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RBM SYSTEM: PROCESS TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF OBJECTIVES, BASELINES, AND RESULTS INDICATORS

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INTRODUCTION

1. The following document was prepared by the GEF Secretariat in response to the Council's request at the November 2010 Council meeting to clarify how result-based management (RBM) at the GEF establishes "a process to ensure the quality of objectives, baselines, and results indicators, where each step of the results chain can be easily defined and tracked."¹

2. To fully understand how RBM at the GEF achieves the above, it is important to briefly affirm the shared responsibility for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the GEF. On different levels, for different partners, and involving different functions within the GEF, a complex picture emerges of who is involved and what is to be done. The GEF Council provides the overall framework, starting with agreement on objectives and corporate and focal area results frameworks. The GEF Secretariat proposes to the Council how these objectives and results should be monitored, and the GEF Evaluation Office (EO) proposes to the Council how these should be evaluated. The GEF Agencies and their partners execute project, program, and portfolio M&E. The GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) provides advice on indicators, targets, and evaluation approaches.²

3. Based on these different roles, the Secretariat provides guidance and minimum requirements for the setting of objectives, completion of baselines, inclusion of relevant results indicators, and annual reporting. The overarching aim of the GEF's RBM is to improve management effectiveness and accountability by defining realistic expected results and targets, monitoring progress toward the achievement of expected results and targets, integrating lessons learned into management decisions, and reporting on performance. The partnership model of the GEF, necessitates the use of the combined capacities of the GEF partnership to monitor and report results. The GEF Secretariat therefore relies on the internal monitoring systems of the GEF Agencies and the breadth of the Agencies' implementation expertise to track and report on progress at the project or program level.

4. The role of the independent GEF EO within the overall RBM context is also important. "While monitoring is one of the key instruments of RBM, evaluation looks at monitoring and RBM with a critical eye to assess their validity, credibility, and reliability. *Monitoring* tells whether the organization, country, portfolio, or project is on track to achieving its intended objectives. *Evaluation* provides information on whether the project or portfolio is on the right track. Evaluation also provides evidence on how changes are taking place, and the strengths and weaknesses of the design of the projects, programs, or corporate strategies embedded in the RBM."³

This distinction is often blurred, but it is clearly defined and outlined in the revised GEF M&E Policy (<http://www.thegef.org/gef/node/4184>). Evaluation seeks to address issues of causality, giving evidence as to why targets and outcomes have or have not been achieved. Input from the

¹ GEF/C.37/3, Annex B: Policy Recommendations for the Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund, paragraph 41.

² Modified from *The GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (2010)*, p. 19

³ *GEF M&E Policy*, 2010, p.9.

GEF EO's work feeds back into GEF management decisions, project design, and overall strategies.

5. This document provides an overview of how RBM at the GEF explicitly defines and tracks each step in the results chain. The document provides an overview of the GEF's RBM framework, outlines the results chain developed for GEF-5, highlights how RBM is embedded in the revised M&E policy, provides an explanation for how each step of the results chain is tracked through the project cycle, and details additional tools that are under development in GEF-5 to strengthen the system.

RBM FRAMEWORK HISTORY

In June 2007, the Secretariat submitted a RBM framework to the Council for its consideration. The approved RBM framework⁴ outlined the conceptual and methodological building blocks of how the GEF as an institution intended to measure progress toward results. RBM was first implemented during GEF-4, incorporating monitoring and reporting at three levels: institutional (organization); programmatic (focal area); and project. The framework was built on the strategic programming for GEF-4 focal area strategies and their associated indicators⁵ (Figure 1)

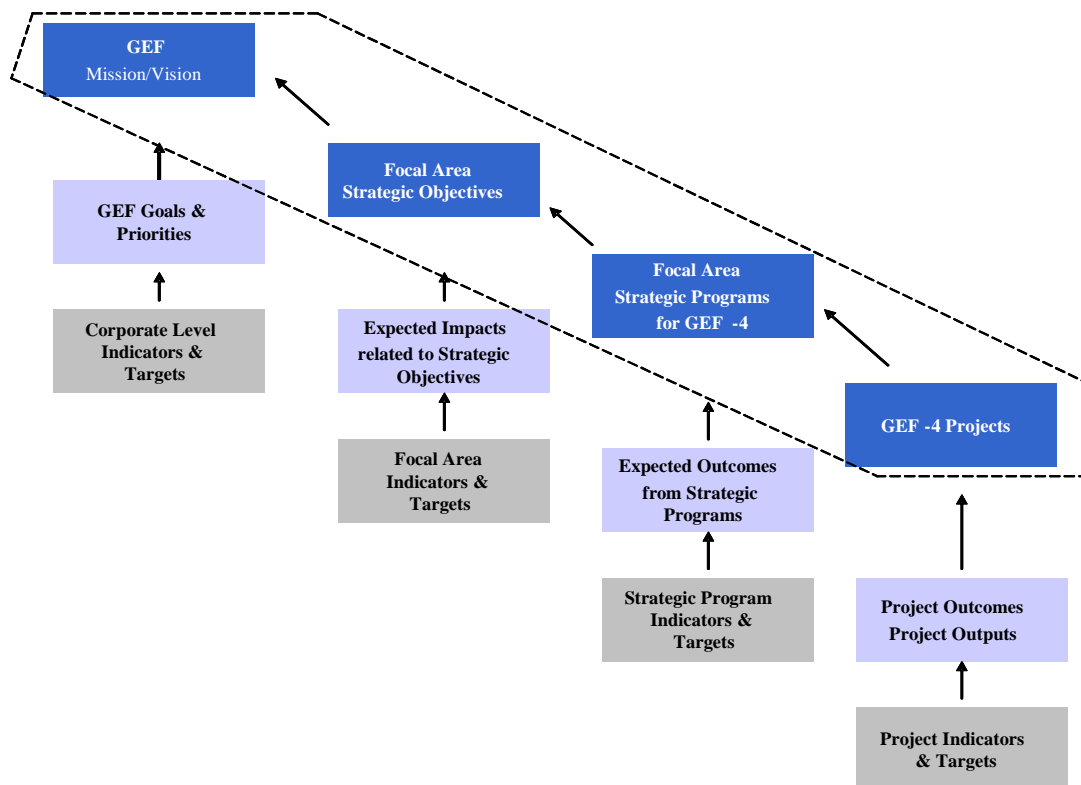


Figure 1: Results Framework Linking Goal, Impacts, Outcomes and Outputs

⁴ GEF/C.31/11.

⁵ GEF/C.31/10.

6. In GEF-4, the Secretariat began work to systematically track key indicators at the project level through the development of tracking tools. The first focal area to launch and test a tracking tool was biodiversity (BD) during GEF-3. Climate change (CC), international waters (IW), and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), all developed and piloted tracking tools during GEF-4. For projects under implementation in these focal areas, the Secretariat is now able to assess progress toward outcomes that align with the overall focal area objectives agreed to as part of the fourth replenishment. Establishing the key indicators that the GEF should track at the portfolio level was a key first step in measuring progress toward results. To further strengthen RBM and to ensure greater quality for achieving results, there are several other elements the GEF is implementing during GEF-5.

RESULTS CHAIN GEF-5

7. During GEF-5, there are several ways the GEF will work to strengthen its RBM system and specifically ensure that each step in the results chain is monitored and assessed. To begin with, for GEF-5, the GEF has defined corporate level goals that align with the mandate of the GEF. The focal area strategies and their respective results frameworks align with these goals and in turn individual projects or programs must directly reflect the objectives and implementation priorities of countries, and support the contribution to one or more focal area objectives, the results chain is therefore clearly laid out from project to GEF goal (see figure 2).



Figure 2: The GEF-5 Results Chain

8. The results architecture for GEF-5 identifies four broad, corporate-level strategic goals, each with a select number of indicators and accompanying targets. The four strategic goals cover all activities under the mandate of the GEF:

- (a) Strategic Goal 1 - Conserve, sustainably use, and manage biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources globally, taking into account the anticipated impacts of climate change.
- (b) Strategic Goal 2 - Reduce global climate change risks by: 1) stabilizing atmospheric GHG concentrations through emission reduction actions; and 2) assisting countries to adapt to climate change, including variability.
- (c) Strategic Goal 3 - Promote the sound management of chemicals throughout their lifecycle to minimize the effect on human health and global environments.
- (d) Strategic Goal 4 - Build national and regional capacities and enabling conditions for global environmental protection and sustainable development.

9. With the higher level goals defined, the GEF has a stronger articulation of how objectives at the individual project level should align to the overall mission of the GEF. This provides a framework for both the monitoring and evaluation of the objectives laid out as part of the fifth replenishment process.

M&E POLICY REVISION

10. The GEF-5 results architecture dovetails with the revision of the M&E Policy (http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/ME_Policy_2010.pdf). In the revision of the policy, greater emphasis was given to RBM, including baselines and ensuring alignment with the results frameworks of the focal areas. This is most clearly seen in the revision of Minimum Requirement 1: Design of the M&E Plans:

- “All projects and programs will include a concrete and fully budgeted M&E plan by the time of CEO endorsement for full-size projects and CEO approval for medium-size projects. Project logical frameworks should align, where appropriate, to the GEF’s focal area results frameworks. This M&E plan contains the following as a minimum:
- ... SMART indicators for results and implementation linked appropriately to the focal area results frameworks; additional indicators that can deliver reliable and valid information to management may also be identified in the M&E plan.
- Baseline for the project or program, with a description of the problem to be addressed, with indicator data or, if major baseline indicators are not identified, an alternative plan for addressing this, by CEO endorsement.
- Identification of reviews and evaluations that will be undertaken, including midterm reviews and terminal evaluations.
- Organizational set-up and budgets for M&E.”

11. Taken together, the GEF's RBM framework, GEF-5 results architecture, and revised M&E policy lay out the blueprint for how the GEF tracks results. The processes that are in place to operationalize these policies ensure the alignment of objectives and indicators with GEF focal strategies and goals. Ensuring the quality of baselines, results indicators, and objectives is embedded into the larger GEF partnership where monitoring and evaluation are a shared responsibility. The next section details through the project cycle, how the Secretariat, in collaboration with the GEF partnership, operationalizes RBM to track each step of the results chain.

RBM AND THE PROJECT CYCLE

12. With the policy frameworks in place, the GEF has turned its focus to improving the systems utilized for implementing RBM. In the project cycle, there has been greater emphasis on ensuring quality of results indicators and baselines at the project design stage. The GEF is also working to improve its ability to report and utilize results from projects and programs under implementation. The following section outlines how RBM is integrated into each step of the project cycle.

13. Step 1 - project concept: At the project concept stage, GEF program managers review project identification form (PIF) submissions *to ensure the alignment of project objectives to GEF focal area outcomes*. At the request of the Council, the Secretariat has reformulated the PIF template to request information on indicative funding per focal area expected outcome. The Secretariat will report on the amount of funding programmed per focal area outcome over the course of GEF-5. Since this is the first time project proponents are being asked to give indicative funding amounts per outcome at the concept stage, the Secretariat and Agencies will take stock of issues, challenges, and experiences in this area.

14. In addition to the Secretariat review, all PIFs are screened by STAP. "The purpose of early stage project screening by STAP is to decide at the earliest opportunity whether a project proposal could benefit from high-level scientific advice in its further preparation and whether the project proponents have the necessary access to and understanding of recent advances in the relevant aspects of science and technology."⁶

15. Step 2 - fully developed projects: At CEO endorsement for full sized projects or approval for medium sized projects, projects must include a fully budgeted M&E plan, a detailed results framework/logframe, and a completed tracking tool. A completed tracking tool *ensures that key outcome indicators include a baseline and establish targets*.

16. Step 3 - project implementation: The GEF Agencies submit on an annual basis individual Project Implementation Reports PIRs for all full and medium-sized GEF projects. The PIRs provide a status update including ratings on implementation progress and progress toward achieving global environmental benefits. These are aggregated and reported to Council through the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

17. In addition to individual PIRs, Agencies are requested to fill out and submit tracking tools for projects. Each project must submit a focal area tracking tool at the time of CEO

⁶ STAP website, Accessed April 21, 2011:
(<http://www.unep.org/stap/ScreeningofPIFsInTheProjectCycleDocument/tabid/2913/language/en-US/Default.aspx>)

endorsement/approval. Tracking tools are then submitted at mid-term and project completion in conjunction with the PIRs. This allows the Secretariat to *establish a baseline, as well as track and report on relevant results indicators at the portfolio level.*

18. Step 4 - project completion and evaluation: The GEF Agencies also submit to the EO terminal evaluations of all full and medium-sized GEF projects that complete implementation each year. Several GEF Agencies have an established process in place whereby an independent evaluation office reviews and validates terminal evaluations and *assesses the quality of the terminal evaluation reports*. Where such processes exist, the EO assesses the extent to which the independent review process meets GEF standards and provides the required information for GEF oversight and reporting. Once the EO has deemed that a GEF Agency's independent review process meets GEF standards and information needs, it may accept the reviews and the verified ratings by the independent evaluation office of the respective Agency. The GEF EO will also periodically assess the extent to which the independent review process continues to meet GEF standards.

19. Where a GEF Agency does not have an independent evaluation unit or lacks an independent review process, the GEF EO will review the terminal evaluation reports to verify ratings and assess quality.

20. The EO presents an Annual Performance Report (APR) evaluating the performance of the GEF portfolio. As part of the APR, the EO verifies ratings on outcomes and sustainability for projects for which a terminal evaluation has been submitted. An assessment is also undertaken on relevance, which focuses primarily on determining *whether the anticipated outcomes are relevant to the GEF mandate for generating global environmental benefits.*

ADDITIONAL TOOLS UNDER IMPLEMENTATION

21. While the Secretariat has a number of effective tools in place to track the results chain, there are a number of initiatives that will be implemented in GEF-5 to strengthen portfolio monitoring and in turn improve the Secretariat's ability to ensure quality.

22. *Quality-at-entry*: While the Secretariat program manager's review of projects serves as a quality-at-entry mechanism, the Secretariat has not systematically examined the consistency of reviews, criteria, and quality of specific design issues. As such, the Secretariat will develop a methodology for examining some of these issues, in particular budgeted M&E plans, quality of baselines, and integration of relevant results indicators.

23. *Automization of data*: To effectively track the results chain, RBM must be fully integrated into the GEF's information technology infrastructure. The Secretariat's ability to capture and analyze standardized information in a timely manner allows the Secretariat to report on portfolio level outcomes and output indicators agreed to in the GEF-5 Programming Document.⁷ The Secretariat has prioritized the need to capture data for the purposes of RBM and has already made progress in this regard. Over the next several years, the Secretariat will be working to strengthen this area.

⁷ GEF/C.37/3, Annex B: Policy Recommendations for the Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund, paragraph 41

24. *Lessons learned:* The Secretariat, in collaboration with the GEF Agencies and STAP, is working to improve its system of extracting and utilizing lessons learned. As part of this process, focal areas are developing targeted and measurable learning questions. Some of these questions will delve into issues such as the quality of a particular set of results indicators.

CONCLUSION

25. RBM was introduced at the GEF during GEF-4, when the fundamental building blocks of the system were conceptualized based on the experience and input from all GEF partners. The results chain, as has been the case since the inception of the GEF, begins with GEF projects and programs. RBM compels projects and programs to explicitly link objectives to focal goals. The system has been updated further in GEF-5 to include clearly defined corporate objectives, outcomes, and targets, to which focal area goals align.

26. Over the course of the past five years, RBM policies at the GEF have been fully developed and are now operational. The system has been structured to support monitoring by tracking where a project or program is at any given time with respect to corporate objectives, targets, and outcomes. The system provides regular feedback on performance of projects and programs taking into account the external environment. Information from systematic monitoring serves as a critical input to ongoing management decisions (adaptive management), evaluation, and learning.

27. As outlined in the above sections the “process to ensure the quality of objectives, baselines, and results indicators, where each step of the results chain can be easily defined and tracked” is in place. As with any robust RBM system, however, the Secretariat will continue to learn, improve and adjust its system as necessary to advance the tracking of the GEF’s results chain.