

GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Benin (1991–2007)



Photo: Sandra Romboli, GEF Evaluation Office

Benin is a coastal West African country with significant forests and biodiversity. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world with a rapidly deteriorating ecological situation, including loss of forest cover and land degradation. As a least developed country, Benin is vulnera-

ble to the effects of climate change through desertification, rising sea levels, water scarcity, and threats to agriculture. Benin also faces specific threats to its international waters and from persistent organic pollutants.

The country has received Global Environment Facility (GEF) financial support since 1991 consisting of several projects and activities implemented in collaboration with GEF Agencies. From October 2007 to February 2008, the GEF Evaluation Office evaluated GEF support to Benin. The assessment was part of a series of country portfolio evaluations examining the totality of GEF support across all GEF Agencies and programs, using a country as the unit of analysis. Benin, Madagascar, and South Africa were chosen for evaluation according to a process that included random selection and specific criteria. The Evaluation Office synthesized these evaluations in its *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008* to assess the experience and common issues across different countries on the continent.

The Benin evaluation focused on 13 GEF national projects that received \$21 million in GEF funding; the first three ongoing projects under the GEF Small Grants Programme worth a combined total of \$150,000; and five regional projects, for a total of \$49.2 million, in which Benin participates. The evaluation looked at project results and assessed how well projects are linked to national environmental and sustainable development strategies as well as to the GEF mandate.

Findings

Relevance

GEF support to Benin has been relevant, given the country's environmental and developmental priorities. GEF support has greatly benefited Benin's National Agenda 21 and environmental action plan through several projects addressing environmental challenges identified in these documents. Several GEF-supported projects originated in Beninese initiatives. GEF Implementing Agencies deserve criticism, however, for insufficient consultations with government authorities on some GEF-supported initiatives.

Results and Effectiveness

The global environmental impacts of GEF support for Benin are sustainable. The GEF portfolio consists primarily of enabling activities, so global environmental impacts are somewhat limited to date. Some large-scale projects, however, have demonstrated ongoing global environmental impacts years after GEF support ended. In Pendjari Park, elephant and western kob antelope populations have increased and illegal hunting has been reduced. Completion of one national project will sequester an estimated 915,000 tons of carbon equivalent.

The village-based comanagement models developed by GEF projects in Benin are sustainable in the long term and can be replicated. Several years after the projects have ended, local structures for comanaging natural resources and their related benefits still play a central role in the success and sustainability of agreed efforts through these initiatives.

Benin is now ready to begin effective implementation of the global conventions, which will ensure the sustainability of enabling activity results; however, several factors related to institutional, human, and financial capacities impede this implementation and the coordination it will require. Benin has developed core capacities, as well as detailed diagnoses, laws and regulations, strate-

gies, and action plans to apply these conventions through a range of enabling activities. Implementation of the conventions will be a much greater challenge in Benin, which has a limited number of active, international players in environmental issues, outside of the GEF.

Efficiency

The findings of the Joint GEF Activity Cycle evaluation were confirmed in Benin. For many stakeholders, the GEF project development cycle was too complex and lengthy, and often obscure. The definitive consequences of implementing a new shorter project cycle remain to be seen. The GEF must now demonstrate that the new project cycle, which stakeholders view positively, will not carry over negative aspects of the previous project cycle.

Benin lacks the capacity to develop project proposals, which affects its access to GEF funding. Lack of even basic capacities to develop persuasive GEF project proposals is a recurring theme in both government and civil society. Exacerbating the situation, Benin's focal point, the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection, is a new ministry with high employee turnover which is subject to civil service process reform, limiting its abilities to coordinate such projects.

The actions undertaken under the Benin GEF portfolio have generally incorporated a variety of mechanisms for sharing knowledge and disseminating information among different local stakeholder groups. In addition to more typical enabling activities, such as awareness-raising workshops with local stakeholders, community radio, and print publications, important actions to build awareness and disseminate project results include radio broadcasts in local languages, school visits to parks, environmental education, and university research.

Several opportunities to coordinate and develop GEF cross-cutting measures in Benin are not being fully exploited. One reason is the loss in 2005 of the Committee for the Coordination of GEF Activities (COCAFEM). Most projects are now implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection. Only the Small Grants Programme is implemented by nongovernmental organizations.

Recommendations

To the GEF Council

- The GEF must begin to consider potential courses of action to ensure an integrated and coordinated national approach.
- A greater effort must be made to strengthen the capacities of least developed countries such as Benin at different levels.
- Procedures must continue to be streamlined in order to increase access to GEF resources.

To the Government of Benin

- Benin must work closely with the GEF and its Agencies to develop new national and international partnerships (with other public actors, new private actors, or civil society) to implement global conventions that acknowledge the limits of GEF resources and its role as a catalyst, rather than as a driving force.
- It is imperative to reactivate and strengthen the coordinating mechanism of the focal point in Benin. It involves both identifying the operational focal point and revitalizing COCAFEM to ensure better coordination of the project concepts submitted and national strategic planning that is truly interdepartmental and intersectoral.
- In terms of decentralization, Benin must continue to use the sector programs and other initiatives to support the participatory comanagement model for resources developed with GEF support, which has proved effective.

The GEF Evaluation Office is an independent entity reporting directly to the GEF Council, mandated to evaluate the focal area programs and priorities of the GEF.

The full versions of the *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Benin (1991–2007)* and *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008* (Evaluation Report Nos. 41 and 44, 2008) are available in the Publications section of the GEF Evaluation Office Web site, www.gefeo.org. For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.