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GEF Council  
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Agenda Item 11

**ELEMENTS OF A GEF OPERATIONAL PROGRAM  
FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF  
DESERTIFICATION AND DEFORESTATION  
THROUGH SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT**

**Recommended Council Decision**

The Council reviewed document GEF/C.20/8, *Elements of a GEF Operational Program for the Prevention and Control of Desertification and Deforestation through Sustainable Land Management*, and approves the elements, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by November 15, 2002, as the basis for the preparation of an operational program. The Council requests the Secretariat to develop, in consultation with the Implementation Agencies, relevant Executing Agencies, and the Secretariats of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and its Global Mechanism, a draft operational program on the basis of the revised elements. The draft operational program should be circulated to Council Members for comment before it is finalized and published.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Land degradation is an important global environmental issue because of its adverse impacts on ecosystems that are critical for the survival of more than one billion people in developing countries. People are an integral part of ecosystems and they depend on interactions with ecosystem processes such as the biogeochemical cycles – carbon cycle, hydrological cycle, and nutrient cycle – and ecosystem services and products for their survival.

2. In accordance with the Global Environment Facility's Instrument<sup>1</sup> and continuous guidance from the Council, the GEF, since its establishment in 1991, has been providing incremental funding to assist developing countries to prevent and control land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, as it relates to its four focal areas – biodiversity conservation, climate change, international waters, and ozone layer depletion.

3. In 2000, an independent study<sup>2</sup> of the GEF's support for land degradation prevention and control concluded that: "... the large majority of current projects identified as land degradation linkages projects have been designed to address the focal areas as a first priority and only in some cases has land degradation mitigation been a priority." The study recommended a fundamental change in the way land degradation is addressed in the GEF if it is to have a significant positive impact on the global environment.

4. In December 2001, the GEF Council recommended a fundamental change in the way land degradation is addressed in the GEF. It agreed to recommend to the GEF Assembly at its meeting in October 2002 "... amendments to the Instrument to designate land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, as a focal area, as a means of enhancing GEF support for the successful implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification."<sup>3</sup> This designation would help to optimize the global environment benefits of GEF-funded activities in arid, semi-arid, sub-humid, and humid areas of the world because it would make sustainable land management a primary focus of GEF assistance.

5. Increased emphasis on sustainable land management is necessary because inappropriate land use practices are among the main causes of some global environmental problems such as the loss of biodiversity, increased carbon emissions, and degradation of national and transboundary water bodies (surface freshwater, groundwater, and coastal waters). The global environment benefits of GEF-supported activities on land degradation prevention and control would include the following:

- (a) Restoration of stability in ecosystem structure and functions. Ecosystem instability can alter or fragment habitats of global importance leading to the loss of biodiversity such as species richness and genetic diversity, particularly in agricultural landscapes, freshwater

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<sup>1</sup> GEF 1994. Instrument For the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility.

<sup>2</sup> Berry, L. and J. Olson, 2000. GEF Land Degradation Study.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Summary of the Chairs. GEF Council Meeting, December 5-7, 2001.

bodies, and the coastal and marine environment. It can also result in the loss of ecosystem resilience and ecosystem services such as nutrient and water cycles.

- (b) Reduction in carbon dioxide emission and improved sequestration of carbon. Increased emission of carbon dioxide can alter global or regional climatic conditions through the “greenhouse effect”. The loss of carbon sequestered in soil and biomass can have adverse impacts, including on water regulation, soil formation, and nitrogen fixation.
- (c) Stabilization of sediment storage and release in water bodies. Changes in sediment storage and stream flow can lead to increased frequency and intensity of floods in watersheds and the loss of biodiversity, particularly in freshwater bodies and marine ecosystems.
- (d) Reduction in transboundary wind borne movement of dust and other particulates that are harmful to human health and ecosystems and can alter weather patterns.

6. This document, The Elements of a GEF Operational Program for the Prevention and Control of Desertification and Deforestation through Sustainable Land Management, outlines the main strategic considerations and operational principles that would guide the development of GEF-eligible activities. It is the first step in the development of a GEF Operational Program that will provide detailed operational guidance to countries and GEF Implementing and Executing Agencies on how to develop activities for GEF support.

## **II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

7. The objective of the GEF’s operational program on the prevention and control of land degradation is to mitigate the root causes and negative impacts of land degradation on terrestrial and aquatic (freshwater, groundwater, and coastal waters) ecological systems through sustainable land management.

## **III. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS**

8. The rationale for GEF’s assistance to countries for land degradation prevention and control, as noted above, is to achieve global environmental benefits within the context of sustainable development. These benefits complement local and national benefits such as improved land and water productivity, food security, and rural development. GEF support, therefore, helps to integrate global environmental concerns into the mainstream of sustainable development efforts in the affected regions and countries.

9. The main strategic considerations guiding GEF-financed activities to prevent and control land degradation through sustainable land management are:

- (a) Integrating conservation and sustainable use of land resources as a priority into overall strategic frameworks such as local, national, and sub-regional sustainable development plans, policies, and programs.
- (b) Helping people, particularly local communities, to protect and sustainably manage non-protected and inhabited dryland, forest, and mountain ecosystems, particularly in agricultural landscapes, through targeted and cost-effective interventions at local level.
- (c) Integrating sustainable land management interventions to achieve global environment benefits into three other GEF focal areas – biodiversity conservation, climate change, and international waters.
- (d) Building institutional capacity, from the community level to the national level where appropriate, to effectively address land degradation.
- (e) Developing a portfolio that encompasses representative non-protected ecosystems and people affected by land degradation.
- (f) Targeting and designing GEF activities which complement recipient countries agreed sustainable land management objectives, particularly at the community level, in strategic and cost-effective ways.

10. Early intervention in areas vulnerable to land degradation and rehabilitation of degraded areas.

#### **IV. OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

11. The following principles, based on the GEF Instrument, Operational Strategy, and Council decisions, will guide the development and implementation of GEF-eligible activities on land degradation prevention and control:

- (a) GEF eligible activities will be consistent with the policies and program priorities related to sustainable land management of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- (b) GEF will provide grants and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental cost of measures to achieve global environmental benefits within the context of sustainable development.
- (c) The GEF's financial contribution will be based on the principle of cost sharing. Consistent with its catalytic role, GEF funding will leverage additional financing from other sources for sustainable development or baseline activities. The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD is expected to cooperate with the GEF Implementing and Executing Agencies to assist countries to leverage non-GEF funds for such activities.

- (d) Countries will seek to promote synergies among the UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC in programs and projects they develop for GEF funding.
- (e) Programs and projects will be country driven and they should have strong country ownership, based on national priorities as outlined in the National Action Programs, Sub-Regional Action Programs and Regional Action Programs to Combat Desertification and Mitigate the Effects of Drought, Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, National Capacity Needs Self Assessments, National Adaptation Programmes of Action, National Development Plans, and other priority setting documents.
- (f) Programs and projects will respond to strategic priorities outlined in the GEF Business Plan.
- (g) Programs and projects will adopt integrated approaches to natural resources management by integrating the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of land management issues to achieve both global environment and sustainable development benefits.
- (h) Programs and projects will facilitate innovation, demonstration, and replication of good sustainable land management practices.
- (i) Mechanisms will be developed during the development and implementation of programs and projects to facilitate effective participation of stakeholder groups, including the intended beneficiaries and affected groups.

## **V. ELIGIBILITY FOR GEF ASSISTANCE**

12. Developing countries and countries with economies in transition that are parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification will be eligible for GEF funding for land degradation prevention and control.

## **VI. MAJOR AREAS OF GEF INTERVENTIONS**

13. The GEF will provide incremental funding for activities aimed at preventing or mitigating the root causes and negative impacts of land degradation on the structure and function of terrestrial and aquatic (freshwater, groundwater, and coastal waters) ecological systems through sustainable land management at the local, national, and regional levels. The following four types of inter-related interventions will be

eligible for GEF funding – enabling activities, capacity building, on-the-ground investments, and targeted research<sup>4</sup>.

### *Sequencing of GEF Assistance*

14. The GEF's support would initially focus primarily on enabling activities and capacity building activities that aimed at helping countries to build a conducive enabling environment and strong institutional and human capacity for sustainable land management. With these fundamentals in place, GEF assistance would then focus on supporting catalytic on-the-ground investments for land degradation prevention and control to achieve both global environment and sustainable development benefits.

### *Enabling Activities*

15. Enabling activities are aimed at assisting countries to provide information to meet the requirements of global environment conventions and/or to identify priority issues and actions required to address global environment issues<sup>5</sup>. The GEF will provide full funding for the agreed costs of eligible enabling activities aimed at assisting countries to meet the objectives of the UNCCD.

16. To ensure efficient and timely assistance to countries seeking GEF support for enabling activities, GEF's expedited procedures will be used for the approval of funds. Enabling activity proposals would be submitted to the GEF Secretariat through a GEF Implementing or Executing Agency.

17. For GEF's initial support for enabling activities, each country could request up to US\$250,000 to assist it to build on and harmonize various land degradation-related priorities outlined in action plans such as the National Action Programs, Sub-Regional Action Programs, and Regional Action Programs for Desertification control, Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, National Implementation Plans on Persistent Organic Pollutants, National Capacity Needs Self Assessments, and National Adaptation Programmes of Action into an integrated medium-term implementation program for land degradation prevention and control (e.g. to be implemented over 10 years). The medium-term program would provide an adaptive management framework to outline specific interventions for action on the ground.

18. This program will form the basis for countries to mobilize GEF and non-GEF funding for specific projects.

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<sup>4</sup> In elaborating an operational program, the Secretariat will take into account the evolution within the GEF of its policies concerning enabling activities and capacity building activities, in light of the work that is being developed for Council consideration to respond to the Capacity Development Initiative as well as the Policy Recommendations of the Third Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund that recognize the need to rationalize and coordinate activities related to enabling activities and capacity building to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency.

<sup>5</sup> GEF 1996. GEF Operational Strategy.



- (a) The medium-term implementation program would include information such as:
- (b) Initial assessment of the extent of land degradation and identification of priority areas for action.
- (c) Global environment and sustainable development objectives and expected outcomes.
- (d) Individual projects and their objectives, expected outcomes, and indicative components and costs.
- (e) Prioritization, sequencing of implementation, and time tables for projects proposed under the implementation program.
- (f) Strategy for the mobilization of funds for program implementation. Development of this strategy should be closely coordinated with GEF Implementing and Executing Agencies and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD.
- (g) Proposed country's commitments such as reforms of policies, incentive structure, and legislation as well as financial contributions (cash and in-kind contribution) for the implementation of the program.
- (h) Program level indicators to monitor and evaluate implementation performance and impacts on the global environment and sustainable development.

### *Capacity Building<sup>6</sup>*

19. The GEF would provide assistance to countries to strengthen their capacity to effectively address land degradation issues. The focus of GEF capacity building assistance may include:

- (a) Institutional strengthening and human resource development to enable countries to reform land management policies, regulations, and incentive structure to promote sustainable land use and protect the global environment.
- (b) Development of mechanisms for participatory land use planning and management
- (c) Assessment of land resources and land use practices as the basis for management measures.
- (d) Development of information management systems for decision-making on sustainable land management as part of broader planning and management activities.

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<sup>6</sup> GEF assistance will take into account, among other things, the results of the National Capacity Needs Self Assessments being funded by the GEF.

- (e) Activities to facilitate the synthesis and dissemination of information on good land management practices to protect the global environment and promote sustainable development, including indigenous knowledge.
- (f) Selected community-based demonstration projects to facilitate the transfer of good sustainable land management practices.

20. The GEF would emphasize use of its Medium Sized Projects (i.e. projects with up to US\$1 million in GEF financing) for capacity building projects.

#### *On-the-Ground Investment*

21. Where institutional and human resource capacity is demonstrated, the GEF would provide assistance to a country to implement priority investments and associated capacity development activities identified in its medium-term implementation program for land degradation prevention and control to achieve both global environment and sustainable development benefits. The GEF would place greater emphasis on pilot or demonstration projects that can catalyze wider adoption of viable and cost-effective sustainable land management practices and technologies suitable for the local environment.

#### *Targeted Research*

22. GEF would provide assistance for targeted research projects to address science and technology as well as biophysical and socioeconomic issues related to land degradation prevention and control. This may include research on the root causes of degradation and barriers to the adoption of integrated land management approaches. The findings of such applied research should help to enhance the global environment and sustainable development benefits of sustainable land management activities.