

IEO Learnings

Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF • August 2021



HOW DOES THE GEF HELP SCALE UP IMPACT? A CASE STUDY-BASED EVALUATION

GEF-supported interventions have been shifting from site-level pilot projects toward programs implemented at higher scales. This evaluation assesses the scaling-up process in depth.

Key findings of evaluation

- The Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) focus on scaling is more explicit than in many other international development institutions. But like other institutions, the GEF's vision for scaling-up is not consistently clear in operational guidance across its portfolio.
- The GEF has contributed to post-project continuation of scaled-up activities by catalyzing sustainable financing sources and strengthening institutional capacities. Political and economic changes pose risks to long-term sustainability of scaling-up activities.
- GEF support to scaling-up activities has varied widely in terms of grant amount, implementation period, and project modality. Overall, GEF-supported initiatives typically last longer than five years and leverage higher cofinancing ratios at the scaling-up stage.
- The GEF's comparative advantage lies in supporting pilots that demonstrate positive benefits and establishing enabling conditions for scale-up. These strengths attract support from other actors that then provide funding for full scale-up.
- Cases generally reported a higher magnitude of environmental outcomes per dollar per year during scale-up versus piloting. The extent of scaling could not be measured in one case because common environmental indicators were lacking between pilot and scaling projects.
- The GEF partnership benefits from its Agencies having different comparative advantages in different modes of scaling.



This evaluation draws on previous GEF experience in scaling-up to better understand the processes through which scale-up occurs and the conditions under which it is effectively achieved. Using a purposive sampling approach, the evaluation conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses on both successful and less successful cases of GEF support to scaling-up. Each case consisted of one or more related projects. The cases covered a span of 20 years from the GEF pilot phase to GEF-5 (figure 1).

What is scaled-up impact?

- Increase in magnitude of benefits
- Expansion of geographical and sectoral areas that generate benefits

Modes of scaling

Three modes of scaling, often interdependent, were identified through interviews. All three are processes that may take place through one or more projects—in parallel or in sequence; each contributes to a specific impact at a target scale.

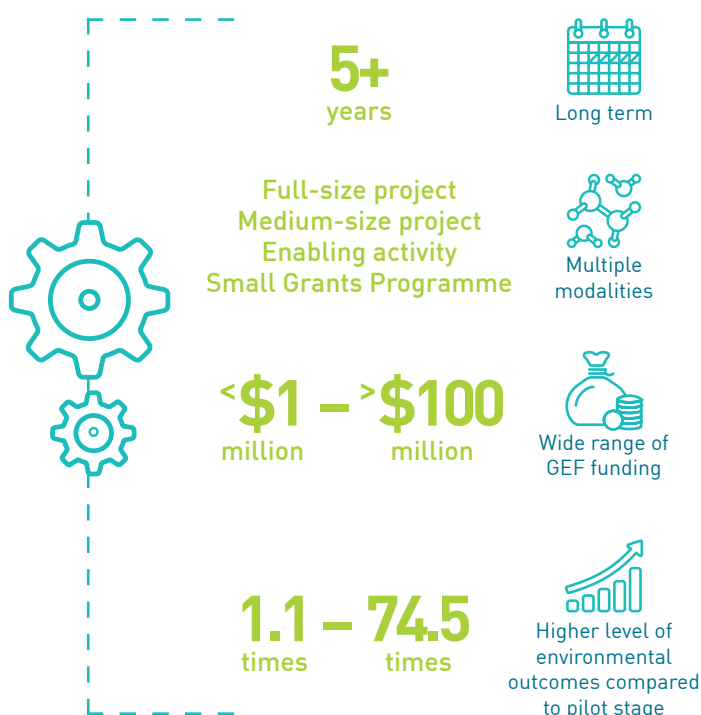
- **Replication** refers to implementing the same intervention multiple times, thereby increasing the number of stakeholders and/or covering larger areas, usually by leveraging finance, knowledge, and/or policy. That is, an intervention may be implemented across a wider area either through government or other funders investing more money for this purpose, through knowledge about the intervention motivating stakeholders to implement it using their own resources, through

a policy requiring or encouraging stakeholders to implement an intervention, or a combination of these. In the GEF context, countries typically use replication in connection with larger financing and technical assistance provided by multilateral development banks to reproduce successful interventions within a larger area.

- **Mainstreaming** involves integrating an intervention within an institution's regular operations, usually through a policy or law. While mainstreaming typically occurs within a specific national or local government agency, it may also occur simultaneously through multiple government agencies or in other institutions, such as donors, civil society organizations, or private companies.
- **Linking** is the implementation of multiple types of interventions that, by design, all contribute to the same impact at the scale of a system defined by environmental, economic, or administrative boundaries. Among the systems mentioned were landscape, seascape, ecoregion, value chain, and national government. Almost all GEF stakeholders interviewed described scaling-up as the linking of interventions and actors across different geographic locations, administrative levels, focal areas, sectors, or a combination of these. In the GEF context, smaller Agencies primarily play a convening and coordinating role to bring coherence to the multiple interventions across a system, especially those crossing country boundaries.

The GEF's comparative advantage lies in supporting pilots that demonstrate positive benefits and establishing enabling conditions for scale-up; these strengths attract support from other actors that then provide funding for full scale-up (figure 2).

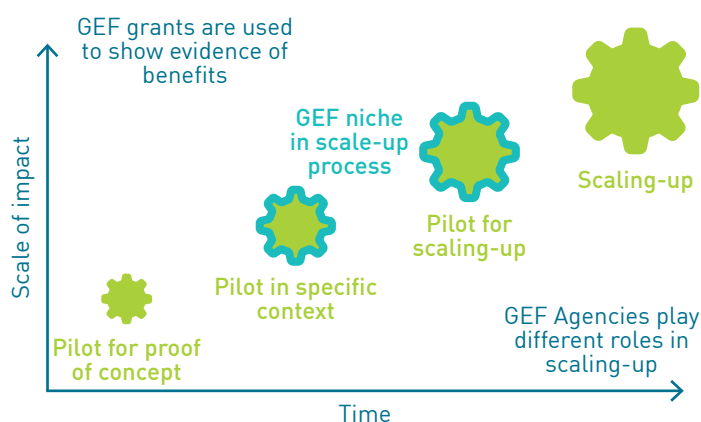
FIGURE 1 Characteristics of GEF support to scaling-up



Factors and enabling conditions for scaling-up

Key factors influencing the scaling-up process were identified through 18 interviews with GEF Secretariat teams and GEF Agencies at the corporate level. These factors were then validated using 20 cases built primarily from document reviews, supported by evidence from an additional 40 cases. Six of the cases involved

FIGURE 7.4 GEF comparative advantage in scaling



field visits and interviews specifically aimed at assessing if and how scaling activities were sustained post-GEF support.

All the factors were found to cluster around three key actions: adoption of the intervention, sustained support for scaling activities, and learning for adaptability and cost-effectiveness.

Adoption of intervention

For impact to be scaled up, the relevant stakeholders must first want to implement interventions that generate impact. Factors that contributed to stakeholder willingness to adopt interventions clustered into two types: those that developed a sense of ownership for the intervention, and those that made the benefits of adopting the intervention clear and salient.

Stakeholder ownership has been identified by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office’s previous portfolio- and country-level evaluations as a factor contributing to progress toward impact.

Having ownership means that stakeholders find a program’s objectives personally meaningful and useful. In at least 12 out of 20 cases, buy-in to the intervention was attributed in part to participatory activities or mechanisms, such as public consultations during project preparation, village committees, and community-based natural resource management agreements.

In all successful scaling cases, stakeholders were motivated to adopt an intervention because they had evidence of the benefits of doing so. Benefits emerged as gains or avoided losses. Gains were usually in the form of higher income, cost savings, or new business opportunities; losses avoided were usually penalties, legal liabilities, or decreasing income due to degraded natural resources.

In some cases, adopting an intervention had the synergistic effect of both creating gains and avoiding losses. In North

Macedonia, a cheaper alternative for PCB decontamination together with the risk of legal penalties for noncompliance created mutual reinforcement for private companies to decontaminate their equipment. For farmers in China and Brazil, switching to sustainable land management resulted in both biodiversity protection and higher incomes, among other benefits.

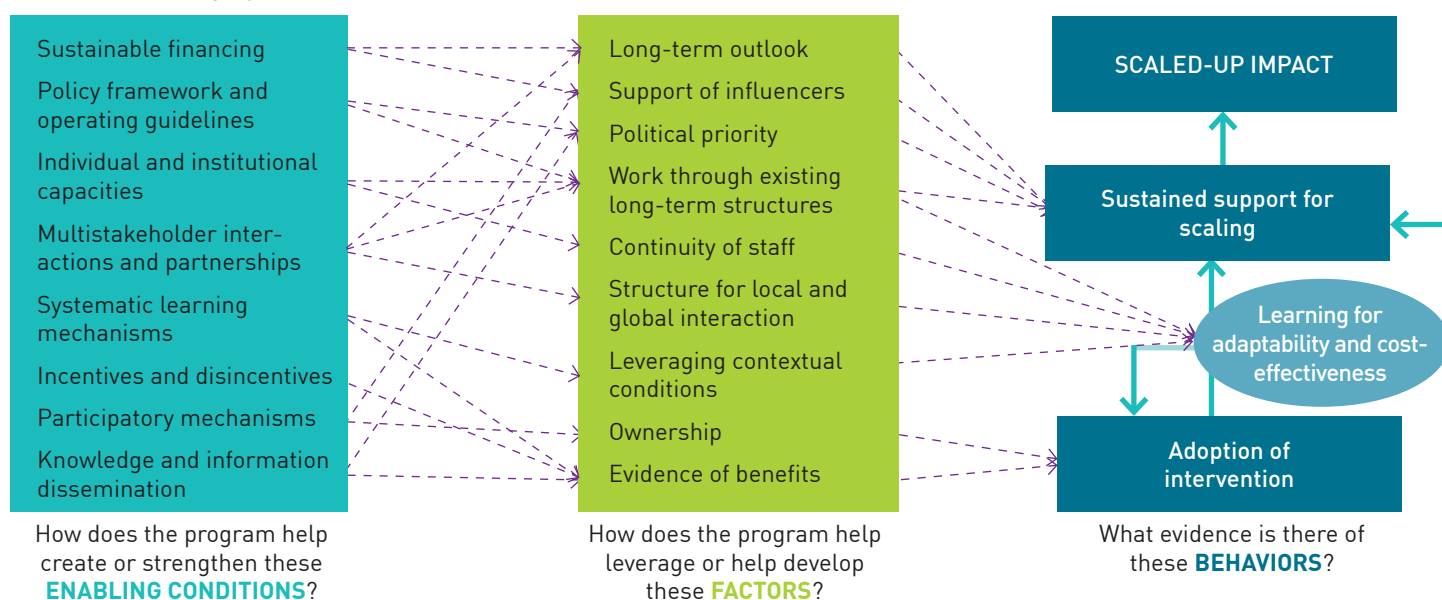
In at least five cases, specific pilot activities were not successfully scaled up because the gains were not sufficient to overcome the costs of changing the status quo. One project introduced the planting of buffer strips and pasture rehabilitation as part of managing nutrient pollution in the Danube River. The pilot was successful, yet did not scale in a subsequent project, in part due to state subsidies that left little incentive to include forestry activities in land management. Other components of the project that demonstrated benefits, such as reduced manure in waterways, were successfully scaled up and continue to be scaled up without GEF support.

Sustained support for scaling-up processes

For the relevant stakeholders to implement interventions that generate impact, supporting institutions must sustain the enabling conditions for implementation (figure 3). All successful cases received some form of support for longer than one project cycle, mainly from their respective governments. This evaluation and other research have found that, in general, sustained support of 10–20 years is necessary for scaling-up to take place.

Three factors emerged as important in ensuring long-term support for scaling-up processes: becoming a political priority, gaining the support of political and economic influencers, and working through existing long-term structures—all of which may be influenced by a program’s appropriate choices of people and

FIGURE 7.5 Scaling-up framework



institutions to work with, and through participatory processes and knowledge dissemination.

The evaluation found eight types of conditions necessary for enabling scaling-up in the GEF experience. These were knowledge and information dissemination, participatory processes, incentives and disincentives to motivate adoption of interventions, institutional and individual capacities, policy framework and operating guidelines, sustainable financing to provide the resources for implementation, multistakeholder interactions and partnerships, and systematic learning mechanisms to allow the scaling-up process to be adaptable and cost-effective in the face of changing contextual conditions.

These enabling conditions, if not already present, may be established as part of a program's objectives. For example, GEF support contributed to building institutional and individual capacities for scaling-up in all 20 cases.

Learning for adaptability and cost-effectiveness

For scaling-up processes to be sustained, supporting institutions have to learn from systematic feedback that will allow them to adapt the scaling-up process to changing contexts and make it more cost-effective. Most of the assessed cases had some form of learning during project implementation, resulting in interventions being scaled up more cost-effectively. Learning also made it easier for stakeholders to adopt interventions. Systematic learning mechanisms usually took the form of knowledge exchange networks and regular multistakeholder meetings. At least five cases cited using midterm reviews and terminal evaluations to improve the scaling-up process. These improvements typically corresponded with reallocating project funds.

For example, in the [Romania International Waters case](#), the reallocation led to a shift from an expensive concrete-based waste management platform to a cheaper and equally efficient plastic alternative, allowing more farmers to benefit from project funds.

Conclusions

1 Even though the GEF 2020 strategy and programming directions set a clear vision and goal to scale up global environmental benefits, operational guidance for scale-up is not consistently clear across all programs and projects.

2 The GEF uses multiple modes—replication, mainstreaming, and linking—to scale up interventions that generate global environmental benefits, drawing on the comparative advantages of GEF partners.

3 The extent of GEF support to scale-up and the rate at which outcomes are scaled vary by focal area, but typically take place over more than five years and generate higher outcomes per GEF dollar per year during the scaling-up stage. Indicators used between the pilot and scaling-up stages were not always consistent, limiting the ability to track progress.

4 The GEF has supported scaling-up by establishing enabling conditions, choosing the appropriate influencers and institutions to work with, and leveraging contextual conditions at the right time.

5 GEF support has catalyzed the scaling-up process by demonstrating evidence of intervention benefits at the pilot stage. Systematic learning mechanisms for scaling-up were not supported in most early GEF projects, but about half of approved GEF-7 projects address learning more systematically.

Recommendation

1 The GEF partnership needs to ensure that factors and enabling conditions that influence scaling-up are identified. These factors and enabling conditions subsequently need to be taken into account during program design and implementation, and their effects assessed at midterm and terminal evaluations. While this evaluation found successful cases of scaling-up in the absence of guidelines, developing such guidance may systematically increase the likelihood of outcomes being scaled up in line with the GEF's vision. The GEF's current results framework provides common core indicators which makes this possible at the portfolio level; however, linked projects and programs must use common units of measurement and indicators to track progress of more specific outcomes that are not tracked by the GEF's core indicators and subindicators.



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