

Evaluation of Results Based Management in GEF – Key Themes for OPS-8

Concept Paper

This evaluation is being conducted as part of the review of the GEF Results Based Management System for the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF.

Background

GEF RBM System

The Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) results-based management (RBM) system aims to capture results of the GEF activities including transformation of the targeted systems (GEF 2018, 2022). The RBM system is aimed at improving management effectiveness and accountability through specification of realistic expected results targets, tracking the achievement of expected results, integrating lessons into management decisions, and reporting on performance (GEF 2011). The GEF RBM system is designed to “generate more relevant and more reliable data and information on results, while promoting integration, multiple benefits, and simplification” (GEF 2018).

Several actors within the GEF partnership shape and implement RBM activities across the partnership: the GEF Council establishes priorities; the GEF Secretariat leads the monitoring function including management of the RBM system at the corporate level; and the GEF Agencies implement GEF activities on the ground and report on their implementation and results (GEF IEO 2023). The GEF IEO, which leads the evaluation function, regularly assesses, and reports on, the effectiveness of the GEF RBM system.

The GEF approach to RBM continues to evolve. At the corporate level, emphasis has shifted from tracking a wide range of indicators to monitoring a small set of core indicators and their sub-indicators. For GEF-8, minor changes were made to make some indicators clearer, but GEF has continued with the same set of core-indicators as those used in GEF-7 (GEF 2022). In 2018 the GEF transitioned from the Project Management Information System (PMIS) to the GEF Portal. Since its launch, several new modules and features have been added to the GEF Portal. The Agencies are now able to upload M&E related documents directly to the portal and its data may be analyzed in real time by the GEF Secretariat which also includes an overview of the completeness of the data on core indicators (GEF IEO 2021).

The instruments used for reporting on portfolio results and performance have changed and give greater attention to strategic issues and to achievements of corporate targets (GEF IEO 2023). The corporate scorecard, which the GEF Secretariat started publishing in GEF-6, provides an overview of performance on key indicators at regular intervals.

Coverage of GEF RBM System in Previous Evaluations

The GEF IEO assesses the performance of the GEF RBM System within the context of the Overall Comprehensive Evaluations (OPS) which are aligned with the GEF replenishment cycle. In addition to identifying the areas of strength, these evaluations have also pointed several weaknesses and gaps in the GEF RBM system. For example, OPS4 found that the tracking tools and environmental results indicators were not fully integrated into GEF strategies and policies (GEF IEO 2010). OPS5 concluded that the GEF RBM system was overly complex and burdensome (GEF IEO 2014). OPS-6 noted that RBM played a limited role in evidence-based decision making and learning, and that the GEF Project Management Information System was unable to meet the increasing needs of the GEF partnership (GEF IEO 2018). The review also found that the PMIS was unable to meet the increasing needs of the GEF partnership.

Within the framework of the Seventh Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS7), the GEF IEO undertook four evaluations/reviews that assessed the performance of different aspects of the GEF RBM system including the GEF terminal evaluation validation process, self-evaluation systems of GEF Agencies, the GEF Portal, and the system of corporate level core results indicators. The Review of the GEF Terminal Evaluation Validation Process (GEF IEO 2020a) found that the validation process was well established and provided a basis from comparison across the GEF Partnership but should strengthen knowledge sharing and focus more on the newer Agencies included in the Partnership.

The Evaluation of the Agency Self-Evaluation Systems found that despite broadly similar approaches across Agencies, minor differences in the ratings process make cross Agency comparisons difficult; that mid-term reviews are not being prepared for majority of projects and there were significant gaps in submission of project implementation reports (PIRs) (GEF IEO 2021). The evaluation had two recommendations: first, “the GEF Secretariat and Agencies should strengthen the use of mid-term reviews for learning and adaptive management”; second, “the GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with other partners, should strengthen learning through the systems that it manages, support for cross-Agency exchanges, and incentives for candor.”

The Evaluation of the GEF Portal found that the portal has substantially achieved its objectives to enhance project review and processing abilities, capture information in consistent format, integrate GEF strategies and policies into reporting requirements, facilitate monitoring of results of GEF activities, and enhance transparency and information security (GEF IEO 2021). It also found that the portal performance has been mixed in areas such as taxonomy and tagging, search and analytical abilities, batch document downloading capability, auto alerts, and real-time availability of data to external stakeholders and the public. The evaluation had two recommendations: first, “The GEF Secretariat should strengthen its process to address user feedback on the Portal”; second, the “GEF Management should develop and implement a time bound plan to speed up the development of the Portal.”

Annual Performance Report 2021 included a chapter on the findings of the review of the GEF RBM system, which took stock of the corporate system of core indicators (GEF IEO 2023). The review found that the GEF system improved during the GEF-7 period as the number of indicators tracked at the corporate level was streamlined. It also identified several gaps and challenges. The core indicators do not address the drivers of environmental degradation and system transformation. Some of the indicators are not realistic based on how they are phrased or may be prone to double counting. It also pointed out that the use of information from the system is limited due to a long feedback loop.

As part of the upcoming Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8), the IEO will undertake several targeted evaluations and reviews to assess the performance of the GEF RBM system. These evaluations will build on the work undertaken for OPS-7. They will assess the progress made during GEF-8 and will also examine some aspects of RBM that have not been adequately covered so far. For example, while the past work of the GEF IEO has given considerable attention to the results and process indicators tracked at the corporate level, their measurement method and approach has not received adequate attention. The GEF IEO will address these gaps to support learning and accountability related to the GEF RBM system.

Key Questions

The GEF IEO seeks to answer the following RBM related questions:

1. To what extent have the recommendations of the IEO related to GEF RBM systems been implemented?

As noted earlier, during the period covered by OPS-7, the Evaluation of the Agency Self-Evaluation Systems and The Evaluation of the GEF Portal (GEF IEO 2021) made several recommendations related to RBM. The GEF IEO will assess the extent to which these recommendations have been implemented and the results achieved.

2. How are the core indicators measured and reported on?

The work undertaken for OPS-8 will assess the extent to which methodologies applied to measure the core-indicators are consistent and appropriate, and whether GEF Agencies are gathering data on these indicators as per project M&E plans. It will also assess use of the data gathered for analysis, learning and reporting. This will cover all indicators that are tracked at the corporate level, i.e., the core indicators and sub-indicators.

3. To what extent do GEF Agencies measure the achievement of project objectives and expected outcomes?

The GEF IEO will assess the extent to which GEF projects specify appropriate indicators to measure progress in the achievement of project objectives and outcomes. This will include not only those indicators that are tracked at the corporate level, but also those that are specific to the given project. GEF IEO will assess whether a baseline is provided on specified indicators, and whether these indicators are measured and consistently reported.

4. How does country context affect project M&E?

The GEF IEO will assess the extent to which country context affects project M&E, especially measurement of and reporting on indicators. M&E of GEF activities in Fragile, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) affected countries will be covered in detail through a s. Other categories of interest include LDCs and SIDS. The performance in measurement and reporting on indicators in these country categories will be compared with that of the other GEF recipient countries. If there are significant differences in performance, the GEF IEO will examine the factors that explain the difference.

5. To what extent does the monitoring guidance, especially for measurement of and reporting on core-indicators, meet the needs of the intended users?

The GEF IEO will assess the effectiveness of the guidance related to various aspects of project and portfolio monitoring in meeting the needs of intended users including the GEF Agencies and their executing partners. It will assess how this guidance is being applied by the GEF Agencies and their executing partners to measure and report on the core and other indicators included in the project M&E plans and assess the extent to which the actual practice is aligned with the guidance.

Sources of Information

The GEF IEO will draw from several sources of information to answer the key questions (Table 1). The aim is to draw upon information sources for which the GEF IEO and GEF Secretariat gather data on an ongoing basis. Where needed targeted evaluations, reviews and studies will be conducted to supplement the data that will become available through regular activities of the GEF IEO. Detailed approach for studies and reviews undertaken as part of the evaluative work will be developed in due course.

Table 1. Evaluation Matrix

Key Questions	Means to answer	Coverage
To what extent have the RBM related recommendations of the GEF IEO been implemented?	Management Action Record; and, Assessment of the GEF Portal	Implementation of the recommendations related to the Agency Self-Evaluation System and the GEF Portal.
How are the core indicators measured and reported on?	Review of project documents including proposals, PIRs, MTRs, and terminal evaluations; and, study of M&E in FCV contexts.	Completed GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects. Sample of GEF-7 and GEF-8 project proposals.
To what extent do GEF Agencies measure achievement of project objectives and expected outcomes?	Review of project documents including proposals, PIRs, MTRs, and terminal evaluations; terminal evaluation review dataset; and key informant interviews.	M&E design and implementation in completed projects, with focus on completed projects approved in GEF-6 and GEF-7.
How does country context affect project M&E?	Review of project documents including proposals, PIRs, MTRs, and terminal evaluations; Terminal evaluation review dataset; and, study of M&E in FCV contexts.	M&E design and implementation of GEF projects, with focus on projects in FCV countries, LDCs, and SIDS.
To what extent does the monitoring guidance, especially for measurement of and reporting on core-indicators, meet the needs of the intended users?	Review of the GEF policies and guidance related to RBM	GEF policies, guidance, project appraisal templates, GEF Portal data input forms, related to RBM.

Desk review of project documents

The project documents such as documentation submitted at the point of CEO Endorsement/Approval, PIRs, MTRs, tracking tools, and terminal evaluation, will be reviewed for GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects. The review will assess the extent to which project M&E design specifies appropriate indicators, baseline, and targets, to facilitate assessment of achievement of project objectives and expected outcomes. It will assess the extent to which changes in the indicators are measured and reported on consistently and systematically. This work will be carried out within the framework of GEF IEO's Annual Performance Report (APR) starting with APR2023.

Management Action Record (MAR)

As part of the MAR process, the GEF management responds to the GEF IEO recommendations with an action plan. Subsequently, the GEF management provides a self-assessment of the progress in implementation of its action plan, and GEF IEO validates the self-assessment. The RBM related recommendations provided in The Evaluation of the Agency Self-Evaluation Systems and The Evaluation of the GEF Portal are being tracked through MAR. The management's self-assessment and the GEF IEO's validation will be a useful source of information on progress in implementation of the GEF IEO's RBM related recommendations.

Terminal Evaluation Review Dataset

The terminal evaluation review dataset provides validated project performance ratings including ratings on M&E design and implementation. These ratings are useful for assessing trends and patterns based on factors such as focal area, period when a project was designed and implemented, country context, and GEF Agencies responsible for implementation. The dataset will be especially useful for exploring patterns and trends in M&E design and implementation, in LDC, SIDS and FCV countries.

GEF Portal data

GEF Agencies submit MTRs at the GEF Portal. Therefore, analysis of GEF Portal data will provide information on the extent to which MTRs are being prepared for GEF projects. It will also be useful source of information on reporting on core-indicators.

Review of GEF policies and guidance related to RBM.

An in-depth review of GEF and Agency policy and guidance documents will be conducted. This includes review of documents such as the Guidelines on the Implementation of the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework (GEF 2020) and Policy on Monitoring (GEF 2019), and the results frameworks and guidelines issued by the GEF Agencies to operationalize the Secretariat's guidance for GEF activities.

Special Study on M&E in FCV Contexts

The GEF IEO will undertake this special study to: explore and identify the ways in which the GEF and other actors are advancing the M&E of environmental work in FCV contexts; develop the foundation for a measurement agenda that includes theory of change best practices and core indicators relevant to FCV contexts; and, advance learning for the GEF about good M&E practice in FCV contexts. The study will build on the Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (GEF IEO 2020b) and

will gather additional evidence from the literature and exemplary projects on M&E in FCV contexts. Information on exemplary projects will be used to develop case study vignettes. The study will include review of other GEF projects and institutional approaches and guidance, recommend good theory of change practice as well as a set of core indicators – with a focus on process indicators that account for the risks of operating in FCV contexts – to serve as the initial basis for a measurement agenda.

The study will seek to answer the following specific questions:

- What approaches, strategies, and guidance have GEF-funded projects and GEF Agencies developed to address the challenges and opportunities of working in FCV contexts? How do their M&E approaches and processes reflect this?
- In what ways are GEF results frameworks relevant to and fit for purpose in FCV contexts? What adaptations and improvements can be made to increase their relevance?
- How do GEF partners gather data on the GEF's corporate results indicators for projects implemented in FCV contexts? What are the challenges and opportunities in gathering the data?
- How can M&E, and a concrete measurement including refined core indicators, support the GEF and its partners in demonstrating results in challenging and dynamic FCV contexts?
- What institutional and contextual opportunities and challenges might affect the GEF's ability to implement a measurement agenda for FCV contexts? How can these potentially be addressed?

The study will draw on a range of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. These will include:

- **Interviews** with GEF Secretariat and Agency staff, and other practitioners outside of the GEF, to better understand the M&E processes, core indicators, and practices applicable in the FCV context.
- **A review of available literature** on M&E in FCV contexts. This will also help in assessment of the extent lessons learned and good practice developed by others are considered in developing the GEF approach.
- **An in-depth review of GEF and Agency documentation**, including the GEF's M&E framework and related policies and guidance, project documents, evaluations, etc.
- **Case study vignettes** of six projects will be used to gather more detailed information on the ways in which projects are affected by FCV contexts, their needs in adapting to those contexts, examples of existing adaptations already being made, and the corresponding M&E processes that projects are employing or could employ in future.
- A **validation workshop** will provide an opportunity to review and revise the study findings and draft measurement agenda. Key stakeholders identified alongside the GEF IEO will participate.

Evaluation Team

The evaluation will be led by Neeraj Negi, Senior Evaluation Officer and supported by Jeneen Garcia, Evaluation Officer and Mariana Calderon, Evaluation Analyst. Oversight and quality control will be provided by Geeta Batra, Chief Evaluation Officer, IEO.

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