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GEF COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION: BENIN (1994-2007)

The following document contains two sections:

- 1) Key conclusions and recommendations from the Country Portfolio Evaluation conducted by the GEF Evaluation Office, including a small introduction describing the GEF support to Benin and the methodology. This summary is Chapter 1 of the full report of the Country Evaluation which is available in the GEF Evaluation Office web site.
- 2) Response of the government of Benin to the evaluation

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION – BENIN (1994 – 2007)
(prepared by GEF Evaluation Office)

BACKGROUND

1. Benin has received GEF financial support since 1991 through several projects and activities carried out in collaboration with GEF Agencies.¹ From October 2007 to April 2008, the GEF Evaluation Office undertook an evaluation of Benin’s country portfolio for the period from 1991–2007. This evaluation was launched because of the GEF Council’s request that the Evaluation Office assess national, GEF-supported activities. The purpose of these evaluations is twofold: (1) to evaluate how GEF-supported activities fit into national strategies and priorities, and take into account the enormous ecological challenges that lie at the heart of the GEF mission; and (2) obtain additional information on the results of GEF-supported activities and how they are implemented. Benin, Madagascar, Cameroon, and South Africa were selected for the evaluation as a representative sample of African countries. Benin, in particular, was selected because of its status as one of the world’s “least developed countries” (LDC) and for its advanced work on the National Capacity Self-Assessment for Global Environmental Management. Synthesizing the four Country Portfolio Evaluations will allow the Evaluation Office to assess the experience and common issues across different countries on the continent.).

2. The Benin CPE focused on 13 national that received a total support of \$21 million in GEF funding. The evaluation also examined five regional projects. Of the national projects, five have been completed, seven are ongoing, and one is being prepared. One regional project has been completed, one is ongoing, and three are being prepared. These projects were not developed within a strategic country framework, as such, but rather with a view to achieving several goals and objectives over more than 15 years.

	\$ millions	% of total
Biodiversity	11.34	53
Climate Change	2.9	14
POPs	0.49	2
Multifocal	6.52	30
Land Degradation	0	0
SGP	0.15	1
Total	21.4	100

3. All GEF’s main focal areas are represented in the evaluated projects, as are all three GEF Implementing Agencies i.e. the UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank. The evaluation also looked at the first three ongoing projects under the Small Grants Programme, worth a combined total of \$150,000, which began in 2007.

¹ The African Development Bank (AfDB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

4. Based on the overall purpose (above) of the GEF Country Portfolio Evaluations, the evaluation for Benin had the following specific objectives:

- a.) Independently evaluate the **relevance** and **efficiency** of the GEF support in a country on several levels: national environmental priorities and decision-making processes; the GEF mandate and the improvement of the world's environment; and GEF policies and procedures;
- b.) Assess the **effectiveness** and **results** of completed and ongoing projects in each relevant focal area; and
- c.) Share the **lessons learned** and **knowledge acquired** with 1) the GEF Council in its decision-making process to allocate resources and develop policies and strategies; 2) the Country on its participation in the GEF; and 3) the various agencies and organizations involved in the preparation and implementation of GEF support.

5. Benin's CPE focuses on all types of GEF-supported activities in the country at all phases of the Activity Cycle (in preparation, ongoing, and completed) and administered by all the Implementing Agencies in all the focal areas. The sum of all these activities taken together constitutes the GEF's country portfolio.

6. The Benin Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted between September 2007 and February 2008 by an evaluation team² consisting of staff from the GEF Evaluation Office and consultants. The methodology included a series of components using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. The basic aspects of the evaluation included an exhaustive documentary review, project review protocols, a large number of interviews, focus group sessions with key stakeholders and field visits to six projects.

7. One limitation to this evaluation consists in the fact that the GEF's projects in Benin are not articulated around a national programme. As a result, there is no evaluation framework consisting of predetermined environmental objectives, on the basis of which results and activity effectiveness can be assessed and compared. The evaluation thus focuses on the particular objectives and internal coherence of individual portfolio projects and activities, and how they are proceeding. Furthermore, in many cases, GEF support is provided after the fact and/or via partnerships involving numerous institutions. Under these conditions it is difficult to attribute the impact of certain activities on development solely to the GEF. Rather, the aim will be to examine GEF's contribution to the results as a whole, i.e., to establish a credible link between the support given to the institution and the benefits.

² Task Manager: Sandra Romboli, Evaluation Officer, GEF Evaluation Office, Lead consultant Alain Lafontaine, Baastel, and national consultant Paul Onibon, Baastel.

CONCLUSIONS

Country Portfolio Relevance

8. The following conclusions were reached based on the relevance of GEF support for the country's sustainable development framework and its environmental priorities, as well as the relevance of this support to the GEF mandate and programs:

Conclusion 1. GEF support to Benin has been relevant, given the country's environmental and developmental priorities.

9. The main reference documents on environmental and sustainable development issues in Benin, the National Agenda 21 and the environmental action plan, have benefited considerably from GEF support through several projects focused on the environmental challenges identified in these various programs. Furthermore, several of the GEF-supported projects in Benin originated from Beninese initiatives. However, GEF Implementing Agencies deserve some criticism for insufficient consultations with government authorities in the past about some of the initiatives advanced with GEF support.

Country Portfolio Results

10. A number of conclusions can be drawn concerning the effects and impacts of GEF support on the portfolio's reproducibility and sustainability.

Conclusion 2. The global, environmental impacts of GEF support for Benin are sustainable.

11. Currently, most of the GEF Benin portfolio consists of enabling activities and thus the global environmental impacts remain somewhat limited at this developmental stage of the portfolio. However, some large-scale projects completed to date have demonstrated ongoing global, environmental impacts years after GEF support has ended in their two respective focal areas, i.e. climate change due to carbon sequestration and biodiversity in the Pendjari Biosphere Reserve. In terms of carbon sequestration, it is estimated that 915,000 tonnes of carbon equivalent can be stored and, with respect to biodiversity, implementation measures have helped to rapidly regenerate the fauna of Pendjari Park. A case in point is the increase in the elephant population, which was greatly reduced in 1999, but increased from 900 in 2003 to over 1,600 in 2006; in addition, the number of western kob antelope rose from 2,000 in 2000 to 9,000 in 2005. Moreover, illegal hunting saw an overall decline in Pendjari Park.

Conclusion 3. The village-based co-management models developed by GEF projects in Benin are sustainable in the long-term and can be replicated.

12. Overall, the portfolio's socio-economic sustainability has performed well in terms of actions on biodiversity and climate change, which depend upon developing and

strengthening the local structures for co-managing natural resources and their related benefits. Today, several years after the projects have ended, these structures still play a central role in the success and sustainability of agreed efforts through these initiatives, and assume some value in terms of their reproducibility elsewhere in the country and in the region.

Conclusion 4. Benin is now ready to begin effective implementation of the global conventions, which will assure the sustainability of enabling activity results. However, several factors related to institutional, human, and financial capacities impede this implementation, and the coordination it will require.

13. Now that Benin has developed core capacities, as well as detailed diagnoses, laws and regulations, strategies and action plans to apply these conventions through a range of enabling activities, the country is poised to implement the conventions and mobilize these developed capacities. This will be a much greater challenge in a country like Benin, where the number of active, international players in environmental issues, outside of the GEF, is limited.

Country Portfolio Efficiency

14. Questions regarding the portfolio's efficiency revolve around assessing the time, energy, and money needed to develop and implement GEF projects; the roles, coordination, lessons learned, and synergies among the various players and GEF projects; as well as the main challenges to the success of the GEF mission—communications, project information, and the structure of GEF focal points.

Conclusion 5. The findings of the joint, GEF activity cycle evaluation were confirmed in Benin. For many stakeholders, the GEF project development cycle was a black box and far too long. The definitive consequences of implementing the new GEF project cycles remain to be seen.

15. In the minds of most of the stakeholders encountered in Benin during this evaluation, the GEF project development cycle was complex, far too lengthy, and too often unclear. Naturally, these perceptions are primarily based on the previous project cycle in which the portfolio developed until now. However, there remains a blatant lack of adequate information concerning the GEF project cycle and its requirements, and no clear explanations for the delays in approving or starting projects. Until 2007, large-scale projects in Benin took an average of 2.7 years from their entry into the pipeline to start-up, as compared to enabling activities, which take an average of only 6 months. However, the time required to develop and negotiate projects varies greatly within Benin's project portfolio; some large-scale projects required approximately four years or more to start up. The challenge for the GEF now lies in demonstrating that these features will not be carried over into the new, recently adopted project cycle. Needless to say, the various stakeholders view the introduction of this new, shorter project cycle very positively.

Conclusion 6. There is a lack of capacity in Benin to develop project proposals, a factor that has always affected Benin's access to GEF funding.

16. In both government and civil society, this finding was a recurring theme in Benin: that the country lacks even the basic capacities to develop persuasive GEF project proposals and needs to strengthen these capacities in general to help it, as an LDC, access GEF money in this context. Furthermore, the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection (MEPN) acts as the GEF focal point in Benin to coordinate project development. However, the MEPN is a new department with a very high employee turnover rate and subject to the pressures of civil service process reform, which limits its capacities to coordinate in this regard.

Conclusion 7. The actions undertaken under the Benin GEF portfolio have generally incorporated a variety of mechanisms for sharing knowledge and distributing information among different, local stakeholder groups.

17. On the one hand, these initiatives include awareness-building and distribution actions typical of most enabling activities under the Benin GEF portfolio, whether as awareness workshops in Communes with various local stakeholder groups, community radio interventions, or the use of various awareness-building supports, such as booklets, leaflets, posters, stickers, Web sites, etc. On the other hand, there are just as important actions aimed at awareness-building and distribution of large-scale project results, for example, through the use of local radio broadcasts in local dialects; school visits to parks; the establishment of an environmental education center; joint post-graduate, university research programs, etc.

Conclusion 8. Several opportunities to coordinate and develop GEF crosscutting measures in Benin are not being fully exploited.

18. The vast majority of the projects are currently being implemented through the Ministry of the Environment and Nature Protection, and none of the projects, except for the SGP, are being directly carried out by NGOs. Most of the stakeholders met during this evaluation regret the loss of momentum in the operational structure and the absence of national coordination structure - COCAFEM in 2005. In fact, the evaluation team noticed several opportunities to coordinate and develop GEF cross-cutting measures in Benin that have not been fully exploited—a situation that is at least partly due to the absence of such a national coordinating structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the GEF Council

Recommendation 1. The GEF must initiate further reflection on potential courses of action to ensure an integrated and coordinated national approach.

19. Through its support for enabling activities, the GEF stimulated the formulation of many diagnoses, plans, and strategies to implement the global conventions in Benin.

Many challenges are now linked to mobilizing the inherent resources in the effective implementation of global conventions in an LDC such as Benin. Furthermore, cross-cutting integration and coordination are necessary for this effective implementation. Faced with these challenges, the GEF must initiate further reflection on potential courses of action to ensure an integrated and coordinated national approach. This will imply, for instance, more sustained dialogue, in conjunction with the Beninese authorities and the other national and international development partners, and could involve a more active role by the GEF in discussions about sector and general budget support programs.

Recommendation 2. A greater effort must be made to strengthen capacities of LDCs, such as Benin, at different levels.

20. With regard to the type of capacity building, the evaluation highlighted the need to target the development of: 1) technical capacities to develop eligible GEF project concepts under the new GEF project cycle; 2) management capacities of NGOs involved with the GEF through the SPG; and 3) required capacities to implement conventions as identified under the NCSA. In particular, the communication mechanisms between the GEF and LDCs like Benin need to be strengthened to ensure that all parties concerned fully understand the new project cycle and Resource Allocation Framework (RAF), and for the GEF to have greater visibility. Furthermore, in LDCs such as Benin, too often NGO capacities are reduced. The efforts of the SPG must be associated with the appropriate resources and recognizing the particular status of the LDCs. Finally, the GEF-supported capacities developed to this point are often specific to a given sub-sector, and in no way reflect all of the key capacities needed to implement the conventions as identified, among other things, in the National Capacity Self Assessment.

Recommendation 3. In order to help access to GEF resources, procedures must continue to be streamlined.

21. The various stakeholders involved in the evaluation process are of the opinion that the GEF needs to ensure effective implementation of the newly established procedures (i.e. the new project cycle), and even consider further streamlining some procedures, particularly with respect to the required matching of local funding for GEF projects in LDCs like Benin. These requirements are viewed as an additional obstacle to accessing GEF resources.

Recommendations to the Government of Benin

Recommendation 1. Benin must work closely with the GEF and its Agencies to develop new, national and international partnerships (with other public actors, new private actors, or civil society) to implement global conventions that acknowledge the limits of GEF resources and its role as a catalyst, rather than as a driving force.

22. In this regard, the potential advantages of integrating the global conventions in all other sector support that Benin receives, must be more actively exploited with these partners and the other targeted ministries. For instance, as expected, in the area of biodiversity, this could be reflected in the actual development of trust funds to ensure that

Benin's national wildlife management centre, CENAGREF, continues to operate indefinitely, both at headquarters and in the protected areas. In terms of adapting to climate change for example, this could be reflected by closer collaboration in the priority water and drainage sector with the national and international partners that are already active and plan to invest tens of millions of dollars in this sector in the coming years.

Recommendation 2. From this perspective, it is imperative to reactivate and strengthen the coordinating mechanism of the focal point in Benin. It involves both identifying the operational focal point and revitalizing COCAFEM, in order to ensure better coordination of the project concepts submitted and national, strategic planning that is truly interdepartmental and intersectoral.

23. An effective national structure to coordinate with and consult on GEF support in Benin is essential. In 2005, COCAFEM ceased operations in Benin, and the position of operational focal point has remained vacant since then. COCAFEM has an important role to play in the distribution of information, especially about the popularization of the GEF and the recently instituted RAF. Furthermore, the lack of a recognized, national coordinating mechanism greatly reduces the potential for developing a crosscutting approach to implementing the global conventions.

Recommendation 3. In terms of decentralization, Benin must also continue to use the sector programs and other initiatives to support the participatory co-management model for resources developed with GEF support, which has proved effective.

24. The sustainability of this co-management system and the developed community organizations depend upon the continuation and improvement of revenue-sharing mechanisms associated with the sustainable natural resource management, and established between park authorities and community organizations, in particular. In this case, the long-term sustainability of these structures and of the participatory management approaches they employ lies in maintaining, and even reinforcing, the "conservation through co-management" philosophy that Benin has promoted thus far. Furthermore, Benin must also ensure, in parallel, that GEF projects are developed and that the decentralized levels of management in the country have access to GEF support through the aforementioned strengthened, national coordination mechanisms.

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

25. **Preliminary issue 1:** Although the RAF currently allows Benin ensured access to GEF resources in the focal areas of biodiversity and climate change, this access will be extremely limited because of Benin's rank on the list and the measures the country previously identified as necessary to ensure that these two conventions are, in fact, implemented. Obviously, some effort will be required to ensure co-financing and the coordination of implementation activities in these perspectives with the other development partners active in Benin.

26. **Preliminary issue 2:** It is still too early to fully appreciate how the establishment of the RAF has affected GEF operations in Benin. According to the evaluation, apart from the executing agency representatives and the GEF political focal point, very few of the stakeholders have heard of the RAF that will definitely have some effect on the future shape of the GEF portfolio in Benin, both in the area of biodiversity and climate change. These effects are reviewed in this evaluation. It is in this context that the RAF will also necessarily affect the dynamic and sustainability of efforts made to implement the conventions of these two focal areas in Benin, and probably in others, as well. However, it is still too early to confirm the exact impact of these effects and their relative importance.

27. **Preliminary issue 3:** The GEF must continue to closely monitor the effects and impacts of the RAF on the LDCs. While the necessary data for this evaluation were being gathered, no country from the West African sub-region had yet benefitted from RAF resources. Given that most of the players had not even heard of this mechanism yet, it seems too early to appreciate fully the effects and impacts of the RAF in Benin, not to mention those that will be felt in the sub-region. In this context then, close, sustained monitoring is required of both the potential positive and negative effects identified in this evaluation and in other key reports on the subject.

**GOVERNMENT OF BENIN RESPONSE TO
COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION – BENIN (1994 – 2007)**
(prepared by the Government of Benin)

Will be available shortly.