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Agenda Item 15

ELEMENTS FOR STRENGTHENING NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS AND ENHANCING CONSTITUENCY COORDINATION IN GEF RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having reviewed the paper GEF/C.25/9, *Elements for Strengthening National Focal Points and Enhancing Constituency Coordination in GEF Recipient Countries*, approves the proposals presented in the paper for a four year program of assistance to strengthen national focal point and Council Members. The Council requests the GEF Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies to collaborate in preparing a project proposal to operationalize the program for approval by the Council.

INTRODUCTION

1. In May 1999, in response to the findings of the Overall Performance Study of the GEF and the New Delhi Statement of the first GEF Assembly, the Council approved a program of support to Council Members and focal points. The program was designed to provide financing for services that would be delivered through the country office of an agreed Implementing Agency to help the GEF national focal points and Council Members in recipient countries carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively and raise awareness of the goals and opportunities offered by the GEF.¹
2. Coordinated by the GEF Secretariat and implemented by UNDP and the World Bank through their field offices, the program covers 119 countries to date. The bulk of the program has been managed by UNDP, which provided support to focal points in 108 countries. The World Bank covered 11 countries. Implementing Agency field offices assisted focal points to identify priority activities and develop annual work plans, helped organize coordination meetings and supported travel to constituency meetings. Services were either provided directly by the Implementing Agencies or the costs of activities reimbursed. The Implementing Agencies received a fee for their services of 3% of the funds administered equivalent to \$240/year per country.
3. As of May 2005, the program has expended \$1,780,269 of the \$2,162,900 allocated for its implementation.
4. The Second Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS2) found that focal points were appreciative of the assistance provided through this program, although some dissatisfaction was expressed with the procedures of the program. OPS2 recommended that the GEF should continue ongoing efforts to support capacity development of operational focal points, the national GEF coordinating structures and the country dialogue workshops. At the second GEF Assembly, it was agreed that national operational focal points should be strengthened to effectively carry out their responsibilities in the GEF.
5. At the Council meeting in May 2003, the Council agreed to continue the focal point support program pending a review of the program by the Council and a decision as to a means to continue strengthening focal points as agreed at the second GEF Assembly. In addition, the Council authorized financing for an independent evaluation of the program to provide information that would assist it in considering whether and how it should be extended in the future.
6. The evaluation of the program was completed in March 2004, and the evaluation report was circulated to the Council for its information and submitted to the May 2004 Council meeting as document GEF/C.23/Inf.12.
7. This paper draws upon the evaluation, OPS2, consultations with the Implementing Agencies, and other relevant information to present proposals for Council consideration on means to strengthen GEF national focal points. It also presents proposals on means to strengthen constituency coordination.

• ¹ GEF/C.13/13, Constituencies and Assistance for Country Level Coordination

Evaluation

8. An independent evaluation of the GEF Council Member and Focal Point Support Program was carried out from November 2003 to January 2004. The overall objective of the evaluation was to review and evaluate the support program, to obtain information on lessons learned, and to assess the need for continued support. The evaluation also reviewed the modalities through which the support was provided and recommended means to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of providing support.

9. The evaluation was carried out through a review of relevant GEF documents, including Council papers, OPS2, Implementing Agency financial records and annual reports submitted by focal points on the assistance they had received. Questionnaires were sent to all focal points and Council Members, and a series of interviews were conducted with representatives from the Implementing Agencies, national focal points, Council Members and GEF Secretariat.

Conclusions of the Evaluation

10. The evaluation stated that “the GEF Focal Point and Council Member Support Programs in their present form are having a positive but limited effect on the capacity of Council Members and focal points to carry out their responsibilities more effectively”. The report further stated that “there is room for improvement in both the design and administration of the program and a continuing need to support focal points and Council Members in the future”.

11. The report concluded that “the GEF Focal Point and Council Member Support Program contributed to improved communication, increased awareness and better coordination with program stakeholders”. Responses to the questionnaire show that the support program has the highest impact in increasing the flow of GEF information to focal points, interested agencies and institutions and increasing access to GEF documents and related information. The responses also show that the support program has increased the number of stakeholder meetings and helped to improve national stakeholder coordination. Some respondents stated that the support program has enabled focal points to raise their profile within the government thus enhancing their capacity to coordinate GEF activities within the country.

12. The evaluation recognized the key role of the Implementing Agencies on the management of the programme on behalf of the GEF. The report found that the Implementing Agency field offices and staff played a critical role advising Focal Points on GEF priorities and helping coordinate GEF activities with other development actors in the country. The majority of respondents to the evaluation stated that “Implementing Agency field offices responded effectively to focal point and Council Member requests for technical and logistical support”.

13. The program has also facilitated more interaction with governmental and private stakeholders by supporting meetings and workshops on GEF priorities and programs in the countries. The support program has also provided a useful vehicle for collaboration between the GEF Secretariat, the Implementing Agencies and the focal points and Council Members it supports.

Recommendations of the Evaluation

14. The evaluation recommends that the GEF support program be extended with some redesign. The results of the evaluation made it clear that there is a continuing need, particularly among less developed recipient countries, to strengthen GEF coordination at the country level, raise awareness of GEF priorities, policies and programs, strengthen stakeholder involvement in global environmental programs, and enhance the capacity of those countries to develop and implement GEF projects.
15. The evaluation proposed three options for the future structure of the support program:
- (a) modify the existing program slightly, making necessary improvements without altering the basic design;
 - (b) implement a more strategic overhaul, sharpening the focus of the program and fitting it more squarely into an overall strategy for developing the global environmental management capacity of the country; or
 - (c) combine elements of both, moving gradually from the first to the second over time.
16. The Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies endorse the overall conclusions of the evaluation that the current focal point support activities have had a positive effect on the focal points' ability to carry out their responsibilities and that the program should be continued.
17. In continuing the program, it is proposed that the third option be followed: i.e., that the program should be reshaped in the short term to respond to a number of problems highlighted in the evaluation and that it should continue to evolve over the next four years towards a more focused program that can be mainstreamed into capacity building activities within each country. In this regard, the ultimate aim of this program will be to integrate the programme and the activities it supports, fully and seamlessly with the major elements envisaged in the GEF's Strategic Approach to Capacity Building, including the follow up to National Capacity Self Assessments (NCSAs), stand alone cross-cutting capacity building initiatives, and the country capacity building programmes in LDCs and SIDS currently contemplated as part of the implementation of the Strategic Approach.

RATIONALE FOR CONTINUED AND ENHANCED SUPPORT TO FOCAL POINTS

18. Country ownership is one key to the success of GEF projects, and it is fully recognized that country level coordination is primarily a concern and prerogative of recipient countries. The GEF's role should be to facilitate the processes a country undertakes for these purposes. Enhancing the ability of national focal points to conduct outreach and coordinate GEF activities at the country level will contribute to country ownership, and this has the potential of strengthening the impacts of GEF projects.
19. As shown by OPS2, the draft Third Overall Performance Study (OPS3)², and the focal point support evaluation, as GEF procedures and policies have evolved rapidly over the years, there continues

² GEF/ME/C.25/4

to be a strong need to assist focal points to achieve the goals of attaining country ownership and country drivenness of GEF activities.

20. Today, the role of focal points, especially that of the Operational Focal Point, has increased as GEF portfolios grow and as countries start to apply long-term programming approaches to GEF activities within the context of overall national sustainable development policies and programs. An enhanced focal point support program is particularly important at this point in time when the GEF is developing new strategies and policies such as the Resource Allocation Framework, engagement with the private sector and enhanced emphasis on integrated resource management. The Secretariat is also reviewing its current engagement with NGOs with a view to creating more effective engagement of NGOs in its projects and activities.

21. Furthermore, operational focal points need to be enabled and supported to initiate and sustain a dialogue with a broad group of GEF stakeholders, including the private sector, academia and civil society. This stakeholder dialogue will build upon the recommendations of the GEF National Dialogue in countries that have hosted such dialogues. Consultation helps to create an exchange of information on the GEF's mandate, policies, and procedures and raises awareness about the GEF at the country level.

22. As global environmental activities are mainstreamed into the policies and programs of countries, the need to strengthen capacity within governments to address global environmental issues becomes more evident. The support program can provide resources to help countries to develop more efficient coordination mechanisms and will promote this goal through a stronger focus on improving inter-governmental coordination to maximize synergies and mainstream environmental activities.

23. In this regard, OPS2³ noted in particular the following needs:

- (a) some focal points requested specific support and guidance on how to carry out their assignments. Others suggested training to improve technical capacity for carrying out GEF program coordination at the national and local level;
- (b) each operational focal point should be encouraged to disseminate semi-annual status reports on country-relevant national, regional and global GEF projects, and to make these reports available in the language(s) appropriate for effective in-country communication on GEF activities. The GEF Secretariat and the Implementing/Executing Agencies should provide direct technical support services for such reporting;
- (c) there is a need for additional support measures to enable improved functioning by the country operational focal points, which are still weak links in the GEF operations;
- (d) in general, funding should be limited to contributions towards in-country travel, accommodation and communication costs. The financial administration and accountability for this special service to in-country portfolio reviews should rest with the GEF Secretariat;

³ The Second Overall Performance Study of the GEF , Pages 53-57

- (e) inclusive participation should include stakeholders at the regional and local levels, as well as the private sector. The GEF operational focal point can and should be able to act as the main facilitator for such coordination;
- (f) increasing the capacity and effectiveness of the operational focal points would substantially enhance the efficiency of GEF interventions;
- (g) the GEF Secretariat needs to establish staffing capacity in the form of a country support team to be able to interact more promptly and efficiently in providing consistent guidance, information and advice to the operational focal points.

24. The evaluation⁴ also highlighted the same needs and in addition included the following:

- (a) increased support for GEF intergovernmental coordination units; and
- (b) regular participation of focal points in constituency meetings.

Support to Council Members for Constituency Coordination

25. The support program approved in May 1999 also provided resources to finance services for Council Members related to constituency coordination. It is proposed that this support continue, with the following modifications:

- (a) administration of the program should be streamlined by permitting transfers of resources directly to Council Members on the basis of a work plan agreed with the GEF Secretariat. The types of activities to be financed will be linked to improving communications within the constituency and for the convening of constituency meetings;
- (b) Council Members will be required to report annually to the GEF Secretariat on how the funds have been spent, in accordance with a standardized reporting format; and
- (c) sufficient resources will be provided to convene two constituency meetings per year.

26. Most recipient countries are members of multi-country constituencies. For these constituencies, the issue of coordination is a major ongoing concern. Resources needed to finance full constituency representation are often not available to Council Members from recipient countries.

27. In order to fulfill their responsibilities to coordinate among the countries they represent, Council Members need to communicate regularly with members of their constituencies. Constituency meetings provide an opportunity for participants to meet prior to Council meetings to discuss issues under consideration by the Council and to ensure that constituency views are reflected in the Council deliberations. Council Member support will help to fund these meetings and to pay for the costs associated with contacting focal points in other member countries by telephone or fax.

⁴ GEF/C.23/Inf.12

Proposals for Continued Focal Point Support and Constituency Coordination

28. In light of the above, and taking into account the recommendations of OPS2 and the evaluation, it is proposed that the Council consider the continuation of the focal point support program with the following understandings:

- (a) the support program should be extended for a four-year period, after which its continuation and/or modification will be reviewed by the Council;
- (b) the administration of the program should be streamlined by making financial resources available to focal points on the basis of a work plan agreed with the GEF Secretariat;
- (c) new guidelines of eligible expenditures are proposed for Council approval. These guidelines will provide increased flexibility to the focal point to determine activities that will assist in achieving the objectives of the program, while providing emphasis on the need to enhance coordination and mainstreaming of global environmental aims in the policies and programs of the recipient countries; (See Annex A (Focal Points) and Annex B (Council Members) for proposed guidelines);
- (d) accountability for expenditures will be exercised through annual reporting by the focal points to the GEF Secretariat in accordance with a standard reporting format which will require reporting on indicators to measure results and impacts;
- (e) spot audits on the use of the focal point and constituency coordination funds may be requested by the GEF Secretariat and financed by the program; and
- (f) funding will be provided to allow both the political and operational focal points to participate in two constituency meetings each year (see section below on Constituency Coordination).

IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Roles of the GEF Secretariat

29. The objective of the enhanced focal point support and constituency coordination program will be to support focal points and Council Members in:

- (a) increasing awareness of GEF strategic priorities, policies and programs;
- (b) creating institutional memory of GEF policies and programs in the appropriate government ministry; and
- (c) supporting the establishment of GEF coordination or resource units in appropriate government ministries to:
 - (i) increase coordination among national agencies with a view to ensuring greater country ownership and a cohesive approach across the government to global environmental issues;
 - (ii) keep track of GEF portfolios in the country;
 - (iii) promote mainstreaming of global environmental issues into the national sustainable development strategies; and
 - (iv) strengthen stakeholder involvement in global environmental programs.

30. It is proposed that in the next phase of the support program, the GEF Secretariat will be responsible for management and strategic oversight of the program, working in collaboration with the Implementing Agencies and, in particular, UNEP which has agreed to assist in administering the disbursement of funds to focal points and Council Members. Among other things, the GEF Secretariat will be responsible for the following.

31. The GEF Secretariat will facilitate and coordinate:

- (a) agreement with focal points and Council Members on approval of work plans (See Annex C for details on the proposed process for approval of focal point and Council Member Support);
- (b) authorization of payments; and
- (c) review of reports, statistics and indicators to provide feedback, compilation of case studies of good practices in GEF country coordination and lessons learned.

32. This would be consistent with the recommendation of OPS2 that the GEF Secretariat should “be able to interact more promptly and efficiently in providing consistent guidance, information, and operational advice to operational focal points”. It would also respond to the view expressed by a number of recipient countries in their response to the questionnaire that “the GEF Secretariat should take

a stronger more direct role in the program in order to facilitate a more direct exchange of information and simplify lines of responsibilities.”

33. There are a number of merits in the GEF Secretariat taking a lead role in the administration of the Support Program:

- (a) GEF Secretariat’s direct involvement will help to raise awareness of the corporate GEF at the country level;
- (b) GEF Secretariat having a more engaged and proactive relationship with national focal points will enhance direct and horizontal networking and an on-going dialogue between the GEF Secretariat and the focal points;
- (c) direct contact with the national focal points will facilitate linkages with other existing and proposed corporate activities currently co-ordinated or administered by the GEF Secretariat (see Annex D - *Other GEF Activities that will contribute to strengthening focal points*); and
- (d) working directly with focal points to design their work programs will provide an opportunity to ensure that new GEF strategies and policies are taken into consideration in the implementation of the activities that are supported by the support program.

Expected Benefits of Enhanced Focal Point Support Program

	Expected Outcomes/Impacts	Results
1	Enhancing the ability of national focal points to conduct outreach and coordinate GEF activities at the country level	Increased contribution to country ownership which potentially strengthens the impacts of GEF projects
2	Strengthening of GEF corporate identity	Direct interaction, on-going dialogue and more proactive relationship with focal points
3	Enhanced horizontal networking between focal points	More constituency meetings, improved communication and coordination between focal points
4	Enhanced capacity-building for focal points	Improved GEF country level coordination and enhanced awareness on the GEF across various stakeholders
5	Collaboration with focal points to design/customize their work programs	GEF strategies and policies are fully reflected in the implementation of the activities that are carried out through the support program
6	Providing technical backstopping and logistical support directly to the focal points	Higher efficiency and more cost-effective implementation of the support program
7	Improved monitoring and tracking mechanism of program by GEF Secretariat	Annual country reports detailing activities, expenses etc. to be received by the GEF Secretariat. In addition to annual reports, performance indicators, feedback and lessons

		learned, statistics will be compiled and analyzed by GEF Secretariat
8	Promotion of integration and mainstreaming of GEF activities into national sustainable development activities.	Hosting/organizing meetings of relevant stakeholders on completion of GEF projects to discuss ways to mainstream project outputs and follow up (number and variety of participants)

Role of Implementing Agencies

34. By virtue of their country presence, the Implementing Agencies will continue to play a critical role in supporting focal points. Implementing Agencies will continue to exercise a lead role in programming at the country level, undertaking country dialogue on mainstreaming GEF operations within overall country programming and on sector policies, and in supporting countries in the development of projects, as well as the supervision and evaluation of GEF projects.

35. In addition to their policy advisory role, Implementing Agencies through their respective country and regional offices, will support GEF Focal Points through the following activities:

- (a) advise on eligibility and design requirements;
- (b) provide information on status of project proposals;
- (c) support to the focal point review process;
- (d) promote and facilitate GEF networks; and
- (e) provide general information on the GEF.

36. UNEP has offered to assume responsibility for the administration of this program which will be financed through a project to be submitted to the Council for its approval. In this role, UNEP will perform the following tasks:

- (a) preparing financial authorizations to transfer funds to GEF focal points and Council Members as required, based upon approval from the GEF Secretariat;
- (b) facilitating and processing travel requests and processing claims for reimbursement of travel costs;
- (c) ensuring financial accountability, including budget monitoring and financial reporting.

37. This proposal was developed after extensive consultation between the GEF Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies, and has their full support. It is recommended that the Council approve the program as outlined above.

Costs of the Support Program

38. Should the Council approve the approach described in this paper, the Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies will prepare a project which will be submitted to the November, 2005 Council Meeting for approval. It is proposed that UNEP will serve as the Implementing Agency. The proposed cost of the focal point and Council Member support program is estimated at \$7,144,000 for a four year period. (see Annex E – Proposed Budget for Focal Point and Council Member Support Program).

ANNEX A: REVISED GUIDELINES FOR FOCAL POINTS SUPPORT

The following revised guidelines are applicable to focal points requesting funding under the Enhanced Focal Point Support program.

1. The GEF Secretariat will provide funding to GEF operational and political focal points to carry out activities to:
 - (a) increase awareness of the GEF strategic priorities, policies and programs;
 - (b) create institutional memory of GEF policies and programs in the appropriate government ministry;
 - (c) increase coordination among national agencies with a view to ensuring greater country ownership and a cohesive approach across the government to global environmental issues and GEF support;
 - (d) develop a database to keep track of GEF portfolio of projects and concepts in the country;
 - (e) promote mainstreaming of global environmental issues into the national sustainable development strategies; and
 - (f) strengthen stakeholder involvement in global environmental programs;

2. Examples of the types of activities which will be considered eligible for funding include, but are not limited to:
 - (a) translation, printing and dissemination of relevant GEF documents;
 - (b) creation of a GEF web site;
 - (c) creation of a GEF project database;
 - (d) creation of a reference library of relevant information and publications on the GEF;
 - (a) organization of meetings for country level coordination;
 - (b) establishment of an inter-agency GEF committee;
 - (c) workshops, training courses and field visits;
 - (d) participation in GEF constituency meetings convened by the Council Member in the region.

3. The following activities will not be eligible for funding:

- (a) international travel (ticket and daily subsistence allowance), with the exception of a Focal Point's participation in no more than two constituency meetings per year convened within the region by the Council Member;
- (b) procurement of computer hardware and other equipment. An exemption can be made for the purchase of an internet modem to be covered out of the \$500 for Internet access and training in its use; and
- (c) support to GEF Council Members. Funds have been allocated separately for Council Members.

4. Focal points will report annually on the use of the resources provided by the GEF.

5. The project document will provide efficient for a four-year period, but resources will be released to countries annually upon receipt of an annual report on how previous resources have been used.

ANNEX B: REVISED GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL MEMBER SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUENCY COORDINATION

The following revised guidelines are applicable to Council Members requesting funding under the Constituency Coordination program approved by the GEF Council in June 2005.

1. The GEF Secretariat will provide funds to Council Members to assist in their outreach to constituency members. Examples of the types of activities which will be funded by these funds are:
 - (a) telephone, faxes and mail;
 - (b) dissemination of GEF Council documents;
 - (c) meetings and telephone conferences for constituency level coordination as necessary; and
 - (d) hosting of constituency meetings prior to GEF Council meetings.
2. Funding will not be available for:
 - (a) procurement of computer hard- and software and other equipment; and
 - (b) recurring expenditures (e.g. staff salary, rent).
3. The GEF will provide funds (up to \$4,000 per year) to the Council Member on an annual basis for a four-year period to cover costs of the services it provides.
4. The Council Member will report annually to the GEF Secretariat on the use of the funds.

ANNEX C: PROCESS FOR APPROVAL OF FOCAL POINT AND COUNCIL MEMBER SUPPORT

1. The GEF Secretariat will send a letter to all Council Members and focal points informing them of the availability of focal point and Council Member support funds and requesting countries to contact the Secretariat with proposed work programs.
2. Each focal point will be required to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with UNEP and to provide UNEP with information on the account to which focal point support funds will be transferred.
3. Accounts must be located within the agency in which the focal point is located and must be clearly identified as an account for use by the focal point to carry out activities funded by the program.
4. Upon approval of the work program, the Secretariat will request UNEP to disburse funds to the dedicated account to carry out activities for one year.

Focal Point Support

5. Countries will be provided with sample work programs and budgets as well as new guidelines⁵ on the types of activities that can be funded by the funds. Guidelines will provide the purpose for which funds can be used, and penalties for misuse or misappropriation of funds will be clearly spelt out.
6. The GEF will provide strategic input into the development of work programs. Countries will be encouraged to contact the Secretariat to discuss proposed work programs, and countries that have developed follow up recommendations resulting from a national Dialogue Workshop will be expected to integrate appropriate follow up recommendations in their work program.
7. Focal Points will be provided with tickets and subsistence to attend constituency meetings by UNEP. Tickets to travel to constituency meetings will be provided upon receipt and confirmation of a constituency meeting. Funding to attend constituency meetings will be provided for both operational and political focal points.
9. Additional funds for the following year will be released only after receipt of an expenditure report from the government.

Constituency Coordination

10. Funds for constituency coordination will be provided to allow Council Members to hold two constituency Meetings a year, prior to each Council Meeting.
11. Funds for constituency coordination will be made available to Council Members upon receipt of an annual work program, an indication of the proposed dates on which both

⁵ Revised Focal Point and Constituency Coordination Guidelines – See Annex

Constituency Meetings will be held, and information on the proposed agenda and logistics for the meetings.

12. Council Members will be required to provide an accounting of the use of the coordination funds before obtaining additional funds for another meeting.

ANNEX D: OTHER GEF ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTING TO STRENGTHENING FOCAL POINTS

In addition to the proposed focal point support program, the Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies will continue to undertake other activities to advance recipient countries' knowledge of the global environment and the GEF, facilitate country access to GEF financing and country ownership of GEF financed projects, and facilitate coordination at the country level. The following lists some of those activities most directly focused on strengthening the capacity of national focal points.

GEF National Dialogue Initiative: The GEF National Dialogue Initiative is a key component of the GEF's efforts to support the GEF focal points. It began implementation in January 2004 following approval by the May 2003 GEF Council. This initiative builds upon lessons learned from the GEF Country Dialogue Workshops (80 countries and more than 5000 GEF stakeholders have participated in 57 consultations and workshop hosted by countries to date). The main objectives of the GEF Dialogue Initiative are to assist Participating countries through a multi-stakeholder dialogue process by:

- (a) promoting in-depth understanding of the GEF's strategic directions, policies and procedures;
- (b) strengthening country coordination and ownership in GEF operations and sharing lessons learned from project implementation; and
- (c) achieving greater mainstreaming of GEF activities into national planning frameworks and coordination and synergies amongst the GEF focal areas and convention issues at the national level.

The Dialogue Initiative is being organized over a four-year period as a collaborative process between the GEF national focal points, the GEF Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies. The focal point support financing will be available to the focal point to assist it, among other things, to implement or monitor implementation of the recommendations resulting from each national GEF National Dialogue. It is also envisioned that GEF Focal Points will be able to participate in a dialogue organized within their region. Such participation can contribute to sharing of knowledge amongst focal points while building the capacity of focal points.

GEF Familiarization Seminars: In seeking financing for the support program, it will be proposed that financing be included to cover the cost of the participation of up to six newly appointed focal points in each of the GEF familiarization workshops, which are held annually in Washington, D.C. The purpose of these workshops is to familiarize newly assigned GEF staff and staff of partner agencies with GEF strategies, programs, policies, and procedures. Attendance of focal points will provide an opportunity for direct contact with staff of the GEF and its partners and will also provide an opportunity for focal points to learn more about the operations of the GEF.

GEF Newsletter – “Talking Points”: The GEF Secretariat produces and disseminates a quarterly newsletter (“Talking Points”) to all focal points, NGO partners and other stakeholders, informing them about recent and upcoming events, developments, and individual projects. It is sent out

both in electronic and hard copy formats and is published in 3 languages, (English, French and Spanish). The newsletters' main functions are to:

- (a) maintain, strengthen and deepen linkages between locally disperse stakeholders, especially NGOs and focal points;
- (b) provide these stakeholders with relevant information and support related to their roles;
- (c) initiate and support exchange of experiences, best practice examples and lessons learned among partners with similar roles; and
- (d) raise/increase awareness about GEF activities and procedures on a country level in order to strengthen country ownership of GEF activities.

The newsletter covers a variety of topics providing information on recent and upcoming events, GEF policy developments, and projects. The Secretariat is working towards having the newsletter become more of an interactive tool that can initiate an exchange of information and experiences, obtain feedback on different topics of interest and serve as a forum of discussion and exchange of experiences among stakeholders. Focal points and other stakeholders have been encouraged to submit articles for publication in the Newsletter.

Participation of GEF Staff at Constituency Meetings: In the past few years, there has been a growing interest expressed by Council Members in having Secretariat staff participate in constituency meetings. Recognizing the limitations in human resources and budget of the Secretariat, yet wishing to be as responsive as possible to the Council Members and their constituents, the Secretariat will use resources within its corporate budget to participate in up to 9 constituency meetings a year. This would mean that each recipient country constituency would be able to expect the Secretariat to participate in one of its constituency meetings every two years. Participation of the Secretariat will be determined based on the constituency's request for support, availability of Secretariat staff and resources and regional distribution.

Orientation for New Council Members: Prior to each Council Meeting, the GEF Secretariat organizes an orientation session to prepare new Council Members and Alternates to participate fully in the Council Meeting. This orientation session covers the history, governance, rules of procedure and agenda for the Council Meeting as well as GEF relations with participating countries.

CEO Consultations with Council Members: Prior to each Council Meeting, the CEO organizes a number of consultations with recipient country Council Members in small groups organized on a regional basis to provide additional information and facilitate an informal exchange of views so as to better advance a better understanding of the issues to be considered at the Council Meeting.

GEF Communications Strategy: The evaluation report indicated that there is a need for better information products and communication to increase the visibility of the GEF at the country level. The GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with the Implementing Agencies, recently completed a communications and outreach strategy. Materials produced consistent with the emerging strategy will support GEF's efforts to strengthen focal points and Council Members.

Activities will include the development of a core group of communications materials using different products, including print, CD-ROM, and visual media products. There will also be a dedicated web page to provide country information. An inter-agency planning group will ensure that there is coordination between the Implementing Agencies and the GEF Secretariat on the types of materials developed, and there will be pro-active dissemination of country focused information directly to focal points and other stakeholders as well as through the country offices of the Implementing Agencies.

Focal Point Recognition. The Secretariat will put in place a programme to recognize the activities of focal points who have contributed to development of good practices in country coordination and development of institutional memory of the GEF at a national level. This recognition will be in the form of a Certification of Recognition from the GEF.

Pipeline Management Information: As previously indicated in the information paper submitted to the GEF Council in November 2003, “The Project Cycle-An Update”⁶, the GEF Secretariat now provides focal points with systematic and periodic information on the status of their GEF project proposals at the GEF Secretariat. This has the potential of re-connecting focal points with their project proposals, strengthens the links with focal points, and provides an additional forum and opportunity for bilateral interaction on a regular basis. World Bank Regional Coordinators also provide Focal Points with a six monthly report on the status of the Bank-GEF portfolio as well as a list of projects in the pipeline.

Linking Focal Points with in-house STAP Experts: The roster of experts of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) comprises experts from all regions of the world. Recognizing that, the GEF Secretariat will notify national focal points of their national STAP roster of experts and facilitate the means of their communication with them as and when deemed appropriate.

⁶ GEF/C.22/Inf.9

ANNEX E: PROPOSED COSTS OF FOCAL POINT SUPPORT PROGRAM

Activity	4-Year Total	2006	2007	2008	2009
Direct support to focal points (\$8,000 to 128 countries)	4,090,000	1,024,000	1,024,000	1,024,000	1,024,000
Travel of focal points to constituency meetings (2 focal points per country to 2 constituency meetings per year)	2,640,000	660,000	660,000	660,000	660,000
Participation of new focal points in GEF familiarization seminars (6 focal points per year / \$5,000 per trip)	120,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Total	6,850,000	1,714,000	1,714,000	1,714,000	1,714,000

Proposed Costs of Council Member Support Program

Activity	4-Year Total	2006	2007	2008	2009
Convening of constituency meetings and communication with constituents (\$4,000 per year for 17 multicountry recipient constituencies)	272,000	68,000	68,000	68,000	68,000
Total	272,000	68,000	68,000	68,000	68,000