

Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs



Using an integrated approach to tackle drivers of environmental degradation, the GEF is helping countries take sustainable approaches to commodity supply chains, cities, and agriculture.

This review assessed the design elements and early processes of the three IAPs—focused on cities, food security, and commodities—for insights into how likely these programs are to achieve their objectives.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

1. In-country stakeholders broadly agree on the potential for the IAP programs to address multiple conventions through an integrated programming approach; this view was not shared by all convention secretariats. Ninety-three percent of survey respondents agreed that the IAP programs help address the conventions across multiple scales. Interviewees at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariats were somewhat more critical, noting that integration could also take place in stand-alone projects,

and pointing to difficulties in understanding how synergies between focal areas would be generated. In contrast, interviewees at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat fully supported the GEF's integrated approach to multiple focal areas.

2. Positive examples of alignment with country priorities through adequate entry points are observed, although this strategy risks sidelining some focal areas. The Commodities IAP child projects align with specific government priorities. The Food Security IAP shows synergies across biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation, with financial allocations clearly favoring the latter as an entry point. Interviews indicated that biodiversity and climate change were included as more of an afterthought in this IAP program's child project design. The major drivers of the Cities IAP connect local urban sustainability priorities to climate change mitigation,

PURPOSE AND METHODS: This review assessed the coherence of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) programs' design with GEF-6 focal area strategies, their alignment with convention guidance, and their capacity to reflect synergies in delivering focal area strategies while taking country needs and ownership into account. The review also looked at the programs' initial uptake and launch efficiency. It applied a mixed-methods approach, encompassing desk and literature reviews, quality at entry analysis, portfolio and project cycle analysis, and stakeholder perceptions obtained through interviews and an online survey.

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ABOUT US: The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the GEF has a central role in ensuring the independent evaluation function within the GEF. www.gefio.org

IAP PROGRAM DRIVERS

- **Cities IAP:** Processes of unsustainable urbanization in rapidly growing cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America
- **Commodities IAP:** Agricultural expansion in emerging markets leading to deforestation from commodities production
- **Food Security IAP:** Food production in natural resource poor farming systems

biodiversity, and chemicals. The initial ambition was for a greater synergy, which was not pursued later in program design. Taking deforestation out of commodity supply chains is addressed through interventions in the biodiversity and climate change focal areas, as well as through support for sustainable forest management.

Design

3. The IAP programs and their component child projects are broadly coherent in terms of their structure and objectives in their respective theory of change, with some exceptions. The IAP program and project objectives and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are aligned with each other. However, alignment between program/project results frameworks and tracking tools in terms of outcomes and indicators is uneven across the three IAP programs. Only two projects in the Cities IAP show alignment between program/project results frameworks and tracking tools. Three out of five child projects in the Commodities IAP, and 5 out of 12 in the Food Security IAP, align.

4. IAPs demonstrate interesting innovative features as compared with previous programs, emphasizing knowledge exchange through dedicated platforms for collaborative learning; considerable efforts

will, however, need to be made to realize their potential. The main innovation for the three IAP programs is the development of “hub” projects for each IAP program, which function as capacity-building, coordination, and knowledge support platforms or networks for the other child projects. This is a clear improvement over past programs. The success of the IAPs largely depends on the effective functioning of the hub projects.

“**The IAPs draw on the comparative advantages of a variety of GEF Agencies and specialized think tanks. They emphasize knowledge exchange through dedicated platforms for collaborative learning.**”

—Baljit Wadhwa, IEO Senior Evaluation Officer

5. Broader adoption has been emphasized in the design of the IAP programs. Documentation demonstrates that all child projects have a plan for sustaining project interventions beyond the respective project’s time frame. Almost all child project documentation provides evidence of specific measures for planned broader adoption of outcomes by stakeholders such as replication at a comparable administrative or ecological scale, scaling-up interventions into larger geographical areas, and measures to help catalyze market transformation.

6. IAPs show well-designed M&E strategies, albeit with some exceptions. M&E, a historically weak area in GEF programs in terms of its capacity to demonstrate program additionality, has been carefully considered in the design of the three IAPs. All child projects have an M&E strategy and show coherence between program and child project M&E frameworks. The [GEF-6 Programming Directions](#) indicate that a limited set of outcome indicators will be developed to track achievements. These were expected to replace the traditional tracking tools. A multifocal tracking tool was developed by

the Food Security IAP, which has yet to be operationalized.

7. There are inconsistencies in the role, expression, and measurement of global environmental benefit targets that will adversely affect program-level M&E. All three IAPs provide targets toward global environmental benefits, but the data are scattered throughout program and project documents, and it is not clear whether these are meant as aspirational

goals or hard targets. Program framework documents (PFDs) lack targets altogether (Commodities IAP), or underestimate (Cities IAP) or overestimate (Food Security IAP) global environmental benefit targets, compared to those reported in child project requests for Chief Executive Officer (CEO) endorsement. Variations exist in child project calculations of direct and indirect carbon dioxide equivalent mitigated, as different periods of influence and poorly substantiated indirect top-down causality factors are used.

Process

8. It took 26 months to bring all child projects to the stage of CEO endorsement from Council PFD approval; much of the work in the design of the programs is front-loaded and takes place before Council approval of the PFDs.

On average, it took child projects 14–15 months to reach commitment deadlines, and 21 months to reach CEO endorsement.

9. Approaches for country selection varied across the three IAPs. For the Commodities and Food Security IAPs,

“**Developing these multicountry, multifocal area, multi-Agency integrated designs collaboratively with a wide set of stakeholders takes time compared to other, less complex, modalities.**”

—Dennis Bours, IEO Evaluation Officer

country selection was based on sound criteria but communication during the selection process was poor. In the Cities IAP, the country selection process occurred via informal consultations between the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, and the national governments at the design stage. Participants agree that the Secretariat led critical decisions regarding which countries and cities to include in the programs.

10. There has been some competition for the lead Agency position, and the role of the consultations in the lead Agency selection process was not always clear. This was the case both for the Cities and Food Security IAPs, but the Agencies selected do have the comparative advantages needed to fulfill the lead role.

11. The three IAPs draw on the comparative strengths of several Agencies and other experienced think tanks. The IAPs are characterized by the participation of a large number of GEF Agencies and executing partners. All of these participants are generally well qualified, but their number increases the multitude of institutional preferences, and requires greater planning and coordination.

12. Set-aside funds provided incentives for countries to commit System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) resources to the program; however, most of the financial resources to IAP programs were already committed. GEF grants complement other financial resources, most of which were already allocated to their intended purposes of food security improvements, integrated natural resource management, or urban infrastructure provision—indicating that a

good part of the IAP interventions would have taken place without the GEF. However, efforts are now more integrated, with a strong emphasis on adaptive management, learning, and knowledge exchange.

Cross-cutting issues

13. Gender has been considered in most child projects, and more than half have a gender mainstreaming strategy or plan in place. The three IAPs score well on gender in terms of gender analysis at design, gender strategy, and gender indicators.

14. Resilience considerations—in terms of risk management as a co-benefit or integrated into a multiple benefits framework—are embedded in the IAP programs. The only exception is the Food Security IAP, which aimed to pilot the [Resilience, Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Assessment tool](#), but has not yet succeeded in integrating it—or any comparable tool—across all projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The above findings led to the following four conclusions:

- Integrated programming to tackle the main drivers of environmental degradation through the IAPs lets the objectives of multiple

conventions be addressed, while allowing participating countries to also focus on national environmental priorities.

- The IAPs have pursued an innovative and flexible design to address the drivers of environmental degradation, but show a wide variety of indicators and tracking tools, hindering aggregation within each IAP as well as for the three IAPs altogether.
- The IAPs draw on comparative advantages of a variety of GEF Agencies and think tanks, but the involvement of several Agencies and institutions in each IAP has added to organizational complexity.
- An overall positive picture emerges from this review of the IAPs' design and launch process; but both were affected by insufficient (1) clarity regarding the rules of engagement between Agencies and on the role of the Secretariat, (2) transparency in selection processes, and (3) communication between some participating GEF Agencies and countries on technical design.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The IAP programs have recently been launched and will need time to demonstrate results. Accordingly, this formative evaluation has focused on elements of relevance of the programs, their design, and the process for their launch. In the interests of adaptive management, the following broad recommendations are proposed for all the IAP programs.

1. Assess the value addition of the knowledge platforms in a midterm

“**The IAP knowledge platforms will require a strong commitment by all participating entities to provide the services for which they have been designed, and generate the additionality and support to program implementation envisioned.**”

—Carlo Carugi, IEO Senior Evaluation Officer

review to ensure they generate the necessary traction and provide overall support to program implementation. For many interviewed stakeholders, the most important innovative feature in the IAPs is the hub project-supported knowledge platforms. These platforms are viewed as a forum to learn about innovations, exchange ideas, and showcase child projects. The platforms will require a strong commitment and support by all participating entities to provide the services and benefits for which they have been designed. Their contribution

toward overall program objectives should be assessed to ensure they generate the envisioned additionality and support to program implementation.

2. Standardize indicators, tracking tools, and metrics across the IAPs to demonstrate program additionality through M&E. Indicators, tracking tools, and metrics should be made uniform to enable aggregation within each IAP and for the three IAPs together. This is to be done as a matter of urgency, to address the crucial need to clearly demonstrate the additionality brought by these pilot initiatives.

3. Assess the role of global environmental benefit targets, clarifying whether and when they are meant as aspirational goals or as hard targets, and how aspirational goals will be measured at the program level.

A midterm review of the IAPs should assess issues of additionality, effectiveness, and efficiency. The review should clarify the role of global environmental benefit targets, and explain how the GEF aims to assess aspirational global environmental benefit goals at the program level. ■

