

GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: South Africa (1994–2007)



Photo: Cronin-Paine family, Cape Town

South Africa contains internationally significant biodiversity, habitats, and marine resources. Although considered a middle-income country, it has wide economic, racial, and gender disparities that affect the state of

the environment. The country has a high proportion of threatened species, and many habitats are poorly conserved. South Africa is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the region and one of the world's most carbon-intensive countries. Land degradation and pressures on marine resources are critical issues.

South Africa has actively participated in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) since 1994. Most GEF support has gone to biodiversity and climate change, and the rest to persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and the Small Grants Programme (SGP).

In October 2007–February 2008, the GEF Evaluation Office evaluated GEF support to South Africa. The assessment was part of a series of country portfolio evaluations examining the totality of GEF support across all GEF Agencies and programs, using a country as the unit of analysis. Benin, Madagascar, and South Africa were chosen for evaluation according to a process that included random selection and specific criteria. The Evaluation Office synthesized these evaluations in its *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008* to assess the experience and common issues across different countries on the continent. South Africa was chosen, in particular, because of its historically large and diverse portfolio of 11 completed projects with potentially important results and a government-developed medium-term priority framework for GEF support. The country will receive a large allocation under the Resource Allocation Framework due to its important global biodiversity and dependency on fossil fuels.

The evaluation focused on the country's 26 GEF national projects worth \$86.27 million, including 26 projects under the GEF SGP, which were evaluated as one project. One global and four regional projects focused on international waters were included in the evaluation.

Findings

Relevance

GEF support has addressed national priorities, particularly in biodiversity and the South African component of international waters projects, but less clearly for climate change.

Key challenges in biodiversity are to integrate with sustainable land and water resource management that factor in social and economic development. For climate change, an exclusive focus on mitigation, not adaptation, and on renewable energy does not align with national energy or climate change policy.

The GEF portfolio is broadly relevant to South Africa's draft sustainable development framework and the South Africa GEF Medium-Term Priority Framework, but the balance of support to different focal areas raises questions.

Gaps exist both within focal areas and across the portfolio. GEF support does not sufficiently recognize that environmental sustainability is closely tied with addressing poverty and inequality, and overconsumption and waste. An important area of potential impact will be institutional and systemic capacity building as well as catalyzing action and developing and transferring technical expertise.

Country ownership of the GEF portfolio varies among focal areas, but overall ownership of the portfolio needs strengthening. Significant cofinancing by the government reinforces that a country strategy that aligns with international conventions and South Africa's needs and priorities should drive the GEF portfolio. Such a strategy is currently lacking, except in the biodiversity area.

GEF support to South Africa is relevant to the GEF mandate, principles, and objectives, but this varies by focal area. GEF support has targeted areas with the greatest potential global benefits: biodiversity and international waters. Gaps and weak areas, however, may represent missed opportunities to achieve benefits in land degradation, the SGP, and POPs. Resource allocation in climate change, for instance, a gap in energy efficiency projects, has not maximized potential global benefits.

Results and Effectiveness

GEF support to biodiversity in South Africa has resulted in significant impacts. Examples include formal protection of the internationally significant Cape Floristic Region and Succulent Karo; strengthening of conservation systems and management; and significant influence on conservation policy, strategy, and management practice that has been replicated beyond the project portfolio.

GEF support to international waters projects has strengthened South Africa's commitment to global and regional cooperation to reduce overexploitation of fish stocks and land- and sea-based pollution. The country has signed the International Maritime Organization Convention on Ballast Water, which it helped shape, and has increased its capacity to regulate International Maritime Organization requirements.

The climate change portfolio has had limited direct impacts on greenhouse emissions, but some catalytic and replication effects are expected. A concrete strategy for South Africa's climate change response is likely by the end of 2008. Projects to date have focused on increasing renewable energy use. The value of most projects, however, will be in testing and demonstrating technology; removing market barriers; and improving policy, regulatory, budgetary, and strategy frameworks supporting technology change.

Results in other focal areas are limited. SGP projects have lacked effective support for management and implementation. A national plan on POPs is close to completion. No projects in land degradation have been approved.

Long-term sustainability of global and local benefits achieved is uncertain. Capacity built in the biodiversity and international waters focal areas must now be embedded in the relevant mandated agencies. The GEF could improve its effectiveness by better targeting the impact of poverty on South Africa's environmental and global biodiversity results.

Efficiency

Stakeholders view GEF processes and procedures as overly complicated and inefficient, negatively affecting the country's ability to drive the portfolio. These processes erode stakeholder energy and interest mobilized during project design. Stakeholders also have difficulty distinguishing the roles of the GEF Agencies and focal point.

The focal point should have played a more effective role in strategic guidance and information and in facilitating learning and synergies. Absence of clear focal area strategies and of plans for South Africa's response to conventions, except for biodiversity, has hampered the focal point mechanism, affecting portfolio relevance and replication.

Recommendations

To the GEF Council

- GEF strategies and programs should recognize and respond to existing integrated regional and national analyses and strategies for meeting convention requirements and/or support their development where relevant.
- Improve the basis for monitoring and evaluating GEF support.
- Establish a basis for more flexible country-based portfolio management to strengthen country ownership, accountability, sustainability, relevance, and efficiency.
- Specify and communicate GEF Agency roles and responsibilities.

To the Government of the South Africa

- Establish a strategic basis for directing the portfolio; selecting, designing, and implementing GEF projects; and monitoring and evaluating achievements.
- Take decisive action to strengthen the SGP.
- Strengthen the focal point mechanism.
- Improve the sustainability of gains made through GEF support.

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 versions of the *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: South Africa (1994–2007)* and *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008* (Evaluation Report Nos. 43 and 44, 2008) are available in the Publications section of the GEF Evaluation Office Web site, www.gefo.org. For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.