

Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities

Concept Note

February 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is an international financial organization that provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for projects that address global environmental concerns related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and chemicals and waste. The GEF has provided over \$20.9 billion in grants and mobilized an additional \$135 billion in financing for over 5,300 projects and programs in 170 countries.¹ Today, the GEF is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The governance structure of the GEF includes an Assembly, a Council, a Secretariat, a Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, the World Bank as Trustee, and an Independent Evaluation Office (IEO).

2. The GEF provides support to countries in three main modalities: (i) enabling activities, (ii) medium-sized projects, and (iii) full-sized projects. Additional financing is provided through programs such as the GEF Small Grants Programme,² Programmatic Approaches, Integrated Approach Pilots, Integrated Programs, and the Non-Grant Instrument Program. The GEF IEO is conducting an evaluation of the GEF enabling activity modality. The GEF enabling activities are foundational modalities specifically designed to prepare plans and/or strategies, and to help countries fulfill their obligations under the Conventions to which the GEF is the financial mechanism. The GEF currently serves as the financial mechanism and funds enabling activities related to five conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), and the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

3. During GEF-5, the GEF introduced a direct access modality for enabling activities and the National Portfolio Formulation Exercises, allowing national entities to request up to \$500,000 of direct financing to meet their objectives under the Biodiversity, Land Degradation, and Climate Change Conventions. In 2013, the GEF was chosen as the financial mechanism for the Minamata Convention within which the GEF is providing support for countries to ratify and meet their obligations under the Convention. The enabling activities were last evaluated as part of the fifth Overall Performance Study (OPS5), in which the IEO conducted a comprehensive meta-evaluation of enabling activities at the GEF.³

¹ Number of projects/programs and financial information as of January 2021.

² The Small Grants Programme is approved as a GEF full-size project and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme on behalf of the GEF partnership.

³ The *Meta-Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities*, –GEF IEO, January 2013.

At the time, the direct access modality for enabling activities had just started implementation and was thereby not included in the evaluation.

4. The *Meta-Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities*⁴ found that GEF enabling activities “represent a basic building block of GEF assistance and support countries to formulate and direct sectoral and economy-wide programs that address global environmental problems,” through which the GEF has been able to respond to “requests from the conventions in a quick and systematic manner.” The enabling activities in the GEF are seen as forming “a key part of convention adherence by Parties and [are] highly relevant to ensure that countries meet their convention obligations and identify their needs and priorities.” The meta-evaluation also noted that enabling activities are aligned with GEF focal area strategies and the sustainable development agendas of recipient countries. It highlighted that GEF enabling activities are instrumental for the development of country-based actions by providing baseline information and technical as well as contextual analyses that can be used for introducing new policies and strategies. The meta-evaluation found that capacity development was a key objective in enabling activities and that they are responsible for much of the progress in strengthening the capacities of countries to deal with climate change, biodiversity, and POPs issues. However, despite this recognition, the evaluation noted that GEF has not provided support in a more strategic way based on national requirements, rather than project by project.⁵

5. This evaluation will cover the period from GEF-4 to GEF-7 to cover enabling activities under both the direct access and non-direct access modalities.

2. EVALUATION DESIGN

2.1 Goals, Objectives, and Audience

6. The objective of the Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities is to provide the GEF Council with an assessment of enabling activities and generate evaluative evidence for the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7).

7. The evaluation will address three main areas of enquiry: (i) *Relevance*, (ii) *Effectiveness and Results*, and (iii) *Efficiency*. It will assess the role of enabling activities in helping countries meet their Convention obligations, their role in developing national policies as well as preparing national plans and strategies, and the efficiency of the direct access mechanism.

8. The primary audience is the GEF Council and the evaluation will inform OPS7 and the GEF’s 8th replenishment process. The evaluation will also be useful to the GEF Secretariat, to the broader constituency of GEF Agencies, and to GEF member countries as well as civil society partners.

⁴ GEF Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO). 2013. *Meta-Evaluation of GEF Enabling Activities*. Washington, DC: GEF IEO

⁵ GEF Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO). 2008. [Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008](#). Evaluation Report No. 44. Washington, DC: GEF IEO

2.2 Evaluation Scope, Issues and Key Questions

9. The evaluation will cover GEF interventions under the enabling activities modality approved and implemented from GEF-4 to GEF-7. The GEF-4 to GEF-7 portfolio is composed of 544 enabling activities⁶ with \$262.19⁷ million in GEF grants and \$187.97 million in cofinancing. The evaluation will make a clear distinction between enabling activities aimed at reporting to conventions and GEF specific activities under the enabling activities modality such as the NCSAs and the NPFs. The evaluation recognizes that reporting related to conventions can sometimes be done through full and medium sized projects and programs as umbrella arrangements outside the enabling activities modality, but these will not be covered under this evaluation. The GEF financed 46 such projects and programs amounting to \$201.67⁸ million in GEF grants and \$649.02 million in cofinancing. This evaluation will consist of desk evaluations of enabling activities where the GEF is the financial mechanism. The evaluation will also look at the implementation of the GEF stakeholder engagement and gender policies in enabling activities.

10. The evaluation questions are derived from: 1) the GEF-7 programmatic directions; 2) the main issues identified by previous GEF IEO evaluations; 3) guidance from the Conventions; and 4) from issues of concern for the GEF Council. Questions are divided into the three main evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness and results, and efficiency. An Evaluation Matrix is presented in annex 1.

Relevance

- What is the strategic importance of enabling activities in the GEF suite of modalities?
- To what extent are activities under the GEF enabling activity modality relevant to:
 - Conference of Parties guidance;
 - GEF focal area strategies; and
 - recipient countries' national agendas in climate change, biodiversity, POPs, mercury, and land degradation?
- How has the use of enabling activities changed over time?

Effectiveness and Results

- What is the evidence on the role of enabling activities in developing national policies as distinct from preparing national plans and strategies?
- Complementarities or overlaps between enabling activities and other Agency projects in the GEF—is there scope for efficiencies?

Efficiency

- How are enabling activities processed? Is there economy in terms of processing times and resources in bundling enabling activities as large projects, programs, and umbrella arrangements?
- How is the allocation for enabling activities being spent?
- What have the conventions done to streamline reporting, internally and among other conventions? What are the opportunities for the GEF to streamline enabling activities support to enable countries comply with convention requirements?

⁶ Portfolio as of February 2021.

⁷ Grant amount including PPG but excluding agency fees.

⁸ Grant amount including PPG but excluding agency fees.

2.3 Methods and Tools

11. The evaluation questions will be answered through a mixed methods approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods and tools. An evaluation matrix composed of the key questions, relevant indicators, sources of information, and methods is presented in annex 1. Synergies with other ongoing evaluations will be sought by coordinated data gathering, analysis, and cross-fertilization. The evaluation will also draw on existing IEO evaluative evidence and ongoing evaluations which cover enabling activities through case studies.

12. Methods and tools will include:

- **Document review** of GEF policies and strategies, and of enabling activities, project-related documents.
- **Portfolio Analysis** of GEF enabling activities based on GEF Portal data and Annual Performance Reports. A database will be compiled including basic project information such as GEF activity cycle information, financing (including cofinancing), implementing institutions involved, focal areas, countries, key partners, and implementation status. Additionally, enabling activities will be classified by Convention and report type. A Project Review Template (PRT) will be developed to assess the enabling activities in a systematic way and to ensure that key evaluation questions are addressed coherently and allow for aggregation.
- **Stakeholder Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with GEF staff, Agency staff, Convention staff, and GEF country-level partners (including meetings with country operational focal points). The interviews will help identify and present perceptions of key institutions with regards to GEF support to enabling activities, including those in selected country contexts. Criteria driving the sampling include the following: the overall diversity of GEF support in terms of: geographical distribution; Agency distribution within countries; and other issues arising during the evaluation, including practical considerations.
- **Surveys.** Surveys will be delivered online to capture the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders, including the GEF Secretariat, Conventions, GEF Agencies, GEF operational focal points, and other relevant government departments.
- **Case Studies.** Case studies will assess the influence and impact of enabling activities in developing national policies. The evaluation will do a desk case study, tracking GEF enabling activities and their use in country policies and other GEF interventions. The evaluation will start with three country case studies in Jamaica, Madagascar, and Thailand, supplementing them with additional project reviews and stakeholder interviews. The selection of countries and intervention types is informed by the overall portfolio analysis and guided by the frequency of occurrence of intervention types in the portfolio and by geographical distribution.

13. Triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative information gathered will be conducted at completion of the data analysis and gathering phase to determine trends and identify the main findings, lessons, and conclusions. Stakeholders will be consulted during the process to test preliminary findings.

2.4 Quality Assurance

14. In line with IEO's quality assurance practice, quality assurance measures will be set up for this evaluation. An IEO internal reviewer will provide feedback and comments on the concept note, the preliminary findings, and the evaluation report. The principles of transparency and participation will

guide this process. The feedback process will continue during data collection and analysis, as well as on completion of the report. Broader stakeholder interaction will contribute valuable information and qualitative data to supplement data, interviews, case studies, and other research.

2.5 Evaluation Limitations

15. The evaluation team will be limited by time constraints and budgetary restrictions in the selection and analysis of the number of enabling activity projects for deeper learning. This limitation will be mitigated through a sample of project reviews and country case studies analysis. The desk reviews will help identify the issues that require further study.

16. The evaluation will only look at enabling activities financed through the GEF Enabling Activity modality. Though foundational activities may be implemented through other project modalities or as components of larger projects, they will not be covered in this evaluation.

17. GEF enabling activities are not required to submit terminal evaluations unless they are approved under the non-expedited procedures. This is a significant limiting factor for the evaluation, considering that less than 4 percent of all enabling activities fall under this category. It will therefore not be possible to obtain portfolio-level results using terminal evaluations.

3. PROCESS, DELIVERABLES, AND DISSEMINATION

18. This evaluation is being conducted between February and June 2021. The evaluation will be conducted in two phases: I) aggregate analysis (portfolio, quality at entry, other); and II) desk verifications (case studies) and interviews. An initial work plan is presented in table 1. The work plan will be revised and fine-tuned as part of further preparations.

Table 1: Evaluation Timetable

Task	Year	2021																													
	Month	January				February				March				April				May				June									
	Week	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4								
Approach Paper																															
Background information & portfolio data gathering		X	X																												
Approach Paper discussed with internal management / reference group			X	X	X																										
Data gathering and analysis																															
Meta-analysis		X	X	X	X																										
Desk review/Portfolio analysis (PRT design and filling)			X	X	X	X	X	X																							
Survey design, administration, and results/findings			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																				
Interviews with Stakeholders (Countries, Conventions, GEF SEC)							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																	
Triangulation													X	X	X																
Gap filling													X	X	X																
Report writing																															
Draft report													X	X	X	X															
Due diligence (gathering feedback and comments)																X	X	X	X												
Final report																	X	X	X	X	X										

Note: PRT = project review template. SEC = Secretariat.

19. The main findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented to the GEF Council. The full report will be submitted as a Council document. It will be distributed to the Council members, the GEF Secretariat, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, GEF country focal points, and GEF Agency staff. A graphically edited version will be published as open access on the IEO's website. A detailed dissemination plan will be prepared and implemented, which will include distribution of the listed outputs in the main evaluation networks through existing IEO mailing lists as well as mailing lists of audience and stakeholders that will be developed during the conduct of the evaluation. The plan will also consider concrete opportunities to present the evaluation through webinars as well as at evaluation conferences and workshops.

4. RESOURCES

20. The evaluation of GEF enabling activities will be conducted by a team led by an Evaluation Analyst with overall guidance from the Chief Evaluation Officer of the IEO. The evaluation will coordinate with other ongoing evaluations for desk reviews and portfolio analysis support. An international consultant will be selected to assist in the overarching report. The required skills mix includes practical, policy, and/or academic expertise in key GEF focal areas of the projects and programs under analysis, evaluation experience, and knowledge of external information sources that are relevant to GEF activities in the case study countries.

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION MATRIX

Key Questions	Indicators/Basic Data/What to Look for	Sources of Information & Methodology
Relevance		
What is the strategic importance of enabling activities in the GEF suite of modalities?	1) What was the purpose of enabling activities in the GEF instrument 2) What are enabling activities being used for? What gaps are they addressing? 3) Is the original purpose/aim of enabling activities being fulfilled?	1) Desk and portfolio analysis 2) Interviews 3) Global survey
To what extent are activities under the GEF enabling activity modality relevant to Conference of Parties guidance, GEF focal area strategies, and recipient countries' national agendas in climate change, biodiversity, persistent organic pollutants, mercury, and land degradation?	1) Are enabling activities aligned with GEF focal area strategies? 2) Are enabling activities aligned with national priorities? 3) How are enabling activities helping countries meet obligations to Conventions? 4) How are enabling activities aligned with the conventions to which the GEF is the financial mechanism	1) Document review 2) Interviews with stakeholders 3) Global survey (operational focal points and Convention focal points)
Has there been a review/evaluation by Conventions of the needs and importance of enabling activities? How has the use of enabling activities changed over time?	1) Have enabling activities influenced the evolution of Convention guidance? 2) Has the purpose of enabling activities changed over time (from the perspective of different stakeholders, e.g., GEF Sec, and from Conventions/countries)? 3) Does the enabling activities modality have future relevance (from the perspective of the different stakeholders)?	1) Desk review 2) Document review 3) Interviews with stakeholders
Effectiveness and Results		
What is the role of enabling activities in developing national policies as distinct from national plans or strategies?	1) Is there any evidence that enabling activities influence the design of national policies or laws/regulations?	1) Desk review and document review 2) Interviews with stakeholders 3) Global survey (operational focal points and Convention focal points)
Complementarities or overlaps between enabling activities and other Agency projects in the GEF—is there scope for efficiencies?	1) What are the key factors that affect the achievement of results within the enabling activities modality? 2) Are enabling activities used as inputs to the design of other GEF projects? 3) Are enabling activities used as inputs to the design of other donor funded projects?	1) Desk review and document review 2) Interviews with stakeholders 3) Global survey (operational focal points and Convention focal points)

Key Questions	Indicators/Basic Data/What to Look for	Sources of Information & Methodology
Efficiency		
How are enabling activities processed? Is there economy in terms of processing times and resources in bundling enabling activities as large projects, programs, and umbrella arrangements? Are enabling activities well aligned and adhering to GEF policies?	1) How long does it take to process an enabling activity? 2) How does the process compare with other GEF modalities? 3) Have the direct access and expedited mechanisms improved the efficiency of the overall enabling activities process? 4) Are the various policies (Gender, Safeguards, and Stakeholder engagement) reflected in the design and implementation of enabling activities?	1) Desk and portfolio analysis 2) Interviews with stakeholders
How is the budget for enabling activities allocated and being spent?	1) How has the financial allocation for enabling activities changed over the GEF replenishments?	1) Desk and portfolio review 2) Interviews with Conventions
What have the conventions done to streamline reporting? Internally and among other conventions How can the GEF streamline enabling activities and support provided to enable countries to comply with convention requirements?	1) Have they been involved in streamlining reporting across the different conventions; what have they done? 2) What are the types of activities and information collected through enabling activities and are there opportunities or scope for efficiencies and streamlining of processes?	1) Desk review 2) Interviews with stakeholders

ANNEX 2: TYPES OF ENABLING ACTIVITIES IN THE GEF

Focal Area	Enabling Activity
Climate Change	Biennial Update Report (BUR)
	National Communications
	National Programmes of Adaptation (NAPAs)*
	Technology Needs Assessments (TNAs)
	National Action Plans (NAPs)
Biodiversity	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP)
	National Communications
	Biosafety Reports* under the Cartagena Protocol
	Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) under the Nagoya Protocol
Land Degradation	National Action Plans (NAPs)
Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)	National Implementation Plans (NIPs)
	Preparation for Implementation of the Convention
Mercury (Minamata Convention)	ASGM National Action Plans
	Minamata Initial Assessment
Multi-Focal	National Capacity Self-Assessments *
	National Portfolio Formulation Exercises*
*Note: These enabling activities have been evaluated previously. Their findings will be combined with new findings and findings from Country Performance Evaluations and the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations.	