

Indigenous Communities and Biodiversity

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
About the GEF and GEF Biodiversity Program	2
Indigenous Communities: Policy and Participation	4
GEF Policy on Involvement with Indigenous and Local Communities	5
Participation of Indigenous Communities	6
GEF's Biodiversity Program and Indigenous Communities	8
Why We Work with Indigenous Communities	9
Indigenous Community Involvement in GEF Projects	12
Indigenous Communities and GEF's Small Grants Programme	18
Highlights and Good Practices:	
Indigenous Communities' Involvement in GEF Projects	22
■ Ecuador: Biodiversity Conservation in Pastaza	23
■ Vanuatu: Facilitating and Strengthening Local Resource Management Initiatives of Traditional Landholders and their Communities to Achieve Biodiversity Conservation Objectives	25
■ Central America: Integrated Ecosystem Management in Indigenous Communities	27
■ Global: Indigenous Peoples' Network for Change	28
Lessons Learned	30
Future Directions and Next Steps	34



Foreword

1

Indigenous peoples have been responsible stewards of their lands and resources for thousands of years. Relying on traditional knowledge and sustainable resource management practices, indigenous cultures have survived and thrived in all corners of the world.

However, neither their communities nor our industrialized societies are immune to a globalized economy whose side effects, when left unchecked, threaten the environmental public goods that indigenous peoples so vitally depend upon for their cultural, spiritual, and physical sustenance.

In many regions, the plight of biodiversity is closely intertwined with that of indigenous cultures. For example, a significant fraction of the world's protected areas, the principal tool for biodiversity conservation, is found within or overlaps with indigenous lands, territories and resources. This remarkable spatial convergence presents both an enormous opportunity as well as a challenge for both conserving biodiversity and supporting Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods.

It is precisely around these strong connections between conservation and local economic development that GEF's approach with

indigenous communities and biodiversity conservation is being built, so far through more than 100 projects worldwide. This publication provides an account and a first analysis of the scope, content and depth of indigenous communities' involvement with GEF projects. To the reader, it will become clear that, while much remains to be done, GEF is evolving rapidly to promote the participation of indigenous communities at all stages of project design, implementation and monitoring. We are pleased to have been able to adopt, since the early days of the GEF, a public participation policy which has provisions specifically designed to include indigenous and local communities. The present assessment and other related studies will form the basis to enhance the existing policy and the introduction of additional elements, all relying on the key lessons presented in the report.

We remain open to receive feedback and guidance from constituencies of all sectors, and we invite indigenous groups and community organizations to help the GEF continue to evolve as an effective mechanism that supports stewardship of global public goods.



Monique Barbut
CEO and Chairperson



About the GEF and GEF Biodiversity Program

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established in 1991 as an independent financial mechanism that provides grants to developing countries for projects that benefit the global environment and promote sustainable livelihoods in local communities. The GEF provides grants to projects in biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, the ozone layer and persistent organic pollutants.

The GEF is the financial mechanism for implementation of the international conventions on biodiversity, climate change and persistent organic pollutants. The GEF is also a financial mechanism for the Convention to Combat Desertification and collaborates closely with other treaties and agreements. The GEF works closely with Convention Secretariats, Implementing Agencies, Executing Agencies, the private sector and civil society.

The GEF unites 178 member governments – in partnership with international institutions, nongovernmental organizations, indigenous and local communities, and the private sector – to address global environmental issues while supporting national sustainable development initiatives. In just 16 years, the GEF has evolved into an effective and transparent entity with a solid, outcomes-driven track record. As the largest funder of projects to improve the global environment, the GEF has allocated \$7.65 billion, supplemented by more than \$30.6 billion in co-financing, for over 2,025 projects in more than 165 developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Through its Small Grants Programme (SGP), the GEF has also made more than 7,000 small grants

directly to nongovernmental and community organizations, including indigenous and local communities.

The GEF partnership includes three Implementing Agencies — the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank — and seven Executing Agencies — the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the U.N. Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

As the financial mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the GEF supports countries in reducing their rate of biodiversity loss. The GEF supports the key objectives of the CBD and other activities worldwide to generate global environmental benefits in the area of biodiversity. It has promoted the expansion and improvement in the management of protected areas systems worldwide, and catalyzed the integration of biodiversity objectives into such production sectors as fisheries, tourism and agriculture. Biodiversity projects constitute the largest percentage of the GEF's portfolio, making up 33 percent of total GEF grants. Between 1991 and 2007, the GEF provided about \$2.3 billion in grants and leveraged about \$5.36 billion in co-financing in support of about 790 biodiversity projects in more than 155 countries. In addition, activities in other GEF focal areas — in particular international waters, land degradation and integrated ecosystem management — also contribute to the CBD's strategy and objectives.

The goals of the GEF's biodiversity program include the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, the maintenance of the ecosystem goods and services that biodiversity provides to society, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. To achieve these goals, GEF's strategy now encompasses four complementary and mutually reinforcing objectives:

- Catalyzing sustainability of protected area systems;
- Mainstreaming biodiversity in production landscapes/seascapes and sectors;
- Safeguarding biodiversity, including building capacity for biosafety and prevention, control and management of invasive alien species; and
- Building capacity on access and benefit sharing.

The first two strategic objectives are the backbone of the current GEF biodiversity strategy and emphasize *in situ* conservation and sustainable use. All of GEF's biodiversity work is consistent with country priority frameworks, fostering the sustainability and mainstreaming of projects and programs. The strategies seek to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use through an ecosystem approach. These strategic objectives make a substantial contribution to the achievement of most of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly environmental sustainability and poverty reduction.



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Indigenous Communities: Policy and Participation

GEF Policy on Involvement with Indigenous and Local Communities

The GEF was one of the few international financial institutions to develop early on an independent public participation policy, which includes provisions for indigenous and local communities. The policy, which was laid out in the document *Public Involvement in GEF-financed Projects*, approved by the GEF Council in April 1996, provides the basis for public involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of GEF-financed projects. Public involvement

comprises three related and often overlapping processes: information dissemination, consultation and stakeholder participation. Upon approving the policy, the GEF Council stressed that, when applying the principles, there should be emphasis on local participation and local stakeholders, and specific national and local conditions should be taken into consideration. The document recognizes the need for developing strategies that incorporate stakeholder participation throughout the project cycle, especially for projects that impact the incomes and livelihoods of local groups, with particular attention to populations in and around project sites, notably indigenous and local communities.¹

The GEF project design and implementation process also complies with the GEF Agencies' policies and procedures. The GEF Agencies, including the World Bank, UNDP, ADB and IDB, all have their own policies and strategies on indigenous peoples in the context of project interventions, and these apply for GEF projects as well. For example, relevant GEF projects managed by the World Bank are also required to comply with the Bank's mandatory operational policy on Indigenous Peoples (OP/BP 4.10). Recognizing that not all GEF Agencies have a policy on indigenous and local communities, the GEF is reviewing and drawing lessons from its past involvement with indigenous and local communities, in order to more effectively address the related issues and opportunities.

¹ GEF Secretariat. 1996. *Public Involvement in GEF-financed Projects*, Washington, DC.

Due to the varied and changing contexts in which indigenous peoples live, and because there is no universally accepted definition of *indigenous peoples* or *indigenous communities*, the GEF does not define the term *indigenous communities* which is used throughout this report. The term *indigenous communities* was used in this report as it is the commonly used term at the Convention on Biological Diversity, for which GEF serves as the financial mechanism. Indigenous peoples or communities are often referred to in different countries by terms such as indigenous ethnic minorities, aborigines, hill tribes, tribal groups and others.



Participation of Indigenous Communities

There are various channels through which indigenous communities have been participating in GEF processes. These include:

- Gaining access to GEF funds for specific projects;
- Involvement and participation in GEF projects;
- Involvement in policy processes through the GEF Assembly and Council; and

- Involvement in the CBD Conference of Parties (COP) process, particularly by helping to provide guidance to the GEF in its role as the financial mechanism of the convention.

The GEF NGO Consultation Meeting, which is held before each GEF Council meeting, has served as a key official forum open to indigenous communities to discuss policy matters that concern them. A representative of the indigenous peoples' networks has been part of the Coordination Committee of the GEF NGO Network, and has been supported by the GEF to participate in the GEF NGO Consultation and the Council meetings. The degree of participation of indigenous peoples' groups in the NGO Consultation Meetings has not been steady over the years, and the overall structure and strategy of the GEF NGO Network is currently under review. This review will represent an opportunity for indigenous peoples' groups to re-examine and strengthen their inclusion in key GEF processes.

Another venue for dialogue between the GEF and indigenous communities has been the CBD COP meetings. During such occasions, the CEO of the GEF has held regular meetings with indigenous community representatives, which attracted active participation on the part of indigenous peoples on policy issues related to indigenous communities, and around specific projects.

Indigenous communities have been involved in accessing funds and participating in GEF-funded projects in the areas of biodiversity, sustainable land management, international waters, climate change and POPs. Indigenous involvement has been by far the greatest in the biodiversity focal area, as indigenous communities are closely tied to land, forests, water, wildlife and other natural resources. The number of projects involving indigenous communities has also increased over the years in the focal area of sustainable land management. The remaining sections of this document review the involvement of indigenous communities in GEF projects, particularly in the biodiversity focal area.



GEF's Biodiversity Program and Indigenous Communities

Why We Work With Indigenous Communities

Many indigenous and local communities live in territories that are biologically outstanding on a global scale. Traditional indigenous territories have been estimated to cover up to 24 percent of the world's land surface and contain 80 percent of the earth's remaining healthy ecosystems and global biodiversity priority areas.² A significant fraction

of the world's protected areas is found within or overlaps with indigenous lands, territories and resources. This remarkable spatial convergence presents both an enormous opportunity as well as a challenge for conservation efforts in protected areas and in the larger production landscape. Indigenous communities have also been responsible for the preservation and maintenance of traditional knowledge and practices that are highly relevant for the sustainable use of biodiversity. This nexus makes it imperative that the rights, interests and livelihoods of indigenous communities are respected and reinforced in all relevant GEF biodiversity projects.

International treaties have recognized the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources, notably in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Article 8(j) of the Convention commits to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices, and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices. The Programme of Work on Article 8(j) and related Provisions is the main instrument that Parties to the CBD have given themselves to

² GEF project document on *Assessment and Recommendations on Improving Access of Indigenous Peoples to Conservation Funding*, 2007

achieve this commitment. The Conference of the Parties (COP) has also established a working group specifically to address the implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention.

As the financial mechanism of the Convention, the GEF has received specific guidance from the COP to provide appropriate support for activities related to Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention. The GEF has been asked to provide information on activities and processes, including information on the criteria for eligibility and access to project funding, and to make such information easily accessible to interested partners, including indigenous and local communities. The COP also invited the GEF to provide special consideration in funding to projects that clearly contain elements of participation of indigenous and local communities, where appropriate, and to continue to apply the GEF's policy on public involvement to support the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities.³ Moreover, at the Eighth COP in 2006, GEF was invited to support community-conserved areas, ensuring

the immediate, full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in the development of relevant activities.⁴

Recognizing the important role that indigenous communities play in biodiversity conservation, and responding to the CBD guidance, the GEF biodiversity focal area identifies indigenous communities as key partners in achieving its strategic objectives. Under the GEF Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy (2007-2010), the GEF acknowledges the importance of the participation of indigenous and local communities in the design, implementation, management and monitoring of projects to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. Promoting capacity development of indigenous and local communities is recognized particularly under the strategic objective on catalyzing sustainability of protected areas systems. The strategy supports community- and indigenous-conserved areas as part of national systems of protected areas and as a way to strengthen sustainable management of a protected areas systems.

3 COP6 Decision vi/10, 29 and 30, Convention on Biological Diversity.

4 COP8 Decision VIII/24, 22 (d) and (e), Convention on Biological Diversity.





Indigenous Communities' Involvement in GEF Projects

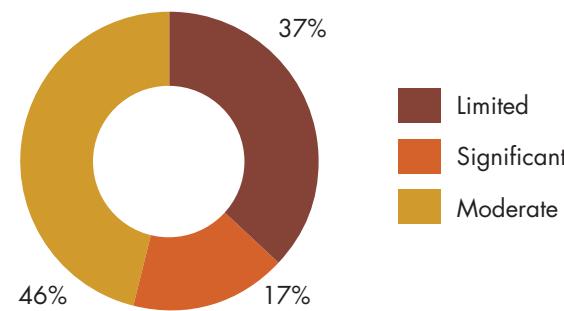
Number of projects and degree of involvement

As of June 2006, GEF had supported 102 projects that involved indigenous communities at various levels.⁵ As their involvement

5 For the purposes of this document, a list of projects involving indigenous communities, which had been compiled during an analysis of the GEF portfolio of biodiversity projects as well as information provided by the GEF Agencies, were utilized. The present analysis was not intended to have captured all relevant projects, and GEF's information base on this subject will continue to be updated.

6 For World Bank projects related to indigenous communities, a list of projects identified in a draft World Bank publication, *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation* (draft Jan 2008), prepared by Claudia Sobrevida, was used.

FIGURE 1
Degree of Indigenous Community Involvement in GEF Projects



varies, these projects were qualitatively categorized in three groups in terms of the degree of participation by indigenous communities:

- *Significant involvement*, including projects that were designed exclusively to benefit indigenous peoples or projects where the executing and/or implementing agency was an indigenous organization;
- *Moderate involvement*, including projects that had distinct components and/or sub-projects benefiting and targeting indigenous peoples; and

FIGURE 2
Types of Projects Involving Indigenous Communities

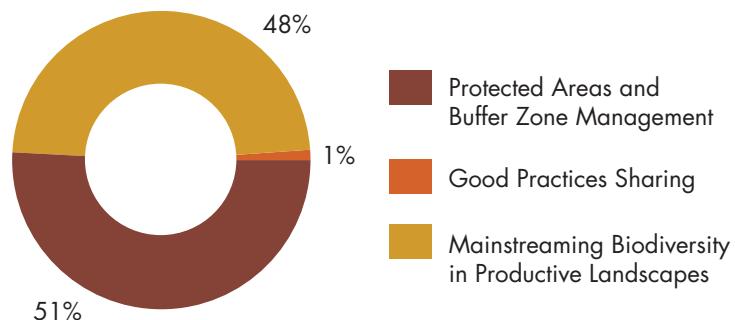
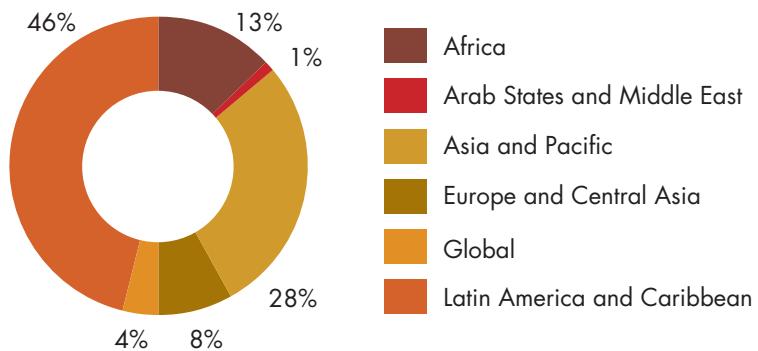


FIGURE 3
Regional Distribution of GEF Projects Involving Indigenous Communities



- *Limited involvement*, including projects that had participation of indigenous peoples in a few project activities. In the case of World Bank projects, these included projects that established benefits to indigenous peoples at the outcome level at project completion.⁶

Of the 102 projects, the majority (47) had moderate involvement of indigenous communities, while 38 were classified as having had only limited involvement. Among the 17 projects demonstrating significant involvement (see Figure 1), the majority (14) were projects from the Latin America and Caribbean regions.

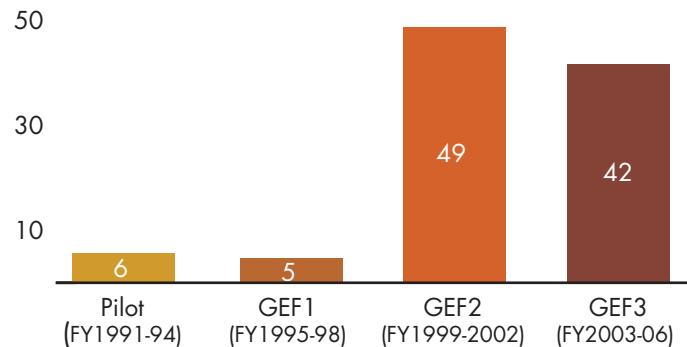
Types of projects

Nearly half (52 out of 102) of these projects focused on co-management or direct participation in protected areas and buffer zones management (see Figure 2). There were about the same number of projects (49 out of 102) focused on mainstreaming biodiversity in the production landscape, through activities such as promoting sound agriculture practices utilizing traditional knowledge of indigenous communities. The remaining project focused on lesson learning and sharing of good practices. Frequent project activities targeting indigenous communities included capacity development and awareness raising, policy and institutional development, and alternative income generation and economic development.

Regional distribution

Indigenous communities in the Latin America and Caribbean regions generally seek active participation, particularly on issues

FIGURE 4
Trends in Projects Involving Indigenous Communities, by GEF Replenishment Cycle



related to biodiversity conservation. Reflecting this trend, the largest number of GEF projects involving indigenous communities (47 projects, or 46 percent) took place in that region. This was followed by 29 projects in the Asia and Pacific regions and 13 in Africa. There were also eight projects in Europe and Central Asia, one in the Middle East, and four global projects, including the *Indigenous People's Network for Change*, which addresses the issue of indigenous and local communities' participation in GEF and CBD processes at the global level.

Trends by GEF replenishment cycle

The number of GEF projects that involve indigenous communities has increased steadily since the GEF-2 replenishment cycle (see



FIGURE 5
Size of Projects Involving Indigenous Communities

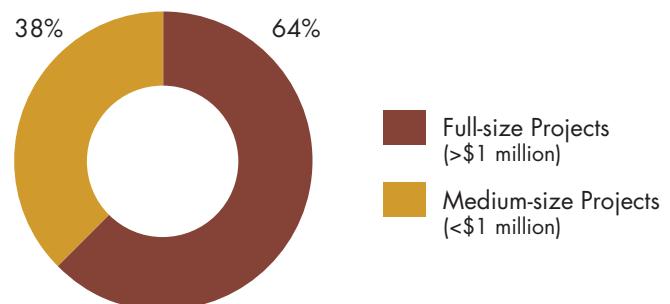


FIGURE 6
Distribution of Projects Involving Indigenous Communities, by GEF Agency

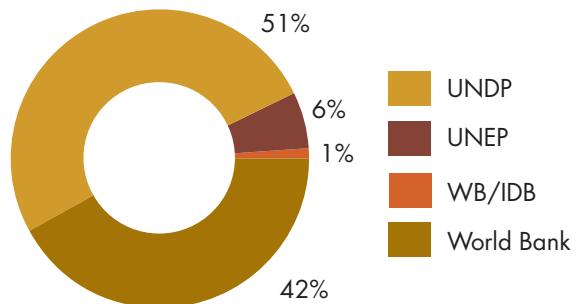


Figure 4). While there were only five projects in GEF-1, there were 49 in GEF-2 and 42 in GEF-3. This increase could be attributed to increased capacity within GEF Agencies for working with GEF projects in general and with these types of projects, leading to an overall increase in GEF proposals and financing requests. In addition, in 1996 a medium-size project modality (for projects up to \$1 million) was introduced to simplify and expedite the project development and appraisal procedures for proponents, targeting in particular the NGOs, and indigenous and local communities (see Figure 5).

Distribution of GEF projects by agency

UNDP and the World Bank were responsible for the implementation of the majority of GEF projects related to indigenous communities, 52 and 43 projects respectively (see Figure 6). Additional World Bank projects may also have included some limited indigenous community participation, but were not accounted for in this analysis, given that this review included only the Bank's projects with some impact at the outcome level as identified through its recent study.⁷

⁷ Claudia Sobrevila. 2008. *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation, draft, Jan. 2008.*





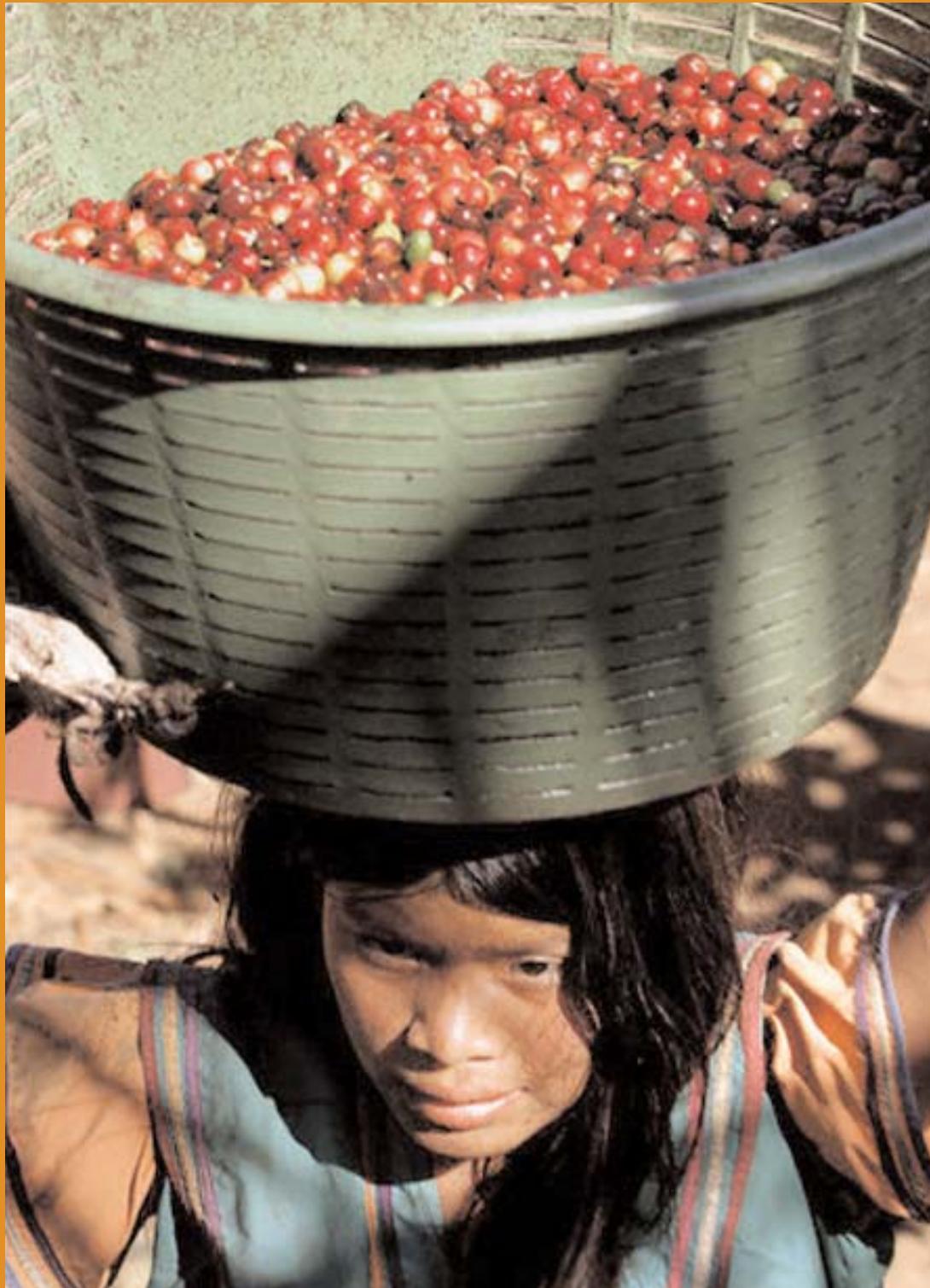
Indigenous Communities and the GEF Small Grants Programme

The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) is a key GEF funding modality reaching out to indigenous and local communities worldwide, including in some very remote areas. Launched in 1992, the SGP is designed to support grassroots initiatives with community-based and nongovernmental organizations in developing countries, aiming to deliver global environmental benefits while contributing to poverty reduction and local empowerment. As of the end of 2007, 101 countries were participating in the SGP, and more than 9,500

small grants had been provided to civil society organizations. The funding to date comprises \$247.2 million from GEF and \$242.8 million from other partners in cash or in-kind equivalents. A 2007 independent evaluation rated more than 90 percent of these projects as satisfactory in terms of achieving their intended outcomes, a very high standard for multilateral funding mechanisms to date.

About 15 percent of 1,664 SGP projects have targeted and involved indigenous communities with biodiversity and other focal area-related initiatives. The SGP has also established principles for working with indigenous peoples, which include a flexible, time sensitive and simple project cycle. Proposals for the SGP are accepted in national languages, and in some cases utilize innovative formats, such as participatory videos and community theater, in order to facilitate local solutions and to build on traditional knowledge. The SGP also allows for flexible disbursement terms to address indigenous peoples' culture, customs and seasonal movements.

In Vietnam, for example, the SGP has developed a strategy that provides priorities to proposals to work with remote indigenous communities and pilot innovative approaches and the use of indigenous knowledge for biodiversity conservation. Indigenous peoples and their organizations are major partners of the SGP in a wide range of activities, including the revival of the use of traditional medicinal plants and sustainable agricultural knowledge practices and systems. The SGP draws on indigenous peoples' expertise when undertaking environmental assessments, facilitating dialogue with local and central government representatives, and building institutional and legal capacity.



GEF SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME CASE STUDY

The Guaymí: Forest Conservation in the Coto Brus Indian Reserve, Costa Rica

Costa Rica's 5,000 Guaymí people live in a region that stretches from the Osa Península on the Pacific Coast, to the heights of the Brunca mountains, bordering the Talamanca Mountain Range in La Amistad International Park, the first World Heritage Site in the region. Within this landscape, nearly 1,500 people live in the Guaymí Indian Reserve of Coto Brus, subsisting on agricultural production. The Integrated Development Association, a Guaymí organization, has been entrusted with the management of nearly 28,000 hectares of wilderness area on the green slopes of the Brunca mountains, an area with significant strategic importance for national conservation authorities. These temperate, fragmented forests contain nearly 70 percent of the forested areas to be included in a biological corridor that will join La Amistad International Park with the lush Piedras Blancas and Corcovado National Parks.

With the help of the GEF SGP, and in collaboration with the district official from the Ministry of Natural Resources, a management plan was drafted and approved, and the indigenous association was able to obtain cash incentives from the government, in the form of payment for environmental services, by protecting 600 ha of community land. Another 600 ha is planned to be included this year. A revolving fund was created, where 40 percent of the money is

invested to generate interest revenues, while the rest is used for community projects.

Since the Guaymí received their first incentive payments earlier in the year, a small tree nursery was created and provides modest earnings to the women who prepare the trees for reforestation of a 1,000 ha grassland. Two rangers were trained to keep illegal loggers and poachers away, and a bridge linking the mountainous reserve with the road leading towards the nearest settlement, Sabanillas, was repaired. Urgent repairs were completed on the school facilities, and the “Salón Comunal” or community house, a meeting facility for the six communities included in the reserve, was finally inaugurated. In total, the SGP project benefited about 200 Guaymí people.

“Conservation has brought us benefits,” says Jaime Atencio Guerra, one of the Coto Brus rangers trained by the project. “I enjoy going to the mountain, where you can still find tigers (jaguars) and lions (pumas). Now that they know we are here, the hunters have disappeared and we rarely hear the chainsaws. This project has left us a lot of good experiences. It allowed us better contact with people from our own communities and it showed us we could make contacts outside the reserve. We have better access to financial support and that gives us better opportunities to protect our land,” he adds. “The mountain is our home,” he concludes. “It is our source of food, shelter and medicine. We know we have to take care of it. I am happy we have access to resources to help us do it.”

The Guaymí livelihood is also threatened by plans to build a huge dam, the Boruca Dam, on the margins of the Térraba river. The dam will flood extended areas in the Coto Brus and Osa lowlands, and its envi-

ronmental and social impacts will affect most of the indigenous settlements of the Southern Pacific watersheds. To keep the indigenous populations informed and attempt to minimize the project’s impact on their lifestyles, the GEF SGP also contributed to the establishment of the Indigenous Cultural Center in Buenos Aires de Osa. The center organizes workshops and distributes information about the project, its possible repercussions and indigenous peoples’ rights on the matter.



Highlights and Good Practices: Indigenous Communities' Involvement in GEF Projects

The four GEF projects summarized in this section exemplify best practice in the engagement of indigenous communities in GEF projects, and ensuring that their priorities and aspirations are taken into account within the overall project design and results framework.

These projects were all initiated by indigenous communities and support the objectives of indigenous communities.

23

Ecuador:

Biodiversity Conservation in Pastaza

GEF Agency: WB; GEF: \$788,000; Co-financing: \$248,744; GEF approval: FY2002⁸

Background

The project was implemented in the territories of the Quichua communities of Yana Yacu, Nina Amarun and Lorocachi, in the border area of the province of Pastaza, Ecuador. Consisting of approximately 250,000 hectares of tropical Amazonian rainforest, the three community territories are home to about 300 indigenous Quichua inhabitants. These territories traverse two important hydrographic basins, the Curaray River to the north and the Pinduc River to the south. Between these two watersheds, there is a mosaic of terrestrial forest and aquatic ecosystems that harbor one of the greatest concentrations of biodiversity on Earth.

The goal of the project was to contribute to global ecological benefits and to the maintenance of biological diversity through the

⁸ Project Completion Report, Ecuador: Biodiversity Conservation in Pastaza. 2006. Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela Country Managing Unit, ESSD Sector Unit, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, September 5.



conservation and sustainable use of the resources of the Amazon forest in the province of Pastaza. The specific objective was to conserve and attain *in situ* management of the forest ecosystems and biodiversity in the territories of the indigenous communities of Pastaza through the implementation of three components: 1) design and application of management plans in three community territories; 2) establishment of a socio-environmental information center for the indigenous territories of Pastaza; and 3) design and implementation of a capacity-building program on environmental and natural resource management. The project was developed by an inter-institutional network of specialists in environmental management that included representatives of the Quichua Institute of Biotechnology, the Amazon Environmental Institute of Science and Technology, the Technological Center of Amazon Resources and the Omaere Foundation.

Achievements and lesson learned

The project results have surpassed initial expectations, as the Quichua communities, in the course of implementing their management plans, have established an Inter-Community Biological Conservation Zone as one of the priority outcomes for the conservation of their territories. This conservation zone brings together areas located at the deltas of several important tributaries, including the Yana Yacu, Sindi Yacu, Aymu Yacu and Arabela Yacu Rivers. The zone also serves as an inter-community biological corridor for the conservation of flora and fauna, defined in a participatory manner by the three communities, under common standards of management and conservation of existing flora and fauna at these deltas.

The community-designed management plans targeting strategic biological resources were developed covering an area of 250,000 ha. The families utilized a participatory mapping process to map the community territories, taking into consideration important ancestral knowledge of the social and cultural use of the territorial spaces, the classification of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, the location and management of ecosystems and associated plant and animal species, the identification of management zones according to the principal productive methods of the communities, and the ancestral mechanisms needed for the conservation of the territory. The strengthening of community organizations through different capacity-building events provided venues and opportunities for inter-community meetings during which the community leaders have been able to discuss policies for management and conservation of the territory and existing resources. The Quichua border communities have created a new association that includes the communities participating in the project as well as other neighboring communities.

During all stages of design and implementation of the management plans, the project applied participatory methodologies oriented toward the rescue of ancestral knowledge. These methodologies facilitated the integration of approaches for land, ecosystem and biodiversity management grounded on both ancestral knowledge and modern science. This combined approach in the three community territories helped to also strengthen the community organization and regain ancestral land use practices.

Vanuatu: Facilitating and strengthening local resource management initiatives of traditional landholders and their communities to achieve biodiversity conservation objectives

*GEF Agency: UNDP; GEF: \$770,807; Co-financing: \$709,933;
GEF approval: FY2004*

Background

The objective of the GEF project is to work with traditional landholders, chiefs and their communities to facilitate, adapt and strengthen traditional mechanisms to conserve biodiversity in lands under communal resource ownership schemes. The project's pilot initiatives on Gaua, Tanna and Santo Islands focus on strengthening local, provincial and national capacity to support local biodiversity conservation activity. The GEF's funding is directed at three objectives: 1) to facilitate, adapt and strengthen traditional mechanisms to conserve biodiversity; 2) to provide an enabling environment and strengthen government and non-government capacity to support community-based conservation initiatives and replicate successes in other areas of Vanuatu; and 3) to monitor the impact and effectiveness of landholder-based conservation areas to inform and direct work to strengthen and adapt traditional conservation approaches.



35 © Patricio Robles Gil/ Sierra N

Achievements and lessons learned

Indigenous peoples are involved in every aspect of the project in Gaua, Santo and Tanna. Eighty percent of participating landholders are satisfied with the level of adherence to community regulations that apply to resource management and conservation activities in two-thirds of participating activities. There has also been an increase in local capacity to recognize and apply traditional measures that contribute to biodiversity conservation.

Through the project interventions, the island indigenous communities have expanded the introduction of temporary *tabus* (sacred, no entry and no take zones) in coastal, marine and terrestrial environments in communities on Gaua, Santo and Tanna. Traditional practices are being used at more than 50 sites where resource management or conservation activities have been initiated. Inter-village committees have also been established to support the traditional landholders and maintain the customary *tabus*. The proportion of participating communities reporting that governance difficulties affect their resource management and conservation activities has been reduced by 50 percent.

Traditional mechanisms of resource management and adaptation to natural environmental changes are deeply rooted among many island communities in Vanuatu. The strong links between environment and livelihood issues (health, income and education) are also being recognized. Given the reaffirmed importance of local peoples' knowledge on environmental management, the project finds it essential to empower local communities by maintaining, reinforcing

or giving control over their own territories and natural resources. This is being complemented by the strengthening of their traditional knowledge with access to modern information and technology. Moreover, legally recognized and enforceable rights to lands and waters give the communities both an economic incentive and a legal basis for stewardship. The project also recognizes that enduring solutions to achieve sustainability in community-driven initiatives are unlikely to be found if policy reform is framed solely in terms of articulating local rights and/or the use of plants and animals. The project suggests that the focus should be broadened to require the establishment of institutional processes that secure local peoples' involvement in environmental decision-making systems in an integrated and proactive manner.

Central America: Integrated Ecosystem Management in Indigenous Communities

GEF Agencies: WB and IDB; GEF: \$9.7 million; co-financing: \$39.88 million; GEF approval: FY2004

Background

This project represents one of the first large-scale GEF projects devoted to strengthening the role of indigenous peoples in biodiversity conservation and management. The total area inhabited by indigenous people in Central America is estimated to be as high as 170,000 square kilometers, or almost 33 percent of the area of the

seven countries that make up the region. About 80 percent of these indigenous lands are forested, 7.3 percent are included in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, and about 23 percent overlap with recognized protected areas. The strong overlap between indigenous territories and natural resources is not coincidental. Their ecosystems have been shaped by human practices in subsistence agriculture, home gardens, forest extraction, hunting and gathering, and by the use of forests as a refuge from mainstream society and as sacred sites.

The objective of the project is to achieve more effective conservation of biodiversity and natural resources in the seven Central American countries (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama) by strengthening the capacity of indigenous communities to protect and manage their natural and cultural resources, rescuing and reinforcing traditional land use practices they have developed over centuries.

The project is pursuing its objective through a series of initiatives. These involve a network of indigenous communities engaged in biodiversity conservation and sustainable and culturally appropriate land uses; building organizational and institutional capacity across countries and groups; promoting exchanges between indigenous communities on traditional knowledge, experiences and lessons learned; consolidating culturally based sustainable natural resource management practices and sustainable land use across the region; and supporting projects for sustainable production, promotion and

marketing of traditional products, environmental services and eco/ethno-tourism.

Achievements and lessons learned

This project reflects a strong regional commitment to operations focusing on social inclusion. The project has adopted a highly participatory approach in organizing consultations with the indigenous communities to begin project implementation, while ensuring that there were skilled and experienced project staff working with indigenous communities. The project is seeking to protect 135,000 hectares during the first year of implementation through community conservation efforts; complementing the 30,100 hectares already under community management practices. More than 193 indigenous and rural communities have been participating in the agro-ecological productive systems, which promote farming without chemical inputs.

These project efforts are helping to limit additional land degradation that threatens the continued provision of environmental services, livelihoods and economic well-being while at the same time promoting the conservation of the region's highly diverse biological resources. The project supports and expands on the initiatives of indigenous communities that inhabit areas of high biodiversity in six priority eco-regions within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor whose livelihoods depend on preservation of their cultural values and promotion of their traditional land-use practices.

Global: Indigenous Peoples' Network for Change

*GEF Agency: UNEP; GEF: \$938,844; co-financing: \$499,000;
GEF Approval: FY2006*

Background

The *Indigenous Peoples' Network for Change* is a global initiative aimed at advancing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by strengthening the capacity and knowledge of indigenous peoples to participate in processes related to the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant international instruments. The project was developed in a collaborative manner among key indigenous leaders, national and regional indigenous peoples' organizations, the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests (IAITPTF) and UNEP, in response to the continued recognition within the CBD process of the importance and need for increased participation by indigenous peoples.

The project focuses on the achievement of four key outcomes:

- Increased awareness and capacity among indigenous peoples, with particular focus on indigenous women, with respect to the CBD and the GEF and their processes;
- Increased contribution to and participation in CBD and GEF processes at national, regional and international levels by indigenous peoples, particularly women;

- Effective regional and international coordination of indigenous peoples' interaction with the CBD and the GEF; and
- The establishment of strategic partnerships and improved existing partnerships leading to greater participation and more emphasis on indigenous peoples' role in conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity resources.

Achievements and lessons learned

Since 2006, when project implementation began, the project has succeeded in enhancing the participation of indigenous communities in the various CBD processes, while at the same time providing valuable lessons for the indigenous movement as a whole. A range of integrated activities on capacity building, information sharing and facilitation for participating in international processes have been implemented in ten different regions of the world. For example, community radio programs in Kenya and Panama have been effective in reaching and effectively informing indigenous communities of the relevance of the CBD. The radio programs are broadcast in local languages, thereby increasing the reach and the sense of ownership by the indigenous communities. This approach is now being expanded to other network countries. Publications on the CBD (posters, primers and CDs) were also prepared, specifically targeting an audience from indigenous communities.

The project has also organized regional capacity-building seminars specifically for indigenous people. To date, about 200 people have participated in six different seminars. These have proven a valuable forum for the more systematic and formal sharing of information



and experiences between young indigenous activists and older, more experienced ones. The project has also facilitated and provided training for the participation of young indigenous representatives to the global CBD meetings, thereby ensuring a new generation of indigenous focal points to continue following this political process.

During this final year of the project, a series of case studies will be documented and published detailing the relevance and practical experience of indigenous peoples within CBD-related themes. These case studies, written by indigenous authors, could serve as valuable contributions to policy dialogues at future CBD meetings.



Lessons Learned

A series of lessons have emerged from GEF's portfolio of projects related to indigenous communities, particularly from the World Bank's analysis of its related projects, which are highlighted in this section:⁹

Participation: Closer attention needs to be paid to designing prior consultation, participation and consent processes that are acceptable to indigenous peoples and that are culturally appropriate. Early involvement of indigenous representation in project design is essential, and this will save time and avoid serious problems in the long term. Participation of women and youth of indigenous and local communities is also considered essential and effective in reflecting diverse interests. One of the best practices is to sign formal agreements between indigenous organizations and government authorities before the project starts.

Communication: Sharing and dissemination of information at all stages of the project is essential for project success as it enables

indigenous communities to fully participate in decision-making processes and other activities. Development of a cross-stakeholder communication strategy has proven useful to manage both over- and under-expectations, and for conflict resolution and prevention.

Institutional structure: It is more effective to utilize and maintain indigenous peoples' own institutional arrangements and decision-making processes, rather than creating new frameworks. This approach will, in the longer term, save time and effort, reinforce community organization and capacity, and foster better achievement of project objectives and sustainability. Projects using a rotational communal work system or regular community meetings, instead of organizing special meetings to discuss project issues, have proved effective and efficient.

Governance: Institutional arrangements should be as simple and flexible as possible when institutional structure beyond indigenous institutions is required. Relationships with and roles of other partners, including nongovernmental organizations, need to be clarified at the earliest stages. Traditional decision-making processes using consensus building usually work better than voting, which tends to create winners and losers and may result in conflict.

⁹ Presentation prepared by Paola Pioltelli, Alonso Zarzar, and Yabanex Batista, 2003. Thematic Review of GEF Projects: Indigenous Peoples Participation in the Conservation of Biodiversity in LAC; and Claudia Sobrevida, January 2008, *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation*, draft.

Flexibility of rules and processes: Projects that involve indigenous communities require more time for reaching agreements or making decisions. The project's timing and scope must also take into account the community's reality and calendar of activities. Processes are as important as project output and indigenous communities place a high value on them. Processes should be put in place that allow learning and adaptation, as these are indispensable for developing capacity and can help accelerate capacity building.

Specific process-oriented indicators should be given more careful consideration, as processes can be made outcomes themselves in project design.

Indigenous land rights: Projects that have assigned indigenous groups their ancestral lands result in less conflict during implementation. Protected areas adjacent to these areas then become either a focus for co-management by the indigenous people or they are



managed by protected areas officials with minimum conflicts. Many of the conflicts that have arisen in projects stemmed from the fact that indigenous lands claims were not previously addressed.

Strengthening cultural integrity: Indigenous communities that have strong historical continuity and cultural and spiritual heritage are generally more determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity. These are key elements for their continued existence as indigenous peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. Contributions to cultural revitalization (traditional knowledge and spiritual beliefs) can therefore help improve conservation efforts.

Empowering indigenous people to manage biodiversity in their own territories has resulted in more sustainable and cost-effective biodiversity protection.

Income-generation and environmental education activities: With the widespread use of income-generation and environmental education activities, more in-depth review of such activities is required to identify challenges, opportunities and best practices to improve quality of outcomes and their sustainability. Particular attention needs to be placed on how revenue-generating schemes target different groups of resource users and managers in order to avoid discriminating against groups that live, for instance, inside or outside designated protected areas.



Future Directions and Next Steps

The contributions of indigenous and local communities will remain crucial to the overall success of relevant GEF projects, and to achieving the goals of the GEF biodiversity program.

In line with the CBD Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Conventions dealing with traditional knowledge, GEF will continue to support initiatives to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and promote their wider application. The GEF will also encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices.

To this end, the GEF plans to undertake a series of actions to facilitate more effective involvement of indigenous communities in GEF-financed projects:

- Analyze in more detail GEF's engagement with indigenous and local communities in the context of GEF projects, identifying areas and themes that merit significant improvements;
- Based on this analysis, explore opportunities to establish appropriate tools that complement GEF's public involvement policy and GEF Agency policies for enhancing indigenous communities' involvement in project design and implementation, subsequent monitoring of the activities, and evaluation of the project impacts;
- Facilitate the exchange of best practices in projects involving indigenous communities among recipient governments, the GEF Agencies and other stakeholders, ensuring that lessons are incorporated into the design of future projects;
- Explore ways to strengthen the strategic approach and involvement of indigenous communities within relevant existing and new GEF programs and projects, particularly those which target civil society organizations and relevant geographical and thematic initiatives; and
- Ensure that appropriate funding is allocated within GEF projects to promote effective involvement of indigenous communities.

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1818 H Street NW
Washington, DC 20433 USA
tel: 202 473 0508
fax: 202 522 3240

www.theGEF.org

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