Stakeholder Comments on the "Evaluation of the GEF Portal" and GEF IEO response
10ᵗʰ of June 2021

The draft report of the Evaluation of the GEF Portal was shared in May 2021 with the key stakeholders, including the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies. This document presents an account of the feedback received from the key stakeholders and how the feedback was addressed in finalization of the report.

The evaluation report was shared with the key stakeholders as a standalone document. The GEF Secretariat provided consolidated comments. Among the GEF Agencies substantive inputs were provided only by the World Bank – others that provided the feedback agreed with the findings presented in the report. Based on the feedback, the draft report was revised.

The revised evaluation report was then integrated as Part B of a combined report that presented two pieces of work related to results-based management, i.e. evaluations of GEF Agency Self Evaluation Systems (Part A) and GEF Portal (Part B). The combined report is to be presented to the GEF Council as a Working Document at its June 2021 meeting[1].

Page number	REFERENCE TEXT	Comments	GEF IEO Response
		Consolidated comments from the GEF Secretariat	
	General Comment	The evaluation paper does not say anywhere that the GEF modalities in the project cycle and the related workflow procedures have a high level of complexity. We believe that this complexity contributes to some of the problems with data inconsistencies /document management/ analysis functions and mainly causes the slow development of the portal. It would be useful to make this point.	Change. Complexity of the GEF project cycle and related workflow procedures with be acknowledged.

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[1] https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.E_C60_07_RBM_SES_Portal_Combined_Report_FINAL.pdf

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	General Comment	The report should highlight low response rate for this evaluation (just 24%) as a limitation of the study. IEO may also like to number the paragraphs for future ease of review of referencing.	No change. The response rate is fairly healthy. It higher than most of online surveys that are administered by scholars. Even among the online surveys conducted by the GEF IEO surveys, the response rate is at the higher end of the spectrum. There are other sources of information, interviews, that have been used to validate the survey information and gather additional information from major category of respondents.
4	*The Portal is intended to provide a user-friendly online interface to submit, review, and approve project and program proposals and to store data and documents related to implementation and results.*	"… to store data and documents related <mark>to project approval</mark>, implementation and results." We suggest amendment accordingly.	Change will be made.
4	*Along with the GEF Portal, the web pages of three peer portals including Green Climate Fund Project Portfolio System, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Project Navigator, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Clean Development Mechanism (UNFCCC CDM) information system, were surveyed as an external user to generate data for comparison.*	"… were ~~surveyed~~ <mark>examined</mark>(?) as an external ~~user~~ <mark>comparator</mark>(?) to generate data for comparison." We suggest amendments accordingly.	Partial change. We will use the term 'examined'. "User" is correct description as it was based on how an external user will experience it.

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4	*The Portal creates a clear trail of the who, what, and when of a given action to facilitate accountability.*	"…The Portal creates a clear ==audit== trail ==(or work-flow?)== of the who, what, and when of ~~a~~ ==any== given action to facilitate accountability." We suggest amendment accordingly.	Change We will use the term audit.
5	*The user perception on ease of navigation and use of webpages is varied and appears to be linked with the frequency of usage—those who use it more often have a more favorable perception of it than those who don't—==and based on user group type==.*	Who are these user group type(s)? It would be useful to have some more information on that in this paragraph.	Change Additional information will be added.

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5	*However, there are several areas where the Portal needs to be developed further. These include* <mark>development of a system of alerts through emails,</mark> *providing the ability to batch download documents, enhancing the capabilities of the search function,* <mark>providing go back function for navigation,</mark> *and* <mark>ensuring that the calculations presented in the Portal data outputs and reports are correct.</mark> *Of the* <mark>US $ 922,229</mark> *cumulatively allocated for development of the Portal, at the start of fiscal year 2017 US $658,650 was available for development of the Portal and at the end of fiscal year 2020 US $ 299,000 remained unspent. These cost figures are a low bound because these* <mark>do not reflect full costs</mark>*.*	Please note that email alerts to governments and agencies under the Cancellation Policy were activated in early 2021. Email alerts of pending action items for GEF Sec were activated in April 2021. It would be useful to include these details here.\n\nThe "go back" function has been updated to ease navigation. It would be useful to make this clarification.\n\nThere are automated features to ensure calculations in the Portal are correct, including validation alerts governing entry of data. In addition, part of the Portal project included an extensive review and validation of historical data and gaps, which has greatly enhanced data quality and accuracy of reported information. It would be useful to explain these details here.\n\nThe source of US $ 299,000 is not clear. The Portal is developed carefully according to planned and available budget. As noted below, if the $299,000 figure refers to funds available in Special Initiatives for IT upgrades, these are needed not just for the Portal but also to cover other requirements (e.g., website migration, KM IT platform).\n\nAlso, any comparative costs from other peer systems would be useful.	Partial change.\n\nWe will clarify that our observation is related to presence of a comprehensive system of alerts.\n\nWe have used the GEF Business Plan and Corporate Budgets for FY2018-FY 2021 submitted for various GEF Council meetings.\n\nThere is information asymmetry on costs of development of peer portal. Total costs for even the GEF Portal are not clear. Therefore, comparison across portals on the cost criteria will be misleading.
5	*However, there is dissatisfaction among users with what they perceive as numerous* <mark>low-level glitches and challenges</mark>*.*	These technical issues occurred earlier in time. The IT team addressed and corrected them last year, and carefully monitors performance. The system is now fast and efficient, with high performance. It would be useful to include this clarification.	No change.\nThese glitches are encountered on a regular basis. The information from the interviews was gathered as late as February 2021.

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5	***Connectivity is a major concern for many users.*** *For many users, recurrent issues related to logging in, connection losses, and "silent logouts" caused by the page timing out, led to wasted effort. These challenges become more acute when there is heavy use of the portal, such as around deadlines. There also appears to be bandwidth-related constraint that disproportionately affected users in the least developed countries and remote areas*	This is outdated. As noted above, ITS addressed and fully resolved the technical performance and bandwidth issues (at peak-load) last year, and they report that they have not heard from GEF portal users on connection related issues and silent log out issues since then. The system is now fast and efficient, with high performance for all users, including in remote areas. it would be useful to include these points. ITS can provide additional details, if needed, on the efficiency enhancements and the ongoing monitoring of system performance.	Partial change Connectivity concerns due to capacity constraints at the GEF Portal end due to bandwidth have been addressed. However, capacity constraints at the user end remain in several countries. Therefore, experienced performance may be different for users.
p. 6 and key finding 6 on page 21	*real-time availability of data to external stakeholders and the public.*	Public access is not a typical feature of internal information systems. The Portal should not be assessed negatively against this. In addition, the Portal has been programmed to feed data and information in real-time to the GEF website, including all policy-required documents relevant to projects, proposed work programs, STAR utilization information, country profile information, and a wide range of other information, in support of GEF's commitment to transparency and access to non-confidential information as set out in the GEF Instrument. This creates real-time availability of this information for all stakeholders, beyond the direct users of the Portal.	No change. In the Progress Report on the Development of the New GEF Portal (GEF Secretariat 2018), the section on transparency and access to information notes: "*In addition, the Portal project is working to enable real-time flow of project and results information to other partners and the public via the GEF website, while respecting any relevant needs of confidentiality. This will provide an enhanced means to ensure that information and lessons about the GEF's work, projects and programs is readily available to external stakeholders and the public in real-time.*" The evaluation, therefore, followed up on this topic.

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6	*lack of capability to send project cycle–related auto-alerts through emails, and errors in data outputs*	As noted above, the Portal is sending auto-alerts through emails, and potential for data errors has been greatly reduced through auto-validation and historical data check of the system. It is planned to program soon additional auto-email notifications for Agencies.	Partial change.

Some alerts are indeed being sent. We will clarify that our observation is regarding absence of a comprehensive system. |
| 6 | *An overarching concern is slow development of the Portal* | Relaying this concern is understandable but should be backed by evidence confirming if the Portal delivery is behind schedule. Also, as indicated elsewhere, the Portal is being developed with progressively advanced features and functionality, now in the system, and to reflect updates to GEF policies and priorities. In some cases (e.g., the advanced reporting feature), these needed to await the completion of the review of all historical project information noted elsewhere. And at all times during this work, GEF business continuity was fully maintained, and the ITS team was rapidly available to all users to work through any issues that arose. | No change

The assessment is based on user perception and on the opinion of a professional consultant that has been involved in development of similar Portals for other Agencies. None of the documents available to the evaluation team show time bound milestones. The finding is well supported with the responses received through the online survey and through interviews. |
| 6 | *The Portal team has linked slow development of the Portal to the limited resources that they have to work with. GEF Management needs to assess whether additional support is necessary and the extent to which speedier development of the Portal may be aided.* | The high level of complexity in GEF's project cycle contributes to the time needed fo fully program the portal (see also general comment above that was made on this point), which is closely tailored to GEF needs and work modalities.

Adding new Policies during GEF-7 and requirements approved by Council makes the Project Cycle more complex – as the Portal aims (among other issues) to facilitate the processing of projects following these Policies, its development is contingent to these new Policies. | No change.

We don't agree that between GEF-6 and GEF-7 the level of complexity has changed in any material sense. GEF project cycle is complex but that have been the case during the period PMIS was in use. Especially, given the experience that GEF had to move from the Trustee led effort to develop the Portal. |

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8	*The GEF Portal task team within the Secretariat conceptualized the Portal.*	This is incomplete: the conceptualization also included a broader audience within GEFSEC such as Program Managers, Managers and both Directors, and also included ITS's staff and consultants. There was actually a robust and extensive process of consultation with a range of partners and future users to help in the conceptualization, design and continued progressive development of the system. This has helped to ensure that the system is tailored to the many needs and complexities of the GEF's work, business model and the GEF-7 agenda.	Change. The input will be reflected. It will be noted that the Portal team led the process, and then the process will be explained.
10	*Table 1*	It is unclear why OFPs or OFP staff in-country were not interviewed, they seem like they would be a key stakeholder group from which to receive input. An important benefit of the Portal is to provide OFPs with real-time information about projects in or involving their countries, and the portfolio overall – far beyond what was available before. Further, the evaluation didn't seem to address the role of OFP staff as Portal stakeholders, and the extent to which their needs are being met and they have been able to engage actively and productively with the Portal and running reports etc. OFPs and staff should have access to Portal contents and reports-and be able to run data downloads and financial reports for their country, and should be trained/onboarded accordingly to facilitate greater country access to the Portal.	No change. They were not interviewed as they were adequately covered through the online survey. Annex 4 of the report provides a summary of their responses.
12	*The process is not as seamless as it could be because it is not yet supported by a system of automatic email alerts on changes in a proposal's status and alerts on critical deadlines.*	As noted above, the system now generates email alerts to GEF Sec users, and to all users on pending deadlines and actions under the GEF Cancellation Policy. It would be useful to clarify this point accordingly.	Partial change. The observation will be about the absence of a comprehensive system of alerts.

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12	*The Portal creates a trail providing information on decisions taken, the persons who took it, and when it was taken*	"…creates a audit trail (or work-flow) providing…". We suggest amendment accordingly.	Change Suggested change will be made.
13	**The Portal presently does not allow for version control; this leads to prevalence of incorrect copies and documents**	This is factually incorrect - project submission creates a .pdf snapshot, which serves as the previous version if there is another submission.	Partial change. Clarification is already there in the paragraph. In our understanding in addition to pdf snapshot, a version control will include more features to that ensure that correct information is available to the user – without the user having to go through several documents to identify the correct one. The report explains "At present, when users submit reports to the Portal, they are no longer able to access, edit, or delete the report. Sometimes, when the wrong report is uploaded, it is followed by uploading of the correct copies. However, later, when these documents need to be used, the presence of several copies is confusing to users." In this sense, version control includes more features than only having pdf snapshots. We will make the description clearer.
13	*For example, the Portal is still not able to split data entry requirements for projects implemented jointly by two or more Agencies. Thus, for such projects, even though the project is being implemented by two or more Agencies, the data may be entered by only one Agency.*	The evaluation omits mentioning that data from projects implemented by two Agencies should be entered by the project's Lead Agency. Agencies are aware of this requirement. This practice actually avoids duplicate of entries for multi-agency projects.	Partial change. Process explained more clearly.

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13	*At present, when users submit reports to the Portal, they are no longer able to access, edit, or delete the report.*	The evaluation could add here that Portal users have the option to keep versions as draft up until they deem the document as final. Once final, Agencies go through GEF Secretariat and ITS to allow for editing data entry. This ensures data integrity and avoids changes on already final submissions.	Change. Change made.
14	*For example, original document upload dates got automatically revised by the system: the date of the document is the date of migration, and every time the system gets refreshed, a new date based on that latest system update gets listed. Documents that used to span several years suddenly had the same date, making document-tracking by dates difficult.*	In the system, dates are updated if any value for a record is updated. Similarly, when a user checks or unchecks the checkbox on the "Public Document" tab to post or remove the document from the website, the last modified date gets updated. We will review development of another column called "Created On" date which will capture and display the original uploaded/created date for the document.	No change.
16	*Table 3: Functional Links - The home button leads to a currently empty page.*	Please note that ITS has not been able to replicate this issue.	No change. No disagreement. The link was checked during the evidence gathering phase. It didn't work at that point.
17	*Since its launch in 2018, several features have been added to the Portal, but there are several areas where the Portal needs to be developed further.*	There are in fact additional advanced features in the planning and it would be useful if the evaluation also refers to these. They include: additional enhancement to the search feature (including taxonomy-linked filter), enhanced georeferenced information, email alerts extended to Agencies, and integration with Trustee System.	No change. It has already been noted that periodic updates have been made.

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18	*Content search is not enabled; for example, a non-GEF staff user may not ask how many hectares have been funded by the GEF via land degradation projects and get a list or tabulation.*	This is not clear. Who is a non-GEF staff user? The Portal has defined users as noted above, and links of information to the GEF website.	Change We will revise the text.
18	*However, there are areas where the system needs to develop further. It needs to provide alerts that are targeted not only at the Agency staff, but also other action takers at the Portal.*	As noted above, email alerts are now activated for To Do items for Secretariat staff.	No change. The areas for futher development still remain.
18	*For example, in the absence of guidelines on the categorization of data, often there is inconsistency in the use of categories to classify data*	The more advanced reporting features now in place in the system, along with document taxonomies, have created a strong capability to generate well-organized data along multiple filters and categories, tailored to the advanced needs of the GEF. The data presented in the reporting platforms and dashboard follow the GEF project modalities in the GEF project cycle which is quite complex and therefore, users need to familiarize themselves with the GEF Project Cycle Policy and Guidelines to be able to understand and use the different categorization of data.	No change. The methodology section mentions the time upto which the evidence is considered. The evaluation team is not in a position to verify the efficacy of changes made after this.
18	*The Portal is expected to provide the ability to use georeferenced data: so far it allows for only upload of maps in a PDF format. Consequently, it is difficult to search GEF project activities using georeferencing.*	This is not correct. The Portal allows the entry of text data and any other image files or attachments.	Partial change. THe narrative will be made clearer. What is mean here is that the georeferenced shape files – which are especially useful for identification of geographical areas – is not available. For example, protected area covered by a project can't be just be represented by a georeferenced pont. Image files are uploaded but these are not directly analyzable.

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18	**Search and identification are difficult because of challenges in labeling and tagging.** *The Portal's lack of categorization makes it difficult for users to sort, filter, and aggregate data. Because of weaknesses in the naming convention followed for the Portal, in most instances documents cannot be identified without opening them.*	Actually the Portal has a carefully developed document taxonomy for all parts of the project lifecycle, and has clear and easily accessible labels for the major documents that are part of the project review process (PIF, Review Sheets, CEO Endorsements, Stakeholder comments, etc.). There has also been significant progress in asking agencies to use consistent formats in the file names of uploaded documents into this taxonomy. There are also menu options of document catergorizations, document prefixes as well as recommended information classification (i.e. public, official use only, etc…) to ensure consistency in document catergorization by users who can upload documents in the Portal. We suggest clarification and amendment accordingly.	No change. Our assessment on this topic shows that this is a concern. It came up repeatedly during interviews.
20	*Although users are generally satisfied with the responsiveness of the Portal team, several users are dissatisfied with what they perceive as a lack of clarity in the approach used to identify and prioritize problems in the Portal.*	To address this issue ITS has created an email id (ITSOP GEF Portal technical team ITSOP_GEF_Portal_technical_team@worldbankgroup.org) and has requested GEF portal internal and external users to send all technical issues to this email id. GEF Sec staff also are always readily available, and provide periodic updates and briefings to Agency and other users on features and developments.	No change. The problem noted is not related to absence of an email address.

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21	*During interviews, users expressed that sometimes the data are simply not available to the public.*	The GEF portal is not for the public - public data can be found in the GEF website. We suggest clarification of this statement accordingly. In addition, as discussed in another comment above, the Portal has been programmed to feed a wide range of information in real-time to the GEF website, including all policy-required documents relevant to projects, proposed work programs, STAR utilization information, country profile information, and a wide range of other information, in support of GEF's commitment to transparency and access to non-confidential information as set out in the GEF Instrument. This creates real-time availability of this information for all stakeholders, beyond the direct users of the Portal.	Change. The change will clarify that that the portal feeds information to the GEF website, which is accessible to the public.

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21	**Connectivity is a major concern for many users.** *For many users, recurrent issues related to logging in, connection losses, and "silent logouts" caused by the page timing out led to wasted effort. These challenges become more acute when there is heavy use of the portal, such as around deadlines. There also appears to be a technical access disadvantage to users with narrower bandwidth, which disproportionately affected users in least developed countries and remote areas. This needs to be tackled with urgency because with decentralization of data entry to Agencies—especially project managers who are posted in recipient countries—the Portal needs to be accommodate the technical constraints of most, if not all, of its users.*	As described above, this has been tackled and fully addressed and resolved, with the system operating at high efficiency, performance and speed. We suggest clarification and amendment accordingly.	Change.

Change will reflect that the GEF Portal band width has been upgraded. This has reduced the challenges due to the limitations in system capacity. |
| 22 | *The Portal team has linked slow development of the Portal to the limited resources that they have to work with. At the same time there are substantial resources for the special initiative for the Portal that have not been fully utilized.* | The Special Initiative resources have been carefully planned for in the context of GEF overall IT requirements. They are not only for the GEF Portal but also for other IT needs, including website migration/upgrade and KM needs. An amount has been carefully planned for the advanced dashboard of the Portal this FY, now nearing full development. We suggest clarification and amendment accordingly. | No change.
The Secretariat/Portal team was provided an opportunity to share their budget and plan documents on use of special initiative resources. These were, however, not provided to the evaluation team. In absence of these documents that could have supported Secretariat's argument, the evaluation team has used publicly available budget and utilization data. |

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22	*The advent of the Portal shifted the burden from the Secretariat to the GEF Agencies*	The word 'burden' is misleading here and we suggest both the choice of a different word and the provision of the right context. Before (PMIS era) the Secretariat was responsible to upload the project's information in the system: we were at the same time responsible for including the information and the reviewers of that information. This was not a good practice for a funding organization. The Portal put things in the right place: the proponents (countries through the Agencies) are now responsible and accountable for the information they include in their proposals via the Portal, while the reviewers (the Secretariat) are not only not linked with uploading the information that later on they will review, but also this guarantees transparency and proper accountability, which should be the good practice for any funding organization that handles public funds. This comes with a shift in the responsibility of tasks which enhances transparency and accountability of all stakeholders.	No change. No disagreement. The term burden is used to signify effort. No aternative word has been suggested.
	Recommendation 1	As noted above, the ITS and Secretariat teams have been rapidly and reliably available at all times to support user needs relating to the Portal. They have also been highly efficient in addressing issues that arose. The text of this message could recognize this.	We will reflect this in the message of the recommendation.

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22	*Recommendation 2*	Recommendation 2 asks for a plan to accelerate Portal development, but provides no evidence that the Portal is behind schedule other than that it has been under progressive development. Information systems are an ongoing journey in all development organizations, and as noted above the Portal is well developed with many advanced features and capabilities that are closely tailored to the needs and complexity of the GEF work needs and partnership. This is not recognized in the language of this recommendation. Our programming and policies are evolving with each replenishment and the Portal is expected to keep up to that.	Partial change. The point rasied by the Secretariat is very different from the information the evaluation gathered through interviews including interviews of the Secretariat staff. The is no publicly available schedule or blue print that gives a time bound road map of what will be done and by what time.
**Shaanti Kapila, Senior Operations Officer, World Bank**		
	On recommendations	While the WB was not among the agency interviewees, the issues/concerns we have as far as usage and features of the portal are concerned, were well captured in the draft. However, we feel the recommendations could be sharpened to include some specificity, such as suggesting a specific timeline by when the most important missing features (such as the creation of a robust alert system) will be developed and made available to users/agencies (e.g., end FY22, the conclusion of the GEF-7 period).	Revised The relevant recommendation has been revised to include the term 'time bound'.
	On role of Portal in strengthening KM	One aspect that we find missing from the evaluation is the (potential) role of the portal in strengthening knowledge management within the GEF. The fact that the portal is not yet a KM tool was noted in the OPS7 evaluation on KM where it states that the evaluation on the portal would examine this issue further. However there is no mention of the role of the portal as a KM tool in this evaluation. A link should be made between the two evaluations on this topic.	No change. The revisions in the report have addressed KM to the exent it relates to the evaluation questions. This question of role of Portal will also be assessed in the ongoing review of GEF RBM system.