

Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments



Success in achieving global environmental objectives is linked to whether countries have the robust institutions, experienced personnel, enabling policy and legal frameworks, and technical

expertise needed to meet the complex environmental challenges that confront them. Since its inception in 1991, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been helping countries build their environmental capacity. In 2001, the GEF Council approved the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) initiative, designed to help recipient countries take stock of their capacity needs, determine national priorities, and plan activities to develop capacity in areas where it was most needed.

Since 2002, the GEF has provided \$28.7 million for 153 NCSAs; each country received a grant of about \$0.2 million to conduct its own self-assessment. With nearly 90 percent of the assessments completed, the GEF Council requested the GEF Independent Evaluation Office undertake an independent evaluation of the NCSA initiative. The evaluation, which took place between February and November 2011, seeks to provide lessons, experiences, and recommendations regarding NCSA relevance, efficiency, and results.

The evaluation included an assessment of all approved NCSAs, the Global Support Program, and follow-up capacity development projects. Data collection was carried out and triangulated through interviews with key stakeholders, an e-survey, a review of NCSA final reports and action plans, teleconferences and visits to seven countries—Paraguay, Ecuador, Montenegro, Croatia, Senegal, India, and Thailand.

Findings

Relevance

The NCSA initiative was a central part of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development. Since its inception, the initiative has been a keystone for implementation of the capacity development strategic framework and has provided

resources to countries for self-assessments. However, NCSA relevance to GEF activities is diminishing. NCSAs were not followed up with adequate investments to address capacity development priorities, nor have NCSA outcomes been taken into account in developing GEF focal area projects.

The NCSA initiative was highly relevant to national sustainable development agendas and the capacity development strategies of the GEF Agencies and multi-lateral environmental agreements. A review of 23 follow-up cross-cutting capacity development projects conducted in 2010 confirmed the relevance of NCSAs to the sustainable development agenda of recipient countries. NCSAs have also been highly relevant to the mandates of the GEF Agencies and to obligations under the global conventions.

Efficiency

A “one-size-fits-all” approach is not the most efficient way to assess global environmental capacity needs at the national level. A small equal grant for all countries may not be the best method to carry out national self-assessments. Other than geographic size, factors that influenced the effectiveness and efficiency of country use of NCSAs include population, political context, legislation, policies, economy, timing, level of development, and global environmental significance.

The Global Support Program improved NCSA implementation. The Global Support Program was established by the GEF Council in 2005 as a joint facility of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environmental Programme. It provided technical support and backstopping for implementing NCSAs, developed guidance material, analyzed lessons, and developed programming frameworks for implementation of capacity development priorities.

A broad range of stakeholders participated in the NCSA process, but the participatory process could have been

more inclusive. Stakeholder participation was a key NCSA principle, and for many countries this process was very useful. Often, the meetings provided an opportunity to recognize the need for national cross-sectoral coordination of efforts. However, results from the e-survey indicated a sharp contrast in the perceptions of government representatives and civil society organizations, with only 34 percent of the latter stating that they were satisfied with the stakeholder engagement process.

Results

The NCSA initiative is the first assessment of national environmental capacity needs and priorities with a global reach. The NCSA process helped countries understand what needs to be done to improve their environmental management frameworks. It was the first assessment of this kind made available to all GEF recipient countries.

Globally, the top cross-cutting capacity development needs are public awareness and environmental education; information collection, management, and exchange; and the development and enforcement of policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks. Cross-cutting constraints identified by countries included stakeholder engagement (46 countries), information and knowledge management (69 countries), capacity of environmental organizations (53 countries), monitoring and evaluation limitations (62 countries), and convention conference of the parties negotiations, managing international projects and integrated ecosystem management (less than 30 countries).

Globally, the top thematic capacity development need is in the biodiversity focal area. Thematic assessments analyzed the country's obligations and opportunities for each multilateral environmental agreement, and the country's performance and achievements to date. A review of these thematic assessments was conducted using four focal areas—biodiversity, climate change, freshwater coastal ecosystems, and land degradation. Biodiversity conservation was identified as the highest priority by 103 countries; 80 countries ranked climate change vulnerability as their top priority; 74 countries cited land use and deforestation as their most important issues. Most issues identified as high priority were also recommended for capacity development actions.

Twenty-three follow-up projects are addressing capacity development constraints identified by NCSAs. Out of 132 completed NCSA projects since 2002, 23 countries have received a \$0.5 million follow-up grant during GEF-4 (2006–10) to implement priorities identified in NCSA action plans. In addition, the GEF has allocated \$44 million for the cross-cutting capacity development strategy.

The GEF and the Rio conventions did not take full advantage of the information and methodology produced by the NCSA initiative. The long-term impacts of the NCSA initiative will be measured by whether these assessments and action plans are used to support larger strategies and programs, particularly at the country level. The lack of linkages with other Initiatives limits the use of NCSA information.

Recommendations

- As GEF-5 (2010–14) strategies were approved and are now under implementation, NCSA experiences and lessons learned should be incorporated in a new GEF strategic framework for capacity development for GEF-6 (2014–18).
- NCSA knowledge products should be made available to the GEF Agencies and disseminated at GEF workshops, such as the National Dialogue Initiatives.

Follow-Up

In November 2011, the GEF Council requested the Secretariat to incorporate NCSA experiences and lessons learned in the programming approach for GEF-6 and to make available NCSA knowledge products, including toolkits on how them, to agencies and GEF workshops, as well as to GEF focal points.

The GEF Independent 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 *Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments* (Evaluation Report No. 70) is available on the GEF Independent Evaluation Office website, www.gefeo.org. For more information, please contact the Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.