

GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation 2012: Latin America and the Caribbean Region



The fifth *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report* (synthesizes the main conclusions and recommendations emerging from the evaluative evidence in the country portfolio evaluations and studies conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Latin America and the Caribbean. These comprised two portfolio evaluations in Nicaragua and a cluster of member countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)—Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—and two portfolio studies in El Salvador and Jamaica. The report also contains validated findings, conclusions, and preliminary recommendations from country portfolio evaluations in Brazil and Cuba. The countries examined include large, medium, and small recipients of GEF support, as well as a considerable number of small island developing states (SIDS). The evaluations focused on the results of GEF support, its relevance, and its efficiency.

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Findings

Results

Most projects achieved moderately satisfactory or higher outcome ratings in their focal areas. Global environmental benefits are still modest, though progress toward impact is happening. GEF support to Brazil has enabled a long-term approach to biodiversity with sustainable results. Cuba has achieved satisfactory results in several areas, particularly in biodiversity and biosafety. Nicaragua has achieved satisfactory results in climate change mitigation through renewable energy projects. OECS countries have achieved satisfactory results in climate change adaptation. On the negative side, overly ambitious goals in biodiversity have led to unfulfilled expectations in progress toward impact in achieving global environmental benefits in Nicaragua. In OECS countries and Jamaica, GEF support has not moved much beyond foundational and demonstration activities.

Climate change adaptation in the Central America and Caribbean region is becoming increasingly important in the GEF portfolios analyzed. In some countries, this is fully evident, while in other countries adaptation is still in its initial stages. In Brazil, climate change adaptation features as a key element in many multifocal area projects. Projects in Cuba and Jamaica also address adaptation, and it is particularly well addressed in the OECS by the World Bank's Pilot Program on Climate Resilience. In Nicaragua, adaptation to climate change has been recognized as a priority but has not yet been mainstreamed in the portfolio.

Capacity development at both the individual and institutional levels was good overall, with a few exceptions at the local level. In Cuba, GEF support helped promote institutional capacity and financial sustainability of projects. In Brazil, GEF projects contributed to the creation of institutions and institutional capacity, especially in water basin management. Almost all projects in Nicaragua have targeted local populations, and the majority of enabling activities have involved participants from local populations and/or civil society. But local institutional sustainability of civil society actors remains a challenge. National capacity strengthening is a priority in the OECS to ensure that national agencies can participate in developing and managing GEF projects. Capacity development is also critical in civil society, which is currently constrained in its ability to contribute to effective environmental management in the region.

Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean follow an ecosystem approach to environmental conservation and sustainable use, which increases the demand for multifocal area projects. In Brazil, multifocal projects are expected to become more common to exploit and address the interrelations between many GEF focal areas. In Nicaragua, integrated land-use and watershed management approaches have been promoted. In Cuba, nine national projects supported by the GEF include multifocal elements. However, it is not clear if multifocal approaches are more common now, or if new projects are being classified as multifocal more than in the past.

Scale-up, replication, and sustainability remain a challenge in the portfolios analyzed, with some notable exceptions. The GEF portfolios in Nicaragua, the OECS, and Jamaica lack scale-up and replication. Climate change adaptation initiatives in the OECS are noteworthy exceptions to this trend, as is the GEF portfolio in Cuba as a whole. In Cuba, continuity is a government priority that applies to all externally funded projects. Biodiversity projects in Brazil have followed a sequence that has led to some scale-up and replication.

Opportunities for South-South cooperation through national, regional, and/or global projects and/or project components exist, but are not fully taken up. Some GEF projects in Brazil and Cuba have resulted in informal and uncoordinated cooperation with other Southern countries, especially on knowledge-sharing issues and transfer of information. In recent years, this South-South cooperation has increasingly been seen as a modality that should be further explored.

Relevance

Overall, GEF support has been relevant to both national environmental conservation and sustainable development policies, and to the GEF international mandate of achieving global environmental benefits. A few exceptions are noted. OECS countries faced difficulty in aligning global and regional project objectives to member countries' national priorities. And in El Salvador, land degradation is a national priority but was not addressed by GEF support.

Mixed ownership is observed in the portfolios analyzed; ownership is strong in middle-income economies and less so in SIDS, with the exception of Cuba. GEF support in Brazil and Cuba is nationally owned and country driven, with most cofinancing coming from government. Less ownership of the GEF portfolio is observed in Jamaica and the OECS.

Efficiency

SIDS face challenges in project approval processes and in implementation due to the specific circumstances in which they operate and to their specific needs. This hampers the achievement of greater global environmental benefits. In Cuba, the impact of the "special period," the embargo, the recent global financial crisis, and the hurricanes of 2008 have affected design and implementation of GEF projects. Various structural issues challenge GEF projects in the OECS, including

inadequate communication and coordination between different levels of the GEF partnership, limited capacity, and the complexity of fostering cooperative relationships between countries.

Monitoring and evaluation for adaptive management, as well as environmental monitoring, are challenging. Adequate adaptive management was observed in the OECS, Brazil, and Cuba. However, GEF tracking tools are still considered challenging. Lack of baseline data and centralized knowledge management information system compounds the challenges to monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations

- Project approval and implementation in SIDS should be more flexible and context specific.
- The burden of monitoring requirements of multifocal area projects should be reduced to a level comparable to that of single-focal area projects.
- South-South cooperation should be enabled as a component of national, regional, and global projects where opportunities for exchange of technology, capacity development, and/or sharing of best practices exist.

Follow-Up

The GEF Council requested that the Secretariat consider ways to make project approval and implementation in SIDS more flexible and context specific; to reduce the burden of monitoring requirements of multifocal area projects to a level comparable to that of single-focal area projects; and to enable South-South cooperation activities as components of national, regional, and/or global projects where opportunities for exchange of technology, capacity development, and/or sharing of best practices exist.

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 Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation 2012: Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Jamaica, and the OECS* (Evaluation Report No. 74) is available on the GEF Independent Evaluation Office website, www.gefeo.org. Also available on the website are the individual country reports for Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and the OECS. For more information, please contact the Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.