

International Waters Focal Area Study

Terms of Reference

Contact:

Geeta Batra
Chief Evaluation Officer and Deputy Director
gbatra@thegef.org

Kseniya Temnenko
Knowledge Management Officer
ktemnenko@thegef.org

Introduction

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a partnership for international cooperation where 183 countries work together with international institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to address global environmental issues. Since 1991, the GEF has provided developing countries and countries with economies in transition \$14.5 billion in grants. The GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) has a central role in ensuring the independent evaluation function within the GEF. The IEO sets minimum requirements for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ensures oversight of the quality of M&E systems at program and project levels, and shares evaluative evidence within the GEF partnership.

In 2015, as part of its efforts to enhance learning from evaluations, GEF IEO conducted and presented to the GEF Council its Knowledge Management Needs Assessment (GEF/ME/C.49/Inf.01). In addition to very encouraging results in terms of stakeholders' satisfaction and use of IEO evaluations, the Assessment also identified stakeholder needs, including the need for products that would distill evidence, lessons, and good practices from evaluation reports in different areas. In response to the findings of the Knowledge Assessment, and the large volume of focal area investments which represent more than 70 percent of the GEF funding¹, GEF IEO will develop focal area products that summarize evaluative evidence, and distill emerging lessons for GEF-7 and as a contribution to the Sixth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF².

Background on International Waters

The GEF International Waters (IW) focal area was established to support countries to jointly manage their transboundary surface water basins, groundwater basins, and coastal

¹ Technical Document #9. Multi-Focal Area Projects in GEF Portfolio, the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5), 2013:
https://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/EO/TD9_Multi%20Focal%20Area%20Projects%20in%20GEF%20Portfolio.pdf

² GEF-7 is expected to start in 2018. The Sixth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF will inform the replenishment negotiations for GEF-7.

and marine systems to enable the sharing of benefits from their utilization. The goal of the IW focal area is to promote collective management for transboundary water systems and subsequent implementation of the full range of policy, legal, and institutional reforms and investments contributing to sustainable use and maintenance of ecosystem services.

The global environmental benefits targeted by the IW portfolio include multi-state cooperation to reduce threats to international waters; reduced pollution load in international waters from nutrient enrichment and other land-based activities; restored and sustained fresh water, coastal, and marine ecosystems goods and services, including globally significant biodiversity and maintained capacity of natural systems to sequester carbon; reduced vulnerability to climate variability and climate-related risks, and increased ecosystem resilience³.

The overall strategic approach of the GEF IW focal area has been consistent over the years, and included joint fact-finding, multi-country strategic planning, and implementation of governance reforms and investments. The IW portfolio extends to nearly all GEF-eligible catchments and Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs). Since its establishment in 1991, the GEF allocated, through its IW focal area, over US\$1.5 billion in grants to over 170 countries⁴. As of December 2015, GEF allocated more than 290 projects using IW focal area financing, including multi-focal area projects⁵.

The GEF IW investments have been evaluated since the GEF Pilot Phase. The relevant evaluative evidence includes⁶:

- 1) Overview of IW strategies, projects and programming issues in the Independent Evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the Global Environment Facility, 1994 and the Study of GEF's Overall Performance, 1999
- 2) Comprehensive Studies of GEF International Waters Program conducted in 2002 and 2005 as contributions to the Second and Third Overall Performance Studies of the GEF (OPS2 and OPS3)
- 3) The Evaluation of the Role of the Local Benefits in Global Environmental Programs, which included IW focal area and a purposeful sample of 14 IW projects and in-depth case studies, 2006
- 4) Impact studies: Progress toward Impact Review of the GEF IW focal area assessed 23 IW projects completed during GEF-4, and contributed to the Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS4), 2010; Progress toward Impact Study conducted within the Fifth Overall Performance Study (OPS5) and included the review of 48 IW projects completed during GEF-4 and GEF-5, 2013; Impact Evaluation: the GEF in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas, 2012
- 5) Assessment of GEF focal area strategies and achievements: Evaluation of the GEF Focal Area Strategies which included evaluation of the GEF-5 IW focal

³ GEF-6 Programming Directions, 2014:

https://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/webpage_attached/GEF6_programming_directions_final_0.pdf

⁴ GEF Project Management Information System (PMIS), December 2015

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Annex A for more information about these evaluations

- area strategy and a Technical Document on Implementation of GEF Focal Area Strategies and Trends in Focal Area Achievements which included a section on IW and contributed to OPS5, 2013.
- 6) Other GEF IEO evaluations that included some evidence on GEF IW investments, including two Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluations of the Small Grants Programme, completed in 2008 and 2015; and 23 GEF IEO Country Portfolio Evaluations and Studies completed since 2006
 - 7) Terminal evaluations of completed GEF projects: as of May 2015, there are 107 terminal evaluations of completed IW focal area projects, including terminal evaluations of 38 IW projects which became available since OPS5
 - 8) Other evaluations conducted by GEF Agencies (excluding terminal evaluations of GEF projects) that are relevant to IW issues that assessed projects, programs, portfolios, strategies, and initiatives which may include some GEF funding or not include GEF funding at all.

Purpose, Objectives and Questions of the International Waters Focal Area Study

The purpose of the IW Focal Area study is to distill existing evaluative evidence in relation to the relevance, performance, results, progress to impact, and lessons learned of the GEF support to International Waters. Based on the evidence, and an analysis of the strategy, the study will provide insights and lessons for the focal area going forward.

The objectives of the IW Focal Area study are:

- 1) Assess the relevance of the strategy
- 2) Present a synthesis of IW results and impacts
- 3) Assess the approaches and mechanisms through which results have been achieved
- 4) Assess whether recently approved projects are consistent with the strategy and, to the extent possible, are likely to achieve outcomes
- 5) Identify lessons for GEF-7

Consistent with the objectives, the study will aim to address the following questions:

- What is the current relevance of the IW focal area to global environmental problems and key transboundary issues?
- How relevant is IW support provided during GEF-6⁷ to the GEF IW focal area strategy as formulated in the GEF-6 Programming Directions and GEF Council Decisions?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of GEF IW focal area strategy as formulated in the GEF-6 Programming Directions?
- What are the concrete achievements of the GEF IW focal area on the protection of transboundary water ecosystems on the levels of (i) process, (ii) stress reduction, and (iii) environmental status change?
- What are the trends in the performance and implementation of the GEF IW focal area support?

⁷ GEF-6 extends from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2018.

The IW focal area study will also aim to generate lessons learned on several cross-cutting issues, including gender, and stakeholder engagement, including private sector participation.

The audience of the GEF IW Focal Area Study is GEF Council, GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies, and GEF member countries, as well as the GEF CSO Network.

Scope of the IW Focal Area Study

The IW Focal Area study will draw on existing evaluative evidence generated by the GEF IEO and GEF Agencies, and will provide an update on the evaluative evidence since OPS5⁸.

Methods

- An evaluation synthesis: thematic synthesis of IW focal area-related evaluations conducted by GEF IEO and Independent Evaluation Offices of the GEF Agencies (excluding terminal evaluations of GEF projects). The thematic synthesis will provide a historical perspective and an overview of recurring findings, issues, themes, and lessons learned in relations to GEF focal areas.
- A portfolio analysis: trends in GEF IW focal area performance and implementation based on verification of PMIS data, Annual Performance Reports (APR), and terminal evaluations of the GEF projects; with an emphasis after OPS5.
- An update of the progress toward impact (P2I) desk analysis: building on the Progress to Impact analysis conducted for OPS5, the studies will analyze IW focal-area-related terminal evaluations of GEF projects that became available after OPS5. The analysis will aggregate the available evidence on longer-term results and factors that contribute or hinder to broader adoption of results in IW focal area.
- A review of quality at entry: An objectives mapping exercise to assess coherence between GEF IW focal area strategy at the GEF-6 Programming Directions and focal-area projects that received at least PIF approval during GEF-6.
- An expert review: As an update for the Evaluation of the GEF focal area Strategies (2012), a senior consultant will review and contrast GEF-6 IW focal area Programming Directions and key transboundary issues.
- Other possible methods may include a limited number of P2I case studies using Geographic Information Systems/Remote Sensing in selected geographic ecosystems with significant GEF IW focal area support to verify environmental

⁸ The Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5) was completed in 2013 and informed replenishment negotiations for GEF-6.

stress reduction and status change. As necessary, the IW focal area study may also include key informant interviews and surveys.

Calendar of Activities

The study will be conducted between March and October 2016. The initial work plan presented here below will be adapted as a result of further preparations.

Activity	Timeframe
Preparation of the terms of reference (preliminary document review and scoping)	March 2016
Thematic evaluation synthesis, desk review of evolution of IW strategies	April-May 2016
Portfolio review, key informant interviews, quality-at-entry review	June-August 2016
Preliminary findings, additional analyses, draft report	September 2016
Final Report	October 2016

Deliverables

The report of the International Waters Focal Area Study will be produced and presented to the October 2016 Council Meetings. The knowledge management product synthesizing key insights and suggestions for GEF-7 will be also prepared and shared with the GEF stakeholders as part of the knowledge sharing strategy for the Sixth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF.

Completed evaluations relevant to GEF IW focal area

International Waters Protection. Chapter 5. The Strategies and Projects of the GEF Focal Areas, Independent Evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the Global Environment Facility, 1994. The evaluation included an overview of IW strategies and 13 IW projects initiated during the pilot phase of the GEF. The overview considered the overall scope of GEF IW protection projects, the strategy for selection and funding of the IW portfolio, the issues of global benefits monitoring, incremental costs, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness, legally binding IW agreements, scientific and technical basis for the portfolio, as well as the IW projects evaluation and dissemination of results.

Programming Issues in International Waters, The Study of GEF's Overall Performance, 1999. The chapter on the programming issues reviewed the GEF Operational Programs developed by the GEF during GEF-1 (1994-1998), including three IW Operational Programs adopted by the GEF in 1995, considered the issues of resource allocation, balance between investment and capacity building activities, as well composition and development of IW portfolio.

International Waters Program Study, 2002. The study was a systematical assessment of the GEF IW portfolio and contributed to the Second Study of the GEF's Overall Performance (OPS2). The study focused on the GEF IW portfolio, its results, and preliminary impacts measured through the process, stress reduction, and environmental status indicators. The study covered three levels of analysis: 1) global transboundary issues addressed through the GEF support; 2) types of project interventions / design features; 3) projects organized into a geographically based approach. The study also sought to determine the extent to which GEF policies agreed with the strategic guidance adopted by the GEF Council, as well as assess the relevance of the GEF policies and procedures to priority issues in international waters, and determine the relative alignments with intergovernmental initiatives regarding damage and threats to international waters. At the time of the study, the GEF IW portfolio consisted of 41 full-sized projects (FSP) and four medium-sized projects (MSP).

Program Study on International Waters, 2005. The study was a contribution to the Third Study of the GEF's Overall Performance (OPS3) and assessed impacts, results, approaches, and strategies of IW focal area, as well as identified lessons learned and recommendations for the GEF operations. The study also assessed the global contribution of GEF IW activities among eligible water bodies. The study examined the development of the GEF IW portfolio since 1991, and assessed the implementation of the process of the scientific transboundary diagnostic analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Program (SAP). The four geographical regions were selected for in-depth case studies to assess the results and impacts of the GEF activities, including: 1) the Black Sea Basin (including the Danube and Dniro River Basins); 2) The Rio de la Plata Basin (including the adjacent Patagonia Shelf); 3) African lakes and their catchments (Tanganyika, Malawi, and Victoria); 4) The East Asian seas (including the Gulf of Thailand, and the South China Sea). At the time of

the study, the GEF IW focal area portfolio included 95 projects in virtually all GEF-eligible regions.

The Role of Local Benefits in Global Environmental Programs, 2006. The study analyzed the links between the local benefits and attainments of global environmental goals, particularly in the areas of international waters, climate change, and biodiversity. The study purposefully selected 14 IW projects for detailed consideration based on their stated intention to provide local livelihood benefits with linkages between the attainment of those benefits and global environmental gains. The links were analyzed with the help of the livelihoods framework in accordance with the following four parameters: changes in consumption patterns, improvements in the local resource base, reduced vulnerability, and changes in the external insitutional environment. A detailed *case study of the Romania Danube Delta Biodiversity Project* also contributed to the Local Benefits study.

Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme, 2008. The purpose of this joint evaluation was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and cost effectiveness of the SGP in relation to the overall mandate of the GEF. In addition, the evaluation assessed the results of the SGP, the factors that affect these results, and the program's monitoring and evaluation systems. It traced the evolution of the SGP, the changes that have taken place in the program, and the drivers of these changes. The evaluation included an assessment of eight country programs that were contributing to the reduction of environmental stresses on international waters, often in collaboration with larger GEF projects in IW focal area.

The Progress toward Impact Review of the GEF International Waters Focal Area, the Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS4), 2010. A chapter in OPS4, this review assessed the extent to which 23 IW projects completed during GEF-4 (2007 – 2010) had progress toward achieving global environmental benefits. The assessment used the review of outcomes to impacts (ROtI) methodology. The chapter also considered the relevance of the IW focal area to global environmental problems and key assumptions and drivers that ensure progress toward impact, and also provided a historical overview of IW focal area.

Impact Evaluation: the GEF in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas, 2012. The evaluation assessed the environmental and institutional impacts of 20 years of GEF support addressing marine and coastal concerns in the South China Sea (SCS) and the Gulf of Thailand. Using a systems approach, this evaluation focused on the large marine ecosystem, and covered a portfolio of 34 GEF projects and 150 small grants in seven countries that surround the SCS and are eligible for GEF funding. The countries included Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Technical Paper #3. International Waters, Evaluation of the GEF Focal Area Strategies, 2012. This formative evaluation assessed the GEF-5 (2010-2014) focal area strategies to inform the development and improvement of strategies for GEF-6 (2014-2018). The evaluation focused on the strategic paths envisioned to lead to the achievement of GEF goals and, ultimately, to create global environmental benefits. Using the theory of

change approach, and the real-time Delphi approach, this evaluation encompassed analysis of GEF-5 focal area strategies, including IW.

Technical Document #3. Implementation of GEF Focal Area Strategies and Trends in Focal Area Achievements, the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5), 2013. As part of OPS5, this document was built on the Evaluation of the GEF Focal Area Strategies (2012), and analyzed projects designed under the GEF-5 strategies, including an overview of the current state of the GEF-5 portfolio and a first overview of how focal area Strategies translate into GEF activities. The analysis included one purposefully selected IW project approved during GEF-5.

Technical Document #2. Impact of the GEF; and Technical Document #12. Progress toward Impact, the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5), 2013. OPS5 applied the theory of change and the progress toward impact approach to analyze the extent and scale of stress reduction and improved environmental status, as well as factors contributing to and hindering progress toward impact of the GEF projects and in the larger context. The analysis included the desk review of 48 IW projects whose terminal evaluations became available during GEF-4 and GEF-5.

Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme, 2015. This second joint GEF-UNDP evaluation of the SGP covers the period 2008 to 2014, with a focus on the fifth SGP operational phase, which began in 2011. The evaluation assesses the extent to which the most important recommendations and related GEF Council decisions emerging from the 2008 evaluation have been implemented, the factors that have affected their implementation, and the extent to which these recommendations and Council decisions remain pertinent in light of current and future circumstances. The evaluation also provides an overview of the SGP IW portfolio up to 2013.

GEF Country Portfolio Evaluations and Studies. Since the introduction of country-level evaluations in 2006, the IEO has conducted 23 country-level evaluations across all the GEF geographic regions in the world. These evaluations assess the performance and results of GEF support at country level, and how this support is linked to national environmental and sustainable development agendas, as well as to the GEF mandate of generating global environmental benefits within its focal areas.

Terminal evaluations of completed GEF IW projects. The GEF IEO terminal evaluations database includes evaluations of 107 completed IW projects, including terminal evaluations 38 IW projects which became available since OPS5. Terminal evaluations conducted at completion of GEF projects cover assessment of project results, including outputs outcomes, and progress to impact; assess project design, implementation, and execution; provide information on project finances and co-financing; enclose recommendations to the project agencies and management; and document lessons learned that may be relevant across the GEF partnership.

Other evaluations conducted by GEF Agencies (excluding terminal evaluations of GEF projects) that are relevant to IW issues that assessed projects, programs, portfolios, strategies, and policies.