



GEF/ME/C.46/06

April 30, 2014

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GEF Council Meeting

May 25 – 27, 2014

Cancun, Mexico

Agenda Item 18

**REPORT OF THE SECOND PROFESSIONAL PEER REVIEW  
OF THE GEF EVALUATION FUNCTION**

**(Prepared by the Peer Review Panel)**

### **Recommended Council Decision**

The Council, having reviewed document GEF/ME/C.46/06, “***Report of the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function,***” as well as GEF/ME/C.46/07, “***Management Response to the Report of the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function,***” requests the Independent Evaluation Office, in consultation with the Secretariat, STAP and the GEF Agencies, to take the findings and recommendations of the peer review, as well as comments made during the Council meeting, into account when preparing the Work Program of the Office for GEF-6.

## Executive Summary

This is the second Professional Peer Review of the GEF IEO, which was conducted from January to April 2014.

The Panel was impressed by what the IEO has achieved. The current Director has succeeded in establishing and protecting a strong and independent GEF evaluation office thereby performing the accountability function very well. The IEO has produced a large number of evaluation products assessing a wide range of GEF activities, thereby meeting the accountability requirements and expanding the knowledge of GEF focal areas. The IEO has demonstrated leadership and innovation in the evaluation community and has contributed to the development of new evaluation methods.

The Panel also identified a number of areas that may require attention in order to harvest the full potential of the evaluation function. The Panel found that the IEO efforts to ensure the accountability function of evaluation were more successful than efforts to ensure the learning dimension. As such, the Panel agrees with the IEO self-assessment prepared for this Review, which identified learning as the challenge for the future.

The Panel is inclined to make a few suggestions to strengthen the GEF evaluation function in order to enhance the utility of its evaluation results.

- a) While maintaining the established independence will be essential for the evaluation function, the Office ought to engage in a different more meaningful manner with the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies in order to identify the demand for evaluation and to assure that final products are timely and are owned by the GEF network.
- b) The Panel suggests that prior to establishing its work programmes the IEO widely consults with stakeholders about their needs and priorities.
- c) The Panel would like to encourage the GEF Council to have more strategic discussion on the IEO work programme (subjects to be evaluated). The GEF Council may also want to consider finding a new mechanism to have more in-depth engagement with the IEO in particular also on evaluation reports and their findings.
- d) The Panel suggests reviewing the IEO's product mix and prioritisation according to the demand from stakeholders. Future evaluations ought to be planned more selectively based on relevance and timeliness and less by the four work streams. Possibly, this can have implications on the size and compositions of the teams in the IEO.
- e) IEO may also consider reducing the number of evaluation reports. Fewer products will also reduce the burden on the GEF system and the IEO, which is under considerable delivery pressure.
- f) Also during evaluations, the IEO should move from perceived pro-forma consultations with stakeholders to in-depth engagement with stakeholders on ToRs, approach papers, draft reports, draft recommendations, etc.
- g) Most importantly, the IEO ought to make sure that the learning loop is closed after an evaluation is completed and results from evaluations have actually been absorbed by key actors. This may require more face-to-face interactions.

- h) The Panel suggests that the GEF assess the Management Action Record (MAR) tool with a view to make it a more useful management instrument.

Finally, the Panel would like to encourage the IEO to continue efforts to measure the environmental impact of GEF funded activities, in particular at the global level. Efforts should continue to capture 'hard' evidence of environmental impact.

**Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF  
Evaluation Function  
Report of the Peer Review Panel**

Target audience	The main target audience of this report comprises the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), the GEF Agencies (operational units and evaluation offices) and country level stakeholders. Background information on the GEF is kept to a minimum assuming that readers are familiar with the GEF. Additional information can be found on the GEF website ( <a href="http://www.thegef.org">www.thegef.org</a> ) or on the IEO website ( <a href="http://www.thegef.org/gef/eo_office">http://www.thegef.org/gef/eo_office</a> ).
Panel Members	<p>The Peer Review Panel was comprised of four members supported by an evaluation consultant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dr. Mary Chinery-Hesse, Member of the African Union Panel of the Wise (Chair of the Panel).</li> <li>- Rachel Sauvinet-Bedouin, Head, Independent Evaluation Arrangement, CGIAR.</li> <li>- Rakesh Nangia, Evaluator General, Independent Development Evaluation of the African Development Bank and Chair of the Evaluation Cooperation Group of the International Financial Institutions.</li> <li>- Nick York, Director, Country, Corporate and Global Evaluations, Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank.</li> <li>- Urs Zollinger, Managing Partner, King Zollinger &amp; Co. Advisory Services, (Consultant).</li> </ul>
Disclaimer	The findings, conclusions and suggestions expressed in this report are those of the members of the Peer Review Panel in their individual capacities.
Acknowledgement	The members of the Peer Review Panel would like to express their appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this professional and highly rewarding peer exchange. Panel members would like to extend a thank-you to the Director of the IEO and his entire team for making the peer exchange a seamless exercise. The efficient support and open discussions greatly contributed to the results of this Peer Review. The Peer Review was as much a learning experience for Panel members as it - hopefully - was for the GEF IEO.

## **Introduction**

### **Professional Peer Review Framework, Objective and Assessment Criteria**

#### ***Professional Peer Review Framework***

1. This is the second Professional Peer Review of the GEF IEO. It builds on the first Professional Peer Review conducted in 2009<sup>1</sup> and follows the revised UNEG Framework of Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organizations<sup>2</sup>. Originally developed in 2004, based on internationally recognized standards and with the support of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, such professional peer reviews are a contribution to the efforts of the international community to strengthen performance in international development cooperation. In its last version the Framework emphasizes the peer exchange function of the Peer Review as well as the need for less costly and lighter review. It is in this spirit that the second Professional Peer Review of GEF IEO was conceived.

#### ***Objective***

2. The objective of the Professional Peer Review is to provide the GEF Council, the Assembly of the GEF, the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies and the IEO with an independent assessment of the evaluation function within the GEF. The Review intends to inform strategic planning in the GEF as it moves forward in its next replenishment phase. This report of the Professional Peer Review will be presented to the GEF Council in May 2014, together with a management response. An action plan will be developed on the basis of the Council's decision on how to address the Panel's suggestions. The Review report may also be used as a guide by the new Director of IEO.

3. This report will also be presented to the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) of the International Financial Institutions as feedback on the GEF evaluation function. Five of the GEF Agencies are UNEG members, whereas six are members of the ECG. In addition to presenting its report, the Panel will also provide feedback on the peer review process to the UNEG task force on peer reviews to contribute to the further development of this particular instrument.

#### ***Core Assessment Criteria***

4. In line with the UNEG Framework of Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organizations, the Professional Peer Review applied three core criteria that need to be satisfied in order for evaluation functions and products to be considered of high quality:

- *Independence* of evaluations and evaluation systems. The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process of policy making, delivering and managing assistance.
- *Credibility* of evaluations. The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings of the 2009 Peer Review are summarized in Annex 2.

<sup>2</sup> UNEG/REF(2011)1.

- *Utility* of evaluations. To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way.

5. The Professional Peer Review Panel was keen to be strategic and to focus on a limited number of key areas. Within the above-mentioned three core assessment criteria, the Panel identified issues that are – in the Panel’s view – the most relevant for the future of IEO and useful to the stakeholders of the evaluation function. The Panel report aims to be brief and is structured around key aspects and issues identified by the Panel.

## **Methodology and Limitations**

### ***Methodology***

6. The Professional Peer Review was conducted from January to April 2014. At the heart of the Professional Peer Review was a five-day visit to the GEF (24 to 28 March 2014).

7. Prior to the visit to the GEF, IEO conducted a self-assessment along the core assessment criteria. The self-assessment informed the strategic issues selected by the Panel for further review. Based on the strategic issues identified, a supplementary document review of IEO and GEF documents was conducted prior to the visit to the GEF resulting in a consolidated information document and an interview guide.

8. During the visit, the Panel conducted interviews and group discussion with the various stakeholders of the evaluation function and GEF IEO staff in order to solicit views on the evaluation function (Annex 1: List of persons met). In particular, Panel members had meetings with GEF Council members, staff from the GEF Secretariat including the CEO, staff from coordination units in GEF Agencies, staff from evaluation offices from GEF Agencies.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, the Panel had various exchanges with the IEO staff itself, in particular also a half-day peer exchange workshop.<sup>4</sup> The visit to IEO was also an opportunity for the Panel members to work among themselves arrive at joint findings, conclusions and suggestions.

9. Following the visit, the Panel’s report was drafted and findings as well as suggestions discussed with the IEO Director. Thereafter, the report was finalized and submitted to the GEF Council, along with a management response.

### ***Limitations***

10. This Professional Peer Review was a ‘light’ exercise. The rapid nature of the review neither allowed for an in-depth analysis of documents nor a consultation with a large number of stakeholders, in particular consultation with country-level stakeholders was limited. In line with the TORs and the time available, and given that this was a ‘light’ peer review, the Panel was not able to carry out field visits.

11. Also, it is important to remember that the Review only looked at IEO and not at the evaluation function of the GEF Agencies.

12. More generally, it must be recalled that peer reviews are not intended to be full-fledged evaluations. In particular the second generation of peer reviews are designed to be targeted and

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<sup>3</sup> Some interviews were conducted by phone or VoIP (Voice over the Internet Protocol).

<sup>4</sup> The format selected for the workshop was the ‘World Café’ format, a highly participatory methodology.

lean to avoid making unreasonable demands of time, expense and additional workload on both panel members and the organization being reviewed.

13. Despite these limitations, the Panel is confident that it has a good understanding of IEO's work and its relations with stakeholders. Nevertheless, rather than making recommendations, the Panel feels that suggestions might be more appropriate as they cannot be backed with full-fledged evidence.

## **Assessment of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office**

### **Overall Assessment**

#### ***Independence and Accountability***

14. Overall, the Panel was impressed by the achievements of the IEO over the past ten years. The current Director has succeeded in establishing and protecting a strong and *independent* GEF evaluation office (institutional independence). This is widely acknowledged and appreciated by stakeholders and in particular by the GEF Council. The acknowledgement of IEO's independence is underlined by the Council's approval of the name change to include 'Independent' in the Office's name.<sup>5</sup> Also, the GEF CEO fully respects the independent evaluation function.

15. Legally speaking, the IEO is not independent from the GEF Secretariat (structural independence). However, the Panel's exchange with the legal counsel to the GEF IEO and the GEF Secretariat confirmed that IEO has de facto full operational independence. The legal counsel assured the Panel that the few remaining administrative issues will be resolved within the coming weeks.<sup>6</sup>

16. Also the behavioural independence appears strong. According to the M&E Policy the IEO staff is fully independent from the operational part of the GEF,<sup>7</sup> which was confirmed during discussions with the IEO staff.

17. A high degree of independence is a precondition for a *strong accountability function* which the IEO performs well. Building on its independence, the IEO has established excellent relations with the GEF Council. Council members consulted during this Professional Peer Review unanimously underscored the good collaboration with the IEO. It appears that the Council's needs for accountability purposes are adequately met by the Office's work and its last four-year work programme was approved by the Council without modification.<sup>8</sup> It emerged from the discussion that the Overall Performance Studies (OPSs) and to some extent the Annual Performance Reports (APRs) are particularly relevant to the Council.

18. Over the past ten years, the IEO has produced a large number of *evaluation products* assessing a wide range of GEF activities, thereby meeting the accountability requirements and

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<sup>5</sup> Joint Summary of the Chairs, 45<sup>th</sup> GEF Council Meeting, November 5-7, 2013, para. 13.

<sup>6</sup> They are related to the human resources processes for IEO staff and the IEO Director's travel authorization.

<sup>7</sup> GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Joint Summary of the Chairs, 40<sup>th</sup> GEF Council Meeting, May 24-26, 2011, para. 12.

expanding the knowledge of GEF focal areas. A review of the IEO website confirms the richness of the work conducted over the past years.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Leadership***

19. In general, the IEO Director's role and *leadership* on the evaluation function is appreciated by stakeholders. The Office has established a good dialogue with the evaluation offices of the GEF Agencies. Moreover, the IEO has demonstrated leadership and innovation in the evaluation community and has contributed to the development of new evaluation methods. In particular, the Office contributed to the debate on impact assessment by developing its own Theory of Change based approach for assessing impacts, which leads to application of mixed methods in the impact evaluations themselves. Also, the Office is a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), a permanent observer in the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) of the International Financial Institutions, the Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE), the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) among others and participates actively in several task forces within these entities. Publications on evaluation methods and approaches developed by the Office appear in evaluation journals.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Utility***

20. While overall the Panel was impressed by what has been achieved over the past ten years, it also identified a number of areas that may require attention in order to harvest the full potential of the evaluation function. In particular, the Panel found that of the three assessment criteria - independence, credibility and utility – it should focus more on the latter. With that, the Panel concurred with the IEO self-assessment which concluded that 'the Office faces the challenge to broaden the utility of evaluation among the various GEF stakeholders.'<sup>11</sup>

21. To the Panel, three areas emerged of particular relevance for utility: a) the engagement with stakeholders, b) the evaluation products and the evaluation work programme, and c) the tension between accountability and learning. As noted below, these three areas are closely related.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

22. The Panel found five prime stakeholder groups for the IEO and its work: the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, the countries with GEF projects and the national GEF representatives like the operational and political focal points. All five stakeholder groups have different needs and require a different manner of engagement.

23. *GEF Council:* The IEO's engagement with the GEF Council appears, overall, to be satisfactory. Council members met for this review expressed appreciation for the work of the IEO and considered the engagement as adequate. Nevertheless, the Panel found some constraints. First, the Council is a non-resident council which only meets twice a year. This limits the face-to-face engagement of the IEO with Council members. Second, the Panel was informed by the IEO and Council members that during the Council meeting in June 2013 the IEO work

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.thegef.org/gef/eo\\_office](http://www.thegef.org/gef/eo_office).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. 'The Importance of Negative Evidence in Evaluation', Rob D. van den Berg, Evaluation Connections, European Evaluation Society, September 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Self-assessment, GEF IEO, February 15, 2014, para. 42.

programme was not discussed strategically but dealt with rather rapidly during the evaluation budget approval process. The Council expressed to the Secretariat that it wanted to reinstate the work programme discussion in the M&E part of the agenda as it used to be the case. The Panel found that not all evaluation products in the work programme create the same interest among Council members. Third, Council members have limited capacities to devote to evaluation, which limits the engagement on individual evaluation reports. The Panel is of the view that these constraints seriously limit the opportunity for learning from the evaluation function.

24. *GEF Secretariat*: The Panel found that the engagement with the GEF Secretariat is ambivalent. Although the IEO stepped up consultations with the Secretariat during GEF-5 by seeking more interaction during the development of evaluation approach papers and by incorporating Secretariat staff into reference groups for evaluations<sup>12</sup>, the Panel found that some GEF Secretariat staff members remain dissatisfied with the interaction with the IEO. While it is acknowledged that there are consultations on approach papers and draft reports, many of these consultations appear superficial and apparently are like an exchange of information without really getting a deep and meaningful dialogue. Consultations are at times perceived as pro-forma consultations as comments and inputs are only taken on board to a limited extent. This is partly due to considerable time pressure preventing the Secretariat and the IEO staff from engaging in a genuine dialogue. Partly this has also to do with the IEO protecting its independence. The Panel was informed - on more than one occasion - that individuals stopped providing comments anticipating that they would not be taken on board. In relation to comments on draft evaluation reports, such statements were to some extent puzzling as the IEO keeps track of comments received and changes subsequently made in so-called 'audit trails'. Audit trails reviewed by this Panel demonstrate that some staff stakeholders comment extensively on evaluation reports. It appears, however, that the audit trails are not systematically shared once they are completed. The Panel believes that this disconnect could be bridged by allowing extra time for comments and appropriate feedback - in writing as well as face-to-face when appropriate.

25. In addition, the Panel views the relatively large number of reports and their length as a challenge for more in-depth engagement with stakeholders. Since the end of 2009 the Office has, according to the IEO, undertaken 33 evaluations and studies, as well as 21 sub-studies for OPS-5. The considerable length of evaluation reports, which varies between 50 to 80 pages main text (without annexes), is another burden, in particular for Secretariat and Agencies to provide comments and engage. The reports going to the Council are shorter versions (15-25 pages), with the exceptions of the APRs and OPSs which are submitted in full length.

26. *GEF Agencies*: It appears to the Panel that the engagement of the IEO with the coordination units of the GEF Agencies is limited. Although the M&E Policy<sup>13</sup> foresees regular consultations with all stakeholders, the IEO is perceived as being focussed primarily on the needs of the GEF Council and less on the needs of the GEF Agencies and other stakeholders. At times, the IEO is perceived as having a top-down approach. As an example, the new 'Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations' were cited. The IEO is proposing to incorporate a specific methodology to measure the contribution of projects towards impact. For some agencies, it is difficult to subscribe to this change as they use different methodologies. As a consequence, the Guidelines have not been updated since GEF-4 which can also be seen as

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<sup>12</sup> Self-assessment, GEF IEO, February 15, 2014, para. 41.

<sup>13</sup> GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 2010.

avoiding a top-down approach. The *perceived* top-down approach is not new. The 2009 Peer Review found a 'general feeling of a top-down approach by the EO'.<sup>14</sup>

27. It seems to the Panel that the IEO closely collaborates with the evaluation offices of the GEF Agencies as foreseen in the GEF M&E Policy. For example, the Panel found that the IEO has a particularly close relationship with the UNDP evaluation office. It appears to the Panel that while there is a good exchange within the evaluation community of the GEF Agencies, the outreach in the GEF Agencies beyond that circle is somewhat limited.

28. *GEF project countries:* In the time available, and given that this was a 'light' peer review, the Panel was not able to carry out field visits as done for the previous Professional Peer Review in 2009, although one member of the Panel was able to carry out an interview in Ghana prior to the mission. Furthermore, the Panel interviewed Council Members representing developing country perspectives. The Panel's impression of how the IEO is addressing the needs of country stakeholders are therefore based purely on what the Panel heard from interviews with the staff in the IEO, desk review of the products and feedback from the Council and others. According to the self-assessment, IEO has responded to country demands through the Extended Constituency Workshops thereby making presentations on evaluation requirements and practices in the GEF, providing information on evaluation findings and interact with country stakeholders on issues of their interest'.<sup>15</sup> Also, consultations are envisaged during the entire evaluation process for the Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs).<sup>16</sup> During scoping missions, country stakeholders have the opportunity to highlight areas of interest. According to the IEO, these opportunities are widely used. Clearly the heavy investment in Country Portfolio Evaluations is with this audience in mind and the Panel assumes that they are valued by the country governments for that reason.

29. *Beyond the GEF Network:* On a more general notion, the Panel considered the changes in the global architecture of environmental management, in particular related to new emerging actors like the Green Climate Fund. In this regard, the Panel is of the view that the IEO may reflect on how it wants to collaborate with the new actors and if there is a need for strategic alliances. Also, the question came up to what extent changes in the environment can be assessed in isolation of the broader sustainable development agenda and the emerging Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

30. The Panel concludes that the IEO may wish to revisit the way it engages with the different stakeholders with a view to increase the utility of the evaluation function. While the M&E Policy foresees quite some consultation, in practice these consultations take place under considerable time pressure. Also the IEO is cautious in protecting its independence. Both elements prevent a meaningful dialogue and in-depth engagement.

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<sup>14</sup> Peer Review –The Evaluation Function of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Final Report, May 2009, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Self-assessment, GEF IEO, February 15, 2014, para. 41.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.thegef.org/gef/CPE>.

## Evaluation Products and Work Programme

### *Evaluation Products*

31. The Panel discussed with stakeholders the usefulness of the different evaluation products in particular the Annual Performance Reports (APRs) and the Overall Performance Studies (OPSs), the Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs), the Impact Evaluations and the Thematic Evaluations. The Panel found that the evaluation products are valued differently by different stakeholders.

32. The *OPSs* are considered to be very useful by Council members and adequately meet the needs in terms of accountability for the replenishment of the GEF fund. The *APRs* are also viewed as useful. However, it was less clear to the Panel whether or not the *APRs* are required every year or if a less frequent, such as a biennial modus may be sufficient. Indications from Council members suggest that a biennial performance report may be acceptable. Also, *APRs* and *OPSs* are targeted at Council members. Other stakeholders appear to benefit less from these two types of studies, partly because they are considered too general in nature and because some of the proposed recommendations are viewed as not being actionable at their level.

33. The *Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs)* cover GEF support across GEF Agencies, projects and programmes in a given country over a period of about 20 years. The Panel found that *CPEs* have small constituencies, that is, mainly the countries whose portfolio has been evaluated. Since the IEO conducts three to four *CPEs* per year, coverage and audience is indeed rather limited. In addition, *CPEs* are rather costly evaluations. In terms of budget, the *CPEs* require the largest share of the IEO budget – approximately 30% of the IEO budget (Table 1).

**Table 1: Evaluation budget of the GEF IEO (FY 12-15)**

	<b>FY 12-15</b> (in \$k)	<b>%</b>
Country Portfolio Evaluations	1,920	30%
Impact Evaluations	1,224	19%
Performance Evaluations	1,029	16%
Thematic Evaluations (incl. \$ 1,15 million for OPS5)	1,690	26%
Knowledge Products	592	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,455</b>	<b>100%</b>
Source: Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the GEF Evaluation Office, GEF/ME/C.44/02/C.4, May 21, 2013.		

Also, the Panel found that the GEF does not have a standard country planning framework (e.g. country programme), although the GEF introduced the voluntary National Portfolio Formulation Exercise (NFPE) in GEF-5, and in a number of countries national programming happened even in GEF-4. However, not having a country planning framework in most countries is a constraint to evaluating country portfolios. The question is therefore how meaningful the aggregation of various projects by country can be given that the principal focus of the GEF is on global public goods. The Panel discussed with the IEO team leading on *CPEs* how they might maximize the usefulness and learning from this instrument by, for example, planning them in groups or clusters – as already done for the Pacific and the Caribbean regions - and/or using the annual synthesis of

CPEs in a more high profile way. This could go beyond the geographical groupings already used (the IEO has a regional approach, having just looked at countries in Africa this last year), to look at countries which have similarities in terms of issues/challenges faced. There was some interest in this as a way of promoting a thematic or cross-country dimension to the product which would broaden its audience and influence. However, this must be balanced with country interests and ownership.

34. *Impact Evaluations* are considered by all stakeholders as an innovative contribution to the challenge of measuring impact in the area of environment. The underlying approach for the impact evaluations – the Theory of Change – is cutting edge, supplemented with different data collection methods. The IEO faces a major challenge to measure the impact of the GEF at the global level: the availability of data. While hard evidence is used when available many stakeholders highlighted the speculative nature of the applied Theory of Change. As a consequence, some stakeholders are not fully satisfied with the impact evaluations. The Panel however acknowledged that measuring the impact of the GEF at the global level is a major challenge in terms of methodology and data availability. The Panel would like to promote more assessment of aggregated results, including outcomes and impacts, across projects.

35. The fourth type of evaluation is the *Thematic Evaluation*. Thematic evaluations assess specific themes. The term ‘theme’ is understood in a rather broad sense. The GEF thematic focal areas are only one sub-category and the Panel was somewhat surprised to find only a few thematic evaluations of GEF focal areas. Since 2009, only one thematic focal area evaluation was conducted.<sup>17</sup> Under work stream ‘Thematic Evaluations’ the IEO also assesses other issues like funding modalities<sup>18</sup> or cross-cutting objectives like GEF capacity development activities. The Panel noted that within the IEO, the team responsible for thematic evaluations is currently the smallest (one person). The IEO highlighted that thematic evaluations are conducted by staff across the Office. Also, in the context of the OPSs a number of thematic sub-studies were conducted. In any case, it emerged from discussions with stakeholders that more thematic evaluations would be welcomed as they are considered very useful, in particular by the GEF Secretariat and the GEF Agencies.

36. The Panel found good *quality assurance mechanisms*, reflecting and adjusted to the different nature of the four evaluation streams.<sup>19</sup> In addition to inter-agency and stakeholder meetings there are Peer Review Panels, Reference Groups, Quality Assurance Panels, Technical Advisory Groups, Steering Committees and the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), as well as occasional quality assurance provided by the Institute for Development Studies (although with mixed results). The IEO has also developed a sound quality assurance mechanism for project evaluation reports, together with GEF Agency evaluation offices.

37. Going beyond preparing evaluation reports, the Office has made efforts to prepare *additional knowledge products* in order to facilitate the distribution of and access to evaluation results. Among others, the IEO organizes ‘EO Events’ like the webinar on the ‘Impact of GEF Support in the South China Sea and Adjacent Waters’. This webinar demonstrates how to apply a Complexity Theory in a large-scale evaluation. The IEO produces ‘Signposts’ which are two-page learning products that summarize evaluations and highlight findings and recommendations. The IEO also produces so called ‘EO Multimedia’ (video clips) addressing issues like IEO’s

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<sup>17</sup> GEF Thematic Evaluation: Focal Area Strategies (FAS), GEF Evaluation Office, October 2012.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. the Small Grants Programme.

<sup>19</sup> Performance Evaluations, Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPE), Impact Evaluations and Thematic Evaluations.

approach to Measuring Impact Analysis. Finally, the Office established and manages two communities of practice. The first – Climate-Eval<sup>20</sup> – is a community of practice for evaluators active on climate change and natural resources management. The second – CEPKE<sup>21</sup> – is a community of practice on comprehensive evaluations.

38. Overall, the Panel found that the usefulness of the evaluation products varies depending on the stakeholders needs. Clearly, not every evaluation report or knowledge product can - nor must - be of use and interest to every stakeholder. However, it appears to the Panel that the four types of evaluations have to some extent become processes with their own dynamics. An annual delivery mode has been established which now may be challenged by the need for a more flexible, more selective and more strategic model, thereby being more responsive to the needs of stakeholders in choosing evaluation subjects.

39. The Panel found an Office which has an *ambitious agenda* and which is under some delivery pressure, straining not only Office staff and their work-life balance, but also limiting its time for engaging with stakeholders. Looking at the entire portfolio of activities and products, the Panel was wondering if the Office may be stretched too thinly over too many activities. Since the end of 2009 the Office has, according to the IEO, undertaken 33 evaluations and studies, as well as 21 sub-studies for OPS-5. In the four-year work programme (2012-2015) 38 reports/studies were planned (Table 2). Together with the 21 sub-studies for OPS-5, around 60 reports/studies are likely to be produced in four years, although not all reports/studies are resource intensive. In addition, the IEO has produced numerous knowledge products and is engaged in many ways in the international evaluation community. The persistent workload was highlighted also in the Professional Peer Review 2009.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 2: Number of IEO evaluation reports and studies planned (FY 12-15)**

	<b>Number of reports/studies</b>
Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs)	14
Country Portfolio Studies (CPSs)	5
Impact Evaluations	5
Performance Evaluations	8
Thematic Evaluations	5
OPS-5	1*
OPS-5 sub-studies	21*
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>
Source: Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the GEF Evaluation Office, GEF/ME/C.40/01, April 27, 2011. * actual figures	

### **Work Programme**

40. According to the GEF M&E Policy – and also in practice - the Director of Evaluation formulates - independent of management - a four-year rolling programme of work, which is

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.climate-eval.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cepke.net/>.

<sup>22</sup> Peer Review –The Evaluation Function of the GEF, Final Report, May, 2009, p. 56.

approved by the GEF Council at the beginning of the four year cycle.<sup>23</sup> Currently, the work programme is being developed based on a systematic analysis of a number of parameters around the four work streams, which came into being at the end of GEF-4. However, the Panel found that consultation on the programme is weak and many stakeholders are not clear on how the work programme is established. In fact, some express the view that the work programme is developed in isolation, an issue which also came up during the last Peer Review in 2009.<sup>24</sup> A valuable opportunity to get early buy-in of the stakeholders is thus lost.

41. The Panel is of the view that developing the work programme in close consultation with all stakeholders is an important opportunity to engage. While the final decision on the work programme must remain with the Director of the IEO in order to safeguard the independence of the evaluation function, reaching out to stakeholders in order to identify key issues for evaluation is the first step to enhance the utility of the evaluation function. *Utility-focused* evaluations greatly contribute to ownership of evaluation results.

42. This may require a *reassessment of the four streams of evaluations*. While all types have merits, the needs of the different stakeholders must be matched with Office capacities and structure. A new prioritization of evaluations may be required. Also, the number of reports may have to be reconsidered. As all actors have limited time, the time to engage with one another on any specific evaluation can be expanded if the overall number of evaluations is reduced (e.g. in many cases, the same persons are required to react to draft evaluation reports).

43. This may be an opportune time to step-back and revisit the work programme and taking into account the strategic value, current work load of the IEO may also have implications on the structure of the IEO. Currently, the teams are organised along the four work streams complemented by an operations and knowledge team.<sup>25</sup> According to the IEO, some work is being done across teams. While the Panel is aware of the merits of continuity (e.g. institutional memory, efficiency gains, etc.), it must be balanced with the merits of flexibility to respond to strategic priorities. Rigid teams (and work streams) risk becoming ‘silos’. The Panel is of the view that a work organization fostering exchange among the teams would create greater cross-fertilization and synergies and perhaps would help reducing individual team’s workload. Modification in the IEO structure may also be an opportunity to revisit the gender balance in IEO, in particular with regard to management responsibilities, currently mainly carried by male staff.<sup>26</sup>

## **Learning**

### ***GEF Council***

44. The Panel found that the IEO efforts to ensure the accountability function of evaluation were more successful than efforts to ensure the learning<sup>27</sup> dimension. As a consequence, not all key stakeholders of the evaluation function have benefited equally.

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<sup>23</sup> GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 2010, para 50.

<sup>24</sup> Peer Review – The Evaluation Function of the GEF, Final Report, May, 2009, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> IEO is organized along five teams in IEO: the Performance Evaluations Team (4 staff), the Country Portfolio Evaluations Team (2 staff), the Impact Evaluations Team (2 staff), the Thematic Evaluations Team (1 staff), and the Operations and Knowledge Team (7 staff).

<sup>26</sup> Besides a male Director, four of the five teams are led by men.

<sup>27</sup> Learning is understood as change in behaviour.

45. The GEF Council members are generally satisfied with the usefulness of the IEO's work. The Overall Performance Studies (OPSs) - and to some extent also the Annual Performance Reports (APRs) - provide essential information, for example for the replenishment processes. Information in the evaluation products contribute to the decision making of the Council, which can be understood as a result of a learning process. Many recommendations from evaluations form the basis for decisions taken in the Council, as can be seen in the Management Action Record (MAR).<sup>28</sup>

46. With regard to the MAR, which is an essential part of follow up to evaluations in any major development agency, the Panel found that as currently operated it is not working as it should be. While the example<sup>29</sup> reviewed by the Panel looks reasonable and comparable to the tracking system of other multilateral organizations, various stakeholders either questioned the usefulness of the MAR or indicated not being aware of its existence. It is to a large extent perceived as a bureaucratic requirement rather than a management tool. This could however be addressed with some relatively straightforward changes, learning from the experience of improving MAR systems in other multilateral agencies which have faced the same challenges.

### ***GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies***

47. Learning based on evaluations also takes place in the GEF Secretariat and the GEF Agencies. The Panel found a mixed picture and it appears that the GEF Secretariat and some of the GEF Agencies (operational units) have benefitted comparatively less from evaluations than the GEF Council. The Panel found a number of reasons for that.

48. First, it seems that knowledge sharing is a challenge in the GEF network going beyond the sharing of evaluation knowledge. OPS-5 found that GEF Agencies do not give high ratings to the GEF's knowledge management arrangements in general.<sup>30</sup>

49. Second and more specifically related to evaluations, the usefulness in terms of learning also depends on the relevance of the evaluation subject. Staff of the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies indicated to the Panel that some of the products are viewed as being not so relevant for them. Relevance also depends on timing.

50. Third, some stakeholders were concerned with the evidence base of some reports. Interviewees criticized the heavy dependence on perceptions and qualitative data and the limited use (or availability) of 'hard' and quantitative data. A wish was expressed to be more empirical and to work more with counterfactual data.<sup>31</sup> In the context of impact assessment, the prospective data gathering was seen as partly 'speculative' and a limitation of the Theory of Change approach. The Panel recognizes that there is an ongoing debate on the most appropriate evaluation methods for environmental intervention including the (non-)feasibility of using counterfactual data in the area of environment. Also the limited availability of so-called 'hard' data is an issue that goes beyond the IEO. In fact, a monitoring system that would provide data is the responsibility of the GEF Secretariat. It is acknowledged by the GEF Secretariat that having a coherent data monitoring system that could provide a robust database with comparable

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<sup>28</sup> The MAR is a tool to systematically track – in table format - the follow up to Council decisions which were made based on recommendations from evaluations and the related management responses.

<sup>29</sup> Management Action Record (MAR) 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Final Report of the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF: At Crossroads for Higher Impact, GEF Evaluation Office, November 19, 2013, para. 261.

<sup>31</sup> Counterfactual data emerge from comparable reference groups/areas that have not benefitted from an intervention.

data across the GEF network is a major challenge because of the different systems of the ten GEF Agencies.

51. Fourth, Secretariat staff expressed the need for more analytical reports in order to enhance the potential for learning. Some reports were viewed as being too descriptive and not sufficiently working out the reasons behind successes/failures (why things are happening). Moreover, translating findings to lessons learned and how they should be incorporated at the operation level is seen as a major challenge. The usefulness of some recommendations is questioned as being too general or not being actionable.

52. Fifth, the limited usefulness of evaluations was also attributed to the limited consultation of the IEO with the staff of the Secretariat and the Agencies in selecting the evaluation subjects, in defining the right evaluation questions, in incorporating comments made on draft reports, or in discussing draft recommendations before finalizing them.

### ***Evaluation Community***

53. There is a third group benefitting from evaluation knowledge - the evaluation community. The IEO has good relations with the evaluation offices of the GEF Agencies and frequent exchange on issues ranging from methodological questions to planning of joint evaluations. Joint evaluations are seen as useful ways to enhance joint learning.

54. Learning also takes place beyond the evaluation offices of the GEF Agencies, such as, for example, in the community of practices in evaluations of climate change and development (Climate-Eval) managed by the IEO. In addition, the IEO Director has also been at the forefront of Professional Peer Reviews of evaluation offices, similar to this one.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

55. Over the past ten years, the current IEO Director has successfully established and secured a strong and independent GEF evaluation office. This is widely acknowledged and appreciated. This independence must be safeguarded in future. Along the same line, the IEO must continue with the strong emphasis on accountability vis-à-vis the GEF Council. This is particularly relevant for the replenishment process.

56. The IEO has produced a large number of evaluation products assessing a wide range of GEF activities, thereby expanding knowledge of the GEF's focal areas. This is a considerable achievement.

57. Also, the IEO has demonstrated innovation and leadership in evaluation methodology, for example in the area of impact evaluation. In addition, the IEO is an important actor in the evaluation community, contributing to the advancement of the evaluation function in the environment area and in multilateral organizations in general.

58. The Panel found that the IEO efforts to ensure the accountability function of evaluation were more successful than efforts to ensure the learning dimension. Also, the Panel found that the IEO is under quite some delivery pressure, straining not only its staff, but also significantly limiting its time for engaging with stakeholders.

59. The Panel is inclined to make a few suggestions to strengthen the GEF evaluation function in order to enhance the utility of its evaluation results.

***Better balance between accountability and learning***

60. The Panel is of the view that the time has come for the IEO – and probably for the GEF - to give equal weight to accountability and learning. In order to bring the learning up to the level of accountability, the IEO may want to revisit the way it interacts with key stakeholders. While maintaining the established independence will be essential for the evaluation function, the Office ought to engage in a different more meaningful manner with the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies in order to identify the demand for evaluation and to assure that final products are timely and are owned by the GEF network. However, engagement requires two parties ('it takes two to tango'). It will be helpful for the IEO to identify stakeholders that are actually *willing to engage*. This can lead to powerful coalitions for learning.

***Widely and actively consult in developing the work programme, to ensure greater ownership and awareness***

61. The Panel suggests that prior to establishing its work programmes, the IEO widely consults with stakeholders about their needs and priorities. The challenge will be to balance different needs in terms of accountability and learning. The evaluation products might gain usefulness if the work programme integrates demand from stakeholders rather than being driven by the four work streams as is currently the practice. A strong ownership of the programme by key stakeholders will also complement the learning efforts.

***Council to consider new mechanism to engage with IEO***

62. The Panel supports the GEF Council's request to discuss the evaluation work programme and budget in the M&E part of Council meetings (and not as part of the general budget discussion). However, the Panel would like to encourage more strategic discussions on subjects to be evaluated. Also, the GEF Council may want to consider finding a new mechanism to have more in-depth engagement with the IEO in particular also on evaluations reports and their findings. As reference mechanisms may serve the World Bank's Committee on Development Effectiveness (CODE) or the FAO's Programme Committee.

***Review product mix***

63. The Panel suggests reviewing the IEO's product mix and prioritisation according to the demand from the primary stakeholders, i.e. the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies and the programme countries. Future evaluations ought to be planned more selectively based on relevance and timeliness and less by the four work streams, which came into being at the end of GEF-4. Presenting evaluation findings at the right time can be very powerful.

***Thematic work likely to gain importance***

64. Reporting to the GEF Council on the performance of the GEF network should remain a priority. At the same time, the Panel is of the view that, after listening to the different stakeholders, it is probable that the product mix will change and that among others, more *thematic* work is likely to be required. This is likely to have implications on the size and compositions of the teams in the IEO.

### ***Select evaluation subject strategically – reduce burden on system***

65. As engagement takes time and is costly, evaluation subjects must be selected strategically and selectively. Also, the IEO may consider reducing the number of evaluation reports. The objective could be to have more traction with *fewer products*. Fewer products will also reduce the burden on the GEF system and the IEO. One option could be to reduce the number of annual reports<sup>32</sup> by merging them into one or changing to a biennial modus (e.g. for the Annual Performance Report). Also, the length of reports might be shortened with a view to keeping reports as concise as possible in order to reduce the burden on all actors involved.<sup>33</sup> For strategic discussions in the GEF Council, summary reports distilling key findings, conclusions and recommendations may be considered.

### ***Engage with stakeholders during entire evaluation cycle***

66. Strengthened engagement with stakeholders is important throughout the entire evaluation cycle. In that sense, evaluations can be understood as processes rather than products. During evaluations, sufficient time should be allocated allowing for meaningful in-depth dialogue with stakeholders in particular the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies and the programme countries, on terms of reference for evaluations, approach papers and draft reports, including recommendations. The IEO should *move from perceived pro-forma consultations with stakeholders to in-depth engagement with stakeholders*. The IEO should allow for sufficient time for commenting and for taking concerns on board where feasible without compromising its independence and impartiality. The challenge for the IEO is to find the right balance between listening and being constructive on the one hand and protecting independence and its mandate on the other hand.

### ***Close learning loops***

67. Most importantly, the IEO ought to make sure that the learning loop is closed after an evaluation is completed and results from evaluations have actually been absorbed by key actors. This may require more face-to-face interactions. The Panel suggests to (a) establish standards for stakeholder engagement; and (b) allocate financial resources dedicated to learning within evaluation budgets. While face-to-face interactions can be costly (when travelling is required), the Panel is of the view that face-to-face interaction is a very effective way to facilitate learning. Closing the learning loop can not be left to the IEO alone. Given the non-hierarchical relationship with stakeholders, all actors in the GEF network are encouraged to join hands.

### ***Assess Management Action Record (MAR)***

68. The Panel suggests that the GEF assess the Management Action Record (MAR) tool with a view to make it a more useful management instrument.

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<sup>32</sup> Currently, there the IEO produces four different annual reports: Annual Performance Reports (APR), the **Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report (ACPER)**, the **Annual Impact Report (AIR)**, and the **Annual Thematic Evaluation Report (ATER)**.

<sup>33</sup> Following its own advice, the Panel makes an effort to keep this report short.

*Continue efforts to measure impact*

69. The Panel would like to encourage the IEO to continue efforts to measure the environmental impact of GEF funded activities, in particular also at the global level. Efforts should continue to capture to the extent possible 'hard' evidence of environmental impact. In this regard, the IEO may consider strengthening its collaboration with the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP). In any case, it will be important to involve relevant stakeholders in the process in order to have the necessary buy-in, in particular of the GEF Agencies.

## Annex 1: List of Persons met

### GEF Council Members, Alternates, Donors

- Matthews Williams, Council member for Australia, New Zealand, and Republic of Korea & Counsellor, Australian Embassy, AusAid
- Winston Thompson, Council member for Cook Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Naru, Nieu, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu & Ambassador to the US Embassy of the Republic of Fiji
- Clarence Alexander Severens, Acting Council member for United States & Director Office of Energy and Environment, US Department of Treasury
- Frank Fass-Metz, Council member for Germany & Head of Division, Climate Policy and Climate Financing, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
- Josceline Wheatley, Council member for United Kingdom & Team Leader, Climate Negotiations and Finance Team, Department for International Development (DFID)
- Bella Tonkonogy, Policy Advisor, Office of Environment and Energy, U.S. Department of Treasury
- Rebecca A. Adler Miserendino, Office of Environmental Quality and Transboundary Issues (EQI), Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, U.S. Department of State

### GEF Independent Evaluation Office

- Robert van den Berg, Director
  - Aaron Zazueta, Chief Evaluation Officer
  - Carlo Carugi, Senior Evaluation Officer
  - Anna Vigh, Senior Evaluation Officer
  - Neeraj Kumar Negi, Senior Evaluation Officer
  - Juan J. Portillo, Senior Operations Officer
  - Baljit Wadhwa, Senior Evaluation Officer
  - Elizabeth B. George, Senior Program Assistant
  - Evelyn Chihuguyu, Program Assistant
  - Kseniya Temnenko, Knowledge Management Officer
  - Jeneen Reyes Garcia, Evaluation Officer
  - Malac L. Kabir, Research Assistant
  - Francisco Grahammer, Extended-term Consultant
  - Joshua Schneck, Extended-term Consultant
  - Shanna Edberg, Junior Professional Associate
  - David Akana, Extended-term Consultant
  - Ruben Sardon, Short-term Consultant
  - Muhammad Najeeb Khan, Short-term Consultant
  - Simon Blower, Short-term Consultant
  - Sara El Choufi, Short-term Consultant
  - Joshua Gange, Short-term Consultant
- GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)
- Thomas Hammond, STAP Secretary
- GEF Secretariat
- Dr. Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson
  - Gustavo Fonseca, Head of Natural Resources
  - Ramesh Ramankutty, Head of Operations and Business Strategy
  - Franck Jesus, Senior Climate Change Specialist, Climate and Chemicals Team

UNDP

- Nancy Bennett, Results Management and Evaluation Advisor, UNDP-GEF  
UNDP Independent Evaluation Office
- Juha Uitto, Deputy Director
- Alan Fox, Evaluation Adviser  
UNEP Evaluation Office
- Michael Spilsbury, Head  
UNIDO Evaluation Group
- Margareta de Goys, Director & Vice-Chair on UNEG Peer Reviews  
World Bank
- Siv Tokle, Senior Operations Officer, Deputy GEF Coordinator
- Maria Dakolias, Lead Counsel, Legal Vice Presidency  
World Bank Independent Evaluation Group
- Christopher Gerrard, Former Lead Evaluation Officer
- Kenneth M. Chomitz, Senior Advisor
- Anna Amato, Consultant

## **Annex 2: Findings of the 2009 Peer Review**

*Independence:* In 2003, the GEF Council decided to establish an independent Office of Monitoring and Evaluation. The 2009 Panel noted the positive effects on the conduct of evaluations brought about by the achievement of structural independence of the Evaluation Office (EO). Stakeholders, including staff of the GEF Secretariat and the EO, as well as in GEF Agencies, considered that the cost for the EO's structural independence reflects in isolation from the Secretariat and the GEF Agencies. Stakeholders complained that this affects negatively the consultation and communication process during the preparation of the EO work plan as well as the organisational learning loop from evaluations. Council members, however, did not appear to share this view. The structural independence of the GEF EO was vested in two letters of agreement exchanged between the CEO and the EO Director, authorizing the latter to speak to the Council directly on all matters pertaining to evaluation and to take decisions on human resource issues in the Evaluation Office. The Panel found that the sustainability and validity of the letters of agreement as a binding institutional measure were questionable. Therefore, the Panel held that a more formal agreement, at least at the level of rules and regulations, was needed to put the structural independence of the GEF EO on a firmer legal basis.

*Credibility:* The 2009 Panel noted that the quality of the GEF EO evaluations has improved over recent years. The Panel was nevertheless faced with some issues that deserve consideration: The analysis of the evaluation products has shown that particular products and specifications are more important for establishing – or affecting – credibility than others. The Panel was surprised to see an overwhelming majority of evaluations being rated moderately to very positive rather than a more even distribution across the rating scale. The Panel was informed about persisting workload overstressing the human resources in the GEF EO over extended periods of time. The Panel also found a restrictive practice regarding fieldwork. One of the weakest parts of the GEF EO work identified at the time was transparency of planning and conducting evaluations. A complaint voiced across the whole GEF partnership, in Washington as well as in other places visited by the Panel, relates to the very short period of time that the M&E Policy provides for the GEF Secretariat as well as for the GEF Agencies for preparing a management response to an evaluation.

*Utility:* The evidence collected during the 2009 Peer Review allowed the Panel to confirm that the Council and its members are generally satisfied with the work of the Evaluation Office, with the coverage of its work plan and the topics selected for and addressed in evaluations. On the whole, the Council members found that the evaluations are useful in clarifying issues of general concern for the GEF, in informing Council discussions and in helping members to take the necessary decisions in the ongoing reform process. Evaluations also appear to find their way into GEF Constituencies. In the field, the Panel faced situations where the GEF EO evaluation work is seen as quite removed from the national level, with the exception of the Country Portfolio Evaluations. As a result, the GEF EO evaluations were predominantly perceived as top-down approaches, at a distance from the operational level. Finally, the 2009 Panel observed on several occasions, that there was a kind of “competitive relationship” between the evaluation office and the Secretariat affecting the smooth running of business between the two. The Panel thought that this relationship needed to be kept under review to avoid disruptions and adverse impacts on the utility of evaluations.