A Concept Note for the International Waters Focal Area Evaluation

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Introduction:

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a global financing mechanism addressing global environmental issues related to biodiversity, climate change, chemicals and waste, land degradation, and international waters. Established in 1991, the GEF has provided nearly US$ 25 billion in grants and US$ 138 billion in co-financing to implement over 5,700 national and regional projects through 18 GEF implementing agencies[1,2].

2. The GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) plays a central role in ensuring the independent evaluation function with the GEF. Over the past two decades, the GEF IEO has provided strategic and programmatic recommendations to the GEF Council based on the latest and historical evaluative evidence. These efforts have contributed to documenting the performance of GEF projects, strengthening the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems at program and project levels, and informing the GEF's programming actions.

3. The GEF IEO is undertaking the Eighth Overall Performance Study (OPS8), which will summarize key achievements, challenges, lessons learned from the previous and ongoing GEF projects. The findings of OPS8 will be a key evidence-based report to inform the GEF-9 replenishment process and discuss any emerging priority for the GEF's programming, resource mobilization, and partnership development.

4. As part of OPS8, the GEF IEO will conduct a series of focal area studies. This concept note describes the evaluation questions, objectives, methods, and preliminary findings of the International Waters (IW) focal area study. The findings of the IW focal area study will be incorporated into the OPS8 report in 2025.

Background:

5. Water is essential for all humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems to survive, grow, and thrive. Available evidence suggests that over 1.38 billion cubic kilometers of water is available on Earth[3]. Of the total, approximately 97.5% is saline or seawater, and the remaining 2.5% is freshwater[4]. As glaciers account for 69% of available freshwater on Earth,

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[1] GEF. (n.d.). *Who we are*. Retrieved May 28, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/who-we-are.
[2] GEF. (2024). GEF-8 score card: February 2024. Retrieved May 28, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-02/GEFScorecard_FEB2024.pdf.
[3] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). (2024). Where is all of the earth's water? Retrieved May 31, 2024, from https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/wherewater.html.
[4] Kashiwase, H. and Fujs, T. (2023). "Strains on freshwater resources" In Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2023, edited by A. F. Pirlea, U. Serajuddin, A. Thudt, D. Wadhwa, and M. Welch. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://www.doi.org/10.60616/93he-j512

humans can only access freshwater supplies from groundwater and surface water sources (e.g., rivers, lakes, ponds), which hold 30% and 0.3% of freshwater, respectively[5]. The remaining freshwater is available as moisture in the soil and atmosphere.

6. Freshwater supplies have been withdrawn by humans for agricultural, industrial, and domestic purposes, and their water requirements differ by sectors and national income levels. Globally, agriculture accounts for approximately 70% of freshwater withdrawals, followed by industrial and domestic sectors.[6] However, the proportion of freshwater usage by the agricultural sector ranges from 44% in high-income countries to 90% in low-income countries. Industrial and domestic water use also varies substantially by countries' income levels. The total amount of freshwater use in 2020 was highest among lower-middle income countries at 1,656.9 billion cubic meters, followed by upper-middle-income, high-income, and low-income countries (Figure 1).

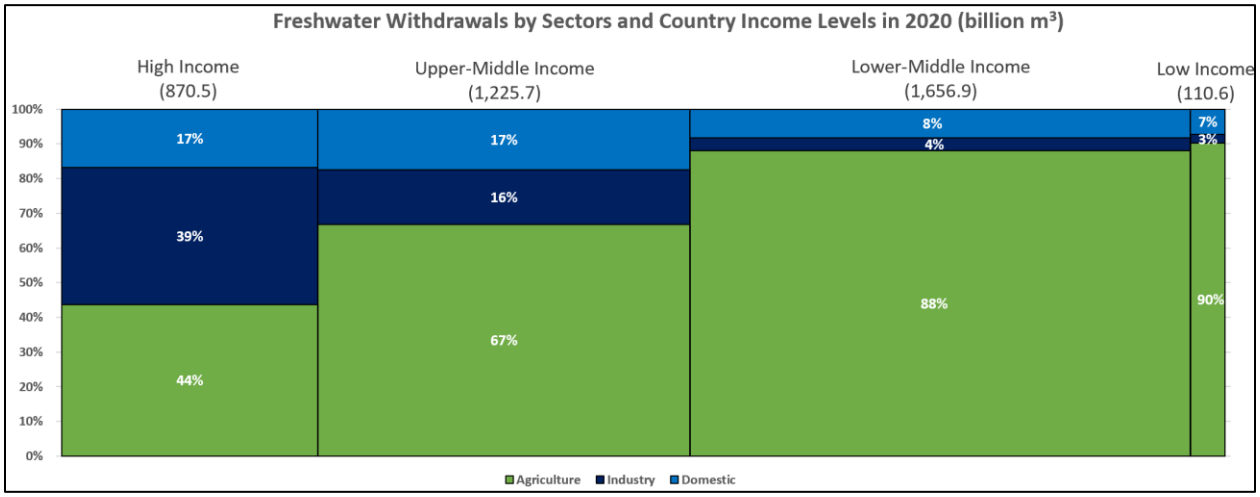

Figure 1. The proportion and amount of freshwater withdrawals by agricultural, industrial, and domestic sectors and country income levels in 2020. Adapted from Kashiwase and Fujis (2023).[7]

7. Marine ecosystems are also essential to protect the global environment and support human activities. They absorb approximately 90% of excess heat and 30% of carbon dioxide emissions by humans[8], provide aquatic food as the major source of high-quality protein[9], serve as habitats and breeding grounds for fish and other animals, foster biodiversity, and

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[5] Shikimalgor, I. A. (1993). World fresh water resources. In P. H. Gleick (Ed.), *Water in Crisis: A Guide to the World's Fresh Water Resources* Oxford University Press: New York.

[6] UNESCO. (2024). *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for Prosperity and Peace*. Retrieved May 31, 2024, from https://www.unwater.org/publications/un-world-water-development-report-2024.

[7] Kashiwase, H. and Fujs, T. (2023). "Strains on freshwater resources" In Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2023, edited by A. F. Pirlea, U. Serajuddin, A. Thudt, D. Wadhwa, and M. Welch. Washington, DC: World Bank. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO. https://www.doi.org/10.60616/93he-j512.

[8] UNEP. (2024). Ocean, seas and coast. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from https://www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts.

[9] FAO. (2024). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture: Blue Transformation in Action*. FAO: Rome, Italy. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0683en.

facilitate the transport of materials, products, and people. However, the ocean has faced substantial environmental stress and negative consequences of human activities, such as habitat destruction from coastal development activities (e.g., tourism, infrastructure development, and housing construction), acidification, plastic pollution, and loss of coastal ecosystems including mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass. Social cohesion, indigenous knowledge, and cultural heritage have been at risk in various marine areas due to these activities[10].

8. Climate change, water scarcity, and water pollution have also exacerbated the global environmental and socioeconomic circumstances. ***Extreme climate events***, such as floods and droughts, have increased worldwide. For the period between 2002 and 2021, floods resulted in 100,000 deaths, affected 1.6 billion people, and induced US$832 billion in economic losses. During the same time period, drought caused 21,000 deaths, affected more than 1.4 billion people, and led to US$170 billion in economic losses.[11] ***Severe water scarcity*** has also been experienced by almost half of the global population[12], and 25% of the global population from 25 countries has withdrawn more than 80% of their renewable freshwater supply[13]. In 2021, several countries in Middle East and North Africa were under critical water stress levels, where over 100% of renewable freshwater supply was withdrawn (Figure 2)[14]. Furthermore, ***water pollution*** from agriculture, industries, and municipalities has induced dead zones in various water sources due to limited governance and infrastructure investments[15]. These water-related issues have major implications for social stability, migration, and economic vulnerability in many countries.[16]

9. Transboundary cooperation and governance are vital to achieving the sustainable use of available water resources and ecosystem services. Over 60% of the global freshwater flows are transboundary, and 153 countries share at least one of the 592 transboundary aquifer

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[10] Pearson, J., Jackson, G., & McNamara, K. E. (2023). Climate-driven losses to knowledge systems and cultural heritage: A literature review exploring the impacts on Indigenous and local cultures. *The Anthropocene Review*, 10(2), 343-366. https://doi.org/10.1177/20530196211005482.

[11] Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED). (2023). *2022 Disasters in Numbers*. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from https://www.cred.be/sites/default/files/2022_EMDAT_report.pdf.

[12] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2023). *Climate change 2023 synthesis report: Summary for policy makers*. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from _https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf.

[13] Kuzma, S., Saccoccla, L., and Chertock, M. (2023). *Aqueduct 4.0: Updated Decision-Relevant Global Water Risk Indicators*. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from https://www.wri.org/research/aqueduct-40-updated-decision-relevant-global-water-risk-indicators.

[14] UN Water. (n.d.). 6.4.2 Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources. Retrieved June 13, 2024, from https://sdg6data.org/en/maps?rwc=World&sdgr=&gr=&georc=&tree_id=563&active_map=Simple&latest_year=0.

[15] GEF. (2024). GEF-8 score card: February 2024. Retrieved June 13, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-02/GEFScorecard_FEB2024.pdf.

[16] Zaveri, E. D., Russ, J. D., Khan, A. M., Damania, R., Borgomeo, E., & Jagerskog, L. A. (2021). *Ebb and Flow, Volume 1: Water, Migration, and Development*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/681141629794783791/Ebb-and-Flow-Volume-1-Water-Migration-and-Development.

systems and 286 river and lake basins.[17] Approximately 64% of the surface of the oceans are Marine Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), where no single country is responsible for management[18].

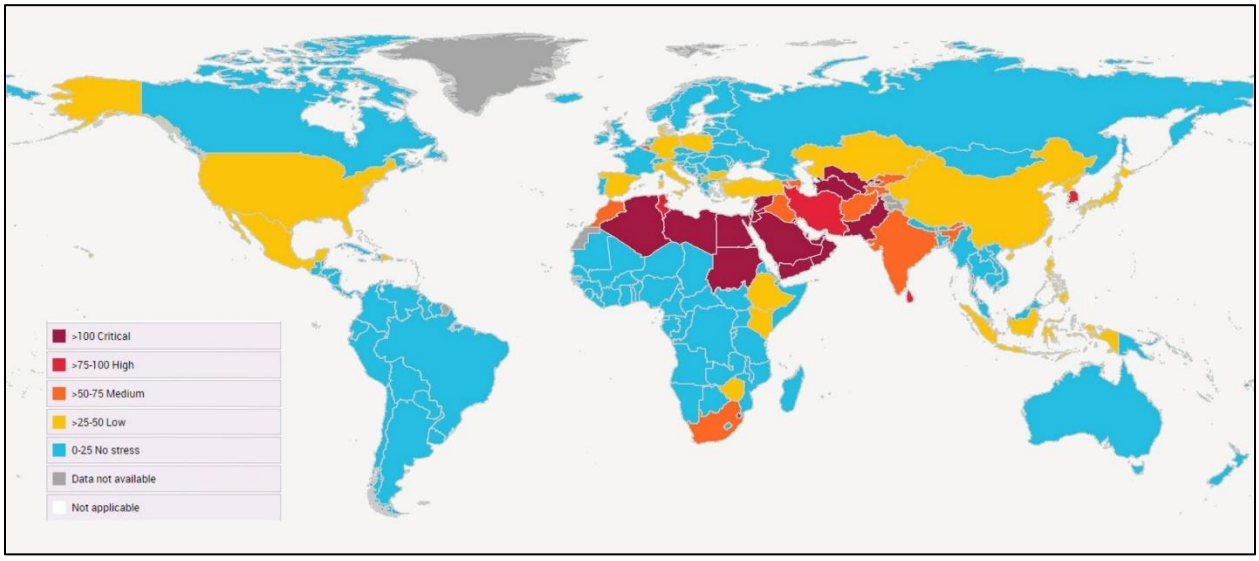

Figure 2. A proportion of freshwater withdrawal from available freshwater resources in 2021. Source: UN Water.

GEF's Contributions to International Waters

10. The IW focal area was established within the GEF with a specific focus on transboundary cooperation in marine and freshwater systems shared by two or more countries. The IW focal area aims to promote the collective management of transboundary water systems by facilitating policy, legal, and institutional reforms and investments for the sustainable use of ecosystem services.

11. Over the past decades, the GEF has consistently employed an IW project-specific approach, which includes the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and the Strategic Action Program (SAP). TDA provides an opportunity for countries to conduct joint fact-finding and scientific analysis to identify common threats in transboundary water systems. This process leads to the development of SAP, a politically endorsed document that highlights strategic interventions to address the transboundary water threats identified in the region. Accordingly, the nature of IW interventions has been centered around capacity building, assessment, strategic planning, policy reforms, and investments for transboundary cooperation.

12. Based on the consistent IW project approach, GEF has responded to a wide range of persisting and emerging environmental issues. The GEF-8 Programming Directions articulated the global context and key issues related to the IW focal area, including but not

[17] United Nations and UNESCO. (2021). *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Global Status of SDG Indicator 6.5.2 and Acceleration Needs*. UN and UNESCO: Paris, France.
[18] GEF. (n.d.). Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/areas-beyond-national-jurisdiction.

limited to: climate change impacts, nutrient runoff from agriculture, wastewater from industry, noise pollution, plastic pollution, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overfishing, habitat destruction, destruction of large marine ecosystems (LME), and limited monitoring capacity[19].

Relevance of GEF's IW Focal Area to the Global Context

13. Water remains a key cross-cutting topic for GEF focal areas, international conventions, and treaties. A COP28 decision on the global goal on adaptation (GGA), for instance, urged global communities to address climate-induced water scarcity, ameliorate ecosystems and biodiversity loss, and accelerate the adoption of ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions.[20] The outcome of the first stocktake toward the achievement of the Paris Agreement also acknowledged the vital role of water systems and water-related ecosystems in achieving climate adaptation as well as social and environmental safeguards.[21] Furthermore, the IW focal area directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, 14, and 15, which address a number of water-related topics including transboundary cooperation on water resource management, water-related ecosystems, marine pollution, ocean acidification, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and marine resource management in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Although the IW focal area had not directly served any specific international convention as a designated financial mechanism, the adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) in 2023 presented an opportunity to facilitate BBNJ ratification and early implementation.

Historical Trend of the International Waters Focal Area Strategies

14. The strategic priorities of the IW focal area have evolved over the past three decades in accordance with global priorities and emerging issues. Yet, GEF's contributions to transboundary cooperation on marine and freshwater ecosystems have been consistent since the establishment of this focal area. Table 2 presents the strategic objectives of GEF-5 through GEF-8. The most recent GEF replenishment cycles (GEF-7 and GEF-8) have focused on sustainable blue economy, areas beyond national jurisdiction, and water security.

	GEF 5 (2010-2014)	GEF 6 (2014-2018)	GEF 7 (2018-2022)	GEF 8 (2022-2026)
SO1	Catalyze multi-state cooperation to balance conflicting water uses in transboundary	Catalyze sustainable management of transboundary water systems by	Strengthen national Blue Economy opportunities to reduce threats to	Accelerate joint action to support a Sustainable Blue Economy

[19] GEF. (2022) GEF-8 Programming Directions. Retrieved June 20, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_29_Rev.01_GEF8_Programming_Directions.pdf.

[20] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_L18_adv.pdf

[21] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_16a01_adv_.pdf

	surface and ground water basins while considering climatic variability and change	supporting multi-state cooperation through foundational capacity building, targeted research, and portfolio learning	marine and coastal waters	
SO2	Catalyze multi-state cooperation to build marine fisheries and reduce pollution of coasts and Large Marine Ecosystems while considering climatic variability and change	Catalyze investments to balance competing water-uses in the management of transboundary surface and groundwater and enhance multi-state cooperation	Improve management in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)	Advance management in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)
SO3	Support foundational capacity building, portfolio learning, and targeted research needs for ecosystem-based, joint management of transboundary water systems	Enhance multi-state cooperation and catalyze investments to foster sustainable fisheries, restore and protect coastal habitats, and reduce pollution of coasts and LMEs	Enhance water security in freshwater ecosystems	Enhance water security in shared freshwater ecosystems
SO4		Promote effective management of Marine Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)		

Table 2. Strategic Objectives of International Waters Focal Area from GEF 5 to GEF 8.

15. Building on the foundation of GEF-7 programming efforts, GEF-8 set the following strategic objectives and targets:

GEF-8 IW Strategic Objectives

- Accelerate joint action to support a Sustainable Blue Economy;
- Advance management in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ); and
- Enhance water security in shared freshwater ecosystems.

GEF-8 IW Core Indicator Targets

- Improve cooperative management in 40 new and existing shared water ecosystems contributing to water security, decrease pollution and more sustainable uses of water and related natural resources;
- Move at least 2.1 million metric tons of global overexploited marine fisheries to more sustainable levels.

16. As with the previous GEF replenishment cycles, GEF-8 employed the Transboundary Diagnostic Assessments (TDAs) and Strategic Action Programs (SAPs) as key project activities, which recognize women as key catalysts for generating and sustaining change. Additionally, GEF-8 program directions put an emphasis on proper representation of women in legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks and gender mainstreaming in all processes and investments in the programming directions[22].

International Waters Focal Area Portfolio

17. The cumulative number of GEF projects in the IW focal area and relevant multifocal area (MFA) has reached 462 as of May 2024. While IW-related projects decreased between GEF-5 and GEF-6, they increased by 24.6% from GEF-6 to GEF-8 replenishment cycles. A notable shift occurred at GEF-8 regarding the proportion of MFA projects in the IW focal area. Almost 75% of GEF-8 projects in the IW focal area were MFA projects, which suggest that water issues are addressed in the contexts of multiple GEF focal areas (Figure 3).

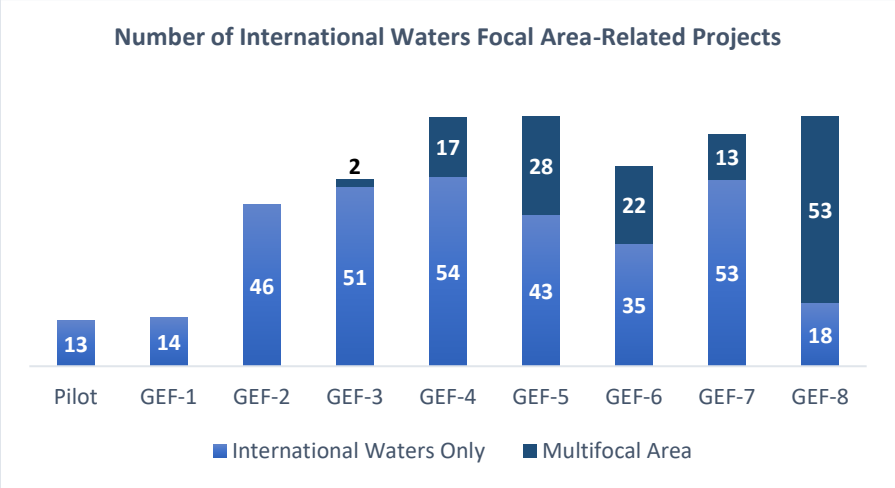

Figure 3. Number of International Waters-related Projects by GEF Replenishment Cycles.

18. The majority of GEF projects in the IW focal area has been consistently full-sized projects (FSP) throughout the GEF replenishment cycles. GEF-8 included only one medium-sized project (MSP), while the rest was FSP, suggesting that GEF strove to implement IW-related interventions at scale (Figure 4).

[22] GEF. (2022) GEF-8 Programming Directions. Retrieved June 20, 2024, from https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_29_Rev.01_GEF8_Programming_Directions.pdf.

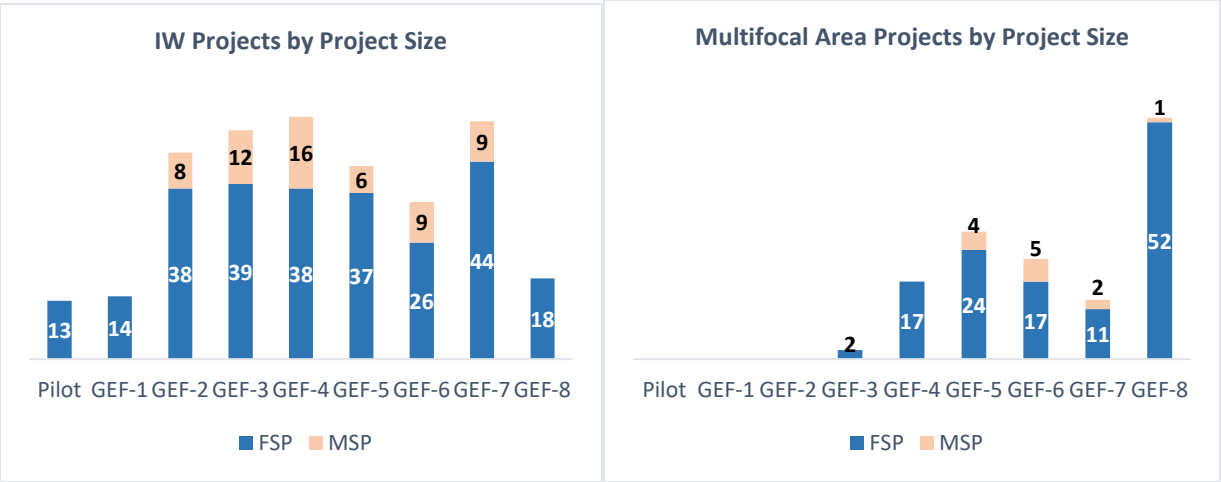

Figure 4. Number of GEF Projects in the International Waters Focal Area Only (left) and Multifocal Area (right) by Project Size.

19. GEF grants for the IW focal area reached a peak of $475 million at GEF-5 and dropped to $344 million at GEF-6 (Figure 5). The last two GEF replenishment cycles provided $437 and $433 million, respectively. GEF also leveraged co-financing for the IW focal area projects by mobilizing a total of $18.64 billion. The ratio of grants to co-financing is 1 to 6.3.

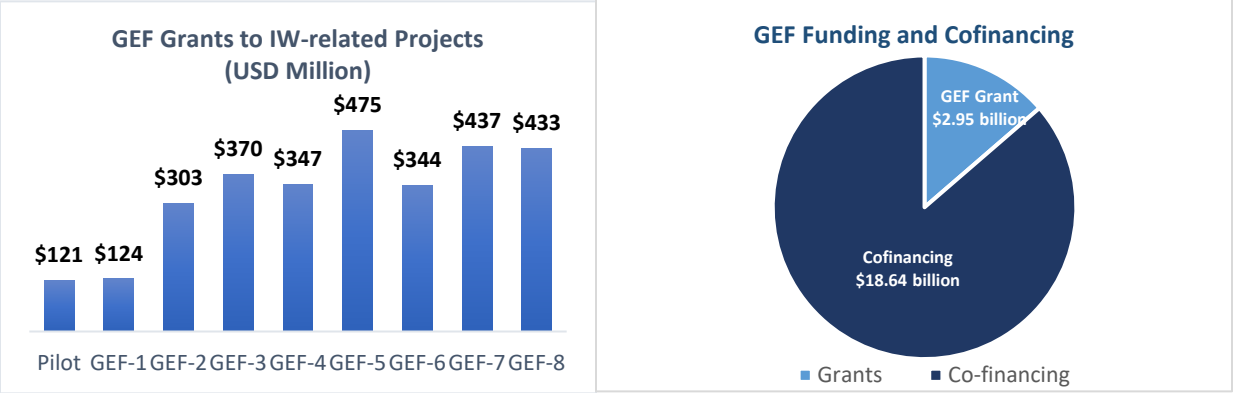

Figure 5. GEF Grants to IW-related Projects (left) and Cumulative GEF Funding and Co-financing Amount (right).

20. The share of IW focal area projects and grants has been high among four GEF agencies including UNDP, World Bank, UNEP, and FAO (Figure 6). Over 82.5% of all IW-related projects and 83.5% of grants have been allocated to these four agencies. At GEF-8, UNEP, UNDP, and FAO maintained a relatively larger share of grants and projects, followed by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Conservation International (CI), and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (Figure 7).

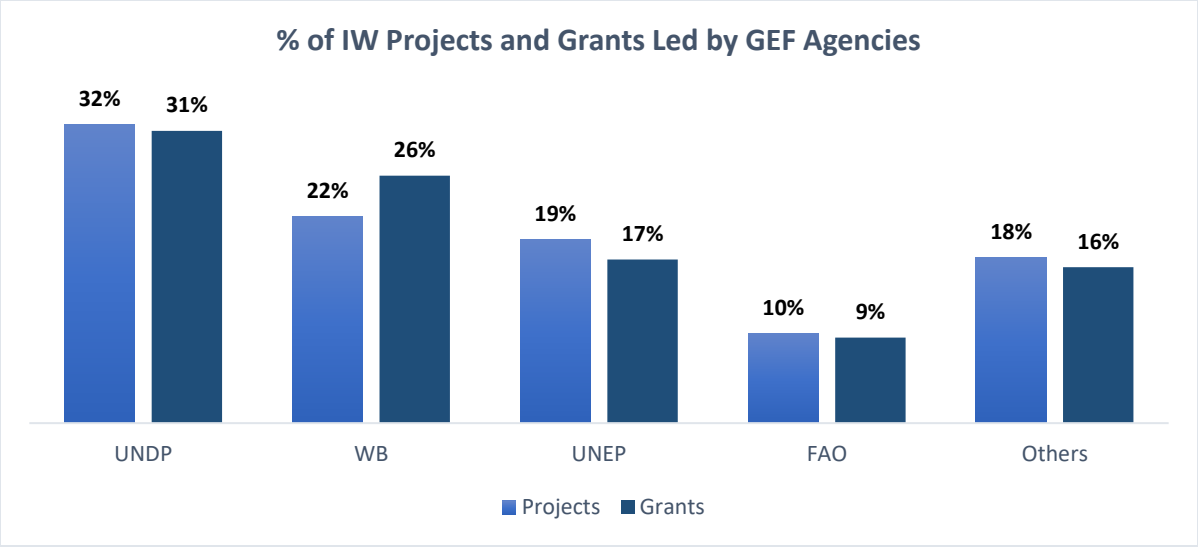

Figure 6. Cumulative Proportion of IW-related Projects and Grants Managed by GEF Agencies.

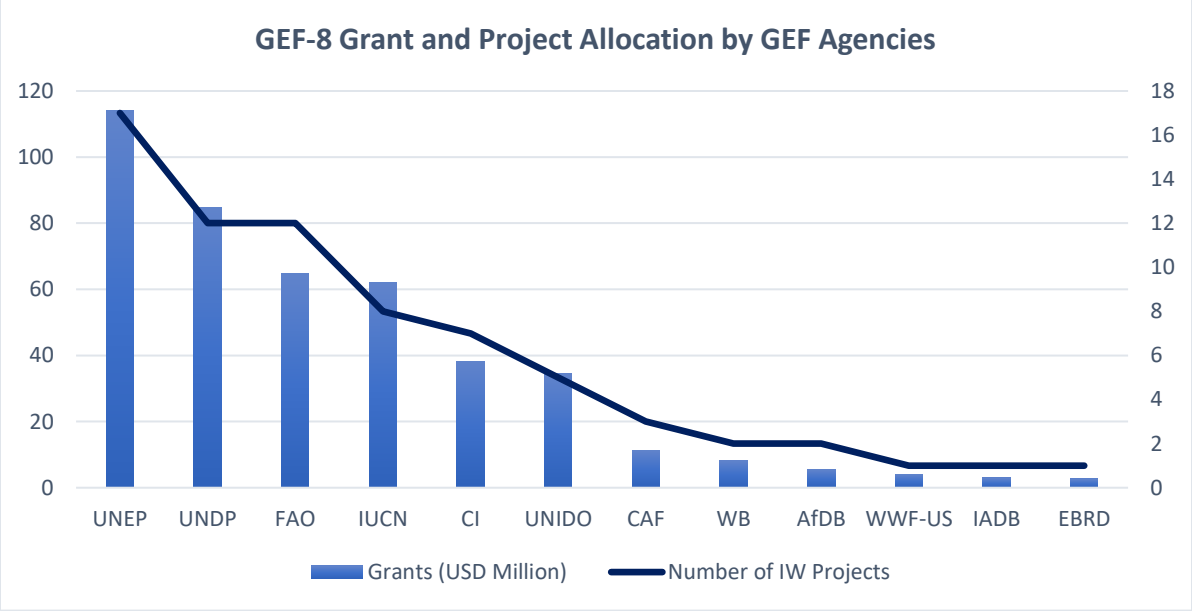

Figure 7. GEF-8 grant and project allocation by GEF agencies.

Available Evaluative Evidence

21. Since the GEF Pilot Phase, the GEF IW projects have been evaluated to inform GEF's strategic directions and programming efforts. The evaluative evidence of IW focal area projects up to GEF-6 was assessed in the previous IW focal area studies[23, 24]. The most recent

[23] GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. (2004). Program Study on International Waters 2005. Retrieved June 20, 2024, from https://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/iw-study-2005.pdf.
[24] GEF Independent Evaluation Office. (2018). International Waters Focal Area Study. Retrieved June 20, 2024, from https://www.gefieo.org/evaluations/international-waters-iw-focal-area-study-2016.

IW focal area report from October 2018 suggested that the IW focal area maintained a high level of relevance to global environmental issues, demonstrated satisfactory performance in 75% of the closed projects, presented a high potential to be a catalyst for multi-sectoral integration, and promoted compliance with international conventions, treaties, and agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea[25].

22. During the GEF-8 replenishment period (2022–2026), two IW-related evaluations were presented to the GEF Council. First, *the Evaluation of the GEF's Approach and Interventions in Water Security* was conducted to underscore the importance, relevance, and recognition of water as a key cross-cutting issue in GEF strategies and projects. Despite GEF's long-term engagement with transboundary water cooperation through the IW focal area and multifocal area, a systematic analysis of water security across GEF's entire portfolio had not been conducted. This evaluation aimed to fill this knowledge gap and highlight GEF's approach to water security across GEF's focal areas. Second, *the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Lower Mekong River Basin Ecosystem* was conducted to understand how GEF addressed environmental issues on biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, and IW across the Lower Mekong River Basin. By focusing on multiple GEF focal areas, this evaluation highlighted the interlinkages between IW and other focal area interventions.

Evaluation Objectives and Questions

23. The overall objectives of this IW focal area study are: 1) to review and synthesize evaluative evidence on the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, knowledge management, and innovation of GEF IW programs and projects; and 2) to inform the OPS8 with evaluative evidence from the IW focal area.

24. This focal area study will address the following primary evaluation questions:

- To what extent has the IW focal area adapted to the evolving global, regional, and national priorities and the GEF's recent shift to integrated programming?
- How did the IW focal area projects perform and produce impacts?
- How has the GEF contributed to knowledge management and information sharing of IW-related projects and initiatives?

25. Additional evaluation questions are closely aligned to the OPS8 evaluation questions to ensure coherence between individual focal area studies and the OPS8 (Table 3). A comprehensive list of evaluation questions for the OPS8 can be found in Annex A.

Evaluation Questions for the IW Focal Area Study	Information Sources	Methodology	Relevant Evaluation Questions for the OPS8
How relevant are the strategic priorities in	• GEF project documents	• Desk review	To what degree does the GEF maintain global

[25] Ibid.

GEF 7 and GEF -8 aligned with global priorities in this focal area?	• Journal articles • Grey literature • Terminal evaluations		relevance and what strategies could be implemented to further its global significance?
How has the IW focal area strategies continued to align with country priorities?	• GEF project documents • Terminal evaluations	• Desk review • Key informant interviews	Is the GEF's programming effectively aligned with country specific priorities and overarching global environmental concerns?
How has the IW focal area demonstrated policy coherence in the recent and ongoing projects?	• Terminal evaluations • Project stakeholders • IW Evaluations	• Desk review • Key informant interviews	What strategies best help countries achieve policy coherence in the context of competing environmental, social and economic priorities?
To what extent did the IW focal area projects achieve intended outcomes and project sustainability?	• Terminal evaluations	• Quantitative analysis of project ratings	What are the impacts of GEF support within countries, and how sustainable are GEF interventions over the long term?
How has the IW focal area considered gender, indigenous people, local communities, and youths?	• Terminal evaluations • Project stakeholders	• Desk review • Key informant interviews	Do GEF projects prioritize support for gender, inclusion of indigenous peoples, civil society, and youth? What findings and lessons emerge from these endeavors?
How has the IW focal area engaged the private sector?	• Terminal evaluations • Project stakeholders	• Desk review • Key informant interviews	How is the GEF actively engaging the private sector?
How has GEF contributed to knowledge management and information sharing of IW-related projects and initiatives?	• IW: Learn • International Waters Conference (IWC) 10 • Project stakeholders	• Desk review • Direct observations • Key informant interviews	Is the GEF effectively fulfilling its role as a significant data and information provider, and are there any systemic issues that need addressing in this regard?

How has the IW focal area promoted broader adoption and scaling up of key interventions for transformational change?	• Terminal evaluations • IWC 10 • Project stakeholders	• Desk review • Direct observations • Key informant interviews	Has the GEF effectively acted as a catalyst in promoting broader adoption and scaling up for transformational change either through its own interventions, through partnerships or demonstration effects?
What innovations and technologies have the IW focal area projects used?	• Terminal evaluations • IWC 10	• Desk review • Review of IWC 10 materials	What is the evidence on the GEF record for supporting the use of new technologies?

Table 3. Evaluation questions for the IW focal area study and the OPS8.

Methods:

26. This study will employ a mixed-methods approach to review, collect, and synthesize available evaluative evidence. More specifically, this study will conduct a portfolio review, an evaluation synthesis, an assessment of IW project quality at entry, direct observations, and key informant interviews. Additional literature reviews, case studies, surveys, and geospatial analysis may be conducted as appropriate.

27. A portfolio review involves quantitative and qualitative analysis of IW project data from the GEF portal site, Annual Performance Reports (APR), and terminal evaluation reports submitted by the GEF implementing agencies. Descriptive analysis will focus on the historical trend of the IW project number, size, geographic distribution, total funding and co-financing amount per GEF replenishment period, and outcome ratings on the overall project performance and M&E implementation. Inferential analysis may be conducted to explore potential determinants of successful or unsuccessful performance.

28. An evaluation synthesis includes the review and summarization of two IW-related evaluations and terminal evaluations to present the most updated evaluative evidence from the IW focal area.

29. A quality at entry assessment addresses if recently approved projects are designed to demonstrate project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, and sustainability by characterizing project activities, expected benefits, levels of systems thinking, project designs and approaches, feedback loops, stakeholder involvement, coordination, gender consideration, social inclusion, private sector engagement, and innovation. This focal area study will focus on addressing additionality, innovative approaches, transformative effects, and sustainability.

30. Direct observations focus on documenting how capacity building and knowledge sharing activities are conducted through IWC10 pre-conference workshops and conference activities.

31. Key informant interviews elicit key stakeholders' experience and perceptions on the IW focal area and projects based on the semi-structured interview guide. The interviews will be conducted through online platforms (e.g., Zoom) and in person.

Timeline:

32. The IW focal area study will be conducted between June and November 2024. The estimated timeline below may be updated in accordance with progress with evaluation activities (Table 4).

Evaluation Activities	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Literature Review and Concept Note Development						
Portfolio Review						
Evaluation Synthesis						
Quality at Entry Review						
Key Informant Interviews						
Draft Report Writing						
Final Report Writing						

Table 4. Expected Timeline for the IW Focal Area Study.

Expected Deliverables:

33. The final report of the IW focal area study will be presented in March 2025. Additional knowledge products (e.g., journal article) may be produced to share key findings with external stakeholders in 2025.

Annex

Annex A: List of OPS8 Evaluation Questions.

	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	To what degree does the GEF maintain global relevance and what strategies could be implemented to further its global significance?
	Is the GEF's programming effectively aligned with country specific priorities and overarching global environmental concerns?
	How does the relevance of the GEF intersect with the guidance provided by the Conventions? Additionally, does GEF programming adequately align with focal areas and objectives delineated by both Conventions and individual countries, particularly in light of the increasing emphasis on integrated and impact programs?
	Have the policies implemented by the GEF facilitated the necessary flexibility to maintain relevance and respond efficiently to recent crises?
	How well positioned is the GEF to support countries in addressing the triple environmental crises, ensuring attention to socio-economic co-benefits, social justice, and equity in its assistance efforts?
GEF-8 Strategy	What is the current status of progress toward achieving the main objectives outlined in the GEF-8 Strategy?
	Is the current business model of the GEF conducive to supporting the strategy and effectively facilitating its implementation?
GEF Policies	Have GEF policies been effectively implemented to foster a whole of society approach?
	Do GEF projects prioritize support for gender, inclusion of indigenous peoples, civil society, and youth? What findings and lessons emerge from these endeavors?
RBM & KM	Is the Results Based Management System adequately meeting the needs of the GEF Partnership for effective project monitoring information?
	Are the self-evaluation systems yielding high quality information for both for accountability and organizational learning purposes?
	Is the GEF effectively fulfilling its role as a significant data and information provider, and are there any systemic issues that need addressing in this regard?
	How well is the GEF positioned as a "learning organization"?
Outcomes, Policy Coherence, & Sustainability	What are the environmental and socio-economic outcomes of GEF interventions, and how sustainable are these over the long term?
	What are the impacts of GEF support within countries, and how sustainable are GEF interventions over the long term?
	What strategies best help countries achieve policy coherence in the context of competing environmental, social and economic priorities?
	What role does behavior change play in influencing the long-term sustainability of outcomes?

	In the context of a whole-of-society approach, what strategies best help recipient countries recognize the synergies between global environmental benefits and social and economic co-benefits particularly those related to social justice and equity?
Catalytic Roles & Transformation	Has the GEF effectively acted as a catalyst in promoting broader adoption and scaling up for transformational change either through its own interventions, through partnerships or demonstration effects?
	How has GEF effectively implemented Nature Based Solutions to achieve transformational change?
	What is the evidence on the GEF record for supporting the use of new technologies?
	To what extent does the GEF promote a level of risk taking aligned with its mission to enhance Global Environmental Benefits?
	How is the GEF actively engaging the private sector?
Finance	How does the GEF effectively catalyze financing to scale its interventions?
	How does the GEF leverage non grant instruments to innovate and scale up conservation financing?
Comparative Advantage	What specific advantages does the GEF partnership offer in addressing contemporary environmental challenges?
	Are the policies, structure, administrative processes of the GEF well suited to fulfill its mission effectively?