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REFINING THE TRACKING OF CO-BENEFITS IN FUTURE GEF INVESTMENTS

A STAP BRIEF

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STAP SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
ADVISORY PANEL
*An independent group of scientists that advises
the Global Environment Facility*



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Refining the tracking of co-benefits in future GEF investments.

Co-benefits – positive effects of Global Environment Facility (GEF) investments that are not included in its formal set of global environmental benefits (GEBs) – can be prerequisite to achieving those GEBs in an enduring way or can be incidental to their achievement, though important in showing the wider return on GEF investments. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) suggests that the GEF should treat and report these classes of co-benefits differently.

Co-benefits are loosely defined as any positive effects that an intervention aimed at one objective might have on other objectives, though common usage at the GEF is for co-benefits to refer to benefits other than its mandated GEBs.

Clarifying a typology of co-benefits

STAP suggests that it is useful to distinguish different types of co-benefits conceptually (i) to formalize the common usage that distinguishes *multiple benefits* that fall within the GEF's mandated GEBs from other environmental or socioeconomic *co-benefits* and (ii) to distinguish co-benefits that are *prerequisite* to achieving the mandated GEBs from those that are *incidental* to achieving them (see box 1). Project design and measurement efforts would logically differ for each category.

Prerequisite co-benefits are essential for achieving durable GEBs, particularly at transformative levels of ambition; in other words, such co-benefits support the implementation of the GEF's delivery model.¹ These co-benefits will mostly be socioeconomic and will often be closely associated with the successful application of the levers for system change that the GEF has identified: governance and policies, innovation and learning, financial leverage, and multi-stakeholder dialogue. For example, multi-stakeholder dialogue may only contribute to enduring conservation of GEBs if local stakeholders achieve livelihood benefits from the interventions; effective financial leverage from the GEF investment may only occur if a government sees that its people are obtaining economic benefits; a reduction in mercury use may only be enduring if artisanal miners have alternative decent work (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 8); and leakage from GEF projects on re-afforestation may only be avoided if corruption in governance is reduced. While some of these co-benefits may be valuable for external reporting, their critical importance is to ensure that GEF investments are effective, so their measurement should be incorporated into ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning within any project or program.

Identifying prerequisite co-benefits in context and achieving them should be integral to project and program design.

Incidental co-benefits may demonstrate significant added value in the GEF portfolio but should not distract from achieving the GEBs targeted by a particular GEF investment.

STAP notes that many multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) use indicators to track the progress of their strategic frameworks and mandates, some of which are complementary to the core GEBs. For example, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has developed

¹ GEF, 2022. *GEF-8 Policy Directions: The Enabling Environment for Transformation*. GEF/R.08/31. Global Environment Facility, Washington, D.C., para. 60. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf.

progress indicators for parties to track the implementation of its 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, such as “improving the living conditions of affected populations”.² GEF investments targeting land degradation, including the Integrated Program on Ecosystem Restoration could focus on these indicators. For efficiency, indicators already being collected by countries should be used. **Many co-benefits also correspond to indicators already being collected for the SDGs and MEAs that the GEF serves, so new approaches need not be developed.** For example, UNCCD progress indicator SO2-1, “Trends in population living below the relative poverty line and/or income inequality”,³ and SDG indicators 1.1.1, “Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status, and geographic location (urban/rural)”, and 1.2.1, “Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age”, could be used to map socioeconomic co-benefits.⁴

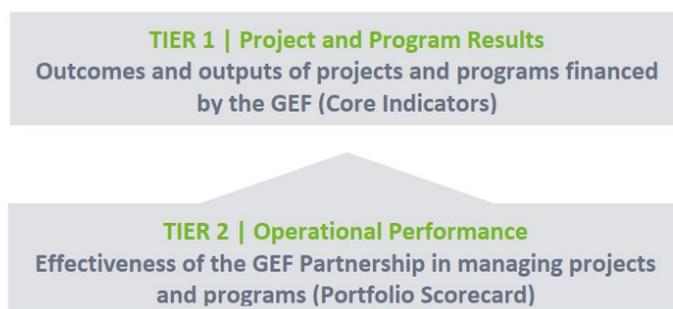
Co-benefits and the Results Measurement Framework

The revised *GEF-8 Policy Directions* document⁵ proposes five ways to improve the Results Measurement Framework (RMF):

- (i) Improving the tracking of the GEF’s contribution to system change
- (ii) Better measuring co-benefits in improving human well-being
- (iii) Deepening the assessment of GEF operations’ impact on the economy
- (iv) Strengthening the monitoring and evaluation frameworks of projects and programs
- (v) Supporting the implementation of the GEF’s delivery model

The RMF distinguishes between the GEF’s contribution to achieving GEBs (operational outcomes from the GEF’s investments) and the effectiveness of the GEF Partnership’s operational performance, as well as the inputs, processes, and activities (operational inputs) that helped lead to those outcomes. The RMF defines two tiers of indicators to this end (figure 1).

Figure 1: The two tiers of the proposed GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework



Source: *GEF-8 Policy Directions*, 2022.⁶

² UNCCD, 2017. The future strategic framework of the Convention. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Bonn, [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/ICCD_COP\(13\)_L.18-1716078E.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/ICCD_COP(13)_L.18-1716078E.pdf); UNCCD, n.d. “UNCCD monitoring and evaluation framework”..

³ UNCCD, 2022. *PRAIS4 Reporting Manual*. <https://prais4-reporting-manual.readthedocs.io/en/latest/SO2.html>

⁴ Sustainable Development Goal, Indicator 1.1.1: <https://sdg.data.gov/1-1-1/>

⁵ GEF, 2022. *GEF-8 Policy Directions: The Enabling Environment for Transformation*, para. 60. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf.

⁶ GEF, 2022. *GEF-8 Policy Directions: The Enabling Environment for Transformation*, fig. 24. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf.

There are currently three Tier 2 indicators: speed of operations, strong portfolio management and adaptation, and co-financing. The GEF has proposed adding two more: timely completion of terminal evaluations and how projects adapt to improve implementation.⁷

At a portfolio level, STAP suggests that adding measures of *prerequisite co-benefits* to the RMF Tier 2 scorecard would be beneficial and would help track how well the GEF Partnership is collectively achieving the design and management of projects and programs for transformative outcomes.

Both prerequisite co-benefits and incidental co-benefits (socioeconomic and environmental) could assist in measuring the GEF's contribution to human well-being and to understanding the GEF's impact on the economy.

Aggregating the ***prerequisite co-benefits according to how they contribute to achieving the causal links that underlie the GEF-8 theory of change*** would provide more evidence on how well the GEF's strategic direction is being achieved. ***The incidental co-benefits could be aggregated according to their relevance to different MEAs*** (or to the wider United Nations commitments to the SDGs), as appropriate, and provide evidence of the GEF's wider impact.

The causal logic linking the RMF's Tier 1 and Tier 2 could be expanded by reviewing how the MEAs that the GEF serves seek co-benefit indicators already and how these indicators map to the SDG Tier 1 indicators that are already being collected. This information would connect to the GEF's knowledge management and learning strategy, particularly in showing how to develop a more detailed typology of forms of co-benefit.

⁷ GEF, 2022. *GEF-8 Policy Directions: The Enabling Environment for Transformation*, fig. 25, paras 68–70.

Box 1: STAP's framework for clarifying different types of benefit

Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects target one or more global environmental benefits (GEBs) that fall within the GEF's mandate. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) suggests that the term "multiple benefits" is usefully reserved for GEBs that may be realized by a project, even though they are not the main target of that project. This is common usage currently, but it could be made more explicit. All other benefits are co-benefits, whether environmental or socioeconomic, but these co-benefits can be categorized according to their function (see figure below).

Some benefits are **prerequisite** to achieving the targeted GEBs; they might include, for example, livelihood benefits that engage local communities in supporting a conservation intervention, or the economic outcomes of reduced land degradation that engage government in making the necessary policy changes. These co-benefits can occur on a variety of scales and are crucial to the theory of change for the intervention, so they should be included in the design and their achievement should be tracked, but their measurement may be mainly to ensure the project is on target.

There is also a wide range of possible environmental and socioeconomic benefits that are **incidental**; that is, they fall outside the GEF's mandate and are not critical to achieving GEBs, but they may be important to demonstrating the GEF's added value and economic impact. Some of these co-benefits may be consequent on achieving GEBs, such as human health benefits from reduced land clearing that may mean fewer zoonoses turn into pandemics. These incidental co-benefits should be neither targeted nor measured if doing so would detract from achieving GEBs.

STAP suggests that the GEF should clearly distinguish those co-benefits that are **prerequisite** to achieving a project's GEB targets from those that are **incidental** – nice to have but not critical to delivery.

