

# COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (CES) EVALUATION

Concept Note

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**Prepared for**  
IEO GEF

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## 1.1. Background

The Country Support Program (CSP) is a GEF corporate program, administered and implemented by the GEF Secretariat since 2010, that seeks to enable a strategic, better-coordinated access to GEF resources by informing, assisting, and empowering GEF Operational Focal Points (OFPs), Political Focal Points, Council Members and Alternates, Convention Focal Points, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), GEF Agencies and other interested country stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

**The last evaluation of the CSP, conducted in 2020-2021 by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) with the support of Baastel, resulted in six recommendations:** (a) build on current efforts to collaborate with other global environmental funds; (b) develop a clear and comprehensive CSP program strategy and implementation plan with an appropriate budget and resources envelope; (c) strengthen the technical expertise of the CSP team and the program's monitoring and reporting systems; (d) better align the reach and timing of national dialogues with country needs for support; (e) enhance inclusiveness at events to improve collaboration on the ground; and (f) apply a customized approach to capacity building.<sup>2</sup> The management response established different actions to address these recommendations in the context of the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for GEF-8.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation also fed into the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7),<sup>4</sup> which in turn informed the GEF-8 replenishment negotiations.

**As a result, the CSP evolved into a component of the Country Engagement Strategy (CES),** which has two strategic priorities: (1) enhancing the capacity of recipient countries to make informed and impactful strategic decisions on the use of GEF resources, and (2) sustaining the impact of GEF resources at the country level, towards globally relevant targets, outcomes, impact and sustainability. To achieve its expected outcomes,<sup>5</sup> the CES has three interlinked components: upstream programming support, which includes the Technical and National Dialogues; the CSP, which focuses on improving collaboration at the country level through inclusiveness, further increasing country ownership and leadership by empowering OFPs, and promoting South-South knowledge-sharing through tailored capacity building and outreach; and the Knowledge Exchange and Learning Strategy.<sup>6</sup>

**The CES is still at early stages of implementation.** The CES implementation arrangements were approved by the GEF Council in November 2022<sup>7</sup> and its budget was updated accordingly in early 2023. Activities under the upstream programming support and CSP components have been ongoing since October 2022, while the GEF Knowledge and Learning Strategy was approved in October 2023.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GEF Secretariat (2022a). [GEF-8 Programming Directions \(GEF/R.08/29/Rev.01\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> GEF IEO (2023). [GEF Country Support Program: Evaluation Report No. 153](#).

<sup>3</sup> GEF Secretariat (2021). [Management Response to: Evaluation of the Country Support Program \(GEF/E/C.60/09\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> GEF IEO (2022). [Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF: Working Toward a Green Global Recovery](#).

<sup>5</sup> These are: enhanced country ownership and empowerment, improved strategic alignment of GEF priorities for higher overall impact, fulfillment of the GEF Visibility Policy, improved country portfolio development, improved national policy coherence, and increased coordination at the country level with other funds (GEF Secretariat, 2022a).

<sup>6</sup> GEF Secretariat (2022a).

<sup>7</sup> GEF Secretariat (2022b). [Country Engagement Strategy Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8 \(GEF/C.63/05\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> GEF Secretariat (2024) [Report on implementation of GEF-8 Country Engagement Strategy \(GEF/C.66/Inf.06\)](#).

## 1.2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

Building on the findings and recommendations from the last CSP evaluation, the **purpose** of the present evaluation is to assess the evolution and implementation progress of the CES and provide input to the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8), which will in turn inform the ninth replenishment of the GEF. The evaluation will be guided by the following key questions, organized by OECD DAC evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance:** *To what extent has the revised approach to country support embedded in the CES addressed the recommendations stemming from the last CSP evaluation?*
- **Effectiveness (outputs):** *What is the progress in the implementation of the CES? What are the key factors that have enabled or hindered progress?*
- **Effectiveness (outcomes):** *How has the CES influenced the evolving relationships within the GEF partnership to facilitate country access to climate and environmental finance?*

The evaluation will focus on the initial implementation of the CES (spanning from 2022 to 2024), and it will analyze its activities globally and in the different regions where it operates: Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Pacific, and South Asia.

A **preliminary evaluation matrix** (Annex I) was developed to scope the evaluation and ensure that evaluation questions drive the proposed methods for data collection and analysis. This matrix will be refined and expanded based on feedback from the GEF EIO. The final version of the evaluation matrix, to be completed during the inception phase, will include indicators (qualitative and quantitative as relevant) to operationalize the specific evaluation questions and will further detail the information sources and methods to be used to assess these indicators. It will inform data collection (including the development of data collection tools) and data analysis.

## 1.3. Proposed approach

The evaluation will draw on international good practices and will follow the ensuing principles:

- ✓ **Utilization focused:** The evaluation design will be conducted in a participatory manner with GEF IEO and GEF Secretariat staff as relevant to ensure that the end users and uses of the evaluation drive data collection, data analysis, and reporting. At inception, the evaluation questions will be refined to ensure that they are aligned with expected evaluation uses, and a fit-for-purpose methodology will be developed to answer these questions.
- ✓ **Participatory and inclusive:** CES stakeholders will be engaged throughout the evaluation process by creating space for their voices and views to be heard. The evaluation team will make every effort to involve CES stakeholders in a participatory manner, recognizing their crucial role not only as repositories of a wealth of information but also as key users of the evaluation findings. Stakeholders will be consulted and engaged at appropriate stages of the evaluation by using tailored methods and data collection tools.

- ✓ **Close coordination** with GEF IEO staff, who will comment, provide guidance on, and validate deliverables as relevant to ensure that expectations are aligned, and that the evaluation is utilization focused. Attention will be paid to ensuring complementarity and avoid duplications with other ongoing evaluations, such as the evaluation on policy coherence.
- ✓ **Iterative and flexible approach:** Recognizing that circumstances differ from one context to another and may change over time, the evaluation team will be systematic and organized, but also willing to adapt the methodology as necessary to take advantage of emerging opportunities for data collection.
- ✓ **Impartiality:** The team proposed for this will develop findings and recommendations independently, following a systematic process of data collection and analysis to avoid bias.

## 1.4. Overview of the methodology

The evaluation will be implemented using a **mixed methods approach** for data collection and analysis, including a desk review, a portfolio analysis, interviews and group discussions with key informants, observation of CES events, an e-survey, and case studies. The proposed mixed-methods approach will triangulate different data sources (quantitative and qualitative) and stakeholder perspectives to ensure a comprehensive, robust, and evidence-based assessment of the CES. It is anticipated that the following data collection methods will be used:

**In-depth desk review:** The evaluation team will conduct an in-depth desk review of relevant documents, which will be carefully assessed based on the evaluation criteria and questions in the evaluation matrix. In addition to providing a solid basis for the other data collection activities, the desk review will look into how the recommendations of the last CSP evaluation have been addressed.

**Updated portfolio analysis of CES activities and outputs:** Drawing on available data, the evaluation team will update the portfolio database developed during the last CSP evaluation and conduct a portfolio analysis to obtain a snapshot of progress in the implementation of CES activities and identify any relevant trends at the portfolio level, e.g. any relevant changes in the type and timing of activities implemented. All data will be processed and analyzed using Excel and/or Power BI.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Up to 15 semi-structured Key Informant Interviews will be conducted with the GEF Secretariat staff to explore how recommendations from the CSP evaluation have been addressed, the evolution of the CSP into the CES, any enabling or hindering factors encountered in the implementation of its components, and emerging lessons on the new activities introduced. An additional 5 interviews will be conducted with representatives of other environmental funds (such as the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Investment Funds) to explore recent efforts to increase coordination at country level. These interviews will be conducted virtually and will be guided by interview protocols, built from the evaluation questions established in the evaluation matrix. The list of interviewees will be defined during the inception phase. Group interviews will be conducted as relevant with slight adaptations to the interview protocols.

**E-survey:** A short e-survey will be administered to participants of the Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs), with support from GEF's IEO staff in attendance, using the questionnaire developed for the last CSP evaluation and updated in 2023. This will make it possible to collect

participants' feedback on CES activities, update the results of the previous survey conducted in 2020, and identify any relevant trends.

**Participation in CES events:** The Evaluation Team will assist to 4 CES events planned between May and October 2024 (tentatively, 2 ECWs and 2 National or Technical Dialogues) to explore stakeholder perceptions on the country support provided through the CES, especially regarding specific CES priorities such as the empowerment of OFPs. In addition to applying the e-survey, data collection activities will include: (a) observation of the event following a guide developed based on evaluation questions; (b) semi-structured Key Informant Interviews with country stakeholders as part of the case studies (see below); (c) semi-structured Key Informant Interviews with Council Members and Alternates (if in attendance) and group discussions with OFPs at ECWs, following the interview protocols and facilitation guides developed at inception (these data collection tools could be used by GEF staff to conduct additional interviews and group discussions at the other ECWs that they will be attending).

**Country case studies:** Four country case studies, to be prepared as succinct internal documents, will be conducted to explore the emerging outcomes of the CES in greater depth and in different country contexts. The focus of these case studies will be on assessing to what extent the CES has contributed, or is likely to contribute, to its expected outcomes (enhanced country ownership and empowerment, improved strategic alignment of GEF priorities, enhanced visibility of the GEF as a strategic partner at the country level, improved country portfolio development, improved national policy coherence, and increased coordination at the country level with other funds), as well as on identifying other concurring factors that are enabling or hindering these outcomes. To do this, attention will be paid at understanding the evolving relationships of OFPs with Political Focal Points and the GEF Secretariat.

A purposive sampling process will be followed to select these countries, considering the following sampling criteria: (a) regional balance (selecting different countries than those consulted in the previous evaluation); (b) country capacity, based on GDP and other relevant characteristics (including a LDC and a SIDS); (c) countries currently with/without Council members; and (d) convenience, by selecting countries that will participate in/host ECWs or National and Technical Dialogues to be attended by the Evaluation Team, as a way to optimize data collection.

Each case study will entail a desk review of country-level documents and data, complemented by up to 15 Key Informant Interviews (in-person at CES events or remote) with Political and Operational Focal Points, Convention Focal Points, representatives from other key government agencies, CSO and private sector representatives, and relevant GEF Agencies (national offices). A short, internal report will be developed for each case study and the findings will be integrated into the overall data analysis.

**Observation of online events:** If relevant and feasible, the Evaluation Team will assist to selected online events such as Stakeholder Empowerment Series and Thematic Workshops to conduct observation following a guide developed based on evaluation questions.

**Data analysis and triangulation:** The data collected from different sources (including internal country case study reports) will be coded against evaluation questions with the aid of data analysis software such as Dedoose or MAXQDA. The data thus compiled from different sources for each evaluation question will then be triangulated to develop robust findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## 1.5. Tentative timeline

Tasks	M1 04/24	M2 05/24	M3 06/24	M4 07/24	M5 08/24	M6 09/24	M7 10/24	M8 11/24	M9 12/24	M10 01/25	M11 02/25	M12 03/25
<b>Inception phase</b>												
Inception meeting												
Preliminary document review												
Scoping meetings												
Draft inception report	D1											
Final inception report		D2										
<b>Data collection phase</b>												
Documentation review												
Updated portfolio analysis												
Interviews (remote)												
E-survey												
Participation in CES events												
Observation of online events												
Additional remote data collection for country case studies (doc review and interviews)												
Country case study reports							D3					
Analysis and triangulation												
<b>Reporting</b>												
Draft evaluation report (including 2-page summary for GEF Council)										D4		
Presentation of the draft evaluation report												
Final evaluation report												D5



## Annex I. Preliminary evaluation matrix

Key evaluation question	Specific evaluation questions	Information sources	Methods for data collection and analysis
<b>1. Relevance:</b> To what extent has the revised approach to country support embedded in the CES addressed the recommendations stemming from the last CSP evaluation?	1.1 What actions were taken in response to each recommendation? 1.2 To what extent the actions taken address the recommendations? 1.3 What were the bottlenecks encountered, if any, to fully address the recommendations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documents (including the GEF CSP evaluation and management response, OPS7, GEF-8 Programming Directions, CES Implementation Arrangements, and the Knowledge and Learning Strategy)</li> <li>GEF Secretariat staff</li> <li>Other environmental funds (incl. the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Investment Funds)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured, key informant interviews with GEF Secretariat staff and other environmental funds</li> </ul>
<b>2. Effectiveness (outputs):</b> What is the progress in the implementation of the CES? What are the key factors that have enabled or hindered progress?	2.1 What is the progress in the implementation of CES activities under each component? 2.2 What are the key factors that have enabled or hindered progress? 2.3 What are the emerging lessons about the new activities introduced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CES event materials, relevant outreach and knowledge products</li> <li>Portfolio data, including the Report on Implementation of the GEF-8 CES (January 2024)</li> <li>GEF Secretariat staff</li> <li>CES events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Updated portfolio analysis</li> <li>Semi-structured, key informant interviews with GEF Secretariat staff</li> <li>Observation of events (online and in person)</li> </ul>
<b>3. Effectiveness (outcomes):</b> How has the CES influenced the evolving relationships within the GEF partnership to help countries make better use of the resources available through the GEF?	3.1 How has the perception of country stakeholders on CSP/CES support evolved since the last evaluation? 3.2 To what extent have CES activities and outputs contributed, or have the potential to contribute, to its expected outcomes? 3.3 What factors are enabling or hindering outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country-level documents and data (e.g., relevant CES products, agendas and materials of relevant CES activities, GEF country project portfolio data)</li> <li>Other environmental funds (incl. the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Investment Funds)</li> <li>CES events</li> <li>Country stakeholders including GEF Political and Operational Focal Points, Convention Focal Points, Council members and alternates, other government representatives, GEF Agencies (country offices), Civil Society Organizations, private sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured, key informant interviews with other environmental funds</li> <li>Observation of events (online and in person)</li> <li>E-survey (<i>with support from GEF IEO</i>)</li> <li>Semi-structured, key informant interviews and group discussions with country stakeholders at CES events (<i>with support from GEF IEO</i>)</li> <li>Country case studies</li> </ul>



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