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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Monitoring and Evaluation of Climate Change Adaptation

STAP Advisory Note

This advisory note presents to the GEF Council the conclusions and recommendations from STAP for strengthening the monitoring & evaluation (M&E) of climate change adaptation (CCA) and leveraging M&E for more effective learning, planning and implementation of adaptation strategies and investments in future.

The note draws from, and is based on the companion STAP report, “Strengthening the Monitoring & Evaluation of Climate Change Adaptation” (in press). In addition, this report reflects the synthesis of efforts over the past two years that were supported by the STAP and UNEP’s Global Programme of Research on Climate Change Vulnerability Impacts and Adaptation (PROVIA). While the primary input for this advisory note is STAP’s synthesis report, the note also draws from a wider base of knowledge regarding the current state of national and multilateral actions on adaptation, the outcomes of the Paris Agreement, and the needs and priorities of the GEF.

1. The GEF and climate change adaptation

Over the past decade-and-a-half, the GEF has been a leader in supporting climate change adaptation in the developing world – by investing over US\$1.3 billion to help communities, notably through the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). The GEF has been an “early mover” in climate change adaptation, and this base of past experience is not only a rich source of insights and learning; it also places the GEF in a unique position to scale-up and mainstream adaptation in the future.

As the recent GEF publication “Time to Adapt: Insights from the GEF’s Experience in Adaptation to Climate Change¹” notes, ensuring the climate resilience of development is an imperative now and for the foreseeable future, given the current trajectories of climate change. The GEF has a critical role to play in this endeavor, given its past experience, and the strong synergies between climate resilience and the core mandate of the GEF for securing global environmental benefits.

The GEF can play a central role in advancing the climate adaptation agenda by continuing the work being done through the SCCF/LDCF, in response to UNFCCC mandates and guidance; and building on this work through a broader strategy that mainstreams climate resilience. Indeed, with the anticipated entry into force of the Paris Agreement, there is increased and renewed emphasis on accelerating implementation – and given its rich experience, track record and internal capabilities, the GEF is clearly well-positioned to support this agenda.

¹ <https://www.thegef.org/publications/time-adapt-insights-gefs-experience-adaptation-climate-change>

With regard to a broader strategy for climate adaptation, STAP recommends that the GEF consider the suggestions from the STAP report to the 5th GEF Assembly – Delivering Global Environmental Benefits for Sustainable Development (May 2014)². Specifically, STAP recommended that the GEF:

- a) “*Climate-proofs*” interventions in climate sensitive systems, sectors and regions to ensure continued delivery of Global Environmental Benefits (GEB’s). This would involve screening projects for climate risks and developing and adopting suitable risk management measures. A starting point would be to ensure effective use of risk screening tools and climate information;
- b) *Seeks* adaptation co-benefits of interventions in GEF focal areas – given that the generation of GEB’s can often create opportunities for strengthening the resilience of communities and systems to climate change impacts. For example, in ecosystem-based adaptation, ecosystem restoration can serve as a means for reducing the vulnerability of human socio-economic systems. A careful analysis of past GEF experiences in drawing such linkages; for example through the Strategic Pilot on Adaptation (SPA) or through multi-focal and multi-trust projects, may provide useful inputs; and
- c) *Explores* approaches that allow multiple objectives and multiple benefits to be achieved simultaneously. STAP has consistently supported the idea of integrated approaches, and believes that done well, such approaches could be a very effective means for simultaneously achieving GEB’s as well as climate resilience and sustainable development benefits.

The lessons and insights from past GEF experience are likely to prove valuable for designing and implementing such a strategy. The STAP report on M&E and the recommendations and conclusions in this advisory note may be seen as a step in this direction.

2. STAP report on Strengthening Monitoring & Evaluation of Adaptation

M&E plays an essential role in understanding where to focus investments, what is working and what is not, why this is the case, and how to learn from experience to know how to maximize impact. M&E can (and should) support strategic and effective investments in CCA. While there are now many M&E systems in place for CCA at project, country, and international levels, the field is still relatively young and rapidly evolving. In fact, despite 15 years of CCA project implementation experience at the GEF and elsewhere, M&E has only in the past few years gained broader attention, focus, and prioritization as a strategic toolset for not only understanding what is and is not working well, but for ongoing learning and improvement to enhance results and impact. In this context, the GEF STAP and UNEP/PROVIA

² <http://www.stapgef.org/delivering-global-environmental-benefits-for-sustainable-development-report-to-the-5th-gef-assembly/>

initiated a process to assess the state of knowledge on CCA M&E, leading to a synthesis report which serves as the basis for this advisory note.

The synthesis report identifies a number of methodological challenges and difficulties for M&E starting with the difficulty of defining “success” in CCA. The long-term nature of climate change makes the success of adaptation efforts only apparent over time and in retrospect, creating difficulties for current and near-term assessments of progress. Further, adaptation interventions occur against the background of evolving climate, environmental and developmental baselines – posing challenges for attribution and evaluation – including the relative lack of counterfactual examples for comparative purposes.

The STAP report suggests a number of areas that appear promising for strengthening CCA through more effective M&E including: orienting M&E and adaptation interventions to support learning; adopting indicators that reflect the processes of adaptation planning and implementation at different scales and provide contextual richness and detail while allowing for some degree of comparability and aggregation; and progressing from project-based M&E to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems that are linked with developmental efforts. Key conclusions and recommendations based on this report are provided below.

3. Orienting M&E and project design to support learning

The scientific and practitioner literature emphasizes adaptation as a process of iterative risk management – with a central role for learning, given the deep uncertainties with climate change, contested values and objectives and unclear cause-effect relationships. M&E systems and associated indicators historically have leaned toward accountability—to identify whether programs and projects have met their targets and achieved their results, whether GEF investment has been efficient, and whether there were any unintended consequences (positive or negative). While these are indeed important aspects, learning often requires different approaches that emphasize emergent, rather than pre-specified outcomes; extensive stakeholder engagement from concept through design, implementation and evaluation; as well as risk-taking and experimentation. Moving beyond a narrow accountability-based focus to a learning orientation will require significant rethinking and commitment from donors, recipients and implementers.

Recommendation 1: Start as simply as possible, learn by doing, and plan for change.

CCA M&E is likely to be most effective if it is designed and implemented iteratively, starting with modest ambition and testing, and then developing over time based on experience and iteration. Such an approach resonates with Theory of Change and systems-level design approaches. Recognizing the urgency and inherent complexity of CCA, and also that the scale of investment in CCA is increasing rapidly, this may translate into making plans for a modest number of initial indicators and early

learning or formative evaluation activities. These starting points can be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and scaled up or built upon if when they are demonstrated to be useful for understanding what is working (or not working) and making improvements. Note, however, that this recommendation to ‘start as simply as possible’ should not be confused with rhetoric to ‘keep things simple’, which is often used as a basis for avoiding complexity.

Recommendation 2: Encourage projects that support experimentation and are designed in a way that supports MEL

CCA M&E will require learning by doing. Even when considering the best-in-class lessons from experience to date and CCA M&E innovations with strong potential, there are no ‘silver bullets’ which will continue to be a ‘learning-by-doing’ field, just like CCA itself. Expectations for CCA M&E should be realistically modest. For instance, it is simply not the case that applying existing M&E frameworks (or any particular set of existing indicators) will work brilliantly and immediately. Instead, each effort can seek to understand what is already available, and with some thoughtful and context-specific consideration, can pick and choose what may work, start modestly, then test and iterate over time

Recommendation 3: Allocate sufficient resources for M&E

M&E is often seen as an activity that while necessary, detracts from the main objectives of an intervention – and consequently there is reluctance to invest in M&E. A general ‘rule of thumb’ for budgeting for M&E is to plan for between 1 to 10 percent of a project budget, with one percent being minimal for basic requirements, and ten percent reflecting more ambitious stakeholder engagement and robust evidence-based learning on a routine basis. In the case of CCA, given the importance of learning, it would be advisable for M&E support at the upper end of the range.

4. New developments in indicators and methodological approaches hold promise for strengthening MEL and CCA programming

Adaptation is increasingly seen as a process of mainstreaming, requiring long-term systemic and institutional changes. The portfolio of adaptation projects being supported by the GEF and other agencies increasingly consists of “upstream” interventions that seek to create or strengthen institutional capacity or enabling environments or readiness. For example, countries are coming forward with projects to support their national adaptation plan (NAP) processes. Consequently, measuring and tracking progress requires GEF to monitor and track process and capability outcomes. In addition, given the local and heterogeneous nature of adaptation interventions and outcomes, indicator selection needs to strike an appropriate balance between the need for comparability and aggregation and the need to preserve contextual richness and detail.

Recommendation 4: Be flexible with indicator selection, including qualitative and quantitative indicators and process and outcome indicators

The challenge is to find indicators that are measurable but also can be aggregated to provide meaningful results at higher levels. This could mean that simple indicators, popular for development work, may not work as well in M&E frameworks for CCA. Uncertainty about future climate creates challenges in both adaptation planning and evaluation. As such, defining and determining success in adaptation can be difficult. With adaptation, conventional development projects must take into account the potential future impacts of climate change. These impacts are often uncertain or unknown at the relevant geographic and temporal scales. This dimension of uncertainty compounds other risks, uncertainties, and information gaps that projects would normally face. All of these challenges are manifested in the difficult task of tracking and measuring success in adaptation. It is important in CCA M&E to adopt a set of indicators that provide contextual richness and detail, and meet the need for comparability and aggregation.

Recommendation 5: Be prepared to constructively address tensions and trade-offs.

Tensions and trade-offs within the M&E process for CCA are to be expected. As already discussed, one tension frequently experienced is between accountability to delivery (i.e., sticking to a plan or achieving pre-identified results) and accountability to learning. However, other tensions are also to be expected, particularly around suitable methods and the values they represent, including what constitutes credible evidence and their relevance, appropriateness, robustness, and validity. Experts are unlikely to agree on what is best, but that does not mean that there are not sound viable choices; it is more a matter of doing enough research to be aware of the tensions (or consulting with trusted advisors who can do this research on behalf of an effort), being comfortable with the trade-offs that committing to particular strategies and methods entail, and being able to explain these to others as needed.

Recommendation 6: Consider mixed method approaches.

Mixed method M&E approaches are typically recommended. This applies broadly to selection of results frameworks (and perhaps trying a few approaches to these), indicator selection (e.g., testing both quantitative and qualitative indicators), and selecting suitable evaluation and learning approaches and methods. Traditional evaluation methods that assume linear cause-and-effect relationships suitable for simple situations are often unsuitable due to the complex, context-specific, dynamic, and long-term nature of CCA and the unique nature of the required solutions. (They can be suitable for a certain subset of interventions that are simple and short term, and/or for analyses that are aiming to understand one controllable variable at a point in time, such as behavior or attitudes of a community based on a specific activity.)

5. Move from project-based M&E to systems integrated with development (mainstreamed)

Countries are investing in measuring and tracking progress in a wide variety of development sectors that are also targets for interventions for climate change adaptation; including agriculture, food security, public health and water resources. Indeed, a primary goal of mainstreaming is to ensure consideration of current and future climate risks in climate sensitive sectors. Adaptation metrics and M&E will need to connect with, and leverage, national and sectoral monitoring and measuring systems to ensure that data and indicators relevant for adaptation are reflected in these systems. In addition, adaptation and resilience considerations are mainstreamed into national development assessment activities – including tracking progress on the SDGs. The relationship between CCA and mainstream development matters, with priority considerations including how CCA may disrupt development, support and enhance development, or even redefine development. This is a question of context, with different national governments (and sectors and local communities) seeing this relationship in different ways. Therefore, considerations of effective CCA must be considered in light of context-specific development needs and objectives, and so too must M&E of CCA.

Recommendation 7: Explore and exploit complementarities and synergies between CCA M&E and development M&E

Countries are investing in measuring and tracking progress in a wide variety of development sectors that are also targets for interventions for climate change adaptation; including agriculture, food security, public health and water resources. CCA M&E will need to connect with, and leverage national and sectoral monitoring and measuring systems to ensure that data and indicators relevant for CCA are reflected in these systems – and that adaptation and resilience considerations are mainstreamed into national development assessment activities – including tracking progress on the SDG's.

Recommendation 8: Design M&E for and with stakeholders

Although there is widespread agreement that M&E in general should be designed with, and for, stakeholders. This is particularly true for CCA M&E given that adaptation is particularly stakeholder based, stakeholder experienced, and unique to each set of stakeholders. In practice this means engagement with stakeholders from climate-sensitive development sectors – where the actual needs for climate resilience lie. Further, CCA is characterized by high data needs and whether it is local climate information or socio-economic characteristics that determine vulnerability and adaptive capacity. Learning and complexity orientations further necessitate stakeholder engagement (from all relevant sectors) early on and often. This starts with development of a results framework and throughout the stages of M&E including evaluation and learning cycles.

6. Create environments that enable learning and knowledge management

Learning occurs in many ways. An important requirement for learning is the ability to document practices, extract lessons and share and exchange knowledge. The conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge and vice-versa is integral to learning and often requires engagement between different communities – including the practitioner and academic communities. There is now a growing formal knowledge base of resources about CCA M&E, including frameworks, case studies, guidance notes, as well as the peer-reviewed literature. However, it is necessary to further strengthen this knowledge base – which may be possible through partnerships with knowledge institutions. Such partnerships are also important for the explicit to tacit conversion, where the uptake of formal knowledge may occur most effectively through exchange (discussion / dialogue) and in-person interactions.

Recommendation 9: Create and support communities of practice and learning environments

CCA M&E—as well as M&E of other complexity-rich issues across a variety of sectors—will benefit from formal and informal communities of practice, updates of studies like these, and individual peer-to-peer exchanges. The GEF has supported and used communities of practice. A good example is iW:Learn in the international waters focal area. In CCA, there are now a variety of regional and thematic communities of practice including the Asia-Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN), and NAPCentral, and in the M&E area, the GEF IEO's climate-eval, SEA change. The GEF could engage with and strengthen these initiatives. Further, the GEF could engage more deeply with the academic community to mine and analyze the GEF experiences with CCA, not only to support M&E, but also to derive lessons and insights that may be valuable not only for the GEF, but for the wider community.

Recommendation 10: Invest in capacity-building for M&E, especially in local institutions

Given current states of development in many countries of both CCA understanding and of M&E systems, it is important to invest in capacity building around what constitutes CCA in each context, what sectors should be engaged, and what M&E means (and entails) in each fit-for-purpose situation. Further capacity building (e.g., through stakeholder engagement and technical training and continued mentoring), resource investments (e.g., for data collection), and training for M&E practitioners (who often are not versed in a wide range of methods or learning approaches) are also likely to be needed, particularly in those cases where donors are requiring M&E in order to provide funding.

The STAP hopes that these ten recommendations will provide timely and actionable inputs to the GEF partnership and looks forward to continued engagement with the partnership in the implementation of them.

