



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

International Waters





THE ISSUE

Healthy marine and freshwater ecosystems are critical to sustaining life on earth. Water—both freshwater and the oceans—supports and connects ecosystem functions, human health, and key economic sectors. Yet our aquatic ecosystems face unprecedented threats. Ocean ecosystems are under pressure from climate change, acidification, habitat loss, pollution, excessive fishing, unintended effects of shipping, and seabed mining. Freshwater ecosystems face threats from climate change, urbanization, and increasing demand for food, which are polluting our waters and destroying freshwater habitats.

Most large marine and freshwater ecosystems cross political boundaries. Globally, more than 300 watersheds and over 360 aquifers cross the political boundaries of two or more countries and 58 out of the 64 large marine ecosystems globally are shared by two or more countries. Transboundary watersheds cover about half of the Earth's land surface and are home to about 40% of the global population.

Conserving these ecosystems and ensuring they are managed sustainably requires that countries coordinate actions to secure a healthy environment and achieve sustainable development outcomes. GEF experience demonstrates that sustainable management of transboundary resources requires a common understanding of the pressures shared ecosystems are facing, coupled with implementation of coordinated national and regional investment plans.

THE APPROACH

The GEF is the largest funding mechanism for multi-country collaboration on water and the ocean, with 156 GEF recipient countries and 24 non-recipient countries working together to manage their transboundary water resources. Countries participating in GEF International Waters (IW) projects have successfully negotiated numerous regional cooperation frameworks, treaties, and protocols, ranging from cooperation on shared freshwater resources to agreements on marine resources.

GEF IW investments facilitate integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that engage the public and private sector, civil society, nongovernmental organizations, and bilateral and multilateral institutions. They are designed to work at multiple scales—from village chiefs to cabinet ministers—and across entire watersheds, from source to sea.

An example of such a process can be experienced through the Pacific IWRM project that supported national integrated water resource management plans in the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and how these then not only informed national policy formulation and improved freshwater management, but also positively impacted the coastal zone. The IW portfolio illustrates how regionally agreed frameworks lead to national action and produce global environmental benefits. At the same time, the GEF's approach aims to incorporate the value of natural resources and ecosystem services into national economies and to provide tangible economic benefits from the sustainable management of shared water resources.

This integrated approach demonstrates the transformative social and economic impact that sustainable management of transboundary fresh and marine water resources can have on national economies. The GEF's IW Focal Area has a unique mandate: support transboundary cooperation in shared marine and freshwater ecosystems. The GEF has proven successful in achieving long-term benefits by building trust between states that often find themselves locked in complex and long-lasting conflicts over marine and/or freshwater use. Setting effective policy goals, coupled with investments, requires working at all scales, with a range of stakeholders, in the public and private sectors and across watersheds, from source-to-sea and beyond.

GEF-7 investment in International Waters has three key objectives:

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL BLUE ECONOMY OPPORTUNITIES

The Blue Economy concept identifies the oceans as areas for potential sustainable development of existing and new sectors, including tourism, seabed mining, bioprospecting, renewable energy production, fisheries and aquaculture, coastal development, and marine transport. The GEF helps countries identify sustainable public and private investments in the Blue Economy by funding collective management of coastal and marine systems, and by supporting the implementation of the full range of integrated ocean policies and legal and institutional reforms. This approach is accomplished through investments in sustaining healthy coastal and marine ecosystems, catalyzing sustainable fisheries management, and addressing pollution reduction in marine environments.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT IN THE AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation is especially challenging in the complex ecosystems in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions (ABNJs).

Commonly called the "high seas," no one nation has sole management responsibility for these areas of ocean. Open oceans cover 40% of the planet and are increasingly threatened by over-fishing of iconic pelagic migratory species, bottom trawling on seamounts, pollution, and extraction of minerals and hydrocarbons.

ENHANCING WATER SECURITY IN SHARED FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS

Freshwater is vital to life; yet, lakes, rivers, and groundwater basins are incredibly complex to manage. Transboundary river basins cover over 50% of the earth's land surface and are home to about 40% of the world's population. Cooperation on water, therefore, is vital to provide secure access to water, food, energy, and ecosystem services, and to increase resilience for each nation. Shared groundwater resources are especially hard to manage due to the limited knowledge of the resource and its 'invisibility.' With mounting pressures on water resources, and increasing pressures from climate variability and change, managing surface and groundwater is the only sustainable path. GEF support focuses on three areas of strategic action: advancing information exchange and early warning systems; enhancing regional and national cooperation of shared freshwater surface and groundwater basins; and investing





in water, food, energy, and environmental security. In shared marine systems, the GEF has a unique opportunity to assist countries in effectively addressing a suite of stressors — overfishing, land-based sources of pollution, and degradation of key coastal and marine ecosystems—through a combination of national and regional investments. Targeted interventions will strengthen national Blue Economy opportunities as well as ensure conservation of ABNJs. These efforts will directly support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Aichi Targets. A good example of such investments is the long-term engagement in the West and Central Pacific Ocean, which is home to over half of the world’s tuna stocks.

systems, the GEF will focus on interventions in transboundary basins and aquifers where water stress creates a challenge, but also can be a driver and opportunity for cooperation. Interventions will prioritize preventative actions in transboundary basins facing multiple stressors that place them at risk for conflict on national and regional levels. Investment in cooperation among countries, as experienced in the Amazon River basin in South America, the Dniester River basin in Europe, and the Niger River basin in Africa, can be one avenue to increase interaction among countries and enhance trade and transport of goods and services. These above described investments provide an entry point for regional integration and peaceful country relations.

THE WAY FORWARD

The GEF’s work with 15 SIDS nations and partner organizations has been instrumental in creating a convention for the conservation and sustainable use of tuna. The GEF has recently provided additional resources to support monitoring and enforcement of the tuna convention. Another exciting investment that will be supporting the global coverage of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), namely the Blue Nature Alliance, is a unique partnership between philanthropists and the GEF that has the potential to attract other partners over the coming years. In shared freshwater

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet’s most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided close to **\$20 billion** in grants and mobilized an additional **\$107 billion** in co-financing for more than **4,700 projects** in **170 countries**. Through its Small Grants Programme, the GEF has provided support to nearly 24,000 civil society and community initiatives in 128 countries.

