



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

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Agenda item 11

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO:

EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND ENGAGEMENT OF THE GEF

INTRODUCTION

1. The GEF Secretariat welcomes this IEO “Evaluation of the Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF”. The Secretariat concurs with the IEO findings that in many cases it is too early to evaluate actual results of these new Policies and fully agrees on the need to focus on implementation. The Secretariat welcomes the early IEO findings, conclusions and recommendations to help guide the GEF partnership for continued progress in all these areas through GEF-8 and beyond, and in the development of documents for consideration during the GEF8 Replenishment process.
2. As highlighted by the IEO Evaluation, leading up to GEF-7, the Secretariat made considerable revisions and updates to its Policies and approaches related to Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality and Environmental and Social Safeguards. The Secretariat facilitated extensive consultations with GEF Agencies, Council Members, civil society and other stakeholders across the GEF Partnership to update these policies as well as in the development of the subsequent guidelines. We are pleased to see that the IEO finds the Policies generally well reflected in the vision, strategic priorities and operational principles of the GEF and that their utility extends beyond just the “how” of GEF’s work to contribute to achievement of concrete global environmental benefits.
3. The Secretariat also takes note of the findings that the GEF institutional policies and engagement are, on the whole, aligned with other comparable partnerships and institutions. We also welcome the emerging IEO insights on the general coherence among the GEF’s new policies as well as the findings related to the Secretariat’s engagement with the GEF Gender Partnership (GGP), the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and the GEF CSO Network.
4. The Secretariat shares the IEO view that the “*nudging effect*” is a central and valuable benefit of the GEF Partnership, encouraging the integration of good practice and reflecting strong minimum standards across all Agencies. The Secretariat noted with some concern, however, the IEO statement that the assessment processes required by the GEF policies “*often uncover key institutional weaknesses in policies and regulations*”.¹ Where the recent positive compliance assessments of Agencies’ policies did reveal gaps, these were not considered critical and Agencies have developed action plans to address them – further evidence of this nudging effect. The Secretariat places high importance on facilitating Agency compliance assessments with the minimum standards, as required by the GEF the Policies, including on Environmental and Social Safeguards, Gender Equality and Stakeholder Engagement.² In addition, as the report recognizes, the Secretariat has made considerable improvements across its project review process to ensure compliance throughout the GEF project cycle.

¹ Para 4, page viii.

² See for most recent report: GEF/C.60/Inf.08

5. The Secretariat is encouraged that IEO finds the accompanying guidelines for the Agencies as “generally compatible with (their) own practices, useful and not onerous”.³ Insofar as implementation of GEF-financed projects relies critically on GEF Agencies, it is important that GEF and Agency guidelines continue to be consistent and mutually supportive. This will therefore remain a key guiding principle for the development of any forthcoming GEF Policies and Guidelines.

6. The Secretariat also notes in the IEO findings that there is an interest among some GEF Agencies for the Secretariat to play a greater knowledge sharing/capacity development role and that the GEF is seen as well placed to be an information and relationship broker. The Secretariat has already committed to intensify work on knowledge and learning across the partnership in response to the recommendations of the recent Knowledge Management Evaluation,⁴ and this will feature in the GEF-8 documents currently under preparation.

7. This management response focuses specifically on the three IEO recommendations and articulates strategies for addressing them going forward.

RECOMMENDATION 1

“The Secretariat should prepare an overarching narrative for the three policies under the banner of “inclusion”, make explicit the complementarities across the policies, their contribution to the GEF program, and their tie-in to the GEF project cycle. As the policies progress through implementation, the Secretariat should build capability to track inclusion at a project level in a way that allows GEF to analyze policy impact at a portfolio level.”

8. The Secretariat welcomes this recommendation. We share the view that consolidation and simplification of GEF policies - with a view to practical implementation at the project level - should be an important focus for GEF-8. The Secretariat recognizes the benefits of providing an overarching framework for inclusion. Evidence and lessons learned from safeguarding vulnerable people and groups, addressing gender inequalities and meaningfully engaging local actors and civil society in environmental policy, financing and projects can prove to be important as countries around the world are pledging to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic threatens to severely roll back decades of development successes and impeding SDG achievement; it has not only exposed the human pressure on nature and natural systems but also revealed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities within and among countries. As the immediate health crisis will gradually abate, attention will be turning to preparing policy and investment measures to trigger social and economic recovery and safeguarding prosperity for the longer term. The GEF recognizes that it can play a central role helping countries to restore a healthy environment and to ensure a people-centered recovery

³ Para 9, page ix

⁴ GEF/E/C.59/04, *Evaluation of Knowledge Management in the GEF (2020)*, https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.E_C59_04_evaluation_of_KM_GEF_2020.pdf

that focuses on human well-being, improving inclusiveness and reducing inequality. As such, it expects to place greater attention on inclusion in its GEF-8 programming direction and policy agenda, including efforts to better capture GEF co-benefits including socio-economic benefits.

9. While we agree on the merits of tracking inclusion at the project level, we will need to explore how and where the Secretariat can effectively “*build capability*” for this as the Secretariat does not have an implementation role at the project level. The Secretariat concurs with the IEO, however, that the GEF should move toward a framework to better “*analyze policy impact at a portfolio level*” and we commit to working with the Agencies on this during GEF-8. The Secretariat expects that early commitments and approaches to move in this direction will be included in the GEF-8 replenishment documents.

RECOMMENDATION 2

“The Secretariat should develop a knowledge sharing effort that leverages expertise within the Partnership to highlight approaches for addressing safeguards implementation issues related to the updated ESS policy. Related to the IEO’s evaluation on Knowledge Management, the Secretariat should incorporate: a) inclusion practice content; b) Environment and Social Safeguards implementation topics within the scope of the Secretariat’s forthcoming KM strategy.”

10. The Secretariat welcomes this IEO recommendation and the findings on the important role the GEF can play to increase knowledge and learning on specific areas outlined in the GEF Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards, including new areas such as labor and working conditions, community health and safety, Free, Prior, Informed Consent and Gender based Violence. It is important to note that some topics are not environment-specific areas of expertise that the Secretariat currently possesses. Considering the emerging experiences and expertise within the GEF Agencies, the Secretariat will explore cost-effective ways to take advantage of its position as knowledge broker, utilizing existing platforms such as the Country Support Program, GEF Agency Retreats, virtual courses and learning events to leverage existing knowledge and facilitate learning across Agencies and the GEF Partnership more broadly. The Secretariat will also explore opportunities to highlight the importance of this area of work in the forthcoming Knowledge and Learning Strategy⁵ being developed in response to the earlier IEO Evaluation on Knowledge Management.⁶ Progress on this effort will be reported in the Secretariat’s annual Progress Report on the Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards.

⁵ The Secretariat uses the term Knowledge and Learning instead of “Knowledge Management”, as the former suggests a more inclusive and forward leaning approach within a partnership.

⁶ GEF/E/C.59/04, *Evaluation of Knowledge Management in the GEF (2020)*, https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.E_C59_04_evaluation_of_KM_GEF_2020.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 3

“The Secretariat should a) reset the GEF’s relationship with the CSO Network with clarity on roles and responsibilities, and b) recalibrate the IPAG mechanism for increased strategic impact. In both instances, the Secretariat should draw upon the growing body of knowledge on civil society outreach practices, the opportunities inherent in the policies to promote inclusion, and the strategic directions indicated for GEF-8.”

11. The Secretariat strongly believes in the importance of civil society engagement as an important lever for delivering global environmental benefits. It concurs with the IEO’s findings on the need for a greater clarity on roles and responsibilities between the Secretariat and the CSO Network. The Secretariat, however, would like to highlight that the current relationship is guided, at the strategic level, by the “Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement with the GEF”⁷ based on the results of an ad hoc working group of interested Council Members. The Secretariat proposes to develop more detailed guidelines within the approach defined by the vision statement, working with representatives of the GEF CSO network and the broader GEF partnership to formulate greater clarity on the GEF’s engagement with civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities moving forward and reporting to Council on the outcome. The Secretariat proposes, as a first step, to carry out a review of similar organizations’ civil society outreach practices, in consultation with the GEF CSO Network and the broader GEF Partnership, and present the findings of this analysis and early recommendations to the GEF Council for their consideration at the 62nd Council meeting.

12. The Secretariat greatly values the role of the IPAG as a key actor in the GEF Partnership and welcomes the IEO’s many positive findings in this regard. Furthermore, the Secretariat would like to point to the full and continued engagement of the IPAG in the development (and soon implementation) of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative: IPAG was substantially involved in every step of the creation and development of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI), and the ICI Indigenous Interim Steering Committee, which is guiding the project during project preparation, includes IPAG and non-IPAG indigenous members in the development of this project. IPAG was also actively engaged in the recent Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings held in GEF-8 to guide the GEF-8 programming strategy, and will continue to provide input into the development of that strategy. In response to this recommendation, the Secretariat commits to a continued engagement with the IPAG in both higher-level strategic GEF-8 programming dimensions and in specific projects and programs as most relevant, and including regular engagement with the CEO.

13. The Secretariat would like to highlight that discussions on potential changes in IPAG modalities and membership composition had in fact started in 2019. However, the inability to conduct face-to-face meetings due to the pandemic has considerably slowed this process, particularly with respect to changes in membership structure. In response to this

⁷ GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.53.10.Rev_01_CS0_Vision_0.pdf

recommendation, the Secretariat will restart the discussions within these constraints, with the future directions of IPAG to be guided in detail by the IPAG itself. The Secretariat will also enhance its monitoring of engagement with indigenous peoples: as part of the keyword taxonomy in the Portal, every project and program can be tagged as including indigenous peoples which makes it convenient to identify relevant projects (though it should be noted that differing definitions of indigenous peoples and local communities by national governments can complicate such tracking).

CONCLUSION

14. The Secretariat will track progress on the implementation of the Management commitments in respect of the IEO recommendations, reporting to Council principally through Annual Monitoring Reports and the IEO's standard Management Action Record but also as noted above in the progress reports on the GEF Gender Implementation Strategy, the annual Progress Report on the Policy on Environmental and social Safeguards and the GEF Scorecard. In addition, the upcoming GEF-8 Replenishment documents will be developed to reflect the IEO findings and recommendations.