IEO BRIEF

Review of the GEF Approach to Results-Based Management

This review assesses the extent to which the GEF RBM system meets its objectives to capture key GEF results and promote adaptive management.

BACKGROUND

A monitoring and evaluation unit was established in the GEF Secretariat in 1996, and was made independent in 2003. With the approval of the 2006 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, the monitoring function was transferred from the GEF IEO back to the Secretariat, leading to the establishment of an RBM team at the Secretariat.

During GEF-3 (2002–06), a tool was introduced to track results of the projects focused on protected areas. During the replenishment process for GEF-4 (2006–10), the replenishment group asked the Secretariat to develop results indicators for all GEF focal areas. In 2007, an RBM framework was adopted by the GEF Council with the objective of improving operations.

The GEF-5 (2010–14) programming document included a corporate results framework, which specified results and targets for GEF-5. The IEO's review of the GEF's RBM system, conducted in 2013 as part of OPS5, found that the system was overly complex and imposed a considerable burden on the Agencies, which are responsible for tracking project results. Taking note of the OPS5 recommendation, the GEF Secretariat recommended that the GEF should strengthen its RBM system by "rationalizing the indicators in the focal area tracking tools, with particular focus on multi-focal area projects" ("GEF-6 Policy Recommendations").It also requested the GEF Council to consider an RBM action plan for GEF-6 (2014–18). The GEF-6 programming document includes a corporate results framework, which builds on the framework for GEF-5. In October 2014, the GEF Council approved the document "Results-Based Management: Action Plan," which was updated in 2016.

KEY FINDINGS

Role of RBM. As per the GEF's 2007 report, "Results-Based Management Framework," the purpose of RBM in the

PURPOSE AND METHODS: This review assesses the role of results-based management (RBM) in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) partnership; the extent to which the GEF RBM system is relevant, effective, and efficient; the utilization of information generated through the RBM system; and the extent to which the concerns noted in the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5) and in GEF-6 policy recommendations have been addressed. The review draws information from primary and secondary sources, including documents, websites, databases, and semistructured interviews with 38 key informants.

WEB PAGE: http://www.gefieo.org/evaluations/results-based-management-rbm-gef

CONTACT: Neeraj Kumar Negi, Senior Evaluation Officer, Nnegi1@thegef.org

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

OPS6
SIXTH COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE GEF

> "To manage for results effectively, the GEF needs to track a limited number of results indicators and needs to track them well."
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> *—Neeraj Kumar Negi, IEO Senior Evaluation Officer*

GEF is to "improve management effectiveness and accountability" by "defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress toward the achievement of expected results, integrating lessons learned into management decisions and reporting on performance." This purpose is consistent with what is generally expected from RBM by the international development community. However, RBM in the GEF is generally perceived as an exercise focused on reporting to the Council and conventions, whereas its role in supporting evidence-based decision making and in promoting learning across the GEF partnership has not received as much attention.

RBM Framework. The 2014 report, "GEF-6 Programming Directions," discusses the goals and objectives of GEF activities, and specifies the expected focal area impacts and expected outcomes of its programs. It also includes a corporate results framework which specifies six environmental results along with 10 targets and several process indicators. Although the report provides information on 43 focal area programs through which the corporate environmental results are to be achieved, it does not articulate their respective theory of change. It is therefore difficult to specify appropriate indicators to track outcomes and impact, or to determine the appropriateness of specified indicators.

The corporate environmental results indicators specified tracking outcomes for GEF-6, which is an improvement over the indicators specified for GEF-4 and GEF-5, which focused primarily on tracking outputs. The number of core environmental results indicators for GEF-6 is fewer than that for GEF-4 and GEF-5. However, indicators that track long-term environmental impacts have not been specified in the corporate results frameworks for these three periods.

The reporting arrangements provided for in "GEF-6 Programming Directions" are focused on the aggregate of the environmental results targets. Less attention is given to reporting on actual results of GEF-6 projects during the subsequent replenishment periods when the GEF-6 projects will be under implementation and will be completed. The GEF's "Results-Based Management Framework" suggests that the results would be tracked beyond the replenishment period. So far, however, the Secretariat has not reported on actual results of GEF-4 and GEF-5 projects.

Duration of feedback loops. Experience shows that it takes about two more replenishment cycles (8–10 years) before it is feasible to report the actual environmental results of projects. In the interim, however, the GEF programming priorities may have already changed, making the information on results of completed projects less useful for developing future programs and strategies. This challenge is, however, not unique to the GEF. Other organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Climate Investment Funds, that address environmental concerns also struggle using information on actual results of supported activities in decision making. In some situations, scientific evidence on the impact of similar activities undertaken by others may be useful. Within the GEF, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel plays a key role in making scientific and technical knowledge more accessible to support decision making. The GEF IEO evaluates impacts of selected clusters of GEF activities that continue to be relevant for future work. The GEF Secretariat also undertakes targeted learning missions to review completed projects and assess their results on the ground.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GEF programming is consistent with and contributes to the SDGs. Several of the SDGs and their targets and indicators are congruent with the outcomes of GEF programs. In 2015, "The GEF and the Sustainable Development Goals" reported on the support that the GEF had provided to address the SDGs, listing GEF contributions primarily in terms of the aggregate of expected project results targets. A few of the GEF environmental results indicators are already fully compatible with the global indicator framework for the SDGs. Other indicators may need adjustments to make them fully compatible. Adoption of some of the SDG indicators and/or tweaking of the GEF indicators would be necessary to better align the GEF RBM framework with global efforts to track contributions to, and progress on, the SDGs.

Corporate results and tracking tools. The GEF Corporate Scorecard reports on 32 indicators, of which 22 are drawn from the results framework presented in "GEF-6 Programming Directions," and 10 additional indicators are included to cover other topics important for the GEF partnership. For comparison, the Asian Development Bank uses 98 indicators for reporting at the corporate level, and the World Bank's Climate Investment Funds uses 15 core indicators for its four programs. Thus, in terms of indicators tracked and reported on at the corporate reporting level, the GEF seems to be in line with the practices in other organizations. At another level, there are 7 strategic focal area outcomes and 68 strategic program-level outcomes the GEF RBM system needs to track. Each of these outcomes has at least one indicator for measuring progress, for a total of 117 indicators.

More granular information on program results is tracked through the focal area tracking tools. *GEF Annual Performance Report 2015* found that OPS5 had made significant progress in simplifying tools of most focal areas during GEF-6. However, the report also noted that the progress has been limited for the biodiversity focal area and for multifocal projects. It is unlikely that the biodiversity tracking tools will retain their full utility if they are cut drastically. However, there are other approaches such as the use of remote sensing and targeted learning missions that may help in tracking results on the ground and understanding causal linkages. Use of these approaches may mitigate the need to have complex tracking tools for the biodiversity focal area, and interviews with the Secretariat's staff suggest that these options are being considered for GEF-7.

Compliance. It is easier to ensure the submission of tracking tools during Chief Executive Officer endorsement and approval, as compliance is mainstreamed within the project appraisal process. However, it is difficult to ensure compliance during project implementation because it requires tracking project progress, alerting the Agencies on approaching milestones, and following up in case there is a submission delay or incomplete submission. An internal review conducted by the RBM team in 2016 showed substantial gaps in the submission of tracking tools and overall poor quality of information in the submitted tracking tools for several focal areas. *GEF Annual Performance Report 2015* also found such gaps, and concluded that at least a part of the problem was gaps in uploading of the submitted tracking tools by the Secretariat.

Weak capacity of the RBM team was also a reason for poor compliance. Before GEF-6, human resources devoted to RBM were inadequate, and changes in the leadership of the RBM team affected continuity. During GEF-6, however, the Secretariat enhanced these capacities, allowing the RBM team to address barriers to compliance. The effectiveness of these efforts is yet to be ascertained.

Project Management Information System (PMIS). The role of and expectations from the GEF's PMIS have increased. It is now expected to support decisions made across the GEF partnership and to provide information for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Despite several updates, the PMIS has not kept up with these changing expectations. In catering primarily to the needs of the GEF Secretariat, the needs of other users—such as the GEF IEO, the Agencies, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, the Council, and operational focal points—have not been fully addressed.

In June 2012, the GEF Council asked the GEF Trustee to fully upgrade the PMIS. The upgrade was expected to, among other things, automate the work flow and facilitate self-service reporting. Delivery of the full upgrade—expected by the end of FY 2014—was delayed. In May 2015, the GEF Secretariat assumed the responsibility of the upgrade, with delivery now expected in FY 2018.

Quality of information provided by the PMIS is another area of concern, partly because of gaps in information on projects approved before the PMIS was instituted. Information is also compromised through errors in manual entry of data. The data provided by the Agencies may also contain errors and may be difficult to identify and correct.

Utility. The information gathered through the RBM system is used for reporting through the annual portfolio monitoring report, the GEF Corporate Scorecard, reports to the GEF conventions, the GEF website, and analyses that may be requested by the GEF Council. Among these, the annual portfolio monitoring report is the most important tool for formal reporting to the Council. Although it provides information on the overall health of the GEF's active portfolio of projects, and may include an in-depth analysis on a topic, it has yet to provide an accounting of the actual results of a given replenishment period. The Corporate Scorecard, another important information tool, was introduced during GEF-6, and is perceived as useful by key GEF stakeholders, especially the GEF Council.

The GEF conventions find GEF reporting to be useful in providing information on GEF funding and cofinancing for the relevant focal area activities, and in demonstrating how the GEF has responded to convention guidance. In addition, some conventions find that the annexes to GEF reports on specific areas of work—especially knowledge products—are useful to some of their working groups and are discussed during the conferences of the parties.

The data gathered through the tracking tools is used by the respective focal area teams, although the extent of usage varies. Focal areas such as biodiversity and international waters use the tool data for aggregation and analysis. The chemicals and waste team found the tools useful in tracking intervention costs over time to develop cost benchmarks.

Most respondents—including those from partner Agencies, the Secretariat, and the conventions—indicated that the information generated through the RBM system is not being fully used for decision making and strategy development. They also feel that the RBM system is underutilized for promoting learning. Users of the PMIS find the information incomplete, unreliable, and difficult to extract. Agencies and conventions report that, although the GEF website provides a wealth of information, it is difficult to access and use it.

Action on GEF-6 Policy Recommendations. The GEF-6 replenishment document recommended that the GEF improve its RBM system by "rationalizing the indicators in the focal area tracking tools," and requested the Secretariat to develop a comprehensive work plan to strengthen the RBM system. The Secretariat, in consultation with the GEF Agencies, reviewed and updated the focal area tracking tools. Consequently, the tracking tools for most of the focal areas are simpler yet technically more robust. However, the GEF is still tracking more than it should. The tracking tools for the biodiversity focal area continue to be complex, and the GEF approach to tracking tools for multifocal area projects has not been streamlined.

The "Results-Based Management: Action Plan" was approved by Council in October 2014 and revised in 2016 to broaden its scope. RBM staff increased during GEF-6. A lead RBM specialist was recruited to coordinate RBM activities, which has provided the team greater access to GEF management. The RBM team also hired consultants to assess the quality of tracking tool data, identify bottlenecks, and institute measures to facilitate future work. During GEF-6, the Secretariat overhauled its RBM reporting. It is now presenting performance on key indicators through a biannual Corporate Scorecard. The Secretariat has also advanced its work on geolocation of GEF projects, which may facilitate tracking the GEF portfolio on the ground and provide useful input for future programming. Slow progress in upgrading the PMIS is a source of frustration across the GEF partnership.

CONCLUSIONS

- The GEF RBM system has played a strong role in supporting reporting, accountability, and communications, but its role in supporting evidence-based decision making and learning has been limited.
- The GEF has not articulated a clear theory of change nor time frames for achievement of, and reporting on, the expected environmental results for its GEF-6 focal area programs.
- The long duration of the feedback loop poses challenges for incorporating results of GEF activities into developing future programs.
- The GEF is already addressing several SDGs through its programs. For GEF-7, it would need to incorporate the relevant SDG indicators in its RBM framework.
- Although the burden for tracking results decreased during GEF-6, the GEF is still tracking too much information.
- There are gaps in the submission and availability of tracking tools, and the quality of submitted information is often poor.
- The PMIS has not kept pace with the growing needs of, and expectations from, the partnership.
- The GEF Secretariat has followed up on the GEF-6 Policy Recommendations by developing a work plan, although progress on measures specified in the RBM work plan has varied.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Update the GEF RBM Framework. The GEF RBM framework of 2007 needs to be updated to reflect the evolved understanding of RBM across the GEF partnership. During GEF-6, the focus has been on inputs, outputs, and—in some cases—outcomes of GEF activities. The updated framework needs to incorporate theories of change for programs, the indicators for drivers of environmental degradation, and long-term impacts of GEF activities. It also needs to arrange for systematic tracking of progress. The framework should also incorporate the relevant SDG indicators for GEF-7 and beyond.

2. Upgrade the PMIS to facilitate reporting on achievement of targets. Given that GEF-4 and GEF-5 programming directions documents had specified targets for those replenishment periods, there is a case for reporting on the actual achievement of these targets. It may be that past gaps in submitting tracking tools, tracking tool data, and data quality remain a constraint. Therefore, it is imperative that measures are instituted to mitigate these bottlenecks. Upgrading of the PMIS has been delayed by several years and urgently needs to be completed.

3. Address the shortcomings of the focal area tracking tools. The GEF needs to rethink its approach to tracking tools for biodiversity and multifocal area projects. Although streamlining of the biodiversity tracking tools may be challenging, the GEF may consider alternatives such as tracking changes in the protected areas through geographic information system (GIS) and remote sensing tools, coupled with targeted learning missions. Though streamlining the approach to tracking multifocal are project results has been recommended in both OPS5 and "GEF-6 Policy Recommendations," no direct progress has been made on this front. Given the emerging importance of multifocal projects, the burden of tracking their results needs to be rationalized.

Independent Evaluation Office
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

1818 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20433
Website: www.gefieo.org • email: gefevaluation@thegef.org

Photo: Anupam Anand/GEF IEO