

IEO Learnings

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LESSONS FROM GEF SUPPORT TO THE SAHEL AND SUDAN-GUINEA SAVANNA BIOMES

This evaluation assessed determinants of GEF project outcome sustainability in 23 countries; GEF relevance to biomes' environmental challenges; and gender, resilience, and performance in fragile situations.

Key findings of evaluation

- The evaluation by the Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO) looked at 23 countries in the Sahel and Sudan-Guinea savanna biomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. It found that the increasing investment over the GEF replenishment periods in these regions has been relevant to the main environmental challenges faced.
- Importantly, the shift toward integrated programming has had no negative consequences on the relevance of GEF support.
- The expansion of GEF Agencies has improved countries' access to more diverse expertise and better focal area coverage.
- While outcomes and sustainability are areas of concern, they are progressively improving, with the exception of sustainability of multi-focal interventions.
- In general, sustainability tends to improve over time, especially when financial resources for continued outcome delivery postcompletion materialize.
- Context-sensitive, technologically appropriate project design is a major factor affecting sustainability.
- Not much consideration is given at project design to the influence of synergies and trade-offs between socioeconomic and environmental objectives on the prospects for sustainability in the biomes.
- Fragility has affected the timely delivery of GEF support, but the outcomes and sustainability of GEF support in the two biomes has been largely unaffected.



The Sahel and Sudan-Guinea savanna biomes in Sub-Saharan Africa experience severe deforestation, land degradation, and desertification; biodiversity loss; water quality/quantity threats and threats to inland as well as coastal marine water resources; mining; and natural disasters. The pressing socioeconomic needs of a rapidly growing population compound the challenges at hand.

In light of the many common environmental and socioeconomic challenges shared by the countries in the two biomes, this evaluation was conducted as a country cluster evaluation. It covered 453 GEF interventions in the 23 biome countries from GEF-4 to GEF-6. A specific focus of this evaluation was on identifying the determinants of sustainability; this entailed in-depth assessment of a cohort of projects completed between 2007 and 2014.

A sizable investment in the two biomes, without relevance gaps

GEF investment in the Sahel and Sudan-Guinea Savanna biomes has increased consistently since the pilot phase onwards. Over the last two and a half decades, the GEF has provided support to address Sub-Saharan Africa's main environmental challenges through national and regional programs and projects focusing on land, water, forests, energy, and biodiversity. Since its pilot phase, the GEF has invested \$2.48 billion in grants, accompanied by \$16.37 billion in cofinancing, through 794 national and regional projects in the countries in the two biomes.

GEF support has addressed the main environmental challenges faced by countries in the two biomes, with no major gaps of coverage. Most of the GEF support to these countries has focused on climate change, an important underlying cause of most environmental challenges in the biomes. Seventy-eight percent of the climate change focal area support in the two biomes is invested in support to adaptation. Land degradation began to be addressed in GEF-4 through focal area-specific support and continued afterwards mainly through multifocal area interventions.

The relevance of GEF support to country needs has not been affected by the GEF's move toward integrated programming, including through multifocal projects and programmatic approaches. Investment in programs initially increased in GEF-4 and substantially decreased in GEF-5 and GEF-6. Programs and their respective child projects are becoming larger in size. A move from projects addressing a single focal area toward multifocal interventions is observed in the two biomes. The increase in size of child projects is viewed favorably by country stakeholders, who tend to view projects in terms of the direct benefits they generate within the national boundaries.

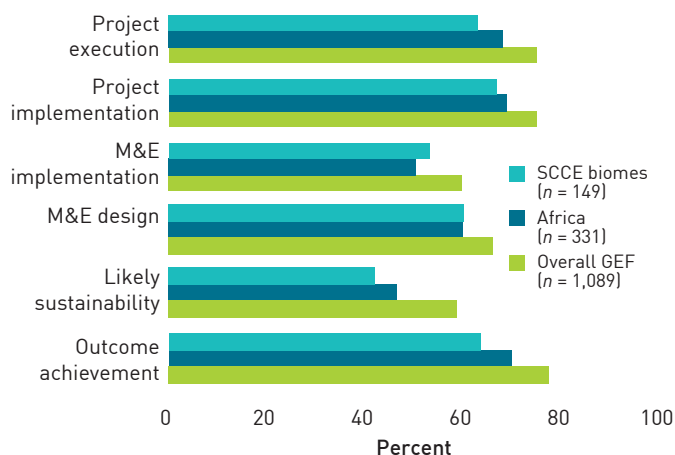
The expansion of GEF Agencies has been a positive development in that it offers countries more choice, more diversity of expertise, and better focal area coverage. Most Agencies active in the Sahel and Sudan-Guinea savanna biomes have a rather diversified portfolio that covers all GEF focal areas. Importantly, countries select

GEF Agencies based on a larger set of comparative advantages than just their technical area of specialization, including, among other factors, the history of engagement between the Agency and the country in which the project is to be implemented.

Results and sustainability are areas of concern, although improving

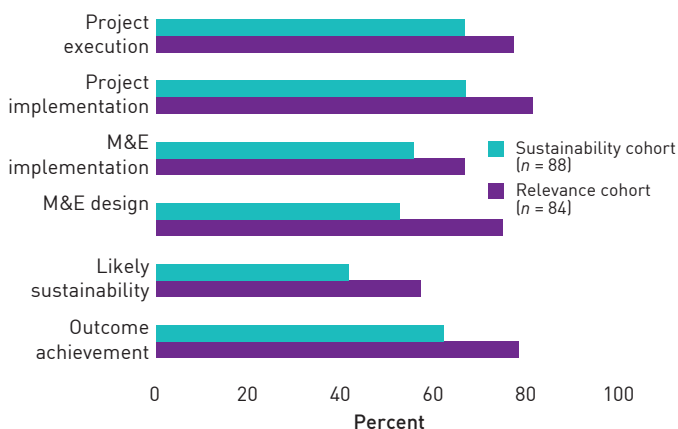
In general, fewer projects in the two biomes—and in Africa as a whole—receive satisfactory ratings in terms of outcomes and their likely sustainability than in the overall GEF portfolio (figure 1). While projects in Africa tend to have lower ratings, more recent terminal evaluations of GEF-4 to GEF-6 projects in the biomes rated higher than terminal evaluations of earlier projects completed between 2007 and 2014, which is promising (figure 2).

FIGURE 1 Performance ratings: percentage of projects with ratings in the satisfactory/likely range



SOURCE: GEF IEO Annual Performance Report 2019 database.

FIGURE 2 Performance ratings: projects with satisfactory/likely ratings, relevance and sustainability cohorts



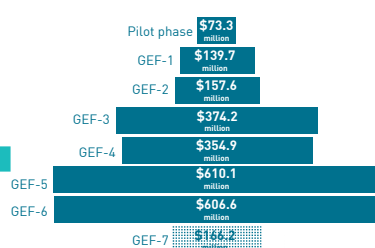
SOURCE: GEF IEO Annual Performance Report 2019 database.

NOTE: The relevance cohort is comprised of national and regional interventions from GEF-4 to GEF-6 in the two biomes; the sustainability cohort is comprised of national and regional interventions completed between 2007 and 2014.

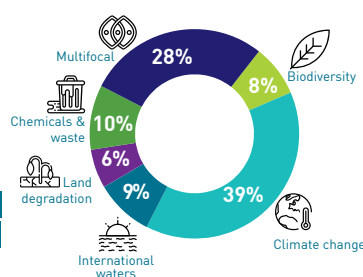
NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN PORTFOLIO

794

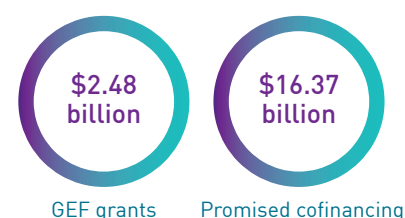
GEF INVESTMENT OVER TIME



FUNDING BY FOCAL AREA



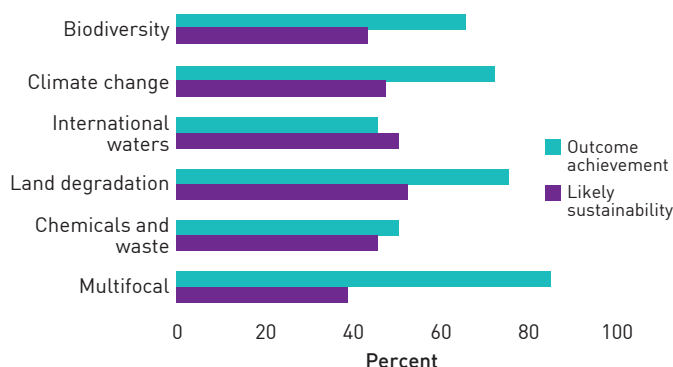
TOTAL FUNDING



SOURCES: GEF Project Management Information System and GEF Portal.

While 85 percent of multifocal projects compared to an average of 68 percent for those with a single focus undertaken in the biomes were rated as having satisfactory outcomes, only 38 percent were rated as having outcomes that were likely to be sustained (figure 3). Clearly, there is room for improvement on how to foster broader adoption and likelihood of sustainability of project outcomes through consideration of sustainability measures at project design, especially in multifocal interventions. This is particularly important given the GEF's move toward integrated programming and multifocal support.

FIGURE 3 Outcome and sustainability ratings by focal area



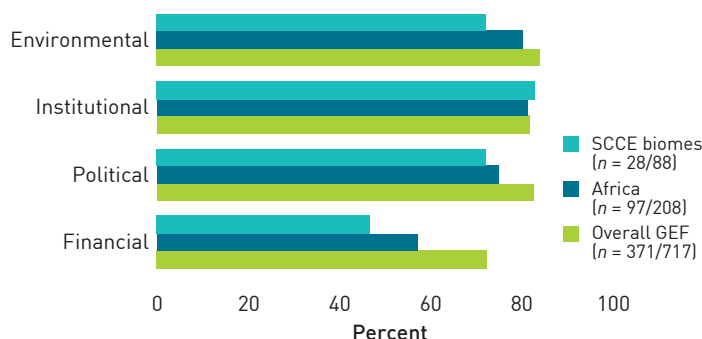
SOURCE: GEF IEO Annual Performance Report 2019 database.

Time and money matter for sustainability

Demonstrating sustainability takes time. Projects tend to show higher observed sustainability of outcomes at postcompletion than at the terminal evaluation stage. Field visits to 16 completed projects during the country case studies for this evaluation—including to 1 regional project visited both in Guinea and Mali—showed that 14 projects demonstrated maintained or improved sustainability postcompletion. While it is plausible that, as time goes on, positive context-related factors increasingly come into play as compared to project-related ones, field observations in this evaluation underscored the importance of designing projects with due consideration to measures that increase the likely sustainability of outcomes.

Financial sustainability is an issue in Sub-Saharan Africa overall and is particularly challenging in the biomes (figure 4). These findings underscore the importance of planning at the design stage in order to set up viable financial mechanisms and measures that can continue to deliver benefits after completion.

FIGURE 4 Sustainability dimensions in the biomes



SOURCE: GEF IEO Annual Performance Report 2019 database.

Context-sensitive, technologically appropriate project design positively affects the sustainability of outcomes in the biomes.

Design that promotes sustainability takes into consideration a country's socioeconomic and political context as well as local conditions and knowledge, and includes measures and activities designed to support—from both financial and institutional standpoints—the continuation of outcomes postcompletion.

Sustainable outcomes build on environmental and development synergies

More consideration could be given at design to the influence of synergies and trade-offs between socioeconomic and environmental objectives on the prospects for sustainability. While socioeconomic priorities are generally considered by GEF interventions in the biomes, only a small percentage of project design documents in the relevance cohort discuss how to address synergies or mitigate trade-offs between short- and long-term, and environmental and development, objectives. This underscores

the importance of nexus thinking between environmental and socioeconomic objectives and between short- and long-term planning in enhancing sustainability. The evaluation found several examples demonstrating that when alternate livelihood systems with a clear, positive environmental-socioeconomic nexus were in place, the chances of the environmental benefits generated by GEF interventions being sustained was greater.

Designing profitable beneficiary-relevant alternative livelihood activities and working with existing institutions to include environmental considerations in local development plans emerged as important project-related sustainability factors in the biomes. The evaluation confirmed the importance of designing profitable alternative livelihood activities that correspond as much as possible to real needs in the everyday lives of beneficiaries. Continued operation and maintenance of small-scale infrastructure depends on costs being within the financial reach of households. Local authorities in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali have included environmental conservation activities in their commune and/or municipality sustainable development plans and budgets.

Gender, resilience, and fragility are considered in the biomes

Gender considerations are increasingly incorporated in GEF interventions in the two biomes. In line with similar findings of previous analyses by the IEO, gender is considered during implementation even if it was not addressed at the design stage in projects developed by the biome countries.

Resilience to climate risks is addressed in climate change adaptation projects, mostly in the form of risk management and as a co-benefit. Newer GEF projects, whether funded through the main GEF Trust Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, or the Special Climate Change Fund, integrate resilience within the respective project's multiple benefits framework.

Fragility has affected the timely delivery of GEF support, but the outcomes and sustainability of GEF support in the two biomes have been largely unaffected. The evaluation found several examples where the negative effects of newly emerged fragile situations have tended to be felt less in rural areas; or in relation to activities with a clear and tangible financial viability, and a high correspondence with beneficiary needs.

Recommendations

1 Project and program design in the biomes must include a discussion on how sustainability, including financial sustainability, is going to be addressed and managed. A well-designed intervention should include measures and activities that will support the continued delivery of outcomes beyond the life of the project. Sustainability factors identified at the design stage should be tracked by GEF Agencies during implementation and terminal evaluations should report on these. Financial sustainability must be given priority in the design and implementation of GEF support in the biomes and in Africa overall. The GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies should elaborate financial arrangements at the project design stage that can continue after project completion to deliver benefits over time. Support to institutions should be designed considering measures to enable those institutions to operate postcompletion on a sufficient and stable financial foot.

2 A clear discussion on how to foster synergies between environment and development must be included in design and managed through implementation. When designing and appraising proposals in the two biomes attention should be paid to the influence synergies between socioeconomic and environmental objectives have on the prospects for sustainability. Not much consideration has been given at project design stage to the influence that synergies between socioeconomic and environmental objectives have on the prospects for sustainability in the biomes. Several examples observed in the five countries visited provided compelling evidence indicating that when these considerations have been taken into account in design and implementation the prospects for sustainability postcompletion greatly improved. Fostering synergies between the environmental and development objectives should be more systematically pursued as the GEF already increasingly considers socioeconomic co-benefits in its recent portfolio.



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