



Independent Evaluation Office

SUMMARY:

JOINT GEF-UNDP
EVALUATION
OF THE SMALL GRANTS
PROGRAMME

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Full Report can be accessed at:

<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/sgp.shtml>

<https://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/sgp.pdf>

Summary: Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme

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FOREWORD



In 2008, the Small Grants Programme (SGP) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was jointly evaluated by the independent evaluation offices of the GEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). That evaluation was crucial in shaping the way forward for the SGP.



The terms of reference for the Fifth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS5), approved by the GEF Council in June 2012, included a key question about the extent to which the SGP had been successful in broadening its scope to more countries while continuing to ensure success on the ground, following on several reforms introduced as a result of the 2008 joint SGP evaluation. The SGP's fifth operational phase was also coming to an end in mid-2014, requiring an independent terminal evaluation. It was thus appropriate for the GEF and UNDP Independent Evaluation Offices to join efforts once again to evaluate the SGP.

The purpose of this second joint evaluation of the SGP was to assess the extent to which the most important recommendations and related GEF Council decisions emerging from the 2008 evaluation have been implemented, the factors that have affected their implementation, and the extent to which these recommendations and Council decisions remain pertinent in light of current and future circumstances. The evaluation also looked at the SGP's current role and results in terms of effectiveness in achieving global environmental benefits while addressing livelihoods, poverty, and gender equality; broader adoption of grant-level results; the SGP's strategic positioning; and monitoring and evaluation. Initial findings of the evaluation contributed to the OPS5 chapter on the SGP.

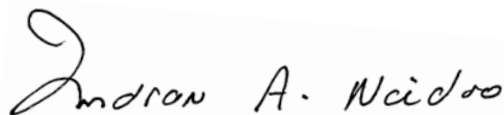
The evaluation, conducted between February 2013 and February 2015, adopted a mixed-methods approach. It covered the period since the previous joint evaluation to July 2014. It included 12 country studies encompassing extensive interviews, field visits to grant project

sites and documentation review; a global online survey gathering responses from 124 countries; a meta-analysis of 50 evaluations referring to the SGP; an in-depth review of a sample of 30 SGP country program strategy documents; a portfolio review of detailed financial data; and interviews with central-level SGP stakeholders.

In December 2014, a draft joint evaluation report was discussed in depth with major central-level GEF and UNDP stakeholders at UNDP's offices in New York. The feedback gathered at this workshop was extremely useful in the finalization of the report. A joint GEF-UNDP management response was provided in May 2015 and is included as annex B of the main report. The report and management response were discussed at the GEF Council meeting in June 2015, and will be submitted to the UNDP Executive Board at its September 2015 meeting.



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BACKGROUND

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) created the Small Grants Programme (SGP) in 1992 with the explicit aim of developing community-led and community-owned strategies and technologies for reducing threats to the global environment—notably in connection with biodiversity loss, mitigating climate change, and protecting international waters—while addressing livelihood challenges.



The SGP was created as a corporate GEF program and is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) provides financial and administrative support to the program, and a global Central Programme Management Team (CPMT) provides supervision and technical support to program countries. Activities in each participating country are guided by a country program strategy (CPS), developed in line with a global template. Each participating country has an SGP national coordinator, supported substantively by a national steering committee and operationally by a program assistant. Project ideas are generated at the community level.

The principal strategy of the SGP is to provide small grants—up to a maximum of \$50,000—to needy communities to support the use of practices and technologies

that benefit the global environment. Since start-up, the SGP has provided over 18,000 such grants to communities in more than 125 countries. In line with the overall GEF strategic approach, funds under the SGP are also used for related capacity development, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), knowledge management, scaling-up and replication, and project management.

The overall objective of the SGP during its fifth operational phase (OP5, 2011–14) was to secure global environmental benefits through community-based initiatives and actions. An aim during OP5 was to expand coverage to 136 countries.

The total GEF funding allocated to the SGP is \$288.28 million, of which \$134.62 million is SGP core funds (i.e., an allocation determined as part of the overall GEF replenishment discussions). The remainder represents funds designated to the SGP by countries out of their GEF System of Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) country allocation. Beyond GEF funds, total SGP cofinancing mobilized at the time of grant approval was \$345.24 million from diverse sources. OP5 was designed to contribute to the following GEF focal areas: biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, international waters, chemicals, and cross-cutting capacity development.

This evaluation responds to a direct request from the GEF Council. It covers the period 2008 to the present, with a focus on OP5. It is a joint effort of the GEF and UNDP Independent Evaluation Offices. The evaluation's execution structure includes a steering committee, a management team, and an evaluation team; this last includes independent evaluators, consultants, and research assistants.

WHAT WE EVALUATED

The evaluation examined the following aspects of SGP:

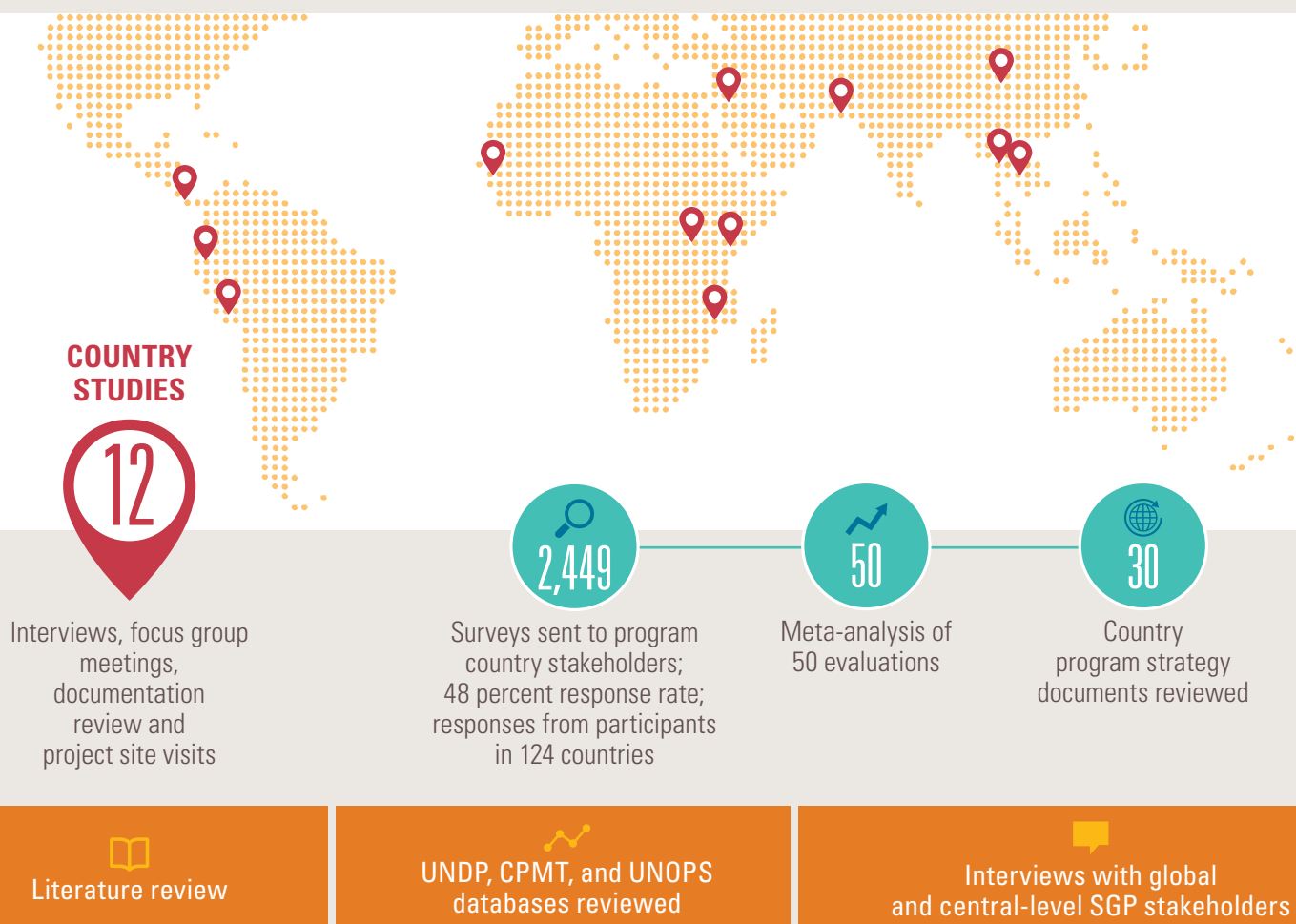
- SGP's current role and the extent to which SGP has effectively contributed to achieving global environmental benefits while addressing livelihoods, poverty, and gender
- Broader adoption of SGP outcomes at the local scale and beyond
- SGP's strategic positioning

- Efficiency issues, with particular attention to the upgrading of SGP country programs and related policies, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

METHODS USED

The evaluation was conducted in four main steps: planning and design, data collection, analysis, and report writing and consultation. The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analyses.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TOOLS USED



SNAPSHOT

of the **EVALUATION'S FINDINGS**

SGP grants support projects that have high levels of success in securing global environmental benefits in both mature and newer program countries.

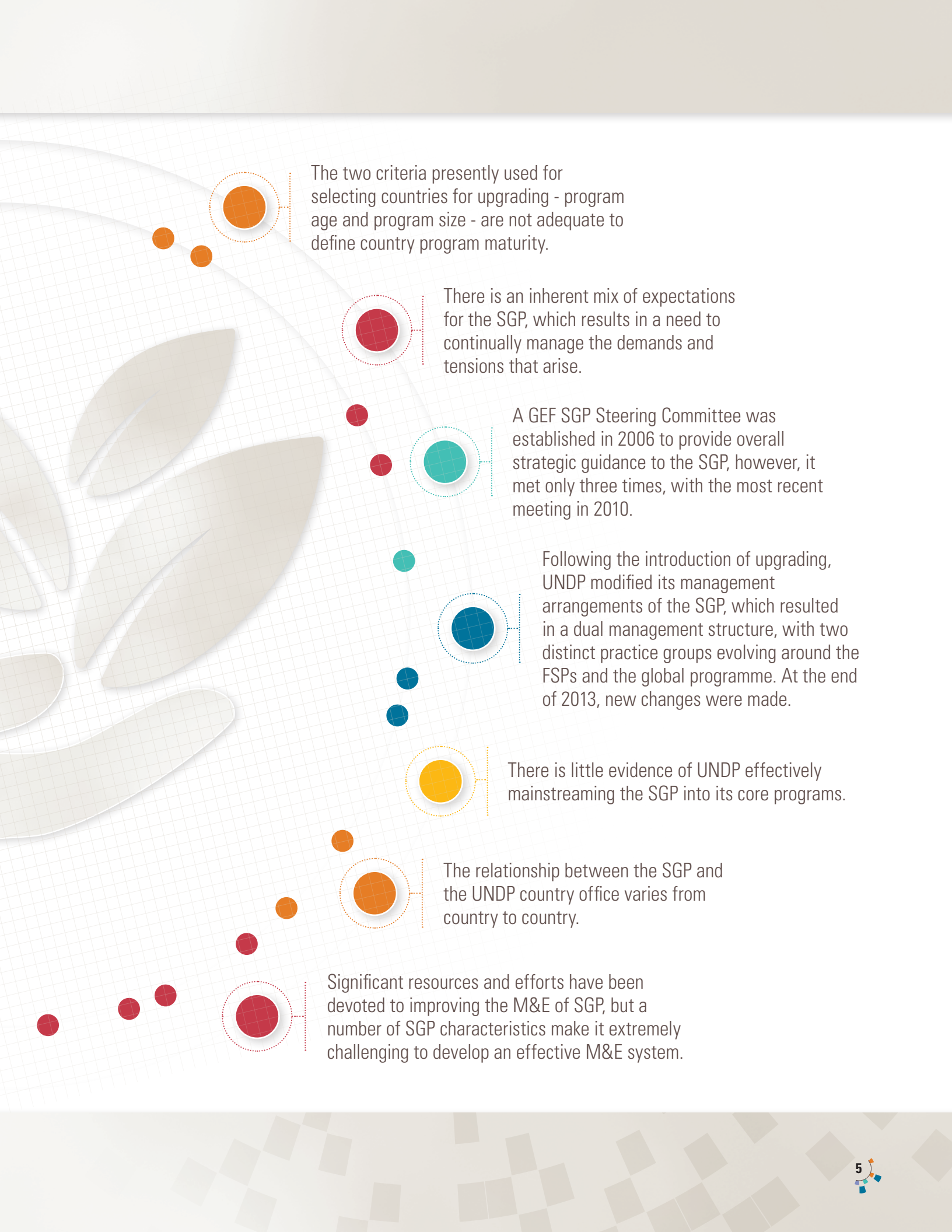
SGP has given significant attention to community-level benefits and livelihoods: 85 percent of the sampled projects contributed in some way to improve livelihoods.

Since 2006, the SGP has undertaken several steps to promote gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, with results evident on the ground.

Expectations of the SGP achieving some form of broader adoption (mainstreaming, up-scaling, or replicating) began to emerge with the introduction of the upgrading policy.

None of the visited SGP country programs had a specific strategy for broader adoption, yet broader adoption occurs, particularly in the form of replication and scaling-up and at a local scale.

Implementing the upgrading policy has had a series of direct and indirect consequences, which have affected SGP in both positive and negative ways.



The two criteria presently used for selecting countries for upgrading - program age and program size - are not adequate to define country program maturity.

There is an inherent mix of expectations for the SGP, which results in a need to continually manage the demands and tensions that arise.

A GEF SGP Steering Committee was established in 2006 to provide overall strategic guidance to the SGP, however, it met only three times, with the most recent meeting in 2010.

Following the introduction of upgrading, UNDP modified its management arrangements of the SGP, which resulted in a dual management structure, with two distinct practice groups evolving around the FSPs and the global programme. At the end of 2013, new changes were made.

There is little evidence of UNDP effectively mainstreaming the SGP into its core programs.

The relationship between the SGP and the UNDP country office varies from country to country.

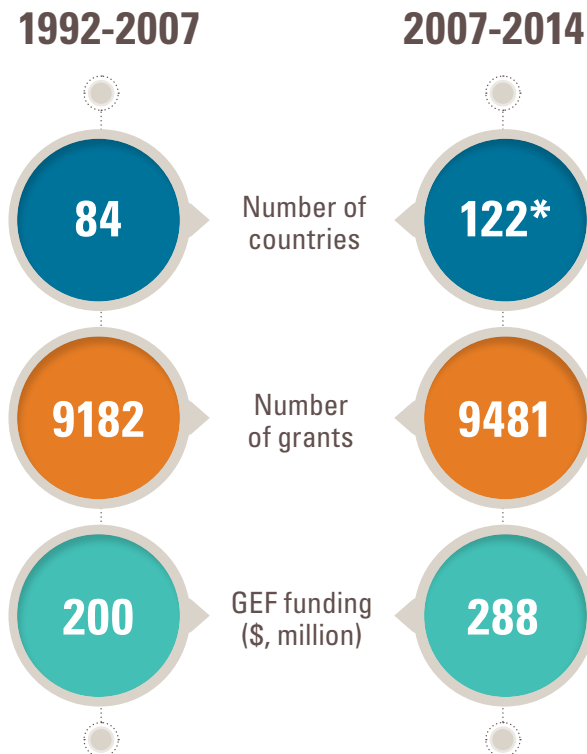
Significant resources and efforts have been devoted to improving the M&E of SGP, but a number of SGP characteristics make it extremely challenging to develop an effective M&E system.

WHAT WE FOUND

Evolution of the SGP

The SGP was originally set up as a program to support local initiatives dealing with the environment and development issues of global relevance. The number of countries participating in the program at its start-up in 1992 was 33; by 2007, this number had grown to 84. Various decisions from the GEF Council requested an increase in the number of countries participating in the SGP. As a result, the number of countries participating in the SGP has increased considerably since 2008 (Figure 1). Most of this increase took place from 2008 to 2010.

Figure 1: SGP Growth: Participating Countries and Grants Awarded



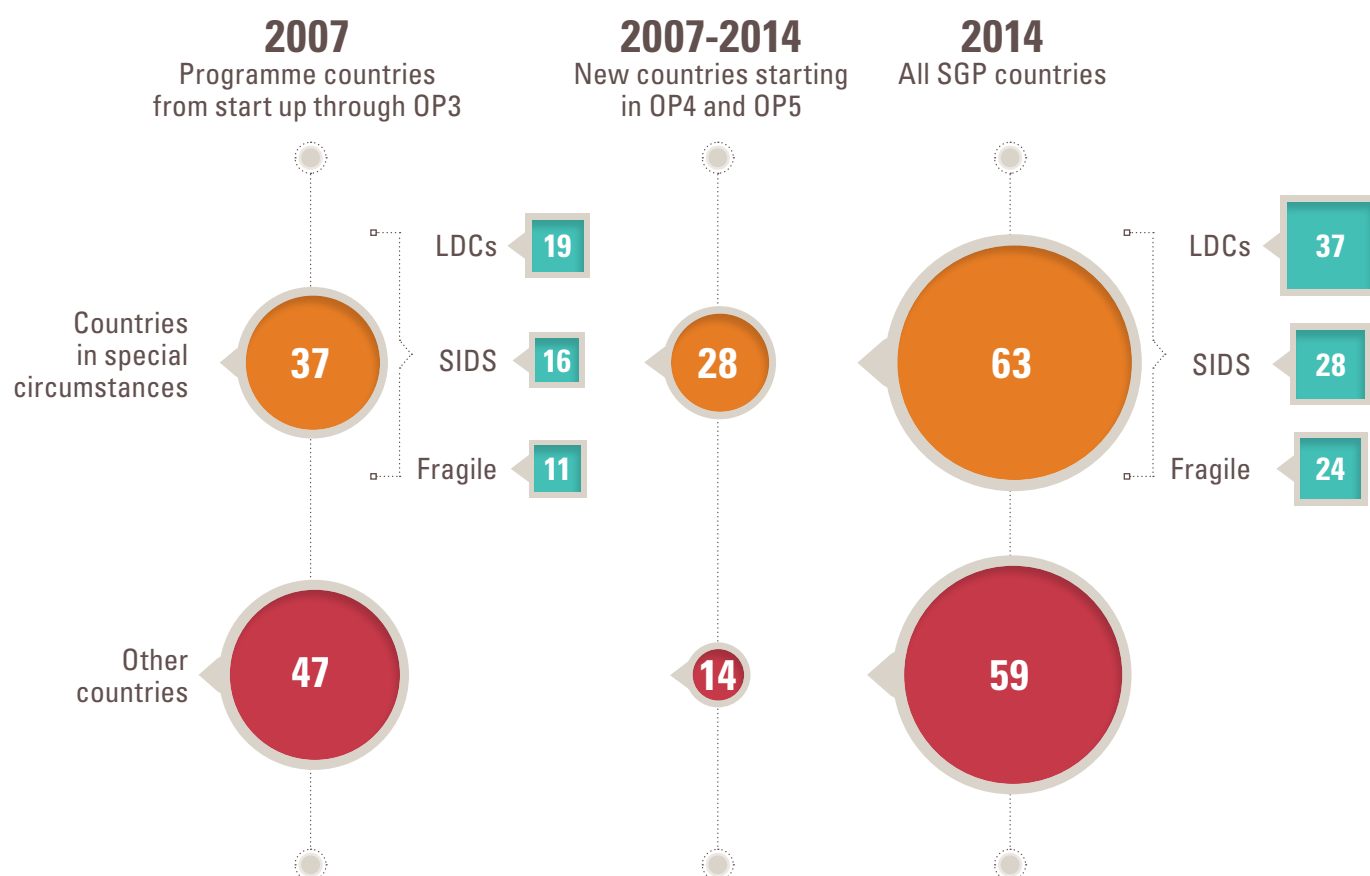
* Active programs as of July 2014

Importantly, the new countries include a high proportion of small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), and countries in fragile or conflict-affected situations —places in which it is generally considered more difficult to establish SGP programs. The proportion of these countries is much higher among countries beginning to participate in the SGP after mid-2007 (Figure 2).

Until 2007, all SGP country programs were financed through SGP core funds. The SGP was not initially designed to be permanent, and there were sunset provisions established for the duration of each country program. The intent was to graduate country programs after a period of time, in order to create budget space for new countries as well as to encourage partner governments to take greater initiative on their own to support the environmental protection efforts of local government and civil society organizations (CSOs). Conclusions and recommendations of a 2008 joint GEF/UNDP evaluation and of the SGP and the GEF Fourth Overall Performance Study (OPS4) stimulated debate around the future of the SGP among GEF Council members and other stakeholders, culminating in major changes to the program. SGP became a permanent modality of the GEF, and the concept of graduation was further defined in an upgrading policy.

This upgrading policy included several important funding and operational changes. First, references to sunset provisions for country programs were curtailed.

Figure 2: Growth in SGP Participation by Countries in Special Circumstances



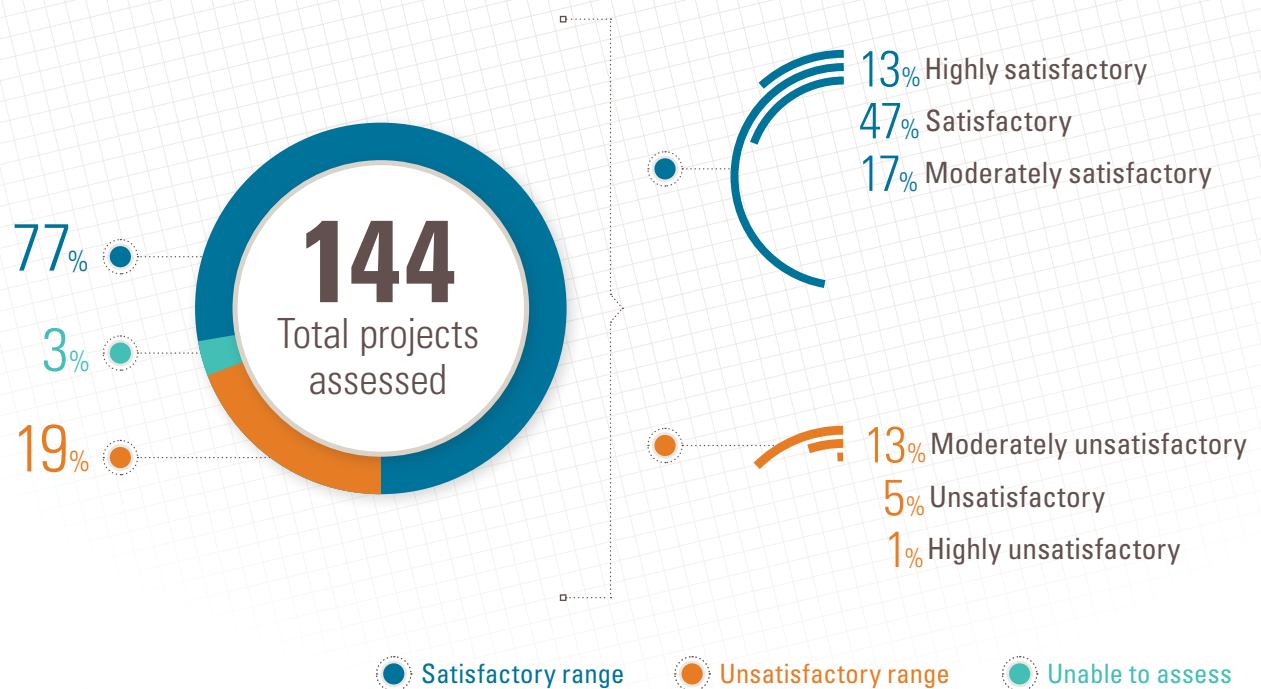
Second, an upgraded country program was to be treated as a GEF full-size project (FSP) (albeit expedited) and funded through the general GEF program budget—for example, using the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) during GEF-4 (2006–10), and then the STAR in GEF-5 (2010–14). In addition, the non-upgraded country programs still managed by the CPMT could utilize a mix of SGP core funds and funding from country RAF/STAR allocations. Finally, financial limits were placed on all SGP country programs to avoid squeezing out other GEF priorities.

Results

Global Environmental Benefits

The SGP's overall objective for OP5 is to secure global environmental benefits through community-based initiatives and actions. Evidence collected in the countries visited by the evaluation team indicates that SGP grants continue to support projects that have high levels of success in securing global environmental benefits in both mature and newer program countries. A total of 144 grant projects in 11 countries were visited and assessed with respect

Figure 3: Overall Outcome Ratings of Sampled SGP Projects



to their relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. These ratings were combined into an overall outcome rating. Seventy-seven percent of the grants thus assessed were found to be in the satisfactory range in terms of overall outcomes (Figure 3).

Evidence collected in country also reveals that 61 percent of the 144 sampled projects face negligible or only moderate risks to sustainability; 37 percent face significant or severe risks. These findings are comparable to sustainability ratings for other GEF projects: over the last several years, around 60 percent of GEF projects have received ratings of moderately likely or higher as to the sustainability of their outcomes.

Poverty and Livelihoods

Evidence gathered suggests that the SGP has given significant attention to community-level benefits and livelihoods, and that

this attention is yielding positive results. The design and actual results of 115 grant projects implemented in eight countries were examined in terms of their contribution to community livelihoods (Figure 4). With respect to design, 38 percent of the sampled projects explicitly sought to benefit poor, marginalized, or vulnerable communities and to contribute to improving their livelihoods. Another 37 percent aimed to contribute to the livelihoods of the local population, without focusing on particular groups. Some projects (16 percent of the sample) included references to livelihoods, but this element was not a significant part of the project design. Only a small percentage of the projects (6 percent) did not articulate any expected contribution to improved livelihoods.

In terms of results observed, 85 percent of the sampled projects had contributed

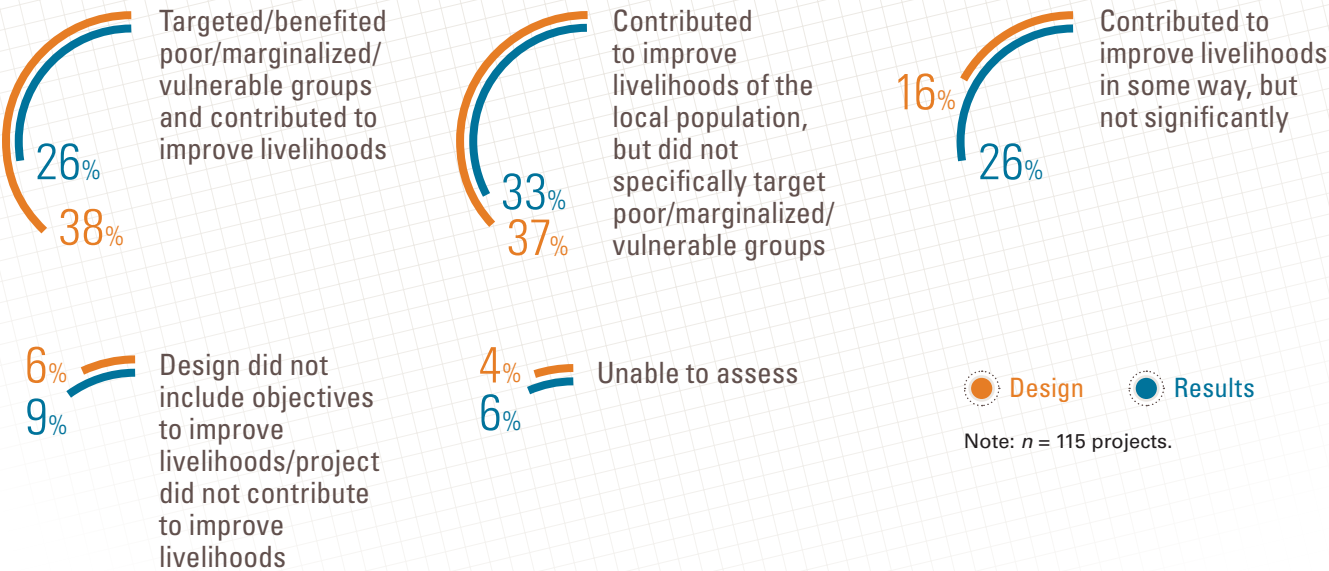
in some, although not always significant, way to improve livelihoods. In many cases, this contribution to livelihoods was in parallel with a contribution to global environmental benefits. For example, a solar cooker project, whose stated objective was to regenerate vegetation, also helped reduce the time spent gathering wood and tending a cooking fire, thus allowing women time to pursue other income-generating activities.

National-level respondents to the survey, including SGP managers and decision makers, generally feel that the SGP's efforts to address poverty, inequality, and exclusion issues strengthen the program's ability to meet its environmental objectives. Interviews at the country level confirmed that most national stakeholders feel the SGP is addressing livelihoods and poverty reduction, but that there is much less agreement as to whether the SGP addresses the needs

of the poorest, the vulnerable, and the marginalized.

At the global level, SGP planners and managers are committed to addressing socioeconomic objectives within the SGP, and many senior CPMT and UNDP stakeholders believe that the SGP should make a special effort to target the poorest of the poor. There is a lack of consensus among key stakeholders on the extent that other socioeconomic priorities should be addressed within the SGP. Some view the incorporation of livelihood components into SGP projects as an end in itself. Others suggest that addressing livelihoods is a useful strategy for achieving global environmental benefits. A third view is that other mechanisms should be used for combating poverty and injustice, and care should be taken not to dilute the SGP's primary mandate.

Figure 4: Livelihoods: Differences between SGP Project Design and Project Results



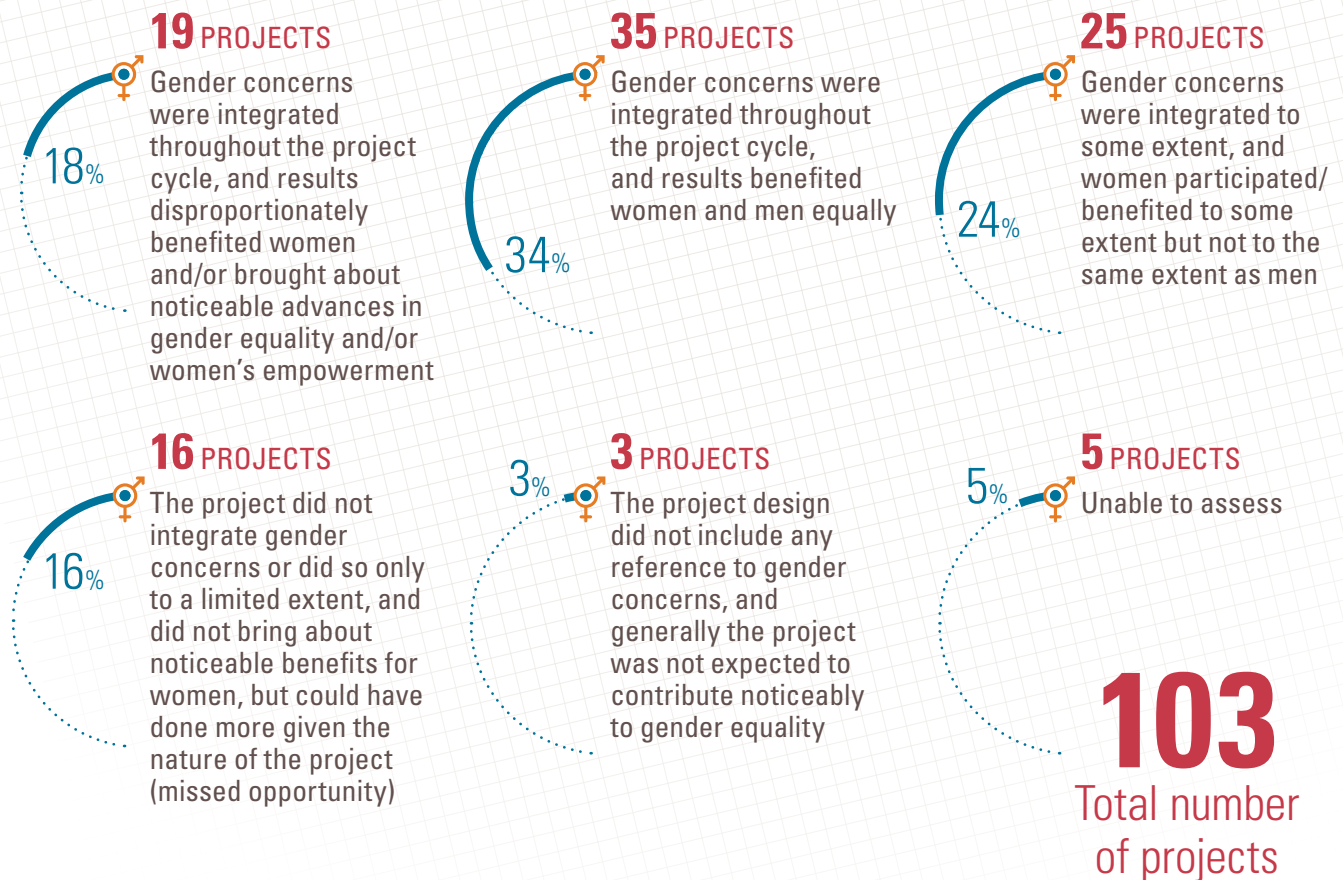
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Since 2006, in line with evolving GEF and UNDP policies, the SGP has undertaken several steps to promote gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. The CPMT has a gender focal point and has provided guidance materials and training for national stakeholders.

National SGP stakeholders generally believe that attention to gender and women's empowerment has strengthened the country's ability to meet environmental objectives. Actual results on the ground in terms of promoting gender equality and contributing to gender empowerment are

evident. Of the 103 grant projects that were assessed with respect to gender (Figure 5), more than half were found to have benefited women and men equally, or to have disproportionately benefited women. Many other projects benefited women, although not to the same extent as men. These benefits to women take different forms—for example, access to microcredit, increases in income, greater livelihood security, access to water and energy, or time savings from a new technology. Sometimes benefits were indirect. For example, in one case, the drilling of boreholes for watering trees reduced the need for women to walk long distances to fetch water. Women and

Figure 5: Gender Assessment of Sampled SGP Projects



 Percentage of projects

men also mentioned increases in women's empowerment. Several noted that women had taken on new leadership roles in projects, which had subsequently extended to their greater participation in other community activities, including decision making. There was no evidence or perception of a trade-off between the SGP's gender and global environmental objectives.

The SGP's achievements in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are inevitably accompanied by challenges. A range of factors influences results in this regard. At the global level, extremely ambitious targets were set in the OP5 project document; notably, the first target is that "all SGP projects include gender analysis or incorporate gender relevant elements in a positive manner." Even though the CPMT has provided the SGP countries with guidance and tools, there is little evidence of gender or social analysis being carried out either during CPS development or during project design. Similarly, despite OP5 targets and indicators, there is limited use of sex-disaggregated data in project reporting. Local contexts and the traditional roles of men and women also influence the extent to which women are involved in project activities. In some contexts, women's traditionally subordinate role to men and lower educational levels affect their involvement in project activities. Gendered division of labor also plays a role: a number of the sampled projects focused on activities that are traditionally carried out by men, such as fishing or certain agricultural activities; thus, these projects involved more men than women. However, other projects were focused on activities traditionally led by women.

Broader Adoption in the SGP

Broader adoption occurs when SGP achievements are mainstreamed, up-scaled, or otherwise replicated and the associated costs covered by another source. As outlined in the GEF theory of change framework broader adoption of the outcomes achieved by GEF projects (e.g., through GEF support to strategies, techniques, technologies, approaches, knowledge management, and institutional capacity) is critical if the GEF is to achieve long-term global environmental benefits in the long run. Due to its very nature as a small grants modality and to the local scale of its operations, the SGP cannot be held accountable for achieving global environmental benefits through broader adoption of grant-level results. Thus, in this first assessment of broader adoption in the SGP, the aim is not to provide evaluative judgments, but rather to provide a fuller understanding of whether and how broader adoption takes place and the mechanisms being used for broader adoption; and to consider where and how change is taking place and under what conditions.

There was **NO** evidence or
perception of a **TRADE-OFF**
between the SGP's gender and global
environmental objectives

A review of programming documents revealed that expectations of the SGP achieving some form of broader adoption began to emerge with the introduction of the upgrading policy, grew in OP5, and diminished with the programming document of OP6.

Initial findings suggest that much has been achieved in terms of broader adoption. First of all, survey respondents from 114 countries (92 percent of all countries represented), were aware of examples in their country of the SGP achieving some form of broader adoption. When asked to rate achievements in their country with regard to mainstreaming, replication, scaling-up, and market change on a scale from 1 (no achievements at all) to 6 (excellent achievements), respondents judged achievements to be moderate to good, with average response ratings between 4 and 5.

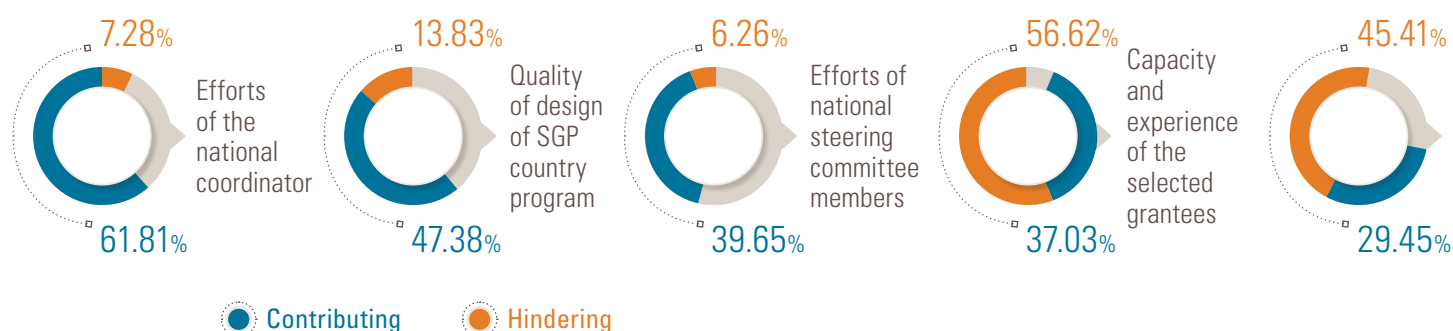
The evaluation team verified several examples of broader adoption during the country visits. None of the visited SGP country programs had a specific strategy for broader adoption, yet many achievements appear impressive. Most examples relate to replication and scaling-up, although there are also examples of mainstreaming, including policy influence. There are only a few cases of scaling-up or replication through GEF FSPs or medium-size projects (MSPs). Initial findings suggest that the more mature programs are achieving somewhat more in terms of broader adoption than other countries. Most interviewed stakeholders were in favor of broader adoption occurring and

believed that it should happen; however, most felt expectations for broader adoption should not be high.

The evaluation also explored factors that promote or limit broader adoption. Survey respondents identified several factors that hinder broader adoption and a range of factors that contribute to broader adoption (Figure 6).

Survey responses show appreciation for the efforts of the national coordinator. The work of the national steering committees is also appreciated, but less emphatically. The capacity of selected grantees was identified as an important hindering factor by all respondent groups. As most grantees are community based, this factor mostly likely will relate to replication at nearby sites, as it is difficult to see how grantees can be expected to be responsible for mainstreaming, scaling-up, or market change. More than a third of the respondents (37 percent) also identified the capacity of a selected grantee as a contributing factor, suggesting that the situation may vary from grantee to grantee, or from country to country. The extent of government support and ownership was identified as a hindering factor. Government respondents

Figure 6: Stakeholder Perceptions of Factors Hindering and Contributing to Broader Adoption



did not concur with this opinion, especially GEF focal points—half of them and 39 percent of all government stakeholders identified government support and ownership a contributing factor.

In short, broader adoption certainly occurs, particularly in the form of replication and scaling-up and at a local scale; and the SGP deserves recognition for its contribution to results that extend beyond the project level.

SGP’s Strategic Positioning

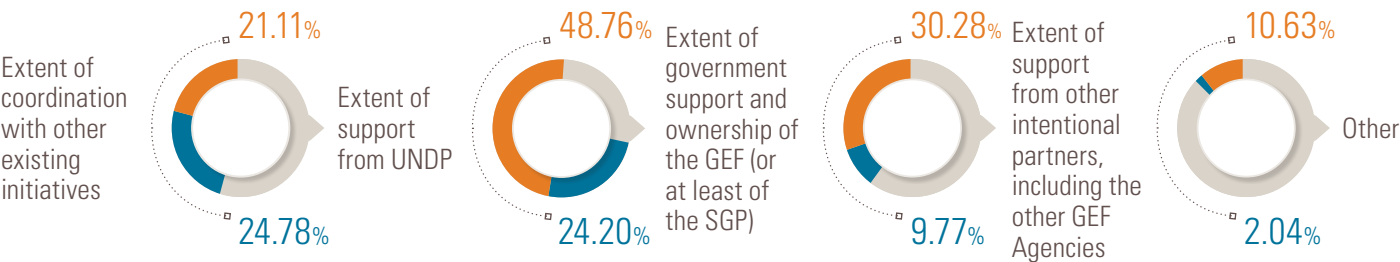
In addition to assessing the SGP’s current role and results, the evaluation explored the strategic fit of the SGP within the GEF and UNDP, both substantively and institutionally. The evaluation gave particular attention to the introduction of the SGP upgrading policy; the diverse expectations placed on the current SGP and implications for the future; and the SGP governance structure and whether and how it has adapted to the challenges, opportunities, and future.

SGP Upgrading Policy

In 2006, a policy was put in place that “beginning 2007, any country which has

benefited from the GEF SGP for more than 8 years will be required to present a plan to graduate from GEF funding on completion of the GEF-4 cycle.” This policy would have led to the graduation of more than 40 country programs—meaning that those country programs would no longer be eligible for any GEF SGP core funds and would stop participating in the overall global SGP process. Further, the amount each country could access from SGP core funds was capped in accordance with a complex formula based on country categories. In order to achieve overall economies of scale at the country level, SGP country programs were expected to access RAF resources to complement SGP core funds.

These funding restrictions on access to SGP core funds, and the expectation that countries access the RAF to support their SGP country programs, essentially placed new demands on the more mature country programs—even those not expected to graduate. These programs needed increased cofinancing, increased capacity to negotiate with national governments and other partners, improved communications, and increased knowledge management capacity. In effect, the greater the maturity of the country program, the greater



the demands placed on the country. This was a form of de facto stratification of SGP country programs.

The 2008 joint evaluation assessed the graduation policy and the issue of accessing RAF resources. Based on this evaluation, the Council decided on two important modifications:

- As the graduation policy risked “reducing the cost effectiveness of the overall GEF portfolio,” it should be revised, especially with regard to SIDS and LDCs.
- Also, “the criteria for accessing SGP resources (including both core and RAF) should be revised to maintain cost efficiency.”

The **UPGRADING** policy
has been actively implemented and
10 countries met the criteria for
upgrading at the outset of OP5

The graduation policy and issue of capping access to GEF funds have since evolved still further. The document entitled “Small Grants Programme: Execution Arrangements and Upgrading Policy for GEF-5” established three categories of country programs, based on age and total cumulative grant received. Category I countries include all SIDS and LDCs SGP country programs and country programs that have been in operation for fewer than 5 years; Category II includes all country programs that have been in operation between 5 and

15 years; and Category III, all country programs that have been in operation for more than 15 years and have been able to access a cumulative total of more than \$6 million in grants. This document also established a basic principle for GEF funding of SGP country programs: namely, that core funds diminish and ultimately end as country programs gradually move from Category I to III, with the countries increasingly utilizing STAR funds. Category III countries are considered ready to upgrade—that is, ready to be financed through a separate, single-country GEF FSP.

Overall, the upgrading policy has been actively implemented. Ten countries met the criteria for upgrading at the outset of OP5. Nine of these elected to upgrade; the 10th elected to leave the SGP altogether. Of the nine upgraded countries, eight began activities under OP5 and have high delivery rates compared to non-upgraded countries. The other upgraded country had an approved FSP project document but had not yet started issuing grants as of August 2014.

The measures taken to implement the upgrading policy have had a series of direct and indirect consequences, which have in turn affected overall SGP effectiveness and efficiency in both positive and negative ways. The net effects vary according to the type of country programme (upgraded, relying purely on STAR funding, or mixed SGP core and STAR funding). For example, overall, access to STAR resources led to increased GEF funds for SGP, although not all non-upgraded countries received more resources in OP5 than in OP4. The requirement to access STAR funds led in

many cases to increased discussion and dialogue with partners, including government. However, it was also noted in some countries that this was having a negative impact, leading to a weakening of civil society's lead in the country program. Use of the FSP modality means once the project is approved, there is more predictability in funding for grants.

The complexity of accessing FSP and other STAR funds led to delays and increasing transaction costs in SGP program design and start up and in issuance of grant payments. Under the FSP modality, time to complete country program implementation is short and fixed, making the time to complete individual projects similarly short and fixed, whereas in non-upgraded countries, all country programs benefit from the use of a "rolling modality." In this rolling modality, unused funds from one cycle can be reallocated to later years. While at the time of evaluation, it was too early to determine if this was a major problem for upgraded countries, concerns were noted with respect to the possibility that the reduced time and the pressure to reach end points would mean less time for learning and adaptive management, and that without timely planning and resources, there might be gaps in transitioning from OP5 to OP6.

In the past, the CPMT could allocate funds to countries based on many criteria, and could therefore respect each country's absorptive capacity. This is not possible with the use of STAR funds, which are approved for use in the given country. As a result, some high-performing countries

relying on a mix of STAR and core funds received less overall funding in OP5 than in OP4, while some low-capacity countries were allocated more than they are able to use effectively. The need to obtain STAR funds also increases competition with other potential GEF stakeholders, resulting in some confusion and reduced collaboration.

Overall, the effects of the upgrading policy have been mixed, and are often country specific. Many important effects only apply to specific countries, making it difficult to identify common trends.

Criteria for Upgrading

As per current policy, countries are selected for upgrading based on two criteria: program age and program size in terms of cumulative grants. In GEF-6, two additional criteria will be introduced: "1) the country's STAR envelope i.e., if a country's STAR allocation is below USD 10.0 million, it would not be subjected to upgrading, and 2) government willingness to support a country programme with a civil society *raison d'être* requiring renewed written government commitment to follow the SGP Operational Guidelines"

The **EFFECTS** of the upgrading policy have been **MIXED**, and are often country specific

As part of its assessment of upgrading, the evaluation sought to examine how SGP country programs evolve. The global

survey asked respondents to select factors that best support the maturation of an SGP country program (Figure 7). Respondents considered a strong and dynamic environment-oriented civil society to be the most important factor in this regard. Notably, the first, second, and fourth most commonly selected factors are all external to the GEF and the SGP framework. This indicates a strong belief, at least at the country level, that SGP program development is more influenced by its context than by GEF and internal SGP factors.

When asked the characteristics best exemplifying a mature SGP country program, survey respondents indicated above all the

level of cofinancing to the SGP country program (from sources other than the GEF) and, the strength and sustainability of the country's environment-oriented civil society (Figure 8). Characteristics similar to the current criteria for upgrading – number of grants issued and age of the SGP country programme – were cited by less than one-third of respondents. These responses were broadly consistent across all stakeholder groups.

These findings were validated through the interviews conducted in the country studies. National-level interviewees stated that the development of SGP country programs is influenced by many factors, most

Figure 7: Factors Supporting Country Program Maturity

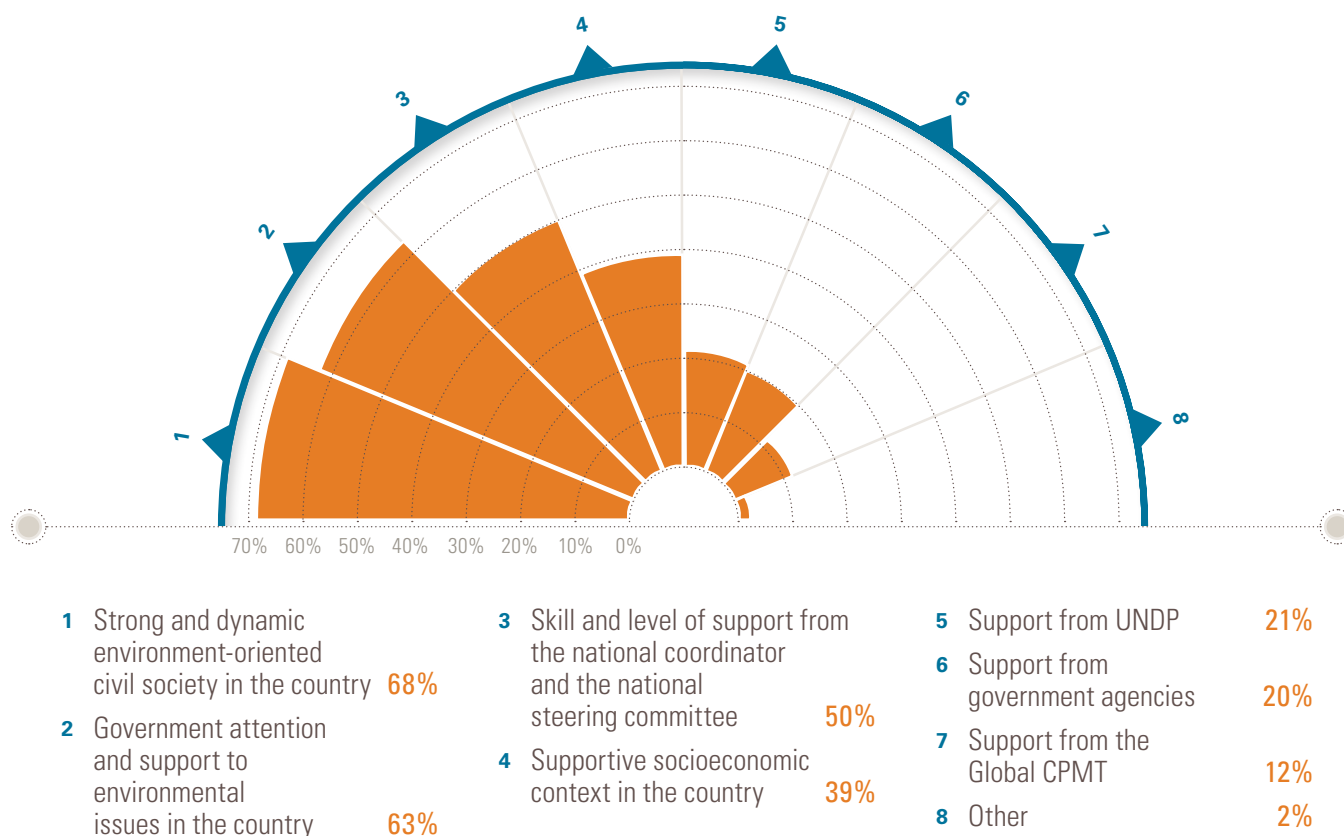
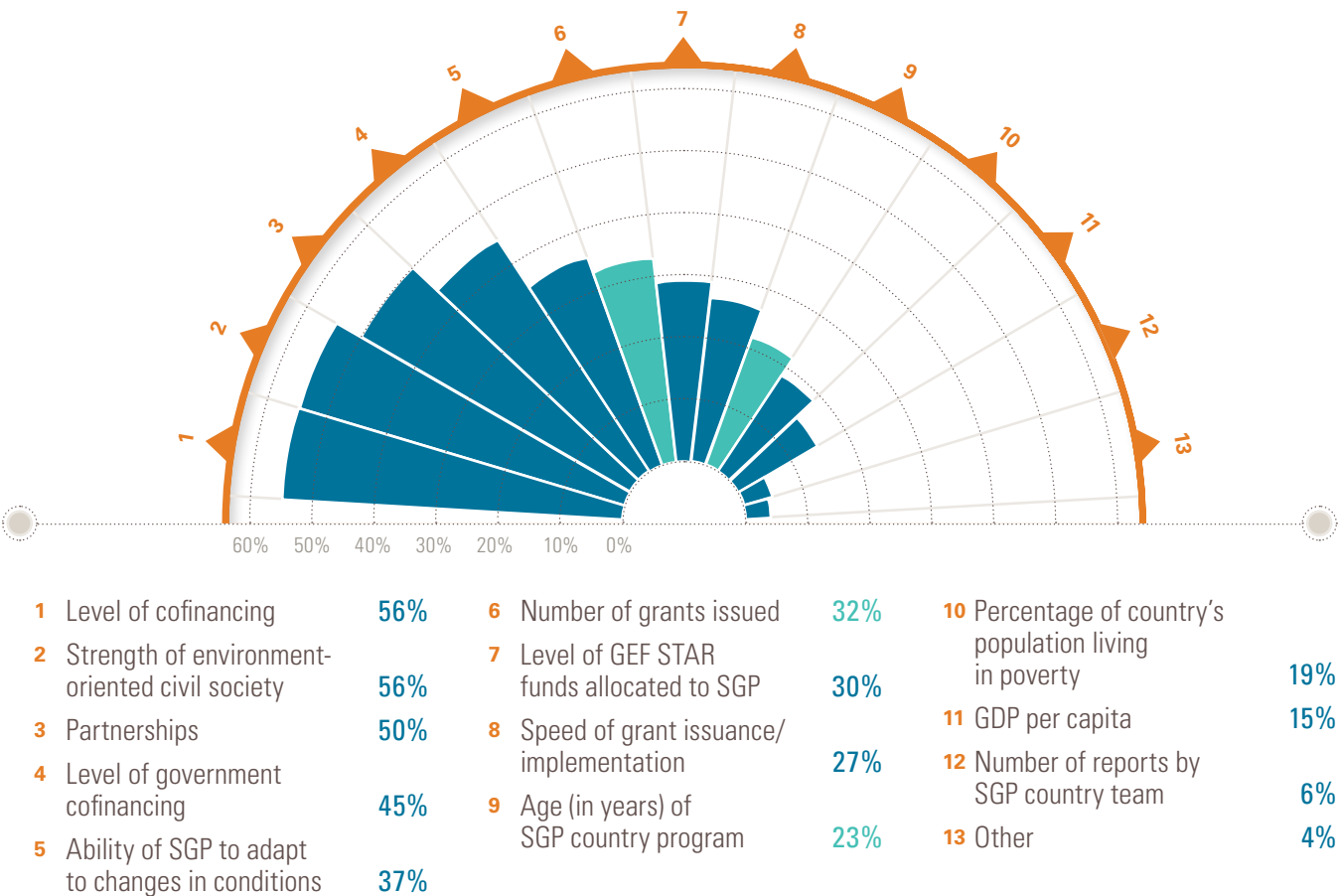


Figure 8: Characteristics of and Contextual Factors Favoring a Mature SGP Country Program



of which are external to the GEF and the SGP. It appears that the two criteria presently used for selecting countries for upgrading are not considered adequate in defining country program maturity.

Expectations and Vision for the SGP

At the global level, the policies and priorities to which the SGP is subject are the same as those of the GEF—to achieve global environmental benefits. To some extent, the policies and priorities of UNDP as a GEF Agency focusing on sustainable human development come into play as well. Evidence collected and analyzed in this evaluation shows that, at the global

level, the balance between a focus on the environment and a focus on other aspects of development has shifted over time. For example, global interviews revealed differences of opinions regarding the SGP's central role. Both the GEF Secretariat and UNDP believe that the SGP contributes to global environmental benefits through the aggregation of grant results. However, the GEF Secretariat is concerned that there may be a need to refocus the SGP on its original *raison d'être* (global environmental benefits), as there has been an increasing emphasis on livelihoods. Other central-level stakeholders observed that the SGP focus in its early years was on

providing communities with access to GEF funds, often in a dispersed manner, with an emphasis on the “means” (i.e., how to reach and work with small, remote communities with little capacity for issues of global environmental concern). The SGP role has since evolved to emphasize the “ends,” such as building partnerships and linkages in order to replicate, mainstream, and scale-up to achieve higher-level results.

National-level planners and managers are also critical for implementation of SGP policy. Planners and managers at the national level have a more mixed set of priorities. There is more balanced distribution across the global environment, the local environment, community empowerment, poverty and livelihoods, and gender, as can be seen in the SGP CPS documents. Finally, at the grassroots level, for many stakeholders, the priority is on generating local benefits in terms of livelihoods, although the global environment does feature.

While countries are receptive
to the GEF focus on
ENVIRONMENTAL
benefits, they also see a strong role
for SGP in promoting
LIVELIHOODS

Interviews at the country level highlighted the endeavors of the national coordinators and national steering committees to bring the GEF’s global goal and communities’ local preoccupations together in the design and implementation of the SGP country programs. During the country visits, many of the interviewed stakeholders—in particular national steering committee members—highlighted that the

community’s priority is not always the conservation of its environment, and that the SGP needs to offer tangible benefits for communities to help with environmental conservation and sustainable management in return. Moreover, for many stakeholders at the grassroots level, the SGP grants are primarily about supporting local sustainable development, with global environmental benefits being secondary. While countries seem to be receptive to the GEF’s focus on global environmental benefits, they also unanimously see a strong role for the SGP in promoting livelihoods, building communities and capacity at the community level, and fostering government-CSO partnerships.

Given the SGP’s unique position linking global environmental benefits and community development aspirations, there is an inherent mix of expectations for the program, which results in a need to continually manage the demands and tensions that arise.

Another example of differing expectations for the SGP is with regards to broader adoption. As discussed above, on the one hand, the GEF theory of change framework emphasizes broader adoption of GEF strategies and techniques to achieve global environmental benefits in the long run; while on the other, the SGP, given its nature and local scale of operations, should not be expected to achieve broader adoption. Some of the SGP documents do refer to broader adoption processes, and the CPMT feels pressure to achieve broader adoption. Yet many stakeholders emphasize that, while broader adoption is occurring, and that is a positive outcome, high expectations in this regard should not be placed on the SGP.

Different expectations on the SGP's role and purpose are also reflected in different interpretations of the SGP's operational nature. Stakeholders question whether the SGP is a program, a GEF modality, or a delivery mechanism. This perception has implications on issues such as funding and resource mobilization, and on what the SGP should ultimately aim to achieve. If the SGP is seen as a GEF project, it can be considered to have a rather substantial budget; however, if it is seen as a GEF funding modality, SGP core funds represent only 5 percent of total GEF funding—a rather small amount. If the SGP is a delivery mechanism, its substantive objectives are flexible and can adapt to potential sources of funding. If it is a program, it should have clear, achievable, non-negotiable targets.

Finally, the context in which the SGP operates has changed considerably since the program's creation in 1992; this is true both globally and in most countries, and the context continues to change. The GEF too has changed. There are fewer civil society-led GEF projects, although a large number of FSPs and MSPs now include a considerable focus on communities. UNDP is sharpening its strategic focus on poverty reduction, sustainable human development, and reducing inequalities, while lessening its emphasis on environmental conservation. The global financing situation has changed, in particular with regard to climate change, as there are now many large sources of funds outside the GEF. Also, many of the traditional GEF donor countries have faced a prolonged budgetary crisis, meaning an overall tightening of budgets and scrutiny to development budgets. The internal situation in many of the SGP partner countries has changed, as many have made good

economic progress and progress toward the Millennium Development Goals. In response, the SGP has had to evolve. Furthermore, each SGP country program has followed a unique, nonlinear path, which at times includes setbacks due to external shocks.

The **CONTEXT** in which the
SGP operates has **CHANGED**
considerably since
the program's creation in 1992

SGP Governance Structure

The SGP is implemented by UNDP, and executed by UNOPS. Within UNDP, the SGP is a “project”; operationally and legally, the CPMT is a project management unit. Yet, the scale and complexity of the SGP resemble that of a small United Nations agency or program.

The GEF Council is the ultimate policy decision-making body for all GEF issues. It debates high-level strategic issues and provides strategic guidance to the GEF as a whole, much of which is relevant to the SGP. Through its programming documents, the Council provides direct guidance to the SGP. However, it is observed that the Council has frequently debated SGP operational and management issues that would ideally be settled by lower bodies (e.g., details of management costs, or the percentage allocation to M&E). After 2010, there is no evidence of the GEF Council providing specific guidance on the SGP.

The GEF SGP Steering Committee was established in 2006. Chaired by the GEF CEO, membership consisted of the GEF

Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, and a representative of civil society. The committee was established to provide overall strategic guidance to the SGP and improve engagement across the GEF Agencies. However, it met only three times, with the most recent meeting in 2010; its focus in these meetings was primarily on operational issues.

As a GEF Agency, **UNDP**
is expected to mainstream SGP
objectives and approaches into UNDP
policy, programming, dialogue,
and activities

The GEF Secretariat reports directly to the GEF Council and GEF Assembly, ensuring that their decisions are translated into effective actions. The GEF Secretariat recognized early that the SGP had grown beyond its initial conceptualization, and took steps to facilitate the necessary changes—notably the creation of the global Steering Committee, introduction of the need for upgrading, strengthening of the focus on results, and measures to streamline program administration.

UNDP has been the GEF Agency for the SGP since 1992. As such, it has a role to play in supervising the CPMT globally, supporting the national teams, and mobilizing resources to the SGP. As a GEF Agency, UNDP is expected to mainstream SGP objectives and approaches into UNDP policy, programming, dialogue, and activities in its partner countries.

At the global level, UNDP's work is led by a GEF unit inside the Agency, UNDP GEF. The evidence suggests that UNDP GEF has been very active in its supervision of the CPMT and in supporting development

of the SGP. Following the introduction of upgrading, UNDP modified its management arrangements of the SGP, which resulted in a dual management structure, whereby management of the global program was separate from that of the upgraded FSPs. Specifically, the CMPT supervised and provided technical support to the global program, and an adviser in the Communities Cluster did the same for the upgraded country FSPs, with the same SGP operational guidelines applying to all countries. Attempts were made to implement a single approach to the SGP knowledge management system, but these encountered challenges. M&E of the global program and of the FSPs was, like their management, separate. In the early phases of the evaluation, it was observed that two distinct practice groups were evolving. At the end of 2013, new changes were made by UNDP, so that both the CPMT and the Technical Adviser coordinating the SGP FSPs report to the GEF Principal Technical Adviser, in the UNDP GEF team in UNDP's Bureau for Policy and Programme Support.

There is little evidence of UNDP effectively mainstreaming the SGP into its core programs. For example, mainstreaming would be seen in terms of far more cofinancing from UNDP core funds and other UNDP-managed funds through the SGP infrastructure. Also, within UNDP, many stakeholders still consider the SGP to be a GEF initiative. It has not yet been possible to fully distinguish between the roles, responsibilities, and—importantly—the costs, of UNDP, UNDP GEF, UNOPS, and the CPMT.

UNDP also plays a role in each of the SGP program countries through the UNDP country offices. Overall, the relationship

between the SGP and the UNDP country office varies from country to country, but there are some common aspects. Notably, the UNDP country offices do not consider the SGP to be part of their program delivery, and do not consider SGP staff to be part of their core staff. The country case studies revealed limited mainstreaming of SGP activities into overall UNDP activities. Except in some countries, UNDP has not been very successful in attracting other partners to invest in the SGP—not even other GEF Agencies. Further, as with global-level UNDP stakeholders, many local UNDP staff consider the SGP to be a GEF global initiative somehow separate from the rest of UNDP. In some countries, there is tension between the UNDP country office and the SGP country program.

The CPMT supervises and provides technical support to all country programs (except upgraded countries), as well as supporting the start-up of programs in new countries. It plays a role in coordination and knowledge management with all countries, has a role in resource mobilization and advocacy at the global level. The CPMT is considered a key factor in the SGP's success. It is generally considered to be dedicated, hard working, and competent. Finally, there is evidence that the CPMT has undertaken certain functions of UNDP or UNDP GEF; these include reporting, resource mobilization, and oversight.

In summary, the SGP governance and management structure has evolved and has been effective overall. Some weaknesses emerged after 2008, such as the dual management structure for upgraded and non-upgraded country programs within UNDP, and the absence of a mechanism for formal high-level interactions between

the GEF and UNDP since the Steering Committee stopped functioning. Some aspects of the SGP governance and management structure may no longer be fully suited to supporting the program's long-term evolution.

Efficiency issues - Monitoring and Evaluation

Significant resources and efforts have been devoted to improving the SGP's M&E system. Progress has been made at the global level, for example, in strengthening the results framework, improving on the excellent database that provides basic data on more than 18,000 projects in an accessible and easy-to-use manner, and the production of two highly informative annual monitoring reports.

92% of the projects reviewed
included **MONITORING**
activities in the project design, and
89% had established at least some
results indicators as part of the design

At the project level, a great deal of monitoring activity has taken place, although coverage is not universal. Of the 144 projects reviewed for this evaluation, 92 percent included monitoring activities in the project design, and 89 percent had established at least some results indicators as part of the design. However, only 47 percent had established a baseline in the design phase. After project closure, completion reports were submitted for 85 percent of the projects; of these, more than half included an assessment of the extent to which all project objectives had been achieved. However, as noted in chapter 2

of the full report, very few projects report using sex-disaggregated data.

A large percentage (88 percent) of the sampled projects had received at least one monitoring visit from the national coordinator or a designee. However, the 2008 joint evaluation found that 96 percent of the projects it sampled had received at least one such visit from the country program teams. One-third of the projects sampled for the present evaluation benefited from three or more visits, compared to more than half of the projects assessed in the previous evaluation. Interviews at the country level suggest that resource constraints—including no longer having a dedicated project vehicle and driver—have resulted in fewer field visits than in the past.

The overall **STRATEGY** or framework for M&E has not been updated since OP3

Other gaps remain in the M&E system at the global program level. The overall strategy or framework for M&E has not been updated since OP3. The CPMT does not have an M&E officer, and M&E-related tasks are spread across the staff. The indicator and target frameworks in the design documents do not seem to be useful or appropriate. There has been a limited emphasis on evaluation.

A number of SGP characteristics make it extremely challenging to develop an effective M&E system that is able to efficiently and adequately track the SGP's contributions to environmental benefits and local livelihoods. First, the SGP is intended to be demand driven by communities, making

it difficult at the outset of a country program to articulate relevant national or long-term indicators, baselines, and targets. Also, the unit of analysis is the project grant, of which there is a vast number, of many different types, and with many different intended local-level results. Each project may have multiple objectives; and developing indicators and baselines, and tracking data against targets, is beyond the capacity of many grantees.

The results framework in the CEO endorsement request includes indicators and requires the aggregation of the results of project grants across all countries. Clearly, this can only capture selected quantitative measures, which—even if tracked and reported on—would only provide a partial picture of the SGP's results. Furthermore, the SGP pilots, innovates, and contributes to knowledge about what works and what does not in different contexts. Seeking to measure only results overlooks this characteristic—and could even discourage innovation and risk taking.

The SGP could learn from the Community Development and Knowledge Management for the Satoyama Initiative Programme (COMDEKS) which is piloting interesting work on M&E in a number of countries using a selection from a simple set of 20 perception-based indicators of resilience in socioecological production landscapes and seascapes.

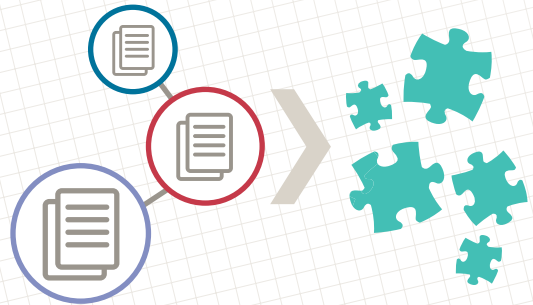
Most stakeholders agree that further progress is required on M&E of the SGP. It is generally accepted that the demands placed on the current M&E system are far too ambitious and unrealistic; and that new, innovative, and practical approaches need to be developed.

OUR CONCLUSIONS

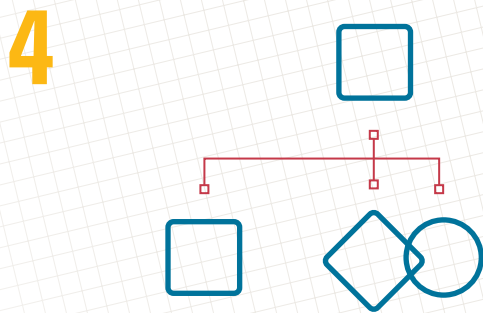
- 1** SGP projects are **EFFECTIVE**, efficient, and relevant



- 2** Upgrading and related policies have resulted in **INCREASED RESOURCES** for the SGP but have also brought challenges

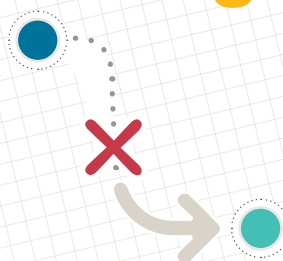


- 3** The SGP has remained coherent and flexible, but the **GLOBAL LONG-TERM VISION** of the SGP has not been updated



SGP governance structures have been adequate, but are increasingly strained by a rapidly **CHANGING CONTEXT**

- 5** M&E does not adequately support **DECISION MAKING** and remains too complex





Conclusion 1:

The SGP continues to support communities with projects that are effective, efficient, and relevant in achieving global environmental benefits while addressing livelihoods and poverty as well as promoting gender equality and empowering women. Replication, scaling-up, and mainstreaming are occurring.

The SGP has successfully delivered grants to communities in more than 125 countries since its start of operations in 1992. These grants are leading to a direct impact on biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, land and water resources, and use of chemicals—all while addressing livelihoods. The grants and the overall SGP are used efficiently and are relevant.

BROADER ADOPTION

occurs through a range of mechanisms—mostly replication, scaling-up, and mainstreaming—which are country and site specific

The SGP has established a structure and system that are committed not only to achieving global environmental benefits but also to addressing the socioeconomic objectives of improving livelihoods, reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and empowering women. The SGP structure and system include skilled, competent, and committed people and institutions at the global, national, and local levels. The system ensures global policies are translated into action at the local level.

And the results at the local level are rather impressive, with high percentages of projects contributing to livelihoods, poverty reduction, and gender issues. However, many projects do not contribute to all the socioeconomic objectives.

The achievements of the SGP are being replicated at the local scale, up-scaled and mainstreamed into local and, at times, national development processes. This replication occurs more frequently in the countries with more mature programs. Broader adoption occurs through a range of mechanisms—mostly replication, scaling-up, and mainstreaming—which are country and site specific. In each case of broader adoption, many factors and stakeholders play a role. The single most important factor in broader adoption is the activities of national stakeholders, notably of the national coordinators and national steering committee members.



Conclusion 2:

The introduction of upgrading and related policies contributed to the evolution of the SGP by setting out expectations for country programs and their development over time. The new policies have resulted in increased resources for the SGP. However, they have also brought challenges. The current criteria for selecting countries for upgrading to full-size projects are not optimal.

Since 2008, the SGP upgrading policy and other GEF policies guiding SGP access to GEF resources have been actively implemented. This implementation has not only

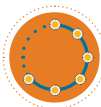
enabled the SGP to continue, but has also contributed to its expansion in terms of total funding and number of countries as well as to other opportunities in terms of approaches and partnerships.

However, the way these policies and measures have been operationalized has had a number of negative effects, including increased delays and transaction costs and increased competition with other GEF project proponents, with the risk of the SGP being left unfunded. For upgraded country programs, additional challenges have included reduced time and flexibility to complete country programs and respond to local partners and, possibly, an overall more top-down approach with less community ownership over country program design and management. Some of these effects can be seen as teething problems, whose occurrence is to be expected with the introduction and operationalization of such major policies. An opportunity exists to build on the strengths demonstrated and address the weaknesses identified.

Currently, country programs in upgraded countries are implemented through the FSP modality. While this practice enables more in-country flexibility and increases the available funds in some countries, it has some negative aspects. Countries with low capacity may face even greater challenges in implementing the FSP modality. Additionally, as presently structured, upgrading is neither suitable for countries with a low STAR allocation nor for countries with limited ability to prepare and implement FSPs.

In OP5, selecting countries for upgrading to FSPs is based on two criteria that are not optimal and that are too narrow: the age of the program and the overall program size in terms of cumulative grants. A wide range of factors affect the maturity of a country program, and progression does not always occur steadily over time. There is a widespread belief among GEF stakeholders at all levels that program maturity is not only, or not predominantly, linked to program age and the number of grants issued. If the selection criteria are inappropriate, there is a risk of either choosing countries where the context and local capacity are not favorable to upgrading or not choosing countries whose context and capacities for upgrading are optimal. As discussed, although two new criteria have been introduced for OP6, they do not change the substance of this conclusion.

A wide range of **FACTORS**
affect the maturity of a country
program, and progression does not
always occur steadily over time



Conclusion 3:

As a global program, acting nationally and locally, and being grassroots driven, the SGP must align to GEF, UNDP, national, and local priorities. Within this context, the SGP has remained coherent while staying flexible. However, different perspectives and changing contexts create tensions. The global or long-term vision of the SGP has not been updated.

Not only does the SGP need to align to GEF and UNDP policies and priorities, but it also has to adapt to multiple and diverse national and local policies and priorities which naturally vary from site to site and country to country. Notwithstanding, a high degree of relevance is found among the SGP priorities and programs, encompassing a mix of the global environment, the local environment, community empowerment, poverty and livelihoods, and gender.

Different stakeholders have different views on how to **BALANCE** the objectives of global environmental benefits and livelihoods

Differences of opinion exist among SGP stakeholders, including global and national planners and managers, regarding the SGP and its components and their interrelationships; these translate into different expectations of what the SGP should be and do as a global environmental program. Notably, different stakeholders have different views on how to balance the objectives of global environmental benefits and livelihoods, and on the extent to which there may be trade-offs between these two sets of objectives. The manner that and extent to which broader adoption should be pursued by the SGP is another source of diverging opinion.

The SGP's overall context has changed since 1992. The policies and priorities that drive the program have evolved since its inception more than 20 years ago. Country programs have each followed unique, non-linear paths. The SGP global vision has not been updated to adapt to these changes.



Conclusion 4:

The SGP governance and management structures have been adequate, but are increasingly strained by an ever rapidly changing context. The GEF corporate nature of the SGP and the role and value added of UNDP as the GEF Agency are not clearly articulated.

The SGP governance and management structure has evolved with the SGP and has been on the whole effective in supporting the SGP. Some weaknesses have nevertheless emerged since 2008. The absence of a mechanism for high-level interactions between the GEF and UNDP affects the program's clarity of purpose. The upgrading process has led to stresses on the governance and management structure, and these may grow as the number of upgraded countries increases. Defining the SGP as a corporate program or modality has not yet contributed to shaping a vision or expectations for the SGP.

UNDP adds significant value to the SGP, such as providing a management framework and an implementation infrastructure;

supporting substantive issues at the global level; and, in many countries, providing technical support on issues such as the global environment, poverty, gender, capacity development, knowledge management, M&E, and broader adoption. However, as a GEF Agency, UNDP's added value is not optimized. The SGP is not mainstreamed into UNDP global programming, and the links between the SGP and UNDP's environment, governance, poverty, and gender initiatives are not fully established. At the national level, in many countries, the SGP is not seen as a full part of the UNDP program and country activities. Globally and nationally, UNDP's identity and role as the GEF Agency for a corporate program have not been adequately explored and developed.

UNDP management of the upgraded countries has differed from that of the rest of the SGP. For most of the period under review, implementation of the SGP through two separate mechanisms (as FSPs and under the CPMT) undermined knowledge management and complicated M&E. Recently, UNDP has introduced several important changes in program management arrangements at the central level, in an attempt to bring the two mechanisms together. As the number of upgraded countries grows, this managerial disparity may become an increasingly important issue, with a real danger of the program splitting into two (or more) SGPs, potentially undermining its effectiveness and efficiency.



Conclusion 5:

Despite important progress, M&E does not adequately support decision making and remains too complex.

Important progress has been made in the SGP M&E system since 2008, particularly at the global level. Yet the challenging nature of the SGP means that weaknesses remain related to monitoring and evaluating the program's impacts. There are also significant weaknesses at the national and project levels. At present, the M&E system is unable to provide a clear picture of the impacts of the SGP on the global environment. Moreover, emerging issues such as addressing poverty, gender, broader adoption, and trade-offs place additional burdens on the M&E system.

The issue is not a lack of resources. Rather, there is a need for a sharper focus and better use of M&E resources and information. An opportunity exists for the GEF and the SGP to continue developing innovative, simpler M&E tools and systems that are better adapted to the program's needs and resources.

Emerging issues such as addressing poverty, gender, broader adoption, and trade-offs place additional burdens on the
M&E SYSTEM

The evaluation makes four recommendations. A management response was prepared jointly by the GEF Secretariat and the UNDP GEF unit in the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support

Recommendation

1

To the GEF

Revitalize the SGP Steering Committee to support high-level strategic thinking in developing a long-term vision for the SGP, to foster dialogue between UNDP and the GEF, and to advise the Council as appropriate on strategic decision making.

The SGP has continued to be a relevant, effective, and efficient program; however, in some areas there is a lack of clarity as to program expectations and its long-term evolution. A revitalized global Steering Committee—which could include the GEF Secretariat, UNDP, UNOPS, a representative from the GEF NGO Network, and/or other members as appropriate—would provide a forum for clarification of the SGP’s long-term vision, future approaches to upgrading (including upgrading criteria), articulation of the role of broader adoption in the SGP, the balance between global environmental benefits and socioeconomic objectives, and other issues that might arise. The revived committee could assist in articulating the GEF corporate nature of the SGP, clarifying the role and responsibilities of UNDP as a GEF Agency implementing a GEF corporate program, and developing a strategy to optimize UNDP’s value added. Where policy decisions are required, the Steering Committee would provide advisory services to the GEF Council. At the final stakeholder consultation workshop on the draft evaluation, the evaluation team was informed that discussions are ongoing on draft terms of reference for a revitalized Steering Committee, following the recommendation in the OPS5 final report, which in turn was informed by the first phase report of this joint evaluation.

FORWARD



Some of these issues could be discussed in a wider forum as well—for example, in an international workshop bringing in SGP decision makers and implementers, as well as other stakeholders and partners from selected program countries. The proceedings of such a high-level forum could then be shared with the GEF Council for consideration.

We support the recommendation of the evaluation report and have begun the process of revitalizing the SGP Steering Committee. New terms of reference have been discussed that clearly define the role of the committee as a forum for clarification of the SGP’s long-term vision as well as other strategic issues.

We concur that the SGP Steering Committee will oversee an updating of the SGP’s corporate vision and long-term strategy. The SGP Steering Committee may organize, as needed, wider forums on key strategic issues to bring other key stakeholders and partners into the discussion. Inputs from these consultations will feed into the committee’s strategic guidance on the SGP as well as in the preparation of Council papers, as appropriate.

To the GEF and UNDP

Continue upgrading, building on strengths while addressing the weaknesses identified. The criteria for selection of countries for upgrading should be revisited.

Upgrading should be seen as a continual process, in which country programs mature; acquire capacity; and evolve in terms of their partnerships, cofinancing, and degree of mainstreaming; and eventually reach an upgraded status. Consolidation of the process should be sufficiently flexible to match the conditions prevailing in all participating countries, while maintaining an incentive to each and every country program to evolve. The criteria for upgrading should be revisited, and recommendations for revisions submitted to the GEF Council. This revision should be informed by the SGP Steering Committee and/or the proceedings from the international conference mentioned in Recommendation 1.



Management Response



Recommendation

Management Response



The FSP modality for upgraded countries should be modified to maximize the positive and minimize the negative effects. This modification could include the use of innovative procedures that

- allow FSPs to follow the “annual rolling modality” of the SGP rather than being limited to fixed time-frames;
- ensure that civil society continues to be at the wheel of the SGP—even when it is no longer alone in the driving seat;
- allow groups of upgrading countries to implement their SGP country programs through a single, multicountry FSP, as was done for STAR 1 and STAR 2 non-upgraded countries; and
- allow the most mature countries with small STAR allocations to be able to upgrade but still use SGP core funds, hopefully leading to a combination of the characteristics and benefits of the FSP modality with the use of SGP core funds.

Although all countries should be able to adopt the upgraded status, upgrading should be voluntary for LDCs and SIDS.

For non-upgraded countries, the process for accessing STAR funds through a global project should be modified so as to minimize delays and uncertainties, as well as to lessen the current competition for GEF funding among stakeholders at the country level.

UNDP and the CPMT, in consultation with the GEF Secretariat, will continue to refine operationalization of the upgrading policy. We welcome the four suggestions listed under this recommendation and will work with the GEF Secretariat to design and execute these recommended changes in GEF-7, in particular to ensure all-around compliance with the SGP operational guidelines.

We agree with the recommendation that upgrading remains voluntary for LDCs and SIDS and that changes to the process for accessing STAR funds by non-upgraded countries through the global project should be clear and agreed upon.

To UNDP

Recommendation



Ensure that the SGP is implemented under a single, coherent, global program framework.

All SGP country programs, whether upgraded or not, should be implemented under a single, coherent, global program framework. As country programs mature from being purely funded by core funds to increasingly

accessing GEF STAR resources and ultimately upgrading to execution as FSPs, the type and level of support from UNDP and the CPMT should evolve as a continuum within that single, coherent, global program management framework.

In addition, in line with a strategy to optimize UNDP's value added as the implementing Agency of the SGP, as mentioned under Recommendation 1, UNDP should provide guidance to the SGP and to UNDP resident representatives to strengthen synergies between SGP and UNDP programming at the country level, while recognizing the peculiarities of the SGP as a GEF corporate program.

We concur with the recommendation that the SGP Steering Committee oversee how the SGP could be implemented under a single, coherent global program framework. This process has already commenced with both the SGP non-upgraded and upgrading country programs supervised under a single unit in UNDP GEF as of January 2014. The policy that upgrading country programs continue to follow the SGP operational guidelines has also been sustained. The SGP OP6 regional workshops for orienting country programs on the strategic directions, priorities, expected outcomes, and targets for GEF-6 include both non-upgraded and upgrading country programs. UNDP will send appropriate communications to UNDP country offices to strengthen synergies between SGP and UNDP programming at the country level while recognizing the specificities of the SGP as a GEF corporate program.

To UNDP and the CPMT

Continue efforts to improve M&E, designing more streamlined and useful M&E tools and activities that balance the need to measure with the need to provide support to local communities in tackling environmental issues.

With guidance from the GEF Secretariat, UNDP and the CPMT should continue to strengthen and streamline M&E. The CPMT should move quickly to update its M&E framework, with a focus on streamlining and aligning indicators and tools to track and validate progress toward SGP strategic objectives, as appropriate at different levels (global, national, and local). An opportunity exists for developing and performing a more practical monitoring function by using simple but innovative M&E tools and systems that are adapted to the needs, resources, and community focus of the SGP, and that achieve a financial and operational balance between the need to measure and the need to provide support to local communities in tackling environmental issues of global significance. A possible source of inspiration for village-level indicators is the ongoing SGP cooperation with the COM-DEKS program.



Management Response



Recommendation

Management Response



As a result of the revised M&E framework, the monitoring demands on national coordinators and grantees should be reduced overall, but should contribute to a clearer picture of project and national progress. The CPMT should consider moving quickly to recruit a full-time senior M&E officer whose main task would be to develop and implement the revised framework.

The CPMT, together with the UNDP GEF global coordinator of the upgrading country programs, has held a series of technical meetings aimed at designing and instituting a more effective M&E system. Much progress has been made toward developing a more practical monitoring function adapted to the needs, resources, and community focus of the SGP. A process of simplifying the program's M&E functions by creating a nested system with appropriate indicators identified at the global, country, and grant project levels is currently under way and will be finalized, after suitable testing and adaptation, by early 2016. Within OP6, M&E will be more impact oriented, as well as contributing to adaptive management at different levels. More focused M&E resources and tools at the community, country, and global levels will be developed by the CPMT and the upgrading country program global coordination team.

The SGP's design for OP6, as articulated in the recently approved SGP OP6 PIF, builds on this framework with the aim of (1) focusing SGP grant making around clear strategic initiatives based on country and global priorities and where strategic impact can be achieved; (2) focusing SGP grant making within defined landscape and seascape areas, where baselines and indicators can be more appropriately selected and monitored to show impact over time; and (3) reducing the spread of SGP grant making from six focal areas spanning 10 immediate objectives to only four priority themes that promote multifocal area strategies on the landscapes and seascapes selected in country. CPMT management planning for OP6 includes adding an M&E specialist to the team to lead development and implementation of an improved M&E framework for the program. This will be done in close collaboration with the UNDP GEF results management and evaluation adviser and UNDP's Development Impact Group.

About the GEF and UNDP Independent Evaluation Offices

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) is an independent unit and has a central role of ensuring the independent evaluation function within the GEF. The IEO pursues the goals of improved accountability and learning. The main function of IEO is to independently evaluate the GEF's efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact, and sustainability. IEO sets minimum monitoring and evaluation standards within the GEF to ensure improved and consistent measurement of GEF results. It provides quality control for the minimum requirements of monitoring and evaluation practices in the GEF, in full cooperation with relevant units in the GEF Agencies, and tracks implementation of Council decisions related to evaluation recommendations. IEO supports knowledge sharing and follow-up of evaluation recommendations and participates in the development and maintenance of a comprehensive knowledge system based on evaluation findings and lessons.

At the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), evaluation is critical in helping countries achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. By generating objective evidence, evaluation helps UNDP achieve greater accountability and facilitates improved learning from past experience. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) promotes accountability and learning by conducting independent evaluations at the country, regional, and global levels, as well as on thematic topics of particular importance to the organization. It also promotes development of evaluation capacity at the national level, and provides critical support to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

Summary: Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme

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