

OPS5

FIFTH OVERALL PERFORMANCE STUDY OF THE GEF

TRENDS IN COUNTRY-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENTS

OPS5 Technical Document #5

OPS5 Technical Document #5:

Trends in Country-Level Achievements

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INTRODUCTION

Technical Papers 1 and 2 present the Country Level Evaluation Team's input of to the First Report of the Fifth Overall Performance Study (OPS5). The two inputs are assessments of **Trends in country level achievements (Technical Paper 1)** and **Country Ownership and Drivenness (Technical Paper 2)**.

Technical Paper 1 presents a synthesis of the main recurring findings and conclusions emerged from country level evidence, based on the 5 Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Reports (ACPERs) produced since 2008 to date. The paper underscores where country level evidence findings triangulate well with other OPS5 evaluative findings from impact, thematic and performance analysis.

Technical Paper 2 provides the basis for an assessment of country ownership and drivenness in the GEF, by relating ownership and country drivenness issues in the GEF to the international discussion of aid effectiveness, as expressed in the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership Declaration. The analysis is fully cognizant of the fact that cooperation towards global environmental benefits has some fundamental differences with traditional aid. An analysis framework has been developed and used to review the country level evaluative evidence on ownership and drivenness.

Conclusion: GEF support at the country level is well-aligned with national priorities, shows progress to impact at the local level and enables countries to meet their obligations to the conventions.

For the GEF to be effective in tackling the challenges posed by today's global environmental treats it has to operate in partnership and demand for action from all the parties forming the GEF global network. Among them, its member countries. Since the beginning of GEF4 in 2006, countries have been given priority in the GEF partnership through the introduction of several important reforms, including direct access by countries, National Portfolio Formulation Exercises (NPFs), envisaged inclusion of national institutions as GEF project agencies, involvement of operational focal points in M&E activities, among others. Parallel to that, in 2006 the GEF Council requested the GEF Evaluation Office to look at country portfolios and assess their results and effectiveness, their relevance and their efficiency.

Since 2006 to date, country level evidence has been gathered through fourteen Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPEs) and three Country Portfolio Studies (CPSs).¹ The first three CPEs in Costa Rica, the Philippines and Samoa were stand-alone evaluations. Starting from 2008, the Office began summarizing its country level evaluations in Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Reports (ACPERs). The key findings presented in this first OPS5 report Technical Document are based on ACPERs 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The countries covered by the five ACPERs, and characteristics of the projects within the relevant country portfolios, are presented in Table 1.

¹ For a description of these two country evaluation modalities please see www.gefeo.org.

Table 1: Project coverage through country level evaluations

Country	GEF funding (US mil.)	Number of projects included in the evaluation			National completed projects
		National FSPs & MSPs	Enabling activities	Regional/global projects covered in the evaluation	
ACPER 2008*					
Benin	21	13	9	5	6
Madagascar	35	3	7	8	9
South Africa	82	26	6	5	14
ACPER 2009*					
Egypt	92.19	12	7	8	9
Syria	12.72	5	5	8	6
Cameroon	25.55	5	5	11	5
ACPER 2010					
Turkey	36.33	8	5	11	6
Moldova	21.72	8	6	14	9
ACPER 2011					
El Salvador	11.41	5	6	20	6
Jamaica	11.86	6	6	15	7
ACPER 2012					
Nicaragua	32.26	10	6	24	9
OECS**	12.32	7	35	25	36
Brazil	335.98	41	4	36	20
Cuba	43.70	14	5	15	10
El Salvador***	11.41	5	6	20	6
Jamaica***	11.86	6	6	15	7

* ACPERs 2008 and 2009 were considered in OPS4, and are analyzed again for OPS5 as they help identifying recurring themes

** Countries covered in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Cluster CPE include Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines

*** Country covered in 2011, but reconsidered in 2012 as part of the LAC regional analysis

Country-level evidence provides an opportunity to triangulate findings with evidence emerged from the impact, thematic and performance streams of work of the Office, with a country perspective. The following sections provide a summary of the main recurring conclusions emerged from the ACPERs that triangulate with other findings in this report.

Finding 1: Results of GEF support are positive at local level but are not yet scaled up

Country level evidence confirms the key finding from the impact stream that GEF support is effective at local level, but it faces challenges when it comes to the need for scaling up. Several CPEs reported only project level environmental and socioeconomic impact at the local scale, associated with the lack of up-scaling replication (i.e. South Africa, Benin and Madagascar in biodiversity, OECS in all focal areas with the exception of adaptation to climate change, El Salvador and Jamaica, and even in large countries like Brazil). Country level evidence also confirmed the impact finding that the most common form of broader adoption is mainstreaming, intended as information, lessons, or specific results of GEF that are incorporated into broader stakeholder mandates and initiatives such as laws, policies, regulations, programs (i.e. Brazil, Cuba). Progress to impact can be constrained by progress toward impact is limited by unresolved institutional barriers and broader socio-economic factors (i.e. Turkey, Moldova).

Finding 2: Institutional strengthening/building has been an area of success

Country level evidence shows that the GEF support has made a significant contribution to institutional strengthening for environmental management, and again, this triangulates well with impact findings. Examples are many. The National Centre for Wildlife Management (NCWM) in Benin and the South Africa National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) are products of GEF support and are both now considered world-class organizations. The Biodiversity Fund Project (FUNBIO), established in the early nineties, is a unique institution in Brazil which still today plays a fiduciary role in implementing several important biodiversity projects, including the two-phase Amazon Region Protected Areas (ARPA) project, as well as projects from other national and international, private and public institutions. FUNBIO success is demonstrated by its recent accreditation as a GEF Agency. The National Biodiversity Strategy (ENBio) introduced a change in the national environmental policy toward strengthening institutions and increasing environmental awareness in Cuba. The Strengthening Protected Areas System (SPAS) project also contributed to institutional capacity and financial sustainability of Cuban protected areas through the development of a financial sustainability strategy for the National System for Protected Areas (SNAP) and the proposal for the creation of the National Protected Areas Fund (FONAP).

Finding 3: Country level evidence strongly confirms GEF relevance to national needs as well as to the GEF mandate of achieving global environmental benefits

Particularly through enabling activities, GEF support has assisted the countries reviewed in determining their environmental priorities, development and implementation of national environmental policies and strategies. In all CPEs, GEF support was deemed to be relevant to national sustainable development priorities. The country environmental legal framework analyses conducted in country level evaluations largely confirmed that GEF projects have supported national frameworks for developing environmental laws and policies in biodiversity, biosafety and climate change, and POPs. GEF support to fulfilling countries' obligations to report to international environmental conventions has been relevant as well. Either GEF support provides the funding to develop national priorities (for example, through prioritization and inventory exercises funded by enabling activities), or it provides the funding to implement an already established national priority, or it is applied within an existing framework.

A few exceptions to this general trend are noted. While adaptation to climate change was recognized by the Nicaraguan authorities as a priority for the country, only one project in the portfolio had this specific focus. Also, regional projects in the OECS region had lower relevance for participating countries as often their focus was not in line with national priorities. Specifically, a difficulty was observed in aligning global and regional projects objectives to OECS member countries' national priorities. Furthermore, the relevance of regional projects objectives and outputs were not always clear to national stakeholders.

Finding 4: GEF support through Enabling Activities is unique in helping countries addressing environmental concerns, especially for LDCs and SIDSs

The GEF provision for enabling activities is extremely relevant, especially for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDSs). GEF-funded enabling activities such as NBSAP, NAPA, NEAP and last but not least the national communications to the various international environmental conventions have provided direct support to policy development

in the countries reviewed by country level evaluations. In a few cases enabling activities in climate change not only helped in complying with the requirements of reporting to UNFCCC, but have also contributed to capacity building in creating and maintaining greenhouse gas inventories and vulnerability assessments, including analysis of options for mitigation and adaptation. As a result, climate change has been put higher on the government agenda in both Turkey and Moldova, and is shaping on going action, debate and future climate change policy, strategy and planning decisions.

In the OECS region, the GEF has been providing funding for 17 years. Efforts completed to date can be described as primarily focused on enabling support, and are still in the early stages of demonstration level support. This is often the case in SIDSs and LDCs, where GEF support is characterized as of an enabling, capacity development or pilot/demonstration nature, and countries simply lack the resources needed to scale up from these initial benefits. Furthermore, as is the case in Jamaica, the GEF portfolio is not sufficiently well-known among other international development partners to maximize collaboration and follow-up, which makes it even more difficult to sustain and scale up the results achieved.

Finding 5: Multi-focal area projects emerge increasingly as a clear trend in the GEF, which requires exploring new ways to do business

The issue of multi-focal area projects has been assessed within country-level evaluations (ACPER 2008 and ACPER 2012). In both cases, attention was called to this issue. At the same time, as evidence from thematic analysis clearly showed, multi-focal projects have become predominant GEF modality in GEF5, with 45% of the total projects approved to date. It will be important to explore in the final OPS5 report the reasons for this observed trend. Country-level evidence points at some initial possible explanations.

ACPER 2008's three CPEs showed that the GEF was missing opportunities to maximize benefits and improve linkages due to the historic lack of integration among GEF focal areas and with other donor initiatives in such areas as rural development, agriculture, and poverty reduction. Such "piggybacking" and coordinative efforts would be particularly useful with regard to adaptation to climate change and land degradation. Both of these issues are at the top of regional (Africa continent-level) priorities and have the potential for providing local incentives to enhance the delivery and sustainability of global environmental benefits. Based on a recommendation included in the ACPER 2008 (comprising the Benin, South Africa and Madagascar evaluations) the GEF Council requested the GEF Secretariat to strengthen the concept of integrated multifocal areas approaches, including addressing transboundary issues. This decision caused a corresponding increase (first observed in OPS4) of multi-focal area projects in GEF country portfolios in the various geographic regions where the GEF operates.

Similarly to what was observed in 2008 in the Africa region, ACPER 2012 reports that in recent years an ecosystem approach to environmental conservation and sustainable use has emerged across the GEF. As a matter of fact, multi-focal area projects have always been present in the GEF portfolios analyzed, as shown by the Brazil and Cuba CPEs, but have only relatively recently been classified as such. A particularly cumbersome issue in the LAC region in connection with multi-focal area projects relates to the complexity of monitoring requirements of multifocal area projects and in particular of indicators. This is considered a challenge by many project planners and executors, as baselines and corresponding tracking tools have to be submitted for all the focal areas involved in such projects. These projects have a considerably higher burden in monitoring than comparable single focal area projects, whereas their efforts in the respective focal areas may be less intense, as the focus is more

on cross-cutting and synergetic issues. Following on a corresponding recommendation from the ACPER 2012 the GEF Council requested the GEF Secretariat to reduce this monitoring burden through deciding on essential focal area indicators that need to be monitored throughout multi-focal area projects, rather than to apply the full tracking tools package, in order to bring the burden down to a comparable level to that in single focal area projects.

Finding 6: The GEF is moving in the direction of strengthening national M&E capacity, which still is an area of concern

Findings from the country level evaluations reaffirm the need to build national M&E capacities to meet the challenges of global environmental action. Dating back to ACPERs 2008 and 2009, it was noted that to reinforce, reactivate, and strengthen the strategic, coordinating and M&E role of the operational focal points and the national committees was imperative to enhance the country ownership and drivenness of GEF initiatives. Lack of capacity within the focal point mechanism meant that there missed opportunities for information sharing and learning that could have improved synergies. The underlying problem was that circulation of project monitoring information did not include the focal point on a routine basis. This had the effect of impeding the lesson learning and knowledge management functions of the focal points, which was particularly evident in Madagascar and Benin. The ACPER 2008 concluded that, with appropriate capacity, focal point mechanism could play a more effective role in providing information and coordinating lesson learning and sharing among the GEF national stakeholders.

The need for M&E capacity building and involvement of the focal point mechanism was once again a theme in ACPER 2010. In Moldova, the environment minister position covered both roles of GEF political and operational focal point, which negatively affected the efficiency of the GEF focal point mechanism. Moreover, this position had often changed in recent years. These factors resulted in a lack of strategic guidance on how best to take advantage of GEF support. In Turkey, the national focal point mechanism and the Externally Supported Projects Division in Ministry of Environment and Forestry were effectively coordinating GEF support. However, M&E and information sharing between GEF Agencies had not yet been sufficiently addressed. In both countries M&E primarily happened at the project level, and was mainly carried out by GEF Agencies. While no portfolio monitoring was carried out in Moldova, in Turkey it concerned only the national projects basic data as project title, agency and focal area; financial information on GEF grant and co-financing; and project cycle dates, etc. Other substantive data regarding actual achievements at completion in terms of reduced environmental stress and / or improved environmental status learned was not maintained. Furthermore, M&E information did not always flow from GEF Agencies to national partners and vice versa. In Turkey, national stakeholders explicitly asked the evaluation team to look into M&E issues.

The findings from ACPER 2010 resulted in a corresponding Council Decision requesting that GEF agencies to systematically involve focal points in M&E activities and share M&E information with them in a timely manner in order to ease country portfolio level M&E by focal points. More importantly, Council requested the Office to include a 4th minimum requirement in the revised GEF M&E Policy on the need for engaging the focal points in M&E activities during the whole project period. M&E information and support for focal points has been provided since 2010 by the GEF Secretariat's Country Support Programme (CSP) through its Extended Constituency Workshops (ECW), also with support of the Office. The ACPER 2010 recommendation to provide specific M&E training to the national focal point mechanism has not yet been fully realized.

M&E tracking tools are still considered challenging in most countries visited during country level evaluations. While the collection of information through the use of tracking tools is paramount at the central level to inform the GEF partnership on progress toward the achievement of global environmental benefits, countries are often faced with difficulties in complying with the requirement of providing such information. Some countries questioned the adequacy of such instruments to the purpose they have been designed to serve. These tools were not well used in OECS. Furthermore, assessing impact level results in the OECS countries was extraordinarily challenging due to a lack of solid baseline data on the status of environmental resources, and a corresponding lack of systematic monitoring data to assess trends over time. Brazilian stakeholders indicated that they too had difficulties in filling out the tracking tool tables, or difficulties in understanding the relevance of some of the indicators included. In addition to that, in most projects baselines are not yet well established. Biodiversity indicators in Brazil are often ignored, even when they represent a significant component of the project. Several possible explanations have been provided: lack of staff, training, or funding; poorly designed indicators that are difficult to monitor; and lack of knowledge about biodiversity monitoring.

Finding 7: Land degradation is a strong national concern

The high demand for GEF support in combating land degradation began to emerge in ACPER 2008, which found that in the 3 countries reviewed (Benin, Madagascar, South Africa), which reported that there had been no national projects approved in the land degradation focal area. This represented a significant gap in GEF support given the importance of the land degradation problems there. Some regional projects were providing support to this focal area; however, the scale of the problems outstripped planned investment. Similarly, the ACPER 2009 recommended exploring within the GEF partnership modalities to address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Egypt, Syria, and Cameroon. The limited support provided to this focal area could be explained by the fact that, although the GEF received guidance from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to prioritize Sub-Saharan Africa, worldwide demand for GEF resources within the land degradation focal area exceeded available resources. Given the shortcomings of the GEF-4 replenishment, there simply were not sufficient funds within the GEF at that time to provide this support.

In GEF5 land degradation has been included in the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR), which is certainly a step in the right direction. However, the indication that land degradation is often an unanswered country need emerged again in 2010. In Turkey and Moldova, despite both countries being eligible for GEF funding in this area and both having established land degradation as a priority in their national strategies and action plans, the limited GEF resources in this focal area did not allow support. Land degradation project proposals submitted to the GEF by the two countries could not be considered. ACPER 2010 highlighted that opportunities were missed to address land degradation through multi-focal area projects, and recommended to explore the possibility of additional allocations for activities in the field of sustainable land management.

ANNEX 1

List of GEF Evaluation Office Country Portfolio Evaluation Reports (since July 1, 2008)

GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Benin (1991-2007)
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Madagascar (1994-2007)
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: South Africa (1994-2007)
GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Cameroon (1992-2007)
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Egypt (1991-2008)
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Syria (1994-2008)
GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2010
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Moldova (1994-2009)
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Turkey (1992-2009)
GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2011
GEF Country Portfolio Study: Jamaica (1994-2010)
Estudio de la cartera de proyectos del FMAM en El Salvador (1994-2010) **(unedited)**
Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2012 **(unedited)**
Evaluación de la cartera de proyectos del FMAM en Nicaragua (1996-2010)
Cluster Country Portfolio Evaluation Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS):
(1992-2011)
GEF Country Portfolio Study: Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste **(unedited)**
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation Brazil **(unedited)**
GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation Cuba **(unedited)**

Global Environment Facility
Independent Evaluation Office
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433
USA

www.gefio.org