

GEF Secretariat Comments on the “Learning from Challenges” Approach Paper and GEF IEO Team Response June 2023

Comment #	Paragraph #	REFERENCE TEXT	COMMENTS	GEF IEO TEAM RESPONSE
1		<i>General comment</i>	This paper seems to be two or three topics combined. • Topic 1: As noted in paragraph 14, the paper will analyze old, underperforming projects to identify risk factors, mitigation measures, and distill lessons. • Topic 2: As noted in paragraph 16, the paper will “review the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs (including child projects approved from GEF-7 onwards) to assess whether lessons from previous interventions, challenges and adaptation measures are considered at the design and applied during implementation.” • Topic 3: Section B is a wide-ranging discussion of factors outside GEF’s direct control. The proposed methodologies to provide analysis on these three topics are fundamentally different or unspecified. The approach paper does not present how the hypotheses on these three topics relate or how the analytical methods will align.	Please see the revised approach paper. The GEF IEO team responses in this column provide specific answers to comments. This study aims to review GEF interventions with challenges in achieving objectives, identify factors of interventions’ low performance (challenges) and adaptation measures, and provide insights on managing the risks of low performance and adapting to challenging circumstances in future operations. Our methodological starting point is to select underperforming interventions; the next step is to trace their evolution in terms of challenges experienced and adaptation measures used or missed; and the final step is to infer the causal pathways through adaptation to challenges toward either improvement or failure to achieve outcomes. Specifically, in a particular type of intervention, which types of adaptation work? What strategies can be used in specific country contexts, or in relations to specific interventions? What combinations of internal and external factors make a difference with regards to how well adjustments are made? This calls for a qualitative methodology which the study applies. The study methodology was developed in close coordination with the World Bank research department (DEC) (a DEC expert Michael Woolcock is part of the team) and is based on GEF STAP studies and guidance, GEF IEO and GEF Agencies evaluations, extensive academic and international agencies literature on delivery challenges, and adaptive management, GEF Strategies, policies, and guidelines. Case studies are the core method used for data collection and analysis,

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				with other methods playing either preparatory (portfolio analysis) or consultative (stakeholder discussions) role. This study is indeed, as the reviewer correctly points out, focused on in-depth review of <u>underperforming projects</u>: those that are <u>rated in the unsatisfactory range</u> at closure or during implementation (ratings from “Highly Unsatisfactory” to “Moderately Unsatisfactory”) to understand what happened with those projects during their implementation and to provide insights on managing the risks of low performance and adapting to challenging circumstances in future operations. To note, most of the recently closed projects were predominately originated under GEF-4 – GEF-6, and that is the study’s overall portfolio (the most recently closed projects). - A sample of ongoing operations with below satisfactory implementation ratings will also be analyzed to understand if lessons from older, closed projects are being applied. The study will not have a dedicated review of the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs as they are covered through GEF IEO evaluations of these programs. - As stated above, the topic of the study is underperforming projects’ adaptation to challenges, including internal and external ones. The list of challenges is based on extensive literature review, including evaluations, academic papers and GEF’s own publications and strategic guidance papers. Based on the literature, <u>external challenges</u> can be within the GEF partnership’s control and addressed by the project itself or by other operations; or <u>outside of its control</u>, requiring <u>adopting the project to the circumstances</u>, and to changing country conditions during project implementation. The importance of considering the latter is discussed at length in a recent GEF IEO paper, <i>GEF IEO. 2020. Evaluation of GEF support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations. GEF/E/C.59/01</i>, which shows that adapting to external challenges that are outside of GEF control is critical for the performance of GEF’s projects. This should be

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				examined beyond the FCV context. It is not clear why the reviewer assumes that external challenges should be taken out of the study about underperforming projects' challenges and adaptation.
2	25-30	<i>General comment: Suggested refocusing</i>	We would like to suggest for consideration that the scope of the approach paper be refocused solely on Topic 1. A refocused paper on Topic 1 would address: - In-depth analysis of underperforming projects in GEF-4 and GEF-5 building on rather than replicating prior reports - Include comparative analysis with higher-performing projects to provide necessary benchmarking - Analyze the written risk assessment in project PIFs and CEO Endorsement Requests against the reported project results. - Focus on the role of executing agency partners in areas that address project implementation, adaptive learning, response to challenges, short-term mitigation actions, etc. - Focus on the role of implementing agencies on monitoring and review, and long-term mitigation actions - Interviews should focus on project managers/team leaders at GEF agencies and executing partners who have knowledge of both the underperforming projects and higher performing projects on the same topic. - Optional: Review if knowledge products were prepared, published, and circulated on the underperforming projects and compare that to products for higher performing projects on the same topic, and whether older knowledge products were referenced in the project designs	Please see the response to Comment 1. Responses to specific points under this comment: - Comment: "In-depth analysis of underperforming projects in GEF-4 and GEF-5..." Response: Agreed. The study is doing exactly that. It also includes closed underperforming GEF-6 projects, as well as a sample of ongoing underperforming projects. This is an innovative study based on the process-tracing qualitative methodology to identify challenges faced and adaptation measures used and missed by underperforming projects and identify lessons on managing the risks of low performance and adapting to challenging circumstances for future operations. - Comment: "Include comparative analysis with higher-performing projects to provide ...benchmarking". Response: As the reviewer pointed out earlier (both within this Comment and Comment 1), <u>the focus should be (and is) on the in-depth analysis of underperforming projects</u>. Commonly used methods for the in-depth analysis are qualitative, such as case studies (e.g., see two recent publications, 1) Winder, J., Woolcock, M., & Ortega Nieto, D. (Eds.). (2022). The Case for Case Studies: Methods and Applications in International Development (Strategies for Social Inquiry). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108688253; and 2) Raimondo, Estelle. 2023. The Rigor of Case-Based Causal Analysis: Busting Myths through a Demonstration. IEG Methods and Evaluation Capacity Development. Working Paper Series. Independent Evaluation Group. Washington, DC: World Bank. DOI: 10.1596/IEG181796). The GEF IEO has been working closely with the World Bank research department (DEC) to

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				develop a specific qualitative methodology for this study, and case studies are the central method used. There are many past assessments, by the IEO and beyond, that are based on quantitative analysis (including benchmarking) of various factors of project performance, defining which factors explain performance rating. This study utilizes that work (see literature reviewed in Annex A of the approach paper) but goes beyond that. This is an innovative qualitative study. - Comment: “Analyze the written risk assessment in project PIFs and CEO Endorsement Requests against the reported project results”. Response: The study does indeed involve a review of project risks/challenges and mitigation/adaptation measures from a wide set of project documents, including design stage, implementation, and evaluation documents. - Comment: “Focus on the role of executing agency partners in areas that address project implementation, adaptive learning, response to challenges, short-term mitigation actions, etc.” Response: The study includes questions about the capacity and buy-in of the EA’s partners as a factor of project performance. It also includes questions on mitigation and adaptation actions. - Comment: “Focus on the role of implementing agencies on monitoring and review, and long-term mitigation actions.” Response: The study includes questions on the implementing agencies’ role and M&E aspects of project implementation as factors of project performance. It also includes questions on mitigation and adaptation actions. - Comment: “Interviews should focus on project managers/team leaders at GEF agencies and executing partners who have knowledge

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				of both the underperforming projects and higher performing projects on the same topic.” Response: The central method used by this study is case studies, involving interviews with project managers. They have such knowledge.
3	25-30	<i>General comment: Sections recommended to be dropped</i>	With a refocused approach, the following would be dropped from the paper: - References to integrated programs, or attempted review of recently approved projects - Sections A.c GEF’s organizational preparedness to implement adaptive learning - Section B Challenges to project and program performance that are outside of the GEF’s control Dropping the sections identified above would allow this paper to more clearly focus on lessons learned from underperforming projects.	- On integrated programs and section B: Please see responses to Comments 1, 2. - Regarding section A.c.: clarified and revised. This section was designed to respond to recommendations from the following documents: “GEF STAP. 2022. Risk Appetite and the GEF. A STAP Advisory Document. May 2022.”; “GEF STAP. 2022. Achieving Transformation through GEF Investments. Information Brief. May 2022”; GEF IEO. 2021b. GEF Support to Innovation: Findings and Lessons. GEF/E/C.60/02; and “GEF IEO. 2021. GEF Support to Scaling up Impact”. In response, the study will distill lessons for future operations, specifically for the members of the GEF Partnership as they make decisions on which operations to finance and set the framework for project design and implementation.
4		<i>General comment</i>	The use of “GEF” is confusing as it’s unclear whether it relates to GEFSEC or to the broader GEF Partnership or to GEF Agencies. Clarifying further would help understand the approach described.	In most cases, the GEF stands for the GEF Partnership. The text has been revised accordingly.
5		<i>General comment</i>	There is not clear linkage with IAP/IP piece as these programmatic approach is new, and the integrated and transformational character of the program design is often out of GEF’s control as the paper rightly said. Not many GEF-6 IAP projects are not yet finalized (no TE), and not many of them are classified as unsatisfactory. GEF-7 IPs are now starting.	Please see responses to Comments 1, 2.

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			The scope of the paper should rather focus on analysis of the 'unsatisfactory' projects from the previous cycles, and analyze the result comparing with those policy changes the GEF adopted since GEF-6 to say whether these changes were appropriate or not, and which adjustments should be made in addition.	
6		<i>General comment – Background and Introduction</i>	Might be worth noting that GEFSEC has already published several reports on emerging lessons from the GEF-6 Integrated Approach Pilots. See e.g. Synthesis of Experiences and Emerging Lessons from Establishing and Operationalizing Governance Framework and the separate reports for Sustainable Cities IAP , Resilient Food Systems IAP and Good Growth Partnership IAP . These learnings have informed the design of GEF-7 Impact Programs and GEF-8 Integrated Programs. In addition, several learning missions to visit GEF-6 IAP child projects have been carried out or are planned for 2023.	Thank you, the team will use all available evidence, including the references provided, where applicable. As noted in response to Comment 1, the study will not have a dedicated review of the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs as they are covered through GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.
7	1-10	<i>General comment on the introduction/context setting section</i>	It will be useful to define what is considered as a "challenge". Often the term is used loosely with "constraints", "barriers", "gaps", risks, etc. It will be useful to clearly set the context of "challenge" for this analysis. In general, the approach paper indicates more of how projects managed the risks (which have been hypothesized), rather than what real challenges were faced during design and implementation of projects.	Comment: "It will be useful to define what is considered as a "challenge". Response: The text has been clarified accordingly. Comment: "The approach paper indicates more of how projects managed the risks (which have been hypothesized), rather than what real challenges were faced during design and implementation of projects." Response: The study methodology, including the list of risks/challenges to achieving interventions' objectives and adaptation measures was designed based on an extensive literature review and in close coordination with a World Bank research department (DEC) on qualitative methods in development research. The study's focus is on real challenges and adaptation measures. The

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				central method used in the study is case studies, which involve interviews with real-life project managers. Please see responses to Comments 1-2. For more information, please see the methodological approach in the revised approach paper.
8	1	Evidence from projects and programs that are less successful is often overlooked	One could argue that evidence from projects and programs that are less successful is at the core of every change the GEF has made over the recent years. This includes a focus on integration, introduction of policies on gender, stakeholders, private sector, etc. but also stronger results management, portfolio oversight and introduction of incentives for adaptive management.	The GEF has been investing in continuous efforts to improve project and program performance, this is correct. However, <u>analytical efforts</u> (including by IEO) have been often focused on best practice examples and lessons on how to design good projects, and include such important topics and issues as gender and private sector involvement. <u>The question answered in those cases is: how to make project design better?</u> However, studies that aim at distilling why poor performance happens, and how projects can adapt are rare. <u>The question answered in this case is: what makes projects perform poorly and how to address those factors?</u> Please also see responses to Comments 1-2.
9	2	<i>As an important but relatively smaller player in global environmental finance, GEF...</i>	What is the reference here for classifying GEF as a smaller player in global environmental finance?	The paragraph has been revised. This extract refers to the following papers: GEF Support to Innovation: Findings and Lessons. GEF/E/C.60/02; and “GEF IEO. 2021c. GEF Support to Scaling up Impact”.
10	2	The GEF’s grant funding is often viewed	Better to change to GEF’s investments ; GEF non-grant instruments are at the forefront of the GEF’s innovative investments, and needs to be highlighted throughout the analysis.	Please see response to Comment 9.
11	4		The segue to risk is important here, but it would be useful to qualify upfront that this paragraphs deals specifically with risks to project outcomes. In addition, this paragraph omits the important fact that GEFSEC will develop a risk appetite baseline, as per the recommendations of the IEO OPS-7 study on Innovation.	Revised accordingly.

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12	4, 15		Will the scope of the study include those projects with huge delays (eg. projects that have not disbursed anything after CEO endorsed)? These projects would not have produced any PIRs to be classified as 'failed' but there are limitations and obvious failure, and we would like to learn from those cases to prevent cases in the future. What about cancelled projects? The paper did not define these as 'failed projects' – but obviously there should be lessons learned from those cancelled/dropped projects, if the purpose of the paper is to learn from the past.	- The study includes projects with delays. The study also utilizes the analysis on delays in first disbursement in the GEF partnership (Analysis of First Disbursement. GEF/C.50/Inf.05). - The study covers canceled/dropped projects. GEF IEO works in coordination with the GEF SEC RBM team who has confirmed that we have complete data about both dropped and canceled projects. This study is also building on the experience of the review of canceled projects in the in the Annual Performance Report 2020, GEF/E/C.58/inf.01.
13	7		It would be useful to provide context starting in this paragraph on the share of projects rated in the unsatisfactory range. Not doing so may fuel the notion that the portfolio as a whole is not faring well.	19 percent, please see paragraph 14 in the revised approach paper.
14	7	<i>The most cited weaknesses in project design included shortcomings in <u>M&E design</u> and interventions strategies, and overly ambitious objectives. The most common management or oversight weaknesses were inadequate training or oversight provided for <u>effective M&E</u>, failure to restructure or cancel...</i>	As M&E is pointed out as one of the most cited weaknesses in both project design and management, will there be a specific focus on this in the forthcoming study?	Yes, M&E weakness is one of the internal challenges, and its adjustment during implementation is one of the adaptation measures, they are included in the study. To conclude which challenges and adaptation measures are most important, the team needs to finalize the study; this is not known apriori.

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15	8	<i>The analysis identified adaptive management as a key enabler of strong outcome achievement, while delays, procedural constraints, and procurement challenges may negatively affect outcome achievements of some projects.</i>	In this para, delays are pointed out as major challenge. One could argue that delays are not a the root cause of the problem but rather a symptom of some other underlying factor. Therefore, would it not be more interesting to understand <i>what</i> caused delays, and what can we learn from that?	As mentioned earlier, the list of challenges comes from literature. Delays is one of the factors identified in quantitative research as a factor of low project ratings. This study is an in-depth examination of project experience, and by definition is looking into the root causes of the observed events, including delays.
16	8		The link between the importance of system thinking and other evaluative pieces of work mentioned is unclear in the context of this approach paper. Perhaps system thinking should be mentioned elsewhere, or be subsumed under the focus on the importance of technical design.	Clarified and revised accordingly.
17	Figure 2		The author may consider also grouping countries by CPIA ratings as analysis on project success factors found correlation on this point in the past.	The team is considering using CPIA in the portfolio analysis.
18	10		Paragraph 6-9 identify numerous reports and suggestions on lessons learning, adapting to challenges, etc. Paragraph 10 does not sufficiently describe how the proposed approach in this paper will differentiate and add value to the prior reports.	The paragraph has been revised and expanded accordingly.
19	10		Paragraph 10 also introduces language that does not appear to be supported by the proposed analytical structure. For example, how will the proposed structure to analyze	Please see responses to Comment 18. Please also see responses to Comments 1-3.

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			underperforming projects identify “<i>solutions to manage challenges and the risks of failure, and incentives that the GEF partnership can use to encourage iterative learning and timely adaptation.</i>”? Perhaps the proposed approach need not be so ambitious. Even if the proposed data collection and analysis is sufficient to identify that “<i>lack of timely adaptation</i>” as a factor in underperforming projects, does this same data and analysis provide strong insights on the “identification of incentives that the GEF partnership can use to encourage timely adaptation?” We recommend the paper focus on factors contributing to underperformance and leave solutions to a different paper.	
20	11		Paragraph 11 and Figure 1 represent a missed opportunity to review GEF’s track record on performance. A companion to Figure 1 should present underperforming projects as a percentage of total projects during the GEF cycle. Then, it would be easy to see if GEF’s track record on underperformance was declining, the same, or improving. This alone would offer valuable insights on whether GEF has “<i>adaptive learning.</i>”	This is exactly what Figure 1 presents: completed underperforming projects as a percentage of the total number of completed projects, by the GEF’s cycle. The team added the relevant information to Figure 1 to make it clear.

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21	11 & graphs		The definition of 'unsatisfactory' is different from para 15. Here they have graphics with TE with unsatisfactory rate. When IEO is calculating these percentage, did they include the total number of projects in the cycle? Then this information might be mis-leading, obviously there would be more on-going projects in more recent cycle (less percentage for unsatisfactory TE. Better to make consistent with unsatisfactory definition with para 15, or indicate those percentage of on-going project on top on the graph, or divide it by total terminated projects. Please change range of the graph to where those values are... Not convincing to say each category has difference with those graphics here as they look all same.	- Figures 1 and 2 are sourced from the Annual Performance Report (APR) dataset which has been validated by the GEF IEO and used in the GEF IEO Council reports. Therefore we use it for the Approach Paper. Data as per paragraph 15 will be available once the portfolio analysis for this study is finalized. -Figures 1 and 2 show completed underperforming projects as a percentage of the total number of completed projects. A detailed description of how the rates are calculated is included in the GEF IEO APR reports (for example, see GEF IEO. 2023. Annual Performance Report 2023. GEF/E/C.64/Inf.01). To clarify, the denominator includes only completed projects. That is because the numerator can only include completed projects, as we would not know which project have underperformed by closure if they are still ongoing. Again, similar calculations as per paragraph 15 will be available once the portfolio analysis is finalized. -Revised.
22	12		Paragraph 12 should be presented with percentages rather than absolute number of projects. For example, the focal area chart CC projects 521 out of a total number of CC projects XXX equals the % of CC projects listed as underperforming. Same with Country – 271 LDC underperforming projects out of total LDC projects XXX equals % of underperforming projects in LDCs. Same issue applies to country income and region. This will give a much better perspective on which areas presenting relatively higher underperforming projects	Please see responses to Comment 21. Similar to Figure 1, Figure 2 presents completed underperforming projects as a percentage of the total number of completed projects. This is a standard requirement to presenting statistical data in publications: the main point is to presents percentages, however, when the percentage=20% (as an example), it matters whether it is 20% out of 1000 projects (which is a reliable outcome) or just out of five projects (which cannot be interpreted as a reliable outcome per se). Therefore, there is a corresponding line under the chart listing the total number of completed projects.
23	12	Figure 2. First diagram.	We normally use the abbreviation 'CW' for Chemicals and Waste focal area, rather than 'chem'. And for Multifocal-area usually we use 'MFA' rather than 'MF'.	Revised.

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24	13, etc.		In the section “The Portfolio of GEF Projects with Unsatisfactory Outcomes” the references and suggested linkage with systems thinking and transformational change should be dropped. In paragraph 13 the asserted linkage is weak and unrelated to the older GEF portfolio.	Clarified and revised. Please also see response to Comment 28.
25	15		Paragraph 15 describes the analysis of projects “GEF-4 onwards.” Referring back to Figure 1, this appears to be a sample size of 598 projects in GEF-4, 214 in GEF-5 and 8 projects in GEF-6. The small sample sizes raise questions. In particular, it may be wise to exclude GEF-6 projects.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2 and 20-22. The study looks at completed projects that have outcome ratings at closure. Otherwise, it is unknown if the project is underperforming by closure or not. There is no plan to compare outcomes by replenishment. The study should include as many projects in later replenishments as possible to analyze most recent closed projects.
26	15	<i>from GEF-4 onwards</i>	GEF-4 covers projects approved in 2006-2010. This is old and may no longer reflect current programming strategies. Could the focus be more current and start with GEF-5?	That would be ideal but unfortunately, there are not enough completed underperforming projects in GEF-5 and GEF-6 for portfolio analysis or for the selection of specific types of underperformance for case studies, as per the study methodology, which was designed jointly with the World Bank’s DEC. Please see responses to Comments 1,2. To complement this analysis, the study also includes a review of ongoing projects (please see responses to Comments 1,2).
27	15, footnote 2		The GEF’s mandate is to achieve results by completion and to put the conditions in place for sustainability. It should also be noted that project and program objectives are defined with a view to achieve and be evaluated against the achievement of results at completion, not beyond.	Thank you, considered; but the Comment has no relation to footnote 2. Footnote 2 states that the study will check if the objectives were achieved post-completion and explains why this is important. It does not say anything about the GEF’s requirement to achieve results by completion. Again, the footnote refers to an important part of the study’ framework, based on literature.
28		<i>Section: The Objective, Scope and Key Questions</i>	Without further evidence, it is not clear that studying old, underperforming projects that were designed before the GEF-7 and GEF-8 consideration of upstream issues, systemic issues, and systems thinking can be concluded as relevant to those types of projects. Therefore, unnecessary references	- On “old projects”. The study, as was acknowledged in several GEFSEC’s comments above, should focus on the underperforming projects. The study is looking at the newest completed projects because only completed projects have outcome ratings. To

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			should be dropped. In paragraph 14, the asserted linkage with systems thinking is not established. We recommend dropping the fragment <i>“especially considering increased GEF focus on innovation, transformational change, and addressing the drivers of environmental degradation through larger, integrated projects and programs”</i>.	complement this analysis, the study also includes a review of the ongoing projects. Please also see responses to Comment 1. - On the “new” ideas of “systems thinking”. The idea of systems thinking originated in the 1940s, right after WW2 (see the work of Norbert Wiener on cybernetics). The GEF partnership has been consistently encouraging this approach over time, and reflected, for example in GEF STAP guidelines. For one of the earliest references please see GEF, UNDP, UNEP, IBRD. 1992. <i>The Pilot phase and beyond. Working paper series (Global Environment Facility)</i>. The complexity of GEF-supported projects and programs has been increasing over time, making systems thinking more and more applicable. Similarly, transformational and innovative projects existed in the GEF portfolio before GEF-7 and GEF-8 (as for example, evidenced by the GEF IEO Transformational Change Evaluation, 2018 and GEF IEO Review of the GEF Support to Innovation, 2021). The study provides an opportunity to learn from previous complex, transformational, innovative interventions that experienced challenges in achieving their outcomes. As indicated in response to Comment 1, the study will not include a dedicated review of integrated projects and programs since they are covered though GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.
29	16		We recommend dropping paragraph 16. It is unrelated to the objective identified in paragraphs 14-15. To conduct an analysis of existing projects, some which are just at the concept stage, a separate analysis that establishes an appropriate hypothesis and establishes a valid dataset would be required. There is no scientific justification to pre-select a subset of GEF projects for such an analysis. In fact, attempted application to integrated programs of factors for underperformance gleaned from analysis of old projects that did not employ integrated programming and systems	Please see responses to Comments 1-2: the study applies a qualitative approach, therefore, it is not clear how “a valid dataset” would be applicable. There is extensive academic literature on selecting project for qualitative analysis, and the study applies recommendations from that literature. On systems approach, please see response to Comment 28. On integrated programs, the study will not include a dedicated review of these programs since they are covered though GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.

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			thinking is inappropriate. To wit, an SAT score from a high schooler used as an indicator of likely success in undergraduate college is NOT used to evaluate if that student will succeed in medical school or law school.	
30	16		It is unclear why the focus is on integrated programs here whereas the evidence base to derive conclusions would be very small. It may perhaps be more fruitful to focus on the portfolio as a whole, with an emphasis on integrated programs where relevant, as opposed to making integrated programs a core, standalone section of the analysis.	Agree. Please see responses to Comments 1 and 29.
31	16, 22	<i>How previous lessons are applied in integrated/impact programs</i>	This doesn't sound consistent with the study methodology which aims to assess how projects which faced challenges, managed those challenges. The lessons from these projects are proposed to inform future project design. By assessing whether GEF utilized lessons in designing of IPs goes beyond study scope. IPs indeed built on past approaches of focal area projects to adopt a more integrated and systems based approach for transformation. So, there was a broader lesson to shift towards integrated approach. However, how GEF learned from specific projects or portfolio and applied them in IP design seems like a different study scope. Also, why focus only on IPs given that FA and MFA project continue and are better candidates to learn from past closed projects which had similar features.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2 and 29.
32	17		Paragraph 17 gets to the heart of re-focusing this paper on Topic 1. • 17a seems very much on target. • 17b can only be addressed if the analysis expands to focus on the risk assessments prepared in the project documents, and the analysis provides insights on the quality of those risk assessments.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2. Please see the revised approach paper, paragraph 20.

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			• 17c includes numerous assumptions that may not be borne out by the data analysis. • 17d is not a review of prior practices, but more akin to brainstorming which would require a different type of research and analysis.	
33	17, b		The focus here is on risk during design, but is silent about managing risk to outcomes during implementation. It would help to elaborate further on this aspect.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2. Please see the revised approach paper, including objectives, methodological approach, annexes B, C, and D.

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34	18-24, and 25-30	<i>Add a comparative analysis with higher performing projects</i>	The proposed analysis requires countervailing evidence, but it is not clear the proposal plans to collect this evidence. For example, you may study older underperforming projects and find patterns that higher than “usual number of project components” contributed to poor performance. In order to make that comparison, data on the number of project components in high performing projects would also be needed. In a similar way, if the study indicates underperforming projects failed to make use of “adaptive implementation mechanisms” then you would also need data from “higher” performing projects that did make use of those mechanisms.	Again, the study applies a qualitative approach. Please see response to Comment 2. The study is using an in-depth examination of the underperforming projects to see which challenges these projects faced and how they were addressed, in order to understand why they underperformed and how the underperformance could have been avoided in those projects that underperformed. We are only looking at the reasons for underperformance and related adaptation. Therefore, comparison with higher performing projects is not possible, as they would not have reasons for underperformance. In other terms, the quantitative approach comparing poor performing and higher performing projects would have the outcome rating as the dependent variable (Y), and project and country characteristics would be independent variables (X₁, X₂...X_n). We have examined the evidence from this type of work through the literature review thoroughly. We are taking the next step: asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ the factors defined as important for performance in those studies – combined with interventions teams’ decisions and adaptation strategies over implementation – lead to either failure to achieve project objectives at closure or turn projects around from poor to good performance. The comparison will be across these types of projects. To reiterate, there are many past assessments, by the IEO and beyond, that are based on quantitative analysis (including comparative analysis) of various factors of project performance, defining which factors explain performance rating. This study utilizes that body of work (see literature reviewed in Annex A of the approach paper) but goes beyond that.

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35	19, 22	<i>In addition, the study will review the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs (including child projects approved from GEF-7 onwards) to assess whether lessons from previous interventions, challenges and adaptation measures are considered at the design and applied during implementation.</i>	I assume that this refer to the GEF-6 Integrated Approach Pilots and GEF-7 Impact Programs? The 'Integrated Program' in GEF-8 are yet to be approved by council are are therefore not ongoing and it is too early to assess. Please clarify in text. For most GEF-7 IP child projects, implementation is at very early stages. For these, there may not be a lot to learn from yet from the implementation phase. For GEF-8 Integrated Programs, no PFDs have been approved by council and child projects will not be CEO Endorsed by October 2023 when this study is to be completed. So the wording 'from GEF-7 onwards' then actually only means GEF-7 child projects?	Please see response to Comment 1. The study will <u>not</u> have a dedicated review of the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs as they are covered though GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.
36	20	<i>used across the three types of projects in the portfolio (the project categories are described in paragraph 14);</i>	I think this is referring to para 15, rather than 14?	Yes, thank you; corrected.
37	20		If IEO is going to keep the IAP/IP analysis, the documents to review shall include annual reports from each IAP/IP.	Please see response to Comment 1. The study will not have a dedicated review of the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs as they are covered though GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.
38	22		Should be dropped.	Please see the response to Comment 1. The study will not have a dedicated review of the ongoing GEF integrated and impact programs as they are covered though GEF IEO evaluations of these programs.
39	23		Paragraph 23 on interviews should be refocused to agency and executing partner project leaders who can reflect on	Please see responses to Comment 1-2. This is a common part of the process of conducting GEF IEO evaluations and studies: consultations

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			the factors identified in underperforming projects in which they are familiar. The GEFSEC, STAP and Council will have an opportunity to reflect on the analytical results and brainstorm solutions to address challenges and identify incentives in the GEFSEC management response, guidance documents, and future programming directions.	with the stakeholders, sharing early outcomes. It is not clear why this process should be changed.
40	25, v	(v) for projects with ratings in unsatisfactory range, the prospective of achievement of objectives after project closure (including potential replication or scaling up) could be identified.	If the paper intends to proceed with this, it may be useful to qualify the level of attribution to GEF financing of the achievement of objectives after project closure.	Thank you, this will be considered.
41	25-30	<i>Proposed analysis of underperforming projects needs to include analysis of the PIF/CER risk assessments</i>	There is little reference to the on-going process, required in each GEF project PIF, to provide a risk assessment. The risk assessment is a distillation of the experience, track record, lessons learned, country situation, stakeholder consultation, and more during the project concept stage. It provides rich evidence that project proposals are in fact addressing past challenges in order to deliver a stronger project. An analysis on Topic 1, underperforming projects, would address the risk assessment directly – making note of when the project design time got it right, got it wrong, etc. Did projects that were rated underperforming correctly identify the risk, and it happened anyway? Or did they neglect a major risk-factor that led to project problems? The risk assessment is also an important factor in understanding whether an underperforming project was	Thank you, considered; the study goes beyond that and looks at how risks are mitigated through the components.

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			still a “good” project. That is, if GEF is going to innovate and learn, then it should be expected that some projects will fail. If a risk assessment correctly identifies a high-risk factor, and it provides true, then the project has generated a positive outcome for learning - despite underperforming.	
42	25-30	<i>Studying evidence of learning</i>	For the analysis to provide useful documentation on “learning from challenges” there needs to be some hypothesis on how learning is evidenced at each level of the GEF project implementation. The paper should do a more thorough documentation on how it will collect and analyze evidence of learning. Different considerations of evidence of learning that could be considered: - lessons learned documented in monitoring reports - references to high performing or underperforming projects found in future project documents - knowledge products that review features of high performing projects as compared to low performing projects - low number of projects similar in design to underperforming projects are submitted in future cycles - whether risk assessments are static or evidence learning	Please see responses to Comments 1, 2, and 34.
43	26		This paragraph does not seem to say anything new that has not been said already above. The value added is unclear.	Thank you, revised.
44	27	<i>Figure 3.</i>	Can the figure also indicate which factors that are <i>within</i> and which are <i>outside</i> GEFSEC control?	Please see annexes B and C in the revised approach paper. Internal factors (challenges to achieving intervention’s outcomes) are listed under the headings “Project design/implementation”.

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45	28-29		Analysis related to external environment noted in Paragraph 28-29 needs to be focused project by project based on the dataset used in the portfolio analysis. For example, “ <i>the risk of failure to partner with local communities</i> ” should not be assessed regionally or even at the country level, but for the specific projects that are subject to analysis and case-studies. Interviews should be arranged accordingly.	The unit of analysis in this study is indeed a project. It is not clear why the reviewer assumes that this analysis would be done at a regional or country level within the framework of the reviewed study.
46	28	<i>Entire para and especially the risks listed</i>	The para mostly lists risks associated with a project. Will the assessment simply look at the risk tables and analyze how risks were managed? What could be more useful is to document what challenges were actually faced by the projects e.g. in relation to decreased ownership, lack of engagement of stakeholders, coordination challenges, etc. Risks indicate a more futuristic assessment whereas study of challenges could focus on what actually happened.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2. The focus is on real/actual challenges and adaptation measures.
47	29		Another question could be: how the challenges affected project outcomes, especially their sustainability.	Please see responses to Comments 1-2.
48	30		Analysis related to project design needs to be clarified in order to be relevant. For example, in paragraph 30, how will design quality be assessed relative to the strategic programming directions at the time of approval? Is systems thinking an appropriate evaluation criteria? How will cost of preparation be evaluated? How is a gap before implementation start related to quality of project design? How will evaluators determine the alignment with stakeholder needs or TTL/staff experience? How will differences in project design requirements by focal area, country, region, technology, and objective be assessed? A	Please see responses to Comments 1-2.

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			smaller list of project design factors that can be assessed within the scope of the paper would be more appropriate.	
49	30	"Higher than usual number of project components"	The number of component itself may not be a sign of complexity. The number of sub-components or high number of results indicators may be other important aspects to look into.	Thank you, this will be considered.
50	30		Under design and implementation, various items have been listed. Are all related to challenges? Some are but not all. Points such as relevance of the design, project governance arrangement, project's adaptive management and risk management, communication strategies, etc. seem to be more relevant challenge questions. Many other points seem more like gaps in the project design, not necessarily challenges. Also, it may be useful to map the challenges vis-à-vis different actors in the projects e.g. GEF agencies, GEFSEC, Executing agencies, beneficiaries, etc. Also, their capacity and readiness to address the challenges could be useful to understand for future programming.	Thank you, this will be considered.
51	A.C	<i>Section: Organizational level: GEF's organizational preparedness to implement adaptive learning</i>	Section A.c needs significant work to become relevant and should be dropped from the paper.	Please see responses to Comments 1-3.
52	32		Paragraph 32 asserts, without justification, that emphasis on systems thinking, innovation, scaling, etc. somehow implies " <i>the organizational culture needs to support or provide incentives to recognize challenges arising during project implementation and encourage reporting on them.</i> " Are not those same organizational requirements needed for all projects and programs? One could easily hypothesize that due to the very strong upfront analytical work needed	Thank you, clarified and revised.

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			to support a systems thinking project, that it might encounter fewer challenges than some “stand-alone” projects in areas such as project design and others. Also, to be fair, one could argue strongly that GEF’s adoption of integrated and impact programs reflects 20 years plus of adaptive learning. With the help of STAP and many others, GEF “learned” the disadvantages of attacking systemic challenges one-project at a time and evolved a new approach.	
53	33		Further, paragraph 33 implies the main analytical technique for exploring “<i>organizational willingness to recognize challenges during project implementation....</i>” is interviews and case studies. Without more clarity on the research design, these interviews sound very abstract and theoretical. The effectiveness of this approach cannot be discerned. Will the interviews address older completed projects, or on-going projects currently under implementation? Will the interviews focus on executing agencies – who are actively implementing projects and “learning from mistakes” in real time? What hypothesis links “organizational willingness” of the Secretariat, who may learn of a project implementation challenge many months or years after the executing agency and implementing agency have faced the challenge?	Please see responses to Comments 1 - 2.
54	34+	<i>Section B. B. CHALLENGES TO PROJECT AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF THE GEF’S CONTROL</i>	Section B should be dropped in its current form. Section B appears to be more a thought piece that might inform a future GEF replenishment that an analysis of GEF’s adaptive learning from underperforming projects.	Please see responses to Comments 1 and 3.

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55	34		Paragraph 34 also inappropriately co-mingles the complexity of systemic thinking with prior underperforming projects. First, the paragraph asserts, without clear justification, that such systemic thinking projects <i>“significantly depend on the mitigation of challenges to project performance that are outside of direct GEF’s control.”</i> Then the paragraph attempts to link these types of challenges to prior underperforming projects, without a clear explanation of why the two types of challenges are comparable. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding of GEF’s approach to integrated projects. One way to view an integrated project is it seeks to bring within the project scope areas of policy and the private sector that were often not considered in stand-alone projects. Thus, a Food Systems child project specifically identifies government policies that need to be recognized and addressed in order to bring more sustainable agriculture to scale – compared to older GEF projects that focused on demonstration of sustainable agriculture practices without addressing broader policy issues. It could be argued that the stand-alone project is the one that has <i>“challenges outside of GEF’s direct control.”</i>	Thank you, clarified and revised.
56	35		The section does not have a realistic methodology for linking the “challenges” listed in paragraph 35 to the analysis of older underperforming projects. The proposed topic is so broad, it is difficult to see how interviews can fully cover the topics as they relate to one focal area or region, let alone the entire GEF portfolio. Further, there does not appear to be a logical way to examine the list of proposed challenges in paragraph 35 and relate those to a specific project or project proposal. Would one conduct an interview with a GEF Council member about	Please see responses to Comments 1-2. - On the assertion (in the comment) that there is no “logical way to examine the list of proposed challenges [...] and relate those to a specific project or program proposal” (we assume “proposal” means “performance”): it is very unclear why the reviewer assumes that there is no such way while there is extensive literature on operationalising research questions into instruments for data collection and analysis; and GEF IEO, World Bank’s DEC, academic institutions, universities, other research organisations routinely utilise knowledge on this subject. Further, the list of external

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			project XXXX and ask, “were there unresolved macroeconomic issues for this project” or would one ask a Council member “are there any unresolved macroeconomic issues affected the GEF?” Neither type of questions seems useful.	challenges is based on an extensive review of literature involving quantitative analysis linking these challenges to project outcome ratings. - Communications with the GEF Council members will serve the function of stakeholder consultations to discuss early findings of the study. The questions will relate to the study’s overall findings.
57	35		Lack or limited government ownership is considered both external and internal GEF challenge. It will be useful to qualify this as it could lead to confusion.	Thank you, this has been corrected.
58	35 iv.	<i>Unresolved governance issues, complicated political economy, vested interests</i>	Can we clarify what type of governance this refers to? National governance?	In this context, it is clear it is national governance, not corporate governance or environmental governance. Development institutions’ terminology commonly includes this term without any specification.