



Focal Area: International Waters

Scope of the Challenge

Nature does not neatly segment environmental or water problems by geography or political unit. Most of the large rivers of the world cross national borders, often resulting in water-use conflicts and tensions, as well as missed opportunities for sustainable development, peace, and security. The sustainable development challenges faced by nations sharing transboundary water resources include pollution, overuse of water for irrigation and diversions, loss of critical habitats and biodiversity, ship waste, and alien species.

About 60 percent of our planet's land area and population and more than 60 percent of global freshwater flow are located in transboundary surface and groundwater basins. They provide national water security, national food security, regional conflict mitigation, and the protection of important international ecosystems. Collective, multicountry cooperation toward a shared vision of action is necessary to continue sustaining the many benefits from these complex water systems.

GEF Response

Since its establishment in the early 1990s, the GEF has pioneered processes to help countries build their trust and confidence in working together on issues that affect their shared water

KEY FACTS

- Water resources that cross national borders dominate our planet, with 70 percent of its area being ocean and 60 percent of the earth's land area and population in transboundary surface and groundwater systems
- At the present rate of degradation most reefs will be gone in 50 years, along with livelihoods for half a billion people.
- Projects across multiple country boundaries have included 30 river and lake basins, 5 groundwater basins, and 19 of the planet's 64 large marine ecosystems, including half of those shared by developing countries.
- More than \$1.1 billion of GEF investment has leveraged \$4.7 billion in cofinance for water, environment, and community security projects across more than 170 countries.
- The GEF's International Waters focal area is the largest ecosystem-based and coordinated program of action to reverse the depletion of marine fisheries.

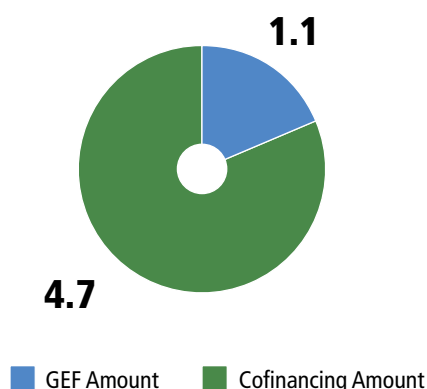


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SUMMARY BY FOCAL AREA:
INTERNATIONAL WATERS

Amounts in billion USD



resources, including legal and policy reforms. As a result, 149 GEF recipient countries have sought and received funding to work alongside 23 nonrecipient countries to improve regional collaboration and share benefits from their particular transboundary water systems.

Over this period the GEF has allocated \$1.1 billion in grants, with \$4.7 billion in cofinancing for 183 projects in its International Waters focal area. The GEF is the largest financial institution with the mandate, ability, and experience to address current and future challenges to shared freshwater and marine systems.

The GEF helps countries to collaborate with their neighbors to modify human activities that place stress on these transboundary water systems and interfere with downstream uses of those resources. In this way, water-use conflicts can be prevented, security improved, and sustainable resource use fostered in support of global goals.

Current strategic programs include:

- Restoring and sustaining coastal and marine fish stocks and associated biological diversity
- Reducing nutrient overenrichment and oxygen depletion from land-based pollution of coastal waters in Large Marine Ecosystems consistent with the Global Program of Action (GPA)
- Balancing overuse and conflicting uses of water resources in surface and groundwater basins that are transboundary in nature
- Reducing persistent toxic substances and testing adaptive management of waters with melting ice.

The GEF has now supported regional collaborative efforts for 22 transboundary surface water basins, 16 large marine ecosystems, and 5 cross-border groundwater systems. Although the GEF's International Waters focal area does not serve as a financial mechanism for a specific convention, it is associated with many global and regional conventions that are involved with transboundary water systems, mostly at a regional level, and helps countries to negotiate additional regional legal frameworks to sustain these water systems.

The development of 13 new regional treaties, protocols, and regional agreements during these GEF projects highlights that many countries view the sustainability of these systems as critical to their future development. For example, the Convention on the Sustainable Management of Lake Tanganyika and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention have resulted from GEF international waters projects.

An integral part of these regional projects has been the support of local demonstration projects to clearly show how communities can balance the competing uses of their water systems and share their living resources. In this way, the GEF has helped many countries with technology transfer and the adoption of more integrated management approaches. The GEF's catalytic activities help to promote greater collaboration between countries, national ministries, and even local communities.

Activities

PROMOTING REGIONAL SECURITY

Together with its development partners, the GEF supports a range of programs to foster cooperation, build trust, and promote greater security across entire regions, including the Danube/Black Sea Basin and the Marine Coral Triangle and Nile Basin Initiatives.

RIVER BASINS — COLLABORATING ACROSS BORDERS

Through a \$1.1 billion portfolio that includes more than 50 projects, the GEF and its partners are assisting countries on four continents to improve their understanding and shared management of 30 lake and river basins. This approach includes legal, policy, and institutional reforms to address priority threats, support regional institutional development, provide technical assistance and investments, and offer a forum for nations to discuss and resolve conflicting views in a transparent manner.

MANAGING TRANSBOUNDARY GROUNDWATER AQUIFERS

Growing populations and intensive irrigation are already outstripping surface water resources,

and millions of people are beginning to rely on their shared aquifer systems for drinking water that are now under threat from overuse and pollution. The GEF is working to support a number of transboundary groundwater management projects across four continents, using a wide variety of approaches to conserve and protect their shared groundwater systems.

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF COASTAL RESOURCES

The GEF is supporting Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) as a broader, more systemic approach to the management of coastal environments, fostering the sustainable development of coastal areas by bringing together government technical specialists and local stakeholders.

REDUCING COASTAL DEAD ZONES

Over the past decade the GEF has supported a number of projects to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in some of the world's most vulnerable water systems such as the Danube and Black Sea Basin, the seas of East Asia, and the Mediterranean Sea. The GEF has supported 12 regional projects, 20 single-country investment projects within four regional partnerships, and separate funds to encourage local investment in nutrient reduction. Exciting new projects include the development of artificial wetlands that can mimic nature by filtering and consuming potential pollutants in the wastewater stream.

AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACH TO COASTAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The GEF is working with countries to protect large marine ecosystems through ecosystem-based management of transboundary coastal and marine resources. Eighty-five percent of

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\$80 billion global fish catch comes from 64 of these ecosystems that parallel the continental shelves. With GEF support, 124 different countries are now working together on 19 shared large marine ecosystems.

REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS OF MARITIME TRANSPORT

GEF projects address pollution from maritime transport, help to improve port management and facilities, address spill prevention, and support contingency planning for special transport areas, such as the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. The GEF has also helped to build the capacity needed for countries to sign and ratify maritime-related global conventions such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and control pathogens and alien invasive species — including disease organisms — carried in ship ballast water.

HELPING SMALL ISLANDS STATES (SIDS)

The GEF works with island nations in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Africa to foster reforms, investments, and greater community participation in the development of practical and cost-effective solutions to water concerns such as fish stocks, pollution from untreated wastewater, and water supply protection. In fact, the GEF is providing support to 33 SIDS to protect their valu-

able surface and groundwater drinking supplies as well as to reduce pollution of their coastal lagoons and reefs.

SHARING INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCES

To share information and experiences across the more than 180 projects under the International Waters focal area, the GEF and its partner agencies have operated the GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network, IW:LEARN (www.iwlearn.net). IW:LEARN promotes networking, knowledge sharing, and peer learning among stakeholders within and across regions, helping to share best practices and improve the quality of all GEF projects.

For more information, see the GEF publication "From Ridge to Reef," downloadable from the GEF Web site.



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