

Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility

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As we transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the evaluation community has opportunities, particularly in evaluating global environmental benefits. It can come together to invest in new methodologies to evaluate complex systems that deliver environmental and socio-economic benefits, encourage innovative assessments of impacts, and broaden the adoption of these methodologies through replication and scale up by developing partnerships and sharing knowledge. The IEO has been investing in evaluation approaches to measure the impacts of GEF interventions in focal areas that relate to the SDGs, which include the measurement of environmental benefits across focal areas and broad socio-economic co-benefits.

GEF and the SDGs

The GEF strives to make innovative, catalytic and integrated investments to achieve transformational change in food security, fresh water, energy, infrastructure, cities, sustainable production and consumption, while achieving a range of additional impacts including gender equality, poverty reduction and good governance.



While the SDGs are definitely more encompassing than the MDGs, including dimensions such as universality, improved coherence and accountability, they come with their acknowledged challenges, which are even more pronounced in assessing environmental benefits. These include the need for good

indicators and measurement by countries, operationalizing the goals through a more integrated and holistic framework and addressing the issues of fragmentation since environment as a public good tends to be shortchanged as in the short term it is seen as an externality and there are perceived trade-offs between economic development and environmental protection.¹

Some examples of IEO's planned contributions to the SDG evaluation agenda.

- (1) ***Assessments of GEF's contributions to the different focal areas that are linked to the SDGs.*** These address the impacts of GEF strategies and interventions and their contribution to the different conventions. Environmental multiple benefits of single focal area interventions (such as carbon sequestration in a project focused on land degradation) will be assessed using a value-for-money approach.
- (2) ***An evaluation of multiple benefits in programs that cover multi focal areas.*** This evaluation will look at the environmental multiple benefits from interventions designed across focal areas such as biodiversity and land degradation, as well as assess the socio economic benefits from these interventions.
- (3) ***The application of cross-cutting tools that address gender and private sector development that are now in the SDGs.*** Guidance notes have been developed for mainstreaming gender, climate resilience and private sector development in all evaluation work.
- (4) ***Evaluating the integrated pilot programs in the GEF on sustainable cities, food security and commodities that are designed to address several SDGs and include the cross cutting themes of gender and private sector.*** This process (formative) evaluation will shed light on the interrelationships and trade-offs involved in implementing the SDGs at the design stage as the projects are still to be implemented.

Methodologies

Measuring the impacts of these interrelated systems requires innovation in our approaches and the use of a variety of tools.

Adopting mixed methods and approaches in complex systems²

Interventions in complex systems which address environmental and socioeconomic issues, are prone to manifesting less obvious types of impact (unintended, indirect and secondary impacts). The definition of a system which an intervention seeks to change has a strong bearing on the factors that the evaluation will consider in its analysis. For example, at the GEF, since the effects of climate take place at different scales including local, national, regional and global, the evaluation questions address the outcomes of the intervention that directly relate to the project and also focus on understanding the broader system that the intended activity was trying to influence. This would include system boundaries, system components, and interactions among the various components of each system. The biodiversity evaluation and the South China Sea evaluations are examples of the application of this approach.

¹ Utitto J (2014) Evaluating environment and development: Lessons from international cooperation. *Evaluation* 20(1): 44-57.

² Garcia J. and Zazueta A. (2015) Going Beyond Mixed Methods to Mixed Approaches: A Systems Perspective for Asking the Right Questions. *IDS Bulletin* 46 (1), 30-43.

Incorporating assessments of quality assurance and safeguard mechanisms

Quality assurance and safeguard mechanisms are important to advance the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. A key GEF principle is that GEF-financed operations that achieve benefits in one area should not lead to adverse environmental or social impacts in other areas. The GEF applies fiduciary standards and has established high standards for environmental and social safeguards, gender mainstreaming, and engagement with civil society organizations and indigenous peoples.³ Evaluations will address the multiple benefits (global environmental and socio-economic) generated through these interventions and pay attention to cross cutting issues such as gender mainstreaming. The gender mainstreaming note is an example of recent work.

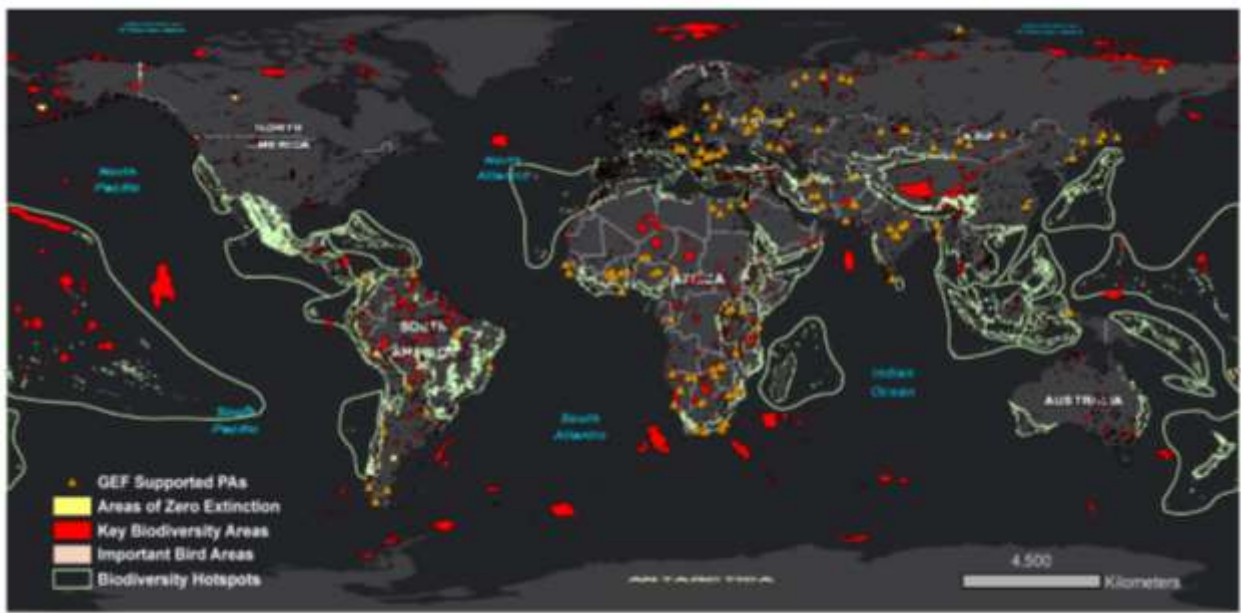
Mainstreaming methodologies for evaluating partnerships, stakeholder engagement (CSOs, private sector)

Sustainable development is not possible without including local governments and local community organizations in the forefront of the sustainable development agenda. Despite the continuing importance of and need to increase official development assistance and other public sector funds, it is clear that there will be huge financial demands on the private sector as well. The past few years have seen a number of innovative public-private partnerships to reduce investment risks, optimize the use of both public and private sources of finance and pool human resources and strategic capabilities. The IEO is including a dimension of partnerships in evaluations, and doing a thematic assessment of the role of civil society and private sector. The CSO Network evaluation and the study on the private sector are examples.

Using available data and methods for environmental evaluation and establishing partnerships in evaluation

For example, the recent evaluation on biodiversity applied the latest scientific criteria on biodiversity values in protected areas, as well as other international biodiversity designations in addressing questions such as, is the funding going to the right places? Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) have become the new criteria for GEF protected areas. Other Important areas are Ramsar Sites, UN heritage sites. The use of GIS enables us to see if the protected areas are located in critical biodiversity areas. The use of GIS data, remote sensing, planetary level cloud computing are now being mainstreamed into our focal area studies and thematic evaluations. The IEO is partnering with research institutions, NASA, to carry out this work.

³ Mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system (A/69/79-E/2014/66)



In summary, ongoing and planned evaluations, by applying a variety of innovative approaches and methodologies will provide useful insights into the observed inter-relationships in the SDGs (environmental and socioeconomic) and possible trade-offs in achieving impacts, and help contribute to the discussion on the progress towards these goals.

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