

GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation 2009



The *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009* prepared by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) synthesizes the main conclusions and recommenda-

tions from three recent country portfolio evaluations: those for Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria. GEF support to these three countries began in 1992 for Cameroon and Egypt and in 1994 for Syria. This synthesis report focuses on three key areas:

- The **results and sustainability** of GEF support, particularly at the global environmental benefits level
- The **relevance** of GEF support to the GEF mandate (that is, the generation of global benefits) and to national sustainable and environmental policies and priorities
- The **efficiency** of GEF support as reflected by the time and effort it takes to prepare and implement a GEF project and the role and responsibilities of, as well as the synergies among, GEF stakeholders

Findings

Results

GEF support to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use has been of strategic importance and has generated some impacts. The Syrian country portfolio evaluation found evidence of actual impacts in biodiversity, with GEF support leading to an increase in the number of migratory birds flying into protected areas. In Cameroon, GEF support contributed to the creation of more than 24,000 square kilometers of protected areas, including 5 national parks, 44 community-based natural resource management units, and 39 community forests. In Egypt and Syria, the GEF contributed to the development of institutional capacity within national and local authorities. GEF support has also helped raise awareness of biodiversity issues on the part of decision makers outside environmental circles and of local administrators, the media, and the public at large. Consequently, the issue of biodiversity

conservation and sustainable use are now higher on the political agenda in these countries.

It is difficult to quantify the direct greenhouse gas emissions reduction or avoidance stemming from GEF support in the climate change area, but the GEF has introduced the topic in these countries and has influenced markets, particularly regarding energy efficiency. Only in Egypt was quantitative information available on GEF support-related carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions reduction or avoidance. It is estimated that, through energy efficiency, the GEF has been able to contribute to the cumulative reduction of 16.8 million tons of carbon dioxide in Egypt.

Results in the other focal areas in Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria have been limited to establishing a foundation for national and regional action plans and policy development, and to enhancing national capacity. Combating land degradation is a key national priority in these countries, but GEF support in this area has been limited to Cameroon.

Long-term sustainability of achievements remains a challenge. The three country portfolio evaluations found several factors affecting the sustainability of achievements, among which are the following:

- Planning is inadequate, and resource allocations are insufficient at all levels.
- Private sector involvement to mobilize financial resources has been insufficient owing to a lack of engagement and/or the development of appropriate mechanisms to leverage or interest the sector in a meaningful manner.
- National policies need a long time frame in which to be changed; for example, in Syria, the development and implementation of financial instruments to sustain achievements in biodiversity pose challenges and require additional institutional reforms.

In Egypt, the portfolio has shifted from one largely driven by technological approaches to one involving more community-

oriented mechanisms. In Cameroon, the long-term budgetary support approach of the Forest and Environment Sector Program provides an opportunity for the government, civil society, the private sector, and communities to collectively engage in an effort to address environmental governance and underinvestment in the sector.

Relevance

GEF support is relevant to national environmental priorities and to the global conventions, even though there is no GEF framework or vision at the country level. GEF support was found to be directly relevant to the national environmental priorities of these three countries. An additional finding from the year's country portfolio evaluations is that, since bilateral support to environmental issues has decreased over the years, GEF support has become more relevant. Although GEF support has been relevant to national priorities, not all national priorities have been prioritized by the GEF; this is particularly true for land degradation and freshwater resource management, most notably in Syria.

Country ownership of the GEF portfolio varies, with many project ideas driven by GEF Agencies and other external factors, including global issues. This is particularly the case for regional and global projects. As found in previous country portfolio evaluations, country ownership of GEF support varies by focal area. An additional dimension found in this year's country portfolio evaluations is that the degree of ownership also seems to vary by support modality, in line with the scope of GEF support.

Efficiency

The potential benefits of the new project cycle have not yet reached the country level. The GEF is still perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect project proposals and implementation processes. Project preparation, particularly the writing of project documents, is often delegated to GEF Agencies by government authorities. The project cycle guidelines and benefits established for GEF-4 have not yet materialized at the country level.

Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank and regional banks do not have programs in that country. This conclusion is applicable only to

Syria from among this year's country portfolio evaluations, but may be applicable to other countries in this and other regions. Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies compared to other countries in the region and the world. The only institution in which Syria participates is the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The World Bank has not had a lending program in or a country strategy for Syria since 1986, and Syria does not belong to the Asian Development Bank.

The efficiency of the focal point mechanism is directly correlated to size of the GEF portfolio. The GEF portfolios of the three countries evaluated differ in size, with Egypt having the largest and Syria the smallest. The establishment of a GEF unit and national steering committee in Egypt has improved the approval process of GEF projects, making it more systematic, in line with clear priorities, and more country driven.

Recommendations

- The GEF should address the significant gap in available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries such as Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria.
- The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations—such as Syria—concerning their limited access to international financial institutions.

Follow-Up

The GEF Council has asked the Secretariat to explore, within the GEF partnership, modalities to address the gap in available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing such countries as Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria and to conduct a survey of countries that are, like Syria, in the exceptional circumstance of having limited access to GEF partner international financial institutions.

The GEF Evaluation Office is an independent entity reporting directly to the GEF Council, mandated to evaluate the focal area programs and priorities of the GEF.

The full version of the *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation 2009* (Evaluation Report No. 50, 2009) is available in the Publications section of the GEF Evaluation Office Web site, www.gefeo.org. For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thefef.org.