

GEF Country Portfolio Study: Timor-Leste (2004–11)



In 2012, the Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) undertook a country portfolio study of

GEF support to Timor-Leste. Country portfolio studies are intended to complement the country portfolio evaluations that are one of the Office's main evaluation streams of work. Specifically, country portfolio studies provide additional regional coverage of country portfolios, but with a reduced focus and scope. They are undertaken where opportunities exist to collaborate with independent evaluation offices of GEF partners as they undertake country evaluations. They thus enable the Office to study a country's GEF portfolio with a relatively lower investment of cost and effort; this also reduces the evaluation burden on the country, while insights and understanding are gained through information exchange and collaboration.

The Timor-Leste country portfolio study was conducted in parallel with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Assessment of Development Results for Timor-Leste (2003–10). Since 2002, the GEF has invested \$7.9 million in Timor-Leste, with \$32.7 million in cofinancing. GEF funding has been provided through seven national projects. Climate change accounts for the largest share of funding, with 87 percent of GEF support.

Findings

Results

GEF support has assisted Timor-Leste to develop foundational capacities, raising the profile of environmental issues and establishing national priorities, particularly in biodiversity and climate change. GEF projects have focused on enabling and capacity-building activities that have helped the country fulfill its initial obligations to global environmental conventions. These projects have raised

awareness, created knowledge, and provided a forum for the government to discuss and define its environmental priorities.

In the biodiversity focal area, the GEF has supported the country in formulating its biodiversity strategy, which assisted the government in defining its priorities for the next decade. In the climate change focal area, the national adaptation program was prepared through enabling activities. It raised capacity to understand and map possible impacts of climate change on the country. However, in other focal areas such as international waters and land degradation, GEF projects have yet to produce significant results in terms of reduced stresses, and the practical element of capacity-building activities was also missing.

Relevance

GEF support in Timor-Leste has been relevant to the country constitution and Strategic Development Plan and priorities, as well as to the country's efforts to fulfill its obligations under the international agreements to which it is a signatory. This support has covered the range of GEF focal areas for which the country is eligible—biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation. The projects have been aligned with government policies and plans for the environment, as well as providing impetus for the development of further plans and strategies that have sharpened priorities for adaptation, biodiversity, and land degradation.

The relevance of this support will be enhanced with the forthcoming implementation of the Least Developed Countries Fund climate change adaptation and biomass projects, which are closely aligned with the Strategic Development Plan and will support forthcoming environmental laws and policies. However, there are still gaps in relevance, which provide opportunities for progress to be made at the international and national policy levels.

Efficiency

Weak capacity is a problem affecting GEF-funded projects throughout their activity cycle. In the last decade, considerable progress has been made to improve the skills, education, and knowledge of government officials across all sectors. However, a key challenge is the lack of human capacity within government and the lack of availability of national consultants to assist with the design, implementation, and management of GEF projects. In most cases, the UNDP country office has had to hire short-term international experts to produce outputs. The high staff turnover has made it difficult to maintain continuity.

An exception to this norm is the approach being developed under the first national communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is based on a national team and includes expertise from within the region, thereby emphasizing South-South cooperation in capacity building.

Lessons Learned

- The GEF project approach is challenging for Timor-Leste, given its transition out of fragility. A longer term engagement or a programmatic approach may reduce the administrative burden and improve continuity.
- Livelihood linkages to environmental management are key for the development of the GEF portfolio in Timor-Leste.

Follow-Up

The main conclusions and lessons learned of this evaluation were presented to the GEF Council in June 2013 as an information document as well as an input to the *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2013*.

The GEF Independent Evaluation Office is an independent entity reporting directly to the GEF Council, mandated to evaluate the focal area programs and priorities of the GEF. The full version of *GEF Country Portfolio Study: Timor-Leste (2004–11)* (Evaluation Report No. 77) is available on the GEF Independent Evaluation Office website, www.gefeo.org. For more information, please contact the Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.