



GEF/C.66/15  
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66<sup>th</sup> GEF Council Meeting  
February 5 - 9, 2024  
Washington, D.C

Agenda Item 10

**MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO:  
EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES AT THE GEF**

**Recommended Council Decision**

The Council, having considered document GEF/E/C.66/02, the *Evaluation of Community-based Approaches at the GEF*, and document GEF/C.66/15, the *Management Response*, takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The GEF Secretariat welcomes the timely IEO's Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF. The GEF Secretariat values the important attention of community-centered approaches for natural resource management, including approaches to devolve decision-making power and extending financial and technical resources to communities and natural resource users. The Evaluation clearly describes the important benefits of Community-Based Approaches as an essential tool for project designers working at the environment-development nexus to facilitate decision-making authority to project beneficiaries and ensuring these key stakeholders' active participation in the design and implementation of GEF financed activities.

2. As concluded in the Evaluation, while Community-Based Approaches (CBA) is not mandated in the GEF, the application of the approach is present across the GEF project portfolio. CBA and associated concepts are embedded in GEF focal area strategies and in the GEF's shift to multifocal area interventions and programs. The GEF Secretariat is pleased that the Evaluation highlights that principles of CBA are particularly and effectively embedded in the foundation of the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI).

3. This Evaluation is especially timely at this stage of early implementation of the GEF-8 Programming Strategy, which places increased focus on social inclusion and a "whole of the society" approach, providing opportunities for civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), women and girls, and youth leaders to collaborate in the planning and implementation of GEF programs and projects to address today's environmental crises.

4. The GEF already has in place an array of policies that focus on inclusion (including Policies on Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality, and Environmental and Social Safeguards). As highlighted in the Evaluation, they include language supportive of CBAs, mandating important principles related to stakeholder consultations and engagement, incorporation of gender equality dimensions, ensuring mitigation against harm to communities affected by projects, as well as to adhering to the rights of IPLCs through, for example, principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

5. The GEF Secretariat appreciates the Evaluation's reasoning that these policies provide requirements that all GEF-financed activities, at a minimum, inform or consult with communities regarding their activities. The GEF Secretariat acknowledges that, considering the wide range of GEF financed activities, these policies do not stipulate that all GEF projects apply a design that centers communities in project activities. The GEF Secretariat appreciates the good practices presented in the Evaluation and keenly takes note of lessons from GEF CBA projects on promoting inclusion and good practices of GEF Agencies to embrace CBAs including introducing indicators to measure the participation of landless farmers, groups led by women/youth, and targeting of women/youth to receive project assets before others.

6. Finally, the GEF Secretariat welcomes that this Evaluation has been built upon substantial interactions with people and organizations involved in GEF projects at many levels and in a diversity of contexts and countries.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

7. The GEF Secretariat agrees with the overall justification of the IEO recommendations, highlighting the relevance of CBAs for the GEF as reflected in their presence in the multilateral environmental agreements and convention guidance to the GEF (including UNCCD, the CBD, and the UNFCCC) and in national priorities. The GEF Secretariat is pleased with the conclusion and overarching preamble that (i) CBA concepts are embedded in GEF focal area strategies (especially those for biodiversity, land degradation, and climate change adaptation); (ii) CBAs and practices are deployed in many GEF projects and programs; and (iii) key dimensions of CBAs are reflected in GEF policies and guidelines.

***RECOMMENDATION 1: The GEF Secretariat should ensure that co-design of projects with communities is possible under the suite of GEF policies and guidelines, for projects where community partnership is a critical element. The ongoing review of GEF policy and guidelines should be done in anticipation of the proposed ‘whole of society’ approach in GEF-9 which emphasizes stakeholder engagement across different segments of society.***

8. The GEF Secretariat agrees with this recommendation.

9. The GEF Secretariat appreciates that this recommendation highlights the importance of recognizing communities as more than beneficiaries but rather as partners in the design and selection of activities. As highlighted by this recommendation, co-design could lead to more significant roles for communities within projects. The GEF Secretariat therefore agrees that CBAs could be further promoted in projects where community partnership is a critical element. Considering the renewed focus and attention to inclusion and the “whole of society” approach in GEF-8 and expectations to further develop this in GEF-9, the substance of this recommendation will be considered in the lead up to the GEF-9 replenishment and the associated GEF-9 programming directions and policy agenda. The GEF Secretariat will also explore considerations for extending CBAs in the ongoing review of GEF policies and guidelines as appropriate.

***RECOMMENDATION 2: Building on earlier guidance, GEFSEC, together with STAP, should provide more clarity and guidance on when and how CBAs can be used in GEF projects. This would include examples of results indicators observed in projects, and appropriate guidance to facilitate the use of CBA.***

10. The GEF Secretariat partially agrees with this recommendation. The GEF Secretariat has consulted with STAP on the response to this recommendation.

11. The GEF Secretariat recognizes the important role played by communities in influencing environmental and socioeconomic outcomes and notes the findings in the Evaluation on challenges related to effective community involvement in project design beyond consultations. As such, the GEF Secretariat appreciates that there may be room for providing further clarity on when and how CBAs can be applied in project design and implementation of GEF financed activities. The GEF Secretariat will seek further advice from STAP on opportunities to further promote the use of CBA in GEF projects and programs as appropriate. This may include considerations to prepare a best practice document with STAP and incorporating into GEF-9 thematic discussions.

12. In addition, the GEF Secretariat will continue to expand the scale and scope of CBAs in relevant projects such as the GEF SGP and ICI in consultation with relevant GEF Implementing Agencies. Moreover, the GEF Secretariat will consider opportunities to promote the use of CBAs in GEF projects within the context of the Strategy for Knowledge Management and Learning<sup>1</sup> as well as the GEF-8 Country Engagement Strategy<sup>2</sup>, intended to enable countries to maximize expected outcomes and to take ownership in design and implementation.

***RECOMMENDATION 3: The GEFSEC should develop an approach for tracking of devolved responsibility and/or financial resources to the local level for GEF projects as appropriate. Such tracking could differentiate between resources allocated to national CSOs, IPLCs, women's groups, etc. as relevant.***

13. The GEF Secretariat agrees with this recommendation.

14. The GEF Secretariat agrees that there is scope to further refine its approach to tracking devolved responsibility and/or financial resources in GEF projects. The GEF Secretariat would like to highlight that some measurement of socio-economic co-benefits is already a part of the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework<sup>3</sup>. Over the years, successive revisions of the GEF's results architecture have strengthened the GEF's capacity to disaggregate data by sex, covering key environmental results areas where differentiated impact may take place on the well-being of girls and women. Details on how Agencies and countries should ensure projects track only direct beneficiaries through the related Core Indicator has also been strengthened in GEF Guidelines on the Implementation of the GEF-8 Results Measuring Framework.<sup>4</sup> The GEF Geospatial Platform, launched in 2023, provides the geographic locations of beneficiary communities.<sup>5</sup>

15. In support of the GEF-8 "whole of society" and inclusion approaches, the GEF Secretariat has committed to working toward improving the tracking of socio-economic co-benefits. The GEF-8 Replenishment Participants emphasized this focus through a policy recommendation to

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<sup>1</sup> GEF/C.65/03/Rev.01, [Global Environment Facility Strategy for Knowledge Management and Learning](#), October 10, 2023

<sup>2</sup> GEF/C.62/Inf.11, [GEF-8 Country Engagement Strategy Implementation Arrangements](#), May 27, 2022

<sup>3</sup> GEF/C.62/03, [Summary of Negotiations of the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund](#), June 15, 2022

<sup>4</sup> GEF/C.62/Inf.12/Rev.01, [Guidelines on the Implementation of the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework](#), June 30, 2022

<sup>5</sup> More information on the GEF Geospatial Platform is available at: <https://www.thegef.org/maps>

*“improve the capture of human and socio-economic well-being metrics as well as climate change adaptation co-benefits in the results monitoring and improve their consideration in the design of GEF-funded projects and programs to further support the achievement of GEBs”.*<sup>6</sup>

16. In line with this policy recommendation, the GEF Secretariat has submitted a document for Council endorsement at its 66th Council Meeting entitled “Tracking and Measuring the Socio-economic Co-benefits of GEF Investments”.<sup>7</sup> This document outlines steps to improve the measurement of socio-economic co-benefits in results reporting and their consideration in the design of GEF-financed projects and programs. This may include opportunities to better capture and monitor the results of GEF financing for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), civil society, and youth. In addition, a possibility may be to further disaggregate indicators that include the number of beneficiary people as their unit of measurement by, for example IPLCs and youth. Simultaneously, the Secretariat will explore the feasibility of tracking financing supporting IPLCs, civil society and youths at the corporate level.

## **Conclusion**

17. The GEF Secretariat welcomes and agrees with the important findings of the IEO Evaluation of Community-based Approaches at the GEF. The Evaluation is very timely following the early implementation of the GEF-8 Programming Strategy, which places increased focus on social inclusion and a “whole of the society” approach.

18. The GEF Secretariat broadly agrees with the three recommendations and importance of ensuring key stakeholders’ active participation in the design and implementation of GEF financed activities and promoting community-centered approaches for natural resource management. Progress on the three recommendations will be tracked through the IEO’s standard Management Action Record. The GEF Secretariat will also consider the findings and recommendations of the Evaluation in lead up to the GEF-9 replenishment and the associated GEF-9 programming directions and policy agenda.

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<sup>6</sup> GEF/C.62/03, [Summary of Negotiations of the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund](#), June 15, 2022

<sup>7</sup> GEF/C.66/12, [Tracking and Measuring the Socio-economic Co-benefits of GEF Investments](#), January 8, 2024