

Terminal Evaluation Validation form, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID		2787	
GEF Agency project ID		38660-01	
GEF Replenishment Phase		GEF-4	
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)		Asian Development Bank	
Project name		CBPF: Shaanxi Qinling Mountains Integrated Ecosystem Development	
Country/Countries		China	
Region		Asia, Middle East & Pacific	
Focal area		Biodiversity	
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives		BD-SP1, BD-SP3, BD-SP4, BD-SP5	
Stand alone or under a programmatic framework		Programmatic	
If applicable, parent program name and GEF ID		China Biodiversity Partnership Framework (CBPF)	
Executing agencies involved		Shaanxi Provincial Government acting through the Shaanxi Development and Reform Commission (SDRC)	
NGOs/CBOs involvement			
Private sector involvement (including micro, small and medium enterprises) ¹			
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval (MSP) date		7/17/2009	
Effectiveness date / project start date		10/15/2010	
Expected date of project completion (at start)		10/31/2015	
Actual date of project completion		11/18/2019	
Project Financing			
		At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding		
	Co-financing		
GEF Project Grant		4.27	
Co-financing	IA own	40	39.51
	Government	88.37	66.17
	Other multi- /bi-laterals		
	Private sector		
	NGOs/CBOs		
	Other		
Total GEF funding		4.27	4.1
Total Co-financing		128.370	105.68
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)		132.64	109.78
Terminal evaluation validation information			
TE completion date		8/20/2021	
Author of TE		Zhiming Niu, East Asia Department (EARD), ADB	
TER completion date		12/29/2022	
TER prepared by		Nabil Haque	
TER peer review by (if GEF IEO review)		Neeraj Negi	

¹ Defined as all micro, small, and medium-scale profit-oriented entities, including individuals and informal entities, that earn income through the sale of goods and services rather than a salary. ([GEF IEO 2022](#))

Access the form to summarize key project features here: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

2. Summary of Project Ratings

Criteria	Final PIR	IA Terminal Evaluation ²	IA Evaluation Office Review ³	GEF IEO Review
Project Outcomes	S	S	S	S
Sustainability of Outcomes		L	L	ML
M&E Design		HS	HS	S
M&E Implementation		—	—	S
Quality of Implementation		S	S	MS
Quality of Execution		S	S	MS
Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report			S	MS

3. Project Objectives and theory of change

3.1 Global Environmental Objectives of the project:

The global environmental objective of the project is to improve sustainable biodiversity conservation to protect globally significant species and to sustain economic growth. Specifically, the project aims for conservation and protection of five globally threatened species (e.g., Giant Panda, Crested Ibis, Golden Monkey, Golden Takin, and Giant Salamander) and their habitats covering 2000 hectares (ha), and sustainable land management in 5,000 ha.

3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The development objective is to improve and integrate biodiversity management providing sustainable livelihoods for the population of the project area demonstrated to the rest of the Qinling Mountains (QM) (p.1 of CEO Endorsement Request).

3.3 Were there any **changes** in the Global Environmental Objectives, Development Objectives, or project activities during implementation? What are the reasons given for the change(s)?

No changes were reported in the environmental and development objectives.

3.4 Briefly summarize project's theory of change – describe the inputs and causal relationships through which the project will achieve its long-term impacts, key links, and key assumptions.

Although a theory of change was not presented in the project documents, the description of inputs and activities were logically presented along with key assumptions. The Project aimed to strengthen the management of nature reserve areas in Qinling Mountains (QM) through integrated approaches including market-oriented measures to sustain environmental and biodiversity objectives while

² The terminal evaluation uses a four-point scale for all the ratings. While these may be compared with the ratings provided by the GEF IEO on a binary scale, other than the sustainability ratings, other ratings may not be compared directly.

³ The validated ratings provided by the evaluation office of ADB are on a four-point scale. While the sustainability rating may be compared – after adjustments to the nominal scale – other ratings may not be compared directly except when these are compared on a binary scale.

increasing rural incomes and reducing poverty (p.5 of CEO Endorsement Request). As the project involves a loan component from ADB supporting commercial eco-tourism activities, GEF's grant was instrumental in wider sustainable management of QM areas and as part of the national biodiversity conservation strategy. Specifically, GEF funds was used to develop much improved communications, information and lessons sharing through wider stakeholder participation in conservation planning and decision making, demonstrating new management systems related to landscape planning, and developing species management plans in QM. Innovations were also introduced such as monitoring and information systems, the use of analog forestry models, and ecologically defined habitat restoration programs. Major assumption centering these activities is that the supporting institutional, regulatory mechanisms and incentives are in place for implementing a biodiversity management approach.

4. GEF IEO assessment of Outcomes and Sustainability

Please refer to the GEF Terminal Evaluation Review Guidelines for detail on the criteria for ratings.

The outcome ratings (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and overall outcome rating) are on a six-point scale: Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory. The sustainability rating is on a four-point scale: Likely to Unlikely.

Please justify the ratings in the space below each box.

4.1 Relevance and Coherence	HS
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This review finds the project to be highly relevant and fully consistent with GEF and national government priorities, and strategies of the implementing agency. The project has been consistent with Chinese government's priorities in the 11th five-year plan, Shanxi province Environmental Protection Agency's biodiversity strategy, and the Qinling Mountains Ecosystem Function Conservation Plan. Through the development of botanical garden and wildlife breeding and research center, the project ensured sustainable financing by using revenue generated through ecotourism. The project supports several strategic programs (SPs) within two of the strategic objectives (SOs) for biodiversity, prioritized in the 4th replenishment phase. The GEF grant covered expenses for institutional capacity building of the implementing agencies and consulting services to support ADB's loan implementation, which added incremental benefits to the project (p.9 of PCR).

4.2 Effectiveness	S
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The project was effective in achieving its intended outcomes and three specific outputs. Improved management covers over 10,000 ha of forests exceeding the target of 7,000 ha. For enhancing forest-based livelihoods, conservation agriculture was achieved on 35 ha and ecological forestry rehabilitation was done on 70 ha. 20 homestay ecotourism enterprises were supported in the region thereby increasing earning opportunities through small businesses and reducing poverty across households. 22 specialized gardens and an herbarium were established in botanical gardens spanning 264 ha. A few enclosed breeding and exhibition facilities were established along with facilities for research, laboratory,

animal hospital, apartments for staff, public education center, and service center. Studies on endangered species (one on giant panda and another on the crested ibis) were completed. The Qinling integrated ecosystem management strategy and action plan was prepared under the project, and related provincial regulations were updated and revised. These efforts were supported by capacity building activities comprising staff exchanges and study visits to strengthen conservation and habitat management. An ecotourism master plan was completed under the project which helped in monitoring progress and achieve many indicator targets.

4.3 Efficiency	MU
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The terminal evaluation rated the project as ‘efficient’ following ADB’s criteria, whereas the IA evaluation office validation report rated efficiency as ‘less than efficient’ using a four-point scale. This review concurs that the project implementation was somewhat inefficient. The project’s planned duration was five years, but it took nine years to complete. Following ADB’s guidelines, the economic internal rates of return (EIRR) for the whole project was calculated to be 10.8%, which was above the viability threshold set at 9.8% (p.11 of PCR). This EIRR was lower than expected during project appraisal due to delays in implementation which affected revenue generation from botanical gardens. The validation report notes that the calculated project EIRR is a conservative estimate since economic benefits of biodiversity conservation and environmental protection were difficult to estimate.

4.4 Outcome	S
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The project achieved its intended targets and created conditions that will support sustainable biodiversity conservation to protect globally significant species and sustain economic growth. For the five prioritized species identified in global environmental objectives, the populations increased significantly from 2010 to 2019: Giant panda (27%), Golden monkey (71%), Golden takin (148%), and Crested ibis (52%) (p. 52 of PCR). Although these increases may be linked to cyclical changes, the arrangements put in place support their sustainable management. Management of these globally significant species are mainstreamed into government conservation programs since 2014, with habitat regeneration and management being undertaken for 4 species. Small ecotourism enterprises have created alternative livelihood opportunities employing 1200 people, while another 300 jobs will be available on botanical gardens and related centers.

4.5 Sustainability	ML
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There are concerns that available funds may not be sufficient to meet the ongoing and expanded operational expenses of botanical gardens and breeding centers. However, the provincial government is maintaining their funding recognizing the importance of biodiversity in the QM area and the opportunities of ecotourism. This commitment also reduces sociopolitical risks, through engagement within local communities where sustainable alternative livelihood options are promoted. The project has directly addressed governance risks by building institutional framework for biodiversity conservation

through capacity building, policies, strategies and action plan development. However, institutional framework for protected area management in China is complex. There is conflicting and duplicate mandates among different government entities along with resource mismatches, which the terminal evaluation validation report highlighted despite maintaining sustainability rating as likely.

5. Processes and factors affecting attainment of project outcomes

Before describing the factors, you may choose to summarize reported outcomes and sustainability here: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

5.1 Co-financing. To what extent was the reported co-financing essential to the achievement of GEF objectives? If there was a difference in the level of expected co-financing and actual co-financing, what were the reasons for it? Did the extent of materialization of co-financing affect project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

The terminal evaluation did not elaborate on the reasoning for co-financing shortfall of about \$23 million. The shortfall does seem to have affected project activities as some of the sub projects were dropped. However, these changes have not been properly described and discussed in the terminal evaluation, a point also highlighted by the agency evaluation office in its validation report.

5.2 Project extensions and/or delays. If there were delays in project implementation and completion, then what were the reasons for it? Did the delay affect the project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

The project implementation arrangement was changed during implementation. It took a year for the loan to become effective after approval, and implementation arrangements involving the project management unit and executing agencies had to be adjusted to suit the agencies' actual mandates and the conditions on the ground (p.4 of PVR). Changes in procurement led to changes in financing plan and implementation schedule. The proposal for having a cable car in the botanical gardens was dropped during project implementation. The scope of the project also changed when location of proposed buildings for construction had to be changed. Construction of Shaanxi Animal Rescue Center (SARC) did not start until 2015, when the land acquisition for its breeding and enclosure facilities were settled. The terminal evaluation did not fully explain the restructuring of implementation arrangements midway through the project implementation. In total, the project was extended three times for a total of 42 months to 30 April 2019, while financial closing took place on 18 November 2019.

5.3 Stakeholder ownership. Assess the extent to which stakeholder ownership has affected project outcomes and sustainability. Describe the ways in which it affected outcomes and sustainability, highlighting the causal links.

The terminal evaluation provides only a brief reference of the project's engagement contributing to increased understanding of biodiverse resource ownership by the government executing agencies and local communities.

5.4 Other factors: In case the terminal evaluation discusses other key factors that affected project outcomes, discuss those factors and outline how they affected outcomes, whether positively or negatively. Include factors that may have led to unintended outcomes.

A market-based approach to managing natural resources and conservation was successfully demonstrated through ecotourism, which saw growing number of visitors to QM areas.

6. Assessment of project's Monitoring and Evaluation system

Ratings are assessed on a six-point scale: Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

6.1 M&E Design at entry	S
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The project adopted both GEF and ADB guidelines for development of its M&E plan. The process was sufficiently detailed in the CEO endorsement request document, along with the monitoring framework that specifically mentioned data sources for verification and project milestones. To monitor the progress of the project in achieving the planned outcome and outputs, the project management unit established a project performance management system (PPMS), allowing flexibility to adopt remedial action regarding project design, schedules, activities, and development impacts (p.4 of CEO Endorsement Request). The project management unit was responsible for analyzing and consolidating the reported data through its management information system, and for reporting the outcome to ADB through quarterly progress reports.

6.2 M&E Implementation	S
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PPMS procedures were used to systematically generate data on inputs and outputs of the project activities, and the socioeconomic, health, and environmental indicators to measure project impacts. There were additional M&E reports on environmental safeguards and resettlement. In addition to regular monitoring, project performance was periodically reviewed jointly by ADB and the government to assess achievement of progress towards project outcomes and outputs, financial progress, and to identify issues and constraints affecting implementation. This review assesses M&E implementation to be 'satisfactory'.

7. Assessment of project implementation and execution

Quality of Implementation rating is based on the assessment of the performance of GEF Agency(s). Quality of Execution rating is based on performance of the executing agency(s). In both instances, the focus is upon factors that are largely within the control of the respective implementing and executing agency(s). A six-point rating scale is used (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory), or Unable to Assess.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

7.1 Quality of Project Implementation	MS
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ADB took a flexible approach in supporting the project and was responsive to the recipient government's needs. ADB undertook regular loan review missions, which facilitated modifications in the project design and ensured that the project activities stayed on track although it took longer to complete. ADB provided a great deal of support to build up the institutional capacity of executing agencies. As the implementing agency of the GEF grant, ADB administered the grant effectively providing semiannual reports on implementation progress and engaging staff consultants to update the biodiversity tracking tool (p.14 of PCR). The terminal evaluation is light on details regarding the changes made to the implementation arrangements which is considered a factor for the implementation delay of four years. This information gap is also noted by the validation report prepared by the evaluation office of the implementing agency (p.8 of PVR). Overall, this review assesses quality of implementation to be 'moderately satisfactory'.

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	MS
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Despite initial challenges related to the allocation of counterpart funds, land acquisition, and procurement related issues, the executing agencies were committed to the activities of the project and successfully delivered on the outputs. The executing agencies had strong ownership of the project and pursued the dual objectives of promoting biodiversity conservation and improving people's livelihoods in line with their development agenda in the Qinling Mountains. The executing agency coordinated effectively to fulfill the compliance requirements set out in the loan, project, and grant agreements, including safeguards, audit, and financial management. Given that there were substantial implementation delays, this review rates project execution to be moderately satisfactory.

8. Lessons and recommendations

8.1 Briefly describe the key lessons, good practices, or approaches mentioned in the terminal evaluation report, including how they could have application for other GEF projects. Lessons must be based on project experience.

The three lessons learned identified in the terminal evaluation and validation report are listed below –

- i) It is very important to source high-quality expertise and personnel from within the host country as well as from abroad, to be involved in this type of project focused on capacity development.
- ii) There are some notable project experiences such as the enhanced coordination in public finance allocation across institutions in charge of the environment and natural resources. As a demonstration project, the implementation lessons of the project can be disseminated widely within and outside the People's Republic of China given that such projects will grow in the region.
- iii) It is crucial for a robust project preparation and quality at project design as it can reduce issues that may potentially impede implementation.

8.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

The terminal evaluation included only one recommendation of a follow-up evaluation in 2022, as the botanical garden and breeding centers will be fully operational by then. The follow up evaluation can report on operational performance, particularly revenue income and sustained impacts on local livelihoods with more comprehensive data.

9. Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report

Before rating the quality of the terminal evaluation, click here to summarize your observations on the sub-criteria: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

A six-point rating scale is used for each sub-criteria and overall rating of the terminal evaluation report (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory)

Criteria/indicators of terminal evaluation quality	GEF IEO COMMENTS	Rating
1. Timeliness: terminal evaluation report was carried out and submitted on time?	The terminal evaluation was prepared 12 months after project completion and submitted after another 8 months.	MS
2. General information: Provides general information on the project and evaluation as per the requirement?	The context and background of the project was explained in a reader friendly way.	S
3. Stakeholder involvement: the report was prepared in consultation with – and with feedback from - key stakeholders?	There was no information about stakeholder involvement for preparing the terminal evaluation.	MU
4. Theory of change: provides solid account of the project's theory of change?	The terminal evaluation lacked a theory of change or logical explanation of how project inputs affect outcomes.	MU
5. Methodology: Provides an informative and transparent account of the methodology?	There was only one paragraph summarizing GEF ToR for terminal evaluation resembling a methodology.	MU
6. Outcome: Provides a clear and candid account of the achievement of project outcomes?	Sufficient evidence was provided for each of the outputs and outcomes agreed during project inception.	S
7. Sustainability: Presents realistic assessment of sustainability?	The sustainability section covered all aspects of risks.	S

8. M&E: Presents sound assessment of the quality of the M&E system?	The M&E section comprehensively covered all stages of implementation.	S
9. Finance: Reports on utilization of GEF funding and materialization of co-financing?	Although the loan disbursements records were detailed, not much information were available about co-financing.	MS
10. Implementation: Presents a candid account of project implementation and Agency performance?	There were sparse details on the implementation challenges are changes in the implementation arrangement in the early years.	MS
11. Safeguards: Provides information on application of environmental and social safeguards, and conduct and use of gender analysis?	The application of safeguards and the monitoring results were sufficiently documented in the terminal evaluation report.	HS
12. Lessons and recommendations are supported by the project experience and are relevant to future programming?	For a project that had substantial delays and implementation arrangement changes, the sections on lessons learned & recommendations were too short.	MU
13. Ratings: Ratings are well-substantiated by evidence, realistic and convincing?	The rating system is different for the implementation agency, but they are all based on supporting evidence.	S
14. Report presentation: The report was well-written, logically organized, and consistent?	The report was logically organized for different stakeholders.	S
Overall quality of the report		MS

10. Note any additional sources of information used in the preparation of the terminal evaluation report (excluding PIRs, TEs, and PADs).

ANNEX 1. GEF IEO THEORY OF CHANGE FRAMEWORK

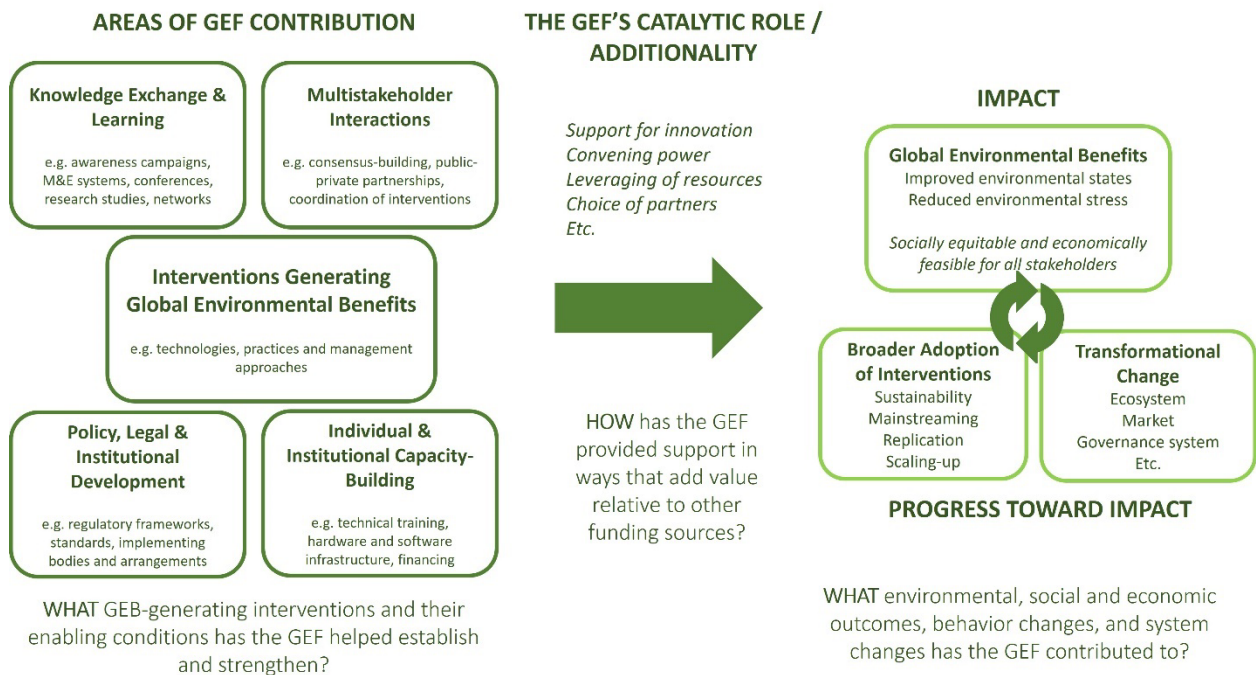


Figure 1. The GEF IEO's updated Theory of Change Framework on how the GEF achieves impact

The general framework for the GEF's theory of change (figure 1) draws on the large amount of evaluative evidence on outcomes and impact gathered over the years by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office. The framework diagram has been updated to reflect the IEO's learning since OPSS5 (GEF IEO 2014, p. 47-50) about how the GEF achieves impact, as well as the evolution of the GEF's programming toward more integrated systems-focused and scaled-up initiatives.

The framework outlines the three main areas that the IEO assesses in its evaluations: a) the GEF's contributions in establishing and strengthening both the interventions that directly generate global environmental benefits, and the enabling conditions that allow these interventions to be implemented and adopted by stakeholders, b) the GEF's catalytic role or additionality in the way that the GEF provides support within the context of other funding sources and partners, and c) the environmental, social and economic outcomes that the GEF has contributed to, and the behavior and system changes that generate these outcomes during and beyond the period of GEF support.

The circular arrow between impact and progress toward impact, as before, indicates how bringing about positive environmental change is an iterative process that involves behavior change (in the form of a broader group of stakeholders adopting interventions) and/or systems change (which is a key characteristic of transformational change). These three areas of change can take place in any sequence or simultaneously in a positively reinforcing cycle, and are therefore assessed by the GEF IEO as indicators of impact.

Assessing the GEF's progress toward achieving impact allows the IEO to determine the extent to which GEF support contributes to a trajectory of large-scale, systemic change, especially in areas where changes in the environment can only be measured over longer time horizons. The updated diagram in particular expands the assessment of progress towards impact to include transformational change, which specifically takes place at the system level, and not necessarily over a long time period.

The updated diagram also more explicitly identifies the link between the GEF's mandate of generating global environmental benefits, and the GEF's safeguards to ensure that positive environmental outcomes also enhance or at the very least do not take away from the social and economic well-being of the people who depend on the environment. Thus the IEO assesses impact not only in terms of environmental outcomes, but also in terms of the synergies and trade-offs with the social and economic contexts in which these outcomes are achieved.

ANNEX 2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Intervention	Any programmatic approach, full-sized project, medium-sized project, or enabling activity financed from any GEF-managed trust fund, as well as regional and national outreach activities. In the context of post-completion evaluation, an intervention may consist of a single project, or multiple projects (i.e. phased or parallel) with explicitly linked objectives contributing to the same specific impacts within the same specific geographical area and sector. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Activity (of an intervention)	An action undertaken over the duration of an intervention that contributes to the achievement of the intervention's objectives, i.e. an intervention is implemented through a set of activities. E.g. training, (support to) policy development, (implementation of) management approach.
Outcome	An intended or achieved short- or medium-term effect of a project or program's outputs. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Impact	The positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a project or program, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Environmental outcomes	Changes in environmental indicators that could take the following forms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress reduction: reduction or prevention of threats to the environment, especially those caused by human behavior (local communities, societies, economies) • Environmental state: biological, physical changes in the state of the environment http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Social and economic outcomes	Changes in indicators affecting human well-being at the individual or higher scales, e.g. income or access to capital, food security, health, safety, education, cooperation/ conflict resolution, and equity in distribution/ access to benefits, especially among marginalized groups.
Synergies	Multiple benefits achieved in more than one focal area as a result of a <i>single intervention</i> , or benefits achieved from the interaction of outcomes from at least two separate interventions in addition to those achieved, had the interventions been done independently.

	http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-multiple-benefits-gef-support-through-its-multifocal-area-portfolio-map-2016
Trade-offs	A reduction in one benefit in the process of maximizing or increasing another benefit. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-multiple-benefits-gef-support-through-its-multifocal-area-portfolio-map-2016
Broader adoption	The adoption of GEF-supported interventions by governments and other stakeholders beyond the original scope and funding of a GEF-supported intervention. This may take place through sustaining, replication, mainstreaming, and scaling-up of an intervention and/or its enabling conditions (see definitions below). http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Sustainability	The continuation/ likely continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has come to an end, and its potential for scale-up and/or replication; interventions need to be environmentally as well as institutionally, financially, politically, culturally and socially sustainable. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Replication	When a GEF intervention is reproduced at a comparable administrative or ecological scale, often in different geographical areas or regions. http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Mainstreaming	When information, lessons, or specific aspects of a GEF initiative are incorporated into a broader stakeholder initiative. This may occur not only through governments but also in development organizations and other sectors. http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Scaling-up	Increasing the magnitude of global environment benefits (GEBs), and/or expanding the geographical and sectoral areas where they are generated to cover a defined ecological, economic, or governance unit. May occur through replication, mainstreaming, and linking. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-gef-support-scaling-impact-2019
Transformational change	Deep, systemic, and sustainable change with large-scale impact in an area of major environmental concern. Defined by four criteria: relevance, depth of change, scale of change, and sustainability. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-gef-support-transformational-change-2017
Additionality	a) Changes in the attainment of direct project outcomes at project completion that can be attributed to GEF's interventions; these can be reflected in an acceleration of the adoption of reforms, the enhancement of outcomes, or the reduction of risks and greater viability of project interventions. b) Spill-over effects beyond project outcomes that may result from systemic reforms, capacity development, and socio-economic changes. c) Clearly articulated pathways to achieve broadening of the impact beyond project completion that can be associated with GEF interventions. https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/council-documents/files/c-55-me-inf-01.pdf