

## GEF Evaluation Office

# Impact Evaluation of the GEF in the South China Sea and adjacent areas

## *Report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reference Group Meeting*

*08 September 2011*

*Bangkok, Thailand*

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## INTRODUCTION

The GEF Evaluation Office (GEF EO), upon the request of the GEF Council, is currently undertaking an impact evaluation of GEF interventions in the South China Sea (SCS) and its adjacent areas. The evaluation seeks to assess the extent to which GEF support has led to, or is likely to lead to, changes in policy, technology, management practices, and other behaviors that will address the priority transboundary environmental concerns that affect the benefits provided by this large marine ecosystem to the region.

As part of the GEFEO's aim to make stakeholder participation an essential component of the evaluation process, a Reference Group was established consisting of the GEF Focal Points from the countries bordering the South China Sea, representatives from the GEF implementing agencies, key staff involved in the execution of GEF projects in the region, and representatives from regional organizations. The first Reference Group meeting took place in September 2010. It sought comments and suggestions of the stakeholders on the proposed approach to evaluation and identified mechanisms to make the evaluation more relevant to stakeholders.

This second Reference Group meeting was convened to present and discuss the evaluation's preliminary findings with the Group. The meeting was attended by 34 representatives from the GEF agencies, key management staff of GEF projects, national and local governments, relevant regional organizations, the private sector, as well as non-GEF stakeholders, and 11 participants representing the GEF EO and the South China Sea Impact Evaluation Team (see list of participants in Annex 1). Presentations on the findings were presented by the Evaluation Team, and the meeting chaired by the Director of the GEF EO. This Reference Group meeting was made earlier than usual in the evaluation process to allow stakeholders to provide inputs to the work in progress, rather than just giving comments on the finished product. The meeting was able to identify several gaps in the evaluation, as well as highlight the issues that are relevant to the countries.

### Preliminary evaluation findings

The preliminary findings show that GEF deals with proximate causes of environmental stress rather than social and economic drivers. Its strategy is to support initiatives that have already proven to be successful, with the aim of expanding them through replication/ up-scaling/ mainstreaming, and also to sustain the momentum that has been started by previous actors. GEF often operates by building on others' work, bringing attention to initiatives, and supporting agents to champion responses to environmental transboundary concerns. By doing so it is able to speed up the process for achievement of impacts. In the SCS, the GEF mainly addresses environmental concerns related to habitat destruction, resource over-exploitation, pollution, and regional governance. The evaluation also identified four prominent approaches that GEF uses to support countries to address these transboundary environmental issues: 1) marine protected areas (MPAs) and, more recently, fish refugia, which have a habitat/ecosystem focus, 2) integrated

coastal management (ICM), which focuses on building governance systems and institutions that can take on both present and future environmental concerns to be addressed at the site, 3) investments to promote and facilitate adoption of technologies that address specific stresses, and 4) support for regional mechanisms and processes involving two or more countries to set and implement joint action agendas.

A major gap found by the evaluation is that after nearly 20 years of GEF support, better information is still needed due to inadequate M & E practices, particularly in relation to environmental status and environmental stress reduction. Data is being gathered in some places, but it is not being analyzed, and often the indicators are not sufficient.

The larger challenges are related to implementation, compliance and enforcement.

### Summary of Reference Group recommendations

The key concerns and suggestions raised during the meeting are as follows:

- draft comparable case studies--if case studies do not address and analyze issues in a consistent manner, comparisons across countries and generalization at the regional level will not be possible;
- present evidence and data, and properly reflect the perspectives of the various stakeholders when appropriate;
- address the mechanisms by which GEF support seeks to bring about impact, and identify lessons of what works and what does not work;
- give more attention to stress reduction and impact, as presentations seemed to concentrate on performance and assessment of outcomes;
- include the measurement of stress reduction and impact, and when possible, the use of counterfactuals; and
- address gaps and weaknesses of GEF support--presentations presented little information on gaps or weaknesses of GEF support.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Following is a summary of the comments and discussions during the meeting. This summary is organized in three main areas: reflecting the three major themes that emerged in the discussions: 1) methodological concerns, 2) comments on specific topics of the evaluation, and 3) constraints beyond the evaluation.

### Methodological concerns

#### *Sampling of demonstration sites*

A participant asked how demonstrations were defined and selected. The Evaluation Team defined “demonstration” as a cluster of activities within the same geographical area that

are expected to lead to stress reduction. The activities were selected based on their having an estimated GEF budget of at least US\$ 100,000. The Team also indicated that the demonstration sites were identified based on what was stated in project documents (pre-implementation), rather than based on the results of project implementation. The identified demonstration sites were then randomly sampled within the countries for which case studies were done.

#### *Selection of countries for case studies*

A concern was raised on what the implications might be on the evaluation's credibility given that 3 of the 7 GEF-eligible countries in the region—Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia—do not have in-depth case studies done on them. The Team explained that two factors limited the number of selected countries to 4: 1) the amount of funding received by the countries, i.e., where GEF is most engaged is presumably where it has had the greatest influence on national governance and stress reduction processes, and 2) logistical constraints, which would make the cost of the evaluation too high if case studies were to be done for all countries. However, although no case studies have been conducted on the 3 countries, the Team has conducted in-depth interviews with key people from these countries, and continues to do so. Cambodia was also visited by the team after the meeting in Bangkok. Findings from these interviews will contribute to the over-all findings on the impact of GEF support in the region.

#### *Comparability of country case studies*

Participants noted that because of the differences in the approaches used by the GEFEO consultants in presenting the country case studies, it is difficult to make comparisons and generalizations about the impact of GEF support across the countries. The Team assured the participants that the structure of the final case studies will be harmonized to allow comparisons. The Team also indicated that evaluators were using standardized forms to collect information for sampled demonstration sites.

#### *Implications of regional actors analysis*

Some participants raised the concern that the analysis of relationships among actors does not adequately address the intensity of the relationships and the sectoral dimension (i.e. fisheries, pollution, etc.). The question was raised on what a “link” between two actors implied, whether this was only on paper or whether they had a real working relationship. It was suggested that the comparative roles of GEF/PEMSEA and the other regional actors not be quantified, and instead merely described. The Team agreed that due to the limitations in the information sources, the results of the analysis merely indicate which actors are actively engaged in which types of regional work, and are not to be interpreted to mean that one actor is more important than all the others. When presenting the network analysis in the evaluation report, the concerns raised by the participants will be taken into account, drawing further on information obtained from questionnaires sent to 26 regional stakeholders, where they identify their main collaborating agencies and the nature of their collaboration.

### *Aspects for consideration in scenario-building*

The inclusion of climate change impacts and mitigation activities in the South China Sea was pointed out as something that may need to be part of the scenario-building model. The Team acknowledged that this was considered, but eventually not included, as the model focuses only on more immediate pressures, and climate change is a pressure underlying all the others.

A scenario with GEF influencing policy responses was suggested to be made part of the analysis. In addition to business-as-usual and worst-case scenarios, the exercise should also present a positive scenario along with the measures and responses that will be required to accomplish that state. One participant informed the group that the proposed scenario of the environmental system flipping is already happening, but many of the national responses are not able to respond to the larger drivers, such as markets. He suggested available sources for ecosystem-level data that could be used, and offered assistance in refining the model.

## **Comments on specific topics of the evaluation**

### *Impact of GEF support on fisheries*

A few participants observed that despite its importance in the region, fisheries has not received adequate attention in the preliminary findings. The Team noted that GEF has provided less support to the SCS fisheries. It was also noted that this is related to the highly transboundary nature of fisheries, which has made countries reluctant to participate in regional initiatives requiring their cooperation.

### *Actual measures of stress reduction*

A question was raised on whether any trends have been seen as a result of replication. The Team replied that examples for stress reduction and replication have been observed, but found few cases in which reliable data on stress reduction was available. For example, for pollution reduction, it is not clear whether reported numbers refer to actual volume of waste treated or to the installed plant capacity. This is a concern because there are instances where plants are built but not operational due to the high costs of running them.

### *Impact through contribution to governance processes*

The importance of looking at GEF's contribution to regional governance processes was raised several times during the meeting. Participants emphasized that the impact of GEF initiatives--such as conflict resolution and trust-building through the sharing of data among countries--should be given attention by the evaluation, as GEF has made a significant contribution in this area along with similar initiatives (e.g. the South China Sea Informal Working Group funded by CIDA). The point was also made that GEF's contribution to governance is not only at the regional level but also within countries, through the coordination of different ministries.

Some participants felt that GEF's role in enhancing the engagement of NGOs and the private sector, especially in China and Thailand, should be examined more closely. Other important areas of GEF support mentioned are public awareness, education, law enforcement, the introduction of new technology, and capacity-building in general.

#### *Mechanisms by which impact takes place*

Several participants suggested giving more attention to the mechanisms that enable GEF to have impact in the context of specific examples. This will also allow the evaluation to illustrate the value-added of GEF support, such as in the case of PEMSEA, where GEF funding has allowed it to transition into a legal entity from being a project.

#### *Gaps and weaknesses of GEF support*

One concern that arose repeatedly was the need to include instances not only of successes but also of failures, i.e. which demonstration sites and/or approaches have not been effective and why. It was suggested that the evaluation report could include a gap analysis, as well as an assessment of the sustainability of GEF projects.

#### *Lessons for use in developing future initiatives*

Participants emphasized how the evaluation and GEF interventions provide the space to identify lessons that can be used for designing future initiatives and for planning their next GEF engagement.

#### *Other ways of measuring impact*

It was pointed out that GEF's approach is to initiate dialogue in sites that have already been selected by countries and other organizations as priority areas for GEF support. The measure of success then is how well GEF has linked up with these previous initiatives and carried them further towards achieving impact. Progress towards impact, however, must be assessed differently for different sites according to each country's political and social context.

Another likely indicator for impact is the countries' budget allocation to support the approaches and mechanisms that GEF has introduced, as the countries' commitment to implement these approaches will indicate the sustainability of GEF interventions.

An important point was made on how GEF initiatives need to be assessed in relation to the scale of the nature of the impact that they are trying to achieve. This will have a bearing on the resources made available for the initiative, and the scale of the time lags in system responses.

### **Constraints beyond the evaluation**

#### *Lack of monitoring data*

All participants agreed that it is difficult to quantify GEF impact in terms of stress reduction when no monitoring systems are in place. Different reasons for the difficulty in obtaining monitoring data were put forward, such as that information sources are difficult to get to, reliability is uncertain due to the different data collection methods being used

even within countries, and standard technology is not available, particularly for wastewater treatment monitoring. Although national data may be available, this usually provides only assessment data and not long-term monitoring data; where long-term data exists, no analysis is being done for its use for management purposes.

It was agreed that since GEF projects are operational only for a short duration, more attention should be given to establishing long term M&E activities that will continue after project completion. Usually, scientific institutions or governments have the mandate to undertake long-term monitoring. GEF should consider supporting institutions already focusing on relevant M&E activities. One example is the Oceanographic Institute in Vietnam, which has collected time-series data in the country's major marine protected areas. In relation to this, it was suggested that the evaluation could assess the progress of the institutionalization of M&E in the countries.

#### *Absence of regional legal arrangements*

The absence of regional legal arrangements was mentioned as an important contextual consideration. One participant pointed out that even within the ASEAN, three conventions that have been proposed were not signed by all member countries. This may be due to a reluctance of countries to "punish" their fellow members in the event that violations are committed.

One country delegate in particular, indicated that the reason for the lack of participation in GEF projects is that the country's priorities for regional seas are different from the priorities of the GEF IW focal area. The evaluation can help by showing government leaders what benefits the countries can gain by participating in GEF IW initiatives.

## ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> REFERENCE GROUP MEETING FOR THE GEF IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

### Invited Participants

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## **ANNEX 2: AGENDA OF THE 2ND REFERENCE GROUP MEETING FOR THE GEF IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

*08 September 2011, Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok*

- 9:00        **Introduction, presentation of participants and review of proposed agenda**  
Rob van den Berg, Chair
- 9:30        **Evaluation objectives, progress and components**  
Aaron Zazueta, Evaluation Team Leader
- 10:00      **Presentation and discussion of Demonstrations and Country Case Studies  
(Philippines & Vietnam)**  
Neeraj Negi, Annadel Cabanban, Vo Si Tuan
- 11:00      Coffee Break
- 11:20      **Continuation of presentation and discussion of Country Case Studies (China  
&Thailand)**  
Xu Xiangmin, Derek Staples
- 12:20      **Presentation and discussion of Regional Thematic Assessments (Governance)**  
Derek Staples, Jeneen Garcia
- 1:00 PM    Lunch
- 2:00        **Presentation and discussion of Regional Thematic Assessments (Stress  
Reduction)**  
Vo Si Tuan, Jeneen Garcia, Neeraj Negi
- 3:00        Coffee Break
- 3:30        **Presentation and discussion of Regional Thematic Assessments (Large System  
Trends & Scenarios)**  
Branka Valcic
- 4:00        **Summary of findings and discussion**  
Aaron Zazueta, Evaluation Team Leader
- 5:15        **Closing remarks**  
Rob van den Berg, Chair
- 5:30        **End of meeting**

