

GEF Country Portfolio Study: El Salvador (1994–2010)



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From October 2010 to April 2011, the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) conducted a country portfolio study of GEF support to El Salvador for the period 1994–2010.

Country portfolio studies are a new modality for the Evaluation Office; they 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 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 El Salvador initiative was the first country portfolio study undertaken by the Office; it was conducted in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme. Since 1994, the GEF has invested about \$11.4 million, with about \$22.7 million in cofinancing, in El Salvador. GEF funding has been provided through 11 national projects. Biodiversity and climate change account for the largest shares of funding—82 and 12 percent of total support, respectively.

Findings

Effectiveness

The GEF has played an important role in supporting El Salvador in complying with its obligations under the relevant global conventions and in the generation of national strategies, but its contribution has been smaller in strengthening the country's legal framework.

The GEF has supported the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (known by its Spanish acronym, MARN) in complying with its international obligations under the conventions. Through enabling activities, the GEF has helped El Salvador organize its environmental management within the GEF focal areas by supporting the country's formulation of its first biodiversity strategy and its generation of inputs for strategies to be devised for dealing with climate change and persistent organic pollutants. The GEF has not made any significant contributions toward the strengthening or generation of El Salvador's environmental legal framework. Its main contribution has been to provide inputs for the Law on Protected Natural Areas approved in 2005. The GEF's contribution has been limited with regard to strengthening El Salvador's institutional framework, with its support consisting of financing enabling activities for capacity building in climate change and biodiversity.

The GEF has made an important contribution toward capacity building in environmental management within the MARN. GEF support of enabling activities has helped create capacities for use in surveying and systematizing environmental information for decision-making purposes. Methodological working guidelines have been established—for example, for identifying priorities and in surveying. The GEF also has contributed to generating capacity for designing instruments and guidance materials. And, through support of project preparation and subsequent implementation, the GEF has helped build capacity for identifying global/national environmental benefits and using tools for planning and monitoring. Many projects have benefited from this capacity building, in terms of the close monitoring provided by the ministry.

One problem that remains regarding capacity building entails the rotation of trained personnel; such rotation hinders continuity of project preparation and monitoring, and obliges the GEF Agencies to provide constant training

in GEF requirements. Another drawback reported by the authorities is that various implementers have been external consultants, which has diminished the possibility of building internal capacities.

The global benefits achieved by GEF projects are still modest or uncertain. The majority of the country's national and regional projects are at an early stage of execution, making determination of global benefits premature. In the case of completed projects, the information necessary for verifying the scope of benefits achieved is not available.

Relevance

The GEF contribution has been relevant to El Salvador's environmental priorities, the mandate of the international conventions, and the GEF mandate, except with regard to combating land degradation. The actions undertaken have been consistent with existing environmental problems and have successfully focused on policy issues within the GEF's mandate—especially regarding biodiversity, mitigation of climate change, and persistent organic pollutants. There is less congruence regarding international waters and adaptation to climate change, and GEF activities are not addressing land degradation at all.

Efficiency

Efficiency in proposal preparation has improved but weak points remain, and the efficiency of project implementation is variable. In terms of the length of time required in the project preparation process up to approval, efficiency has improved in the latest cycles (GEF-3 and GEF-4); this result is due to national capacity building coupled with improvement of the GEF guidelines. Among the weaknesses that have affected the efficiency of proposal preparation are staff rotation within the MARN and the limited time available on the part of the GEF focal point. Efficiency as measured in terms of preparation costs has been variable, ranging from projects that have not incurred any such costs at all to a maximum investment of \$350,000 for the Environmental Services Project. This last was eventually canceled, because the El Salvador Congress failed to approve it within the prescribed time period. Efficiency as measured by the cost-benefit ratios of the projects executed

has been adequate. The selection process for Small Grants Programme proposals is considered efficient in terms of the amount of time taken; however, the analysis of national and global benefits needs to entail a cost-benefit assessment of the outcomes obtained.

Lessons

- Depending on their individual perspective, communities either see the MARN environmental authority as a partner in or an obstacle to environmental management.
- A project's effectiveness and efficiency (cost-benefit) in generating global benefits are directly related to the technical quality of the project interventions.
- The lack of procedures for systematizing and communicating successful projects can result in positive or negative effects when they are replicated in other contexts.
- The requirements connected with cofinancing loans can prevent adequate attention being given to GEF priority requirements.
- Lack of an integrated approach diminishes capacity to obtain global and national environmental benefits.
- Greater connectivity between protected areas and areas where coffee is produced using environmentally friendly methods could decrease inbreeding in isolated and low-mobility populations and enhance the value of coffee certification as a tool for biodiversity conservation.

The GEF 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 *Estudio de la cartera de proyectos del FMAM en El Salvador (1994–2010)* (Evaluation Report No. 67, 2012; in Spanish, with conclusions and lessons learned in English) is available on the GEF Evaluation Office website, www.gefeo.org. Also available on the website is *GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation 2011* (Evaluation Report No. 64, 2012), which presents a synthesis of the two country portfolio studies (in Jamaica and El Salvador) undertaken in 2010–11. For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at gefevaluation@thegef.org.