

GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Syria (1994–2008)



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The Syrian Arab Republic has been a long-standing partner of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), having received GEF financial support since 1994 for a variety of projects and activities in collaboration with the GEF

Agencies, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society. From November 2008 to March 2009, the GEF Evaluation Office carried out a country portfolio evaluation of GEF support to Syria for the period 1994–2008.

The evaluation had the following objectives:

- Independently evaluate the relevance and efficiency of GEF support
- Assess the effectiveness and results of completed and ongoing projects in each relevant focal area
- Provide feedback and knowledge sharing to the GEF Council in its decision-making process to allocate resources and develop policies and strategies, to the country on its participation in the GEF, and to the various agencies and organizations involved in the preparation and implementation of GEF support

GEF funding in Syria is estimated at about \$12.7 million for 10 national projects, in addition to national implementation of the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP). Biodiversity and climate change account for the largest shares of GEF support in Syria—40 and 44 percent of total GEF funding, respectively. Syria has participated in one regional international waters project, along the Mediterranean coast. In all, Syria has participated in seven regional and six global projects supported by the GEF.

Findings

Results and Effectiveness

GEF support to biodiversity conservation in Syria has yielded some impacts, specifically contributing to the formal protection of globally significant biodiversity and

strengthened management systems. Biodiversity projects supported by the GEF introduced alternative livelihood practices, which decrease threats to biodiversity, including local community dependence on such resources as medical and aromatic plants. These projects have supported activities that have increased the number of migratory birds flying into protected areas. In addition, one regional project helped disseminate over 16 target varieties of wild relatives of fruit trees and native species, and wild relatives and land races of wheat, barley, and legumes.

There are no data to estimate the direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but GEF support has influenced national energy efficiency laws with potential long-lasting impacts. One GEF-supported project established a target to reduce national energy consumption by 1.83 percent and carbon dioxide emissions by 765.5 tons by 2008. The SGP contributed to greenhouse gas reduction in Syria through biogas projects; these provide opportunities for communities and NGO groups to learn and replicate results in this focal area.

Long-term sustainability of achievements continues to be a challenge. Two issues emerged during the Syrian CPE shed light on why this is so. The first issue is related to the ability of the government to introduce policy changes in line with institutional and legal frameworks. The second relates to allocation of the necessary financial resources to implement required measures. Specifically, Syria's general financial framework law has constrained executing agencies from acquiring the funding they need to implement recommended measures in GEF projects.

Relevance

GEF support has addressed national priorities in the biodiversity and climate change areas; other national priorities, such as inland international waters and land degradation, have not been addressed. The GEF portfolio in biodiversity protection and climate change constituted about 84 percent of GEF funding in Syria. Projects in these areas are seen as responding more to a global or international

agenda. In contrast, water and land degradation are seen as national priorities.

Country ownership of the GEF portfolio is strong for national projects and less so for regional and global projects.

Concepts for national projects are typically proposed by the General Commission for Environmental Affairs (GCEA) in consultation with the GEF Agencies. Regional and global projects are usually initiated by the GEF Agencies and communicated to national government counterparts; these in turn consult with the GCEA to coordinate with relevant government agencies for approval to join the project.

Efficiency

The GEF is seen by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect project proposals and implementation. The time lag from project entry into the GEF pipeline to Council approval can vary from three months to four years; the lag between Council approval and project start-up can range from one to two years. The time period for the entire process (from entry into the GEF pipeline to project start-up) has ranged in Syria from 1.2 to 5.4 years.

Syria has limited access to GEF Agencies, since the World Bank does not have a program in the country, and Syria does not belong to any of the regional banks with direct GEF access. Among the GEF Agencies, Syria only participates in the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The World Bank has not had a lending program or country strategy in Syria since 1986, although it has provided support to the country through technical assistance in recent years. Furthermore, Syria is not a member of any of the regional development banks that can implement and manage GEF projects such as the Asian Development Bank and the African Development Bank.

The GEF focal point is overly internalized within the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, and there is no clear mechanism for developing and approving GEF-supported projects. Syria lacks a mechanism such as a national committee for setting priorities for developing and approving GEF projects. The deputy minister in the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, which is the primary executing agency for GEF projects in the country, serves as the GEF focal point.

Recommendations

To the GEF Council

- The GEF should increase its funding for land degradation and water management issues, both of which are high priorities for Syria and similar countries. In the future, GEF's support should include increased support to national projects combating land degradation and desertification; and increased support to regional projects on international inland waters. In particular, the GEF should provide support to the government of Syria based on the extensive experience it has acquired in this area in other parts of the world.
- The GEF should focus attention on those countries like Syria with limited access to GEF Agencies.

To the Syrian Government

- Syria should take a proactive role in creating appropriate financial instruments and establishing legislative and institutional frameworks to support the sustainability of GEF project results.
- Syria should establish a permanent GEF national coordination committee. The focal point mechanism should be strengthened through the establishment of a permanent GEF national committee. This committee should be linked to existing government development plans and strategies such as the 10th five-year development plan and the National Environmental Action Plan. Committee members would include convention focal points from the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs and the GCEA, a broad range of ministerial partners involved in GEF work, the SGP, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and academia

The *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009* (Evaluation Report No. 50) presents a synthesis of the three country portfolio evaluations undertaken in 2008–09 by the GEF Evaluation Office—Cameroon, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Syria—including their main findings and recommendations.

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 version of the *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Syria (1994–2008)* (Evaluation Report No. 52, 2009) is 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.