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GEF Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011

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(The main conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation were presented to the GEF Council at its November 2011 meeting.)

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1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433
Internet: www.gefeo.org
Email: gefeo@thegef.org

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Director of the GEF Evaluation Office: Robert D. van den Berg

Team Leader: Anna Vigg, Senior Evaluation Officer, GEF Evaluation Office

Editing & Design: Nita Congress

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Foreword

This is the first annual thematic evaluations report presented by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office to the Council. It completes the shift toward annual reporting along the four streams of evaluation work: country portfolios, impact, performance, and thematic issues. Thematic evaluations cover evaluations of cross-sector topics ranging from strategies and policies to cross-cutting programs.

The Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011 provides an overview of the ongoing work in the thematic evaluations work program for fiscal year 2010 and presents the main conclusions and recommendations for the Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSAs).

The evaluation provides evaluative evidence on progress toward NCSA objectives, as well as main achievements and lessons learned from the implementation of NCSAs one decade after they were established. The evaluation offers recommendations as input for developing a new GEF strategy on capacity development.

The team that conducted the NCSA evaluation was composed of GEF Evaluation Office staff

and two consultants. The evaluation included assessments of NCSAs in three areas: relevance, efficiency, and results and their sustainability. The team collected corresponding data through stakeholder interviews, an e-survey, desk reviews of NCSAs and follow-up cross-cutting capacity development projects as well as regular GEF projects, and a meta-evaluation of previous evaluative evidence. Also, in-depth country visits were made to Croatia, Ecuador, India, Montenegro, Paraguay, Senegal, and Thailand.

The GEF Evaluation Office would like to thank all who collaborated with the report: its staff and consultants, GEF and convention focal points, members of the national project teams, and GEF Agency staff. I would like to thank all those involved for their support and useful criticism. Final responsibility for this report remains firmly with this Office.



Rob D. van den Berg
Director, GEF Evaluation Office

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This report was prepared by Anna Viggh, Senior Evaluation Officer and Team Leader for thematic evaluations at the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office. The Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments was initially managed by Claudio Volonté, Chief Evaluation Officer at the GEF Evaluation Office; and later by Anna Viggh, when she took over as Team Leader for Office thematic evaluations. The evaluation team consisted of Jean-Joseph Bellamy, Senior Consultant; Michael Murphy, Consultant; and Björn Conrad, Evaluation Analyst, GEF Evaluation

Office. The Office thanks members of the GEF Secretariat and representatives of the GEF Agencies for their input and support as well as national staff of the countries visited for their cooperation and assistance in collecting all relevant information.

National ministerial staff, GEF and convention focal points, GEF Agency staff, and members of the national teams that prepared and implemented national capacity self-assessments provided full cooperation and crucial logistical and organizational support during the country visits.

Abbreviations

CB2	capacity building 2	NCSA	national capacity self-assessment
CCCD	cross-cutting capacity development	NGO	nongovernmental organization
CDI	Capacity Development Initiative	OPS	overall performance study
COP	conference of the parties	SIDS	small island developing states
GEF	Global Environment Facility	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
GSP	Global Support Programme	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
LDC	least developed country		
MEA	multilateral environmental agreement		

All dollar amounts are U.S. dollars unless otherwise indicated.

1. Introduction

This is the first annual thematic evaluations report presented by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to the GEF Council. In fiscal year 2010, the Evaluation Office completed two thematic evaluations—the Evaluation of the GEF Strategic Priority for Adaptation and the Review of the GEF Earth Fund; both of which were submitted individually to the 39th Council Meeting in November 2010. As reported in the current four-year work program document presented to the Council in June 2011, over the past few years the Office has consolidated its evaluations into four streams of evaluation work on country portfolios, impact, performance, and thematic issues. During GEF-4 (2006–10), the Office gradually moved from presenting each individual evaluation report to the Council to annual reports that highlight evaluative findings in the first three streams.

This first annual thematic evaluations report completes the shift toward annual reporting. These reports will deal with cross-cutting issues and look for synergies, while taking full advantage

of data collected and analysis completed as well as the key findings and recommendations from other Office evaluations and GEF Agency evaluations.

The Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011 provides an overview of the ongoing work in the thematic evaluations work program for fiscal year 2012 and presents the main conclusions and recommendations of the Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSAs). The NCSA evaluation was conducted between May and September 2011 by a team comprised of the GEF Evaluation Office's Chief Evaluation Officer, a senior consultant with extensive experience in capacity development, and two research assistants. A consultation workshop took place on September 22, 2011, to present the preliminary findings of the evaluation and receive feedback from key stakeholders on possible factual or analysis errors. Comments were reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into the final report. The full NCSA evaluation report is available on the GEF Evaluation Office website (www.gefeo.org).

2. Thematic Evaluation Work Program

Thematic evaluations cover evaluations of cross-sector topics ranging from strategies and policies to cross-cutting programs. In the next 12 months, the thematic evaluation team will conduct an **evaluation of GEF enabling activities** and initiate an **evaluation of GEF-5 (2010–14) focal area strategies**. Starting in July 2012, the team will coordinate the work for the Fifth Overall Performance Study (OPS5). The Progress Report from the Director of the GEF Evaluation Office presents more detailed information on the preparation of OPS5, including an initial identification of key issues to be explored by it (GEF EO 2011). In addition to evaluative work for the GEF Trust Fund, the thematic team provides support at full cost recovery to the two adaptation funds managed by the GEF—the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)—as well as to the Adaptation Fund for which the GEF Evaluation Office implements the evaluation function.

2.1 GEF Enabling Activities Evaluation

The GEF has provided support to countries to fulfill their reporting requirements to the global conventions that the GEF serves. It is estimated that the GEF has provided about \$360 million (with about \$68 million more in cofinancing) for almost 900 enabling activity projects. These figures also

include regional and global projects and programs that supported the preparation and implementation of these projects.

To evaluate GEF support of these activities, the thematic evaluation team will focus on each of the GEF focal areas and take into account evaluative evidence from previously conducted evaluations, in particular country portfolio evaluations and the NCSA evaluation. The scope of the evaluation will include three criteria:

- Relevance to the GEF (i.e., linkages with focal area strategies), the conventions (i.e., GEF responsiveness to convention guidance), and national agendas (i.e., linkages with sustainable development and environmental agendas)
- Linkages with other activities at various levels (to provide a measurement of effectiveness of results)
- Efficiency of preparation and implementation (including comparison of different implementation modalities such as national, regional, and global)

The evaluation will be launched in November 2011 with the development of an approach paper and the establishment of an evaluation team. The evaluation will conduct a review of a randomly selected number of enabling activities within each focal area (using a stratified sample method to

include different types of countries, focal areas, and enabling activity modalities) to assess content and quality. In addition, the evaluation will conduct semi-structured interviews with key GEF stakeholders—representatives from the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies, the convention secretariats, the GEF focal points, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

An important aspect of the evaluation will be to assess GEF responsiveness to convention decisions and guidelines regarding enabling activities. Another important dimension of the evaluation will be an assessment of the efficiency of the different modalities utilized for the preparation and implementation of enabling activities (from supporting individual countries to regional or global support approaches). This assessment should take into account the recent decision on direct access for national communications approved by the GEF Council.

Each of the conventions has conducted reviews of enabling activities, with varying degrees of independence. These materials will be assessed for quality and used as appropriate. The evaluation will coordinate its activities with a review of this GEF modality proposed by the GEF Secretariat to be completed in the context of Rio+20.

2.2 GEF Focal Area Strategies Evaluation

The GEF replenishment process approved strategies for each of the six focal areas of the GEF—

biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, chemicals, and sustainable forest management/REDD+.¹ These strategies have been discussed and approved by the GEF Council. The GEF-5 strategies will be evaluated in terms of their relevance to the global environmental conventions with which they are associated (including GEF responsiveness to convention guidance), the results achieved so far with reference to the targets agreed to in the strategies, and lessons learned from past achievements that are relevant for these strategies. This evaluation will be an important input to OPS5, and new components may be incorporated during implementation of OPS5.

The evaluation will begin by developing an approach paper on its conduct and the key questions to be explored within the two evaluation criteria mentioned above: relevance and results. The evaluation will also conduct technical assessments of the strategies. One of the first steps will be to prepare a meta-evaluation of existing evaluative evidence in the Office's evaluations since OPS4 regarding lessons and achievements toward the focal area strategies.

¹ The GEF defines REDD+ as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

3. Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments

3.1 Background

Since its inception in 1991, the GEF has supported capacity development in regular GEF programs and projects—both targeted capacity development activities and enabling activities. The GEF provides support to capacity development in response to guidance from the three Rio conventions. It recognizes that improving capacity is critical to meeting global environmental objectives. Under the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI), the GEF—in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)—developed its strategic capacity development framework. This resulted in the GEF Council’s adoption of two major policy documents to guide a more focused approach to capacity development:¹

- “Elements of Strategic Collaboration and a Framework for GEF Action for Capacity Building for the Global Environment” (GEF Council 2001)
- “Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building” (GEF Council 2003)

¹ The term “capacity development” is used here in the sense of capacity building, which was the term initially used to describe the development of capacity.

In a May 2001 decision, the Council made the NCSA initiative available to all GEF-eligible countries. The NCSA is part of the GEF’s broader capacity development framework, which includes four pathways:

- Pathway #1 focuses on a self-assessment of capacity needs.
- Pathway #2 is the program of critical capacity development activities for least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).
- Pathway #3 concerns targeted capacity development projects.
- Pathway #4 entails enhanced attention to capacity development components in regular projects.

The innovative NCSA approach allowed a GEF recipient country to assess its own capacity needs to implement the Rio conventions and develop an overarching action plan to maximize synergies and address global environmental issues.

In May 2010, the GEF Council approved the “Summary of Negotiations—Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund” (GEF Secretariat and World Bank 2010). The Council decision includes a request that NCSAs implemented under GEF-4 be evaluated in order to prepare a new capacity development

strategy for discussion at the GEF Council meeting in 2011. The GEF Secretariat, in consultation with the GEF Agencies, was tasked with preparing this new strategy, which would include results and recommendations of the evaluation.

3.2 Evaluation Approach

A team composed of Evaluation Office staff, a senior consultant, and two research assistants conducted the evaluation between February and October 2011. The main findings and recommendations were presented to the GEF Council at its November 2011 meeting.

This evaluation aims to provide the GEF Council and other GEF stakeholders with lessons, experiences, and recommendations based on NCSA implementation. The evaluation focused on NCSA relevance, efficiency, and results and their sustainability. The key issues addressed include the following:

- NCSA relevance to the GEF mandate, multinational and regional environmental agreements, Rio conventions working with the GEF, and national sustainable development and environmental priorities
- NCSA efficiency during implementation and preparation of the final report and action plan
- NCSA achievements, both individually and at aggregate levels

The evaluation included an assessment of all approved NCSAs, the Global Support Programme (GSP), and follow-up capacity development projects. It took into account the level of project implementation and existing assessments, as well as the reviews and evaluations conducted on any of the modalities. Key resources included the findings and recommendations of the *National Capacity Self-Assessments: Results and Lessons Learned*

for Global Environmental Sustainability (Bellamy and Hill 2010) and the recently completed GSP evaluation (Baastel 2010).

The GEF evaluation established the context of NCSAs within the GEF through a review of capacity development in GEF-supported projects and programs. National capacity development projects not supported by GEF funding, such as enabling activities and others reporting to the Rio conventions, were also taken into account. Activities included a meta-evaluation of GEF Evaluation Office evaluations and relevant documents from the GEF Agency evaluation offices on capacity development in general and NCSAs in particular.

The evaluation team collected data and information from the following: stakeholder interviews; an online survey (e-survey); a review of NCSA final reports and action plans, and follow-up capacity development projects; teleconferences with GEF focal points, convention focal points, and NCSA country teams; and visits to seven countries. The team conducted interviews at several stages of the evaluation process to cross-check and validate available documentation and triangulate the initial findings.

Preliminary findings were presented at a consultation workshop in September 2011, with key stakeholders providing feedback on possible factual errors and analysis. The comments were reviewed and incorporated in the final report as appropriate.

This chapter presents the main conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. The full evaluation report, *Evaluation of GEF National Capacity Self-Assessments*, is available on the [website](#) of the GEF Evaluation Office; it includes a thorough portfolio examination as well as detailed assessments of each of the key elements. The full

report and its annexes provide the evaluative evidence to support the conclusions and recommendations contained herein.

3.3 Limitations

The evaluation team encountered a number of limitations during evaluation preparation and implementation:

- Loss of institutional memory in countries that completed their NCSA at the program's outset
- Narrow time frame to meet all information-gathering objectives
- Low response rate to e-survey due to stakeholder availability
- Lack of a clear follow-up strategy affecting the availability and continuity of engaged stakeholders

3.4 NCSA Portfolio Description

A NCSA's primary objective is to identify country-level priorities and the capacities needed to address global environmental issues (with a focus on biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation). Since 2002, the GEF has provided \$28.7 million for 153 NCSAs. Each country has received a \$0.2 million grant to conduct its own self-assessment.

The GEF Council approved operational guidelines and guiding principles for NCSA implementation. The guidelines specified that NCSAs must be country driven, led by national institutions and national experts to the extent feasible, and respond to national situations and priorities. The GEF provided NCSA country teams with the set of guiding principles.

The GSP was launched in early 2005 to provide technical assistance to countries undertaking an

NCSA. GSP services included development and dissemination of assessment tools, guidance documents, and resource materials; regional training workshops on assessment approaches and tools; information and knowledge management through outreach, websites, databases, and electronic listservs; and reviews and analyses of NCSA outputs, particularly action plans and final reports.

The GSP disseminated an NCSA resource kit (GEF GSP 2005), which outlined the basic steps to be followed by each NCSA country team and documented in separate reports. The steps included inception, stocktaking, thematic assessments, cross-cutting analysis, and the preparation of a final report and a capacity development action plan.

As of June 30, 2011, 133 NCSAs had been completed, 13 were still under implementation or in the final stages, 6 had been canceled, and 1 had not been approved. Of the 146 completed and nearly completed NCSAs, 76 percent were implemented through UNDP, 23 percent through UNEP, and less than 1 percent through the World Bank.

3.5 Conclusions

NCSA Relevance

Conclusion 1: The NCSA initiative was a central part of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development.

Following a GEF Council decision of May 2001, NCSAs were made available to GEF-eligible countries "to initiate processes so that the self assessment of capacity building needs and priorities (Pathway A1) [later Pathway #1] and targeted capacity building projects (Pathway A3) [later Pathway #3] can begin immediately in countries that request assistance for them" (GEF Council 2001). The decision extended the strategic part-

nership between the GEF Secretariat and UNDP under the CDI to better define methodologies and delivery modalities for capacity development through all four pathways. At the time, NCSAs represented an innovative approach for GEF recipient countries to assess their capacity development needs with regard to their obligations under the Rio conventions and to prepare a corresponding capacity development assistance program to maximize synergies.

After reviewing the “Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building,” the GEF Council approved a consolidated approach for capacity development and requested that the GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with the Agencies and the GEF Evaluation Office (then the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Unit), fully operationalize this approach. This included development of the following:

- Indicators and targets to measure the results and impacts of capacity development activities
- Operational modalities and project criteria, including the enhancement of capacity development components within GEF projects and country capacity development programs for LDCs and SIDS
- Proposals for a technical support program, such as the GSP, for Council consideration

The NCSA initiative has been relevant since its inception. It has been a keystone for implementation of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development and has provided resources to recipient countries to conduct self-assessments. NCSA results and lessons learned have provided direct feedback for the development of the GEF-5 (2010–14) Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Strategy and its objectives. However, NCSA relevance to GEF activities is diminishing. NCSAs were not followed up with adequate investments to address capacity development pri-

orities, nor have NCSA outcomes been taken into account in developing GEF focal area projects.

Conclusion 2: The NCSA initiative was highly relevant to national sustainable development agendas and the capacity development strategies of the GEF Agencies and multilateral environmental agreements.

NCSA’s cross-cutting and self-assessment guidance, combined with the search for synergies in implementation of the Rio conventions, provided a new and unique framework that responded to stakeholder needs. In many countries, the NCSA process resulted in a broad range of stakeholders meeting together for the first time, priorities determined through participatory processes, and discussions focused on improving national coordination. However, the uptake of results varied from country to country and depended on the timing of the self-assessments. In India, the NCSA process was carried out after developing national strategies; as a result, the findings were of limited use. In Belize and Paraguay, on the other hand, more relevant timing enabled stakeholders to use NCSA results to establish strategies and programs.

A review of 23 follow-up cross-cutting capacity development projects (CB2) conducted in 2010 confirmed NCSA relevance to the sustainable development agendas of recipient countries. The NCSA process identified institutional bottlenecks to synergistic implementation of the Rio conventions. As follow-ups to NCSAs, the CB2 projects provided resources for reducing, if not eliminating, these bottlenecks.

NCSAs have been relevant to UNDP and UNEP. Both Agencies were involved in the CDI as part of their respective strategies to produce a comprehensive capacity development approach to help developing countries meet the challenges of global environmental action.

UNDP emphasizes an integrated approach in its operation and invested a significant amount of time in NCSAs. It increasingly focused on cross-sectoral approaches such as the recently developed UNDP effort to support governments in developing low-emission climate-resilient development strategies. This approach was designed to build upon existing strategies and development plans, including country-driven integrated assessments that use an approach similar to the NCSA methodology.

For UNEP, the NCSA initiative was a practical response to the development of national capacities related to implementation of the Rio conventions. Its timing corresponded to the development of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building. This plan, which was approved by the UNEP Governing Council in 2005, aimed to strengthen the environmental management capacity of developing countries and economies in transition.

The GEF evaluation indicates that NCSAs were well aligned with capacity development obligations to the conventions as reflected in the implementation guidance approved by the parties to the conventions. The conferences of the parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity have asked the GEF to provide funding for country-driven capacity development activities, in particular for LDCs and SIDS. Both the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants highlight the need for capacity development to help countries meet their commitments under the respective conventions. However, only the desertification convention's strategic plan recognizes NCSAs and encourages their use whenever possible.

NCSAs have not been used to their full potential, despite obvious potential synergies with convention processes. They contain relevant information for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), particularly regarding synergies and cross-cutting analyses, but the conventions have not requested them. As a result, there has been little uptake of NCSA results through convention implementation.

NCSA Efficiency

Conclusion 3: A “one-size-fits-all” approach is not the most efficient way to assess global environmental capacity needs at the national level.

All recipient countries requesting an NCSA received an approximately equal amount of \$0.2 million to conduct the self-assessment. Providing an equal-sized grant to all countries may not have been the best approach. Among the countries reviewed, smaller countries such as Belize and the Seychelles were the most successful in using the NCSA grant effectively. Larger countries such as India had more difficulty in applying the comparably small grant effectively.

The one-size-fits-all approach did not take into account the wide range of abilities to implement and benefit from such a program. Differences in size, population, political context, legislation, policies, economy, timing, level of development, and global environmental significance affected the effectiveness and efficiency with which countries used their NCSA grant. In addition, smaller grants tend to have relatively higher transaction costs, which make them less attractive to some countries.

The average duration for NCSA projects was about 32 months from the date of GEF Agency approval to the date the final report was released, with an implementation period ranging from 6 to 83 months. On average, the GEF Chief Execu-

tive Officer approved the NCSA projects eight months before the Agency approval date.² NCSAs implemented through UNDP took an average of 31 months; those implemented through UNEP averaged 37 months. No correlation exists between the quality of final reports and the length of project implementation (Bellamy and Hill 2010). Data analysis indicates that most NCSAs take between 20 and 40 months to complete, with a resultant quality score ranging from 2 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

Three GEF Agencies implemented the NCSAs: UNDP (76.0 percent), UNEP (23.3 percent), and the World Bank (0.7 percent). Recipient countries executed NCSAs through UNDP's nationally executed modality and UNEP's direct legal agreements. Both modalities followed United Nations rules and regulations. GEF focal point offices—mostly ministries of environment—executed more than 60 percent of NCSA projects.

Conclusion 4: The Global Support Programme improved NCSA implementation.

In 2004, the GEF Council approved the GSP and established it in 2005 as a joint facility of UNDP and UNEP. Initially intended as a three-year program, the GSP was extended to five years. The final program evaluation for the GSP found that it was clearly needed and relevant. The GSP was effective in providing technical support and guidance materials for NCSA implementation, backstopping NCSA country teams, analyzing lessons learned, and developing programming frameworks for the systematic implementation of cross-cutting capacity development priorities.

² This date is also referred to as the “project document date.”

However, stakeholders indicated that the NCSA resource kit (GEF GSP 2005) provided too many options and could have been more “prescriptive.” The final evaluation also found that the demand for technical guidance has continued. It remains to be seen whether countries will be able to implement their NCSA recommendations and action plans without technical support, such as the GSP provided.

Conclusion 5: A broad range of stakeholders participated in the NCSA process, but the participatory process could have been more inclusive.

A key NCSA principle was to “ensure multistakeholder participation, consultation, and decision-making” (GEF GSP 2005). Stakeholder engagement was recognized as one of four strategies for conducting a successful NCSA. The resource kit provided extensive guidance, including stakeholder involvement tools; it defined a stakeholder as “anyone who is affected by, has an interest in, and/or should be involved in an initiative” (GEF GSP 2005).

Most NCSAs succeeded in engaging a broad array of stakeholders. In many countries, the consultation process allowed stakeholders to meet for the first time. Often, those meetings provided an opportunity to recognize the need for national cross-sectoral coordination of efforts to implement the Rio conventions. These aspects were highlighted during country visits, teleconferences, and interviews.

However, some stakeholders interviewed apparently did not see the value of the process and were skeptical of the lack of any clear follow-up to NCSA action plans. Results from the e-survey also indicate a sharp contrast between the involvement of government representatives, NGOs, and community-based organizations. When asked to

rate stakeholder participation, 76 percent of government representatives were either satisfied or highly satisfied, but only 34 percent of NGOs and community-based organizations indicated similar levels of satisfaction: two-thirds of the representatives of NGOs and community-based organizations said that the participatory process could have been more inclusive. The findings indicate that more was needed to engage civil society, especially given that stakeholder engagement was recognized as critical to NCSA success.

NCSA Results

Conclusion 6: The NCSA initiative is the first assessment of national environmental capacity needs and priorities with a global reach.

The NCSA initiative primarily sought to identify and help countries prioritize the national capacities necessary to meet broader environmental goals. The process helped countries understand what needs to be done to improve their environmental management frameworks.

The NCSA process was the first assessment of national environmental capacity needs and priorities made available to all GEF recipient countries. It was a logical follow-up to regional and global assessments conducted under the CDI. Participating countries undertook two distinct assessments: an assessment by focal area of strengths and constraints regarding national implementation of the Rio conventions; and a cross-cutting assessment of strengths and capacity gaps at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels in meeting focal area objectives.

Based on guidelines in the NCSA resource kit, each country provided the following:

- A stocktaking report identifying all national activities and documents relevant to the con-

vention themes, as well as core national environmental priorities

- Three thematic assessments summarizing the country's obligations and opportunities in the context of each MEA, and the country's performance and achievements
- An analysis summarizing capacity issues, needs, opportunities, and prioritized needs cutting across the conventions
- A final report and action plan for developing capacities to meet global and national environmental objectives

To assess the NCSA results globally, the evaluation team reviewed an initial analysis conducted in 2010 (Bellamy and Hill 2010) and updated the data set to include recently completed NCSAs. Although there were slight changes in averages and percentages, no major differences were identified between the two analyses. The data trends were similar, and the key results are presented in the following conclusions.

Conclusion 7: Globally, the top cross-cutting capacity development needs are public awareness and environmental education; information collection, management, and exchange; and the development and enforcement of policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks.

The cross-cutting analyses conducted by the Office assessed capacity issues, needs, and opportunities across the conventions and identified possible synergies that could be achieved by addressing two or more themes. These analyses also identified capacity needs common to both national and global environmental management, including possible synergies. The result was a list of priority capacity needs and actions.

A review of these cross-cutting assessments was conducted using a typology of 17 capacity areas

grouped into five main types. Following are highlights of the review:

- Forty-six countries identified stakeholder engagement as a constraint because of limited capacity, skills, and motivation to involve stakeholders in policy and program formulation and implementation.
- Sixty-nine countries cited information and knowledge management as a constraint. The greatest challenges were collecting, managing, and exchanging information, as well as raising public awareness and providing environmental education.
- Fifty-three countries identified the capacity of environmental organizations as a constraint. Economic instruments, sustainable financing mechanisms, and organizational mandates were listed as top challenges.
- Sixty-one countries flagged capacity for environmental governance as a top priority. The need to develop and enforce policy and legislative frameworks as well as the lack of cross-sectoral coordination were identified as top constraints.
- Sixty-two countries identified monitoring and evaluation limitations as a constraint.
- Fewer than 30 countries identified COP negotiations, international project management, and integrated ecosystem management as constraints.
- On average, only six countries identified any of the 17 capacity areas as a strength.
- Eighteen countries identified the capacity to incorporate convention obligations into national frameworks as a strength.

Even though some did not identify a specific area as a constraint, many countries still indicated a need for capacity development under their action

plans. For example, 56 countries identified stakeholder engagement as a capacity development action, even though only 46 countries identified it as a constraint. Similarly, 111 countries recommended capacity development in public awareness and environmental education, yet only 74 identified it as a constraint.

Conclusion 8: Globally, the top thematic capacity development need is in the biodiversity focal area.

NCSA thematic assessments analyzed a country's obligations and opportunities with regard to each MEA, and listed their corresponding performance and achievements to date. The result was an overall assessment of each country's status vis-à-vis the MEAs, including their environmental priorities, capacity development needs, and action plans.

A review of these thematic assessments was conducted using four focal areas—biodiversity, climate change, freshwater-coastal ecosystems, and land degradation—subdivided into 23 thematic areas. The following are the results when the data are reviewed by focal area:

- Biodiversity conservation was identified as the highest priority by 103 countries, 99 listed it as having the most capacity development needs, and 81 indicated that capacity development actions were required.
- Eighty countries ranked climate change vulnerability as their top priority.
- Seventy-four countries cited land use and deforestation as their most important issues.
- Relatively few countries flagged wetlands conservation, rangeland management, soil contamination, unsustainable fisheries, and sea level rise as key issues.

- Most issues identified as high priority were also recommended for capacity development actions.

Conclusion 9: Twenty-three follow-up projects are addressing capacity development constraints identified by NCSAs.

Of the 133 NCSAs completed since 2002, 23 have each received a \$0.5 million follow-up grant during GEF-4 to implement priorities identified in the action plans.³ Most of these CB2 projects are expected to be completed in 2012.

CB2 projects provide resources for reducing or eliminating bottlenecks that hamper synergistic implementation of the Rio conventions. The expected outcomes include strengthening multisectoral processes that promote policy harmonization, achieving cost efficiencies, and enhancing the operational effectiveness of convention implementation. CB2 projects focus on environmental governance and the mainstreaming of global environmental issues in national development programs. A typology of these CB2 projects indicates interventions in four programmatic areas:

- Developing institutional and individual capacity (nine projects)
- Mainstreaming global environmental priorities into national policies and programs (eight projects)
- Strengthening policy and program formulation (three projects)
- Strengthening financial and economic instruments (three projects)

³ An additional two capacity development projects were recently approved in Moldova and Montenegro.

Under GEF-5, a new CCCD strategy was developed and has received an allocation of \$44 million. To access these funds, countries must select a multifocal priority based on the NCSA prioritization process and key objectives. In cases where an NCSA was not conducted or the proposed CCCD project addresses other priorities, countries must justify the proposed projects.

Conclusion 10: The GEF and the Rio conventions did not take full advantage of the information and methodology produced by the NCSA initiative.

The GEF evaluation indicates that GEF programming and focal area strategies have not taken full advantage of the information and knowledge generated by NCSAs. A similar assessment was made for the MEAs. For instance, the Convention on Biological Diversity COP 10 asked the GEF to provide support to eligible parties to revise their national biodiversity strategy and action plans. Guidance to revise these plans calls for the development of capacity development plans. However, NCSA thematic assessments, cross-cutting analyses, and final reports are not mentioned, even though they are highly relevant and capacity development is a recurring theme in GEF-supported projects, as well as in COP decisions.

NCSA long-term impacts will be measured by whether these assessments and action plans are used to support larger strategies and programs, particularly at the country level. The lack of linkages with other initiatives limits the use of NCSA information. An NCSA is not required by any COP guidance or by GEF focal area projects. At the operational level, NCSAs are not included in the guidelines to develop a project information form or project document. Moreover, NCSAs are not part of focal area tracking tools, and capacity development is not included in project approval reviews.

However, NCSAs have recently been added to the guidelines for developing a national portfolio formulation exercise (NPFE) and are now systematically reviewed in country portfolio evaluations where available. A review of the first 15 exercises submitted for GEF funding found that only one explicitly referred to NCSAs, even though most of the documents discussed the need to develop capacity as a foundation for the long-term sustainability of GEF-funded activities.

At the country level, NCSA methods, toolkits, and information have at times been replicated or scaled up. The evaluation found that several countries went further in developing stakeholder engagement strategies, adopting national coordination mechanisms, and making final NCSA reports part of high-level national environmental priorities. However, the evaluation found little indication that NCSA information was used to implement MEAs, including the formulation of national communications or the development of national action plans and national adaptation programs of action.

3.6 Recommendations to the GEF Council

Although the GEF Council approved, and the GEF is now implementing, the CCCD, funding pledges for the CCCD have come under increasing pressure as a result of the financial crisis. Most GEF-eligible countries have completed their NCSAs and identified their capacity development priorities. A number of these priorities are being addressed through follow-up projects or other activities funded by the GEF, other donors, and the recipient countries themselves. However, given its \$28.7 million investment in NCSAs, the GEF is seeking to ensure a broader use of NCSA tools, methodologies, and knowledge.

Recommendation 1: As GEF-5 strategies were approved and are now under implementation, NCSA experiences and lessons learned should be incorporated in a new GEF strategic framework for capacity development for GEF-6.

The “Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the GEF Strategic Approach to Capacity Development” (GEF Council 2008) confirms that progress in capacity development has been significant. The majority of GEF-eligible countries have completed self-assessments. The GEF-5 replenishment agreement indicates that other pathways are also progressing. However, given the shifting global context and evolving national priorities, the strategic approach for GEF-6 (2014–18) needs to be reviewed and updated. The goal is to ensure that future GEF-funded capacity development interventions build on past efforts and accurately reflect the current needs of recipient countries and the convention secretariats.

Recommendation 2: NCSA knowledge products should be made available to the GEF Agencies and disseminated at GEF workshops, such as the National Dialogue Initiatives.

The information resulting from the NCSA initiative is already being used for targeted cross-cutting capacity development projects. It is recommended that the GEF Secretariat and the GEF Evaluation Office disseminate this knowledge more broadly through the new GEF knowledge management strategy.

Knowledge platforms and communities of practice can create an interface that matches demand and supply. This approach uses interactive websites and electronic forums to create demand-oriented flows of information and knowledge, rather than a top-down system in which tools and knowledge products are provided to Agencies and countries. The Evaluation Office is available to

explore this strategy in collaboration with the GEF Secretariat. The GEF Council will be apprised of

progress as part of the report on implementation of the knowledge management strategy.

Annex: Management Response

This annex presents the management response to this report, which was presented to the GEF Council in November 2011 as GEF/ME/C.41/02. Minor editorial corrections have been made.

The following presents the management response to the Annual Thematic Evaluations Report 2011, prepared by the GEF Evaluation Office. The management response has been prepared by the GEF Secretariat in consultation with the GEF Agencies.

The Secretariat welcomes the evaluation of the NCSAs and takes note of the associated findings. The report focuses on the relevance, efficiency, and main achievements of the NCSAs both at the local and aggregate levels. As concluded in the evaluation, the NCSA initiative “is the first assessment of environmental capacity needs and capacity development priorities at the national level with a global reach.” The innovative approach and extensive reach of the NCSA initiative make the lessons, experiences, and recommendations particularly useful.

As the evaluation concludes, the NCSA initiative was a central part of the GEF strategic framework for capacity development starting in 2001. The report notes that lessons from NCSAs have “provided direct feedback in the GEF for the development of the GEF-5 Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Strategy and its objectives.” In

addition, the Secretariat, in collaboration with UNDP and UNEP, has developed a tracking tool with indicators to track the results of the GEF-5 capacity development objectives. This tool is being piloted with applicable projects approved in GEF-5. The Secretariat will coordinate with the Agencies, particularly UNDP and UNEP, to analyze the experience and relevance of the capacity development tracking tool.

The Secretariat takes note of the fact that while 132 NCSAs (87 percent) have been completed, they were not necessarily followed up by adequate investments to address capacity development priorities identified. The Secretariat is pleased that the evaluation found that the NCSA initiative was “highly relevant to national sustainable development agendas and the capacity development strategies of the GEF Agencies and multilateral environmental agreements.” The Secretariat also notes that, despite obvious potential synergies between NCSAs and convention processes, little uptake of NCSA results were observed by the evaluation through the implementation processes of these conventions.

The Secretariat takes note of the evaluation’s first recommendation: “As GEF-5 strategies were approved and are now under implementation, NCSA experiences and lessons learned should be incorporated in a new GEF strategic framework

for capacity development for GEF-6.” The Secretariat believes that capacity development is better achieved if situated within projects and programs that are directed toward GEF focal area objectives and therefore would take into consideration the findings of the review while developing the overall programming approach for GEF-6.

The Secretariat welcomes the finding that the Global Support Programme improved the implementation of NCSAs. The Secretariat will work through the Country Support Program to ensure that the evaluation’s second recommendation that “NCSA knowledge products should be made available to the GEF Agencies and disseminated at GEF workshops, such as the National Dialogue Initiatives” is implemented. Relevant materials and toolkits will be updated and distributed through the expanded constituency workshops and multistakeholder dialogues.

Agency Response

UNDP, as the GEF Agency responsible for the bulk of the NCSAs, is supportive of the evaluation and supports all of its recommendations. Specifically, UNDP is encouraged by the evaluation’s finding that the Global Support Programme launched in 2005 improved the implementation of NCSAs.

UNDP believes the partnership between the GEF Secretariat, UNDP, and UNEP has been productive and provides an excellent example of a cost-effective and efficient collaboration that builds on comparative advantages to add value and sound technical support to the countries. Furthermore, UNDP agrees that the GSP outputs and knowledge base (resource kit, monitoring framework/indicators, lessons, etc.) should be shared and utilized more extensively.

In conclusion, UNDP supports countries’ aspirations to develop their capacities to implement the Rio conventions, including the need to improve public awareness of the global environment; mainstream environmental priorities into sectoral development policies, programs, and plans; and undertake environmental fiscal reform. The NCSA evaluation supports the global demand and need for critical cross-cutting capacities that are central to meeting and sustaining global environmental objectives. As we move forward in partnership with the GEF Secretariat, UN agencies, convention secretariats, donors, civil society organizations, and other partners, UNDP strives to continuously build upon existing strategies and development plans including country-driven integrated assessments such as the NCSAs and promote cross-cutting and cross-sectoral approaches.

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Evaluation Office
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433
USA

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