

IEC Learnings

Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF • October 2021



INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION DRIVERS

Integrated programming now accounts for nearly a fifth of GEF funding. This evaluation assesses its evolution from the pilots launched in GEF-6 to the fully rolled-out impact programs in GEF-7.

Key findings

- More than \$1 billion has been allocated for integrated approach programming through 95 child projects in 56 countries, via three integrated approach pilots (IAPs) in GEF-6 and five impact programs in GEF-7. The five impact programs account for nearly a fifth of overall GEF-7 funding.
- Integrated programming addresses the objectives of United Nations conventions covering climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation, without hindering countries from reporting to those conventions.
- GEF-7 impact programs are better designed compared to the IAPs: they have more robust theories of change, systems thinking, and coherence between child projects and programs.
- Monitoring and reporting on program results remain problematic. Common results frameworks across program and child projects were not well developed or implemented for all IAPs.
- Program- and project-level reporting shows IAPs have made some progress toward global environmental benefits; progress is most common for Resilient Food Systems projects (77 percent) and less so for Good Growth Partnership (40 percent) and Sustainable Cities (23 percent) projects.
- The IAP knowledge platforms—a key feature of the GEF integrated approach—have resulted in greater knowledge and learning compared to past GEF programmatic approaches; but they have suffered from insufficient budget allocations and low priority among the child projects that they are meant to benefit.



The GEF introduced the IAPs in 2014, building on its long and evolving experience of using integration, to address the main drivers of global environmental degradation and deliver multiple benefits across multilateral environmental agreements using the GEF programmatic approach modality. These pilots—Resilient Food Systems, Good Growth Partnership, and Sustainable Cities—were a multidimensional, systemic approach to a multidimensional, systemic challenge. The GEF-7 programming documents took early lessons from a 2017 review of these pilots to roll out the GEF integrated approach in five impact programs—one on transforming food, land use, and restoration systems (FOLUR); one focusing on sustainable urban development; and three focusing on sustainable landscapes in, respectively, the Amazon, the Congo Basin, and selected drylands around the world.

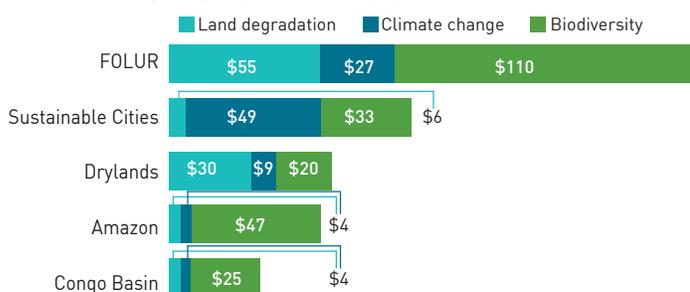
The present formative evaluation assessed how the early results and lessons from the IAPs are informing the evolution of the integrated approach in the impact programs. Mixed methods for the evaluation included a quality-at-entry analysis; portfolio and timeline analyses; 151 semi-structured interviews; an online survey administered to 633 country stakeholders with a 42.3 percent response rate; three country case studies (Brazil, China, and Kenya); and a geospatial analysis on the spatial relevance of food systems-related programs.

Design

Integrated programs address multiple conventions and focal areas, with synergies primarily among biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation focal areas (figure 1). There is scope for stronger integration with international waters and chemicals and waste. GEF integrated approaches include interventions focused on socioeconomic dimensions of environmental degradation, such as urban development, rural livelihoods, and commodity value chains. The opportunity to pilot an integrated approach and develop models for replication, upscaling, or mainstreaming attracted country participation; access to set-aside incentive funding (in addition to STAR allocations) also mattered.

Integrated programming is largely targeting relevant countries and drivers of environmental degradation, with a few exceptions. The strategy to ensure that relevant countries participated

FIGURE 1 Impact program funding by focal area (million \$)



SOURCE: GEF Portal.

in the GEF-7 impact programs—geographical targeting, incentives, and working with relevant Agencies and countries—has been largely successful. Only one small island developing state is participating in IAPs or impact programs, however, which represents a missed opportunity.

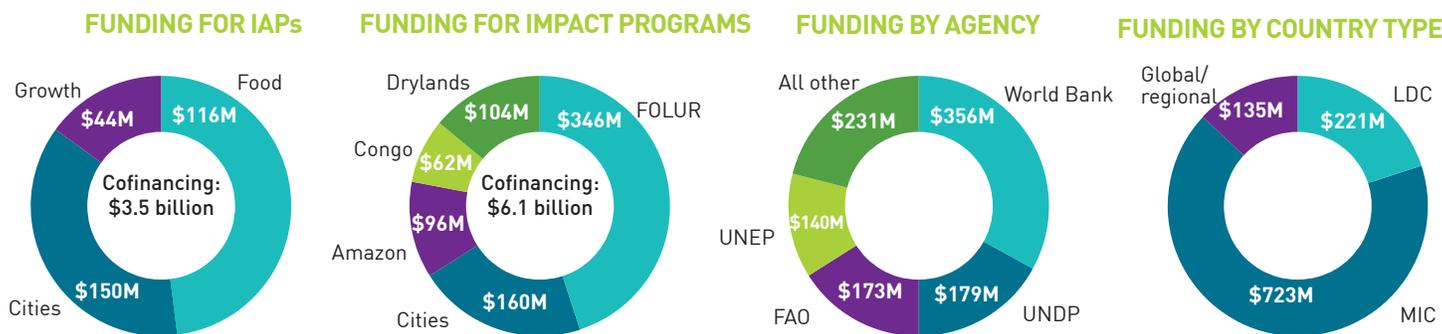
GEF-7 impact programs show evidence of improved coherence of design, compared to the GEF-6 IAPs. Child projects show good alignment with the objectives and main components of the broader impact program. Better sequencing in program design—with child projects generally designed in parallel with the global or regional coordination projects—helped support this outcome. Theories of change have also improved in GEF-7 impact programs, showing stronger evidence of systems thinking. More consideration needs to be given to the roles and responsibilities for linkages between program and country project theories of change in the programs that focus on value chains.

Program-level monitoring and reporting in the GEF-6 IAPs has been insufficient, although the design of such systems in GEF-7 impact programs shows evidence of lessons learned. Common results frameworks across program and child projects, derived from the program’s theory of change, were not well developed for all IAPs, which made program-level aggregate reporting difficult. The Resilient Food Systems IAP took three years to operationalize their results framework, while the Good Growth Partnership IAP and the Sustainable Cities IAPs, more than half-way through implementation, still have not fully done so. The Sustainable Cities IAP has not submitted a program-level annual report for the past two years. In the GEF-7 impact programs, lead Agencies have started to work more strenuously and interactively to develop common program results and reporting frameworks earlier in the design process. A key remaining challenge is how to measure and attribute global environmental benefits—as required for all GEF projects—associated with the policy, institutional, and knowledge work that dominates the global/regional projects tasked with coordinating each impact program. Though the 2019 GEF monitoring and evaluation policies help clarify roles and responsibilities, program-level monitoring and evaluation are not yet reflected in project cycle practices.

Process

Substantial process improvements have been realized in the rollout of GEF-7 impact programs. The competitive expression of interest process has open access and clear selection criteria, and countries show strong interest in participating. The GEF also used a competitive procurement process to select the lead Agency. Country stakeholders, including operational focal points, viewed program design processes as inclusive.

In GEF-7, the GEF also appropriately expands the lead Agency’s critical role to cover program coordination, integration, and reporting—with slightly more funding for coordination projects than in the GEF-6 IAPs. Child projects also now allocate funds for interacting with the coordination project. Managing internal



SOURCE: GEF Portal. IAP funding based on child project financing data, including Agency fees. Total impact program funding is from respective Council-approved program frame document. FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme; LDC = least developed country; MIC = middle-income country.

and external coordination, integrating across scales, countries, and Agencies, and monitoring and reporting on the value the program adds are all important, substantial tasks for lead Agencies. During GEF-6, a lack of Agency cooperation hampered these tasks at times, because the incentives for working in a coordinated manner and the rules of engagement were unclear; for example, some Agencies did not respond to requests from the lead Agency to report results associated with the program-level results framework.

Progress toward results

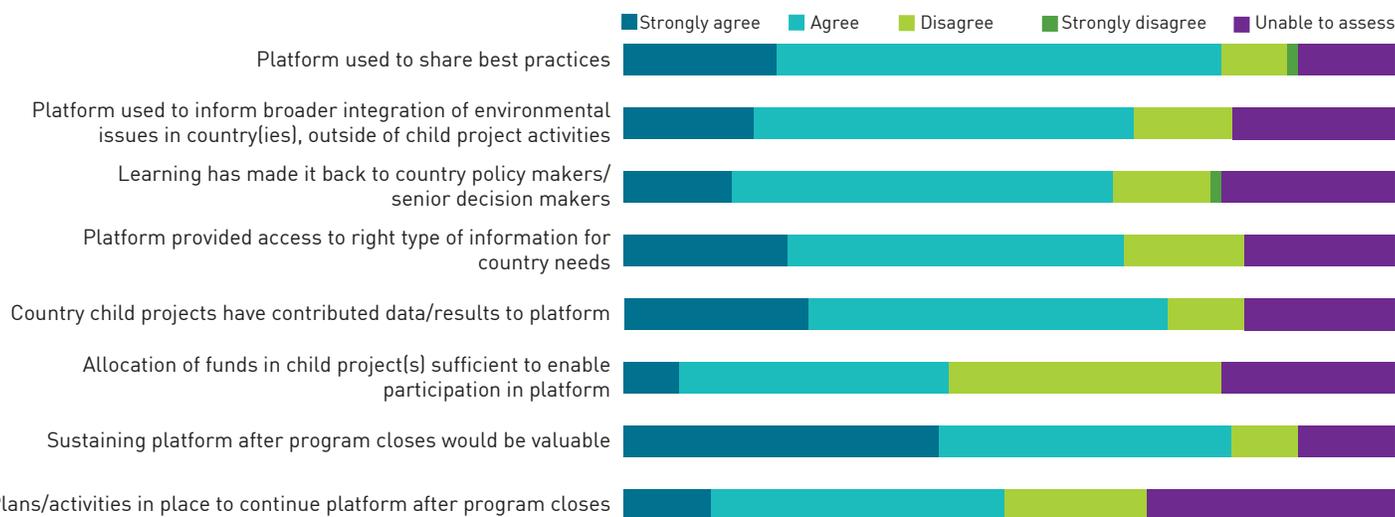
Lead Agency annual program reports, midterm reports, project implementation reviews, and country case studies demonstrate some progress toward results, varying across programs.

It is still early to observe many global environmental benefits. The Resilient Food Systems and Good Growth Partnership IAPs reported on some program-aggregated global environment benefits (including hectares of land restored or protected). The Sustainable Cities IAP has lagged far behind in program reporting. About half of IAP child projects indicate progress toward achieving concrete environmental outcomes, and two-thirds

show progress toward policy or legal results. Few socioeconomic and household resilience outcomes have been reported. All IAPs are establishing (or supporting existing) multi-stakeholder platforms or mechanisms. The country case studies show that the primary implementation challenges relate to using the integrated approach, including working across government ministries, agencies, or departments, and implementation arrangements that involve multiple agencies and executing partners to support integration.

The IAP knowledge platforms have resulted in more knowledge and learning activities than many past GEF programmatic approaches. Partnerships with major institutions and networks show promise of amplifying the effects of these knowledge platforms; however, few child projects allocated funds or staff time for knowledge management (figure 2). The diversity of country contexts means producing country-relevant information and interactions has also been challenging. Contributing to these challenges is the fact that IAP platforms were designed after the child projects were designed. In the Sustainable Cities programs, the GEF-6 and GEF-7 knowledge platforms will run in parallel for the next two years, posing a risk of confusion among platform

FIGURE 2 Perceptions of IAP knowledge platforms (% of respondents)



SOURCE: Country-level online survey; n = 268.

