

IEC Learnings

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EVALUATION OF THE GEF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Policy frameworks that promote inclusion are critical for achieving durable global environmental benefits.

Key findings of evaluation



- The Stakeholder Engagement Policy is well designed, with realistic and appropriate requirements. The policy is mostly consistent with comparator institutions.
- Global Environment Facility (GEF) reporting guidelines for Agencies are clear, generally compatible with Agency practices, useful, and not onerous.
- The one-on-one support for policy implementation provided by the GEF Secretariat is very satisfactory and high quality. Policy-related support provided through training/orientation is seen as adequate, though not developed to provide deeper, role-specific content.
- Implementation constraints are noted in capacity to integrate meaningful stakeholder engagement into design and implementation, inadequate budget and time to undertake quality stakeholder engagement, and country contexts.
- Policy requirements cover the full project cycle but are front loaded. As a result, documentation tends to be focused more on compliance than on actual results. This information gap leads to limited or only anecdotal understanding on how the policies contribute to impact.
- A review of GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects shows improved compliance with policy requirements over time and increasing attention to stakeholder engagement, with some areas for improvement.
- Agencies describe an internal “nudging effect” from the introduction of the updated policy, motivating them to review and revise their own policies and deepen thinking across staff on the practice itself.

Including a broad array of stakeholders and incorporating their diverse perspectives can lead to better, more durable benefits for GEF projects and programs. The GEF's commitment to engaging with stakeholders is reflected in a series of policies, guidance, and strategies that have evolved over time to ensure that GEF Agencies are applying a uniform approach to include stakeholders across the GEF partnership. The [Stakeholder Engagement Policy](#) was adopted in 2017 and is an update of the [1996 Public Involvement Policy](#). It sets out the mandatory requirements for stakeholder engagement in three areas: project and program cycles; activities led by the Secretariat; and Agency policies, procedures, and capabilities. An evaluation was undertaken in 2021 to assess the coherence, relevance, and effectiveness of three GEF policies—on stakeholder engagement, gender equality, and environmental and social safeguards. This brief considers findings on the Stakeholder Engagement Policy.

The evaluation focuses on GEF-financed activities from GEF-6 and GEF-7 (with a cutoff date of July 2020). This is a mixed-methods evaluation utilizing quantitative and qualitative data. Data were collected from a stakeholder mapping exercise and validation, a theory of change exercise, desk reviews of policy documents, stakeholder interviews, online surveys; country case studies (Costa Rica and Mozambique), and a portfolio review comparing projects that were endorsed by the GEF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) before and after the policy was updated.

Strategic alignment and policy coherence

[The GEF Stakeholder Engagement Policy generally aligns with the policies of comparator organizations, with some areas that could be strengthened.](#) The evaluation conducted a benchmarking exercise to compare the updated Stakeholder Engagement Policy with that of five climate and development finance institutions and found that the GEF was in alignment with comparators in how stakeholder engagement is defined and its general stakeholder requirements for identification, planning and participation, and consultations. The GEF policy is less specific than comparators along two dimensions—information disclosure to project stakeholders and grievance redress. These two dimensions are instead addressed in a different GEF policy, on environmental and social safeguards.

Buy-in and support across the GEF partnership

[Overall, GEF Agencies describe the updated policy as well designed, with clear requirements that are realistic and appropriate.](#) The degree of buy-in and utilization of the policy by Agencies is conditioned by several factors: Agency type (United Nations, international financial institution, nongovernmental organization—NGO), its scale of operations, length of time as a GEF Agency, and the relative size of the GEF's participation in the Agency's portfolio of programs/projects.

[Other members of the GEF partnership are moderately familiar with the policy and their role in implementing it.](#) Among operational focal points surveyed by the evaluation, there is ambivalence on what is expected of them to support the policy. Twenty-nine percent of respondents said they were “completely clear” on their role in supporting policy implementation, while around 60 percent said they were “moderately clear.” About 55 percent of respondents could not recall participating in any session in which they had received information on the policy. The majority of civil society stakeholders surveyed were either “somewhat familiar” or “very familiar” with the policy, with GEF–Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network members more likely than non-Network peers to know the policy.

[Reporting guidelines are described as clear, useful, and not onerous.](#) Agencies newer to more complex social/environmental programming are more likely to seek additional guidance. The portal is mostly described as “getting better,” though with limitations remaining. One area of concern expressed by some Agencies is a lack of feedback on reporting—this leaves Agencies unsure whether or how reports are used and whether they meet expectations.

[Support for policy implementation provided by the GEF Secretariat is perceived as high quality.](#) Agency interviewees all assessed the one-on-one support for policy implementation provided by the GEF Secretariat as high quality. Policy support through trainings and orientations is described as adequate although not developed enough to provide more technical, role-specific content. Some Agencies have stakeholder engagement expertise to share, while others seek it. In this context, the GEF is seen as well placed to be an information and relationship broker.

Constraints on implementation by Agencies

[Constraints on implementation are noted by Agencies in three areas.](#) These are internal (Agency/project team) experience and capacity to integrate stakeholder engagement in design and implementation; resource constraints, that is, inadequate time and budget to undertake quality stakeholder engagement; and, in some countries, the prevailing social/political context which can lead to shifts in a country's disposition to undertake stakeholder engagement.

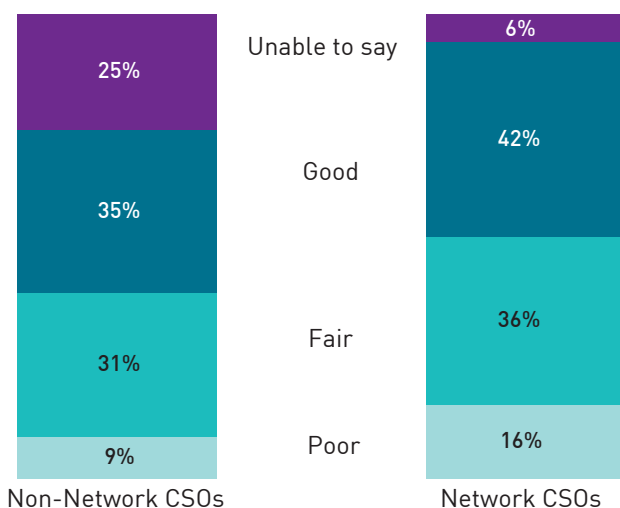
Adherence to policy: stakeholder engagement in GEF governance

The updated Stakeholder Engagement Policy sets out mandatory requirements for stakeholder engagement in activities led by the Secretariat including the development of policies, guidelines, and strategy.

Engagement in the development of policies, strategies, and guidance has varied on a case-by-case basis. There is no standard engagement practice in place for the GEF for these activities; however, there is discernible movement toward a multistakeholder approach as demonstrated during the policy-making process for the Stakeholder Engagement Policy and the Gender Equality Policy that took place during GEF-6.

Patterns of civil society participation in GEF governance have not changed much over the past 10 years. The updated Stakeholder Engagement Policy, together with the [Updated Vision to Enhance Engagement with Civil Society](#) have given the Secretariat a more proactive stance as a facilitator of stakeholder engagement on governance matters. Views are mixed on the merits of this change. In the GEF Independent Evaluation Office's (IEO's) 2021 survey of CSOs, the GEF's performance engaging civil society in governance was rated as mostly "fair" and "good" for both CSO Network members and non-Network members (figure 1). The same survey compared responses on participation in key governance events with survey data collected by the IEO in 2016 (figure 2). Beyond the growth in Expanded Constituency Workshop (ECW) participation for CSO Network members, the figure shows a minor change in reported participation for this group over the two five-year spans. Non-Network members saw a decline in reported participation

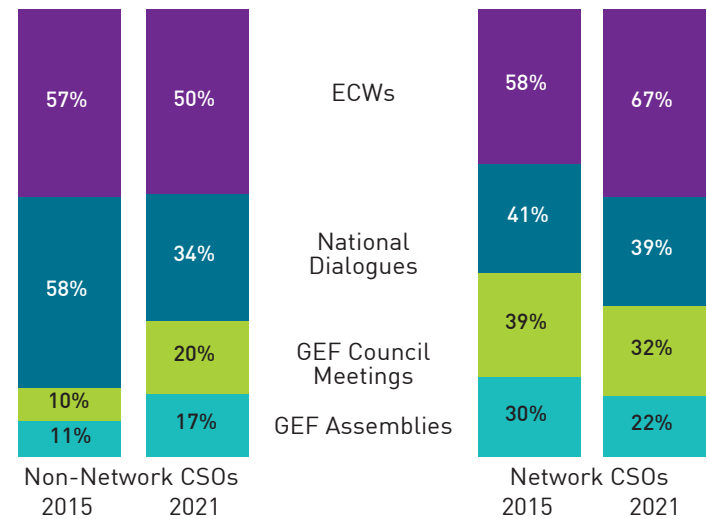
FIGURE 1 CSO ratings of GEF engagement with civil society in formulating policies, guidelines, and strategies, 2021



SOURCE: IEO Civil Society Survey, 2021.

NOTE: $n = 398$.

FIGURE 2 Civil society participation in GEF events over time



SOURCE: IEO Civil Society Survey, 2015 and 2021.

NOTE: Participation is for two time periods: 2010–15 (non-Network $n = 166$; Network $n = 104$), and 2016–21 (non-Network $n = 90$; Network $n = 157$).

in ECW and National Dialogue activities over the 10-year period but an increase in participation at GEF Council meetings and GEF Assemblies; this likely reflects the more proactive stance by the GEF to sponsor CSOs for participation in these events regardless of their membership status.

Adherence to policy: stakeholder engagement in GEF operations

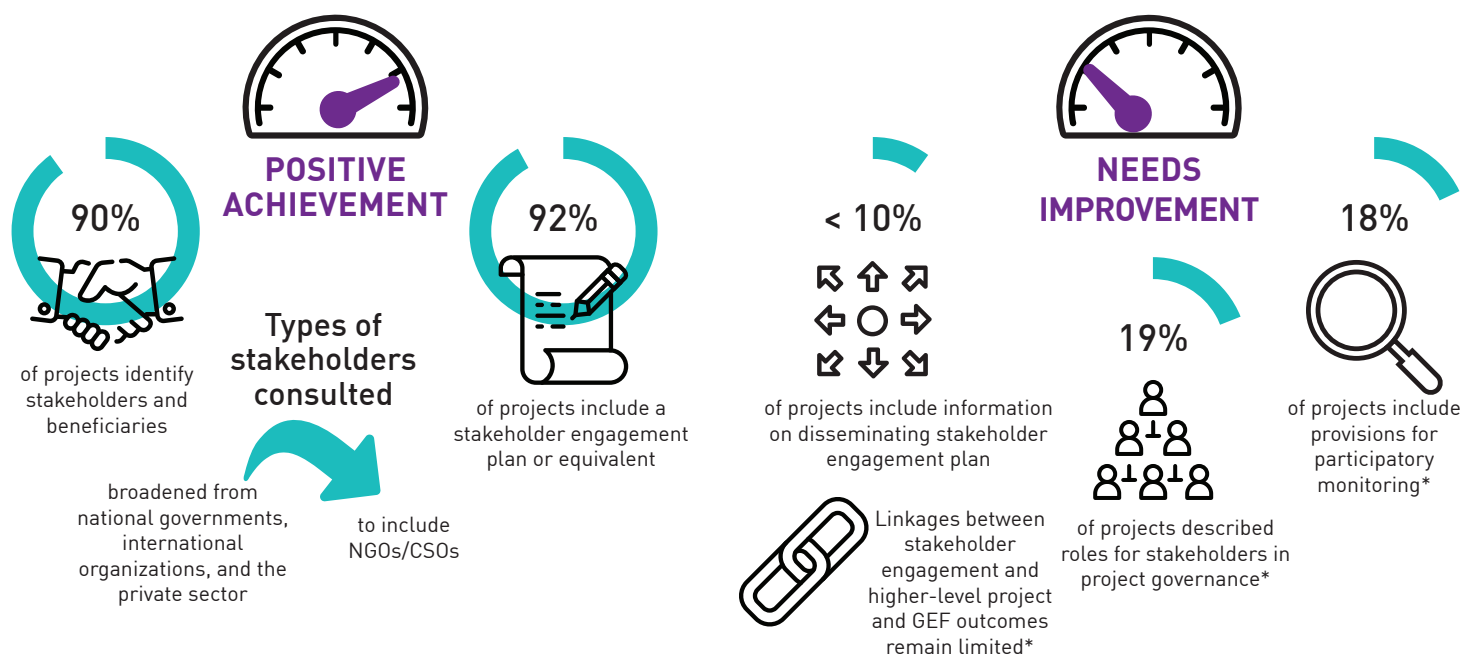
The updated policy on stakeholder engagement sets out mandatory requirements for stakeholder engagement through the GEF project and program cycles. A portfolio review of GEF projects assessed compliance with the policy requirements and change over time with the introduction of the new policy.

A review of GEF projects shows adherence to the requirements of the updated policy and greater attention to stakeholder engagement practice over time, though gaps remain. The updated policy became effective in July 2018, allowing for a quality-at-entry review comparing projects that were CEO endorsed under the previous Public Involvement Policy with projects that fell under the new policy requirements (figure 3).

Policy impact

Agencies describe an internal “nudging effect” from the introduction of the updated policy. It has provided impetus to review and revise their own policies and to deepen thinking across staff on the practice itself. Having a stronger policy has also helped the new GEF Agencies to leverage decision makers in implementing bodies and with governments to go beyond [lesser] conventional practices and/or national standards.

FIGURE 3 Quality-at-entry review of projects subject to the updated requirements



SOURCE: IEO portfolio review.

* Not a requirement under the policy.

Conclusions

1 The GEF's long-standing commitment to engage stakeholders and civil society in GEF policies, strategies, programs, and projects has been reinforced with the updated Stakeholder Engagement Policy. The policy is contemporary, aligned with relevant global strategies, and well supported by the GEF Secretariat.

2 Constraints to policy implementation exist in internal capacity to conduct quality stakeholder engagement, financing and time to meet the requirements, and in-country contexts that influence appetite for stakeholder engagement.

3 The introduction of mandatory requirements for monitoring and reporting position the GEF better than before to demonstrate policy impact. However, reporting on the updated policy has provided more insight on compliance and anticipated results than it has on actual contributions toward program/project outcomes and high-level program priorities; the paucity of a framework (indicators) is limiting.

Recommendations

1 Additional monitoring and reporting commitments are required for the GEF to show policy effectiveness and support learning on inclusion. The task begins at the project level with a systematic collection of policy-related data to guide inclusion practices and to communicate persuasively on inclusion matters at multiple levels.

2 The GEF is entering its eighth replenishment signaling the importance of inclusion. The intention is to strengthen the Stakeholder Engagement Policy, together with the Gender Equality Environmental and Social Safeguards Policies, not by any substantive change to their requirements, but by highlighting their strategic relevance to the GEF.



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