

Evaluation of Knowledge Management in the GEF



Knowledge is one of the most important resources the GEF can provide to the international environmental community.

Over the last three decades, knowledge management (KM) has become an essential component of organizational life. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), for its part, has come to consider knowledge as a primary asset in supporting its environmental mission. This evaluation aimed to identify any systemic KM issues that need to be addressed in planning for GEF-7 (2018-22).

KEY FINDINGS

1. The relevance of KM for the GEF mandate has been increasingly recognized. Stakeholders recognized a series of useful KM activities launched by the GEF since 2015, while pointing out that greater KM needs remained. The GEF has begun addressing these needs, though it is too early to assess its impact.

2. Knowledge is often generated during project implementation, and facilitates the achievement of

environmental benefits primarily through monitoring systems, information sharing, and awareness raising. KM has contributed to behavioral and policy changes that support environmental benefits across the GEF focal areas. Scaling-up of outcomes was supported by knowledge exchange between projects. How effectively KM contributes to environmental benefits depends on the accessibility of the knowledge and information produced by GEF investments. This evaluation and other studies have noted that the knowledge generated by GEF projects is inconsistently integrated into the knowledge bases and platforms of the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies in a form accessible to all interested parties.

3. The GEF partnership has a role as a knowledge provider within the broader international environmental community. The GEF is cited in some 2,500 academic articles for its approaches and lessons, as well as for its funding role. All 26 country portfolios

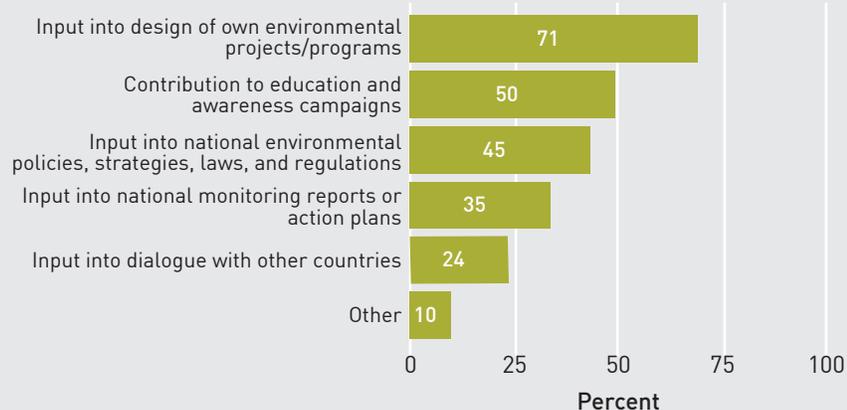
PURPOSE AND METHODS: This evaluation assessed the role of the GEF as knowledge broker and provider, the relevance and effectiveness of KM across the GEF partnership, and the barriers to and opportunities for KM implementation. Its findings were informed by a literature review, semistructured interviews, an online country stakeholder survey, a meta-analysis of 26 GEF country-level evaluations and studies, a comparative study of KM in four publicly funded partnership organizations, and a citation analysis of academic literature.

WEB PAGE: <http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-knowledge-management-km-gef-2017>

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ABOUT US: The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the GEF has a central role in ensuring the independent evaluation function within the GEF. www.gefio.org

FIGURE 1: Use of GEF-related documents and information sources



NOTE: *n* = 456. Online survey question: Thinking of the GEF-related documents, publications, and information sources that you have accessed, have you used them for any of the following? (Select all that apply.)

analyzed in this evaluation had activities to share knowledge; 71 percent of surveyed country-level stakeholders used the knowledge produced by the GEF partnership as an input to their own environmental projects, policies, and awareness campaigns (figure 1). The secretariats of the multilateral environmental conventions for which the GEF is a financial mechanism are a community currently underserved by the GEF's KM and information systems.

4. The knowledge generated and shared by GEF projects is useful, but needs easier access. The evaluation did not observe consistent approaches to knowledge sharing in the GEF partnership beyond the national level. Good examples of knowledge sharing are noted in some focal areas, particularly in international waters and biodiversity, where the GEF has led initiatives to encourage an exchange of knowledge and learning. In cross-cutting areas, the GEF Gender Partnership is slowly developing into a platform for building a wider constituency on gender and the environment. Improved knowledge sharing is also seen in programs (compared to stand-alone projects) and within the Integrated Approach Pilots. GEF Agencies differ, however, in their ability to use the knowledge generated by GEF programs and projects. They

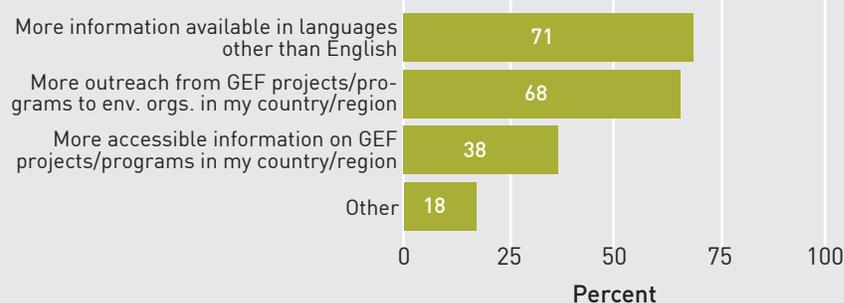
mainly rely on their own KM systems and cannot consistently draw on knowledge generated by other GEF Agencies. The knowledge products of the GEF Secretariat are found to be lacking a consistent style, categorization, and taxonomy. In addition, the stakeholders reported they do not consider the GEF's Project Management Information System (PMIS)—which is a repository for project data and documentation—an effective tool for sharing. Country stakeholders also highlighted limitations to accessing lessons from the GEF partnership, suggesting more outreach and more accessible information on GEF-supported programs and projects in the region (figure 2).

5. Compared to four similar partnership organizations, the GEF has placed less emphasis on developing technical solutions to manage knowledge at the program/project level and on applying a systemic approach to its knowledge products. Overall, the secretariats and administrative units of these partnerships—the Climate Investment Funds (CIF); GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the Global Partnership for Education (GPE); and the Green Climate Fund (GCF)—focus on internal knowledge systems at the strategic level more than the GEF. These organizations are at different stages of implementing technological solutions. The GEF has recognized that technological solutions for KM remain to be fully developed. On the other hand, the CIF, the GPE, and the GAVI are more advanced than the GEF in developing common knowledge products, such as lessons-learned summaries and thematic reports.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, the GEF Council endorsed KM as a corporate-level task. As part of the GEF-3 to GEF-5 replenishment periods (June 2002 to June 2014), a KM strategy and accompanying initiatives were launched. However, Overall Performance Studies of the GEF (2005, 2010, 2014) reported that the KM approach during this period was not comprehensive and lacked sufficient resources. In

FIGURE 2: Making lessons from the GEF more accessible



NOTE: *n* = 437. Online survey question: Do you have any suggestions on what would make lessons from the GEF partnership more accessible and easier to use in your country/region? (Select all that apply.)

“**Knowledge is a resource organizations can use to become more effective. Managing knowledge is one of the key ways that can help the GEF partnership address global environmental challenges and scale up its impact.**” —Kseniya Temnenko, IEO Knowledge Management Officer

2015, the GEF Secretariat responded by producing an approach paper and establishing a workstream to coordinate KM work across the GEF partnership. The approach paper set two overarching objectives:

- Inform global, regional, and national policy dialogues on options and approaches to reverse the course of environmental degradation
- Improve the impact of GEF-supported programs and projects

Since 2015 the KM workstream has implemented a series of actions. The KM Advisory Group was established as an informal mechanism for collaboration across the partnership. KM surveys, a knowledge asset assessment, and a knowledge audit were conducted to assess the current state of the knowledge system and to identify priorities for the work program. The initial action plan and the road map for KM were developed. In addition, several

KM pilot initiatives were launched. They ranged from extracting lessons learned from completed multifocal area projects and implementing regional GEF knowledge days, to developing the guidebook *The Art of Knowledge Exchange* and associated workshops, launching *Kaleo*—the GEF’s online question-and-answer tool—and incorporating mandatory KM questions into project documents, among others. The GEF Secretariat has also proposed to update the PMIS, introducing an improved document management system and library, and establishing a knowledge exchange hub. To date, only the redesign of the PMIS has been initiated.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The GEF partnership has made substantial progress in KM during the GEF’s sixth replenishment period (2014–18). A higher priority has been given to KM in line with GEF-6

replenishment recommendations. A dedicated KM workstream has been established within the Secretariat, and a KM approach paper was developed and is currently being implemented.

2. Knowledge generated by the GEF partnership is being used and has influenced national environmental policies and practices. GEF-supported projects generate a substantial amount of knowledge in the form of technical and operational project-level documentation, as well as strategic and summary papers. There is evidence that this knowledge is being used and is influencing national environmental policies and practices. Lessons from the GEF are also having a broader influence in the academic literature, in focal areas such as international waters.

3. The GEF is more of a knowledge provider than a knowledge broker. The knowledge produced in the GEF is used, but not to its full extent. Limitations exist in terms of systematic organization and sharing of knowledge produced by different parts of the partnership. Recent improvements in this regard include the GEF’s biodiversity mainstreaming work, the regional knowledge days targeting country stakeholders, and the integration of KM as a specific program component in the Integrated Approach Pilots, among others.

4. Systemic issues continue to be barriers to KM in the GEF. Long-standing barriers to progress in KM include

- The availability of an information management system to capture and provide access to project-level documentation that is accessible and user friendly for GEF Agencies, countries, and program and project staff;
- KM guidance (beyond basic documentation requirements) for GEF-supported programs and projects through the project life cycle, to

AT A GLANCE: OUTCOMES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT EFFORTS IN GEF PROJECTS

- In all analyzed country portfolios, GEF projects generated knowledge, approaches, technologies, and recommendations that helped to formulate national environmental policies, strategies, laws, and regulations. The preparation of reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) resulted in institutionalization of climate change into government policies in Egypt and Tajikistan.
- Knowledge exchange between projects supported scaling-up of solar energy approaches in Albania and Morocco and sustainable land management approaches in Myanmar.
- In most analyzed country portfolios, knowledge products and processes initiated by projects were replicated in different geographical areas and regions. Lessons learned on GEF-supported biodiversity monitoring systems for protected areas in the Philippines were replicated by other donor projects and nongovernmental organizations in the region.

ensure minimum standards of consistency and accessibility;

- The capacity within the Secretariat to connect with GEF Agency systems and platforms and to create an enabling environment for corporate-level learning, knowledge exchange, and collaboration across the GEF portfolio.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The GEF Secretariat should place a high priority on improving the quality and availability of project-level documentation from a KM perspective, including lessons learned during design and implementation.** To ensure minimum standards of consistency in KM across GEF Agencies and projects, clear guidance should be provided to Agencies on, for example, the typology of knowledge

products to be generated during and after project implementation, and the capture and storage of such information. As the PMIS is currently under revision, efforts should ensure that it becomes the key platform for storing and sharing project-level documentation through the project life cycle. The revisions should also ensure access for GEF Agencies, program and project staff, and countries. The PMIS should facilitate easy uploading, downloading, and analysis of program and project documents from design through supervision and completion.

- **The GEF Secretariat and KM Advisory Group should develop a plan to connect across GEF Agency KM systems, generate knowledge products, and organize learning activities across focal areas, Agencies, and**

cross-cutting themes. The partnership would benefit from a clear work plan on learning activities and knowledge products to be generated within and across focal areas in collaboration with GEF Agencies, along with proposed resources and enhanced internal capacity. Ideally, these products would draw on lessons from across the partnership, including from Agencies, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, multilateral environmental conventions, and countries, and would support strategic plans and decisions at the portfolio and corporate levels. Mechanisms to disseminate and share such knowledge products should also be clearly articulated in the plan. ■

