fall into three major categories: *natural* (climate; water; seed, soil, and land; minerals; and ecosystems and genetics), *core system* (access to natural resources, labor, inputs, knowledge, finance, and policy), and *value chain* (production, postproduction/storage, processing, aggregation, distribution, and consumption). Across the programs, there is a strong and consistent focus on transforming food systems by engaging comprehensively with these three sets of elements. FSIP emerges as the most comprehensive, addressing all six natural elements and fully covering both core and value chain elements. RFS, FOLUR, and CFI closely follow, each tackling five of the six natural elements (excluding minerals) and achieving full engagement across the other dimensions. GGP, although slightly less comprehensive in its natural elements coverage (four of six), still provides a robust framework by fully addressing all core system and value chain elements.
- **Global environmental benefits.** All programs contribute significantly to global environmental benefits, though their emphasis varies. RFS, FOLUR, FSIP, and GGP each address biodiversity conservation, land restoration, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and beneficiaries, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to environmental and social sustainability. FSIP stands out by additionally targeting chemicals and waste reduction; while CFI is unique in its strong contribution to transboundary water management and marine biodiversity even though it does not directly address land, greenhouse gas emissions, or chemical waste. Overall, FSIP emerges as the most holistic in global environmental benefit coverage (five of six); followed closely by RFS, FOLUR, and GGP (four of six); with CFI focusing more narrowly on biodiversity, water, and livelihoods (three of six).
- **Drivers.** All programs address the six systemic drivers of food system challenges—environmental, political, economic, sociocultural, individual, and science and technology. FSIP and FOLUR take particularly integrative approaches across terrestrial landscapes, while CFI adapts these drivers effectively within coastal and marine contexts. GGP and RFS stand out for aligning political and market mechanisms with inclusive, science-based action.
- **Root causes.** Across the five programs, FSIP, FOLUR, and CFI address the broadest range of root causes, each targeting seven out of nine identified issues,

including climate change, poverty and inequality, unsustainable agricultural practices, governance gaps, and misaligned incentives. RFS closely follows by tackling six out of nine, with a strong focus on climate adaptation, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive governance, although it engages less with consumption trends or fragility. GGP addresses five out of nine, effectively targeting production-driven degradation, incentive structures, and governance; it does not directly engage with sociocultural norms, population dynamics, or conflict.

- **Actors targeted and levels of intervention.** Across the programs, FSIP and GGP stand out for engaging all 10 key actor groups and operating across every level of intervention, from individuals and households to global platforms. FOLUR demonstrates strong inclusiveness with 8 out of 10 actors targeted and multiscalar engagement. RFS focuses primarily on production-level and institutional actors (7 of 10), with limited direct involvement of consumers and waste managers; it operates across community to national levels. CFI targets 6 of 10 actors, mainly within fisheries-related production and governance, and works across individual to global levels. Overall, FSIP and GGP exhibit the most integrated systems-level engagement, while CFI and RFS are more sector-focused in actor targeting.
- **Key outcomes.** Four programs explicitly target all four key outcomes: environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation and mitigation, food security and nutrition, and resilient livelihoods with equitable socioeconomic benefits. GGP delivers strongly on environmental, climate, and socioeconomic outcomes but does not directly address food security or nutrition, making it the only program with three out of four outcomes. Overall, FSIP and FOLUR offer the most comprehensive integration of outcomes within broader systems transformation efforts.

Overall, all programs engage comprehensively with natural, core, and value chain elements, with FSIP standing out as the most holistic. Each contributes significantly to global environmental benefits, though with varying emphasis; FSIP leads in breadth, while CFI focuses on marine systems. All five address the six systemic drivers of transformation and multiple root causes, with FSIP, FOLUR, and CFI covering the broadest range. FSIP and GGP demonstrate the most inclusive engagement across key actor groups and intervention levels. Four of the five programs explicitly integrate environmental, climate, nutrition, and socioeconomic outcomes, reflecting a maturing, multidimensional approach to food systems change.

Table E.1 Heatmap of program framework document analysis for food systems programs

Analytical item	RFS	FOLUR	FSIP	CFI	GGP
Food system elements	High	High	High	High	High
Global environmental benefits	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Medium
Drivers	High	High	High	High	High
Root causes	Medium	High	Medium	High	Low
Actors targeted and levels of intervention	Medium	Medium	High	Low	High
Key outcomes	High	High	High	High	Medium
Overall rating	Medium/High	High	High	Medium	Medium

Note: RFS = Resilient Food Systems Integrated Approach Pilot; FOLUR = Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program; FSIP = Food Systems Integrated Program; CFI = Coastal Fisheries Initiative; GGP = Good Growth Partnership Integrated Approach Pilot.

- **High.** Program demonstrates holistic and integrated approach to food systems transformation, indicates an understanding of the multiple forces shaping food systems, and ensures a systemic approach (3 food system elements; 5–6 global environmental benefits; 6 drivers; ≤ 7–8 root causes; 9–10 actors across all relevant levels; 4 key outcomes).
- **Medium.** Program takes a solid but not exhaustive approach to addressing systemic challenges and many—but not all—of the underlying issues that disrupt food system sustainability and equity. Has good but not full engagement with all stakeholders across the system and effective impact, but leaves some areas partially unaddressed (3 food system elements: 4 global environmental benefits; 5 drivers; 6 root causes; ≥ 7–8 actors: 3 key outcomes).
- **Low.** Program may be well-intentioned and locally effective, but limited systemic change, and lacks the complexity and reach required for meaningful transformation at scale. It addresses food systems elements with limited scope and integration; leaves important system dynamics untouched; and is missing critical factors that perpetuate vulnerability, inequality, or environmental degradation. Actor engagement is insufficient at uneven or inappropriate levels (3 food system elements; 3 global environmental benefits; 4 drivers; 5 root causes; ≤ 6 actors; 2 key outcomes).

Annex F

Quality-at-entry analysis

Table F.1 provides the universe of quality-at-entry analysis.

Table F.1 Universe of quality-at-entry analysis

Item	No.
Total project count	69
Number of child projects	52
Coastal Fisheries Initiative	5
Good Growth Partnership	5
Resilient Food Systems	13
Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration	28
Food Systems Integrated Program	1
Number of stand-alone projects	17

Design: systems thinking

Outcomes addressed in project design

Food systems projects identified a wide range of outcomes, with the greatest focus on land degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity conservation. Community resilience, decreased use of fossil energy resources, food safety and quality, and food waste management were rarely addressed.

Child projects usually included related activities and indicators in the results framework to address the concerns identified in the project document (table F.2). The exceptions to this trend are poverty reduction (35 percent of projects identified as a concern, 13 percent included a specific indicator) and food security (42 percent of projects identified as a concern, 25 percent included a specific indicator).

Food system elements addressed in child project design

Child projects focus heavily on production, followed by processing and distribution (table F.3). They address core food system elements through project activities more often than they are explicitly acknowledged in the project document or results framework. Knowledge and finance are the main core system entry points. Child projects consistently address all natural system elements except for minerals.

Other elements of systems thinking

Child and stand-alone project activities alike targeted several levels, with a greater share of child projects targeting individuals and households (table F.4). Environmental and economic impact drivers of food systems change were most discussed in child project and stand-alone project documents. Few child projects addressed individual or science and technology impact drivers.

Economic and political country-specific root causes of food systems challenges are discussed by the greatest share of projects. Misaligned incentives are discussed much more frequently by child projects than by stand-alone projects.

Table F.2 Outcomes addressed in project design (% of total project count)

Outcome	Identified as concern in project document	Addressed in project components/ activities	At least 1 indicator specified in results framework
Conservation and enhanced carbon stocks in agriculture	21	23	21
Maintaining capacity of natural systems to sequester carbon	35	27	27
Decreased use of fossil energy resources	2	12	6
Climate adaptation	33	31	19
Land degradation	85	81	77
Deforestation	75	69	62
Water use	46	37	35
Pollution, siltation, and eutrophication	27	12	8
Biodiversity conservation	69	71	56
Food security	42	29	25
Nutrition	21	12	8
Health (human or environmental)	12	6	6
Food waste management	2	2	0
Food safety and quality	4	2	2
Poverty reduction	35	17	13
Community resilience	4	4	2
Enhanced sustainable livelihoods for local communities and forest-dependent people	37	50	48
Fair and equitable benefits sharing	21	27	21

Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

While 90 percent of child projects discuss environmental impact drivers, a much smaller share of projects (31 percent) identify climate change as a country-specific root cause of food system challenges (figures F.1 and F.2). Sixty percent of child projects support integration in terms of policy and science linkages. Ninety-four percent of child project documents discuss interventions to create synergies between global environmental benefits and social and economic co-benefits, while 100 percent of stand-alone project documents discuss such synergies.

Design: gender and social inclusion

Planning

Many projects did not include a gender expert on the team in the design stage, and only 10 percent considered the unintended consequences of changing gender dynamics through project activities (table F.5).

Yet nearly all projects included gender-responsive measures, and most developed an action plan (65 percent) and/or included a gender mainstreaming strategy (77 percent).

Table F.3 Food system elements addressed in child project design (% of total project count)

Element	Identified as concern in project document	Addressed in project components/activities	At least 1 indicator specified in results framework
Production	94	92	90
Postproduction/storage	10	17	10
Processing	31	37	21
Aggregation	10	12	4
Distribution	23	31	21
Consumption	19	10	10
Access to natural resources	33	25	19
Labor	10	8	10
Inputs	25	37	13
Knowledge	73	92	88
Finance	58	62	52
Other services	2	2	2
Climate	56	62	52
Water	40	37	33
Seed, soil, and land	77	79	75
Minerals	4	4	2
Ecosystems and genetics	65	62	62

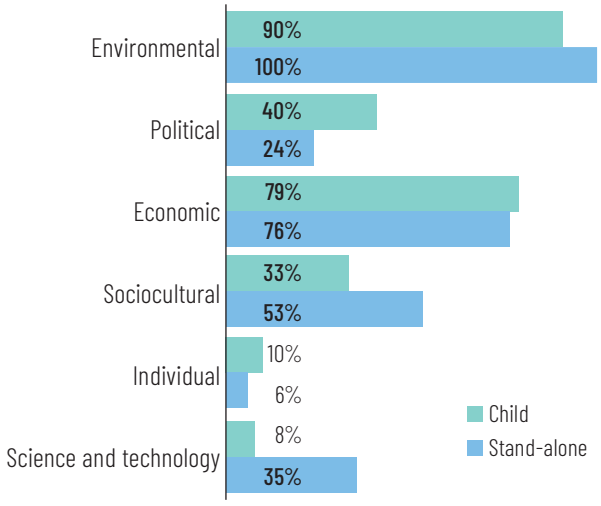
Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Table F.4 Impact drivers of food systems change addressed at project design (% of total project count)

Level	Child	Stand-alone
Individual/household	81	65
Farm/producer organization	48	59
Community	50	71
Landscape	83	47
Value chain/supply chain	63	65
Regional	42	12
National	60	82
Supranational/transboundary	13	18

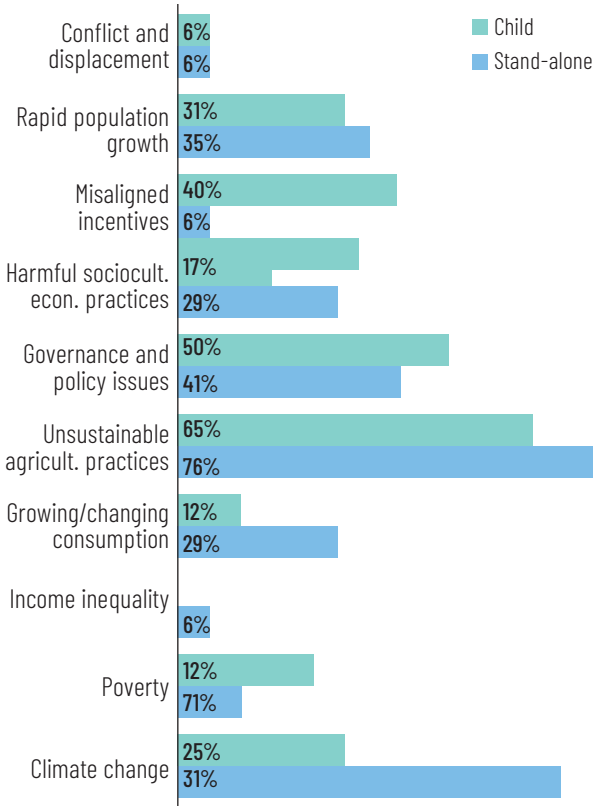
Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Figure F.1 Distribution of project documents that discuss impact drivers of food systems change for child versus stand-alone projects



Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Figure F.2 Distribution of project documents that discuss country-specific root causes of food systems challenges for child versus stand-alone projects



Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Table F.5 Planning for gender inclusion (%)

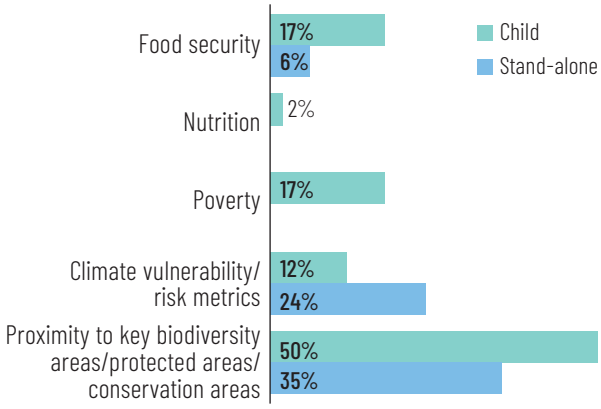
Element	%
Developed gender action plan	65
Included gender mainstreaming strategy across all project activities/components	77
Included gender-responsive measures/project components to address the gender gap in agriculture and/or promote gender equality and women's empowerment as key food systems actors	96
Considered the unintended consequences of changing gender dynamics through project activities	10
Gender expert on team in the design stage	23
Gender expert on project implementation team	58

Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Implementation

Food systems projects most often included activities targeting specific beneficiaries based on proximity to key biodiversity areas, protected areas, and conservation areas, climate vulnerability/risk metrics, food security, and poverty (figure F.3).

Figure F.3 Distribution of project documents that describe targeting of activities for specific beneficiaries for child versus stand-alone projects



Source: Project documents (n = 69).

All country child projects and stand-alone projects include gender-responsive measures/project components to address the gender gap in agriculture and/or promote gender equality and women's empowerment as key food systems actors. The Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI) and Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration (FOLUR) global platform child project documents do not identify such measures.

Results

Child projects frequently aim to strengthen women's capacities and skills, both on the farm and in agrifood business, and to improve women's employment opportunities in the agrifood sector. There is also a notable focus on closing the gender gap in access to agricultural finance.

Few projects focused on improving women's decision-making related to food consumption behaviors (8 percent) or on increasing their decision-making in the household/farm (21 percent) (table F.6). Over a third of projects (n = 29) sought additional gender-related results not captured in the quality-at-entry tool, including related to enhancing women's positions in their communities, promoting labor-saving technologies to ease unpaid workloads, and improving understanding of gender-related concepts among public and private sector partners.

Table F.6 Expected gender-related results in project design (% of total project count)

Result	Expected result	At least 1 indicator specified in results framework
Improving women's decision-making related to food consumption behaviors	8	4
Improving women's participation in producer organizations	19	13
Strengthening women's capacities and skills as farmers	63	48
Increasing women's agricultural productivity	25	15
Increasing women's decision-making in the household/farm	21	15
Improving women's employment opportunities in the agrifood sector	40	31
Strengthening women's business capacities and skills in the agrifood sector	54	42
Closing the gender gap in land ownership	10	6
Closing the gender gap in livestock ownership	2	2
Closing the gender gap in access to agricultural inputs and equipment	23	19
Closing the gender gap in access to water and irrigation	6	2
Closing the gender gap in access to agricultural markets	23	21
Closing the gender gap in access to agricultural finance and other services	38	27
Reducing gender-based violence	4	4

Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Fifty-four percent of Resilient Food Systems (RFS) country child projects sought to increase women's participation and decision-making in natural resource management, primarily through ensuring their inclusion in landscape and regional governance mechanisms.

Relevance

Child projects and stand-alone projects discuss alignment with country policies, programs, priorities, and needs across topics of interest to a similar degree, with a slightly higher share among child projects for most topics related to natural resource management and socioeconomic development (figure F.4). Outliers include land use and/or forest management, biodiversity conservation, agriculture, and water resource management.

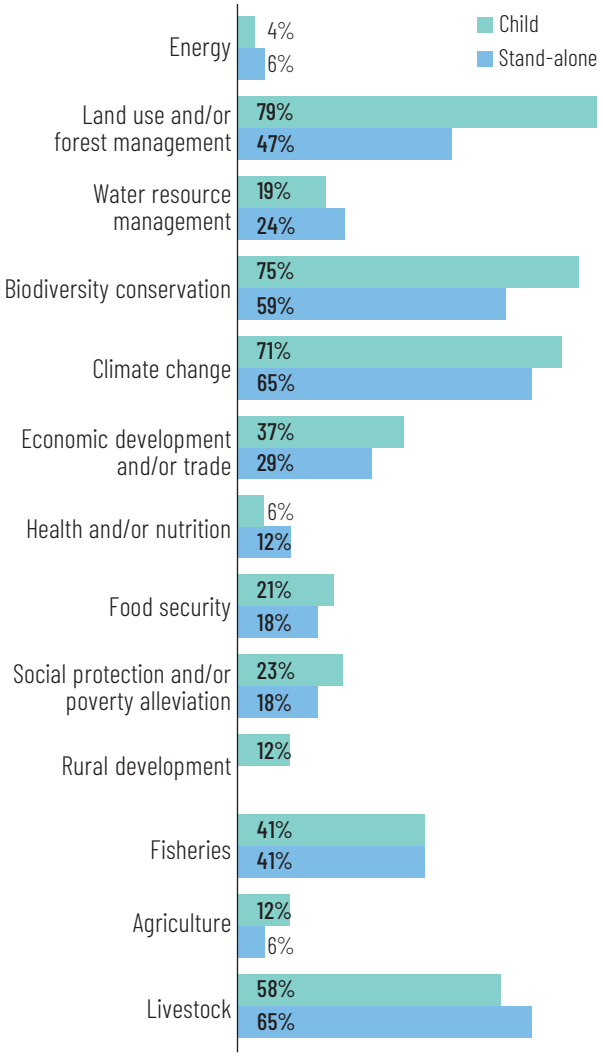
Innovation

Digital platforms are the innovative approach or technology used most often by food systems projects (44 percent of child projects, 71 percent of stand-alone projects), followed by geographic information systems (GIS) (23 percent of child projects, 24 percent of stand-alone projects) (figure F.5).

Traditional knowledge

Forty-three percent of food systems projects (40 percent of child projects, 53 percent of stand-alone projects) incorporated traditional knowledge/traditional ecological knowledge/Indigenous knowledge systems into the design of project components and activities.

Figure F.4 Alignment with country priorities (% of total project count)



Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Private sector engagement

Private sector engagement was varied across the portfolio, with the greatest share of both child and stand-alone projects using sustainable supply chain initiatives (table F.7). Only 4 percent of child projects explicitly used corporate social responsibility to engage private firms. The most used method for private sector engagement varied by program (figure F.6):

- CFI: 80 percent of projects used public-private partnerships
- RFS: 46 percent of projects used capacity building
- Good Growth Partnership (GGP): 100 percent of projects used sustainable supply chain initiatives
- FOLUR: 64 percent of projects used incentives for sustainable practices.

Stakeholder engagement

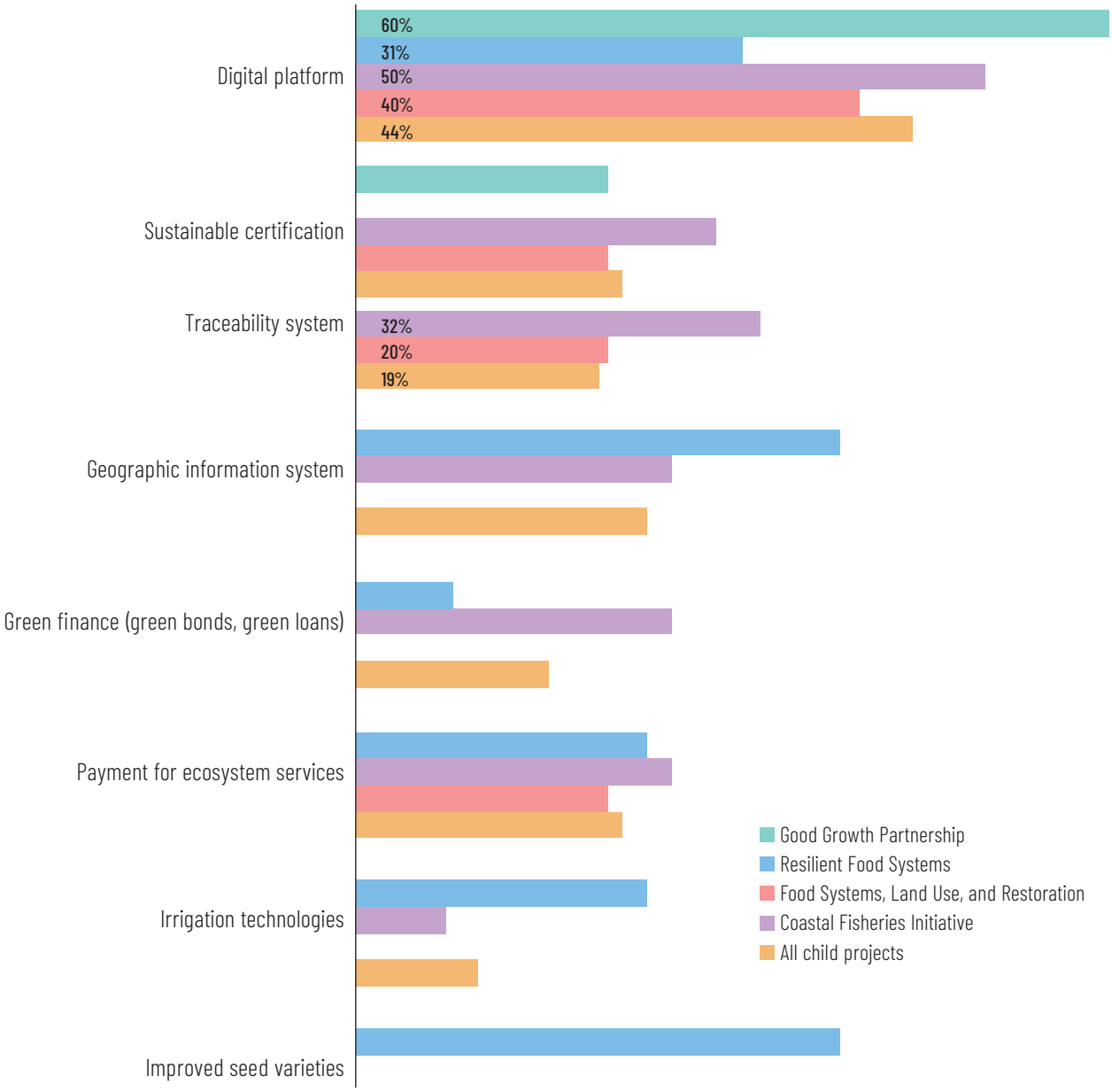
Eighty-three percent of child projects showed evidence of stakeholder mapping/analysis of the country's food system. Child projects planned to engage a broader range of stakeholders during implementation than those who were consulted during project design. The group of stakeholders involved in decision-making during implementation was much less diverse (table F.8).

Table F.7 Private sector engagement strategy identified in project design (% of total project count)

Method	Child	Stand-alone
Public-private partnerships	46	53
Incentives for sustainable practices	50	47
Sustainable supply chain initiatives	54	71
Market-based solutions	37	47
Corporate social responsibility	4	0
Capacity building	46	71
Knowledge sharing	29	41

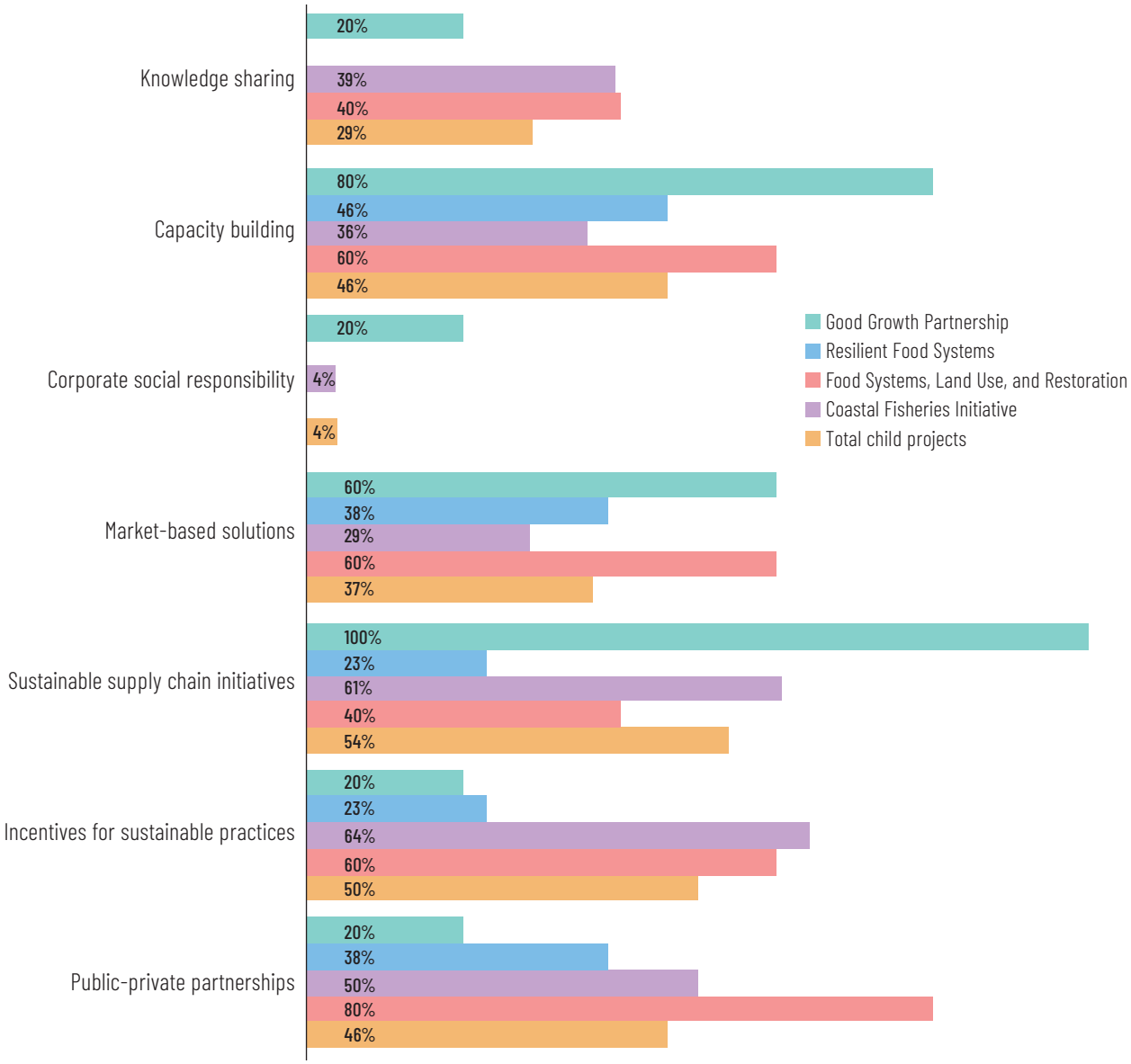
Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Figure F.5 **Innovation types identified at project design, by program (% of total project count)**



Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

Figure F.6 **Strategies noted in project plans to engage private sector, by program (% of total project count)**



Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

Table F.8 Number of stakeholders engaged in child projects

Stakeholder	Consulted during project design	Planned to be engaged during implementation	Planned to be engaged in project decision-making during implementation
Women and girls	60	83	12
Indigenous Peoples	42	46	4
Local communities	60	79	4
Youth	21	35	0
Persons with disabilities	8	6	0
Producer organizations	40	65	8
Input and output traders	12	15	2
Processors	8	17	2
Distributors/retailers	6	13	0
Waste managers	0	0	0
Civil society organizations/community-based organizations	62	83	15
International nongovernmental organizations	35	54	8
Agricultural/food small and medium enterprises	27	38	0
Financial institutions	15	31	2
Agribusiness (national and international)	27	33	4
Subnational government agencies (e.g., provincial, municipal)	44	62	21
Local government agencies (e.g., district, community)	37	60	12
Regional bodies	17	21	8
International development organizations	52	69	29
Research and development institutions including universities	60	69	15

Source: Project documents.

The ministries of agriculture/animal/fisheries and environment/natural resources, respectively, were most commonly the executing agency (37 percent and 33 percent).

Other ministries/departments/agencies were sometimes involved in specific project activities (forest: 38 percent; water: 27 percent; planning: 27 percent; economy/finance/trade: 29 percent), and less frequently involved in the project steering committee. One hundred percent of child projects included activities aimed at facilitating multistakeholder engagement, compared to 88 percent of stand-alone projects.

Most projects (68 percent) included at least one indicator related to improving implementation through multistakeholder engagement mechanisms (table F.9). Seventy-seven percent of child projects included knowledge sharing or joint activities with other donor funded projects in country, compared to 94 percent of stand-alone projects. Four percent of child projects ($n = 2$) identified conflicts or duplication with initiatives supported by other donors in the country.

Table F.9 Uses of child project multistakeholder engagement mechanisms (% of total project count)

Mechanisms	Expected results	At least one indicator is specified
Improve coherent decision-making on laws, policies, strategies and regulations	50	44
Increase buy-in and support	37	27
Improve resource utilization	8	6
Reduce risks and conflicts	17	12
Improve implementation	83	69
Promote sustainability of other project results	12	8

Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

Policy coherence

Seventy-one percent of child projects discuss policy misalignment in project documents, compared to 88 percent of stand-alone projects. Sixty-five percent of these child projects discuss trade-offs or misalignment between agricultural production policies and environmental and climate goals. Thirty percent discuss short-term gains versus long-term sustainability in the agriculture sector. Few projects discuss policy misalignment for livestock or fisheries. Ninety-five percent of child projects designed interventions to address the identified policy misalignment (table F.10).

Nearly all child projects that sought policy coherence outcomes pursued horizontal (51 percent) or vertical (19 percent) policy coherence, or both (22 percent).

Programmatic value addition

Child project design incorporated guidance or knowledge from the global program most often related to monitoring and evaluation (63 percent), project components (50 percent), and knowledge management (50 percent) (table F.11). Twenty-nine percent of child projects did not include any information from the global program in their design; this was driven primarily by RFS (85 percent) and GGP (100 percent).

Eighty-five percent of child projects include linkages with other child projects in the same integrated/impact program. All CFI and GGP projects identified such linkages, while 86 percent of FOLUR projects and 69 percent of RFS projects identified them.

Table F.10 Child project policy coherence activities(% of total project count)

Intervention	Expected results	At least one indicator is specified
Policy review	30	27
Improve legal, regulatory framework	27	24
Establish multisectoral coordination mechanism (e.g., across environment, agriculture, health and nutrition)	73	68
Institutional capacity building	49	43
M&E systems for policy implementation	14	14
Champions for policy coherence	0	0

Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

Table F.11 Knowledge from global program incorporated into child project design (% of total project count)

Item	%
Monitoring and evaluation (e.g., indicators)	63
Theories of change	40
Project components	50
Gender and social inclusion	8
Multistakeholder country engagement/platforms	8
Knowledge management	50
None	29
Other	4

Source: Project documents (*n* = 69).

Child project activities frequently included engagement with the global hub project, but this engagement was less frequently incorporated into the budget or results framework (table F.12). Eighty-five percent of child projects described how the project-level results framework aligns with the global program parent/hub project. None of the GGP projects included such a description.

Seventy-nine percent of child project results framework measured at higher scales, including the sector and value chain levels, compared to 88 percent of stand-alone projects.

Sixty-five percent of child projects included activities designed to work at transboundary (e.g., regional or global) scales, driven by the large share (96 percent) of FOLUR projects with such activities.

Seventy percent of FOLUR projects working at transboundary scales planned to work with sector-based platforms/roundtables/coalitions, followed by 30 percent working with market-based trade initiatives and 19 percent working with agribusinesses involved in purchasing, trading, transporting, processing, and/or adding value.

Table F.12 Activities, budget, and indicators for child project engagement with global hub project (% of total project count)

Inclusion	Activities	Budget	At least 1 indicator specified
Knowledge management activities that contribute to the global program (e.g., case studies, success stories, learning, expertise)	69	40	31
Participation in global hub project activities (e.g., annual meeting, regional or commodity related events, communities of practice, South-South learning, etc)	79	63	52
Technical assistance from the global hub project	31	8	2
Linkages with other child projects under the program (e.g., South-South exchanges or project visits)	73	33	23

Source: Project documents (n = 69).

Annex G

Online survey results

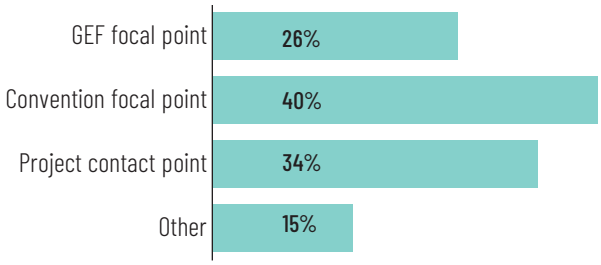
The online survey was sent to 709 stakeholders over the period from February 6 to March 31, 2025. The survey had 136 completed responses, for a response rate of 19 percent.

The majority of the respondents are government stakeholders (69 percent, 94), serving as convention focal points (40 percent), project contact points (34 percent), or GEF operational/political focal points (26 percent).

Q1: Which type of organization do you belong to?

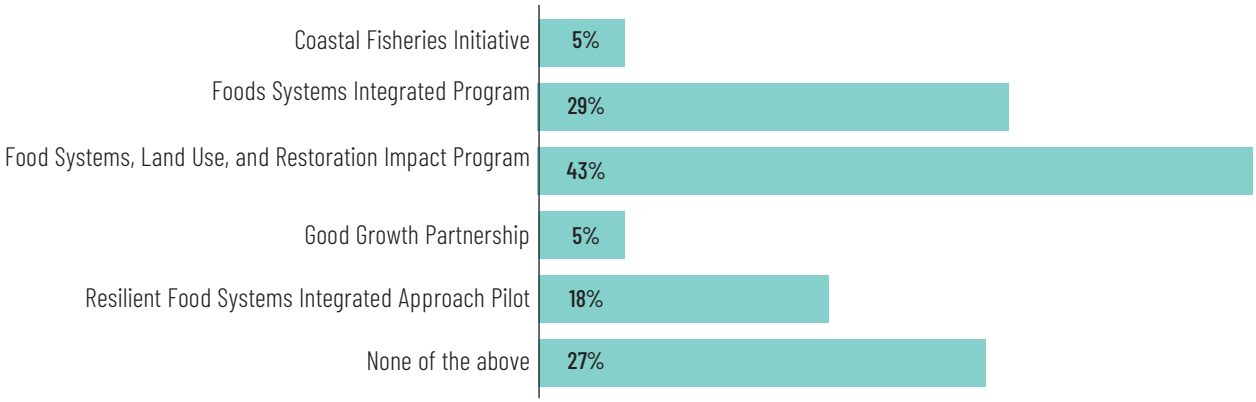
n = 136.

Q2: As a government actor, which of the following describe your function?



n = 94.

Q3: Which specific programs have you been involved in?

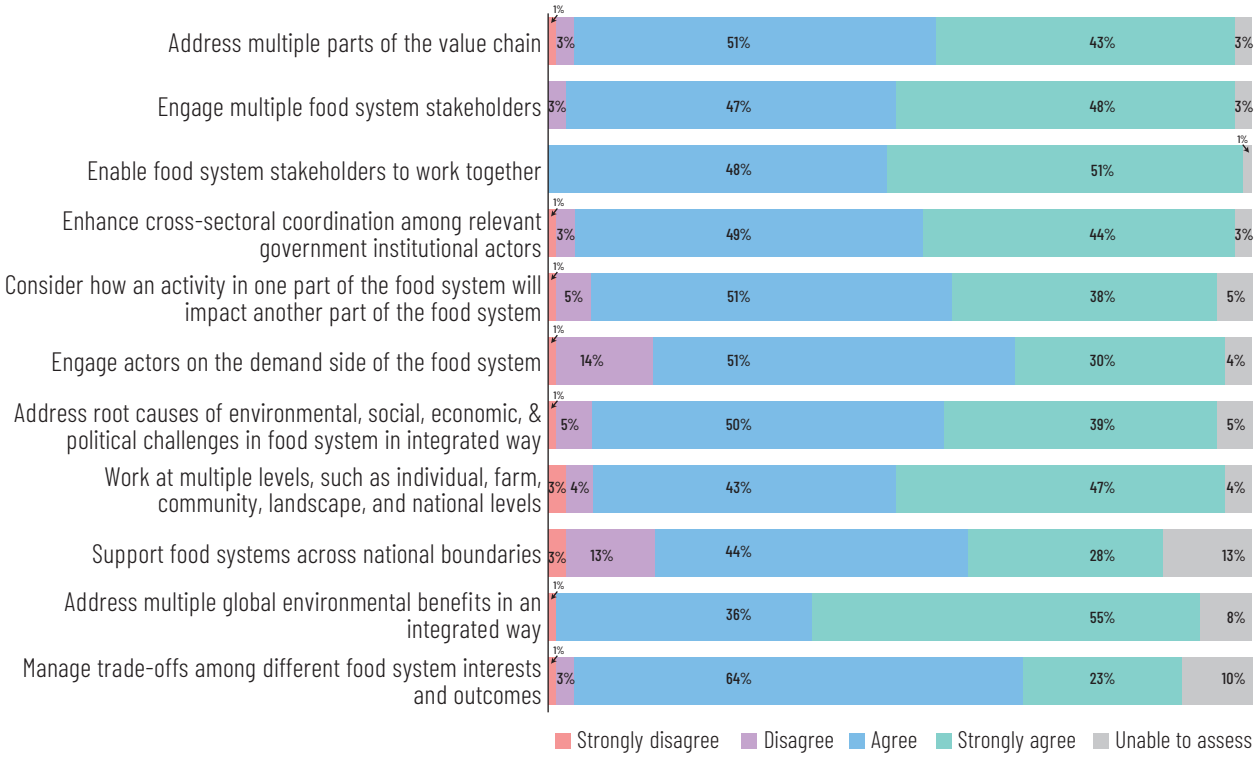


n = 136.

Q4: To what extent do GEF integrated programs apply a food system approach?

The agreement level is well above 70 percent for all statements under Q4. "Enable food system stakeholders to work together" has the highest level of agreement (99 percent); "support food systems across national boundaries" has the lowest level of agreement (72 percent).

Integrated programs adequately...

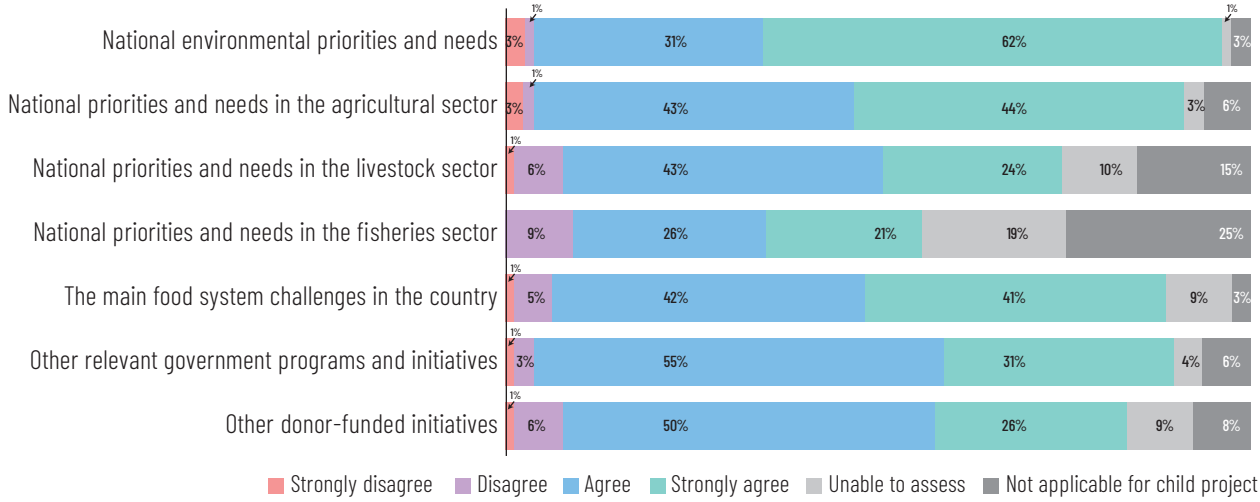


n = 80.

Q5: To what extent do country child projects align with national priorities and other initiatives?

The agreement level varies for the statements under Q5. Country child projects align with "national environmental priorities and needs" has the highest level of agreement (92 percent), while alignment with "national priorities and needs in the fisheries sector" and with "national priorities and needs in the livestock sector" was at 47 percent and 67 percent, respectively.

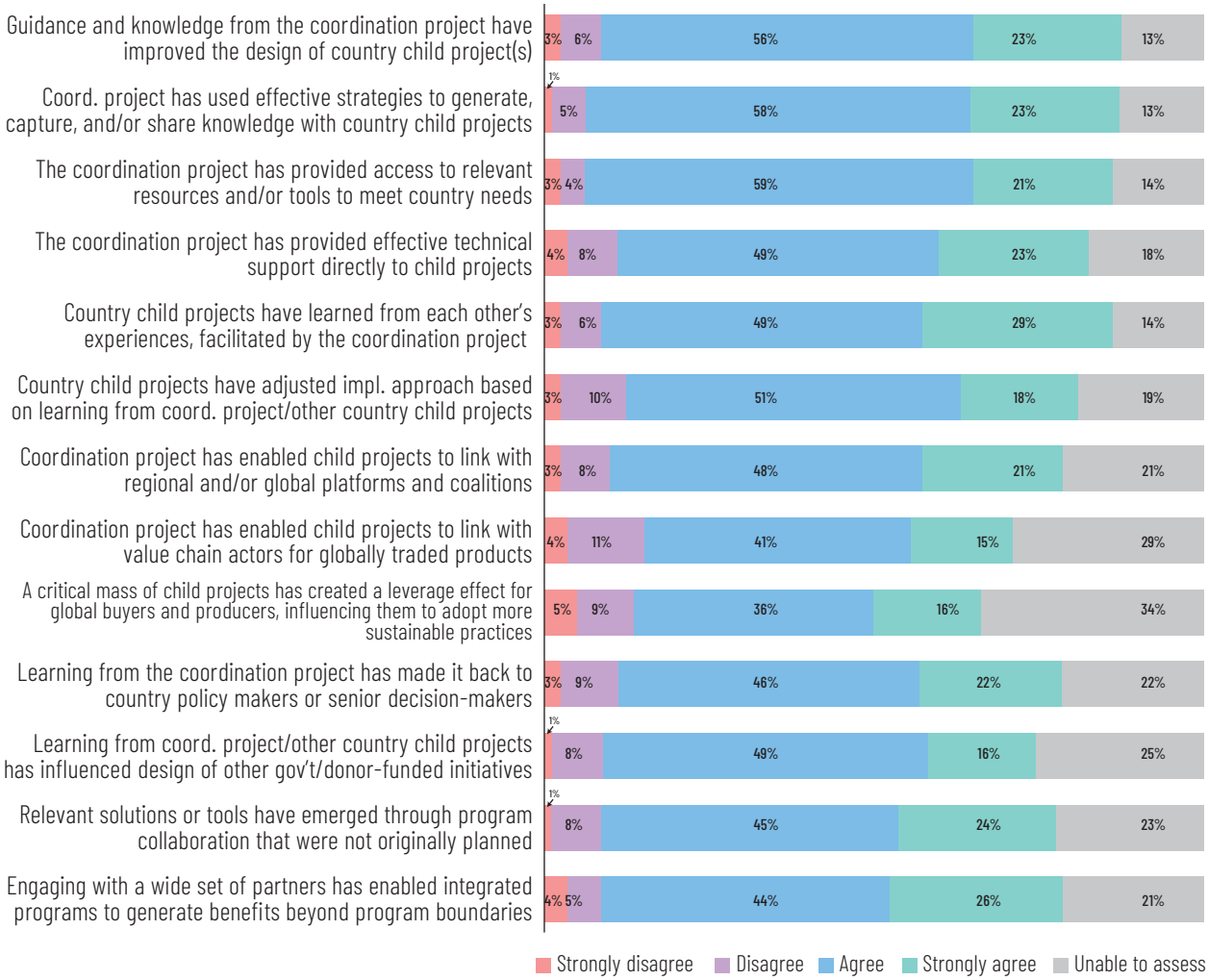
Country child projects are well aligned with...



n = 80.

Q6: What has been the added value of using an integrated program approach, compared to a stand-alone project approach?

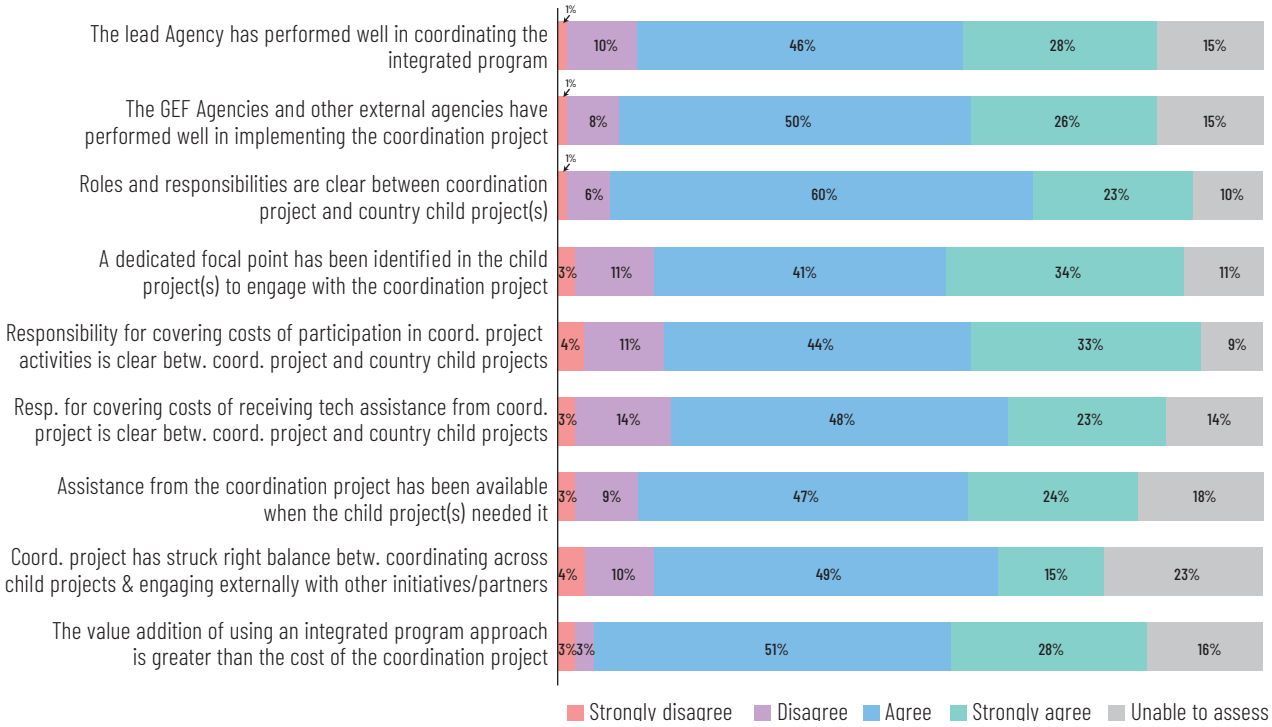
Eighty percent of respondents perceived the added value of using an integrated program approach as "the coordination project has used effective strategies to generate, capture, and/or share knowledge with country child projects" (81 percent) And "The coordination project has provided access to relevant resources and/or tools to meet country needs" (80 percent). The agreement level was low for the statement related to "a critical mass of child projects has created a leverage effect for global buyers and producers, influencing them to adopt more sustainable practices" (53 percent), and "the coordination project has enabled child projects to link with value chain actors for globally traded products" (56 percent).



n = 80.

Q7: Have the integrated programs' management systems been transparent, effective, and efficient?

Eighty-three percent of respondents agree that "roles and responsibilities are clear between the coordination project and country child project(s)," which is the highest agreement level among all statements, followed by "the value addition of using an integrated program approach is greater than the cost of the coordination project" (78 percent). "The coordination project has struck the right balance between coordinating across child projects and engaging externally with other initiatives and partners" has the lowest level of agreement at 64 percent.



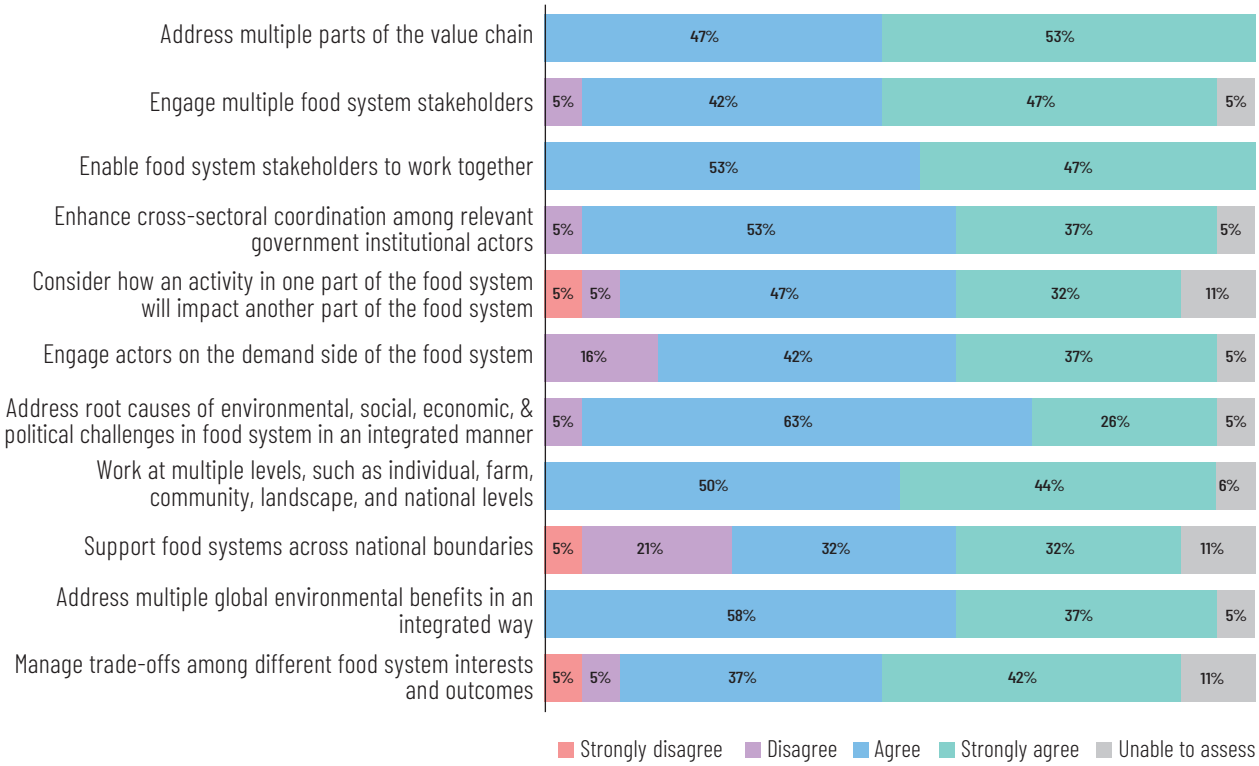
n = 80.

Food Systems Integrated Program–only questions

Q8: To what extent does the GEF-8 Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP) apply a food system approach?

All 19 respondents agree that FSIP adequately plans to "engage multiple food system stakeholders" and "enable food system stakeholders to work together." The agreement level was low at 63 percent for the statement that FSIP plans to "support food systems across national boundaries."

The Food Systems Integrated Program adequately plans to...

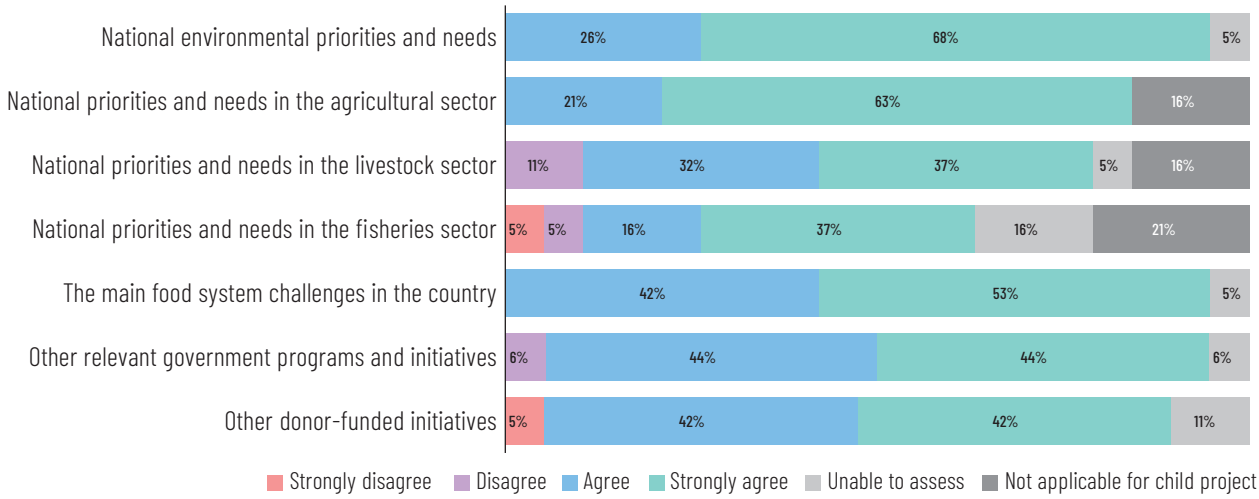


n = 19.

Q9: To what extent do FSIP country child projects align with national priorities and other initiatives?

Ninety-five percent of respondents agree that the country child project under FSIP is well aligned with "national environmental priorities and needs" and "the main food system challenges in the country." Alignment with "national priorities and needs in the fisheries sector" and "national priorities and needs in the livestock sector" has the lowest levels of agreement, at 53 percent and 68 percent, respectively.

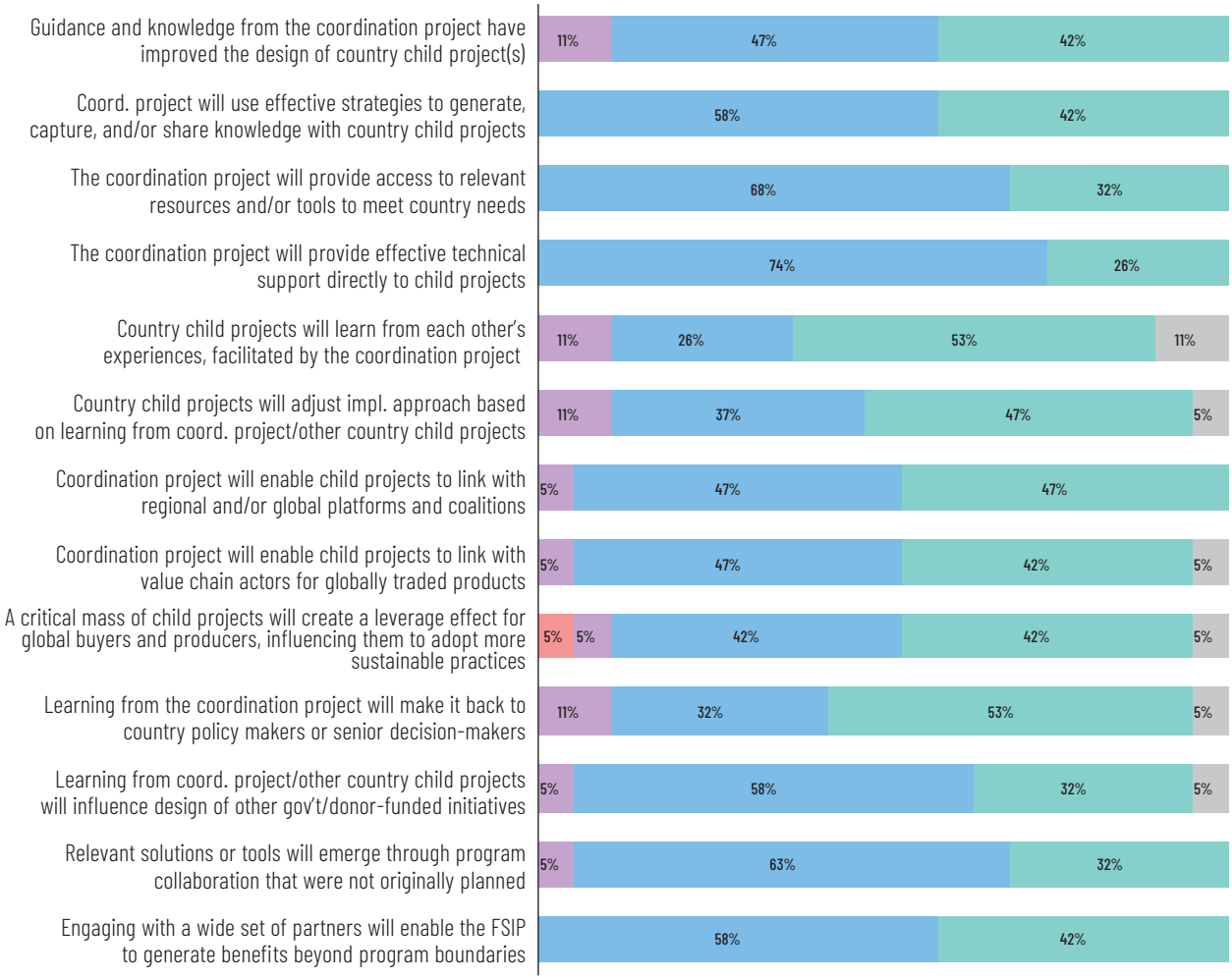
The country child project is well aligned with...



n = 19.

Q10: What do you expect to be the added value of using an integrated program approach in FSIP, compared to a stand-alone project approach?

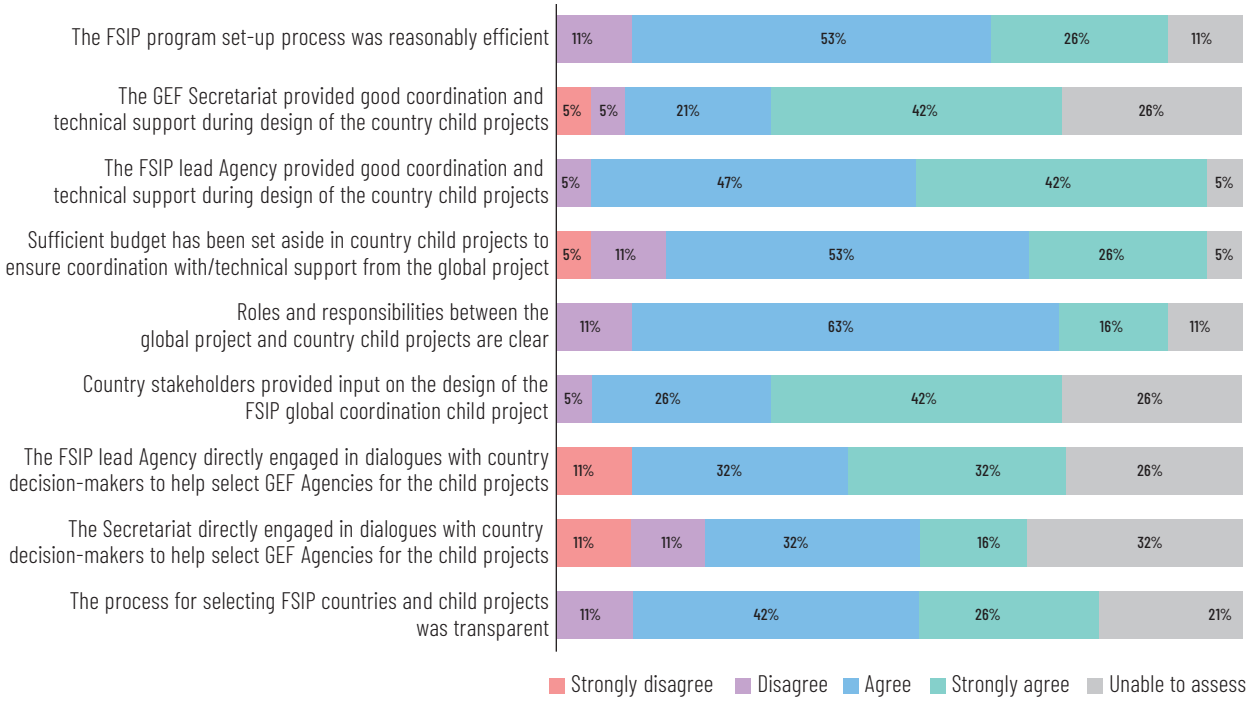
All 19 respondents agree that the added value of using an integrated program approach in FSIP are the following: "the coordination project will use effective strategies to generate, capture, and/or share knowledge with country child projects"; "the coordination project will provide access to relevant resources and/or tools to meet country needs"; and "the coordination project will provide effective technical support directly to child projects." "Country child projects will learn from each other's experiences, facilitated by the coordination project" has the lowest level of agreement at 79 percent.



n = 19.

Q11: Have FSIP decision-making processes been transparent, efficient, and equitable?

"The FSIP lead Agency provided good coordination and technical support during design of the country child projects" has the highest level of agreement at 89 percent, while "the Secretariat directly engaged in dialogues with country decision-makers to help select GEF Agencies for the child projects" has the lowest level of agreement at 47 percent. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agree that "the process for selecting FSIP countries and child projects was transparent," and 79 percent agree that "the FSIP program set-up process was reasonably efficient."



n = 19.

Annex H

Country case study selection criteria

The GEF IEO selected six initial candidate countries (Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Nigeria, Peru, and Tanzania) with multiple food systems child projects to ensure that case studies could capture evidence of how GEF-8 interventions have built on GEF-6 and GEF-7 learning. The evaluation team further purposively selected four countries for case study: Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, and Tanzania. All four countries have food systems child projects for GEF-6, GEF-7, and GEF-8, with variation across the GEF-6 programs. The GEF food systems portfolio includes four countries (Brazil, Ghana, Kenya, and Senegal) with a financially closed child project and one country (Indonesia) with a stand-alone project and multiple program child projects. These factors were considered in the country case study selection, as were variation across regions, GEF Agencies, and sectors targeted through the Food Systems Integrated Program. These selected case study countries are shown in table H.1.

Table H.1 Case study country attributes

Criterion		Ghana	Indonesia	Peru	Tanzania
Region		West Africa	Asia & Pacific	Latin America	East Africa
Number of food systems projects		3[a]	4[b]	3	3
GEF-6 program	Resilient Food Systems	●			●
	Good Growth Partnership		●		
	Coastal Fisheries Initiative		●	●	
GEF-8 target sector	Food crops				●
	Livestock		●	●	●
	Commodities	●			
	Aquaculture				●
GEF Agency	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations		●	●	●
	International Fund for Agricultural Development				●
	United Nations Development Programme		●	●	
	World Bank	●			
	World Wildlife Fund-US		●		●

Source: GEF Portal; project documents.

Note: Counts include country-specific program child projects and stand-alone projects, but do not include regional or global hub projects. The exception is for Peru, where CFI was implemented in Peru and Ecuador through one regional project.

a. Includes one financially closed food systems child project.

b. Includes one active stand-alone project on food systems.

Annex I

Interviewees

Andrew Hume, GEF Secretariat

Astrid Hillers, GEF Secretariat

Mohamed Bakarr, GEF Secretariat

Matthew Ready, GEF Secretariat

Cyril Blet, GEF Secretariat

Peter Umunay, GEF Secretariat

Teayeon Kim, GEF Secretariat

Mark Stafford Smith, GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)

Guadalupe Duron, STAP

Lorenzo Paolo Galbiati, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Fatou Sock, FAO

Hernan Gonzalez, FAO

Patrick Kalas, FAO

Adrian Barrance, FAO

Carley Willis, Global Landscapes Forum (GLF)

Ludwig Liagre, GLF

John Colmey, GLF

Rodrigo Ciannella, International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF)

Paola Palestini, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Michael Von During, IFAD

Dieter Fischer, International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Josefina Maiztegui, IFC

Pascale Bonzom, International Union for Conservation of Nature

Saswati Bora, The Nature Conservancy

Andrea Bina, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

James Leslie, UNDP

Pascal Fabie, UNDP

Robert Erath, United Nations Environment Programme

Lara Yacob, United Nations Environment Programme–Finance Initiative

Aline Mosnier, United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN)

Clara Douzal, UNSDSN

Rachel Collie, UNSDSN

Mimako Kobayashi, World Bank

Gayatri Kanungo, World Bank

Christopher Brett, World Bank

Dinara Akhmetova, World Bank

Ishita Kaushik, World Bank

Patti Kristjanson, World Bank

Claire Murphy McGreevey, World Bank

Deviah Aiama, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

Stefania Avanzini, WBCSD

Jared Messinger, World Resources Institute (WRI)

Farid Hakemi, WRI

Genna Tesdall, Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

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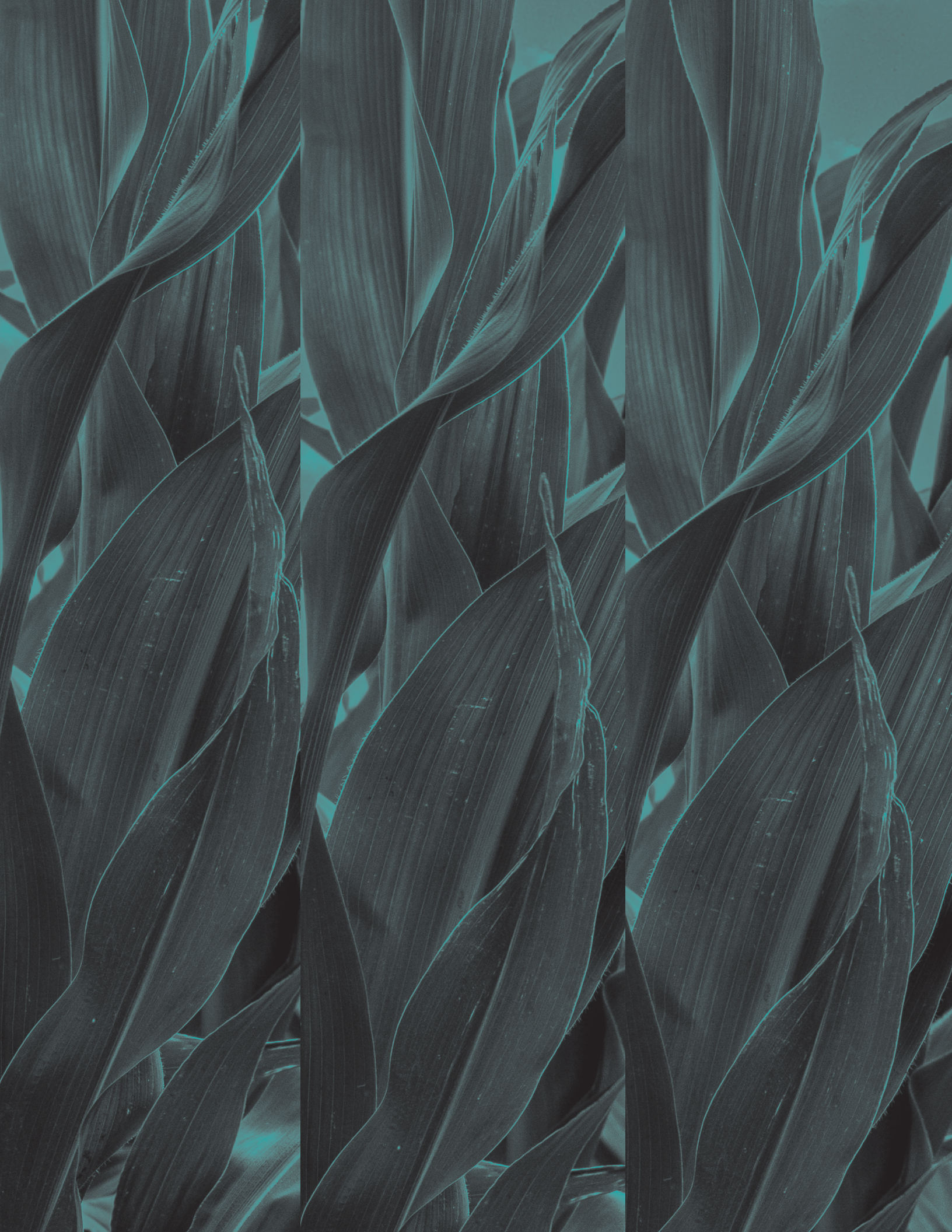

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