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Agenda Item 8

Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011

(Prepared by the GEF Evaluation Office)

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having considered document GEF/ME/C.41/02, *Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011* and document GEF/ME/C.41/03, *Management Response to the Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011*, requests the Secretariat to incorporate NCSA experiences and lessons learned in the programming approach for GEF-6.

The Council requests the Secretariat to make available knowledge products of NCSAs, including toolkits on how to conduct them, to agencies and GEF workshops such as Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues.

Executive Summary

1. This is the first annual thematic evaluations report presented by the Evaluation Office to the GEF Council. This report provides an overview of the on-going work for the thematic evaluations work program for fiscal year 2012 and presents the main conclusions and recommendations for the *Evaluation of the GEF National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA)*.

2. In the next twelve months the thematic evaluation team will conduct an evaluation of GEF enabling activities and will initiate an evaluation of GEF-5 focal area strategies. Starting in July 2012, the thematic evaluation team will coordinate the work for OPS5. The Progress Report of the Director will present more detailed information on the preparation of OPS5, including an initial identification of key issues to be explored by OPS5. In addition to the evaluative work for the GEF Trust Fund, the thematic team provides support at full cost recovery to the two adaption funds managed by the GEF: LDCF, SCCF, as well as the Adaptation Fund to which the GEF provides secretarial support.

3. In May 2010 the GEF Council approved the *Summary of Negotiations – Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund*. This programming document requested that NCSAs implemented under GEF-4 be evaluated in order to prepare a new capacity development strategy for discussion at the GEF Council in 2011. The NCSA evaluation was conducted between May and September 2011. A consultation workshop took place on September 22, 2011 to present the preliminary findings of the evaluation and receive feedback from key stakeholders on possible factual and analysis errors. Comments were reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into the final report. The full NCSA evaluation report is available on the GEF Evaluation Office Web site (www.gefeo.org).

4. The evaluation reached the following ten conclusions:

- 1) The NCSA initiative was a central part of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development.
- 2) The NCSA initiative was highly relevant to the national sustainable development agendas and to the capacity development strategies of implementing agencies and of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
- 3) The “One-size-fits-all” approach is not the most efficient way to assess global environmental capacity needs at the national level.
- 4) The Global Support Program (GSP) launched in 2005 improved the implementation of NCSAs.
- 5) A broad range of stakeholders participated in the NCSA process but two-thirds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations

- (CSOs) representatives felt that the participative process could have been more inclusive.
- 6) The NCSA initiative is the first assessment of environmental capacity needs and capacity development priorities at the national level with a global reach.
 - 7) Globally, the top three crosscutting capacity development needs are (i) public awareness and environmental education, (ii) information collection, management and exchange, and (iii) development and enforcement of policy, legal and regulatory frameworks.
 - 8) Globally, the top thematic capacity development need is in the biodiversity focal area.
 - 9) Twenty-three follow up GEF-4 funded projects are addressing capacity development constraints identified by NCSAs.
 - 10) GEF and the Conventions did not take full advantage of the information and methodology produced by the NCSA initiative.
5. The conclusions of the evaluation are positive in general. However, it does not make much sense to re-instate the NCSA as an instrument of capacity development at this stage, as most countries have already undertaken this assessment and as GEF-5 strategies have already been formulated and approved by the Council. Therefore the evaluation makes the following recommendations:
- 1) As GEF-5 strategies were approved and are now under implementation NCSA experiences and lessons learned should be incorporated in a new GEF strategic framework for capacity development for GEF-6.
 - 2) Knowledge products of NCSAs, including toolkits on how to conduct them, should be made available to agencies and GEF workshops such as Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues.

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INTRODUCTION

1. This is the first annual thematic evaluations report presented by the Evaluation Office to the GEF Council. In fiscal year 2010 the Evaluation Office completed two thematic evaluations, the Evaluation of the GEF Strategic Priority for Adaptation (SPA) and the Review of the GEF Earth Fund, but they were submitted individually to the 39th Council meeting in November 2010. As reported in the current four-year work program document presented to Council in June 2011, over the past few years the Office has consolidated its evaluations into four streams of evaluation work: on country portfolios, impact, performance, and thematic issues. During GEF-4 the Office gradually moved from presenting each individual evaluation report to the Council to annual reports that highlight evaluative findings in the first three streams. This first annual thematic evaluations report completes the shift towards annual reporting. These reports will deal with cross-cutting issues and look for synergies while taking full advantage of data collected and analysis completed as well as the key findings and recommendations from other Evaluation Office evaluations and GEF Agency evaluations.

2. The *Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011* report provides an overview of the on-going work for the thematic evaluations work program for fiscal year 2012 and presents the main conclusions and recommendations for the *Evaluation of the GEF National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA)*. The NCSA evaluation was conducted between May and September 2011 by a team comprising of the GEF Evaluation Office Chief Evaluation Officer, a senior consultant with extensive experience in capacity development, and two research assistants. A consultation workshop took place on September 22, 2011 to present the preliminary findings of the evaluation and receive feedback from key stakeholders on possible factual and analysis errors. Comments were reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into the final report. The full NCSA evaluation report is available on the GEF Evaluation Office Web site (www.gefeo.org).

THEMATIC EVALUATION WORK PROGRAM

3. Thematic evaluations cover evaluations of cross sector topics ranging from strategies and policies to cross-cutting programs. In the next twelve months the thematic evaluation team will conduct an evaluation of GEF enabling activities and will initiate an evaluation of GEF-5 focal area strategies. Starting in July 2012, the thematic evaluation team will coordinate the work for OPS5. The Progress Report of the Director will present more detailed information on the preparation of OPS5, including an initial identification of key issues to be explored by OPS5. In addition to the evaluative work for the GEF Trust Fund, the thematic team provides support at full cost recovery to the two adaption funds managed by the GEF: LDCF, SCCF, as well as the Adaptation Fund to which the GEF provides secretarial support.

GEF Enabling Activities Evaluation

4. The GEF has provided support to countries to fulfill their reporting requirements to the global conventions that the GEF serves. It is estimated that the GEF has provided

about \$360 million (with about \$68 million in cofinancing) for almost 900 enabling activities projects. These figures also include regional and global projects and programs that supported the preparation and implementation of these projects. The evaluation will focus on each of the focal areas and will take into account evaluative evidence from previously conducted evaluations in particular Country Portfolio Evaluations and the NCSA evaluation. The scope of the evaluation will include three criteria: relevance to the GEF (that is, linkages with focal area strategies), to conventions (that is, GEF responsiveness to convention guidance) and national agendas (that is, linkages with sustainable development and environmental agendas), and linkages with other activities at various levels (to provide a measurement of effectiveness of results); and efficiency of preparation and implementation (including comparison between different implementation modalities, such as national, regional and global).

5. The evaluation will be launched in November 2011 with the development of an approach paper and the establishment of an evaluation team. The evaluation will conduct a review of a randomly selected number of enabling activities within each focal area (using a stratified sample method to include different types of countries, focal areas and enabling activities modalities) to assess content and quality. In addition, the evaluation will conduct semi-structured interviews with key GEF stakeholders (that is, representatives from GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies, conventions secretariats, GEF Focal Points, and NGOs). An important aspect of the evaluation will be to assess the GEF responsiveness to the conventions' decisions and guidelines regarding enabling activities. Another important dimension of the evaluation will be an assessment of the efficiency of the different modalities utilized for the preparation and implementation of enabling activities (from supporting individual countries to supporting regional or global approaches). This assessment should take into account the recent decision on "direct access" for national communications approved by Council. Each of the conventions has also conducted reviews of enabling activities, with various degrees of independence. These materials will be assessed for quality and used as appropriate. The evaluation will coordinate activities with a review of this GEF modality proposed by the GEF Secretariat to be completed in the context of Rio+20.

GEF Focal Areas Strategies Evaluation

6. The GEF replenishment process approved strategies for each of the six focal areas of the GEF (biodiversity, land degradation, climate change mitigation, ozone depleting substances and international waters), as well as the development of a strategy for sustainable forest management/REDD+. These strategies have been discussed and approved by the GEF Council. The GEF-5 strategies will be evaluated from the point of view of their relevance to the global environmental conventions they are associated with (including the GEF responsiveness to conventions guidance) and the results achieved so far against the targets agreed to in the strategies, as well as lessons learned on achievements in the past that are relevant for these strategies. This evaluation will be an important input to OPS5 and during the implementation of OPS5 new components may be incorporated.

7. The evaluation will start by developing an approach paper on how to conduct this evaluation and developing the key questions to be explored within the two evaluation criteria mentioned above: relevance and results. The evaluation will also conduct technical assessments of the strategies. One of the first steps will be to prepare a meta-evaluation of existing evaluative evidence in the Office's evaluations since OPS4 regarding lessons and achievements towards the focal areas strategies.

EVALUATION OF GEF NATIONAL CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENTS (NCSA)

Background

8. The GEF has supported capacity development since its inception at all levels, within regular GEF programs and projects, through specific activities targeted at capacity development and through enabling activities. The driving factors for GEF support to capacity development include guidance from conventions requesting the GEF to support capacity development and the recognition that improving capacities are critical to meet global environmental objectives. From 1999, under the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI), the GEF – in partnership with UNDP and UNEP – developed its capacity development strategic framework, which ended with the GEF Council adopting two major policy documents to guide a more focused, strategic approach to capacity building for the global environment: the *Elements of Strategic Collaboration and a Framework for GEF Action for Capacity Building For The Global Environment*, which was approved by the GEF Council in May 2001; and the *Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building*, which was approved in 2003.

9. The GEF Council decision of May 2001 made the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) initiative available to GEF eligible countries. The NCSA initiative is part of the GEF capacity development strategic framework that includes four pathways. Pathway 1 focuses on self-assessment of capacity needs (that is, NCSA). Pathway 2 is the program for critical capacity building activities. Pathway 3 concerns targeted capacity building projects and pathway 4 entails enhanced attention to capacity building. The NCSA was an innovative approach through which a GEF recipient country would assess its own capacity needs to implement the Rio conventions; and prepare an over-arching national capacity development action plan to maximize synergies between them and address global environmental issues.

10. In May 2010 the GEF Council approved the *Summary of Negotiations – Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund*. This programming document requested that NCSAs implemented under GEF-4 be evaluated in order to prepare a new capacity development strategy for discussion at the GEF Council in 2011. This new strategy is to be prepared in consultation with the Implementing Agencies and should be based on results and recommendations of this evaluation.

Evaluation Approach

11. The evaluation took place between mid-February until November 2011 when its main findings and recommendations will be presented to the GEF Council at its November 2011 meeting. The full evaluation report is available through the GEF Evaluation Office Web site. An evaluation team comprised of GEF Evaluation Office staff, a senior consultant and 2 research assistants conducted the evaluation.

12. The main objectives of this evaluation are to provide the GEF Council and others in the GEF with lessons, experiences, and recommendations coming from the implementation of NCSAs. The evaluation had three areas of focus: relevance, efficiency, and results (and their sustainability). The three main evaluation questions were:

- What is the relevance of NCSAs to the GEF mandate, the multinational and regional environmental agreements and conventions working with the GEF and the national sustainable development and environmental priorities?
- What is the efficiency in the processes to implement NCSAs and prepare Final Reports and Action Plans?
- What are the main achievements of the NCSAs, individually and at aggregate levels?

13. The scope of the evaluation included an assessment of all approved NCSAs, the Global Support Program (GSP) and the second phase capacity development projects. The evaluation took into account the level of implementation of each of these projects and existing assessments, reviews and evaluations conducted on any of these modalities and build on them. In the case of NCSAs, a key resource that was considered was the NCSA Results and Lessons (UNDP, UNEP, GEF, 2010) assessment and in the case of the GSP, the evaluation team reviewed the recently completed evaluation of this project and build on its findings and recommendations.

14. The evaluation began by establishing the context of the NCSAs in the GEF through three tasks: (i) a review of capacity development in GEF supported projects and programs; (ii) a review of other types of capacity development conducted at the national level not supported by GEF funding, in particular those described in enabling activities and other reporting to the Conventions; and (iii) a meta evaluation of GEF Evaluation Office documents as well as relevant documents from evaluation offices of the GEF Agencies regarding capacity development and in particular lessons, findings, conclusions and recommendations about NCSAs.

15. A set of instruments were used to collect data, including interviews of key stakeholders (including by phone and skype); an online survey; a review of NCSA Final Reports and Action Plans; a Review of Second phase capacity development projects; teleconferences with GEF Focal Points, Conventions Focal Points and NCSA Country Teams; and, seven country visits. Note that interviews were conducted at several stages of the evaluation process to crosscheck and validate the documentation that was available and triangulate the initial findings of the evaluation.

16. A consultation workshop took place on September 21, 2011 to present the preliminary findings of the evaluation and receive feedback from key stakeholders on possible factual errors and analysis. Comments were reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into the final report.

17. The present document presents the main conclusions and recommendations. The full evaluation report is available on the website of the GEF Evaluation Office (www.gefeo.org), includes a thorough portfolio examination as well as detailed assessments of each of the key elements of this evaluation. The full report and its annexes provide the evaluative evidence to support the conclusions and recommendations contained herewith.

Limitations

18. A number of limitations were encountered during the evaluation preparation as well as during its implementation:

- Loss of institutional memory of NCSA details in countries having completed the project years ago;
- Narrow timeframe to meet all information gathering objectives;
- Low response rate to E-survey due to many stakeholders on leave;
- No clear outline for NCSA follow up projects in most countries; therefore, buy-in has decreased.

NCSA Portfolio Description

19. The primary objective of NCSAs was to identify country level priorities and capacities needed to address global environmental issues (with a focus on biological diversity, climate change, and land degradation). Since 2002, the GEF has provided about \$28.7 million for 153 NCSAs; each country got a grant of about \$0.2 million to conduct their own self-assessment.

20. The two policy documents approved by the GEF Council included operational guidelines and guiding principles for the implementation of NCSAs. The guidelines specified that NCSAs must be country-driven, undertaken by national institutions and national experts to the extent feasible, and respond to national situations and priorities. Additionally, a set of 9 guiding principles was also made available to NCSA Country Teams.

21. A Global Support Program (GSP) was launched early 2005 to provide technical assistance to countries engaged in an NCSA. Its services included the development and dissemination of assessment tools, guidance and resource materials for the NCSAs; training on assessment approaches and tools through a series of NCSA regional workshops; management of information and knowledge through outreach, website, database and electronic list-servers; and review and analysis of NCSA outputs, particularly NCSA action plans and final reports.

22. The GSP disseminated an NCSA Resource Kit, which outlined the basic steps that each NCSA country team was to follow. It included a set of five steps: (i) Inception; (ii) Stocktaking Exercise; (iii) Thematic Assessments; (iv) Cross-Cutting Analysis; and, (v) Capacity Development Action Plan and NCSA Final Report. The guidelines indicated that each step be documented in a report for a total of 5 reports per country in addition to the Final Report and Action Plan.

23. As of June 30, 2011, 132 NCSAs (87%) are completed, 15 are still under implementation or at the final stage, and 6 were cancelled. UNDP implemented 117 NCSAs (76%), UNEP 35 (23%) and the World Bank 1 (1%).

Conclusions

Relevance of NCSAs

Conclusion 1: The NCSA initiative was a central part of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development.

24. The National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) initiative was made available to GEF eligible countries through the GEF Council decision of May 2001 that approved the *Elements of Strategic Collaboration and a Framework for GEF Action for Capacity Building for the Global Environment (GEF/C.17/6/Rev.1)*. The Council decision of May 2001 was “to initiate processes so that the self assessment of capacity building needs and priorities (pathway A1) and targeted capacity building projects (pathway A3) can begin immediately in countries that request assistance for them.” The decision was also to extend the strategic partnership between the GEF Secretariat and UNDP under the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) to better define methodologies and delivery modalities for all pathways (A1-A4). At the time, NCSA was an innovative approach whereby a GEF recipient country was to assess its own capacity needs to implement the Rio conventions and prepare an over-arching national capacity development action plan to maximize synergies between them.

25. In November 2003, the GEF Council reviewed the *Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building* and approved the consolidated approach for capacity development within GEF activities. It requested the GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with the Implementing Agencies and the monitoring and evaluation unit, to undertake further work to fully operationalize this approach, including the development of:

- (a) Targets and indicators for measuring results and impacts of capacity building activities;
- (b) Operational modalities and project criteria for the implementation of the strategic approach, including for the enhancement of capacity building components within GEF projects and for country capacity building programs for LDCs and SIDS; and

- (c) Proposals for Council consideration for a technical support program (that is, GSP).

26. From its inception, the NCSA initiative has been relevant for GEF. As pathway 1, it was a keystone for the implementation of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development. It provided resources to recipient countries to conduct self-assessments of capacity building needs and priorities. During GEF-4, NCSA results and lessons learned have provided direct feedback in the GEF for the development of the GEF-5 Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Strategy that includes five objectives. However, now that these self-assessments are mostly completed, and the fact that these assessments were not followed up by adequate investments to address capacity development priorities nor taken into account fully when developing GEF focal area projects, the relevance of NCSA to GEF activities is diminishing.

Conclusion 2: The NCSA initiative was highly relevant to the national sustainable development agendas and to the capacity development strategies of implementing agencies and of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

27. The NCSA process was relevant for countries' sustainable development agenda. The crosscutting and self-assessment guidance and the search for synergies among the implementation of the Rio Conventions provided a new unique assessment framework that responded to the needs of stakeholders. In many countries, a broad range of stakeholders met together for the first time, priorities were set through participation processes and national coordination was reviewed and discussion took place to improve this coordination in many countries. However, the uptake of results depended from country to country and also on the timing of these self-assessments. In the case of India, the NCSA process was late and as a result, the findings were of limited use. In the case of Belize and Paraguay the timing was more relevant; stakeholders used NCSA results for establishing strategies and programs.

28. A review of 23 follow up CB2 (capacity building 2) projects – conducted in 2010 – confirmed the relevance of NCSAs to the sustainable development agenda of recipient countries. As follow up projects to NCSAs, these projects provided resources for reducing, if not eliminating, the institutional bottlenecks hampering the synergistic implementation of the conventions that were identified during the NCSA processes.

29. NCSAs have been very relevant to UNDP and UNEP as GEF implementing agencies. Both agencies were much involved in the CDI initiative as part of their respective strategy on capacity development to produce a comprehensive approach for developing the capacities needed at the country level to meet the challenges of global environmental action.

30. UNDP emphasizes an integrated approach in its operation and invested a lot of time into the NCSA initiative. It is focusing more and more on cross-sectoral approaches as it can be seen in the recently developed UNDP strategy to support governments in developing *Low-Emission Climate-Resilient Development Strategies*. This approach is

designed to build upon existing strategies and development plans; including country-driven integrated assessments that will use a similar approach to the NCSA methodology.

31. For UNEP, the NCSA initiative was a practical response to support the development of national capacities related to the implementation of the conventions. Its timing was also excellent, corresponding to the development of the *Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building* that was to strengthen the environmental management capacity of governments of developing countries as well as of countries with economies in transition, at all levels. The UNEP Governing Council approved this strategic plan in February 2005.

32. The review indicates that the aim of NCSAs was also well aligned with obligations related to capacity development in the conventions. Capacity development is part of the conventions implementation guidance that is approved by Parties to these Conventions. The COPs of UNFCCC and CBD have requested the GEF to provide funding for country-driven capacity development activities, in particular LDCs and SIDSs. Both the UNCCD and the Stockholm POPs highlighted the need to emphasize capacity development to assist countries in meeting their commitments under their respective conventions. However, it was noted that only the UNCCD strategic plan recognizes NCSAs and encourages using them where possible.

33. Despite obvious potential synergies between NCSAs and conventions processes, NCSAs have not been used to their full potential nationally. They were not requested by any convention despite the fact that they contain very relevant information for the implementation of MEAs; particularly the search for synergies and the cross-cutting analyses. As a result, little uptake of NCSA results was observed during this evaluation through the implementation processes of these conventions.

Efficiency of NCSAs

Conclusion 3: The “One-size-fits-all” approach is not the most efficient way to assess global environmental capacity needs at the national level.

34. All recipient countries, which requested an NCSA, received an amount of about \$0.2 million to conduct their self-assessments, following a five-step process guided by the material provided to all NCSA country teams. A small equal grant for all countries may not be the best method to carry out national self-assessments. The evaluation found a trend that disproportionately benefits countries of different sizes. Among countries reviewed, smaller countries were more successful in using the NCSA grant effectively, such as Belize and the Seychelles as opposed to larger countries such as India.

35. The “one-size-fits-all” approach does not take into account the wide range of ability to implement and gain benefit from such a program. There is a wide range of differences from country to country such as size, population, political context, legislation and policies, economy, timing, level of development, global environmental significance, etc. that would affect the effectiveness and efficiency of a grant such as the NCSA. Additionally, grants of \$0.2 million have higher transaction costs than larger grants.

36. Nevertheless, the average duration for NCSA projects was about 32 months using the date of agency approval and the date the final report was released with a wide range going from 6 to 83 months and a median of 31 months. Additionally, NCSA projects were approved by the GEF CEO on average 8 months before the agency approval date.¹ It was also noted that the implementation time for NCSAs implemented by UNDP was 31 months, while UNEP averaged 37 months. However, despite this wide range of length of implementation time, using the quality rating results developed in 2010,² there is no correlation between the quality of final reports and the length of project implementation. The data analysis indicates that the optimum duration is between 20 and 40 months for a quality varying from 2.5 to 5 (out of a total of 5).

37. NCSAs were implemented by UNDP (75%), UNEP (24%) and the World Bank (1%). Recipient countries executed NCSAs through the nationally executed modality of UNDP (NEX/NIM) and the modality of Direct Legal Agreements for UNEP; both using UN rules and regulations. GEF focal point offices – mostly ministries of environment – executed more than 60% of NCSA projects.

Conclusion 4: The Global Support Program (GSP) launched in 2005 improved the implementation of NCSAs.

38. The Global Support Program (GSP) was approved by the GEF Council in 2004, and established in 2005 as a joint facility of UNDP and UNEP, funded by the GEF. It was intended to be a three-year program, which was then extended to five years. The GSP provided guidance and assistance for countries to undertake their NCSAs, through such support as training workshops, a resource kit, a newsletter, the NCSA website, an intranet website, and hands-on guidance.

39. The final evaluation of the program conducted in 2010³ found that the establishment of the GSP was clearly needed and relevant for countries. The GSP had been effective in providing technical support for the implementation of NCSAs; including the development of guidance material, the provision of technical backstopping to NCSA country teams, the analysis of lessons learned, and the development of programming frameworks for the systematic implementation of cross-cutting capacity development priorities.

40. It was a good modality for delivery of technical services to NCSA country teams; though people interviewed during this evaluation said that the guidance given in the NCSA resource kit⁴ provided too many options and it could be more “prescriptive.” The

¹ This date is also called project document date.

² Bellamy, Jean-Joseph and Kevin Hill (2010), *National Capacity Self-Assessments: Result and Lessons Learned for Global Environmental Sustainability*, Global Support Program, Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Program, New York, USA

³ Le Group-conseil baastel sprl, November 2010, Final Evaluation of the Global Support Program to the National Capacity Self-Assessments – Final Evaluation Report.

⁴ GEF, UNDP, UNEP, Global Support Program, 2005, Resource Kit for National Capacity Self-Assessment.

final evaluation also found that there is still a great need and demand for technical guidance and it remains to be seen whether countries will be able to implement their NCSA recommendations and action plans without technical support such as the GSP.

Conclusion 5: A broad range of stakeholders participated in the NCSA process but two-thirds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) representatives felt that the participative process could have been more inclusive.

41. One principle used by the NCSA initiative was to “ensure multi-stakeholder participation, consultation and decision-making.” In the NCSA Resource Kit, engaging stakeholders was recognized as one of four strategies for conducting a successful NCSA. The Kit gave extensive guidance on the subject, including some stakeholder involvement tools and a definition of what is a stakeholder: “a stakeholder is anyone who is affected by, has an interest in, and/or should be involved in an initiative.”

42. Therefore, stakeholder engagement was encouraged and most NCSA processes were able to engage a broad array of stakeholders. In many countries the successful stakeholder consultation process allowed stakeholders to meet together for the first time. Often, it was an opportunity to recognize that more national cross-sectoral coordination is needed across organizations involved in the implementation of the conventions. These aspects were highlighted during country visits, teleconferences and interviews conducted during this evaluation.

43. However, interviews conducted during this evaluation indicate that some stakeholders did not always see the value in the process and were skeptical. The lack of clear follow-up to the NCSA Action Plans was a primary cause of this skepticism. Additionally, results from the e-survey conducted during this evaluation indicate a sharp contrast in stakeholder engagement between government representatives and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). When asking the question “How would you rate the participation of stakeholders in the NCSA?” Seventy-six % of government representatives were either satisfied or highly satisfied but only 34% of NGOs and CBOs were satisfied or highly satisfied. Stakeholder engagement is one recognized critical strategy for success and the review indicates that more engagement is needed to better engage the civil society.

Results of NCSAs

Conclusion 6: The NCSA initiative is the first assessment of environmental capacity needs and capacity development priorities at the national level with a global reach.

44. The primary goal of NCSAs is to determine national capacity development priorities to better address global environmental issues. The review found that NCSAs assessed national capacities that are necessary to enable countries to meet broader environmental goals at national levels. They helped countries to know what needs to be

done to improve their environmental management frameworks in order to achieve broader environmental goals.

45. It is the first assessment of environmental capacity needs and priorities conducted at the national level that had a global reach as it was available to all GEF recipients countries; yet composed of relatively small projects of about \$0.2 million for each country. It is a unique and innovative approach that was following up regional and global assessments conducted under the CDI in the late 1990's.

46. As a result of the NCSA process, each country produced a lot of information and knowledge, which are based on two distinct assessments: an assessment by focal area looking at the strengths and constraints in implementing the Rio Conventions; and a crosscutting assessment looking at strengths and capacity gaps at the individual, organizational and systemic levels in meeting focal area objectives under the Rio Conventions. This information is documented in 6 separate reports per country as per guidelines contained in the NCSA resource kit. It includes:

- A stocktaking report identifying all national activities and documents that were relevant to the Convention themes, as well as core national environmental priorities;
- Three thematic assessments summarizing the analysis of the country's obligations and opportunities for each MEA, and the country's performance and achievements;
- A cross-cutting analysis report summarizing capacity issues, needs, opportunities and prioritized needs that cut across the Conventions; and
- A NCSA final report and a Capacity Development action plan outlining a strategy and actions for developing capacities to meet global and national environmental objectives.

47. In order to assess the NCSA results globally, the evaluation team reviewed an initial analysis conducted in 2010⁵ and updated the data set with 12 recently completed NCSAs. Despite that some averages and percentages slightly changed, no major differences were identified between the two analyses. The data trends are similar and the key results are presented in the following conclusions.

Conclusion 7: Globally, the top three crosscutting capacity development needs are (i) public awareness and environmental education, (ii) information collection, management and exchange, and (iii) development and enforcement of policy, legal and regulatory frameworks.

48. The objective of the crosscutting analyses was to assess capacity issues, needs, and opportunities that cut across the Conventions. It included identifying those common needs and possible synergies that could be achieved in the country by addressing

⁵ Bellamy, Jean-Joseph and Kevin Hill (2010), *National Capacity Self-Assessments: Result and Lessons Learned for Global Environmental Sustainability*, Global Support Program, Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Program, New York, USA.

requirements across two or more themes. These analyses also identified capacity needs that are common to both national and global environmental management, including the possible synergies between them. This crosscutting assessment resulted in a list of priority national capacity needs and capacity development actions that were developed in the action plans.

49. A review of these crosscutting assessments was conducted using a typology of 17 capacity areas grouped into 5 main types of capacity. Globally, an average of 61 countries identified each crosscutting capacity area as need for capacity development actions. Some highlights of the analysis include:

- 46 countries identified stakeholder engagement as a constraint; mostly directed at the capacity to involve stakeholders in policy and program formulation and implementation, and the skills and motivation to engage stakeholders;
- Information and knowledge management is a constraint for 69 countries, with the capacity to collect, manage, and exchange information, along with the capacity to raise public awareness and environmental education, listed as their greatest constraints;
- 53 countries identified the capacity of environmental organizations as a constraint. Economic instruments and sustainable financing mechanisms, and organizational mandates were the top specific capacity constraints in this area;
- Capacities for environmental governance were identified as a top priority by 61 countries. The need to develop and enforce policy and legislative frameworks, and the cross-sectoral coordination were the top constraints identified by countries in this area;
- Capacity in monitoring and evaluation was assessed as a constraint by 62 countries;
- Fewer than 30 countries identified negotiate at COP, manage international projects and integrated ecosystem management as constraints;
- An average of only 6 countries identified any of these 17 capacity areas as strengths;
- However, capacity to incorporate convention obligations into national frameworks was recognized as a strength by 18 countries.

50. Regarding the identification of capacity development actions (part of the NCSA Action Plan), it was noted that for most 17 capacity areas, more countries are requesting capacity development actions than the number of countries identifying capacity constraints. For instance, 46 countries identified the capacity to involve stakeholders as a constraint but 56 countries identified this type of capacity as a need for capacity development actions. The largest gap is with public awareness and environmental education whereby 74 countries identified it as a constraint but 111 countries recommended capacity development actions in this area.

Conclusion 8: Globally, the top thematic capacity development need is in the biodiversity focal area.

51. The thematic assessments analyzed the country's obligations and opportunities for each MEA, and the country's performance and achievements to date. The result is an assessment of where countries are at, including: prioritized environmental issues; capacity development needs; and, capacity development actions for each focal area.

52. A review of these thematic assessments was conducted using 4 focal areas,⁶ subdivided into 23 thematic areas. An average of 51 countries identified each thematic area as *an environmental issue*. When the data is reviewed by focal area (4), the average by focal area indicate the following:

- An average of 57 countries identified each thematic area in the biodiversity focal area as a priority environmental issue; 53 countries in the land degradation focal area; 51 countries in the climate change focal area; and 39 countries in the freshwater and coastal ecosystems focal area;

53. An average of 45 countries identified *capacity development needs* in each thematic area. When the data is reviewed by focal area (4), the average by focal area indicate the following:

- An average of 51 countries identified priority capacity development needs in each thematic area in the biodiversity focal area; 48 countries in the land degradation focal area; 49 countries in the climate change focal area; and 30 countries in the freshwater and coastal ecosystems focal area;

54. Other highlights of the review include:

- Globally, biodiversity conservation – a thematic area within the biodiversity focal area - is the priority environmental issue identified by the largest number of countries (103); it is also the area with most capacity development needs (99 countries) and the area that was identified as capacity development actions by the largest number of countries (81);
- In addition to the biodiversity conservation area, other thematic areas identified by the most countries as priority environmental issues are vulnerability to climate change (80); land use (74); and deforestation (74);
- Thematic areas identified by the least number of countries as environmental issues and capacity development needs are wetlands conservation; rangeland management; soil contamination; unsustainable fisheries; and sea level rise.

Conclusion 9: Twenty-three follow up GEF-4 funded projects are addressing capacity development constraints identified by NCSAs.

55. Out of 132 completed NCSA projects since 2002, 23 countries have received a second phase support from GEF-4 to implement some priorities identified in NCSA action plans. The GEF provided 23 grants of about \$0.5 million each for a total value of

⁶ Biodiversity, land degradation, climate change, and freshwater-Coastal Ecosystems.

about \$12 million. These projects are known as CB2 (capacity building 2) projects and most of them are still under implementation and should be completed in 2012.

56. CB2 projects provide resources for reducing or eliminating capacity bottlenecks hampering the synergistic implementation of Rio Conventions. The expected outcomes of these projects are, therefore, to strengthen multi-sectoral processes that promote policy harmonization, realize cost-efficiency, and enhance operational effectiveness in the implementation of conventions' obligations. Accordingly, the main focus of these CB2 projects is on environmental governance systems combined with mainstreaming global environmental issues into national development programs. A typology of these CB2 projects indicates that they intervene in four programmatic areas:

- Strengthening the formulation of policies and programs (3 projects);
- Mainstreaming global environmental priorities into national policies and programs (8 projects);
- Developing capacity of institutions and individuals (9 projects)
- Strengthening financial and economic instruments in support of the global environment (3 projects).

57. Following this set of 23 CB2 projects⁷ approved under GEF-4, a new Cross Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) strategy had been developed under GEF-5 in line with the *Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building* with an allocation of \$44 million. In order to access these funds, countries are to select a capacity development multifocal priority on the basis of the NCSA prioritization process and in line with the five main objectives of the strategy. In the case where no NCSA would have been conducted or that the proposed CCCD project addresses other priorities than those in the NCSA action plan, a good rationale would be needed to justify the project.

Conclusion 10: GEF and the Conventions did not take full advantage of the information and methodology produced by the NCSA initiative.

58. The review indicates that GEF has not taken full advantage of this existing body of knowledge in its programming; particularly in its focal area strategies. A similar assessment was made for the Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). For instance, the CBD COP10 requested the GEF to provide support to eligible Parties for revising their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP). Guidance to revise these NBSAPs includes the need to develop a capacity development plan; however, no mention of NCSA thematic assessments, cross-cutting analyses and final reports is made. Opportunities to use NCSA outputs were missed when in fact they were highly relevant. Capacity development is a recurring theme in most GEF funded projects and is also an important strategic theme in the guidance of the conventions.

59. The long-term impact of NCSAs will mostly be measured through the use of these assessments and action plans. These assessments contain national capacities necessary for

⁷ An additional two capacity development projects were recently approved: Moldova and Montenegro.

countries to meet broader environmental goals at national levels, and formed the basis for country-based action plans to address key environment capacity gaps. Therefore, the impact of NCSA results will depend mostly on the uptake of this information and knowledge by larger strategies and programs; particularly at the country level.

60. The lack of linkages with other initiative is a contributing factor to this limited use of this information. Besides follow up activities supported by GEF through capacity development projects funded by GEF-4 and GEF-5, NCSA is not a requirement in any guidance from the COPs nor for any GEF focal area projects. At the operational level, NCSAs are not part of the guidelines to develop a PIF and a project document. It is not part of any focal area tracking tools and capacity development is not part of the review of projects before approval. However, recently NCSA was added in the guidelines for developing a National Portfolio Formulation Exercise (NPFE) and they are now systematically reviewed in Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs) where available. A review of the first 15 NPFEs submitted to GEF for funding found only one NPFE where NCSA was explicitly referred to; however, almost all of these documents discuss the need to develop capacity and that capacity development was the foundation to build long-term sustainability of GEF funded activities.

61. At country level, NCSA methods, toolkits and information have been sometimes replicated or scaled up. The review found that some countries went further in developing stakeholder engagement strategies, in developing national coordination mechanisms and in approving the final NCSA reports as national environmental priorities at a high level in the government. However, little observation was made at the country level on the use of NCSA information in processes related to the implementation of MEAs such as drafting national communications or developing NAPs and NAPAs.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the GEF Council

62. The GEF Council approved the CCCD strategy in May 2010 as part of the Fifth Replenishment process of GEF and it is now under implementation. However, we need to keep in mind that the pledged funding for GEF-5 has come under increasing pressure due to the financial crisis. Re-instating the NCSA as an instrument of capacity development does not make much sense anymore. Most GEF eligible countries conducted their self-assessments and identified their environmental capacity development priorities. Countries are moving on addressing some of these priorities through follow up projects and/or other projects funded by GEF, other donors and recipient countries themselves. However, NCSA achievements should not be abandoned; GEF invested almost \$30 million in this initiative and could ensure further use of NCSA generated tools, methodologies and knowledge.

Recommendation 1: As GEF-5 strategies were approved and are now under implementation NCSA experiences and lessons learned should be incorporated in a new GEF strategic framework for capacity development for GEF-6.

63. As stated in the *Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the GEF Strategic Approach to Capacity Development*,⁸ significant progress has been made in the implementation of the GEF's *Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building*. Under pathway 1 – National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSAs) – the majority of GEF eligible countries have completed their self-assessments.⁹ Other pathways are also progressing well as reflected in the recent GEF-5 replenishment agreement that includes the CCCD strategy with an allocation of \$44 million. However, given the increasingly shifting global context and national priorities, there is a need to review/update the *Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building* for GEF-6 in order to ensure that future GEF-funded capacity development interventions build on past efforts and accurately reflect the current needs of both countries and MEA Secretariats.

Recommendation 2: Knowledge products of NCSAs, including toolkits on how to conduct them, should be made available to agencies and GEF workshops such as Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues.

64. The GEF has invested \$29 million in the NCSA initiative. It produced a methodology – including tools – for conducting national self-assessments and, as a result of these assessments; it produced a lot of information. This knowledge generated during the NCSA process is already used by some countries to address identified capacity gaps through targeted cross-cutting capacity development projects. However, it is recommended to share this knowledge further; the GEF Secretariat should incorporate efforts in the new GEF knowledge management strategy. Knowledge products from this evaluation should also be shared through this strategy by the Evaluation Office.

65. Increasingly knowledge is shared and managed through platforms and communities of practice. These have the advantage that they create an interface in which demand and supply can be matched. Rather than to set up a top down system in which tools and knowledge products are pushed to agencies and countries, interactive websites and electronic forums create demand oriented flows of information and knowledge. The Evaluation Office is available to explore this further with the GEF Secretariat. Progress in this area can be reported to Council when the Secretariat reports on the implementation of the knowledge management strategy.

⁸ GEF C.33/inf.

⁹ GEF extended NCSA grants of about \$0.200 each to 153 countries out of 165 eligible countries. As of June 30, 2011, 132 NCSAs were completed, 6 were cancelled and the remaining 15 are still under implementation, including a few at the final stage.