

Evaluation of GEF Support to Access and Benefit Sharing and the Nagoya Protocol



GEF support to ABS and Nagoya Protocol implementation has contributed significantly to biodiversity conservation and in addressing local and indigenous community rights and needs.

Conservation of biodiversity and human well-being go hand in hand. Parties to the 2010 Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, took a big step toward furthering that link in a landmark agreement: The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. With more than 39 ABS projects funded by the GEF and the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund, this is the first study to evaluate their performance.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Project designs may be “over packed.” Virtually every evaluated project includes activities or outcomes for each of the three elements of the GEF’s ABS strategy: legislative development, research and development of ABS contracts, and benefit sharing for indigenous and local communities. But these elements are better implemented progressively, rather than

simultaneously, beginning with a clear legislative framework.

2. Projects are often lacking in institutional and professional capacity. Effective capacity-building begins with the properly chosen experts who are active in developing the project, a step commonly missing due to lack of available expertise.

3. Each ABS project is complex and unique, and often underappreciated. The complexity and uniqueness of each ABS project often stymies attempts to model one after the other, as when countries with less advanced ABS frameworks attempt to emulate countries with highly developed frameworks.

BACKGROUND

The ABS concept was initiated as a mechanism for linking biological conservation with social welfare and domestic development. It was seen as a “great bargain” by which

PURPOSE AND METHODS: This study assesses the monitoring and evaluation framework, project design, and relevance of 39 access and benefit-sharing (ABS) projects approved or submitted since GEF-4, incorporating the results from portfolio analyses, document reviews, and in-depth interviews with eminent ABS specialists and project stakeholders.

WEB PAGE: www.gefio.org/evaluations/biodiversity-bd-focal-area-study-2017

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ABOUT US: The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the GEF has a central role in ensuring the independent evaluation function within the GEF. www.gefio.org

PORTFOLIO HIGHLIGHTS

71%

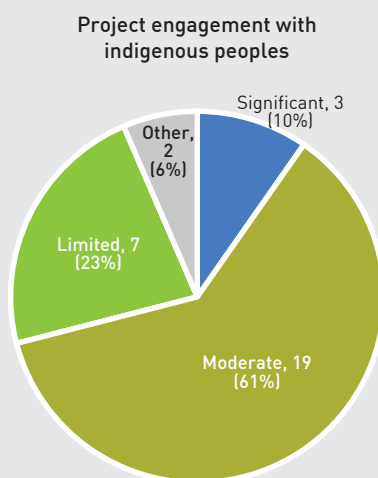
projects achieving a moderate or higher level of success in engaging indigenous local communities

21

projects mature enough to warrant an external evaluation

70

interviewees noting a need for greater project funding



countries and companies could utilize genetic resources for commercial and non-commercial benefits, sharing those benefits in return for being granted access to them. ABS would by design contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by tapping into its financial potential.

Since the official recognition of ABS by the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), its implementation has remained challenging. The Nagoya Protocol (NP), adopted in 2010 sought to ensure that its ABS objectives would keep pace with the CBD's primary work on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Since then, a number of participating countries have begun implementing the NP. Committed parties have been providing more detailed guidance to the GEF on implementing ABS; various committees and working groups have submitted a range of studies addressing both the opportunities and obstacles embodied in the protocol. But along with this profusion of studies has come a correspondingly wide range of perceptions and a persisting lack of unity among ABS approaches.

With only 39 approved or submitted projects at this date, this study has been able to examine documents on all but the two most recent among them. On the other hand, this relative newness of

the ABS portfolio limits its evaluation. Most of the GEF's ABS projects are in early or pre-implementation stages. Few of those now being executed have yet to be independently reviewed.

The NP has been of particular relevance to indigenous and local communities, pertaining to that portion of their traditional knowledge of genetic resources. The NP has reflected the CBD's recognition of such communities' rights and roles with regards to their genetic resources and traditional knowledge. Over the course of this study, it has become clear that, despite certain obstacles, ABS projects supported by the GEF have worked well in addressing its key objectives..

CONCLUSIONS

1. Significant progress. A range of ABS projects have clearly demonstrated material and monetary benefits. Given the relative novelty of the ABS concept, these results have highlighted a number of innovations upon which the GEF can build toward supporting future projects. For example, certain projects have already shown promising progress at identifying resources, prescribing additional R&D, developing agricultural techniques to avoid harming wild populations of valuable plants, adding value to genetic resources, and providing

guidance in developing markets for targeted substances.

2. Local motivation. Projects have generated local employment, training, and other benefits from the ABS focus. They have also assisted in establishing local companies capable of entering into contracts and partnerships with commercial institutions, which in turn profit local growers and their communities. These projects are generally perceived either as organic "learn-by-doing" exercises, or as pilot projects aiming to shortcut the organic process and serve as templates for future ABS efforts.

3. Linking ABS to key CBD objectives. The GEF's support of ABS initiatives has made major contributions to the conservation of biodiversity as well as to the rights, welfare, resources, and needs of indigenous local communities. Numerous commentators have noted that these conservation and social welfare linkages are essential. Thus, the objective of ABS is inextricably linked to the CBD's objectives in these areas. A number of projects have produced concrete examples of linkages, including the following:

- Conservation of medicinal plants
- Conservation of threatened and endangered amphibians and their habitats

“ABS is a one-of-a-kind regulation—a catalyst to conserve biodiversity and ensure equitable benefit distribution while caring for the needs and rights of indigenous people and local communities. However, despite its intent, implementation remains a challenge.”

—Anupam Anand, IEO Evaluation Officer

- Expression of intent to work directly with national park authorities as the nationally designated beneficiaries of genetic resource collections
- Work focused on ensuring no harm to wild populations or ecosystems from bio-collection
- Development of agricultural cultivation of target species to ensure accurate replication of valuable genetic properties

4. Involving indigenous people. Of 31 projects approved under GEF-4 and GEF-5, 71 percent achieved a moderate or higher level of success in engaging with indigenous local communities. Nearly half of all projects include specific provisions addressing the

development of ABS for such communities.

5. Project success. Twenty-one percent of the projects that have been approved or submitted from GEF-4 to the present have progressed to a point of requiring an external evaluation. Those projects formally reviewed were generally rated as performing “satisfactory” or “highly satisfactory”, while relatively few received ratings of “unsatisfactory” or “moderately unsatisfactory.”

6. Funding challenges. Nearly 70 percent of interviewees noted that the funding they received for ABS framework development was relatively small in comparison to the task.

7. Unadopted drafts. Many country projects have working drafts that have yet to be adopted, suggesting that ABS frameworks pose particular challenges not previously addressed.

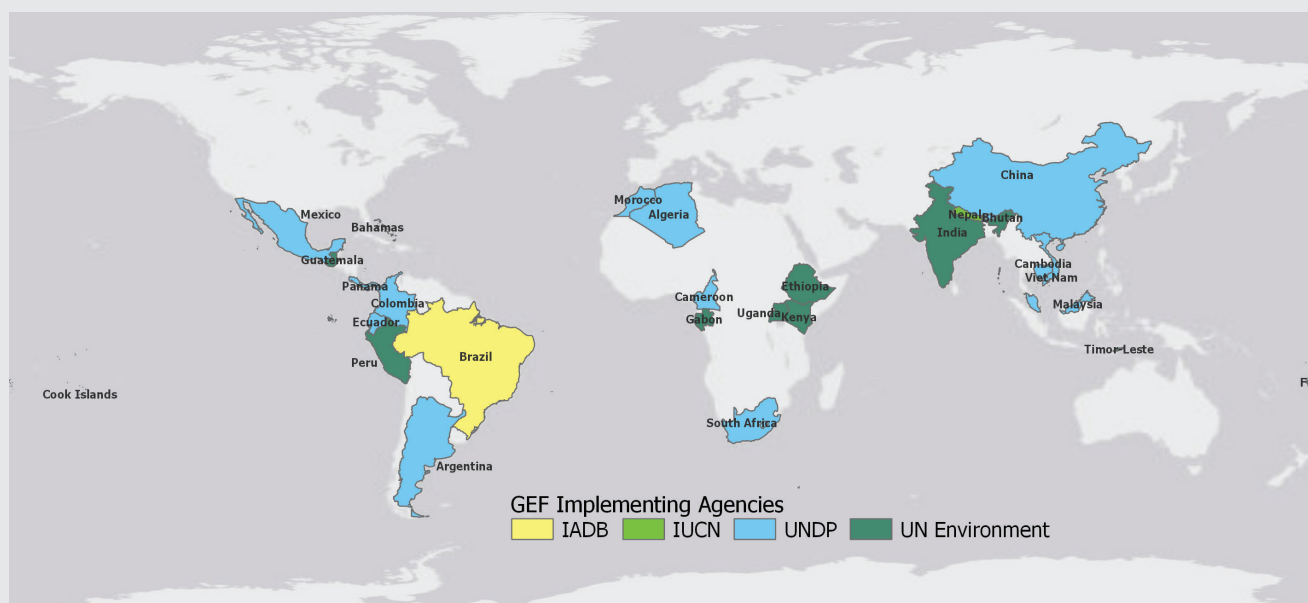
8. Promising resource identification, utilization, and development.

Several of the crowning achievements in the early stages of these projects has been found in building capacity for identifying promising genetic resources and traditional knowledge; adding value to such resources; and negotiating for the development and utilization of such resources.

9. Capacity, awareness, and workshops.

The development of ABS capacity in provider countries is recognized as the most important need for the ABS regime to function independently of external support. Although external evaluations conclude that the capacity-building objectives of many projects were not met, self-assessments of those projects indicated that capacity and awareness have indeed increased since project initiation.

FIGURE 1: GEF-supported national ABS projects



NOTE: Map excludes three regional and seven global projects. The representation of political boundaries does not necessarily reflect the position of the GEF IEO on international issues of recognition, sovereignty, and/or jurisdiction.

10. Issues to address. This study identified five particular areas of potential challenge:

- **Project outputs are sometimes prioritized over capacity building.** Several project participants indicated themselves as unprepared for establishing and sustaining future ABS projects, with expectations of continued reliance on external help.
- **Excessive emphasis on simplification.** ABS is clearly a complex issue, and not one easily reduced to simplified terms. Nonetheless, project participants sometimes expect such simplicity in the wording of ABS legislation, contracts, forms, and guidelines. Such attempts at simplicity will likely exacerbate rather than eliminate the capacity challenge.
- **Skewed representativeness.** In trying to insure a wide representation of stakeholders at events or meetings, the list of invitees is usually limited to only one or a few persons representing their country's indigenous peoples or ABS-related officials. The risk is thus high that the project's outcomes may reflect a non-representative selection of stakeholders.
- **Capacity building.** Problems may arise in projects prematurely attempting to build capacity. Gearing

up for projects still in the draft stage—given the likelihood that such documents will be drastically altered before adoption—may amount to wasted effort.

- **Availability of expertise.** ABS projects require a range of relatively distinct types of expertise, including, for example, those of market analysis and development; strategic contract negotiation; economics, resource valuation, and value addition; scientific issues and R&D systems; industrial engineering and technology transfer; policy and legislation; and community development. But in practice the selection of experts is often hampered by limited budgets and a lack of candidates capable of advising on multiple areas of expertise. Such choices may be defeating the efficacy of those project designs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Address sustainability more directly. ABS projects rely on national support to fund and sustain them. ABS benefits could in turn support additional activities, including transfers of technology and raising of public awareness. Some projects have shown notable progress in this regard, developing national capacities to utilize and add value to domestic genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. This approach can be scaled to each country's needs and capabilities.

2. Focus on building technical and professional capacity, in addition to increasing awareness. Governments and participating users of genetic resources and traditional knowledge need to reduce their reliance on external assistance. It is thus necessary to ensure that (a) their efforts reach the intended audience in a form they can absorb and use; (b) designated capacity-building activities remain specific to the goal; and (c) the proper audiences (e.g., parliamentary and ministerial levels) are targeted for raising awareness and for addressing project sustainability for the communities involved with the project.

3. Tailor country-specific approaches to projects. ABS interventions should be tailored and timed to reflect national priorities and capacities. Including too many interventions in a single project could undermine ABS work required in later stages.

4. Expedite the availability of project outputs and lessons. ABS planning and implementation should place greater emphasis on producing earlier evaluations, along with reviewing and challenging internally developed reports more closely, providing clearer reporting, and conducting mid-term reviews more often. Such information should be made more readily available to guide other projects. ■

