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EVALUATION OF GEF SUPPORT TO SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT
VOLUME 1: MAIN REPORT - MAY 2022

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ARPA	Amazon Region Protected Areas Program
ASL	Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program
BD	Biodiversity (GEF focal area)
CBIT	Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency
CC	Climate Change (GEF focal area)
CEO	chief executive officer
CI	Conservation International
CO_2	carbon dioxide
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FLEGT	European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan
GATI	Indigenous Environmental and Territorial Management Project
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFW	Global Forest Watch
HACT	Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers
IAPs	integrated approach pilots
IPBES	International Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPs	impact programs
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IPLCs	indigenous people and local communities
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LD	Land Degradation (GEF focal area)
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MEAs	multilateral environmental agreements
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MFA	Multifocal Area
MSMEs	micro, small, and medium–sized enterprises
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OECD DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee
PNGATI	National Plan for Environmental and Territorial Management in Indigenous Lands
REDD	United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFM	sustainable forest management
STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has supported sustainable forest management (SFM) for almost 30 years, from the GEF Pilot onwards. This is the first comprehensive evaluation of GEF support to SFM, which assesses the outcomes and performance of GEF's diverse portfolio of SFM activities and provides strategic insights and lessons for future forest-related interventions. It covers the entire span from GEF-Pilot to GEF-7 and offers useful pointers for GEF-8.

2. SFM is vital for:

- Biodiversity conservation. Forests host 60 percent of vascular plant species, 68 percent of all mammal species, 80 percent of amphibian species, and 75 percent of bird species.
- Climate change mitigation. Forests act as a net carbon sink of -7.6 ± 49 $GtCO_2e$ yr^{-1}, just less than the annual emissions from transport.
- Land degradation neutrality. As almost all countries with land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets recognize the need to increase and enhance forest cover
- Agricultural commodities—mainly beef, soya bean, and palm oil—drive deforestation. 420 million hectares of forest have been lost over the last 30 years—the rate of permanent forest loss in primary forests remaining unchecked during that period.

3. Over the years, the GEF has supported 640 SFM projects with a value of $3.654 billion. The portfolio covers a wide diversity of geographies, implementing agencies, focal areas, and financial values. 314 of these 640 projects have completed implementation (49 percent), 138 projects are under implementation (22 percent), and 188 projects are still in the pipeline (29 percent). The median grant size is $4.58 million, while the largest grant made is $60.33 million. GEF-7 has the largest proportion of SFM projects (25 percent) and funds (26 percent), while Latin America is the region that has received the most grants (28 percent) and funds (34 percent). The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have received the greatest proportion of SFM funds (with 35 percent, 28 percent, and 11 percent, respectively), and the largest share of projects (28 percent, 34 percent, and 12 percent respectively).

4. The primary evidence for this evaluation was the 243 terminal evaluations (TEs) that have been produced to date from 314 completed projects. These completed terminal evaluations were the basis for a detailed portfolio analysis, supplemented by key informant interviews addressing all projects and SFM strategy and case studies in two key biomes, the Amazon and the Congo Basin. A framework of evaluative questions was developed to guide each of these evaluation activities and their synthesis, drawing on the experience of several other GEF evaluations relevant to SFM.

Findings

GEF's SFM results

5. The following aggregate positive contributions of the GEF's SFM portfolio have been identified:

(a). Protecting forests. GEF support contributed to at least 78 million ha of forests coming under new protected area (PA) status and/or improved PA management.

(b). Restoring forest landscapes. GEF support helped to restore at least 1.9 million ha of forests.

(c). Environmental security. 41 percent of GEF SFM projects achieved notable biodiversity gains, with gains in soil and water conservation and other protective functions in 25 percent of projects.

(d). Economic gains. 24 percent of SFM projects together created at least 139,300 new formal jobs, with local community income increases also reported for 55 percent of all projects.

(e). Empowerment and equity. Significant community empowerment was identified by TEs in 55 percent of projects, and improved gender equity in 37 percent.

(f). Policy, institutions, and capacity. 21 percent of projects were identified by TEs as achieving transformative change, i.e., deep, systemic, and lasting change. Moreover, 75 percent of projects were evaluated to have been well aligned with government priorities and 11 percent partially aligned.

6. Evaluation of the 243 projects with TEs was not extrapolated to all 640 SFM projects, although key informant interviews indicate promising results from other GEF SFM projects, especially recently. Moreover, there was variation and inconsistencies across TEs, with some barely touching on likely results areas, and using differing evaluation methodologies and metrics that did not allow aggregation of results beyond area data and numbers of beneficiaries. All of this suggests that the above estimate of portfolio results is conservative.

GEF's SFM performance

7. Overall, the routinely assessed performance rating of GEF SFM projects was very similar to the entire GEF project portfolio average across all GEF replenishment periods. The outcomes of 81.2 percent of SFM projects are rated in the satisfactory range, with 57.6 percent of projects likely to sustain their outcomes. 65 percent of the SFM projects received scores in the satisfactory range for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design and slightly higher (nearly 69 percent) for M&E implementation; this is comparable to the GEF portfolio as a whole.

Relevance

8. The GEF's SFM portfolio has become increasingly relevant over time—where it has become focused on the major forest assets (biomes) and main threats (drivers of deforestation) that are central to achieving the multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) as well as most countries' sustainable development priorities. Relevance is reduced where: lengthy delays between project design and implementation hamper adjustment to rapid changes in political and economic drivers of deforestation; project modalities do not adequately reach or empower local stakeholders' organizations across contested lands; and/or key forest types are "left behind."

Coherence

9. Coherence is high where GEF support has given strong emphasis to "best fit" with, and steady support for, government SFM capacity and where it has continually improved in integrating MEA aims with locally valued socioeconomic benefits. Such integration has been limited by a lack of clear and coherent portfolio-wide SFM strategy and/or theory of change that differentiates between regions and forest types.

Impact

10. The GEF's SFM portfolio has mainly contributed to institutional and governance, financial, socioeconomic, innovation, and environmental additionalities. These include flexible and innovative methods, tools, and institutional arrangements; long-term capacity and new financial flows that support integrated approaches; and mobilizing local knowledge and tradition. About a fifth of evaluated projects has been transformative. However, with the lack of comprehensive TEs and the absence of post-completion evaluations, a complete picture of GEF additionality in SFM is not yet available. In addition, several other impact areas, beyond increases in protected and restored forest area, are not well monitored and/or are difficult to aggregate at portfolio level.

Effectiveness

11. There are many examples of the GEF's SFM portfolio effectiveness in terms of environmental and socioeconomic outcomes, such as improved forest protection and management (63 percent), or increased income (55 percent). These tend to play to the strengths of the implementing agency, engage across sectors, and work through partnerships. However, effectiveness has been more limited where little attention has been paid to political economy understanding and strategy, limited capacities, local engagement and rights insecurity, project design, and strong M&E.

Efficiency

12. All project funding sizes exhibit good value for money—especially in jobs created by small grants, in area of forest protected and restored by medium grants, and in transformational change for larger grants. Small grants, despite their high return to the GEF's investment in securing new jobs, have too often been limited by their restricted institutional reach. Larger grants are limited by lengthy, procedural requirements that delay procurement and disbursement.

Sustainability

13. Only half of the GEF SFM project terminal evaluations indicated creation of conditions for social, institutional, and/or environmental sustainability beyond the project period. Sustainability is mainly associated with attention being paid to engaging and investing in national institutions and broader policy frameworks enabling SFM, and creating and disseminating knowledge. About half of GEF SFM projects are likely to sustain their outcomes across all replenishment periods. Achieving sustainability of the GEF's SFM activities remains a challenge in the face of the changing political, legal, and business environments that shape deforestation drivers. It is significantly compromised where stakeholder empowerment and capacity have been neglected—notably for indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs). Relying on a single policy or regulatory provision has been risky where commitments change over time.

Equity

14. The GEF's goals, guidelines, and procedures for equity are robust and, where SFM projects have followed them, distributional outcomes have been equitable, especially through governance and management innovations that empower marginalized groups. However, SFM projects have not always been able to address the entrenched marginalization of key IPLC forest stakeholders, support financially robust IPLC organizations, or take SFM-based small enterprises to scale.

Conclusions

15. **Conclusion 1: The GEF is well positioned as a natural and effective integrator of many goals concerning forests.** The GEF offers a way to integrate international environment and development goals related to forests, notably the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and governance and transparency initiatives such as the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT). Within countries, the GEF helps to manage trade-offs between international commitments and the myriad individual and collective needs and aspirations of people's livelihoods and businesses in forest-dependent areas. Within governments, the GEF's integrated approach has helped with the critical bridging of institutional silos that is needed for multi-objective SFM—supporting long-term capacity development, providing continuity of funding over periods that are far longer than those of traditional development assistance, and mainstreaming many SFM issues into policy debate and planning.

16. **Conclusion 2: Continued support, a substantial and diverse portfolio, and extensive scope of SFM activities calls for articulating a clear long-term vision and theory of change for SFM.** In its three decades of support to SFM, there has been an evolution of approaches to SFM which has adapted to the GEF's programming directions, the context of global policies, donor and country priorities. Although the GEF's SFM activities and modalities have tended to become more complex and more ambitious in scale, there is not yet a clear and long-term vision for SFM. The recent focus on major biomes with intact high conservation value (HCV) forests, (Amazon, Congo), with additional regions included based on complementary criteria (commodities and FOLUR) is a welcome change, but lack of a clearly articulated and comprehensive long-term vision and strategy linking GEF investments to its

SFM portfolio has resulted in gaps in coverage. While the design has improved with some impact program-wide theories of change, programs are complex and time-consuming, and their effectiveness is yet to be established (other IEO evaluations; refer to annex 1). Many projects addressing critical SFM dimensions such as multiple benefits, engagement of indigenous peoples, and gender equity also exist outside the impact programs. The wide range of SFM activities in diverse governance regimes supported through both GEF projects and programs without an overarching vision makes it difficult to understand and assess the results of the GEF's SFM work in its entirety.

17. **Conclusion 3: There have been new developments in design but scope for improving M&E and learning remains.** This evaluation has clearly demonstrated the challenges in creating an SFM portfolio post hoc and assessing its performance. Good provisions for monitoring, evaluation, and learning at the project level were identified by terminal evaluations as a positive factor in achieving SFM outcomes. But evidence shows that M&E systems often lack standardized outcome and impact indicators, with inconsistent terminal evaluations and data along key SFM dimensions including on trade-offs and benefits that are either unavailable or not collected. At the corporate level, the core indicators in GEF-7 are an improvement, but progress is currently measured mainly by area-based indicators over short time horizons. The gaps in monitoring and evaluation also constrain SFM-related learning and knowledge management necessary for uptake and dissemination. Impact programs offer improved design, and their regional platforms for lesson-learning on SFM are a welcome change, but most programs are at the formative stage requiring preparation for capacity building and partnerships, and their additionality is yet to be seen.

18. **Conclusion 4: Managing trade-offs and maintaining benefits of SFM interventions in the longer term remains a challenge.** Evidence-based frameworks to guide trade-off diagnostics, dialogues, and decision-making among country stakeholders remain a rarity. Good SFM project design exists but often does not get translated to action due to national capacity and implementation challenges. Evidence shows that even when many interventions deliver short-term benefits, these suffer from weak sustainability due to both factors internal to the projects and broader contextual factors.

Recommendations

19. **Recommendation 1: Enhance GEF's SFM strategy to include all elements necessary for a comprehensive, clearly articulated and visible long-term vision and strategy for SFM.** The GEF's SFM strategy has evolved and promoted the integration of focal areas in MFA as a starting point, and after GEF-5 & GEF-6 shifted from a scattered approach to funding projects to a consolidated approach in critical biomes. The GEF should now bring these elements together in a more comprehensive, clearly articulated, and long-term strategy for SFM going forward. This strategy should include:

(a). a clear articulation of the SFM vision, approach, alignment with the conventions' objectives, priority areas, and geographical focus

(b). SFM-specific theory of change

(c). guidance on definitions of terms

(d). clear criteria for inclusion in the GEF SFM portfolio; and

(e). guidance on indicators and monitoring results both for the intermediate and longer term, including for environmental, socio-economic, and policy dimensions of SFM.

20. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen monitoring of socio-economic co-benefits and promote learning.** The GEF should clarify and use relevant SFM indicators to capture multiple SFM dimensions, improving the measurement of socio-economic benefits where possible and consistent with project size and scope. Where feasible the use of geospatial analysis and social impact monitoring should be considered. Lessons on methodological and science innovations and broad coverage of diverse contexts of the results of SFM support could be better disseminated. Communication on GEF's SFM work is also needed to unblock awareness and barriers to practical SFM policy and practice.

21. **Recommendation 3: Support specific national and local priorities to manage trade-offs and maintain benefits.** The GEF should support national and local organizations to strengthen capacity, improve SFM enabling conditions and maintain SFM-related benefits and manage trade-offs. This includes promoting and strengthening forest rights and land tenure, setting minimum threshold levels of SFM project funding for IPLCs, considering broadening the small grants, and providing more resources for adaptive management. GEF SFM support should also help engage with broader contextual factors such as the political economy issues affecting forests. In addition, the GEF should continue working with government partners and Agencies to influence upstream policies on forests and identify, track, and address drivers of deforestation beyond the forest sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this evaluation

1. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the outcomes and performance of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) portfolio of projects in support of sustainable forest management (SFM), and to provide insights and lessons for future forest-related interventions based on evaluative evidence generated by the analysis. This evaluation is the first independent and comprehensive evaluation of GEF support to SFM initiatives.

2. After nearly three decades of forest-related GEF investments, the evaluation aims to learn what the GEF's main results have been in terms of the understanding, policy, governance, and practice of SFM, and its impact on forests, forest-related environmental services, forest-dependent people, and economies.

3. Although the focus of the work has been diverse and has evolved over time, GEF strategies have consistent goals of *forest protection, restoration, and sustainable use*. While the approach to monitoring, the issues covered, and the quality of data have also varied, this diverse portfolio offers considerable learning about how people and nature can thrive together in forest contexts.

4. The evaluation is of potentially broader value, too. It offers evaluative evidence of what has been achieved across 133 countries that could be mainstreamed into future policy and practice. There is increasing international demand for greater action for forests to help tackle the twin climate and nature emergencies, coming to a head in 2021 with the Climate Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Biodiversity COP, respectively. Whether through societal pressure or political enlightenment, there are also new national policy openings for transformative shifts in the way forests are managed. Indigenous peoples and local communities are rightly demanding greater rights, security, livelihood opportunities, and recognition of their stewardship of forests.

5. Section 1 of this evaluation report introduces the changing global forest context and the evolving GEF approach to SFM, with a description of the GEF SFM portfolio to date. Section 2 then describes the evaluation methodology used, section 3 the findings, and section 4 the conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Context for this evaluation—global forest challenges and opportunities[1]

6. The GEF's mandate is to serve as the financial mechanism for the three Rio conventions on biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation and desertification. Forests are central to achieving these conventions' objectives. Thus, it is no surprise that forests have been central to the GEF's work since its establishment. Given this common forest context, the GEF's work on forests has been a testing ground for integrated approaches to programming and finance and has enabled an integration agenda to evolve within and between conventions.

[1] Principal references for this section are Begemann et al. 2021; Curtis et al. 2018; Fa et al. 2020; FAO and UNEP 2020; GEF IEO 2017; Hansen et al. 2013; Harris et al. 2021; Macqueen et al. 2020; Macqueen and Mayers 2020; NYDF Assessment Partners 2019; Plumptre et al. 2021; Porter-Bolland et al. 2021; Pretty et al. 2020; Song et al. 2018; Sotirov et al. 2020; and WWF et al. 2021.

7. Earth has a terrestrial surface area of just over 13 billion hectares (ha), of which approximately 9 billion ha involves forest and farm landscapes—5 billion ha of agriculture, and just over 4 billion ha of forest. In other words, forests cover 31 percent of the global land area. Recent estimates suggest that over 4.35 billion ha of land and forests globally are governed by indigenous peoples, local communities, and smallholders. Data are limited, however, to figures provided by the reporting countries, which do not include rights recognized in customary tenure. If these were to be included, it is clear that the land occupied by indigenous peoples, local communities, and smallholders easily exceeds 50 percent of forest and farm landscapes.

8. Forests host most of the world's *terrestrial biodiversity*. For example, 80 percent of amphibian species, 75 percent of bird species, and 68 percent of mammal species are found in forests, while 60 percent of all vascular plants are found in tropical forests alone. Primary forests, where ecological processes are not significantly disturbed, make up one-third of all forests and are especially significant. While people have inhabited forests for millennia, they have taken to deforesting it on a grand scale in recent decades—some 420 million ha have been deforested in the last 30 years, much of it primary. Recently, there has been a net 33 percent reduction in global deforestation rates (comparing 2015–20 with the decade to 2010), but this reflects an increasing imbalance of continued loss of biodiverse primary forests with increasing forest restoration (often with single-species plantations). A net 10 million ha of forest were still lost in each of the last 5 years. Agricultural expansion is the prevailing driver of deforestation and forest fragmentation. Approximately, 27 percent of global forest loss since 2001 involved permanent land use change for large-scale commodity production (primarily beef, soybean, oil palm, and wood fiber). The remaining temporary losses within the same land use involve forestry (26 percent), shifting smallholder agriculture (24 percent), and wildfire (23 percent).

9. Forests globally comprise a net carbon sink of -7.6 ± 49 $GtCO_2e$ $yr{-}1$,[2] reflecting a balance between gross carbon removals (-15.6 ± 49 $GtCO_2e$ $yr{-}1$) and gross emissions from deforestation and other disturbances (8.1 ± 2.5 $GtCO_2e$ $yr{-}1$). To put this in context, global emissions in 2018 reached 58 $GtCO_2e$ $yr{-}1$ primarily from the energy systems sector (34 percent) and industry (24 percent). The net carbon sink from forests is just less than the annual emissions from transport (14 percent) at 8.3 $GtCO_2e$ $yr{-}1$. In the absence of the world's forests, there would be a great deal more carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the atmosphere. . Yet the scale of deforestation, forest degradation (including forest fires), and peatland burning are turning some of the world's major forest biomes into net sources of carbon rather than net sinks (e.g., the Brazilian Amazon). The emissions are further compounded by the foregone sequestration of hundreds of millions of tons of CO_2 that deforested areas would have provided each year had they been left uncleared.

10. Deforestation has caused major *losses of forest biodiversity*. Of 60,000 tree species, 20,000 are classified as threatened by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and 1,400 are critically endangered. Populations of monitored forest animals fell by 53 percent between 1974 and 2014. Deforestation has also entailed material *risks to food security, water security, and energy security*, since forests underpin many ecological processes upon which most sectors and many people's jobs, livelihoods, and health depend, especially in rural areas. *Resilience* is compromised with the loss of: forest insects, bats, and birds that pollinate crops; extensive forest root systems that prevent soil erosion;

[2] Gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

mangroves that provide resilience against coastal flooding; the carbon storage described above; and wild foods that sustain one billion people.

11. Approximately 1.3 billion people live in forests, notably 500 million indigenous peoples and 800 million other people in local, forest-dependent communities. Over 250 million people living in forests and savannahs have incomes of less than $1.25 per day and vast numbers have insecure land and forest rights. There is increasing evidence that when granted local control, they protect forests better than industrial-scale companies and generally outperform government-protected areas in carbon storage, biodiversity protection, and avoiding deforestation. The need for work to secure tenure for IPLCs has been progressively recognized through numerous international agreements such as the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), Convention on the Protection of Biological Diversity (CBD), International Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN-REDD program,[3] United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), and endorsement of States to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT). The fact that indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs) likely control more than 50 percent of forest and farm landscapes demands greater attention, as does the gross annual value of smallholder crop, fuelwood, timber, and non-timber products from forests, conservatively estimated at between $869 billion and $1.29 trillion—substantially larger than the gross annual value of the largest companies. Local organizations are proliferating to defend their members' interests and push for systemic change. Those local organizations are also known to be highly innovative in pursuit of all elements of the SDGs in ways not matched by the corporate private sector or state programs.

12. The majority of new infectious diseases affecting people, including Ebola, AIDS, and the SARS-CoV-2 virus that caused the current COVID-19 pandemic, are zoonotic, and their emergence is often linked to forest loss, which has increased human exposure to wildlife. The One Health Approach has evolved to pursue a goal of achieving optimal health outcomes, recognizing the interconnections between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. The role of forests in achieving One Health, and specifically in pandemic prevention, has recently gained prominence in policy debates. Moreover, the role of sustainably managed forests and trees in contributing to resilient social, health, environmental, and economic recovery in response to the COVID-19 crisis—often as "nature-based solutions" or "conservation-based development"—is also well recognized. Nature-based solutions (NbS) emerged from the ecosystem approach, which underpins the CBD and considers both biodiversity conservation and human well-being to be dependent on functioning and resilient natural ecosystems. NbS recently gained traction as an integrated set of actions to address climate change, reduce disaster risks, provide biodiversity benefits, and enhance human well-being—tailored to specific local contexts. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) of the GEF, in a recent report, offered guidelines to the GEF to integrate NbS in future interventions (GEF STAP 2020). Nevertheless, the concerns of IPLCs that the NbS' ecological framing could lead to further marginalization of the poor must be strongly borne in mind.

13. Approaches used to manage forests in protected areas are evolving. 18 percent of the world's forest area, over 700 million ha, falls within protected areas such as national parks and reserves (IUCN categories I–IV) even if these areas are not yet fully representative

[3] REDD = Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

of all forest ecosystems. "Other effective area-based conservation measures" (OECMs) were introduced into Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, providing for many other ways of recognizing biodiversity conservation outside protected areas. Meanwhile, protected area policies are faced with increasing public challenges being made to the systems, structures, and practices that embody systemic racism and the evidence of conservation's prejudiced and exclusionary roots where indigenous peoples and local communities were often evicted from newly established protected areas, depriving people of ancestral customary rights and access to resources.

14. The role of forests is prioritized in a large and increasingly coherent set of international environment and development agreements. Moreover, there is *action on these proliferating agreements*. New finance and investment vehicles are growing and becoming mainstream for forests' climate change roles, although less so for biodiversity. Governments have increasingly enacted legislation and/or financial incentives to halt deforestation and the trade in products resulting from deforestation, as well as to invest in restoring degraded forests. For instance, the Bonn Challenge to restore 350 million ha of degraded forest lands by 2030 is reckoned to be on target, with 210 million ha already pledged.

15. Arrangements contributing to international or global forest governance have grown in many forms, ranging from international hard law (Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, International Tropical Timber Agreement, and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), to hybrid regimes with non-state actors (European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan [FLEGT] and timber legality regimes, and REDD+[4] and climate and forest regimes), to international soft law (UNFF) and collaborative institutions (the Bonn Challenge, the Tropical Forest Alliance, the New York Declaration on Forests) to the fully private self-regulation of nonstate actors (forest and food supply chain certification, and supply chain initiatives such as the Consumer Good Forum). While collectively these arrangements have fallen short of achieving their shared overarching goal of stopping deforestation and forest degradation, they have raised awareness, and have had some target-group-specific effects and considerable influence over domestic policies. But profound differences remain between specific forest goals (e.g., SFM) and forest-related sustainability goals (e.g., forest climate mitigation or zero gross deforestation in agricultural commodities) and there remains a strong need to make international forest-related cooperation more coherent and to integrate actions outside the forest sector with those of forest governance.

16. *Progress toward SFM* is not easy to measure as no single quantifiable characteristic fully describes its many social, environmental, and economic dimensions. The proportion of forest area under long-term management plans is one measure used by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)—with coverage now estimated to be 54 percent. The area under independent forest certification schemes is a second (overlapping) measure—globally, around 11 percent of forests are certified, although only 6 percent of this is in the tropics. The importance of SFM is recognized in the CBD's draft post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and a headline indicator[5] on SFM—10.0.2 Progress

[4] REDD+ entails reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation plus sustainable management of forests and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.
[5] https://www.post-2020indicators.org/

toward sustainable forest management (*Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan*)—has been proposed to monitor progress. However, these measures do not capture progress by communities and small enterprises for which formal forest planning and certification are less appropriate. At the forest level, progress is often about *empowering accountable local organizations* that provide *governance and management at a landscape level* and *inclusive supply chains*. In addition to a trend toward recognizing and deploying local traditional knowledge, innovations at the local level—such as forest integrity assessment checklists for biodiversity—are increasingly helping small-scale operators be effective forest managers.

17. An increasing number of businesses have mainstreamed forest *certification* and timber and food product supply-chain certification to attest to sustainability. A few food businesses are following this by eliminating deforestation commodity chains, although food demand and production systems remain the biggest threat to forests and public benefits.

18. While *finance for forests* appears to have broadly risen over the last two decades, it is still low relative to the potential of forests to sustain us. Tropical forests can provide up to 30 percent of the climate change mitigation needed to meet the Paris Agreement's objectives. Yet finance for forests in countries where deforestation is a significant problem accounts for just over one percent of global mitigation-related development funding. In 2019 the New York Declaration on Forests Assessment Partners reviewed progress in financial provision—looking at "green finance" aligned with forest and climate goals and comparing it with "grey finance" to land use sectors which have an unclear but potentially negative impact on forests. They found grey finance for agriculture is 15 times greater than green finance for forests, indicating the large economic incentives in sectors driving deforestation. Green finance for forests was under $22 billion in 2019, an increase of only 9 percent since 2017 following years of declining funding from 2010 to 2017. Support to address deforestation and protect forests in tropical countries now comprises less than 1.5 percent—only $3.2 billion—of the $256 billion committed by multilateral institutions and developed-country donors since 2010 to climate change mitigation. Support for REDD+ implementation is particularly lacking beyond the GEF, Green Climate Fund (GCF), and Forest Investment Program (FIP). The renewables sector alone has received over 100 times more committed finance than forests.

19. Moving forward, there is increasing recognition of the need for *transformative action*—reform to shift from business-as-usual "deforestation-driven economies" to "conservation-driven" standing forest economies that support people and nature thriving together. This economic challenge is associated with an institutional challenge: the need to move away from siloed approaches to forests to being able to assess nexus issues and to manage associated synergies and trade-offs. The recent Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 and current IPBES work are getting to grips with such transformations and trade-offs—bringing prospects closer for realizing forests' potential to achieve simultaneously the SDGs for poverty, hunger, health, water, energy, climate, and biodiversity.

1.3 The GEF context—Evolving support to SFM

20. GEF support to SFM began with the GEF Pilot and, over the years, can be grouped into three categories plus international cooperation:

- **Protection—**maintenance of forest resources (forest conservation);

- **Management—**sustainable management and use of forests;
- **Restoration—**forest and landscape restoration; and
- **Cooperation—**regional and global cooperation on SFM.

21. Although SFM is not itself a GEF focal area, SFM initiatives have been supported through GEF focal area interventions of Biodiversity (BD), Climate Change (CC) and Land Degradation (LD) and, increasingly, multifocal projects covering more than one of these three focal areas and through integrated approach pilots (IAPs) and impact programs (IPs). Following REDD+ formalization with the Warsaw Framework in 2013, the GEF also provided increasing resources for REDD+ developing-country pilot projects to reduce emissions from forested lands. The GEF SFM portfolio thus comprises both projects under several specific programs since GEF-4 and many other projects that were not part of these programs but also address many of the UNFF's thematic SFM elements.[6] Some key moments in the evolution of SFM over more recent GEF replenishment periods are highlighted in box 1.

Box 1: Highlights in the more recent evolution of GEF approaches to SFM

GEF-4

- Introduced the need for a more strategic approach to SFM, building on good but "fragmented" previous work, focusing not only on outcomes in the forest but also root causes and barriers to progress.
- Drew attention to the importance of tackling land degradation, "including deforestation," and sustainable land management, "including SFM."
- Introduced the *Tropical Forest Account* in 2007—the GEF's pilot financial incentive for SFM.

GEF-5

- Introduced multifocal area programming to encourage countries to use GEF financing from more than one focal area. It was key to advancing the SFM program, designed to incentivize countries to harness cross-focal area synergies for safeguarding globally important forest landscapes.
- Aimed to deliver multiple benefits at many levels, enabling wide expansion beyond the protected area focus to date (the BD focal area had supplied 68 percent of all forest funding before GEF-5).
- Embraced climate change mitigation (with a tactical focus that tried to harness time-bound opportunities such as REDD+), integrated watershed management, certification of forest products, payments for ecosystem services (PES), and strengthening sustainable ("alternative") livelihoods for people dependent on forest resources.
- Introduced a programmatic $250 million SFM/REDD+ incentive mechanism, providing dedicated funding for forest-related objectives and targets. This encouraged countries to invest portions of their GEF funds for BD, CC, and LD in fully integrated, multifocal area SFM projects and programs. It added up to $1 for every qualifying $3 of System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) funds. During GEF-5, over 80 countries took advantage of the mechanism.
- Aimed to further converge forest investments in more efficient and cost-effective programs, combining resources into multifocal area programs.

GEF-6

- Emphasized integrated approaches at the landscape level, embracing ecosystem and livelihood principles, engaging relevant sectors, and empowering multiple stakeholders.
- Introduced SFM-focused integrated approach pilots (IAPs), including one on Taking Deforestation

[6] Seven thematic elements of SFM have been identified by the UN Forum on Forests as common to all the regional and international criteria for assessing SFM: extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; protective functions of forests; productive functions of forests; socioeconomic functions; and legal, policy, and institutional framework (United Nations 2007).

out of Commodity Supply Chains, and a three-country Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program.

- Made links to (urban) drivers of change. The IAP on Taking Deforestation out of Commodity Supply Chains aimed to bring 23 million ha of land under SFM and mitigate 80 $MtCO_2e$.
- Established the SFM incentive program—a total envelope of $250 million in GEF grants that built upon the GEF-5 SFM/REDD+ incentive mechanism—as a cornerstone. It leveraged a total of $825 million in GEF grant funding, with expected results of 844 $MtCO_2e$ mitigated emissions and 284 million ha of forest under improved management. Project selection emphasized those with the largest potential results.
- Strongly recognized the importance of rights, tenure, local institutions, and the role of indigenous peoples and women in SFM, with a big push on mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment.

GEF-7

- Introduced SFM-focused impact programs (IPs) that established SFM-specific entry points with large-scale and transformative ambition, recognizing SFM as a "dynamic and evolving concept" (citing UNGA 2008). Instead of "fragmented multiple small projects with little potential for biome-level outcomes," the IPs cover multiple countries, value chains, and players collaborating at scale.
- Focuses on the biome level "where concerted SFM efforts focusing on forest integrity and functioning can truly transform development." SFM IPs are introduced for three transboundary forest biomes—Amazon, Congo, and Drylands—to maximize multiple global environment benefits, as well as ecosystem services for the benefit of indigenous people and local communities.
- Pays particular attention to addressing drivers of environmental degradation in an integrated way. A Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration (FOLUR) IP is introduced to address commodity-based drivers of deforestation, broadening the sustainable production and reduced deforestation goals of the GEF-6 program.

GEF-8 (indicative from current documentation)

- Features further integration to promote blue and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic—enhanced linkages across results areas, integrated planning and monitoring, greater inclusion of actors and vulnerable countries, system change beyond projects, and mobilization of the private sector and civil society.
- Develops the GEF's global niche as "uber-integrator" with integrated approaches to tackling drivers of deforestation and emphasis on creating a better enabling environment for country-level forest governance.
- Strongly emphasizes integrated programs, including a focus on intact forest landscapes in globally critical forest biomes—Amazon, Congo, and others such as Indo-Malaya, Meso-America, and Western Africa.
- Establishes results framework that includes assessment of socioeconomic co-benefits and monitoring levers of transformational change in key economic systems driving environmental degradation.

1.4 GEF SFM portfolio

22. A database of SFM projects was developed by the evaluation team building upon an earlier work by the GEF Secretariat that used the criteria based on UNFF's SFM definition.[7] This formed the starting point for a portfolio analysis of the SFM body of work to date. The evaluation has identified projects addressing SFM within the GEF portfolio by using two main selection criteria: contribution to SFM, and SFM significance. In terms of the former, a project was considered a forest project if it addressed one or more of the seven elements that are considered key aspects of SFM adopted from the UNFF's 2007 non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, as noted above. A project was considered significant if over $1 million of funding (GEF funding and cofinance) was directed toward one or more of these seven elements.

[7] The UNFF's seven thematic elements of SFM are: extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; protective functions of forests; productive functions of forests; socioeconomic functions; and legal, policy, and institutional framework.

23. *Project numbers:* At the time of this assessment, the GEF SFM portfolio included 640 projects, of which:

- 314 projects had completed implementation (49 percent);
- 138 projects were under implementation (22 percent); and
- 188 projects were in the pipeline (29 percent).

243 of the 314 completed projects have had terminal evaluations.

24. *Value:* The total value of GEF investment in SFM to date is $3.654 billion. The median grant size is $4.58 million, with a standard deviation from the mean of $5.46 million. The largest grant made is $60.33 million and the smallest grant is $555,000.

25. *GEF replenishment periods:* Each GEF replenishment period has seen an increase in the amount of funds dedicated to SFM (table 1), especially since GEF-5, when an SFM financial incentive was used as a catalyst to encourage countries to invest portions of their GEF funds for BD, CC, and LD in fully integrated, multifocal area SFM projects and programs. GEF-7 now has the largest proportion of SFM projects (25 percent) and funds (26 percent) to date.

Table 1: Distribution of SFM projects and grants across GEF replenishment periods

GEF replenishment period	SFM Grants		SFM Projects	
	GEF grant (million $)	% of total SFM Funds	Count	% of SFM projects
GEF-7	943.1	26%	157	25%
GEF-6	699.6	19%	104	16%
GEF-5	585.9	16%	67	10%
GEF-4	455.6	12%	129	20%
GEF-3	358.0	10%	75	12%
GEF-2	295.6	8%	62	10%
GEF-1	234.5	6%	28	4%
Pilot	82.7	2%	18	3%

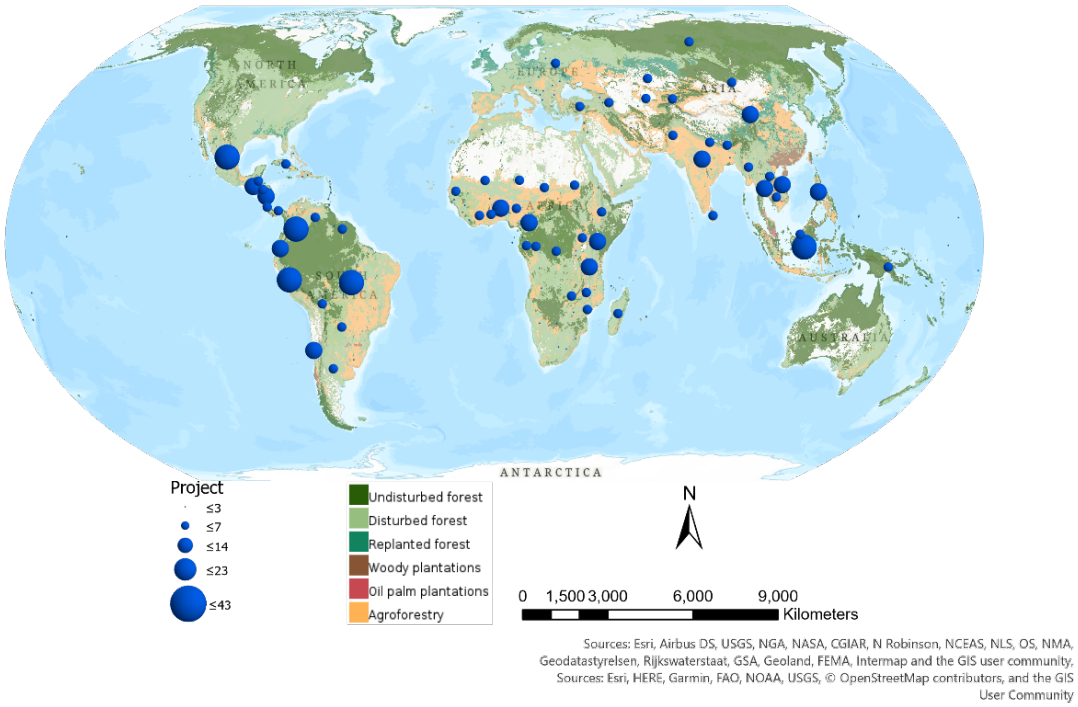

Figure 1: Map of global distribution of GEF SFM projects

26. *Regions:* A map of the global distribution of GEF SFM projects is provided in figure 1. Latin America & the Caribbean (LAC) have had both the largest number of SFM projects (181) and the largest amount of SFM funding ($1.24 billion), amounting to 28 percent and 34 percent of the total, respectively. This is followed by Africa, with 174 projects and a much smaller share of funding ($878 million, 24 percent of total SFM funding). Asia has fewer projects (156) and slightly less funding ($856.6 million, 23 percent) than Africa (figure 2). The implications of this distribution of funding in relation to regional forest and environmental priorities is addressed in section 3.2.1 on relevance.

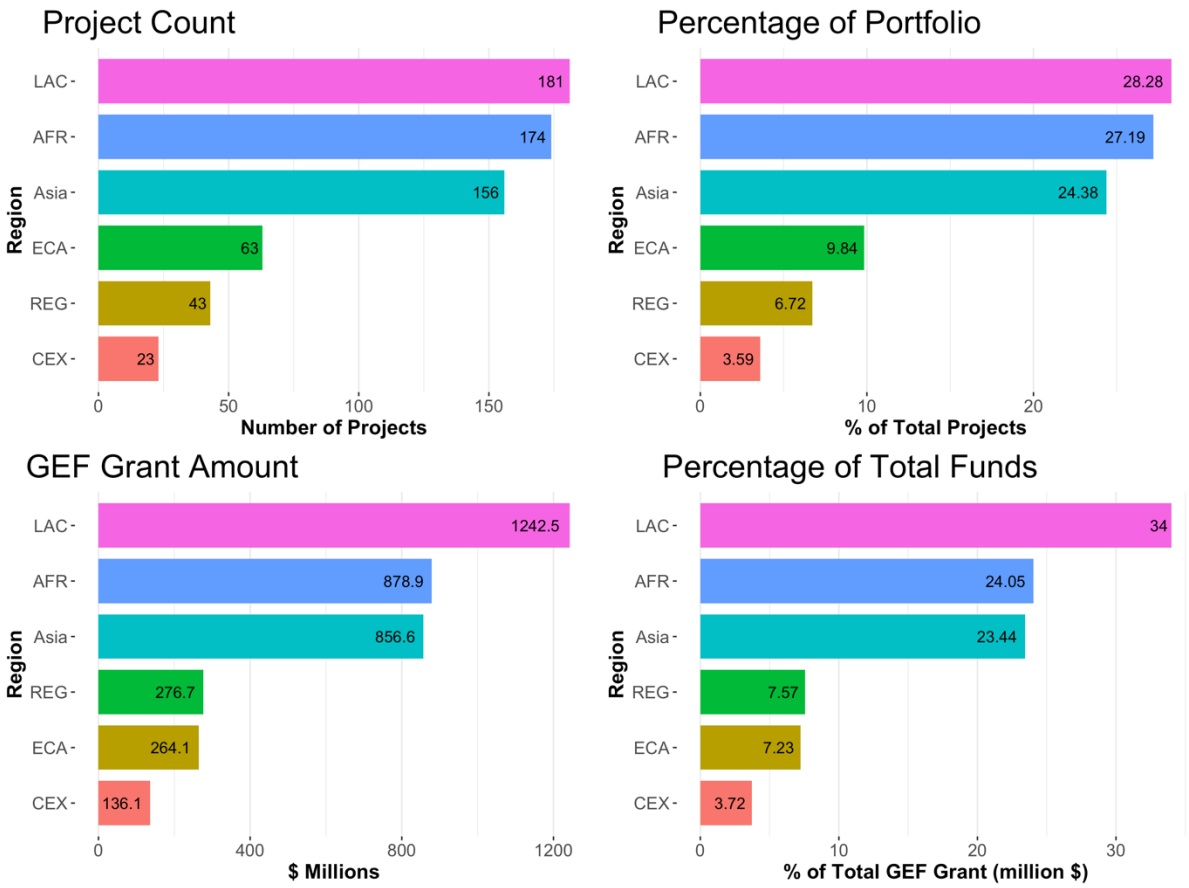

Figure 2: Distribution of SFM projects and grants across regions

LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; AFR = Africa; REG = Regional; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; CEX = Global.

27. *Countries:* GEF SFM work has covered a large number of countries—133 to date. The financial contributions made to the top 10 recipient country total $1.221 billion, but this is only 34 percent of the overall portfolio expenditure. Brazil and Colombia are the top two countries in terms of the number of SFM projects (3 percent of all SFM projects respectively), and they are also among the top three recipients of SFM funds together with Mexico (Brazil = 8 percent, Mexico = 5 percent, Colombia = 4 percent). 8 out of the top 10 countries with the greatest number of SFM projects (i.e., all but Viet Nam and Kenya) are also among the top 10 largest funding recipients, with the additions of India and Ecuador (figure 3). The implications of this distribution of funding in relation to national forest and environmental priorities is addressed in section 3.2.1 on relevance.

28. *Multi-country projects:* There has been a trend toward investment in multi-country projects. This became substantial during GEF-7 and, for the first time, has become greater than the investment in single countries. A total of 191 multi-country projects (30 percent) are valued at $1.18 billion (32 percent of total SFM funding). These are divided into:

(a). 43 regional grants (7 percent of SFM portfolio), with a total value of $276 million (7 percent of total SFM funding);

(b). 23 global grants (3 percent of SFM portfolio), with a total value of $136 million (4 percent of total SFM funding); and

(c). 125 single-country projects associated with multi-country parent projects (19 percent of SFM portfolio), with a total value of $770 million (21 percent of total SFM funding).

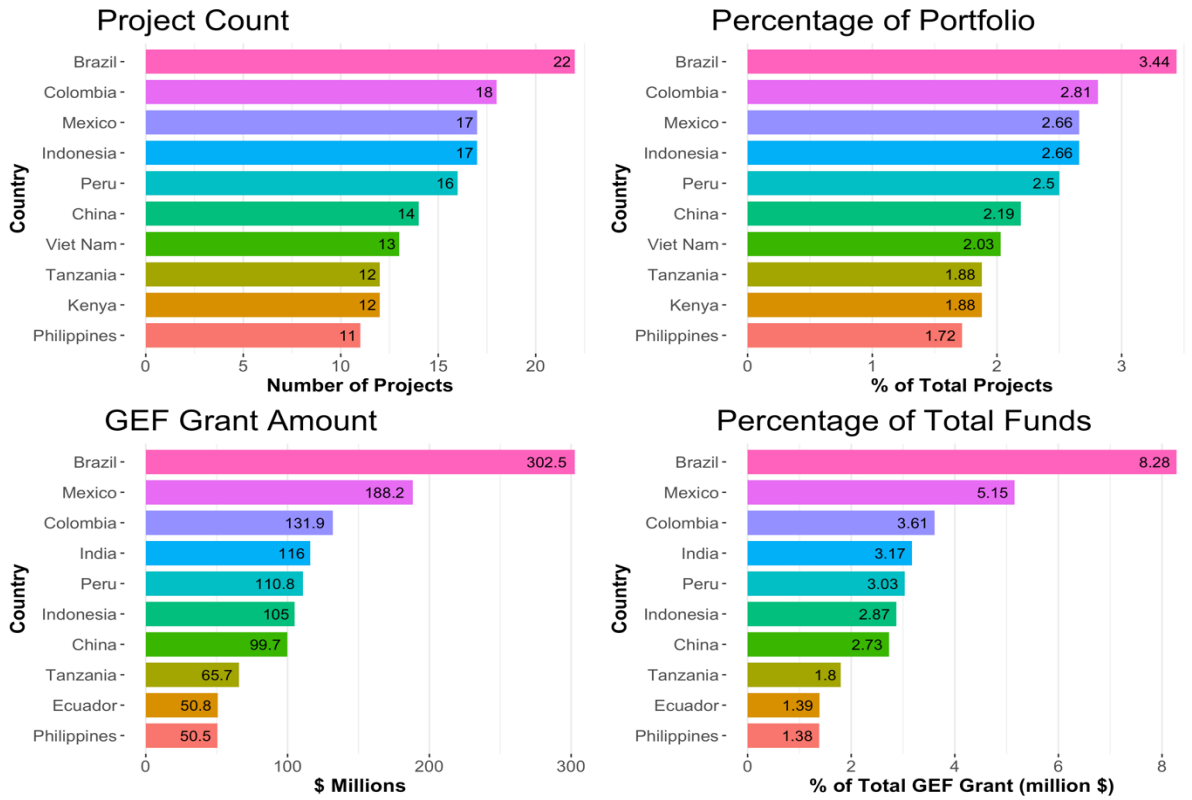

Figure 3: Top 10 country recipients of SFM funds, by project count and GEF funding amount

29. *Implementing Agencies:* The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and FAO account for the highest proportions of SFM funds (with 35 percent, 28 percent, and 11 percent, respectively) and the largest number of projects (28 percent, 34 percent, and 12 percent, respectively). UNDP has managed the largest number of SFM projects (34 percent), and the World Bank accounts for the largest share by grant amount (35 percent). While there were 3 original founding Agencies—the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, and the World Band—10 Agencies are now involved, including some international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and regional development banks (figure 4).

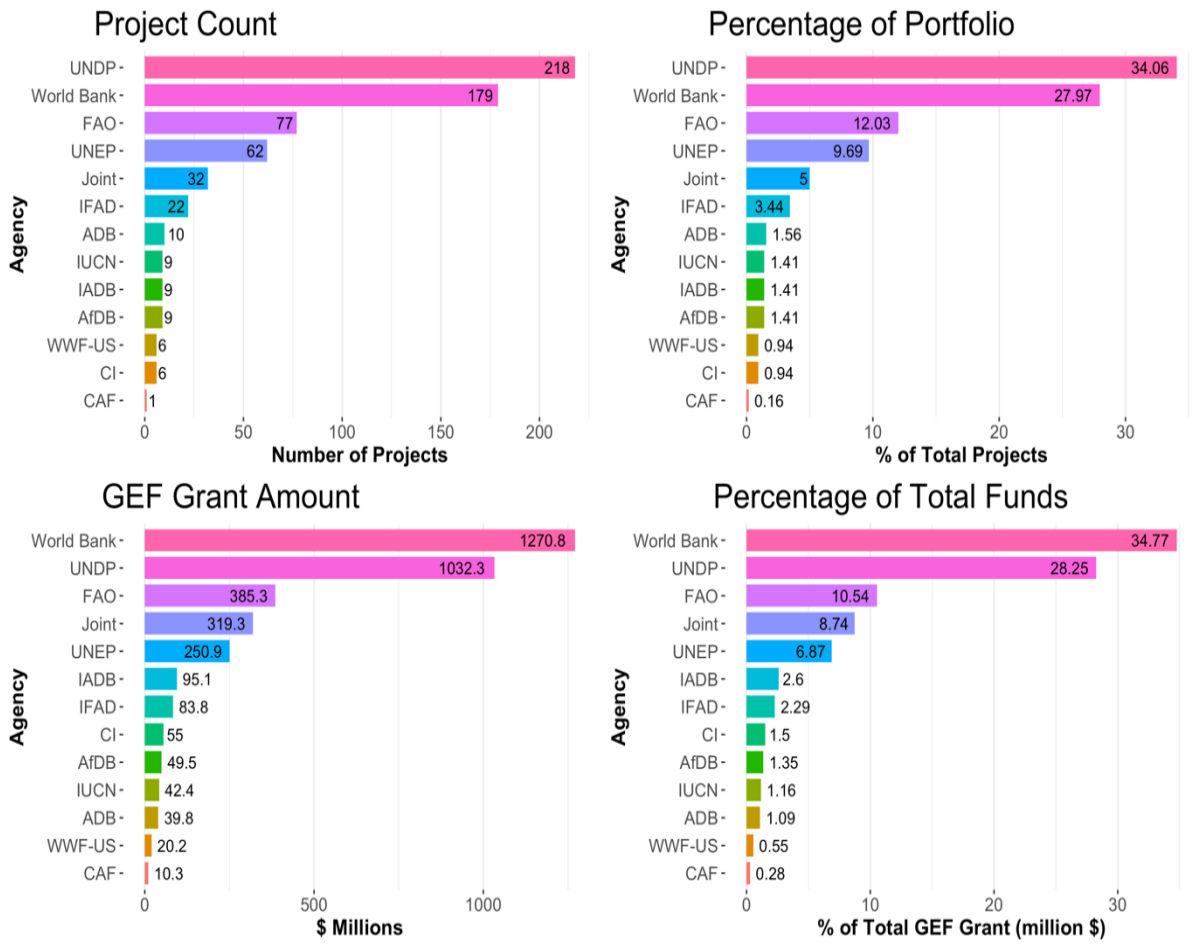

Figure 4: Distribution of SFM projects and grants across GEF Agencies

ADB = Asian Development Bank; AfDB = African Development Bank; CAF = Development Bank of Latin America; CI = Conservation International; FAO = United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization; IADB; InterAmerican Development Bank; IFAD = International Fund for Agricultural Development; IUCN = International Union for the Conservation of Nature; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme; WWF-US = World Wide Fund for Nature-US

30. *Cofinancing:* The GEF SFM portfolio has achieved a steady increase in cofinancing over the seven replenishment periods, with a notable demarcation between GEF-2 and GEF-3 (increase in ratio from 1.99 to 3.63) as well as between GEF-4 and GEF-5 (increase from 4.45 to 5.95; figure 5).

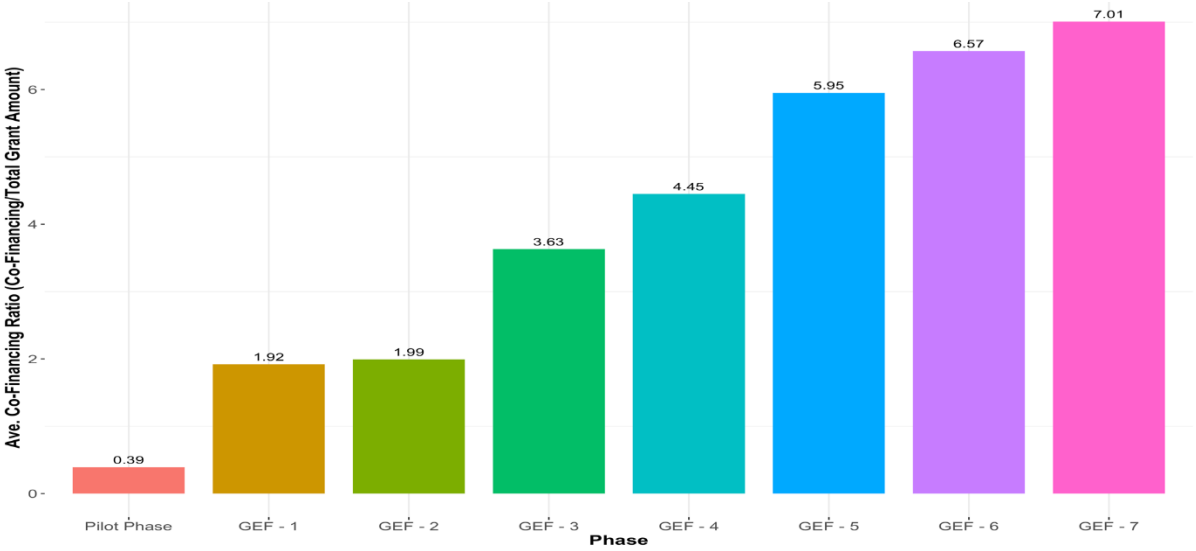

Figure 5: Promised cofinancing ratio by GEF replenishment period

31. *Focal areas:* Despite an initial strong focus on biodiversity, the GEF SFM portfolio has progressively emphasized multifocal area projects (n=282), which now constitute 44 percent of the SFM portfolio. The remaining 56 percent of the portfolio addresses single-focal areas, heavily focused on biodiversity (n=288, 45 percent), but with a minority of projects addressing land degradation (n=32, 5 percent), climate change (n=12, 2 percent), and international waters (n=5, <1 percent). Among the multifocal area projects, the most frequent combination was biodiversity and land degradation (n=114). Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of SFM projects across GEF focal areas.

Figure 6: Distribution of SFM projects and grants by focal area

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION

2.1 Objectives and scope of the evaluation

32. The *objectives* of the evaluation were to:

(a). Assess the relevance and coherence of the GEF's SFM portfolio, including the formative assessment of the newer GEF forest-relevant integrated approach pilots (IAPs) and impact programs (IPs);

(b). Assess the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impacts of the GEF SFM portfolio;

(c). Present a synthesis of SFM results, notably outcomes and early impacts; and

(d). Identify challenges, lessons learned, and good practices in SFM initiatives.

33. The *scope* was broad, offering *unique opportunities* for learning about multifaceted SFM issues, since the portfolio covers:

(a). 640 projects;

(b). Activities over almost 30 years;

(c). Most of the world's major tropical forest biomes;

(d). Many partner agencies;

(e). 133 countries and diverse governance regimes;

(f). Engagement with indigenous peoples, local communities, and businesses;

(g). Multiple project operating modalities and project sizes; and

(h). An evolution of objectives and focal themes across all GEF replenishment periods.

2.2 Key criteria

34. The evaluation adopted seven evaluation criteria. These were: *relevance, coherence, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability* from the 2019 revised OECD DAC framework,[8] supplemented by an additional criterion of *equity*, a core principle of Agenda 2030. For sustainability, we looked for ultimate environmental (and social and economic) impacts as well as sustaining governance and institutions (GEF intermediate outcomes). We drew on the GEF's lessons on transformational change, which is defined as "engagements that help achieve deep, systemic, and sustainable change with large-scale impact"—that "flip" market and (government) systems (GEF IEO 2018).

[8] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria for evaluating development assistance.

2.3 Evaluation questions

35. The evolution of the GEF's SFM approach toward increasing complexity of ambition and scope, plus our brief analysis of the dynamic global context for SFM (above) informed an initial set of *portfolio-level evaluation questions*. These were explored through: (1) a portfolio review based on qualitative thematic analysis of key project documents, focusing on projects with terminal evaluations (but assessing project identification forms [PIFs], CEO endorsement/approval, project implementation reports [PIRs] and midterm reviews [MTRs], as well as terminal evaluations and terminal evaluation reviews); and (2) key informant interviews with sector experts and GEF stakeholders who have a broad and extended understanding of the GEF's work in forests. In order to assess in qualitative terms, the performance and outcomes generated by SFM projects and, as far as possible, estimate their impact, *project-level questions* were also developed and were explored through (3) in-depth case studies and associated case-level interviews with key informants. Both sets of questions, at portfolio level and at project level, address the seven criteria noted above and are laid out in table 2.

2.4 Data themes

36. Where the evidence allows, the evaluation refers to nine SFM results areas in terms of outcomes and impacts. These are the UNFF's seven thematic elements of SFM[9] (which were based on the standard criteria of SFM across several regional processes), plus scientific knowledge results (building and using the SFM knowledge base) and equality, including indigenous peoples and gender results (which are central to Agenda 2030). The UNFF's seven themes are a useful measure because: they provide a more detailed breakdown of forest activities than GEF focal area objectives; the themes have been in use with wide acceptance internationally; and they are used on a recurring basis by the FAO within its Global Forest Resource Assessment.

Table 2: Key evaluation questions

Criterion	Portfolio level	Case level—individual projects and programs
Relevance	• How well has the GEF SFM portfolio *responded* to the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), to the evolving international rationale and priorities for SFM, and to diverse national actors' priorities? • In what ways has the GEF SFM portfolio *understood* stakeholder perspectives, demands, and decisions affecting forests?	• How responsive have longer-running GEF initiatives on SFM been to changing contexts and priorities at international level? • How well have particular GEF projects responded to often competing and changing national priorities and rationales for SFM?
Coherence	• How has the GEF managed its multi-objective/partner/country/beneficiary roles, to ensure integrated and focused action? • What approaches to coherence and integration have worked well in terms of funding envelope, duration of	• To what extent have GEF SFM projects complemented or left gaps with the objectives and operational modalities of other interventions on SFM (including UN, World Bank, bilateral, civil society, and business programs)? • To what extent do the operational modalities of GEF SFM projects at national level usefully work

[9] As noted above, the UNFF's seven thematic elements of SFM are: extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; protective functions of forests; productive functions of forests; socioeconomic functions; and legal, policy, and institutional framework.

	intervention, coordination, interdisciplinarity, risk management, partnership and notably work with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and management systems?	with or undermine in-country policy and institutional frameworks and power structures regarding SFM? • How well have GEF SFM projects complied with GEF and convention policies and guidelines on stakeholder engagement, gender equality, working with indigenous peoples, and overcoming relevant barriers?
Impact	• What are the most significant aggregated results of the GEF SFM portfolio? • To what extent has GEF support contributed to transformational change, i.e., "deep, systemic, and sustainable change with large-scale impact"? • To what extent has GEF support leveraged additional resources and created new partnership for transformational change?	• To what extent have GEF SFM projects delivered better forest management in its three main categories of protection, sustainable management and use, and restoration, and thereby contributed to delivering environmental good practice guidelines (such as forest extent, health and vitality, biodiversity, carbon, water)? • To what extent have GEF SFM projects delivered improved livelihoods of forest-dependent people through improved productive and socioeconomic functions of forests?
Effectiveness	• What are the *top-line contributions* of the full GEF SFM portfolio to the SFM results areas? How well have they drawn out and developed the GEF's *comparative advantages*? • In what ways has the GEF SFM portfolio influenced stakeholders' perspectives, demands, and decisions affecting forests? • With which policy entry points and actors in country and internationally has the GEF been most/least effectively engaged? • What approaches have been particularly effective in tackling the drivers of forest degradation in different contexts, including remote, conflict, and fragile situations?	• To what extent have the specific comparative advantages of GEF SFM projects, relative to other external interventions and conditions (including both enablers and barriers), been recognized and used to improve impact? • To what extent have lessons about GEF SFM processes—relating to forest stakeholder engagement and empowerment, proposal design and implementation, and monitoring and final evaluation—been learned to improve the delivery of impact over time? • To what extent have innovations on successful delivery of GEF SFM projects been tracked, documented, spread, and taken up by other programs?
Efficiency	• How efficiently has the GEF channeled finance for SFM and leveraged further financing, including through GEF financial incentives? Has the GEF SFM portfolio led to structural changes toward transformative forest investment and markets? • How well have GEF innovations contributed to SFM assessment, metrics, monitoring, and transparency (Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency [CBIT], etc.)? • How effectively has the *GEF learned* about success and failure in SFM, shared its learning, and ensured its uptake?	• How cost-efficient have GEF SFM projects been in delivering SFM and avoided deforestation over their lifetime, and is there evidence of increasing efficiency as enabling conditions have been put in place? • How much and what types of cofunding and public or private finance leverage have been secured by GEF SFM project interventions? • How far do GEF SFM projects meet anticipated time deadlines and cost estimates, and have lessons been learned about the ideal duration and budget envelope for maximum efficiency?
Sustainability	• How far has the GEF contributed to transformative, resilient, and enduring improvements in governance frameworks, institutions, and markets? • Is there evidence of sustained forest and livelihood outcomes due to improved policies and institutional approaches? Do they support future needs such as preventing pandemics?	• *Institutional sustainability*. Do legal frameworks, policies, governance structures and processes, management plans, and stakeholder capacities support the continuation of benefits following the project? Where are the risks, and is provision for mitigation adequate? • *Financial and market sustainability*. What provisions are in place to ensure that income/finance will be available to enable

		stakeholders to continue the activities to sustain benefits following the project? How far have market failures been addressed? • *Sociopolitical sustainability*. Do stakeholders see it as in their interest that the project benefits continue to flow? Where social or political risks may undermine the longevity of project outcomes, is provision for mitigation adequate? • *Environmental sustainability*. Are there any activities that present environmental risks that may undermine the future flow of project benefits, and is provision for mitigation adequate?
Equity	• How far has the GEF SFM portfolio addressed the underlying problems of inequality between groups that constrain SFM? • How well has the GEF activity reached, benefited, and empowered different groups of men and women among indigenous peoples and communities?	• To what extent have GEF SFM projects reached, benefited, and empowered different groups of men and women among forest-dependent indigenous peoples and local communities, and improved the equality with which forest-related costs and benefits are distributed?

Source: GEFIEO.

2.5 Reflections from other GEF IEO evaluations on SFM coverage

37. A significant proportion of all GEF interventions to date have taken place in forest contexts and have aimed to improve the sustainable management of forests. GEF's diverse and extensive SFM activities has been characterized by evolving objectives, varying entry points, and limited tagging of projects. There has been no evaluation of the entire body of SFM work until now except the Value for Money SFM evaluation that only looked at the value of GEF SFM investments based on carbon benefits. Consequently, to evaluate the GEF's work on SFM, we constructed a *post hoc* GEF SFM portfolio of 640 forest-related projects since the pilot phase.

38. While the objectives of the "mixed bag" of SFM projects are very diverse, they have tended to reflect certain priorities of successive GEF replenishment periods, some of which concern critical SFM dimensions such as multiple benefits, engaging indigenous peoples, and gender equity. Moreover, the priorities of GEF replenishment periods have also tended to shape the evaluation agenda. The Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7) describes the evolution of GEF evaluations: the trend has been toward assessing how GEF handles complexity, risk, increasingly integrated programs, and sustainability. All of these are relevant to SFM.

39. Several recent GEF evaluations address key dimensions of SFM in depth and in innovative ways, so we elected to draw on them for:

- **Evaluation approach—**informing our evaluation framework and questions (SFM Evaluation Approach) on issues such as transformational change, innovation, and additionality; and
- **Triangulation—**findings that offered orientation or supplementary information on SFM to add to our own findings—most notably to triangulate them, especially on the GEF's role, achievements, and challenges in particular aspects of SFM.

40. The following evaluations offer relevant evidence.

Evaluations touching on the GEF's key SFM results:

(a). Value for Money Analysis of SFM Interventions;

(b). Evaluation of the Multiple Benefits of GEF Support through Its Multifocal Area Portfolio;

(c). Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs;

(d). Formative Evaluation of the GEF Integrated Approach to Address the Drivers of Environmental Degradation; and

(e). Land Degradation Focal Area Study.

Evaluations and method papers covering GEF approaches relevant to SFM:

(a). Evaluation of GEF Engagement with Indigenous Peoples;

(b). Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in the GEF;

(c). Evaluation of GEF Engagement with the Private Sector;

(d). Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling up Impact;

(e). Evaluation of GEF Support for Transformational Change;

(f). Innovation in the GEF: Findings and Lessons, Approach Paper; and

(g). An Evaluative Approach to Assessing the GEF's Additionality.

(h). Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF

Evaluations covering geographic and governance contexts for SFM:

(a). Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations, e.g., of least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), and African biomes; and

(b). Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations.

41. These evaluations are diverse and not amenable to a single meta-analysis for SFM but have informed[10] this evaluation report. Some highlights are offered below from three evaluations that address SFM more directly.

42. *The Value for Money Analysis of SFM Interventions (2019)* demonstrated good levels of deforestation avoided and carbon sequestered, and moderate or at least "neutral" socioeconomic benefits in projects assessed. It looked at four outcome measures and neighboring counterfactuals to model the impact of GEF SFM projects in a spatial way: vegetation density; deforestation levels; night lights as a proxy for socioeconomic benefits; and in-country survey metrics of household assets.

43. *The Evaluation of the Multiple Benefits of GEF Support through Its Multifocal Area Portfolio (2018)* showed how the main drivers of deforestation or forest degradation, i.e., agricultural activities, have been targeted by 59 percent of multifocal (MFA) projects. It highlighted the significant catalytic effect of SFM/REDD+ funding in GEF-5, when 63 percent of MFA projects (n = 109) took up SFM funding, rising to 77 percent in the GEF-6 MFA portfolio (n = 17). But it was also clear that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) demands for MFA (and thus for SFM) were massive: an MFA project addressing SFM required a total of 1,055 data fields to be filled in GEF-5, albeit reduced to 772 in GEF-6.

[10] See annex 1, which draws together information from a rapid assessment of the relevant IEO evaluations.

44. *The Land Degradation Focal Area Study (2017)* revealed a consistent focus on forest and agricultural lands, but increasingly on integrated landscapes—to the "cost" of a 35 percent decline in forest projects between GEF-3 and GEF-5. It demonstrated good outcomes in reducing forest loss and forest fragmentation. A geospatial impact analysis and value-for-money analysis showed that there had been important reductions in fragmentation and forest loss and an increase in vegetation productivity and carbon sequestration (i.e., relevant SDG 15 indicators), notably in two case studies in India of community management of forests. It concluded that sustainable results were strongly associated with community participation and decentralization, but there are skill challenges that limit scale-up.

2.6 Evaluation methodologies used

45. As noted earlier, the evaluation team gathered and analyzed data through a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools and approaches: a portfolio review, key informant interviews, case studies on strategic biomes, and literature review of previous GEF IEO evaluation and studies relevant for or related to SFM. Further details are given below.

46. *Portfolio review.* The portfolio review included two main assessments: *descriptive* statistics for all 640 projects identified as comprising the SFM portfolio, plus a *portfolio impact review* of the 243 completed projects that have had terminal evaluations commissioned by Implementing Agencies (out of a total of 314 completed projects), which together covered 77 percent of all completed SFM projects. The latter served to identify the aggregated impact, effectiveness, coherence, equity, and sustainability of the portfolio.

47. The *descriptive statistics* review analyzed information across the full portfolio related to funding, time of project approval and closure, and geographic distributions of all SFM projects approved by the time of this assessment. The data set covers all GEF replenishment periods to date (Pilot through GEF-7). Parent projects were removed to avoid duplication with their subsidiary child projects, resulting in a total of 640 projects (child and standalone).

48. The *portfolio impact review* gathered evidence through a standardized semi-structured form that drew on the questions in table 2.[11] Figure 7 shows the number of projects reviewed across GEF replenishment periods.

[11] A pilot review was conducted on 30 terminal evaluations to inform the impact review methodology, the choice of the sampling approach, and the final selection of questions for the guiding framework of the assessment. During the pilot review, it was found that the accessibility and usefulness of terminal evaluations that were conducted during the GEF Pilot and the first two phases of the GEF were limited. Thus, we have subsampled 30 of the 99 available terminal evaluations from Pilot to GEF-2. Subsampling was done through semi-random, stratified sampling to ensure that the distribution of GEF replenishment period, global region, and funding was representative.

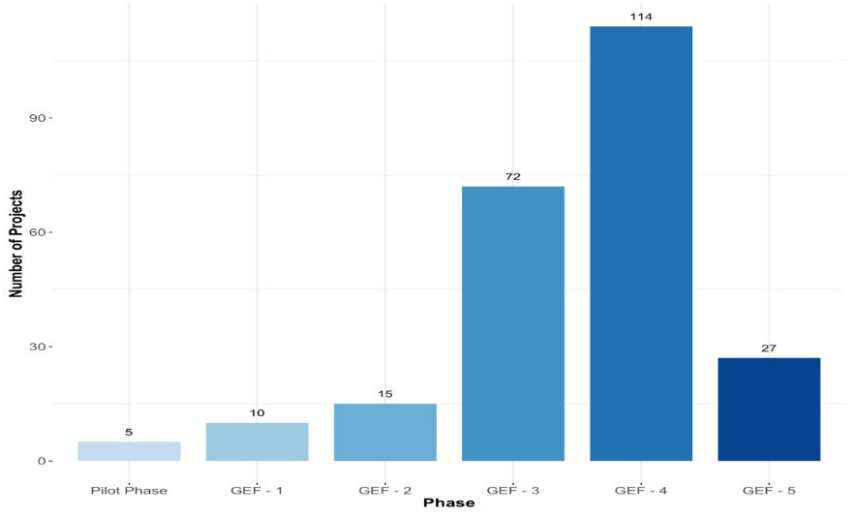

Figure 7: Portfolio impact review by GEF replenishment periods

49. *Key informant interviews.* The evaluation team conducted a series of 30 key informant interviews of key stakeholders of the GEF's SFM portfolio as well as independent forest and environment experts.[12] The interviews were non-attributed and focused at portfolio level. Key informants were approached for their knowledge and opinion and not as evaluators. While we sought their insights from individual projects, it was clarified that this was not an exercise in project evaluation. Questions laid out in table 2 were allocated across the different informant categories so that the most relevant people answered the questions about which they were likely to have relevant knowledge and experience.

50. ***Case studies.*** The *objective* of the case studies was to enable in-depth exploration of project outcomes and impacts in a given context, as well as an assessment of the constraints and opportunities faced and the comparative effectiveness of GEF modalities in handling them. To cover the main regions that received GEF SFM support (LAC and Africa) and globally significant forest biomes**,** candidate projects were selected in both the Amazon and Congo Basin biomes.[13] Within each biome, a set of three projects was selected to cover diverse levels of complexity (the number of objectives pursued by the project) and their collective coverage of three key issues: dependence on forests (for livelihoods, business, or national economies); forest/poverty problem hotspots (major drivers and manifestations); and major GEF themes past, present, and future (e.g., recent REDD+).

[12] The interviews were held between January 8, 2021 and March 31, 2021. Interviewees were grouped into four categories: GEF Secretariat staff (8); GEF Implementing Agency staff (12); GEF project design consultants (5); and GEF-aware forest experts, including one member of the GEF Civil Society Organization Network (5). The interviewees were selected through snowballing sampling. These interviews were then augmented by in-country interviews associated with the case study projects in the Amazon and Congo Basin.

[13] The findings from the Amazon and Congo Basin case studies contribute to the overall findings and conclusions from the evaluation, and they are also drawn on to illustrate some of the overall findings. Recognizing that small island developing states (SIDS) and some drylands countries were comparatively underfunded given the levels of deforestation threat—as well as forests' intimate connections with local livelihoods and local economies in these countries—brief case reviews were added to provide complementary perspectives on SFM in SIDS and drylands. These case reviews are also available separately and they again contribute to our overall findings and conclusions.

Case studies were informed by: a review of the literature, which included all available GEF documents on the projects;[14] non-GEF literature related to the regional and international trends that seemed to have framed GEF project design, or could have/should have framed it, or caused projects to adapt; and key Informant interviews and focus group discussions with the Amazon and Congo Basin project actors, stakeholders, and independent experts,[15] which were led by independent consultants.

2.7 Geospatial analysis

51. The evaluation used geospatial and remote sensing data in selected project sites to assess the contribution of GEF SFM interventions to addressing forest degradation and deforestation, and to assess other contextual factors such as conflict and socioeconomic variables affecting results. Satellite data-analysis techniques, such as change detection, time-series analysis of biophysical indicators, and proxy variables for socioeconomic data, were used with statistical and econometric methods, including machine-learning algorithms.

2.8 Data and methodology limitations

52. The evaluation encountered limitations in terms of data quality and stakeholder reach, which were largely due to the variable quality of terminal evaluations (see below), and a range of constraints posed by the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, the well-accepted limitations of indicators applied, e.g., areas protected and restored, are simply proxies for more complex outcomes, as well as the inherent difficulties of assessing changes in biodiversity, scaling up, and sustainability. To address limitations in data quality, the evaluation used semi-structured interviews with key informants, and detailed case studies to complement findings from portfolio reviews and analysis. The evaluation hired independent experts to conduct interviews and focus group discussions locally, and timelines were adjusted in response to the restrictions and delays posed by the pandemic.

53. *Portfolio review:* Although funding information was largely present in the GEF portal, the descriptive statistical analysis suffered from missing data, especially in terms of time of funding approval and disbursement. The impact review encountered a highly uneven coverage and quality of terminal evaluations. During the pilot of this exercise, we observed poorer quality of terminal project evaluations conducted during the first GEF replenishment periods and terminal evaluations were only available for the pilot and the first five GEF replenishment periods. Thus, it was not possible to make a full assessment of the evolution of the entire GEF SFM portfolio up to GEF-7. Aggregation of impact and effectiveness results at the portfolio level has suffered from a lack of standardized indicators and standards for projects conducted before GEF-5, as well as the different ways in which results and challenges were reported by terminal evaluations. Several terminal evaluations often confused outcomes, outputs, and activities, which made it impossible to distinguish between project's aims and activities, and tangible results.

[14] Notably terminal evaluations, but also midterm evaluations and M&E reports, project identification forms and CEO endorsement documents, project implementation reports, and other project-related documents, along with the program management database.

[15] Some key informants were identified by the prior portfolio-level key informant interviews, and some were associated with important non-GEF SFM programs.

54. *Case studies.* For the case studies, direct engagement with forest-dependent women and men concerning GEF SFM projects, and direct assessment of results in terms of reach, benefit, and empowerment of different groups, was necessarily very limited due largely to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 GEF's SFM Portfolio Results

55. The portfolio review identified these key tangible results from the 243 completed projects that have had terminal evaluations (77 percent of all completed projects). The numbers are a minimum estimate as not all completed projects with terminal evaluations reported on these metrics.[16]

3.1.1 Environmental results

56. **Terminal evaluations of projects show five main types of environmental outcomes for GEF SFM projects**. Figure 8 further shows these on a regional basis:

(a). Forest protection and improved forest management achieved in 63 percent of projects (n = 154);

(b). Forest restoration achieved in 19 percent of projects (n = 46);

(c). Biodiversity gains achieved for 41 percent of projects (n = 100);

(d). Soil and water and other protective functions improved for 25 percent of projects (n = 60); and

(e). CO_2 emissions mitigated by 15 percent of projects (n = 37).

57. The terminal evaluations' figures on areas of forest protected, managed, and restored can legitimately be aggregated at the portfolio level and we explore this more below. For biodiversity, soil and water, and CO_2 emissions, metrics and reporting in the TEs were not standardized and so we offer illustrative results. These numbers are inconsistently reported across the terminal evaluations which include these parameters (figure 8). The completed 243 SFM projects with TEs were from GEF Pilot phase to GEF 5. From GEF-7, the results architecture was updated and streamlined with a view to improve the monitoring and reporting of results. Going forward, these TEs are expected to report results consistently and allow for a better estimation of GEF's contribution to SFM.

58. **GEF SFM projects have helped protect almost 78 million ha of forest—over half of this in Latin America.** The 243 assessed SFM projects have contributed to protecting 77,896,892 ha of forest, by including them formally under protected area regimes and/or by bringing them under improved protected area management. Due to the quality of terminal evaluations, limitations on capturing data on these parameters, and lack of consistent information on SFM-specific targets, it is challenging to compare these across regions. Grants funded in Latin America report the largest areas of forest protected (42 million ha), followed by investments in Asia with about half this achievement (23 million ha). Regional, European, and African grants each reported 3–4 million ha of forest protected.

[16] Note: Terminal evaluations did not cover outcomes and impacts in a standard way. This evaluation covers the two metrics that could be aggregated at the portfolio level—hectares and jobs. Only 44 percent of projects reported hectares of forest protected, and 15 percent reported hectares of forest restored.

Unsurprisingly, global projects reported less than all other regions, but form the smallest proportion of the portfolio in terms of number of projects and funds (table 3).

59. **At least 1.9 million ha of forests have been restored with the help of the GEF, about 1.6 million of this in Africa.** The 243 assessed projects in the SFM portfolio have contributed to restoring 1,924,433 ha of forest. African countries have benefitted from the largest area restored—1,584,804 ha of forest (table 4). We can expect to see much higher figures in the future given the increasing number of grants addressing land degradation and strong political interest in them.

Table 3: Forest protected by region in ha

Forest Protected	
Region	Hectares
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (n=49)	42,454,392
Asia (n=34)	23,518,962
Regional (REG) (n=12)	3,861,389
Europe and Central Asia (ECA) (n=15)	3,295,201
Africa (AFR) (n=39)	3,240,588
Global (CEX) (n=5)	1,526,360
Total	77,896,892

Table 4: Forest restored by region in ha

Forest Restored	
Region	Hectares
Africa (AFR) (n=15)	1,584,804
Asia (n=10)	173,052
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (n=10)	97,902
Europe and Central Asia (ECA) (n=5)	51,933.5
Regional (REG) (n=2)	13,457
Global (CEX) (n=1)	3,283
Total	1,924,431

Figure 8: Number of projects addressing each environmental impact category in six regions

Protected = forests protected or under improved management; Restored = forests restored; Mitigated = CO2 emissions mitigated; Biodiversity = biodiversity gains; Functions = improved soil and water and other protective functions.

3.1.2 Socioeconomic results

60. **Eleven main social and economic outcomes were identifiable in the terminal evaluations**. We identified 11 main social and economic outcome areas of GEF SFM grants where terminal evaluations had reported tangible results (figure 9 further shows these on a regional basis). The five most common were:

(a). Increased income in 55 percent of projects (n = 133);

(b). Community empowerment in 52 percent of projects (n = 127);

(c). Gender equality in 37 percent of projects (n = 89);

(d). Reduced conflict in 28 percent of projects (n = 68); and

(e). Indigenous empowerment in 25 percent of projects (n = 60).

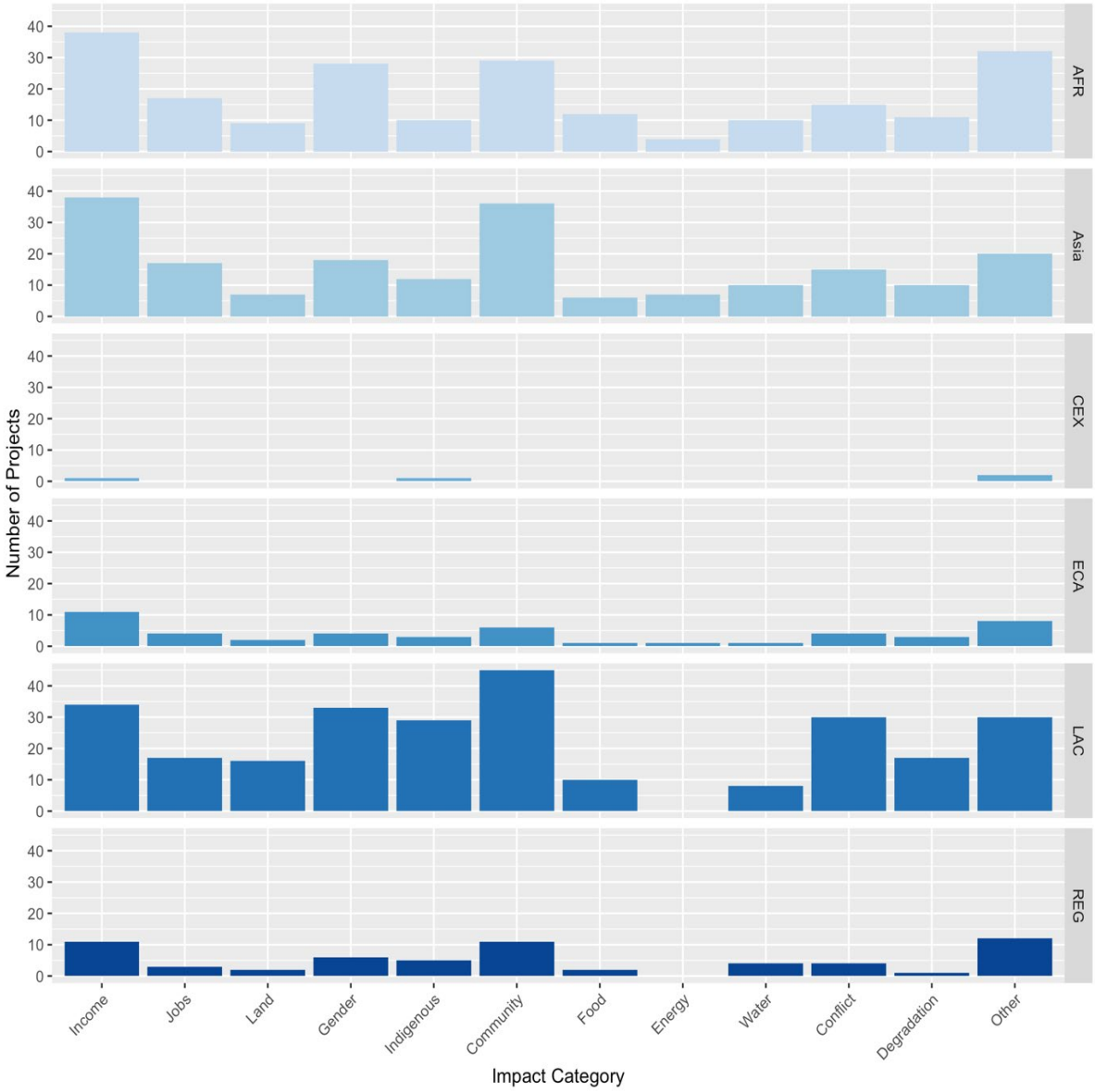

Figure 9: Number of projects addressing each social impact category in six regions

61. **Some 139,336 jobs have been created with the help of GEF SFM projects, mostly in Africa and Asia.** It is informative to aggregate the number of jobs globally, albeit with caveats noted earlier. Africa and Asia report the greatest numbers of jobs created (66K and 54K, respectively), followed by Europe and Latin America (16K and 3K, respectively). Regional and global grants have reported almost no jobs created. On average between the six regions, only nine percent of projects reported job figures in ways that that could be aggregated at the portfolio level, so these numbers are purely indicative and could be much higher (table 5).

62. **The jobs created include new employment opportunities and/or diversification of existing ones** in several fields—protected area establishment and management, sustainable forestry and agriculture, and associated work, e.g., in environmental education and tourism facility management. In some cases, alternative employment was created to reduce the labor input into forest-degrading activities. Some of these measures helped to counteract the loss of jobs arising from illegal activities that would have had a detrimental effect on the

ecosystems, and prevent the negative effects of migration/relocation of the local population.

Table 5: Jobs created by project region

Jobs created	
Region	Jobs
Africa (AFR)	66,478
Asia	53,672
Europe and Central Asia (ECA)	16,552
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)	2,609
Regional (REG)	25
Global (CEX)	0
Total	139,336

3.2 The GEF's performance

63. **Performance was assessed against seven interacting criteria: relevance, coherence, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and equity**. Based on the portfolio review, key informant interviews, and case studies, we offer an assessment of the performance of the GEF's SFM portfolio against six criteria from the 2019 revised OECD DAC assessment framework,[17] supplemented by an additional criterion of *equity.* It should be noted that these performance criteria interact considerably, and performance in one area can help or hinder performance in another area. Because this is a thematic evaluation, we give particular attention to relevance, impact, effectiveness, and sustainability. Again, note that TEs were available for the GEF Pilot to GEF 5 period.

3.2.1 Relevance

64. **The GEF SFM portfolio has strong global relevance, particularly for integrating the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)**. The GEF's SFM work is of high *global relevance* and it provides a means to mainstream the three MEAs—on biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation—in diverse forest environmental, economic, and livelihood contexts. Many key informants at both global and case study level felt that the GEF's SFM work is a relevant integrating umbrella, which has reached its most useful expression in recent impact programs and forest landscape restoration programs. They emphasized that SFM provides a practical integrating framework for implementing the three MEAs together in both forest policy and forest management, although the concept of SFM is not universally adhered to. GEF SFM funding has been used to support various interventions directly or indirectly related to addressing forest degradation and livelihood needs, including projects to combat illegal wildlife trade primarily focused on fauna. Its focus on plant species and illegal timber has been comparatively small, and it has done less than some key informants expected to pilot SFM activities in areas that the UNFF was exploring or promoting such as REDD+ and FLEGT—helping to learn lessons, establish norms, and take them to scale within the forest sector. However, as noted by others interviewed GEF recipient country governments may not have prioritized REDD+, and the timber trade focus of FLEGT may be

[17] OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance.

beyond the GEF mandate. Yet other informants noted that the GEF's work may have suffered from multiple priorities wherein SFM projects were overloaded with objectives beyond the core mandate.

65. **GEF SFM projects are well aligned with government priorities**. The portfolio review revealed that, in terms of *policy relevance*, the majority of projects were aligned (75 percent) or partially aligned (11 percent) with relevant government priorities. For example, in the Amazon case study, projects such as the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program (ARPA; GEF ID 771, World Bank), the Indigenous Environmental and Territorial Management Project (GATI; GEF ID 2934, UNDP), and Amazon Sustainable Landscapes (ASL; GEF ID 9272, World Bank) align with the Legal Amazon Deforestation Prevention and Control Plan, the Terra Legal Program, and the Rural Cadaster, which provide opportunities to integrate sustainable activities in the Amazon. The expansion of protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon (through ARPA and now ASL) was relevant both nationally and globally, and the development of a similar initiative linking indigenous peoples with environmental protection through the new National Plan for Environmental and Territorial Management in Indigenous Lands (PNGATI), was considered a great achievement. While recent trends in environmental degradation and deforestation show deterioration in much of the Amazon in Brazil, GEF continues to build on previous project success in the region and engages on environmental issues of importance including SFM. Similarly, in Benin, the Forests and Adjacent Lands Management Project (GEF ID 5215) was developed in line with the country's Forest Strategy (November 2002), the National Biodiversity Protection Strategy and Action Plan (March 2002), and its National Action Plan against Desertification (adopted November 1999). Another project, the Hwange-Sanyati Biological Corridor Project (GEF ID 4645) in Zimbabwe was aligned with the Government's sustainable development and regional integration agenda.

66. **Time lags between design and implementation may reduce relevance.** Recent strategic SFM intentions in terms of targeting major assets (notably biomes) or threats (notably drivers of deforestation, especially in commodity chains) are seen as highly relevant. But the lengthy time between PIF approval to receiving the first grant disbursement (a median of two years and four months) has seen too many projects losing timeliness or relevance once they are implemented if, for example, the policy space, the key players, or the political regime have changed by then. The gap between project design and implementation appears to have coincided with some withering of in-country capacity for several projects led by UNDP in the Congo Basin for example.[18] However, other delays have been due to factors well beyond the control of GEF Agencies, for example, the two-and-a-half-year delay due to the presence of some 5,000 rebels in Maiko Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo DR; GEF ID 3772).

67. **Some deforestation hotspots appear comparatively underfunded by the GEF**. In terms of geographic relevance, the GEF seems to underfund some "forest hotspot" countries, among them some countries with vast forest areas that are suffering from high deforestation rates. To assess the geographic relevance of the SFM portfolio, including the integrated approach pilots and the impact programs, we compared the amount of funding against the net loss of forest of different countries between 2010 and 2020. We have used –0.22 percent change in annual net forest loss and 50 percent forest cover as cut-off points for high deforestation countries as recommended by Fonseca et al. (2007). The hotspot

[18] GEF Project IDs 248, 2906, and 3750.

quadrant plots below (figures 10, 11, and 12) show how some countries suffering from high deforestation rates have received no more funding than countries with low deforestation. Underfunded hotspots appear to include Angola, Belize, Congo DR, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Panama, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, and Venezuela. In this sense, the spread of SFM grants can be considered geographically relevant, but this relevance may decline if future GEF grants are not targeted at forest hotspots that have been comparatively underfunded so far. For example, the investment in Congo DR seems to be low in comparison to other strategic areas. Congo DR has the fourth largest forest area in the world and a recently high deforestation rate of -0.87 percent, but has received only a tenth of the funds received by Brazil. Even accounting for regional grants to the Congo Basin, the level of investment in Congo DR seems insufficient. In GEF-5 and GEF-6, there were 89 countries that implemented multifocal area SFM projects with the SFM incentive, however 68 of these did not participate in the three SFM impact programs in GEF-7 (Amazon, Congo Basin, and dryland impact programs). After including the FOLUR program, 50 countries remain excluded from the SFM incentive (see Table 3 in Annex). Of the 50 countries, one-third are SIDS. This shift to programs and financial incentives has influenced country participation. The GEF-8 programs include the Critical Forest Biomes covering Indo-Malaya, Meso-America, and Western Africa, may again incentivize regions left behind in the earlier phases.

68. **GEF funding for countries with low deforestation and high forest cover is influenced by various reasons.** There are several countries with high funding but low deforestation, including China, India, Madagascar, Peru, the Philippines, and Russia. Some of these countries have a very high percentage of intact forest cover, which may be the justification for the funding, i.e., to protect and manage this forest sustainably for multiple GEBs. However, others have the same forest cover as countries with low funding and high deforestation. SFM funding is primarily driven by country priorities but also influenced by GEF strategy and incentives for SFM.

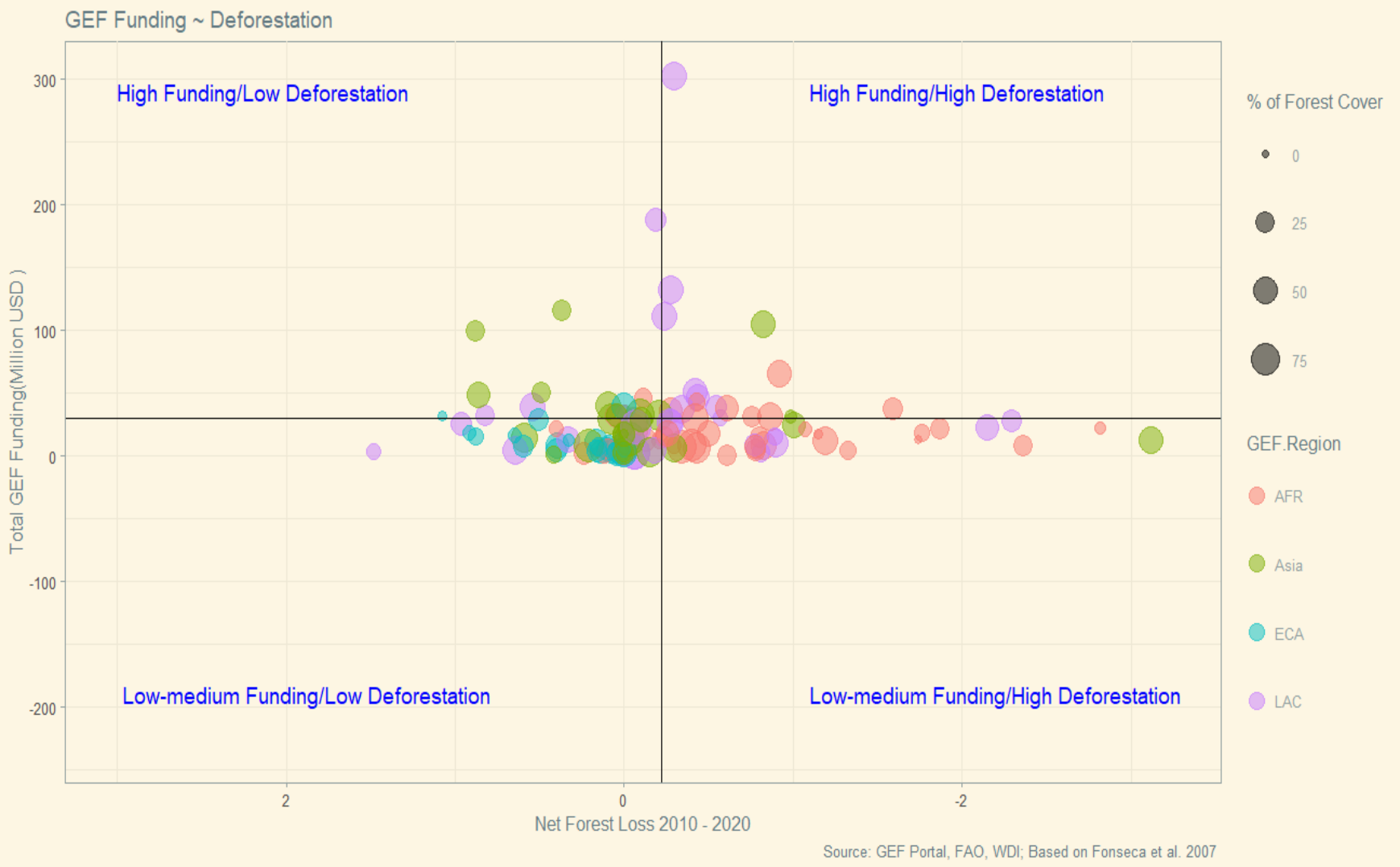

Figure 10: Forest hotspots – GEF funding versus net forest loss

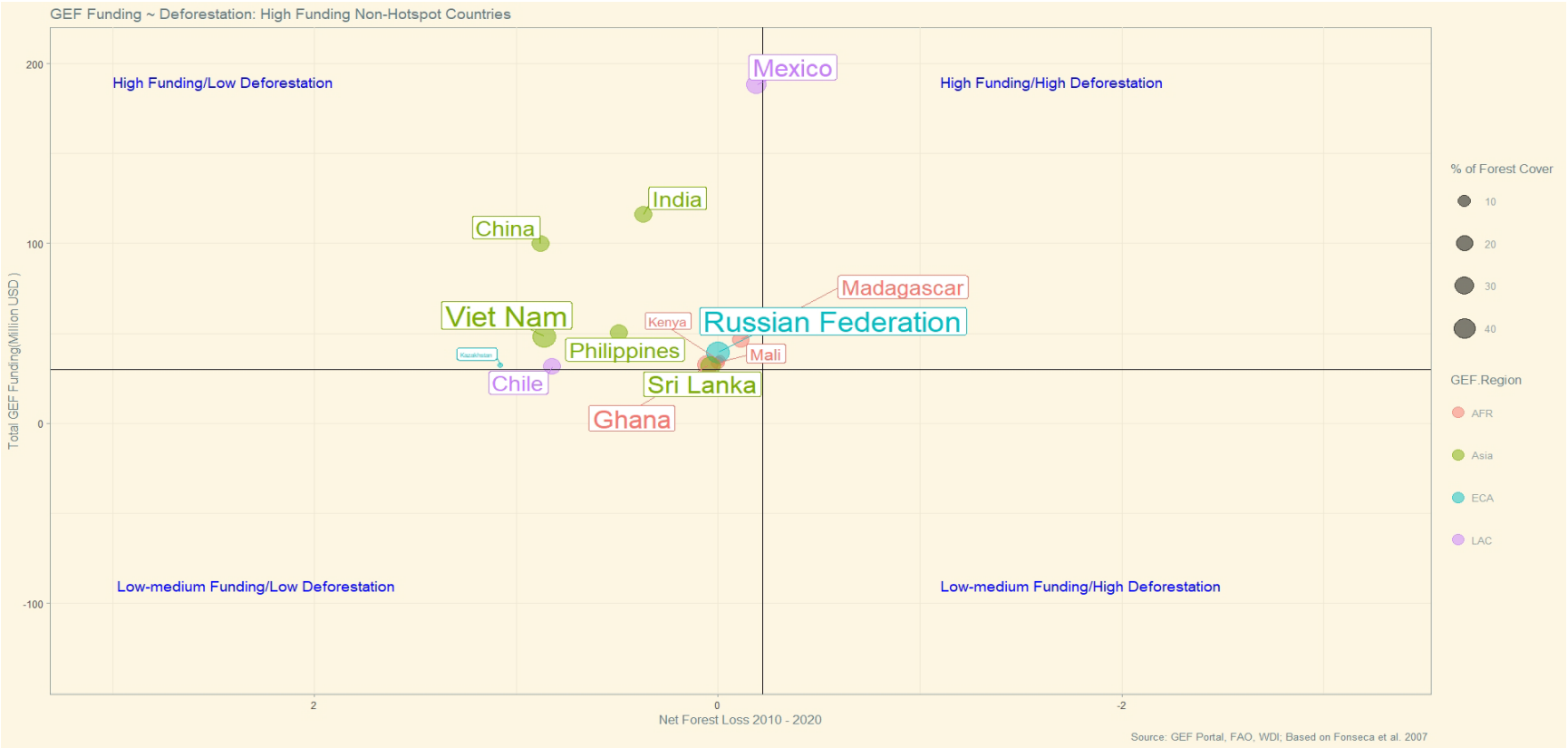

Figure 11: Forest hotspots – High-funding, lower-deforestation countries

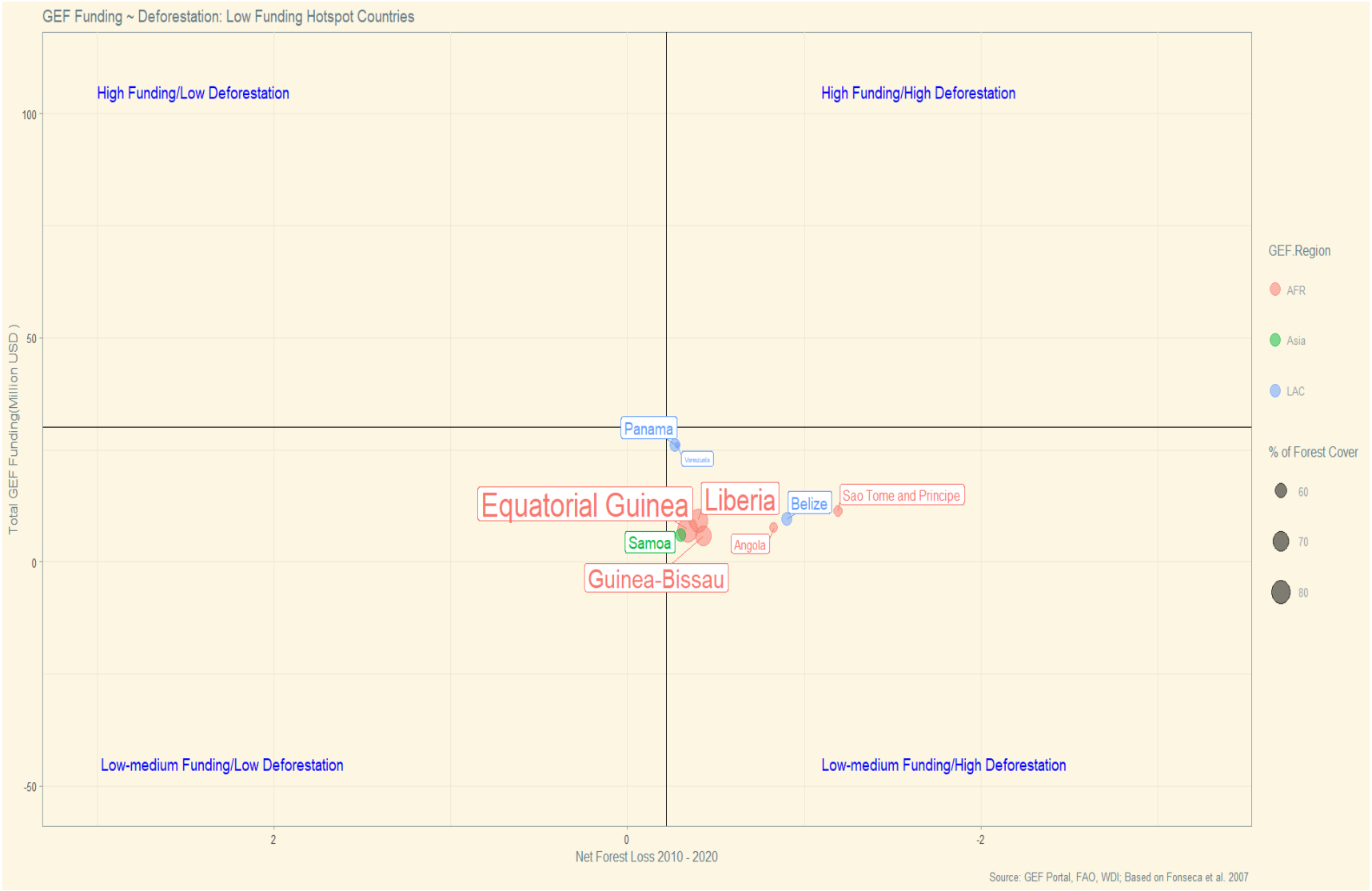

Figure 12: Forest hotspots – Low-funding, high-deforestation countries

3.2.2 Coherence

69. **Integration of socioeconomic objectives has been a growing feature of the GEF SFM portfolio.** The portfolio has come to better integrate multiple environmental aims with each new replenishment period, while also developing an increasingly tangible focus on socioeconomic benefits. Building on an initial strong focus on biodiversity, the GEF SFM portfolio has progressively transitioned toward multifocal area projects (n=282), which now constitute 44 percent of the SFM portfolio. The remaining 56 percent of the portfolio addresses single-focal areas, and it remains unevenly balanced toward biodiversity (n=288, 45 percent). The increasing integration of social aims during SFM project implementation has produced tangible results: 75 percent of projects (n=182) analyzed during our portfolio impact review report social outcomes as well as environmental outcomes.

70. **Environmental and socio-economic objectives have been integrated in two-thirds of the projects.**[19] Synergies and trade-offs exist between social, economic, and environmental outcomes of projects and also between short and long-term goals. The evaluation identified 52 projects where terminal evaluations had singled out their successful proactive measures to mitigate socioeconomic trade-offs and create synergies, including addressing the livelihood needs of local communities through the creation of new employment opportunities; the diversification of existing jobs; the provision of new skills; and the establishment of agreements and partnerships between organizations working in different thematic areas. In contrast, 27 terminal evaluations reported negative trade-offs. Some reported that the implementation of project activities was to the detriment of local livelihoods and in (only) two instances they generated social division and indeed conflict. For these projects, compensation mechanisms such as mitigation plans or strategies had not been devised and/or implemented for those communities, which worsened their living conditions. In a few other cases, the evaluators deemed that the project activities had been a potential threat to the sustainability of land management systems or undermined biodiversity conservation efforts.

71. **GEF SFM projects are increasingly inclusive of stakeholders, with integrated rather than siloed objectives, and consistent support over time, but a coherent and comprehensive approach to SFM is essential.** The GEF's work has provided an increasingly inclusive and integrated design process that has enabled projects to: implement multiple MEAs simultaneously; bridge institutional silos; engage relevant sector authorities; provide governments with continuity of funding for forest environmental issues; and mainstream many SFM issues. It has been most valued for long-term capacity development, especially in government and multistakeholder institutions. Yet, political will for SFM often remains weak while countervailing threats and incentives remain strong. The GEF's approach to SFM has evolved usefully, often in innovative and effective ways, such as at the corporate level the introduction of the SFM incentive to bring together land degradation, biodiversity, and climate change priorities together for the first time in multifocal areas; see section 1.3). However, in the context of GEF's evolving strategies and approaches to SFM, interviewees indicated the need for articulating a clear plan going forward with distinct objectives and boundaries, including differentiation to accommodate different types of forest and forest-dependent people (see below).

[19] Based on an aggregate of terminal evaluations.

72. **Internal coherence of the SFM portfolio has been strong with the MEAs and has grown between GEF SFM projects over time**. Internal coherence concerns the links between an intervention and other interventions carried out by the GEF, as well as the consistency of an intervention with the relevant MEAs. The evolving SFM portfolio has been responsive to progressive developments over the GEF replenishment periods, each of which have responded to progress and guidance from the MEAs. For example, the SFM portfolio has been coherent with, and often a leader for, issues of integration, IPLCs, gender, and private sector engagement. Between GEF SFM projects within a region, internal coherence has tended to strengthen over time with continued involvement. However, there has been an exception in internal coherence with the Global Wildlife Program (GWP). The projects participating in the GEF-6 phase of the program were eligible for the SFM incentive through the MFA modality. However, with the introduction of Impact Programs in GEF-7, the SFM incentive was no longer available to GWP phase 2 child projects. The GEF-8 programming addresses this gap by introducing a new integrated program where participation is incentivised.

73. **For example, the projects assessed in the Amazon and Congo Basin case studies reveal a good internal coherence over time, consolidating and scaling up where appropriate**. Internally, for example, over the timeline of ARPA 1 (GEF ID 771, World Bank), ARPA 2 (GEF ID 4085, World Bank), and ASL (GEF ID 9664, World Bank), the original project (ARPA 1) built managerial capacity for Sustainable Use Protected Areas under federal management. This was then expanded under ARPA 2, including at the state-level using the expertise and innovative capacity building learned from ARPA 1. In a third stage, the ASL protected areas component consolidated and expanded the achievements from previous projects but now broadened through ASL to the whole integrated landscape—including policies and incentives for productive landscapes, plus a regional component to improve capacity, communications, and cooperation with other countries in the Amazon Basin. In the Congo Basin, lack of coherence has been apparent where key issues, notably land tenure and access to land, have been only weakly taken into account by GEF interventions. Such issues have been somewhat better addressed by more recent GEF initiatives, primarily through greater attention given in project design to key actor groups—youth, women, indigenous peoples, and local communities (e.g., GEF IDs 10314 and 10388).

74. **External coherence is observed in a few projects.** External coherence concerns the consistency of the GEF SFM portfolio and projects with other actors' interventions in the same context. This includes complementarity, harmonization, and co-ordination with others, and the extent to which the intervention is adding value while avoiding duplication of effort. For example, an MSP, GEF ID 9861 supported the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) where multiple CPF partners are working together to foster partnerships and coherence for landscape restoration. The project SFM Facilitating Financing for Sustainable Forest Management in SIDS and low forest cover countries (LFCCs; GEF ID 4235) executed by the UNFF focused on enhancing the opportunities for financing SFM.

75. **In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, external coherence of GEF SFM projects has been quite strong**. Projects have integrated quite well with the Congo DR's political, institutional, and strategic frameworks, while also focusing on sites that have not been the focus of other partners (e.g., in former Equateur Province and former Katanga Province; GEF IDs 3750 and 5547), and on themes not covered by other funding partners, such as transboundary resource management (GEF IDs 3750, 10314, and 10388). While it is not clear that coherence was their aim, several initiatives have fostered some coherence

through building capacity at the regional level (GEF ID 3960) and in managing cross-border resources (GEF IDs 3750, 10314, and 10388).

76. **External coherence of the Brazilian Amazon GEF SFM projects has been challenging**. International development organizations including the World Bank were in the support of Constitutional Amendment 95 in 2016 which required macroeconomic adjustment reforms and other austerity measures in Brazil. These measures contributed to a reduction in public environmental spending[20] thus negatively affecting environmental policy undermining GEF SFM objectives.

3.2.3 Impact

77. **The GEF's major verified positive impact has been the increased area of forest protection, with forest restoration also now beginning to be verified**. Pointing in particular to the GEF's work with Amazon protected areas and the GEF's forest landscape restoration work, experts indicated that the GEF's major and consistent impact has been increased areas of forest protection, improved quality of PA management, and growing (if less well verified as yet) impacts in forest restoration. They appreciate similar potential from a GEF-supported project in the Congo Basin where communities benefited more from forest use through social responsibility contracts established between concessionaires and local communities in 57 forest concessions (box 2). Likewise, other examples of forest protection and restoration projects include the Cape Peninsula Biodiversity Conservation Project in South Africa (GEF ID 134), Consolidating a System of Municipal Regional Parks (MRPs) in Guatemala's Western Plateau (GEF ID 1733) in Guatemala and Community-Based Integrated Natural Resources Management in Lake Tana Watershed in Ethiopia (GEF ID 3367).

78. **Sixty million ha of forests are better protected in the Amazon as a result of GEF SFM activities, but sustainable use of forest is more elusive**. The Amazon case study revealed a broad consensus that ARPA 1 and 2 and ASL 1 projects in Brazil have successfully delivered 60 million ha of forest protection and improved quality of protected area management (both with relatively straightforward progress metrics). However, there was less success in investing in sustainable production inside the protected areas and in finding sustainable landscape alternatives outside protected areas.

79. **Total portfolio-level impact beyond forest areas and job numbers is less easy to sum up**. There are many other kinds of impact beyond the metrics of forest area and job numbers that most terminal evaluations barely touched on. These relate to policy and institutional change and capacity, and socioeconomic benefits, as well as new knowledge, which the case studies have explored in more detail. In Uganda, GEF SFM projects have helped to improve household assets (box 2).

[20] Young and Castro 2021; Silva et al. 2019, 2021

Box 2:: Socioeconomic co-benefits of GEF-supported SFM projects in Africa

Communities are benefiting more from forest use in the Congo Basin as a result of GEF SFM projects. The Congo Basin Support Program - Forest and Nature Conservation Project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo DR; GEF ID 3772, World Bank) has made an important contribution to SFM, particularly through supporting the negotiation of 75 social responsibility contracts between concessionaires and local communities in 57 forest concessions. These innovative contracts, provided for in the Congo DR's Forest legislation, are channelling $15.1 million over the four years of the simple management plans they are based on, to community-led social development projects. These projects benefited a reported 588,530 individuals, substantially more than initially targeted (although the quality of projects implemented with these funds has been mixed, owing partly to non-transparent local management of funds). Despite the small size of short-term benefits, establishing this means of local control of forest promises sustainable and enduring results in the longer term.

GEF SFM projects in Uganda have helped to improve household assets. Analysis of GEF-supported project interventions in Uganda, using a novel database of geographic indicators, Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS), and applying quasi-experimental methods, reveal a positive impact of $184.81 in increased household assets between 2009 and 2011. The effect was statistically significant at distances between 2 and 7 km away from GEF projects. There was insufficient evidence to establish the impact of projects beyond 7 km.

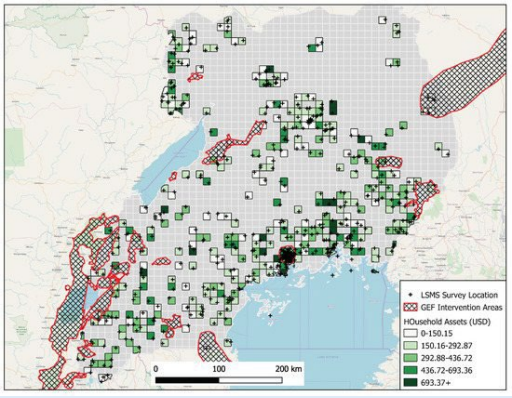

Figure B.2.1: Increase in household assets in GEF intervention areas
Source: GEF IEO Report.

Note: Grey areas indicate areas where no Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) data were available; hashed areas with a red boundary indicate the GEF project areas; and green areas indicate areas where LSMS data were available. White or light green cells represent households with fewer assets in USD than darker green cells, circa our baseline period of 2009.

Full study

80. **GEF support has created an enabling environment for REDD+.** GEF projects have supported readiness and uptake of REDD+ through institutional strengthening, developing incentive-based instruments to finance REDD+ activities, and supporting robust monitoring, reporting, and verification systems (MRV). However, challenges remain in assessing the GEF's contributions to REDD+ as GEF does not systematically track its projects' contribution to REDD+. Additionally, considerable investment into REDD+ Phase 1 (Readiness) have not yet seen widespread progression into Phase 2 (Implementation) or Phase 3 (Results-based payments).

81. **Terminal evaluations of about a fifth of GEF SFM projects suggest that they have been achieving transformational change**. While the terminal evaluations were not asked to explore transformational change, there is supporting evidence that many of the GEF's SFM

projects do result in such change.[21] The terminal evaluations of 52 of 243 evaluated projects (21.4 percent) suggest that transformational change[22] has been achieved by the greater proportion of GEF-1 grants, perhaps due to their innovative nature or to sampling bias.[23] From GEF-3 onwards, the number of projects assessed as transformative is usually in the range of 10 percent to 25 percent of each GEF replenishment period. Two further portfolio findings are helpful: first, almost all (94 percent) of the projects evaluated to have been transformative were also projects evaluated to have clearly met government priorities; and second, the largest projects (in terms of high funding levels) were shown to be the most transformative (figure 13).

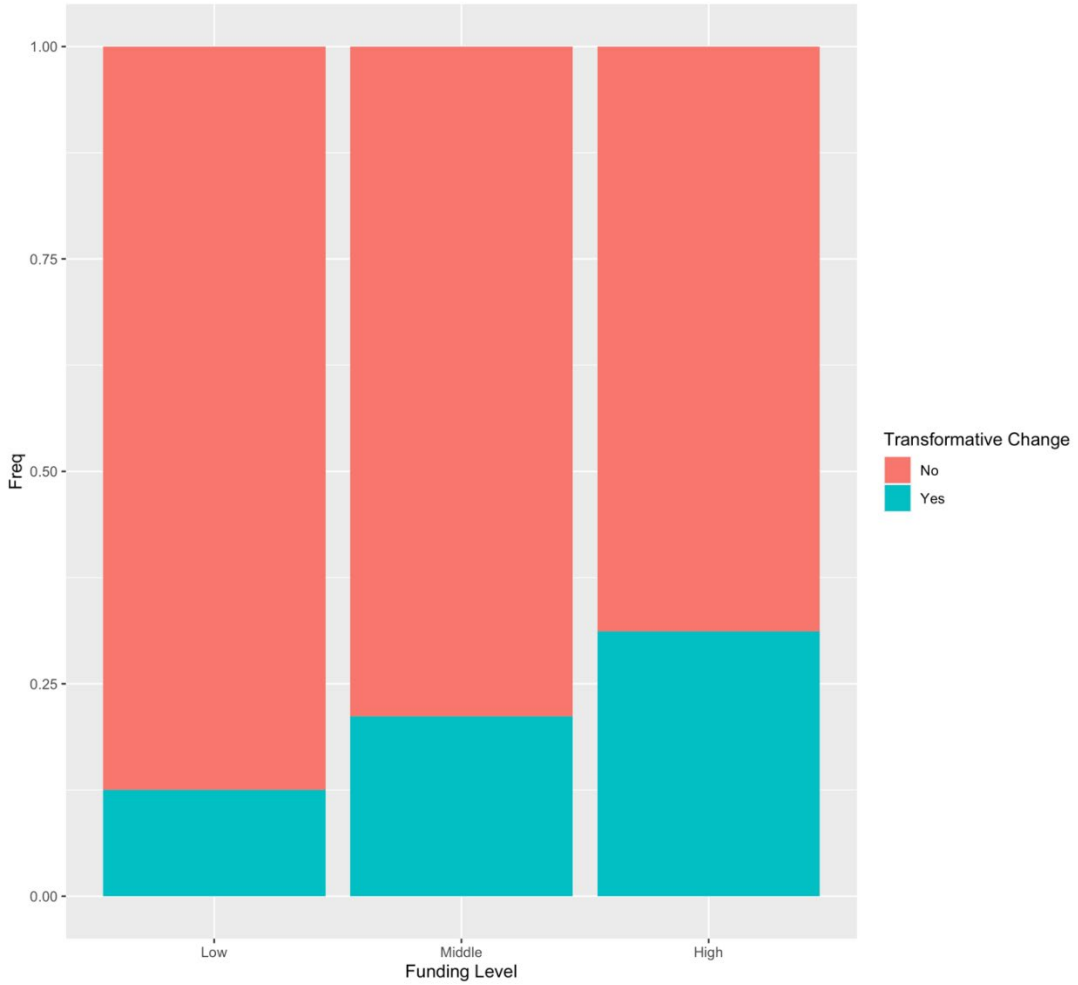

Figure 13: Transformative change by funding level, by percentage of funding

[21] As noted earlier, transformational change is defined as "deep, systemic, and sustainable change with large-scale impact," resulting from activities that "flip" market and government systems" (GEF IEO 2018).
[22] Examples include Sustainable Coffee Landscape Project in Burundi (GEF ID 4631); Integrating Climate Change Risks into Forestry Management in Samoa (GEF ID 4216); and Nature Conservation and Flood Control in the Yangtze River Basin in China (GEF ID 1353).
[23] Sampling bias may be evident here since only 10 evaluations from GEF-1 were selected for the portfolio impact review and, given GEF-1 was a new global program, its novel nature might have led evaluators to assess GEF-1 in terms of innovation more highly than they did with subsequent phases. The proportions of projects being assessed as transformative in GEF-3, GEF-4, and GEF-5 are more reliable, since all terminal evaluations produced in those phases were reviewed.

82. **The GEF's additionality in SFM is most commonly associated with innovative methods, tools, and institutional arrangements; long-term capacity development; and new financial flows**. The terminal evaluations highlighted how GEF projects achieved breakthroughs in reorganizing governance and management to address forests and people's needs together. The portfolio review (volume 2, section 3.3.4) provides numerous illustrative quotes on how GEF innovations enabled socioeconomic benefits to be achieved alongside goals to improve environmental outcomes. For example, the terminal evaluation of the climate change and forest management project (GEF ID 4216) implemented in Samoa noted how the Participatory Three Dimensional model that the project developed helped the communities visualize their village and the surrounding area's topography and vegetation, enhancing their participation in community-based management plans. However, with the paucity of comprehensive terminal evaluations and the absence of post-completion evaluations, a full picture of GEF additionality in SFM is not yet available.

3.2.4 Effectiveness

83. **The portfolio impact review identified 5 main environmental and 11 main socioeconomic outcomes affected by those GEF SFM grants that reported tangible results.** Together, these cover all of the UNFF's seven SFM dimensions,[24] plus our addition of rights and equity (table 6). While the reported outcomes do not overtly address the legal, policy, and institutional framework and knowledge base, it is clear from key informant interviews and case studies that law, policy, and institutions have indeed proven to be key interim outcomes that GEF has prioritized.

Table 6 : Environmental and socioeconomic outcomes of GEF SFM projects reported by terminal evaluations

Environmental outcomes	Socioeconomic outcomes
Forest protection and improved forest management in 63% of projects (n = 154)	Increased income in 55% of projects (n = 133)
Biodiversity gains of many types identified for 41% of projects (n = 100)	Community Empowerment in 52% of projects (n = 127)
Soil and water and other protective functions identified for 25% of projects (n = 60)	Gender equality in 37% of projects (n = 89)
Forest restoration, 19% of projects (n = 46)	Reduced conflict in 28% of projects (n = 68)
CO_2 emissions mitigated 15% of projects, (n = 37)	Indigenous empowerment in 25% of projects (n = 60)
	+ Job creation (n = 58), reduce forest degradation (42) security of land (36), water (33), food (31) and energy (12) +

84. As noted above, outcomes in terms of protected forest area, restored forest area, and jobs created can be summed up globally at the portfolio level, but many other outcome areas cannot be summed up given their diverse metrics. While they do not appear as a "big figure" in our headline portfolio results, there are numerous stories of change that could be told—and we give some short examples below.

[24] As noted above, the UNFF's seven thematic elements of SFM are: extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; protective functions of forests; productive functions of forests; socioeconomic functions; and legal, policy, and institutional framework.

85. **The GEF-supported model approach to forest protection has been scaled up in the Amazon.** One example of effectiveness is the important multiplier effects of the GEF's SFM work in Amazon protected areas. FUNBIO was a local institution created in 1996, with GEF-1 funds. FUNBIO was later selected as the executing agency for ARPA 1 (2002), ARPA 2 (2010) and ASL (2017) projects. It became a GEF Implementing Agency in 2015. This successful model of institutional development could be replicated in other countries to create long-term local capacity for channelling biodiversity related funding. Here, state governments in the Amazon with little former involvement in SFM were introduced to the importance of protected areas—leading to a significant expansion of state-managed protected areas in the Amazon, especially in the sustainable use category. This has provided a model for protected areas combining biodiversity and ecosystem conservation with the recognition of the rights of traditional communities living in these territories. Tools and approaches also spilled over to federal protected areas that did not belong to ARPA, including those outside the Amazon.

86. **The GEF SFM portfolio is not yet fully supporting the effective decision-making powers of IPLCs**. Many key informants felt that IPLCs are not gaining adequate benefits in terms of rights and material gains.[25] Neither is there yet effective support to sustainable commercial use of forests, engaging the private sector and especially IPLC businesses. For example, in the Brazilian Amazon the GATI project, presented as an "ARPA" for indigenous peoples, helped to reduce the traditional mutual distrust between indigenous people and environmentalists. However, after its conclusion, while some efforts to engage IPLCs continued, financial sustainability was a challenge. In the Congo Basin, the Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program (GEF ID 10208, UNEP), for which $57 million was approved in 2019, is the largest GEF program in the region. The program design recognizes the importance of strengthening indigenous and local community tenure and management rights of IPLCs. However, in its review[26] of the program design, the GEF STAP highlighted several challenges in IPLC engagement. The GEF's updated policy on environmental and social safeguards[27] includes strengthened minimum standards on FPIC, consultation, and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and provides guidance but a recent IEO evaluation[28] also highlighted implementation constraints. Within this context, how the barriers to effective participation and substantive engagement of IPLCs are addressed during program implementation is yet to be observed.

87. **The choice of implementing agency is key, as shown successfully in the Congo Basin**. Appropriately chosen, the Implementing Agency can bring its unique positioning and strengths to SFM. In the Congo Basin, while some other organizations appear to have been more constrained by the major and numerous problems created by armed conflict, the GEF Implementing Agencies have been relatively consistent at delivering some substantial SFM support across the region over the years. Several projects in the region are notable for the emphasis on learning from experience in their project design and, as a result, emphasize the value of a simple and flexible project structure.

[25] This view was expressed by those in all four of our categories of key informant—GEF Secretariat staff, GEF Implementing Agency staff, GEF project design consultants, and GEF-aware forest experts—in interviews between January and April 2021.

[26] https://publicpartnershipdata.azureedge.net/gef/GEFDocuments/6eb84671-8057-e911-a827-000d3a365662/Roadmap/STAPreview_10208_STAP_Screen.pdf

[27] https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/gef_environmental_social_safeguards_policy.pdf

[28] http://gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/gef-policies-2020.pdf

88. **Cofinancing benefits of scale and alignment may be outweighed by the costs of excluding smaller partners and innovation.** Cofinancing can confuse the issue. Much cofinancing is little more than an accounting exercise. In the Congo Basin projects, there appears to have been an almost complete absence of practical requirement or incentive for delivery of cofinancing—resulting in the near total absence of public cofinancing in GEF projects in the Congo DR, for example. At a minimum, this has created barriers to disbursement and confused implementation. The benefits from initial alignment between GEF and other funders are often outweighed by the disadvantages of this kind of cofinancing partnership where it results in excluding smaller partners, especially organized groups among IPLCs, and by a reduction in innovation because anything "new" falls outside what is already financed.

89. **Stakeholder engagement works; it tends to be associated with increased forest protection and restoration**. Stakeholder engagement has always been important for achieving SFM outcomes effectively. Our portfolio review revealed that projects that significantly engaged indigenous people, academia, NGOs, and the private sector reported greater areas of forest protected (figure 14), and projects that significantly engaged local communities reported restoring large areas of forest (figure 15). Box 3 provides an illustration.

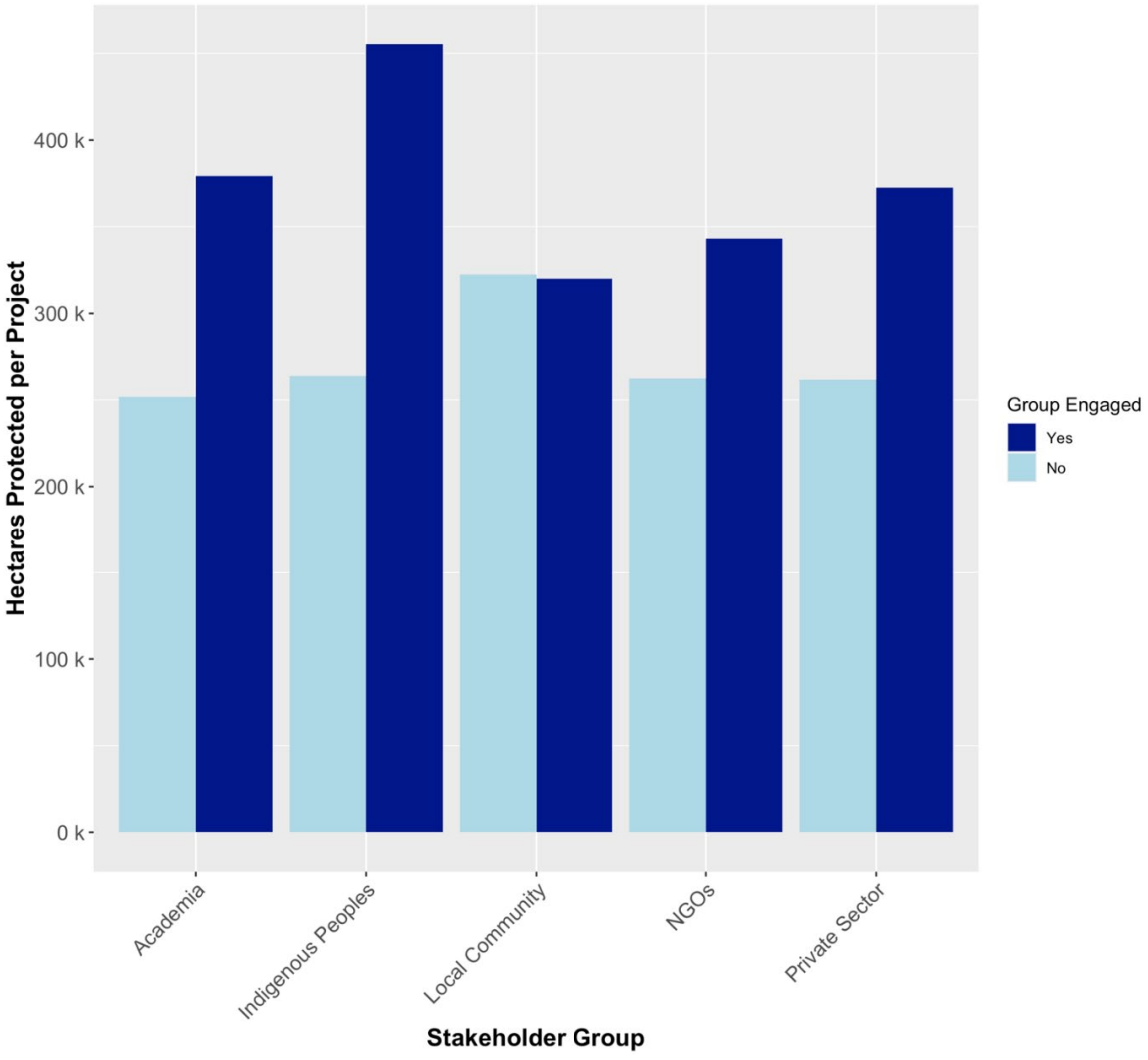

Figure 14: Hectares of forest protected per project by stakeholders engaged

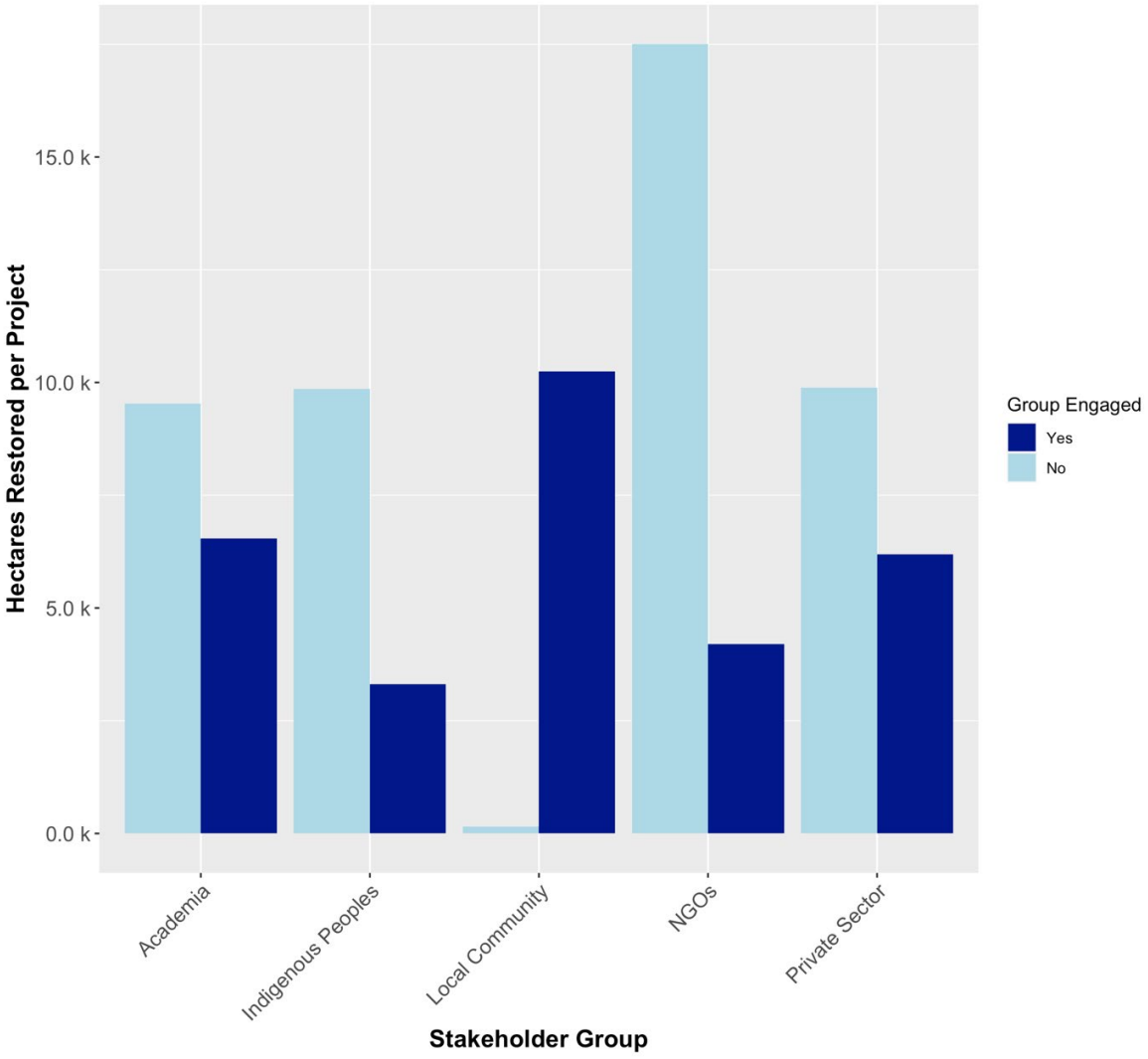

Figure 15: Hectares of forest restored per project by stakeholders engaged

Box 3: GEF-supported, community-based fire management

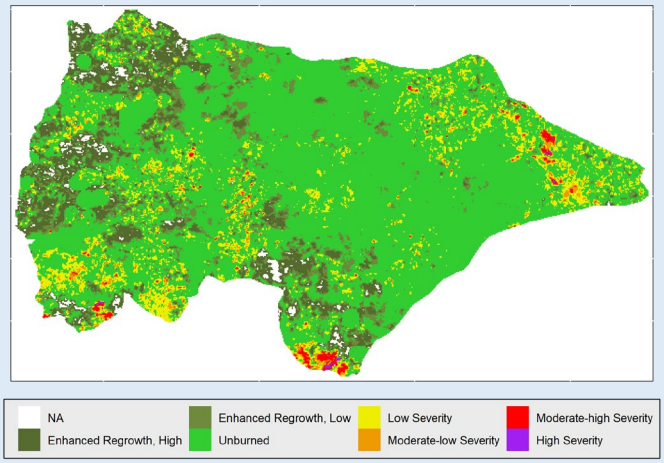

Figure B3.1: Fire severity

Source: GEFIEO analysis.

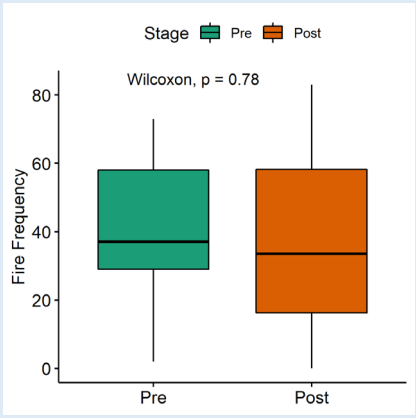

Figure B3.2: Difference in fire frequency

Source: GEF IEO analysis.

Forest fire management activities were part of the broader objective of sustainable forest and catchment management in a GEF-supported SFM project in Thailand.[a] The project adopted an integrated community-based approach and involved community networks. However, fire prevention and management remained a challenge because of the increasing severity and frequency of fire and social factors beyond the project's control.

A geospatial analysis around the project sites indicates that fire severity has increased in about 110 ha, mostly confined to the border areas. In contrast, some areas in the northwest have seen recovery in about 2,800 ha from earlier fire incidents (figure B3.1). As shown in figure B3.2, there has been a small difference in the pre and post median fire frequency.

The project successfully initiated a community-based fire management approach. The terminal evaluation[b] deemed this project as moderately successful and identified project ambition and complicated design, capacity, and logistical challenges as the key factors that impacted the outcome.

[a] https://www.thegef.org/project/sfm-integrated-community-based-forest-and-catchment-management-through-ecosystem-service

[b] https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/8715

90. **Well-designed monitoring and evaluation systems were a major contributor to project effectiveness.**[29] Terminal evaluations found that several other project characteristics positively influenced effectiveness. In order of priority, the most significant were: (1) well-designed monitoring and evaluation systems; (2) stakeholder engagement fostering local ownership and partnerships; (3) integration of lessons learned from previous projects, midterm reviews, and needs assessment; (4) adaptive management; and (5) supportive implementing Agencies playing to their strengths and strong project teams.

[29] In 52 projects, the elements of a well-designed monitoring and evaluation system were seen to positively affect achievement of project outcomes. Examples include projects in GEF ID1043 (GEF-3); GEF ID 3637 (GEF-4) and GEF ID 2511 (GEF-3).

91. **Sustained and flexible partnerships helped to improve resilience in contexts of fragility and conflict.** Key informant interviews emphasized the value of project partnerships and flexibility for handling instability and conflict. For example, in the CBSP (Congo Basin Strategic Program) Forest and Nature Conservation Project (GEF ID 3772), which was implemented shortly after the 2008 peace agreement between Rwanda and the Congo DR, the project recognized the likelihood of lasting instability and adopted "a simple and flexible design, involving partnerships with local and international NGOs that have continued to work on the ground during the recent conflicts and have the capacity to suspend and restart operations quickly." See box 4 for a brief discussion of how GEF SFM projects have handled contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence in Afghanistan and Colombia by adopting project-specific, conflict-sensitive approaches.

92. **Overambitious project design and cumbersome processes are constraints on effectiveness**. The most widespread project characteristics that negatively influenced effectiveness, in order of priority, related to: (1) poor monitoring, evaluation, and learning with a lack of baseline data, consistent and meaningful indicators, or capacity and plans to do so;[30] (2) overambitious project design as reflected in more activities than could be securely delivered given capacity and resources, especially given the available time frame; (3) delays caused by either poor capacity of Implementing Agencies or bureaucratic procurement processes; and (4) problems with financial management, reporting, and cofinancing. Both disbursement and reporting problems have had major negative impacts on effective implementation of activities in several projects in the Congo Basin according to key informants. Terminal evaluations noted in 51 cases how, despite having appropriate strategies, overambitious design was an impediment to delivering results within the implementation period. One example of this was a project in Mongolia (GEF ID 4744).

93. **External factors hindering projects are less frequently reported in evaluations than internal factors, but they commonly include capacity weaknesses.** External hindering factors were less commonly reported in terminal evaluations, but they included: limited capacities of lead Agencies; lack of stakeholder engagement after the project design stage; weak government ministries with little incentive to change policy or resource local organizational change once implementation is underway; lack of capacity of both project and government staff; and high turnover of government and project staff. Examples include a project on protected areas in Thailand (GEF ID 3517) and a natural resource management and climate change project in Mali (GEF ID 5270*)*.

94. **Major issues of political economy—of decision-making control, rights insecurity, and corruption—while not unique to SFM projects, are important and are not systematically addressed by GEF SFM projects.** Political economy issues, such as overly centralized decision making, lack of respect for prior tenure and use rights, and corruption, are neither systematically addressed in the design of GEF SFM projects nor overtly considered in implementation, in spite of their critical importance for achieving transformational change. However, local project staff are often able to navigate these political economy issues well, especially in shaping follow-up projects. For example, the GEF project in Lebanon (GEF ID 4108) was able to address resource conflicts in protected areas by adopting customary approaches to conservation. Political economy issues are also being addressed through the safeguards of the GEF implementing agencies.

[30] In 60 projects, poor monitoring and evaluation systems negatively affected project implementation. Examples include projects in India (GEF ID 3469), a regional project in Andean ecosystems (GEF ID 4750), and in Ethiopia (GEF ID 3367).

Box 4: GEF SFM projects and conflict

Conflict and fragility–related risks adversely affect GEF projects, their implementation, and the sustainability of impacts (GEF IEO 2020a). More than one-third of the GEF's global portfolio is invested in countries affected by major armed conflict. This is true for GEF SFM projects as shown in figure B4.1. At the regional level, an analysis of GEF-supported forest protected areas showed a large portion of GEF projects affected by conflict with severe and fatal conflicts in and around these areas. Overall, conflict fatalities around protected areas are notably higher in Sub-Saharan Africa.

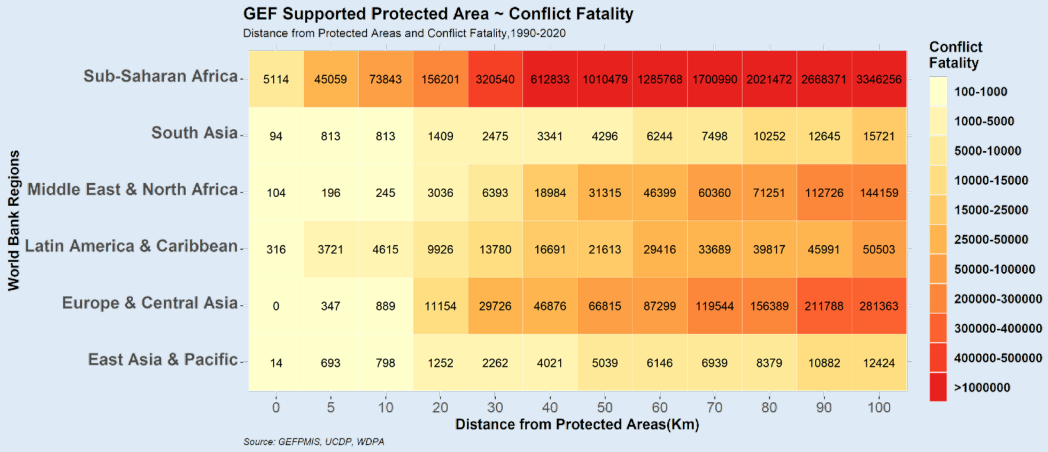

Figure B4.1: GEF-supported protected areas—conflict fatality
Sources: GEFIEO analysis; Data – Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project 2020.

Currently, several SFM projects in Afghanistan are affected by conflict and fragility. The number of conflict incidents and fatalities has increased over the last few months from 3,043 in January 2021 to 5,831 in August 2021 (figure B4.2). Even though some of the GEF SFM projects sites are located away from conflict hotspots (figure B4.3)., the complete cessation of all development work presents an uncertain future.

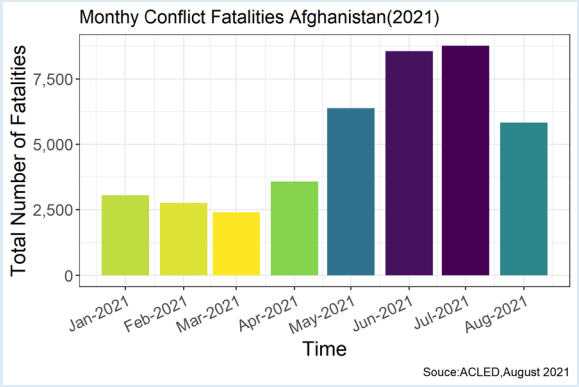

Figure B4.2: Monthly conflict fatalities in Afghanistan, 2021

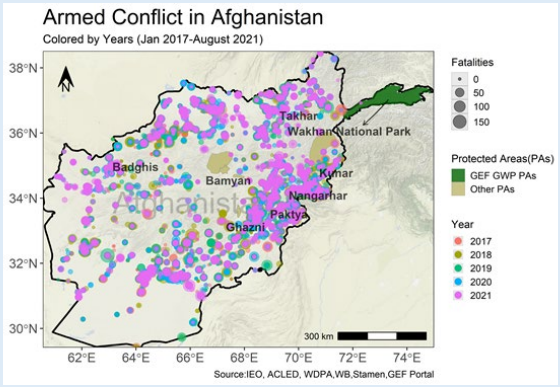

Figure B4.3: Armed conflict in Afghanistan, January 2017–August 2021

Forests can both fuel conflicts (Harwell et al. 2011) and provide opportunities for peacebuilding and recovery. Conflict-sensitive design and implementation is therefore essential if GEF-supported forestry projects are to foster good natural resource governance and achieve large-scale and lasting impacts. However, despite GEF projects' relevance and the risks they face, there is no consolidated set of directions or guidance to manage conflict-related risks.

However, several GEF projects have innovated and employed project-specific, conflict-sensitive approaches (GEF IEO 2020a). For instance, as seen in the figures below, several Colombian protected areas overlap with the conflict zones (figure B4.4), and forest loss in and around these protected areas increased in the post-conflict period (figure B4.5). A GEF project in post-conflict Colombia (GEF ID 5560, World Bank)[a] is now strengthening protected area management and landscape connectivity, reducing deforestation, and promoting land restoration. Besides their environmental objectives, these projects intend to provide opportunities for peacebuilding and long-term reform by building capacity, strengthening governance and institutions, creating jobs, and supporting livelihoods.

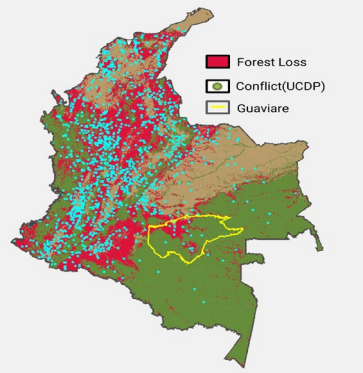

Figure B4.4: Forest loss and conflict areas in Colombia

Source: as above.

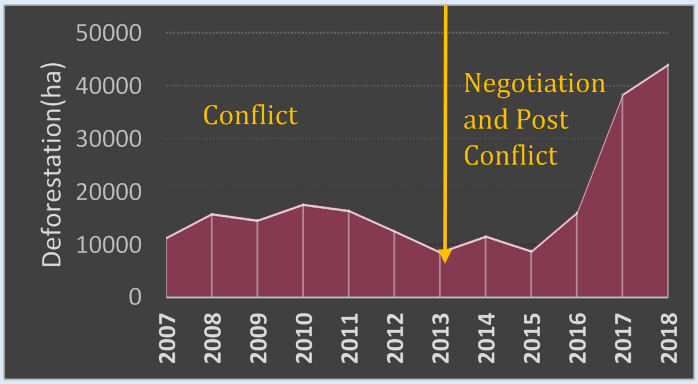

Figure B4.5: Forest loss during and after conflict in Colombia

Source: as above.

[a] - Forest Conservation and Sustainability in the Heart of the Colombian Amazon.

3.2.5 Efficiency

95. **Some GEF operational norms stifle efficiency of SFM projects, with rigid procedures, Implementing Agency rules, and logframes**. Key stakeholders noted how certain generic GEF operational norms and challenges have been limiting to the GEF's SFM efficiency as well as its effectiveness. Constraining modalities have included: lengthy programmatic design and approval processes; the drawbacks of national vs. external project implementation and the limited space for nongovernmental and non-Implementing Agency actors to contribute; inefficiencies in flying in external consultants who only variably understand the operating context; inadequate use of local expertise; and the lack of independence of some evaluations along with weak sanctions for poor performance. The separation of Implementing and Executing Agencies—such that projects designed by Agencies with a particular set of capabilities are not leveraged to use those capabilities in execution—also creates tensions, delays, and perverse incentives. Key informants also pointed out that rigid logframes and theories of change (see quote above at para 86) compound inefficiency and impede adaptive management, and questions were repeatedly raised about the low rigor of some documentation and lack of organized learning. These issues are largely not specific to SFM projects but the challenges within the GEF business model explain some areas of underperformance of SFM projects, as evidenced below.

96. **The longevity of the SFM theme over 26 years is a strength of the GEF, but lengthy time lags in program processes have not always helped individual projects**. A key resource across the GEF's 26-year portfolio has been *time*. Yet time has not always been well used in GEF SFM projects. The extended time lags between design, approval, and implementation are uniformly felt to undermine efficiency as well as the unique value of the GEF. They also limit the accessibility of grants and can leave projects vulnerable to political regime change. On average (median) it took an SFM proposal nearly two years and four months from PIF approval to receive the first grant disbursement (see volume 2, section 3.5.1). Although SFM projects are little different than other projects in facing the constraints of the GEF business model, the time lags do concern many stakeholders who find that the political or market window of opportunity for SFM is not open long enough to grasp.

Figure 16 below shows the average lifespan of each step of a GEF SFM proposal from PIF approval to the first disbursement date.

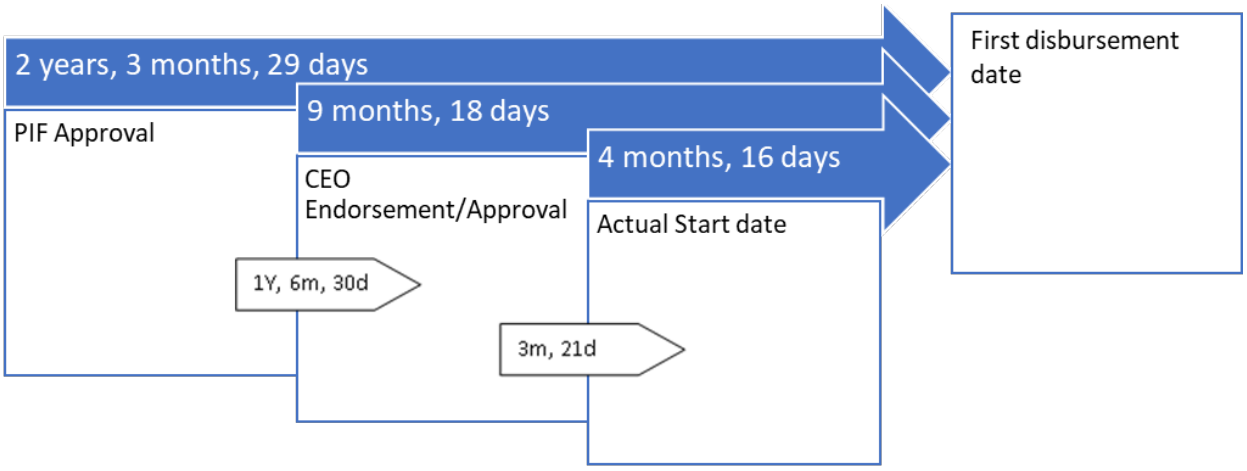

Figure 16: Life span of GEF SFM proposal

97. **Long delays before project implementation and insufficient use of local expertise have reduced efficiency in the Congo Basin**. Here, the time between approval of project idea and beginning of project implementation has been extremely long—an average of 2 years and 11 months and up to 7 years for Congo Basin SFM projects. (Political, conflict and epidemic–related changes over such periods in the region have often been major.) The benefits of rigorous preparation are then outweighed by the costs of reduced relevance and capacity as time progresses.

98. **Differences in accountability systems among institutions have constrained large projects in the Amazon.** Attempts to improve efficiency in the Brazilian Amazon ARPA projects involved decentralization of activities, with planning and coordination being the responsibility of the federal government (MMA), and finance control under the responsibility of an NGO with expertise to handle procurement activities with transparency but also agility (FUNBIO). Local operations are under the control of ICMBio, state-level environmental agencies, and more recently international NGOs such as Conservation International. This model has proved effective to attract cofunding. However, differences in accountability systems and methods between donors, public institutions, and NGOs "caught in the middle" have involved excessive energy wasted in bureaucratic work to make financial and other information compatible, and to accomplish transparency and auditing requirements for each of these systems.

99. **Smaller SFM grants have tended to provide greater value for money, while larger grants may achieve more transformational change.** We developed an indicative, top-level cost-benefit analysis by comparing the three headline aggregated categories of impact against the money spent in grants of low, medium, and high size.[31] Evidence from the portfolio analysis indicate that smaller grants are very effective in securing new jobs, and do comparatively well in forest protection, while medium grants were the best investment for forest protection and restoration (see table 7). Examples include projects in Thailand (GEF ID 3517), and Tanzania (GEF ID 3391). Surprisingly, larger grants did not excel in any of the three aggregated impact categories.

(a). *Smaller* grants had a return on investment (ROI) of 64,000 ha of forest protected per $ million, 65 ha of forest restored per $ million, and 618 jobs per $ million.

(b). *Medium size* grants had an ROI of 89,000 ha of forest protected per $ million, 3,486 ha of forest restored per $ million, and 110 jobs per $ million.

(c). *Larger* grants had an ROI of 59,500 ha of forest protected per $ million, 687 ha of forest restored per $ million, and 92 jobs per $ million.

100. This finding may simply reflect the outcomes typically targeted by projects of certain sizes, which could have focused more on less tangible outcomes such as in policy and governance. Indeed, we conducted a similar top-level analysis also for transformative grants, which revealed that larger grants were more likely to achieve *transformational change*, whereas smaller grants provided greater value for money. This occurred during the implementation of protected areas project in Madagascar (GEF ID 3687, and SFM in community production forests project in Mexico (GEF ID 3637) which were both larger grants and smaller grants such as the SFM and Land Management project in the Vietnam Uplands (GEF ID 3627).

Table 7: Impact results by grant size

Grant size (Number of projects) Total funding	**Hectares protected**		**Hectares restored**		**Jobs**	
	Hectares	**Ha/Million USD**	**Hectares**	**Ha/Million USD**	**Jobs**	**Jobs/ Million USD**
Low (n=64) $58.3 M	3,763,894	64,597.5	3,813.5	65.5	36,000	617.9
Medium (n= 118) $432.7 M	38,499,362	88,978.2	1,508,631.6	3486.7	47,674	110.2
High (n=61)	35,633,635	59,447.0	411,987.5	687.3	55,662	92.9

[31] The types of data available from terminal evaluations did not allow us to calculate a valid cost-benefit analysis, as it was not possible to estimate figures related to the outcome data produced by each project.

$599.4 M						

3.2.6 Sustainability

101. **Conditions for sustainability have been established by almost half of GEF SFM projects**. For 48 percent of projects with terminal evaluations (n=116), those evaluations mentioned that project activities were able to create the conditions for social, institutional, and/or environmental sustainability beyond the life of the project. Moreover, 41 percent of projects (n = 100) highlighted improvements in national and local institutions as the key to embedding sound natural resources management practices and facilitating the adoption of sustainable forest livelihood strategies. Another 41 percent showed knowledge creation and dissemination to be successful means for creating institutional sustainability: these covered web portals, guidelines, research papers, workshop series, and public education. See box 5 for further details on GEF support to various forest monitoring technology solutions and factors affecting their sustainability.

102. **Thirty-two terminal evaluations mentioned catalyzing as a successful approach to support the scaling up of project's activities, notably by network building and securing new funds.** While the absence of post-completion reviews years after project completion means that the sustainability issues indicated by terminal evaluations have not been routinely followed up, key informants suggest that improvements in national and local institutions and governance capacities have tended to explain sustainability in later years. In the Congo Basin, a strong example of organizational development that can sustain impact (GEF ID 3772, World Bank) is described in box 2. However, gains made in other GEF SFM initiatives in the Congo Basin appear much more fragile for lack of such investment in the local organizational power that could sustain them. This is in part because the Congolese legal framework is yet to require such investment and the consultation with vulnerable groups that would shape it. Meanwhile, the strength of progress made in initiatives related to REDD+ remains in question until climate finance becomes institutionalized. Other projects in Tanzania (GEF ID 3000) and Vietnam (GEF ID 1296) were also able to scale up activities through networks and securing new funds.

103. **However, some initially planned policy reforms have been too difficult to achieve for many GEF SFM projects**. Too often, contextual conditions were not favorable for the policy and institutional reforms necessary for sustainability. Forty-one projects encountered challenges in promoting law and policy enforcement, policy improvement, and addressing policy gaps. In these cases, the policy and institutional change processes they had planned were hindered by legal failures and delays, lack of political support, failure of agreements, and conflicts. For example, projects in Colombia (GEF ID 4111) and Peru (GEF ID-1446) had to reassess their strategies for legal and policy reforms due to lack of political support.

104. **While the policy environment for SFM remains unstable in much of the Amazon, GEF projects have helped to mitigate the effects**. A notable example of a contextual change was found in the Amazon case study, where the lack of policy coherence and budget cuts had hindered several environmental initiatives, including large-scale SFM projects in the Amazon. Nevertheless, the institutional design of ARPA/ASL and its engagement in state-level protected areas allowed ongoing financial flows, despite the dramatic cutback in public budgets. There is no doubt that the situation would be considerably worse without the GEF

SFM projects—a conclusion that also extends to the GATI project. For indigenous peoples, a crisis within the government institutions in charge of the indigenous peoples policy, especially at FUNAI, and the violent attacks against IPLCs peaking in the last decade, could have been much worse without the support provided by the elaboration of PNGATI policy.

105. **Through the actions of local actors, GEF SFM projects can find better ways of delivering global environmental benefits**. Key informants were clear that working at more than one level of government on SFM (e.g., from federal to state and local levels in Brazil), and mainstreaming gender approaches, were especially key to sustainability. The resulting durable, highly networked new institutions are now managing forest resources well in some, but not many, countries. In contrast, sustainability was compromised in countries where governments not only retained institutional silos but also did not take local people's capacity to manage forests seriously. Yet key informants felt that more was needed to strengthen the capacity of IPLC organizations and listen to them more closely—especially on their aspirations such as territorial sovereignty or sustainable collective forest businesses—not to divert GEF SFM away from global environmental benefits, but to find more sustainable ways of securing them through local actors.

Box 5: Sustainability of GEF-supported innovative forest monitoring solutions

Robust land monitoring is essential for accountability and learning, at country level and for GEF interventions. For countries, a land monitoring system helps to: assess and establish national forest reference levels; report for conventions and SDG targets; support transparency initiatives such as the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT); and establish national monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems.

Through several projects, GEF has supported countries in monitoring deforestation and forest degradation, land productivity, and land use change. These projects have piloted or mainstreamed new technology to address monitoring and data challenges, support analysis, inform decision making, and help track progress toward national commitments to the MEAs.

Some have pioneered novel ways of using satellite data. For instance, a GEF full-size project contributed a dynamic online forest monitoring and alert system to the Global Forest Watch (GFW) as core partner. GFW is one of the most widely used forest monitoring platforms, bringing together forest-related data from distinguished sources such as the University of Maryland, Nasa, and Google. Several GEF-supported projects, such as the regional project in the Caucasus,[a] are assisting countries to implement the GFW platform to support forest and biodiversity conservation and restoration. Indigenous communities are also using GFW data to monitor communal forests in the Amazon (Slough et al. 2021b). However, the global forest data hosted on the GFW is not suitable for monitoring forests in tropical dry forests and geographies with excess cloud cover.

Another GEF-supported project,[b] Satellite Monitoring for Forest Management (SMFM; GEF ID 5835), implemented by the World Bank, fostered a collaboration between the European Space Agency and the University of Edinburgh to develop tools to measure forest change and carbon stock in tropical dry forests. SMFM is an excellent example of cross-agency collaboration. The tools developed are now an integral part of the FAO-hosted System for Earth Observation Data Access, Processing, and Analysis for Land Monitoring (SEPAL) platform, which helps countries to monitor and report on forests and land use. Hosting these tools was not initially part of the project but became vital for the sustainability of the effort. Similarly, the GEF-supported land degradation neutrality (LDN) tool development has also helped countries to set and monitor voluntary LDN targets.

Sustainability is often a challenge for geospatial-based tools because of rapid technological changes, the impermanency of data and technology platforms, and the arrival of newer tools. However, the projects improved sustainability by building them into national reporting frameworks, integrating them with land use plans, linking them with existing and proven monitoring systems, and incorporating them in traditional surveys.

GEF support for strengthening land monitoring systems has therefore comprised several effective contributions supporting follow-up projects and country-level reporting. GEF could also capitalize on some of the technology solutions mentioned above for corporate-level monitoring and reporting results, but this opportunity remains underutilized. The support of the GEF through several projects and increasing availability of data and analytical platforms—such as the OpenForis, freely available high-resolution satellite data through Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), and free analytical tools through Google and Microsoft—provide good opportunities to incorporate forest monitoring at the GEF corporate level.

[a] Upscaling of Global Forest Watch in Caucasus Region, Available at: ttps://www.thegef.org/project/upscaling-global-forest-watch-caucasus-region

[b] Report: Satellite Monitoring for Forest Management: Use of Earth Observation Tools in the Monitoring of Tropical Dry Forests, b2021, World Bank Available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34998?show=full

3.2.7 Equity

106. **The GEF's improved safeguards and greater focus on local actors are very promising, and SFM projects have followed them at least at design stage, but are yet to deliver improved equity**. Key informants strongly and almost universally endorsed the GEF's

improved safeguards, especially on gender, participation, and indigenous peoples. While larger SFM projects were often felt to be inclusive in their design, this was much less so in their implementation. It is in implementation that partners face less frequent scrutiny on local IPLC engagement, and where IPLCs see only scarce support and few direct efforts to advance their rights or territories. Beyond isolated pilot projects, GEF SFM projects may have missed opportunities to promote devolution of control of forests to local groups, sometimes due to factors beyond GEF's control Integrated impact programs from GEF-7 were felt to offer comparative improvements in empowering local resource users, and some small grants have seen some real breakthroughs, but impacts so far on forest equity have been discouraging. Key informants voiced the tensions that are created by widespread lack of political will in key forest biomes, and especially among finance ministries, to assist IPLCs and favor empowerment of local resource users as opposed to favoring the agribusinesses that drive deforestation. Government capabilities to do this often remain underdeveloped. Key informant interviews also pointed to violation of human rights in several GEF-supported SFM projects, including some large projects.[32]

107. **The GEF's integrated landscape restoration approaches may offer the best prospects for empowering local actors.** As noted earlier, projects engaging local communities reported higher ratios of hectares of forest restored, especially in Africa. The GEF's integrated landscape restoration approaches offer good scope, both for empowering local resource users and for shaping political solutions to resolve the inequalities that often lie at the root of unsustainable forest management. They could be brought to the challenge of shifting artisanal mining away from ecosystem degradation, implementing the Minamata Convention.

108. **Developments in favor of gender equality and inclusion of ILPCs have been strong in GEF SFM projects in the Amazon.** Our Amazon case study found that GEF SFM projects such as ARPA 1 and 2, ASL, and GATI had empowered local communities through their participation in councils, notably in decision-making processes in which women were particularly encouraged to participate. There had been gender-specific activities to foster the economic conditions of women in ASL. And in GATI specifically, an innovation established an equal representation of government agencies (MMA and FUNAI) and indigenous representatives. The GATI project also embraced non-Amazonian indigenous peoples, addressing the distortion implicit in previous programs, which had excluded these communities, many of them in extreme poverty and with little forest.

109. **Analysis and planning for gender equality in GEF SFM projects have greatly improved—and have begun to have an impact in implementation**. There has been closer scrutiny of gender equity and some real progress, if not yet a sea change. The evaluation found an association between the GEF's recent evolution of gender policies and SFM grants' response with each GEF replenishment period. The GEF's gender response is characterized by four important initiatives: adoption of the policy on gender mainstreaming between 2011 and 2012; adoption of the gender equality action plan in 2014; adoption of the policy on gender equality in 2017; and adoption of guidelines on core and sub indicators (including gender-related indicators) in 2019. While grants approved from GEF-5 onwards were more likely to conduct a gender analysis, only 22 percent of projects with terminal evaluations, i.e., up to GEF-5, had had a gender and inclusion analysis (n= 53), and most of these (n=35) were only partial and only a few (n=18) conducted the full exercise. The remaining 78 percent (n=190) had no gender analysis. Results were even lower for inclusion of a

[32] GEF ID 6992, GEF ID 9155, and GEF ID 9159.

gender action plan, which only 8 percent of projects up to GEF-5 had done which included projects in Panama (GEF ID 133), India (GEF ID 84), Kenya (GEF ID 2848), and Indonesia (GEF ID 3279). In terms of gender outcomes, we found a significant association between projects with a gender analysis and those that were identified by terminal evaluations to be successful in furthering gender equality. This was very notable with gender action plans: 85 percent of the projects that had completed gender action plans were evaluated to have achieved gender equality outcomes.

3.3 GEF's SFM strategy

110. **The GEF's activities in relation to SFM have been well developed over nearly three decades.** While remaining firmly linked to the MEAs and aimed at global environmental benefits, the SFM portfolio has responded to changing contexts and emphases in international agreements and national needs, "reinventing itself" and renewing its justification with each GEF replenishment. It has both led and responded to progressive and evidence-based changes in practice. The SFM portfolio has become more integrated, investing more in projects that address multiple focal areas and multiple countries, and is run increasingly by multi-agency partnerships, with the impact programs perhaps the apex response to date. Key informants have appreciated many of the GEF's SFM trends over the seven GEF replenishment periods:

(a). **Biomes.** The portfolio increasingly targets key biomes, including the Amazon and Congo Basins and Drylands and other larger regions of high environmental value as well as economic value, and not only single countries.

(b). **Forest landscapes.** The GEF SFM approach has moved toward managing diverse forest mosaics, recognizing and supporting the synergies, trade-offs, and dynamics among different people and land uses, and not only targeting forest blocks.

(c). **Ecosystem integrity.** The GEF increasingly aims for high biodiversity, connectivity, and function, and not simply large areas of forest covered.

(d). **Integrated aims.** The GEF portfolio unites the goals of diverse MEAs in forest contexts—initially with a focus on biodiversity, then adding climate through REDD+ work and more recently nature-based solutions (NbS) and land degradation through restoration work, potentially pursuing joint human and forest health issues post-COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., through supporting the Minamata Convention in forest landscapes.

(e). **Emphasis on tackling drivers of forest degradation.** The GEF aims upstream at practical drivers of land degradation and developing progressive "deforestation-free" value chains involving market and civil society players as well as governments.

(f). **Stronger ownership by partners.** The GEF's broad, flexible approach to SFM has been attractive to countries as it can match their own needs, and has enabled implementing Agencies to play to their strengths.

(g). **More extensive stakeholder engagement.** Progressive policies and safeguards on gender and IPLCs have begun to open the door to much-needed "bottom-up" involvement and societal demand for SFM.

(h). **Investment in forests and their restoration.** An increasing number of financial innovations have begun to attract and de-risk private sector investment and interest micro, small, and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs). Cofinancing of grants over the GEF replenishment periods, when genuine, also offers potential scale.

(i). **Continuity and transformative impact.** While changes like those noted above are often welcomed by partner governments, there has also been a consistency and continuity of effort over time that enables the foundations for transformational change to emerge and become embedded in their own contexts in the right time.

(j). **More multi-country projects.** These have emerged, now representing one-third of the portfolio, but have only been substantially funded during GEF-7.

(k). **Innovations.** These include market-change adoption mechanisms for sustainable production and use, such as certification mechanisms; in forest management technology, innovation increasingly supports participatory community and small-business approaches and partnerships.

111. **Although the GEF's SFM activities and modalities have tended to become more complex and more ambitious in scale, there is not yet a clear and visible long-term vision for SFM.** Most key informants described the SFM portfolio variously as evolving and adaptive, or eclectic and pragmatic, as diverse "forestry responses" to the particular emphases of each GEF replenishment period, and/or as aiming for "best fit" to contexts rather than toward generic "best practices" (albeit with many best practices nonetheless emerging). They see a consistency in working with government, and strong strategy in relation to the impact programs, but otherwise are not aware of SFM being actively and consistently packaged, analyzed, developed, or managed as a whole SFM portfolio.

112. While usually aiming for "best fit" to each context rather than for generic "best practices" means that many government partners strongly "own" GEF SFM projects, it also means that forest projects have become overloaded with objectives, or simply gap-filling for immediate government needs. Projects rarely acknowledge or have a strategy to counter the financial scale and demographics driving deforestation. In addition, a limitation of multifocal area (MFA) programming is the inherent expectation that global environmental benefits from projects will be proportional to the amount of focal area resources invested (GEF-8 Strategic Positioning Framework 2021). SFM projects are spread across 133 countries to date and the 640 activities in 133 countries are not well connected and are not overtly building up unique learning or knowledge networks or indeed a forum around the SFM portfolio. This suggests there is more to do for effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, and sustainability.

113. However, the recent programmatic investments—such as the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program (ASL); Congo Basin Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program (CBSL); Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR); Global Wildlife Program (GWP); and the Restoration Initiative (TRI)—benefit from knowledge and learning through their global collaboration platforms. From a country-demand perspective, the number of countries covered shows impressive reach; there is widespread familiarity with the GEF's integrated approach to SFM; and the flexibility of GEF SFM support has enabled development of projects that are relevant to countries and support diverse government

priorities. However, the additionality of these global coordination projects is still to be demonstrated.

114. **Guidance and indicators for SFM in GEF programming and projects is inadequate to capture socio-economic elements; thus, key priorities and opportunities for SFM investments are missed**. While SFM is not itself a GEF focal area, it is an integrator for three existing GEF focal areas (biodiversity, climate, and land degradation), which together involve integration of approaches such as *protection* captured in area terms in Indicator 1 (maintenance of forest resources), *restoration* captured in area terms in Indicator 3 (forest and landscape restoration), and *management* captured in area terms in Indicator 4 (SFM and sustainable use of forests).. There is also some information captured on direct beneficiaries as a co-benefit of GEF investment in Indicator 11. However, clear guidance on how these indicators relate to SFM monitoring is needed. In GEF-7, the corporate level reporting was simplified through the introduction of 11 core indicators. It would be a timely opportunity to provide guidance for future projects to capture advances in the socio-economic benefits (UNFF Indicator 6) and the legal, policy and institutional frameworks (UNFF Indicator 7) as they relate to IPLCs."

115. **GEF SFM investments cover an extensive scope of activity, and GEF had the opportunity to mainstream some international forest and development priorities**. Despite not being a GEF focal area, and not being a financial mechanism for the UNFF, GEF SFM investments have helped to protect or restore large areas of forest and create thousands of jobs, as noted earlier. The GEF was well-positioned to pilot more SFM activities in areas the UNFF was exploring or promoting. The GEF could also have shared useful knowledge – cases and lessons- with countries and others engaged in forest interventions, on how to contribute to SDG-15 (Life on Land, the "forest SDG") and to other SDGs that depend on forests for their underpinning role in human health as well as water, energy, and food security since many of these SDGs are directly linked to the MEA objectives.

116. **The GEF's focus on major forest biomes is relevant, but there have been important gaps in coverage.** GEF SFM projects cover many countries. There was a very wide country uptake of the SFM Financial Incentive, which tipped the balance in favor of a country investing in its forests over other ecosystems. But there were no clear criteria for focusing on particular forests for, e.g., their intactness, diversity, or vulnerability. Even its recent focus on major biomes with intact high conservation value (HCV) forests, a lack of dedicated strategy linking GEF investments to a SFM portfolio has resulted in many fragmented projects, e.g., in the Congo Basin. Within the major forest biomes, different types of natural, planted, and agro-forests matter more than others for biodiversity, climate, and land degradation and for people affected—and greater levels of investment could be focused on these. The GEF is well-positioned to respond to the political imperative to "not to leave any forest behind"—making sure this means "not leaving any environmentally significant forest behind." Forests of high environmental value and high levels of need are relatively neglected in drylands and small island developing states (SIDS), where forest regimes have quite distinct roles of local and global importance. GEF investments in GEF-7, which included financial incentives to SIDS, and a dedicated Dryland SFM Impact Program were particularly important. Yet, it is important to note that due to a change in the GEF SFM incentive in GEF 7,50 countries which implemented multifocal area SFM projects in GEF-5 and GEF-6 were not part of the SFM impact programs or the FOLUR program. Of these 50 countries, one-third are SIDS. In GEF-8, the introduction of Critical Forest Biomes may again incentivize countries that were left behind in earlier phases. For more details refer to Annex 3.

117. **GEF support for broader policy and institutional reform at the national and sectoral levels is needed to achieve SFM.** When the GEF introduced its SFM incentive in GEF-5, more countries were encouraged to address forests preferentially when they spent their System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) allocations. However, neither the way SFM is presented conceptually by the GEF, nor the SFM Incentive, nor the mandates of SFM project actors, have proven adequate to shift prevailing political, economic, and demographic drivers away from business-as-usual in forests—with the result that loss of primary biodiverse natural forests is still accelerating despite a slowdown in the overall loss of tree cover. This is a challenge common to all international organizations working in forestry. Yet, the GEF is uniquely placed and well recognized for supporting improvements in biodiversity policy and institutions. Its recent work on the commodity chains that drive deforestation is a promising entry point to transforming economic systems, as it engages "mainstream" finance, trade, and agriculture authorities. Lessons could be learned from these for national forestry and land use policy and institutions, proposing "SFM policy and institutional reforms that work."

118. **Practical, evidence-based SFM frameworks and guidance are missing for the key tasks of engaging drivers of deforestation beyond the forest sector, and for making practical forestry trade-offs and synergies**. Critical synergies and trade-offs between social, economic, and environmental outcomes tend to "hit the ground" at local levels. The case studies demonstrate this and the terminal evaluations identified 27 GEF SFM projects that failed to adequately address trade-offs, plus only two projects deemed to have caused harm, which was associated with a lack of consultation with local communities. But there is another practical factor that is missing: strong and evidence-based frameworks to guide trade-off diagnostics, dialogues, and decision making among country stakeholders.

119. **GEF projects have not fully leveraged government support for including local groups in SFM**. The GEF's SFM work is valued for its significant and continuing support to state capacity, enabling "best fit" and adaptive approaches to SFM that have strong state ownership. But GEF projects have been less successful in leveraging government support for including the people who matter the most for sustaining forests. The GEF is not yet the go-to catalyst for tenure reform in favor of IPLCs, despite widespread evidence of the efficacy of **tenure reform** for SFM. Nor is the GEF seen as a prime mover in **government** collaborations with forest communities to develop sustainable businesses and notably MSMEs. **However, much can be learned from GEF projects** that have pioneered such work, such as the major rollout of 75 social responsibility contracts between local communities and businesses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3.4 GEF's SFM monitoring, evaluation, and learning

120. **Uneven monitoring and reporting by GEF agencies have constrained the learning and knowledge management on SFM.** Progress is currently measured mainly by area indicators, without much use of widely and cheaply available geospatial methodologies recommended by GEF—hectares of protected area (Indicator 1), hectares of land restored (Indicator 3), and hectares of landscapes under improved practices (Indicator 4)—as well as numbers of direct beneficiaries. Also, the indicators need to match their definitions. For instance, the core indicator "area of land restored (Indicator 3)" doesn't align with its current definition,[33] which indicates the areas *undergoing* restoration. There is no scientific

[33] GEF Core Indicator 3 "Area of land restored (hectares)" - Definition: This indicator captures the total area of land undergoing restoration in terms of ecosystem function and/or ecology. Source: GEF Results Guidelines.

precedent for using the indicator "area of land restored" for major global restoration initiatives that the GEF also supports, including the Bonn Challenge, which instead uses the term "area under restoration," and the definition remains the same as the GEF's. (This has now been addressed in the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework.) The nine SFM dimensions are not all covered.[34] Although projects are now encouraged to submit location information and GEF support have helped develop forest monitoring geospatial tools (box 5), the use of that information to monitor the SFM outcomes in projects is limited.

121. **Good provisions for monitoring, evaluation, and learning at project level were identified by terminal evaluations as a positive factor in achieving SFM outcomes, with the impact programs representing the best response to date, since they offer regional platforms for lesson learning on SFM.** However, learning has more usually been hampered by: inconsistent reporting on key performance indicators that are not specific to the many dimensions of SFM (e.g. only 44% of TEs reported on forest protection and only 15% reported on forest restoration); a bias toward reporting achievements and not failures; and socioeconomic and institutional outcomes being positioned only as “co-benefits” rather than essential motivators of SFM. The result is that, after 26 years, there is little accessible GEF-specific, corporate-level learning about how to support SFM. This potentially limits scalability and sustainability. The GEF SFM portfolio includes projects with major methodological and science innovations and a huge coverage of diverse contexts, and their learning deserves to be more widely disseminated.

122. **Monitoring and evaluation at program and project level in SFM has been of varying quality and not sufficiently independent, rigorous, and linked to performance**. Much GEF project reporting is dense and not very clear, with larger projects offering glossy findings and charts but with little compelling narrative and lacking standardized indicators of outcome and impact. Terminal evaluations rely on independent consultants whose future work is often linked to their evaluation’s findings but who frequently lack the methodological capability to be rigorous, especially on social issues, or to assess impact at scale, including use of geospatial analysis, which are both critical to SFM. This undermines the credibility of GEF claims on impacts and the opportunity to learn from SFM projects and refine SFM strategy. Furthermore, nationally directed funding at program and project level is insufficiently linked to SFM performance across national jurisdictions (e.g., as required by REDD+ or FLEGT). The GEF monitoring and evaluation system does not sufficiently incentivize in-country partners to encourage adaptive management and course correction to improve GEF SFM approaches and local ownership.

123. **While the GEF has many forest projects, communication about its SFM approach and results is limited**. SFM is not very visible in the GEF, other than the recent impact programs. Even the highly experienced and globally known forestry experts the evaluation consulted have limited awareness of the GEF’s SFM work beyond occasional projects. SFM is not a GEF focal area and the most visible SFM “entry point” into the GEF has been the SFM Financial Incentive, where the message was “extra funds if SFM is now addressed” rather than the “importance and value of SFM.” Indeed, in a context where the term “SFM” has now come to be seen by some as simply “greenwash” for corporate claims over forests—and not the desirable dimensions laid out by the UNFF—it is imperative to turn this around

[34] As noted earlier, the nine dimensions of SFM are the seven thematic elements put forward by the UNFF—extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; protective functions of forests; socioeconomic functions of forests; and legal, policy, and institutional framework—plus two additional criteria of scientific knowledge results and equality (including indigenous people and gender).

by laying out and monitoring "SFM that works"—which GEF could do from its wide experience and networks. While Implementing Agencies and project partners in the impact programs are increasingly well informed about SFM through the GEF's regional communication work, outside these structures, and beyond the GEF fraternity, there has not been good communication of the GEF's SFM approach and results.

4 Conclusions And Recommendations

124. The GEF is vital for SFM and continues to be one of the major sources of financial support for SFM. In a context of a worsening climate emergency, accelerating loss of primary forests, widespread forest degradation and the threats to human life and livelihoods these bring, it is crucial that the lessons from the GEF's experience so far help shape its future. The following conclusions are drawn from the findings.

125. **Conclusion 1: The GEF is well positioned as a natural and effective integrator of many goals concerning forests**. The GEF offers a way to integrate international environment and development goals related to forests, notably the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and governance and transparency initiatives such as the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT). Within countries, the GEF helps to manage trade-offs between international commitments and the myriad individual and collective needs and aspirations of people's livelihoods and businesses in forest-dependent areas. Within governments, the GEF's integrated approach has helped with the critical bridging of institutional silos that is needed for multi-objective SFM—supporting long-term capacity development, providing continuity of funding over periods that are far longer than those of traditional development assistance, and mainstreaming many SFM issues into policy debate and planning.

126. **Conclusion 2: Continued support, a substantial and diverse portfolio, and extensive scope of SFM activities calls for articulating a clear and visible long-term vision and theory of change for SFM.** In its three decades of support to SFM, there has been an evolution of approaches to SFM which has adapted to the GEF's programming directions, the context of global policies, donor and country priorities. Although the GEF's SFM activities and modalities have tended to become more complex and more ambitious in scale, there is not yet a clear and long-term vision for SFM. The recent focus on major biomes with intact high conservation value (HCV) forests, (Amazon, Congo), with additional regions included based on complementary criteria (commodities and FOLUR) is a welcome change, but lack of a clearly articulated and comprehensive long-term vision and strategy linking GEF investments to its SFM portfolio has resulted in gaps in coverage (explained in para 63). While the design has improved with some impact program-wide theories of change, programs are complex and time-consuming, and their effectiveness is yet to be established (other IEO evaluations; refer to annex 1). Many projects addressing critical SFM dimensions such as multiple benefits, engagement of indigenous peoples, and gender equity also exist outside the impact programs. The wide range of SFM activities in diverse governance regimes supported through both GEF projects and programs without an overarching vision makes it difficult to understand and assess the results of the GEF's SFM work in its entirety.

127. **Conclusion 3: There have been new developments in design but scope for improving M&E and learning remains.** This evaluation has clearly demonstrated the challenges in creating an SFM portfolio post hoc and assessing its performance. Good provisions for monitoring, evaluation, and learning at the project level were identified by terminal evaluations as a positive factor in achieving SFM outcomes. But evidence shows

that M&E systems often lack standardized outcome and impact indicators, with inconsistent terminal evaluations and data along key SFM dimensions including on trade-offs and benefits that are either unavailable or not collected. At the corporate level, the core indicators in GEF-7 are an improvement, but progress is currently measured mainly by area-based indicators over short time horizons. The gaps in monitoring and evaluation also constrain SFM-related learning and knowledge management necessary for uptake and dissemination. Impact programs offer improved design, and their regional platforms for lesson-learning on SFM are a welcome change, but most programs are at the formative stage requiring preparation for capacity building and partnerships, and their additionality is yet to be seen.

128. **Conclusion 4: Managing trade-offs and maintaining benefits of SFM interventions in the longer term remains a challenge.** Evidence-based frameworks to guide trade-off diagnostics, dialogues, and decision-making among country stakeholders remain a rarity. Good SFM project design exists but often does not get translated to action due to national capacity and implementation challenges. Evidence shows that even when many interventions deliver short-term benefits, these suffer from weak sustainability due to both factors internal to the projects and broader contextual factors.

129. **Recommendation 1: Enhance GEF's SFM strategy to include all elements necessary for a comprehensive, clearly articulated and visible long-term vision and strategy for SFM.** The GEF's SFM strategy has evolved and promoted the integration of focal areas in MFA as a starting point, and after GEF-5 & GEF-6 shifted from a scattered approach to funding projects to a consolidated approach in critical biomes. The GEF should now bring these elements together in a more comprehensive, clearly articulated, and long-term strategy for SFM going forward. This strategy should include:

(a). a clear articulation of the SFM vision, approach, alignment with the conventions' objectives, priority areas, and geographical focus

(b). SFM-specific theory of change

(c). guidance on definitions of terms

(d). clear criteria for inclusion in the GEF SFM portfolio; and

(e). guidance on indicators and monitoring results both for the intermediate and longer term, including for environmental, socio-economic, and policy dimensions of SFM.

130. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen monitoring of socio-economic co-benefits and promote learning.** The GEF should clarify and use relevant SFM indicators to capture multiple SFM dimensions, improving the measurement of socio-economic benefits where possible and consistent with project size and scope. Where feasible the use of geospatial analysis and social impact monitoring should be considered. Lessons on methodological and science innovations and broad coverage of diverse contexts of the results of SFM support could be better disseminated. Communication on GEF's SFM work is also needed to unblock awareness and barriers to practical SFM policy and practice.

131. **Recommendation 3: Support specific national and local priorities to manage trade-offs and maintain benefits.** The GEF should support national and local organizations to strengthen capacity, improve SFM enabling conditions and maintain SFM-related benefits and manage trade-offs. This includes promoting and strengthening forest rights and land tenure, setting minimum threshold levels of SFM project funding for IPLCs, considering

broadening the small grants, and providing more resources for adaptive management. GEF SFM support should also help engage with broader contextual factors such as the political economy issues affecting forests. In addition, the GEF should continue working with government partners and Agencies to influence upstream policies on forests and identify, track, and address drivers of deforestation beyond the forest sector.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1. SFM coverage and evidence from other GEF IEO evaluations

A significant proportion of all GEF interventions to date have taken place in forest contexts and have aimed to improve the sustainable management of forests. Yet there has never been a GEF forest focal area, or a consistent SFM definition and objective, and only recently an SFM impact program (IP). There has been no evaluation of the SFM work as a whole until now. Consequently, to evaluate the GEF's work on SFM, we have had to construct a *post hoc* GEF SFM portfolio. It is a mixed, eclectic, and evolved "bag" of 640 forest-related projects, which we have identified as *potentially* relevant to SFM's many dimensions.[35]

The SFM Evaluation Report describes how we evaluated this diverse set of projects. This is based mainly on portfolio review, key informant interviews, and case studies, against a consistent evaluative framework of 15 portfolio-wide and 19 project-focused questions.

While the intentions of the "mixed bag" of SFM projects are very diverse, they have tended to reflect certain priorities of successive GEF replenishment periods, some of which concern critical SFM dimensions such as multiple benefits, engaging indigenous peoples, and gender equity. Moreover, the priorities of GEF replenishment periods have also tended to shape the evaluation agenda. The Approach Paper for the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7) describes the evolution of GEF evaluations: the trend has been toward assessing how GEF handles complexity, risk, increasingly "integrated" programmes, and sustainability. All of these are relevant to SFM.

There are many recent GEF evaluations that address key dimensions of SFM in depth and in innovative ways that we therefore wish to draw on. Our SFM Evaluation Approach Paper was informed by the evaluation frameworks used in other GEF evaluations. Now we aim also to explore the *findings* of other evaluations where they offer *orientation* or *supplementary information* that adds to our own findings, or triangulates them—notably on the GEF's role, achievements, and challenges in particular aspects of SFM. Some evaluations also include SFM-relevant case studies and project lists.

With so much previous investment of evaluation expertise and time by IEO, it seems sensible to benefit from this growing body of learning. Nevertheless, each evaluation was designed for specific purposes and the concerns of different times, so we use them with caution in assessing the SFM portfolio. The following evaluations offer relevant evidence:

A) Evaluations touching on the GEF's key SFM results

(i). Value for Money Analysis of SFM Interventions;
(j). Evaluation of the Multiple Benefits of GEF Support through Its Multifocal Area Portfolio;
(k). Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs;

[35] The boundaries of what counts as SFM projects is not clear. GEF categorizes projects as "SFM' if they are at least one of 1 forest maintenance, 2 forest management/sustainable use, 3 forest/landscape restoration, or 4 regional/global cooperation in SFM – but these are not necessarily "sustainable'. Projects have also been understood as SFM simply if they involve SFM incentive money. While SFM was defined by the UNFF in 2007 in terms of seven elements (to which we have added two more, reflecting recent consensus), the GEF does not use this definition.

(l). Environmental Degradation Evaluation;
(m). Land Degradation Focal Area Study;

B) Evaluations covering the GEF's approach to SFM

(n). Evaluation of GEF Engagement with Indigenous Peoples;
(o). Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in the GEF;
(p). Evaluation of GEF Engagement with the Private Sector;
(q). Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling Up Impact;
(r). Evaluation of GEF Support for Transformational Change;
(s). Innovation in the GEF: Findings and Lessons. Approach Paper;
(t). An Evaluative Approach to Assessing the GEF's Additionality;

Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEFC) Evaluations covering geographic and governance contexts for forestry

(c). Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations e.g., of LDCs, SIDS and African biomes; and
(d). Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations.

Our scoping follows below. It is a brief review only: it simply reviewed the executive summary of each evaluation and used a word-search for "forest" and "SFM" to identify relevant information and observations. The diverse evaluations are very different and not amenable to a single meta-analysis. The review below was not able to address our evaluative framework questions in detail, but clear relevance to particular questions is noted for each (indeed many of the bullet points relate directly to one or two of our questions).

A) Evaluations touching on SFM results

- Value for Money Analysis of SFM Interventions 2019
    - Scope: Looked at 506 SFM projects that address one or more of the seven UNFF SFM elements and are over $1 M in GEF funding and cofinancing (para 14). Both a global portfolio review and a Ugandan country case study.
    - Geographic focus: Madagascar, Colombia, and Brazil are the three countries with the largest number of GEF SFM project locations (para 7)—considered "relevant" because focused on high-deforestation areas.
    - Outcomes: Four outcome measures were sought to "model the impact of GEF SFM projects': (1) vegetation density; (2) deforestation; (3) night lights as a proxy for socioeconomic measures; and (for Uganda) 4) in-country based survey metrics of household assets. Measures (1) and (2) were further used to estimate above-ground carbon stocks using the approach outlined in the VFM Analysis for Land Degradation Projects of GEF (IEO, 2016) (para 18). These were compared with non-GEF counterfactual nearby sites (para 22). Considered "effective" because 4,875 km^2 deforestation avoided (by projects explored) and 1.33 t C/ha/yr sequestered (para 9). Noted a strategic focus more on environmental outcomes in SFM projects than on socioeconomic "co-benefits," which were only "small positive" or broadly neutral (para 10). Where there are high night-time lights, a trade-off was clear—reduced environmental outcomes (para 13).
    - Recommendations—need better local information, baseline and monitoring of environmental and socioeconomic outcomes (para 13).

- Evaluation of the Multiple Benefits of GEF Support through Its Multifocal Area Portfolio 2018
    - Drivers of degradation: Most MFA projects aim to address drivers of biodiversity loss, land degradation, and deforestation or forest degradation, and are designed to generate multiple benefits through management approaches that address the priorities of several focal areas simultaneously (p. 18). Agricultural activities for food production were targeted by 59 percent of MFA projects as the main driver of deforestation or forest degradation (p. 19).
    - Integrated approaches: Most MFA projects use integrated approaches: land use, land use change, and forestry (at least 78 percent), integrated landscapes (67 percent), and forest ecosystem services and sustainable livelihoods in drylands (63 percent). Fig 1.2 offers a useful "hexagon" of opportunities for synergy across different focal areas and socioeconomic benefits (p. 3).
    - Financing: Notes the significant catalytic effect of SFM/REDD+ funding. When this envelope became available in GEF-5, 63 percent of MFA projects (n = 109) received SFM funding. As of September 2016, 77 percent of the GEF-6 MFA portfolio (n = 17) had received SFM funding. "Countries typically submit proposals for MFA projects within the first half of each GEF replenishment period to take advantage of SFM funds, which tend to run out without warning later in the replenishment period; in the absence of SFM funds, they preferred to develop Single FA projects" (p. 52).
    - Case studies: Five MFA case studies are the substrate for full evaluation (pp. 40–58) and are worth exploring. All address ecosystem degradation and forests: (pp. 24–39) Two stand out: Senegal Integrated Ecosystem Management in Four Representative Landscapes to address threats to BD and land, including community nature reserves. Malawi Shire Natural Ecosystems Management Project—SFM with CC, LD, BD (Vol 2 has much more on the Malawi case: p. 69 et seq in Vol 2). There is a comparison with SFA cases.
    - Massive M&E demands: "Agencies are required to prepare separate tracking tools for all the focal areas targeted by an MFA project. An MFA project combining biodiversity, land degradation, climate change mitigation, and SFM focal area objectives required a total of 1,055 data fields to be filled in GEF-5, reduced to 772 in GEF-6, of which 20 percent were considered high effort" (p. 53).
    - Gender: Gender-related indicators were specified in 29 percent of the MFA projects, and 28 percent reported positive socioeconomic outcomes related to gender equality at the terminal evaluation stage. Vol 2 also specifies a negative gender-specific outcome involving the Senegal Eco village case (p. 20).
    - Limited reference to indigenous peoples, but some indication of private sector engagement including in a Senegal case study (32).
- Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs 2018
    - Commodity focus: Of three IPAs—Cities, Food Security, and Commodities—the latter has most SFM relevance: *Taking Deforestation Out of Commodity Supply Chains* for commodities that are responsible for 70 percent of tropical deforestation globally—soy, palm oil, and beef (see Fig 1.2 p. 6 for logic). Covers

Brazil, Paraguay, Indonesia, Liberia. $10M out of $45M was an SFM window.

- Integrated approach: Annex E covers the Commodities IAP in detail—alignment, additionality, comparative advantage of partners, partnerships and especially business engagement, program-to-project coherence (TofC), innovation. It compares IAP with previous (simpler) forest projects (pp. 70–86) with an 11-page evaluation matrix.
- Tackling drivers: Concludes that IPAs' integrated programming to tackle the main drivers of environmental degradation addresses well multiple MEAs alongside national environmental priorities. (However, as a formative review, it stresses its focus has been on the set-up process rather than on results.)
- Stakeholder engagement: The Commodities IAP had external stakeholder consultations and outreach including to industry to understand how business tackles deforestation. Commodity platforms and roundtables in child projects helped collaborative partnerships (p. 29).
- Capacity and institutions: There has been innovation in a child project dedicated to knowledge capture and learning across the projects. Many of the commodity IAP's child projects relate to or rely on voluntary sustainability standards, certification, etc.
- Management complexity: IAPs draw on comparative advantages of many GEF Agencies and think tanks, but involvement of many in each IAP has made for complex management.
- M&E: Good M&E designs, but inconsistent MEB targets and tracking tools hinder aggregation within each IAP and for the three IAPs altogether.

- Land Degradation Focal Area Study 2018
  - Scope: The study aimed to inform GEF-7, based on an analysis of 618 land degradation focal area projects and MFA projects with a land degradation component. The land degradation focal area was established during GEF-3. There has been a consistent focus on forest and agricultural lands, but increasingly integrated landscapes—to the "cost" of a 35 percent decline in forest projects between GEF-3 and GEF-5 (p. 11).
  - Integrated approach: LD now combines principles of landscape approach and integrated ecosystem management to maximize the global environmental benefits of combating land degradation.
  - Outcomes: Good outcomes in reducing forest loss and forest fragmentation (p. x). VFM was analyzed against SDG 15 indicators: forest cover change, fragmentation, vegetation productivity.
  - Case studies: These were India-focused and include: Madhya Pradesh—community management of 15,000 ha of degraded bamboo forest in 10 forest divisions (pp. 20–21) and Uttarakhand community management of oak forests (pp. 21–22): sustainable results through participation and decentralization, but scale and skill challenges.
  - M&E: A big M&E burden has nonetheless been reducing. Of 239 LD tracking tool indicators in GEF-3, 16 concerned forest management; in GEF-5 this reduced to 4 FM indicators out of 61 for LD. (p. 14)

- Effectiveness: Two interesting findings: lag time of 4.5–5.5 years an inflection point before bigger impacts, with larger impacts in areas with poorer initial environmental conditions.

B) Evaluations of approaches to SFM—engagement, scaling up, transformation, innovation, additionality

- Evaluation of GEF Engagement with Indigenous Peoples 2018
  - Evaluation aims: To provide (1) a historical analysis of the GEF's engagement with IPs, (2) a rendering of good practices and lessons learned, (3) an analysis of GEF Agency conformity with GEF policies and guidelines on IPs, and (4) recommendations for roles and initiatives the GEF could incorporate in GEF-7. It looked at empowerment and engagement as objectives in their own right and not only "co-benefits."
  - Scope of indigenous peoples (IP) projects evaluated: There were 426 projects involving IPs spanning the GEF pilot to the middle of GEF-6 (IP portfolio is ~ 10 percent of projects approved). Cross-referencing the list in the evaluation report and the SFM portfolio list shows 138 projects in common.
    - By number of IP projects and by investment, the proportion of full- and medium-size projects that include IPs has now increased substantially.
    - BD focal area accounts for 55 percent of IP projects, with trends to CC and MFA.
  - Engagement: Two-thirds of all IP projects show "limited" participation or "moderate" IP involvement. Formation of an "agenda-setting" Indigenous Peoples Task Force in 2011, then IPs Advisory Group fulfills an important technical advisory and dissemination role. The Small Grants Program of UNDP has been a primary link for engaging IPs (116 of indigenous people's SGP projects were in the SFM theme, and 51 in forests and REDD theme). Positive on working through CSOs. However, poor gender inclusion; and could be more rights-based beyond FPIC.
  - Engagement: The most common barrier to indigenous peoples for access to SGP funding reported by the survey respondents was limited capacity in administrative management skills and communication technology in indigenous peoples organizations (76 percent). More research would be needed to understand whether the capacity support provided by many SGP offices partially addresses this issue, or whether novel approaches are required. The report mentions further barriers, as well as various mechanisms for assisting indigenous peoples in accessing SGP grants used by countries.
  - Indigenous peoples' governance, forests, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+), and indigenous peoples' policy development have relatively low frequency in the portfolio.
  - Safeguards: Implementing Agencies apply the GEF's Minimum Standard 4: Indigenous Peoples (2011, WB-based) fairly well, but it is not well monitored. They complain of restrictedness and ambiguity in the Standard. GEF's 2012 "Principles and Guidelines for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples" are acknowledged as useful but not aligned with human rights instruments and lack commitments and operational guidelines

- Case Study: A World Bank–funded sustainable forest management project in Panama trained 24 indigenous technicians on forest monitoring, verification, and reporting methods and let indigenous peoples take full ownership of the work (Mateo-Vega et al. 2017). The project included comprehensive monitoring coverage, reaching nine remote areas that previously could only be sampled using a much higher-cost method of airborne remote sensing.
- Case study: Catalyzing the Contribution of Indigenous Lands to the Conservation of Brazil's Forest Ecosystems (2934)
- Case Study: Conservation of Biodiversity in the Indigenous Productive Landscapes of the Moskitia, Honduras (3592). NB: Case study in common with Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation

- Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in the GEF 2017
  - Evaluation aims: To provide assessment of (1) implementation of Gender Equality Action Plan in fulfilling the Policy on Gender Mainstreaming, (2) appropriateness of the policy and its implementation against international best practices in the field and in relation to gender mainstreaming efforts taking place in other climate finance mechanisms, (3), GEF gender mainstreaming trends since the OPS5
  - Scope of projects evaluated: The evaluation using mixed methods, involved a quality-at-entry review of projects with the cohort from the OPS5 sub-study on gender mainstreaming (111 projects endorsed before endorsement of the PGM in May 2011, 271 endorsed after) serving as a baseline against which OPS6 gender results were compared. The evaluation also involved a review of project documents, midterm reviews, and terminal evaluations of projects completed since the conclusion of OPS5, and from the OPS6 project cohort to determine trends in gender mainstreaming reflected in project results and to identify lessons learned.
  - Implementation of GEF policy and processes: While 98.4 percent of the stratified random sample of 304 projects at entry, almost 33percent mentioned gender with respect to gender-specific objectives and only 65 projects (21.4 percent) mentioning gender when discussing in project documents, the institutional and partnership arrangements developed as part of the project and parts of the documentation reflecting on coordination with other relevant initiatives and partners in the area. Differences in ratings and performance between the MSPs/FSP and Enabling activity grants, consistent with differences in the process tools (templates), highlighted the effect of GEF processes on the extent to which projects addressed gender at entry. Comparison of OPS6 quality-at-entry data against the baseline showed an increase in the rate at which some gender consideration was present in project documentation from 56.5 percent to almost 98 percent, although the extent to which this was consistent across all elements of project documentation varied, with projects being on average stronger in addressing gender in the context description and project description, and weaker in the partner descriptions and objectives and activities. Analysis of the OPS6 data showed 70 percent of projects used gender-disaggregated indicators, only 17.8 percent (54 out of 304 projects) included gender-specific indicators in their

project results framework. Analysis of quality-at-entry documentation showed a 13.9 percent rate at which MSPs and FSPs mentioned having conducted of a gender analysis and/or social assessment with gender elements, and an even lower rate at which findings from such analysis were shared. Only Fifty-two percent of projects planned to, or had conducted, a gender analysis. Review of projects not mentioning gender analysis revealed low rates of mention of alternative approaches to determining the differential needs, roles, priorities benefits, impacts and risks of women and men (13.4 percent—17.9). 18 percent of CEO-endorsed and -approved projects under OPS6 as gender mainstreamed or higher; with 1.6 percent rated as potentially gender transformative. Comparison between the OPS5 post–May 2011 baseline and the OPS6 project sample highlighted that the biggest change over time was the rate of projects being rated gender blind, dropped from 64 percent and 29.2 percent for the OPS5 pre–May 2011 and post–May 2011 samples, respectively to 1.3 percent, reflected in the growth in the proportion of gender aware projects. Improvement in the rate of projects rated gender sensitive and gender mainstreamed was limited.

- Multifocal area projects outperform single focal area projects when comparing gender ratings by focal area, with 23.5 percent of multifocal area projects being rated gender mainstreamed. Roughly 22 percent of climate change and 16 percent of biodiversity focal area projects were rated gender mainstreamed. 46.2 percent of projects in the land degradation focal area were rated gender sensitive.
- Case studies: UNEP's ecosystem project in Haiti (GEF ID 5531) analyzed gender vulnerabilities, including how male vulnerabilities influence overall social pressures; set a strong baseline that informed gender-differentiated targets and activities; and included gender-disaggregated targets and indicators in its results framework
- Five projects were rated gender-transformative at entry, though none from projects in the SFM portfolio.
- Analysis of completed projects involved a stratified sample of 249 projects in the OPS6 cohort against the OP5 baseline, showed that only 35 percent of the OPS6 completed projects reviewed considered gender, compared with nearly 40 percent of the OPS5 baseline projects. Analysis of gender considerations in project results frameworks found that only 26.5 percent of OPS6 completed projects included gender-disaggregated indicators and 1.2 percent used gender-specific indicators. A gender analysis took place in 15.6 percent of the OPS6 completed projects, and 3.2 percent shared the results of the analysis. Five projects mention that a gender analysis was planned, but provided no evidence of such an analysis having taken place by the time of project completion.
- 45 percent of OPS6 projects reviewed are gender blind. 41 percent of projects were rated gender aware, 11.2 percent were rated gender sensitive, and 2.4 percent were rated gender mainstreamed. Comparison between the OPS6 and OPS5 cohorts showed a decrease of over 15 percentage points in the gender-blind category while projects rated gender aware increased by more than 15 percentage points. The rate of gender- mainstreamed projects decreased.
- Despite all being gender relevant, 45.4 percent of the OPS6 cohort did not

mention gender in a meaningful way. With 37 projects, most gender-blind projects are part of the biodiversity focal area. 41 percent of projects reviewed (102 out of 249 projects) were rated gender aware. 11.2 percent of projects were gender sensitive, with most having completed a gender analysis or social assessment.

  - Case study: As a last example, in the World Bank project Forest and Environment Development Policy Grant (FEDPG) in Cameroon (GEF ID 1063) the project document talks about gender, "The Partners shall seek to adopt a common approach…relating to cross-cutting domains such as respect of the rights of indigenous peoples, gender equality, etc." (World Bank 2016b, 53), but the project implementation reports, midterm review, and terminal evaluation provide no evidence of any gender results.
  - Case study (gender-sensitive): Some projects did not discuss a gender analysis, but gender elements in project components and project implementation point toward a gender analysis having taken place. One of the completed projects visited in the OPS6 cohort, the UNDP project in Honduras, Conservation of Biodiversity in the Indigenous Productive Landscapes of the Moskitia (3592), supported the inclusion and/or equal representation of women on the boards of indigenous federations and local committees to enhance gender balance in decision making and, with the support of a gender consultant, designed interventions to build the capacity of women in the fishery and ecotourism sectors. NB: Case study in common with the Indigenous Peoples evaluation
  - In relative terms, most of the land degradation focal area projects are rated gender aware or gender sensitive, 45 percent and 25 percent respectively.
  - Only 2.4 percent of completed projects reviewed (6 of 249 projects) were rated gender mainstreamed.
  - Case study (gender mainstreamed) - UNDP's land degradation project in Senegal, Groundnut Basin Soil Management and Regeneration (GEF ID 2511), actively tackled the common practice and tradition of excluding women in issues of access to land. Rural councils have adopted deliberations to grant good quality and well-located land to women's groups. Despite some regional differences related to religious pressures, project interventions have developed in communities, especially for women, a sense of confidence and of having better control over their quality of life. None of the completed projects of the OPS6 cohort were rated gender transformative

- Evaluation of GEF Engagement with the Private Sector 2017
  - Online survey of the GEF's private sector stakeholders recognize that environmental issues (as per the GEF focal areas) are important on a global scale, with 50 percent of those linked to the SFM funding agreeing that environmental issues are "important to crucial" to companies' core business (p. 9)
- Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling up Impact 2019
  - Background: The GEF 2020 Strategy and programming directions set a clear vision to scale up Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). This has translated into a shift to IAPs and IPs to achieve impacts at scale. The SFM IP "highlights the need to scale up the successes of GEF-supported pilots, particularly by addressing

drivers of environmental degradation… address[ing] both environmental and economic issues, often through a programmatic approach'. The IEO treats scaling up as one indicator of progress toward impact, and notes how recent evaluations such as on transformational change and the GEF's support for legal and regulatory frameworks emphasized the importance of scaling up if GEF is to in achieve larger-scale impact.

  - Mechanisms: The evaluation examined the main GEF approaches to scaling up: replication (beyond pilots), mainstreaming (in government machinery, market or behavioral transformation), and linking activities (to cover larger areas together). GEF Agencies' bring their own approaches; indeed, the comparative advantages of Agencies often determine which approach to use (para 226).
  - Case studies: 20 "full-information" case studies plus 40 others with incomplete information are not of high forest relevance—but there is good case material on Costa Rica PES scale-up lessons. In 95 percent of the cases, scaling up was achieved by *replicating* interventions over a wider geographical area (para 71).
  - Outcomes: In general, GEF support generated greater outcomes per dollar per year during the scaling up stage as compared to the piloting stage, reflective of cost-efficiencies and higher cofinancing leveraged (para 77). Effective scaling up typically takes over 5 years (para 228).
  - Sustainability: In cases where scaling-up activities continued beyond GEF support, the GEF contributed to their sustainability by:
    - Catalyzing or establishing sustainable sources of financing and strengthening institutional capacities (paras 103, 140, 155);
    - Improving stakeholders' "ownership" and willingness to scale up, by participatory processes, and by knowledge initiatives offering evidence of benefits including learning (para 117);
    - Derisking innovation (para 234); and
    - Ensuring the intervention was part of existing plans and policies and mechanisms, a response to urgent external events, or to international commitments (paras 144, 151, 122).
  - Recommendations: A revised scaling-up framework is suggested (para 174).

- Evaluation of GEF support for Transformational Change 2018
  - Background: GEF considers "transformational change" important because "incremental environmental action has been inadequate'. Defined as "engagements that help achieve *deep, systemic and sustainable change* with large-scale impact in an area of global environmental concern" which aim to "flip" market and (government) *systems* along with *sustainability* in environmental, social and financial terms.
  - Framework: Suggests a framework for assessing transformative change (p. 30): ambition (market/system/scale); mechanism (mainstreaming; demo+replication; catalytic); internal factors; external; outcomes (market/system/scale/sustainability).
  - Case studies: The evaluation focused on eight cases nominated by agencies

because of “depth and scale of change” achieved—including Namibia and Amazon protected areas.

- Sustainability: Cross-case QCA showed financial sustainability is most elusive—best success where govt budget changed. Looked for the conditions needed for sustainable transformation: key are government ownership, policy, and market environment, CSO/community participation, and partnerships

- Innovation in the GEF: Findings and Lessons. Approach Paper 2020 work in progress
  - Background: Over successive GEF replenishment periods, evaluations have concluded that the GEF’s high success rates (93 percent in GEF-5) may mean that GEF is too risk averse. GEF could take more risks and invest in a range of innovative approaches to be more transformative, not simply be cost-effective with what works (a suggested risk appetite of 25 percent failure). GEF-7 now refers to the GEF’s comparative advantage in being an innovator, incubator, and catalyst. Impact programs (including SFM) are designed to promote and support innovations to “achieve breakthroughs.”
  - Framework: Five “innovation domains” are identified by the GEF STAP: technology, financing, business models, policy, and institutional innovation.
  - M&E: There is no systematic tagging of innovation in the GEF portfolio. So, the IEO scanned the terminal evaluations of 1328 completed projects to identify overall trends in the use of 39 keywords (pilot*, innov*, new_technolog* and experiment* came up most). Agencies are nominating innovative projects “with highest learning potential” for evaluation based on 12 case studies, key informant interviews, and cross-case analysis.
- An Evaluative Approach to Assessing the GEF’s Additionality 2020
  - Background: GEF depends upon levering local investment to produce GEBs—covering the “incremental cost” of this.
  - M&E: It is difficult to assess the baseline, counterfactual and thus additionality of GEF work—only 60 percent projects reviewed (random 97 no.) even had an environmental baseline.
  - Framework: Six additionalities are noted: env, legal, institutional, financial, socioeconomic, innovation, i.e., not just env. However, only environmental additionality is prominently recorded in documentation (for 95 percent projects vs only 41 percent financial, 11 percent innovation). Additionality comes not just from projects and GEF finance, but also from GEF influence and the conventions.
  - Recommendation: Track GEF contribution to capacity, legal change, market incentives.
- Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF 2020
  - Guidelines for Agencies are clear, generally compatible with Agency practices, useful, and not onerous
  - Stakeholder engagement issues noted: Implementation constraints - capacity to integrate meaningful stakeholder engagement into design and implementation, inadequate budget and time to undertake quality stakeholder engagement, and country contexts

- Policy issues: Policy requirements cover the full project cycle but front loaded. As a result, documentation tends to be focused more on compliance than on actual results
- Recommendations: Additional monitoring and reporting commitments are required
  for the GEF to show policy effectiveness and support learning on inclusion; highlight strategic relevance of inclusion to the GEF

C) Evaluations covering geographic and governance contexts

- Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations 2020
  - Forest issues: Forest fragility and forest people's fragility is increasing through conflict. Forests are used by armed factions as resources (finance, cover, refuges; para 79). Environmental protection work in forests is causing conflict through restricting access (para 23).
  - GEF SFM work in fragile or conflict situations: There is quite a bit: Congo, drylands, some Amazon (para 76). Also forests as peace initiatives, e.g., in SE Asia (para 27, 35).
  - Case studies: Offered of Colombia (para 123, 189, 267), SE Asia (Emerald Triangle forested area along the borders of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand—peace-building), Congo (para 216), Liberia (Box 2.1), and Guinea (para 137).
  - Gender case study: references to gender integration in projects in the SFM portfolio from Colombia, seeking increase women's access to resources and addressing their participation in decision making (para 271).
  - Human rights case study: references [forest] project that stands out for its adapting to respond to human rights issued relating to indigenous peoples' rights and autonomy over historic lands, something the Colombia case above does as well (para 265).
- Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation (SCCE): Sahel and Sudan-Guinea Savanna biomes Volume 1 2020
  - Forest issues: An area facing much deforestation (para 17) which is host to one of Africa's top BD hotspots, the Guinean forest (para 19).
  - GEF SFM work in the biome: The evaluation looked at how many projects addressed deforestation (22 percent) and forest BD threats (a little less)—rather, the project portfolio is carbon/climate dominated.
  - Case studies: While there are numerous mentions of forest projects, they are only brief. However, the evaluation offers an interesting sustainability matrix (context and project-related contributing factors on a per-country basis; pp. 98–99).
- Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation (SCCE): Least Developed Countries (LDCs) 2020
  - Forest issues: Notes forests are critical to the development and welfare of LDCs, although rates of deforestation vary greatly across LDCs
  - GEF SFM work in LDCs: Tackling deforestation (c 23 percent) and protecting BD are the 2nd and 3rd biggest foci of LDC GEF projects (CC the 1st at 51 percent). Moreover, over GEF-5 and GEF-6, there has been an increasing share of SFM grants through multifocal area interventions

- Case studies: Some material on Conservation and Management of the Eastern Arc Mountain Forests project in Tanzania (paras 39, 50, 92); Cambodia lack of sustainable outcomes (para 68), Bhutan sustainable outcomes (para 80–83). NB, in addition the separate GEF Program Evaluation of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) (2020) includes brief forestry case material on Samoa (para 114 et seq) and Bangladesh (para 105) connected to climate resilience, but otherwise little on forests.

- SIDS Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation SCCE 2018
  - Looks at determinants of sustainability of the outcomes of GEF support in SIDS
  - Forest issues: While the evaluation assesses the relevance and performance of GEF support to SIDS' main environmental challenges, it notes that the 39 SIDS are a heterogeneous group. However, there is a prevalence of deforestation and forest invasives in many SIDS. Even a small number of such problems can be critical in small islands.
  - GEF SFM work in SIDSs: Only 15 percent of GEF SIDS projects have a forest management focus; most concern BD, CC, institutions, and land degradation. However, integrated approaches like ridge-to-reef approach and blue economy are strong in GEF SIDS work, with a focus on water-energy-food nexus. There are five GEF-6 national projects in SIDS with SFM set-aside funds, in the Caribbean and the Pacific. In addition, Guinea-Bissau and São Tome and Principe are in the global program The Restoration Initiative (TRI) in support of the Bonn Challenge (para 55). A review of 45 closed SIDS projects with terminal evaluation reports showed 76 percent had positive environmental outcomes—mainly in biodiversity, deforestation/land degradation, and water quality/quantity (para 79). SIDS governments have said that, because of their small size, they do not have access to some large programs and incentives, such as SFM. "In reality, SIDS could have access, but it takes time to develop projects in SIDS and most PIFs were submitted late in the GEF 6 cycle, when SFM resources were no longer available" (para 155).
  - Case studies: St Lucia Iyanola integrated landscape planning/community enterprise and reforestation to address agricultural slash-and-burn in PA forest buffer zones—in much detail, inc geospatial (Box 3 and Annex 3); Comoros community agrosilvopastoral reforestation for local climate resilience (NB general importance of agroforestry in SIDS; paras 45, 82); Guinea Bissau forest PPs involving communities (para 83).

Annex 2. List of Interviewees

CONGO BASIN INFORMANTS

1. Albert Bakanza, Head of the Agriculture component of PIREDD Equateur-WWF, DRC
2. Rosie Cooney, former GEF STAP member
3. Henk Hoefsloot, Consultant, retired Feb 2021 from role with Tropenbos International, previously involved with GEF initiatives in the region
4. Joseph Itwongwa, REPALEAC Sub-regional Coordinator, ANAPAC-DRC National Executive Director and representative of indigenous peoples, DRC
5. Daniel Mukubi Kikuni, Expert at the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Directorate of Sustainable Development, Biodiversity Division, DRC
6. Arundhati Kunte Pant, Project design consultant in the Congo Basin
7. Herve Lefeuvre, WWF-US Central Africa/Congo basin with GEF initiatives
8. Félicien Mola-Mo-Lokanga, project beneficiary, consulted in the field in Bikoro, DRC
9. Valentin Engobo Lufia, renewable energy supervisor in the indigenous community, Lokolama village. Member of the pygmy community. DRC
10. Muhinya Godefroid Ndaukila, Directeur-Chef de Service de Développement Durable, Point Focal Opérationnel GEF, Point Focal National REDD+, Point Focal National FONARED, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, DRC
11. Nadege Nzoyem, Corine Moser, Beatrice Avalos - Rainforest Alliance, with GEF initiatives in Cameroon and DRC
12. Johan Robinson. Chief, GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, Ecosystem Division, UNEP
13. Jean-Marc Sinnassamy. Impact Program Manager. Senior Environment Specialist. GEF Secretariat. Manages the project portfolio related to Sustainable Land and Forest Management for the Africa region and the Indo-Malay Pacific region.
14. Emma Stokes, World Conservation Society with GEF initiatives in Republic of Congo, DRC and the region

AMAZON BASIN INFORMANTS

1. Adriana Moreira, GEF, and former The Word Bank, Team Task Leader ARPA, and ASL
2. Ana Paula Prates, MMA Director of Protected Areas (2011-2013) and Ecosystems (2017-2019)
3. André Nahur, Nature for Climate Strategy Director Conservação Internacional (CI-Brazil)
4. Bernadete Lange, The Word Bank, Team Task Leader ASL (since September 2020)
5. Carlos Castro, Former UNDP officer in charge of GATI

6. Francisco Itamar Gonçalves Melgueiro, head of the Department of Environmental and Territorial Management, Environment Secretary of Amazonas State and ASL focal point
7. Iara Vasco, MMA civil servant and general coordinator at FUNAI during GATI
8. Izabella Teixeira, former MMA Minister (2010-2016) and Executive-Secretary (2008-2010)
9. Manoel Serrão, Chief Operating Officer (COO), FUNBIO
10. Marcos Paulo Lima Barros, President of the Community Association of the Madeira Sustainable Reserve (included in ARPA/ASL)
11. Paulo Henrique Martins Skiripi, educator and PNGATI participant, Rikbaktsa Indigenous People
12. Robert Miller, senior consultant GATI/UNDP
13. Ronaldo Weigand, senior consultant ARPA 2 (previously MMA Coordinator of ARPA 1)

GEF STAFF

1. Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Director of Programs
2. Mohamed Bakarr, GEF Lead Environmental Specialist
3. Claude Gascon, Manager GEF Secretariat - Programs Unit
4. Jean-Marc Sinnassamy, GEF Senior Environmental Specialist
5. Ulrich Apel, GEF Senior Environmental Specialist
6. Pascal Martinez GEF Senior Environmental Specialist
7. Paul M. Hartman, GEF Senior Environmental Specialist

GEF IMPLEMENTING AGENCY STAFF

8. Andrew Bovarnick, UNDP
9. Maxim Vergeichik, UNDP
10. Garo Batmanian, World Bank
11. Tim Christophersen, UNEP
12. Jeffrey Griffin, FAO
13. Tom Hammond, FAO (Written submission)
14. Joshua Schneck, IUCN
16. Herve Lefeuvre, WWF-US

GEF EXECUTING AGENCY STAFF

17. Emma Stokes, WCS

18. Nadege Nzoyem, Rainforest Alliance
19. Corine Moser, Rainforest Alliance
20. Beatrice Avalos, Rainforest Alliance
21. Fred Stolle, WRI

GEF PROJECT DESIGN CONSULTANTS

21. Bill Jackson, For FAO
22. Josh Brann, For UNDP
23. Yves Desoye, For UNDP
24. Anthony Mills, For UNEP
25. Adriana Moreira, For World Bank

GEF-AWARE FOREST EXPERTS

26. Penny Davies, ex CLUA/Ford ex DFID
27. Maria Leichner, President of Fundación Ecos Corrientes
28. Jeff Campbell, Ex Director of the Forest and Farm Facility, FAO
29. Tom Griffiths, Forest People's Programme
30. Kerstin Cisse, SIDA

Annex 3. Countries that are not part of GEF-7 SFM impact programs

(These countries received SFM incentive in GEF 5 and GEF 6.)

Africa (11)	**Asia (9)**	**ECA (8)**	**LAC (5)**	**SIDS (17)**
Benin	Afghanistan	Albania	Belize	Antigua and Barbuda
Chad	Bhutan	Azerbaijan	Chile	Bahamas
Eritrea	Cambodia	Belarus	Costa Rica	Cuba
Mali	Lao PDR	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Honduras	Dominican Republic
Mauritania	Myanmar	Kyrgyz Republic	Venezuela	Fiji
Niger	Nepal	Serbia		Grenada
Rwanda	Pakistan	Tajikistan		Haiti
Senegal	Philippines	Turkey		Jamaica
Sudan	Sri Lanka			Kiribati
Togo				Marshall Islands
Zambia				Palau
				Sao Tome and Principe
				Solomon Islands
				St. Lucia
				Timor Leste
				Tonga
				Vanuatu