IEC Learnings

• PHOTO: MARIE FRECHON/UN •

• FRAGILITY •

• ENGAGEMENT •

GEF SUPPORT IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

Myriad GEF interventions are in fragile and conflict-affected situations. This first IEO evaluation of projects in these situations sought to understand their performance and contextual factors.

Key findings of evaluation

- The vast majority of Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects are in fragile and conflict-affected situations, with total investment exceeding $4.0 billion, or 29 percent of the GEF portfolio.

- The shift in priorities associated with conflict can negatively affect project relevance; it can also enhance the relevance of those projects addressing livelihoods, food security, cooperation, and basic services in a conflict-sensitive manner.

- The GEF's ability and willingness to fund projects in conflict-affected situations can be catalytic in generating additional funding.

- Country fragility is associated with a negative and statistically significant impact on project outcomes, sustainability, implementation and execution quality, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design and implementation.

- Issues related to physical security were the most common in affecting project performance, implementation, and results.

- Political fragility, weak governance, and limited institutional capacity have affected GEF project implementation and sustainability.

- The GEF lacks conflict-sensitive safeguards, policies, and guidance necessary to systematically manage the risks and effects of conflict and fragility on GEF projects.

- In the absence of a systematic approach to managing risks, GEF projects have employed five conflict-sensitive strategies: acknowledgment, avoidance, mitigation, peacebuilding, and learning.

OPS7

This evaluation assessed the impacts of conflict and fragility on the design and implementation of GEF interventions at three scales: globally, at the country and regional levels, and at the project level. It also assessed the impacts of efforts to make GEF interventions conflict-sensitive. The evaluation covered 4,136 projects and 7 country case studies. The analysis drew upon both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The GEF portfolio in countries affected by major armed conflict has increased over the GEF replenishment periods and now accounts for 44 percent of GEF projects. As of July 2020, the GEF had invested over $4.0 billion in countries affected by major armed conflict, comprising 29 percent of its global portfolio. Of all GEF-funded projects, 33 percent have been implemented in countries affected by major armed conflict (i.e., conflicts with more than 1,000 battle deaths), and 11 percent have been implemented in mixed contexts (figure 1). Regional projects that included both countries affected by major armed conflict and other countries were tagged as "mixed." Fragility is even more widespread: 88.3 percent of the GEF's country-level projects were in fragile situations—that is having either

an "alert" (very fragile) or "warning" (of concern) classification according to the Fragile States Index maintained by the Fund for Peace.

There are five critical pathways through which conflict and fragility affects GEF projects. These are physical insecurity, social conflict and mistrust, economic drivers, political fragility and weak governance, and coping strategies (figure 2).

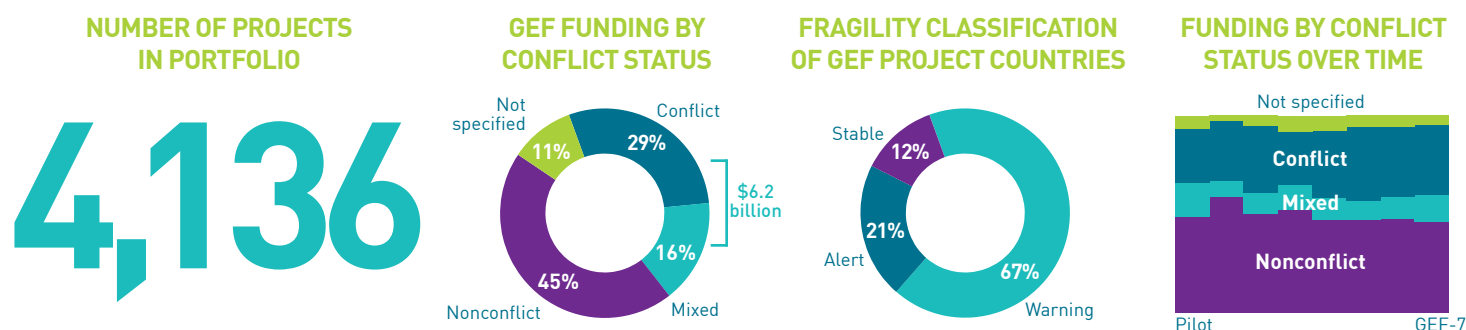FIGURE 1 Conflict hotspots and locations of GEF interventions
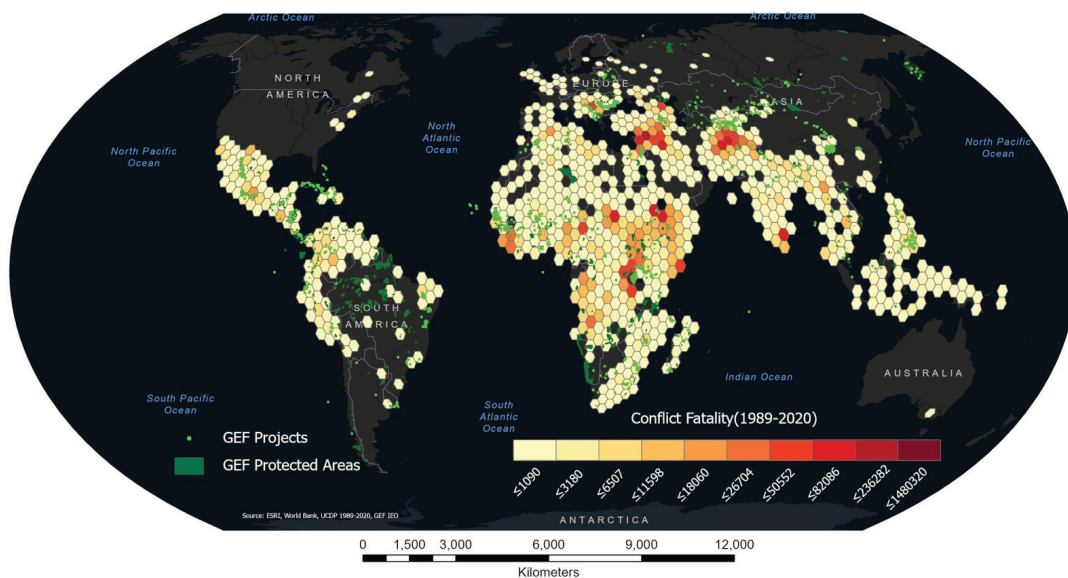
SOURCES: ESRI, World Bank, UCDP, GEF IEO.
NOTE: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply offcial endorsement or acceptance by the GEF or its partners.

FIGURE 2 Key pathways by which conflict and fragility affect GEF projects

	PHYSICAL INSECURITY	SOCIAL CONFLICT AND MISTRUST	ECONOMIC DRIVERS	POLITICAL FRAGILITY AND WEAK GOVERNANCE	COPING STRATEGIES
Negative impact	• Impedes access to project site • Physical safety of project staff and partners • Difficulties hiring staff	• Land tenure issues • Sensitivities hiring project staff	• Illicit extraction and trade of natural resources • Competition over resources can drive conflicts and put staff and parties at risk • Currency depreciation	• Institutional capacity and legitimacy • Financial capacity • Corruption and rule of law	• Conflict between internally displaced persons/refugees and local communities • Decreased carrying capacity • Vulnerability enhanced by climatic stressors
Positive impact		• Projects designed to increase cooperation among groups	• Projects focused on livelihoods and sustainable natural resource management	• Projects designed to align with governmental priorities, including implementation of peace agreement	

SOURCE: Environmental Law Institute and GEF IEO.

NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN PORTFOLIO

4,136

GEF FUNDING BY CONFLICT STATUS

Not specified 11%
Conflict 29%
$6.2 billion
16% Mixed
45% Nonconflict

FRAGILITY CLASSIFICATION OF GEF PROJECT COUNTRIES

Stable 12%
21% Alert
67% Warning

FUNDING BY CONFLICT STATUS OVER TIME

Not specified
Conflict
Mixed
Nonconflict
Pilot — GEF-7

SOURCE: GEF Portal. Data are as of July 2020. Not all countries receiving GEF funding are included in the Fragile States Index.

The GEF's ability and willingness to fund projects in conflict-affected situations can be catalytic in generating additional funding. In a number of instances, the GEF has provided the initial funding necessary to pilot projects and lay the groundwork for additional, larger investments by other institutions that expand and extend the impacts of the GEF funding.

Conflict and fragility affect project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Conflict can enhance GEF projects' **relevance**, particularly those designed to be conflict-sensitive in addressing livelihoods, food security, cooperation, and essential services. On the other hand, armed conflict and fragility can shift the focus and priorities of a state and community away from environmental and other initiatives that require cooperation and toward efforts that directly affect conflict dynamics or provide relief. Conflict and fragility can also undermine GEF projects' **effectiveness** by blocking access to target sites, creating security risks for project staff, and—in extreme cases—causing projects to be canceled or dropped. The efficiency of projects can also be affected by conflict and fragility, for example, by requiring project restructuring, delays, or additional costs for security. Finally, project **sustainability** is undermined by conflict and fragility, particularly by sociopolitical instability and outbreaks of violence.

At all scales of implementation, a country's conflict status had a statistically significant impact on the duration of a project's delays. For example, the project Reducing Conflicting Water Uses in the Artibonite River Basin through Development and Adoption of a Multi-focal Area Strategic Action Programme began in August 2009 and had a planned closing date of July 2013, but was actually completed in December 2014. Tensions between the two project countries—Haiti and

the Dominican Republic—built up throughout the project's lifetime. Although the parties had signed a binational agreement to facilitate the integrated management of the watershed by both governments, meetings were canceled at critical points.

A country's fragility classification is associated with a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of projects being canceled or dropped. Projects in countries affected by major armed conflict had 1.26 higher odds of being dropped or canceled than projects in other countries.

Globally, the conflict status of a project's country had a statistically significant impact on the project's sustainability rating at completion. The presence of major armed conflict in a project country correlates with a lower score for project sustainability, suggesting that projects taking place in conflict-affected sites are on average less sustainable than those in nonconflict contexts.

The evaluation identified conflict-sensitive strategies adopted by GEF projects to manage risks posed by conflict and fragility. These are illustrated in figure 3; they all begin with an acknowledgment of risk.

FIGURE 3 Risk management strategies

| AVOIDANCE	MITIGATION	PEACEBUILDING	LEARNING
• Project site selection	• Training • Monitoring and early warning • Participatory approach • Local partners • Dispute resolution mechanisms • Adaptive management	• Political will • Livelihoods • Environmental restoration • Co-benefits	• Applying learning from previous experiences in project design • Learning during project implementation • Learning during M&E

SOURCE: Environmental Law Institute and GEF IEO.

GEF-supported programming in postconflict Liberia illustrates the catalytic potential of GEF programming in situations affected by conflict and fragility. A GEF medium-size project in Liberia's Sapo National Park implemented between 2005 and 2010 played a crucial role in scaling up efforts in the country's forestry sector. The project's terminal evaluation deemed the project successful in biodiversity conservation, protected area management, and community engagement—despite its being implemented after a decade and a half of civil instability. The project had a leveraging effect and paved the way for subsequent investments in forest conservation and wildlife management.

The remote sensing analysis, as shown in the flat line of figure 4, reveals almost zero forest loss within the park boundary over a period

extending beyond project duration. This illustrates how conservation success initiated during the project has been sustained beyond the project time frame. In contrast, forest loss outside the Sapo National Park and in Liberia as a whole increased massively during the same time period, as shown by the satellite data in figure 4.

FIGURE 4 The GEF's catalytic role in Liberia's forest sector: Sapo National Park 2001–18

Region: — Liberia — Buffer 30km — Buffer 15km — SAPO NP
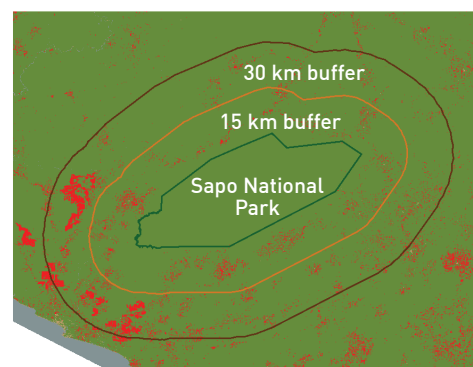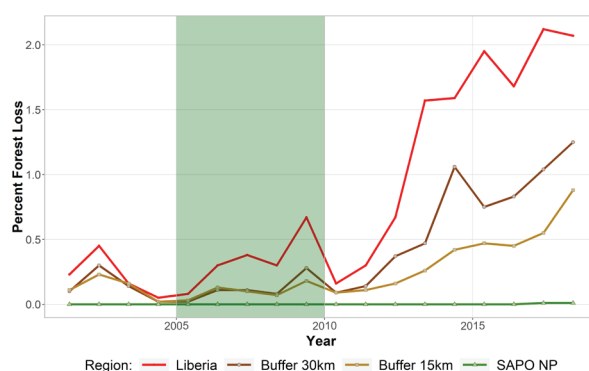
SOURCE: UMD satellite data.

Conclusions

1 Conflict can enhance the relevance of GEF projects, particularly those that address livelihoods, food security, cooperation, and basic services.

2 Risks related to conflict and fragility, as well as the ways in which GEF projects respond to those risks, negatively affect project effectiveness, efficiency, project timings, and sustainability, and increase project cancellations.

3 A growing number of GEF Agencies have been learning from experiences in designing, implementing, and evaluating environmental projects in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

4 GEF project designs have benefited from consultation with indigenous communities and have alleviated gender inequality by including large percentages of women beneficiaries.

Recommendations

1 The project review process should be used to identify conflict- and fragility-related risks to a proposed project and develop measures to mitigate those risks.

2 To improve conflict-sensitive design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of GEF projects, existing platforms for learning, exchange, and technical assistance should be leveraged.

3 The current GEF Environmental and Social Safeguards could be expanded so that GEF projects address key conflict-sensitive considerations.

4 The GEF could consider revising its policies and procedures so that GEF-supported projects can better adapt to rapid and substantial changes common in fragile and conflict-affected situations.