

# GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009

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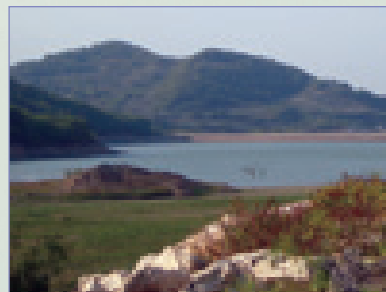
CAMEROON



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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY  
EVALUATION OFFICE



**Global Environment Facility  
Evaluation Office**

# **GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009**

**October 2009**

*(The main findings and recommendations of this evaluation were presented to the GEF Council in June 2009.)*

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This second *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report* is the synthesis of three country portfolio evaluations focused on Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria produced by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Using the country as the unit of analysis, these evaluations examine the totality of GEF support across all GEF Agencies and programs.

Country portfolio evaluations are conducted fully and independently by the Evaluation Office and, when possible, in partnership with other evaluation offices of GEF Agencies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations.

Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria were selected as the countries to be evaluated based on several criteria, including their long history with the GEF, their importance as global biodiversity hotspots, one country's historically large and diverse portfolio, and individual country allocations under the Resource Allocation Framework. The annual report provides feedback in three key areas: (1) the relevance of support to the GEF mandate and national sustainable development policies and priorities, (2) the efficiency of GEF support, and (3) the results and sustainability of GEF support. The original intention was to include the Cameroon evaluation in last year's annual report, but the final evaluation was not completed until after the April 2008 Council meeting.

The synthesis of the findings from the three countries revealed a number of positive results, including achievements at the global environmental level, particularly in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use which has proven to be of strategic importance and has generated some impacts. Through its support to climate change, the GEF has introduced the topic in these countries and has influenced markets, notably in energy efficiency. Results in other focal areas have been limited to setting up the foundation for national and regional action plans, policy development, and enhancing national capacity. Overall long-term sustainability of achievements is still a challenge. GEF support was found to be relevant to national environmental priorities and to conventions. With regard to country ownership, it varies, with many project ideas driven by GEF Agencies and external factors particularly for regional and global projects. Another finding was that the efficiency of the focal point mechanism has directly related to the size of the GEF portfolio.

The GEF Council discussed the *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report* in June 2009, and asked the Secretariat to explore within the GEF partnership modalities to address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries like Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria. The GEF Council also requested that the Secre-

tariat conduct a survey of countries in exceptional situations, like Syria, concerning limited access to GEF partner international financial institutions.

In all three cases, the governments responded to the evaluations through a letter to the GEF Chief Executive Officer to express their opinion about the evaluation and follow-up actions that were under consideration.

The Evaluation Office continues to be very encouraged by positive responses to the country portfolio evaluations and will continue to invest in them in the coming years.



Rob van den Berg  
Director, Evaluation Office

## Acknowledgments

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This report was prepared under the overall leadership of Claudio Volonté, Chief Evaluation Officer of the GEF Evaluation Office. The Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria consultant teams were led, respectively, by Lee A. Risby, Sandra Romboli, and Anna Viggh, GEF Evaluation Officers, with assistance from Timothy Ranja.

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Government officials of Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria provided full cooperation and participated actively in these evaluations. The teams are also grateful for the advice and logistical support provided by the GEF Agencies.

This document was presented to the GEF Council in June 2009, and was based on a synthesis of the three draft country portfolio evaluations presented to national stakeholders in Cameroon in June 2008; and in Egypt and Syria in March 2009. The Evaluation Office remains fully responsible for the contents of the report.



# 1. Introduction

This second *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report* provides a synthesis of the main conclusions and recommendations of three country portfolio evaluations finalized in fiscal year 2009:<sup>1</sup> those for Cameroon, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to these three countries began during the GEF's pilot phase for Egypt and Cameroon and after the GEF's 1994 restructuring for Syria. These three countries were selected through a process established by the GEF Evaluation Office in 2006 and used for its previous country portfolio evaluations, which includes a random selection of countries at the regional level and then a selection according to a number of criteria such as size and diversity of GEF support, type of participation in the Resource Allocation Framework (that is, group or individual allocation), availability of evaluative information (that is, number of completed projects and terminal evaluations), linkages with other evaluations under implementation, and so on. As described below, the three country portfolio evaluations included extensive consultations with all major GEF stakeholders, particularly those residing in the country, and several visits to project sites, particularly to projects that have been completed.

<sup>1</sup>Fiscal year 2009 began July 1, 2008, and ended June 30, 2009.

The three country portfolio evaluations were conducted following the standard terms of reference for this type of evaluation (approved in 2006) and adapted to each country as appropriate. The Evaluation Office has prepared separate publications for each evaluation: *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Cameroon (1992–2007)*, *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Arab Republic of Egypt (1991–2008)*, and *GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Syrian Arab Republic (1994–2008)*. These documents provide the main conclusions and recommendations of the respective evaluation (these are summarized in annex A of this report) and the responses provided to the evaluation by the respective government. These evaluations build on and supplement the country portfolio evaluations conducted in 2006, 2007, and 2008 of Costa Rica, Samoa, the Philippines, Benin, Madagascar, and South Africa, and are direct inputs into the Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF being conducted by the Evaluation Office.

As established in the first annual country portfolio evaluation report, this synthesis report focuses on three key areas:

- The relevance of GEF support to the GEF mandate (that is, the generation of global benefits) and to national sustainable and environmental policies and priorities
- The efficiency of GEF support as reflected by the time and effort it takes to prepare and imple-

ment a GEF project and the role and responsibilities of, as well as the synergies among, GEF stakeholders

- The results and sustainability of GEF support, particularly at the global environmental benefits level

The evaluation teams benefited from high levels of interest and substantial participation in the respective country portfolio evaluations from the GEF stakeholders.

## 1.1 Methodology

The Cameroon Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted between September 2007 and June 2008, with the publication completed in October 2008. The original intention was to include the Cameroon evaluation in last year's annual country portfolio evaluation report, but the final evaluation was not completed until after the April 2008 Council meeting. The Syrian and Egyptian evaluations were conducted between September 2008 and April 2009.

Staff of the GEF Evaluation Office and consultants with extensive experience in each of the individual countries conducted the country portfolio evaluations. The evaluations included quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and standardized analytical evaluation tools following the standard terms of reference for country portfolio evaluations.

The **qualitative** aspects of the evaluations are based on the following sources of information:

- At the project level, project documents, project implementation reports, terminal evaluations or closure reports, and reports from monitoring visits
- At the country level, documents relevant to the broad national sustainable development and

environmental agenda, priorities, and strategies; specific policy, strategies, and action plans relevant to focal areas; GEF-supported strategies and action plans relevant to the global conventions; and national environmental indicators

- At the GEF Agency level, country assistance strategies and frameworks and their evaluations and reviews
- Evaluative evidence at the country level from national evaluations
- Statistics and scientific sources
- Interviews with GEF stakeholders, including relevant government departments, national executing agencies, nongovernmental organizations, presently active GEF Agencies, and the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP)
- A number of field visits to project sites, including interviews with GEF beneficiaries at the community level where appropriate and possible<sup>2</sup>
- Information from the national consultation workshops held to enable comment and discussion on the draft report before it was finalized, as well as written comments

The **quantitative** analysis used indicators to assess the efficiency of GEF support using projects as the unit of analysis (that is, time and cost of preparing and implementing projects and so on). The evaluation teams used standardized tools and protocols for the country portfolio evaluations. These tools included

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<sup>2</sup>Projects were selected for visits based on their completion status and on their geographic clustering, which made a visit to a number of projects in a particular geographic area within limited time frames possible.

- a project matrix outlining the information relevant to the evaluation and expected sources;
- project review protocols to conduct the reviews of GEF national, regional, and global projects;
- an interview guide for interviews with different stakeholders.

The three main phases of the country portfolio evaluations were as follows:

- An initial visit and consultation with GEF focal points by the Evaluation Office to present the terms of reference, launch the evaluation, interview key GEF stakeholders, and identify consultants
- Conduct of the evaluation, including data collection and analysis through extensive interviews and several field visits, with the participation of Evaluation Office staff for all or part of the field visits
- Presentation of the draft report to key GEF stakeholders to discuss preliminary findings and possible recommendations

## 1.2 Scope

The evaluations focused primarily on a review of all national projects supported by the GEF at all project stages: preparation (with a project identification form or project preparation grant approved), under implementation, completed, or canceled.

The SGP in the three countries was assessed against the respective national strategy and not on the basis of each SGP project. Project concepts in the government or GEF Agency pipelines were not included. Table 1.1 presents the portfolios covered by the three country portfolio evaluations. The GEF portfolios assessed in the three evaluations are thus an aggregate of the national projects plus a selection of regional and global projects. The stage of each project determined the evaluation's focus: for example, completed projects were assessed according to all three dimensions of the evaluation (results, relevance, and efficiency), projects under implementation were assessed in terms of relevance and efficiency, and projects under preparation (those with an approved project identification form or project preparation grant) were assessed primarily in terms of relevance (with some limited assessment of efficiency).

## 1.3 Limitations and Challenges

Country portfolio evaluations have certain limitations that have been delineated in previous reports. The three country portfolio evaluations presented here had similar limitations:

- The GEF does not operate through country programs that specify expected achievements through programmatic objectives, indicators, and targets. Therefore, country portfolio evaluations entail some degree of retrofitting of

**Table 1.1**

**Project Coverage of Each Country Portfolio Evaluation**

Country	GEF funding (million \$) <sup>a</sup>	Number of projects evaluated			SGP evaluated	National completed projects
		National full- and medium-size projects	Enabling activities	Regional/global projects		
Egypt	92.19	12	7	8 of 24	Yes	9
Syria	12.72	5	5	8 of 13	Yes	6
Cameroon	25.55	5	5	11 of 19	Yes	5

a. GEF funding is for nationally implemented full- and medium-size projects, plus the total support through the GEF SGP; funding for Egypt is for 1991–2008; Syria, 1994–2008; and Cameroon, 1992–2007.

frameworks to be able to judge the relevance of the aggregated results of a diverse portfolio of projects. Accordingly, the evaluation frame proposed for country portfolio evaluations was adapted to national relevant policies, strategies, and planning frameworks, as a basis for assessing the results and relevance of the GEF portfolio.

- Attribution is another area of complexity. GEF support within any area is one contribution among others and is provided through partnerships with many institutions. Country portfolio evaluations do not attempt to attribute development or even environmental results directly to the GEF, but assess the contribution of GEF support to overall achievements.
- The assessment of results is focused, where possible, at the level of outcomes and impacts rather than outputs. Project-level results are measured against the overall expected impact and outcomes from each project. Expected impacts at the focal area level are assessed in the context of GEF objectives and indicators of global environmental benefits. Outcomes at the focal area level are primarily assessed in relation to catalytic and replication effects, institutional sustainability and capacity building, and awareness.
- Evaluating the impacts of GEF-funded initiatives is not straightforward. Many projects do not clearly or appropriately specify the expected impact and sometimes even the outcomes of projects. Often, the type of information provided by project reports and terminal evaluations is limited to outcomes or even just outputs and does not contain an evaluation of impacts. The project documents do not always provide clear, consistent formulations of objectives, indicators, and targets or baselines from which progress can be assessed. The absence of information on project impacts is also attributed to the time frames of evaluation cycles; evaluations are usually conducted before measurable impacts can be expected. As country portfolio evaluations are restricted to secondary sources, there is no scope for conducting primary research to supplement project reports or identify impact and outcomes.
- Visits to project sites are limited, although in most cases a large portion of the GEF portfolio was visited. In all cases, the project visits involved only a few days, at best, of contact with project beneficiaries and limited opportunities to verify results.

## 2. Conclusions

The conclusions presented here are based on three country portfolio evaluations, Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria. These countries were not selected to be representative of any particular group of countries, but their experience could be applicable to other countries. In addition, these three new country portfolio evaluations supplement the conclusions and recommendations from previous ones. The *Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009* acknowledges experiences and conclusions from previous country portfolio evaluations and thus tries to highlight new conclusions. The individual country portfolio evaluations for each of the three countries present more specific conclusions and recommendations; not all of these are presented here, as they are not considered of a sufficiently broad context. Each of the country portfolio evaluations has been discussed with national stakeholders in terms of local and national contexts, and the stakeholders have proposed actions as they deem appropriate; these are presented in the government responses to the individual evaluations.

The conclusions are presented here according to the three dimensions of the evaluations: that is, in terms of the **results** of the GEF support, its **relevance**, and its **efficiency**.

### 2.1 Results

The results are presented in terms of the outcomes and impacts of the various GEF-supported

projects. As discussed earlier, achievements are presented as the GEF contribution—from both GEF funding and other national/international cofinancing—toward solving global and national environmental issues and improving capacities.

Results were measured by focal area using the following parameters:

- **Impacts:** changes in environmental status, especially those of global significance as well as reductions in threats to globally significant resources
- **Outcomes:** catalytic and replication effects, policy changes and institutional sustainability, and capacity building and awareness

**Conclusion 1: GEF support to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use has been of strategic importance and has generated some impacts.**

The GEF has provided foundational support through enabling activities and other projects regarding the preparation of biodiversity strategies and action plans, capacity building, awareness raising, and institutional strengthening. In Egypt and Syria, for example, the GEF contributed to developing institutional capacity within national and local authorities. GEF support has also contributed to raising awareness of biodiversity issues on the part of decision makers outside environmental circles, of the local administration, of the

media, and of the public at large. The result has been higher political prioritization of and greater visibility for the issue of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; this in turn has enabled some biodiversity projects to generate considerable cofinancing from line ministries, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

GEF support has been instrumental in the planning, expansion, and management of protected area systems, with the potential to secure and sustain global environmental benefits in all three countries. For example, in Cameroon, GEF support contributed to the creation of more than 24,000 square kilometers of protected areas, including 5 national parks, 44 community-based natural resource management units, and 39 community forests.

GEF support has put in place various local incentives and provided alternatives to reduce threats to biodiversity resources. For example, GEF projects have attempted to deliver an approach that balances restricting access to resources with compensatory measures for livelihoods.

The only country portfolio evaluation that provides actual impacts in biodiversity is the one for Syria, where GEF support has increased the number of migratory birds flying into protected areas.

**Conclusion 2: It is difficult to quantify direct greenhouse gas emissions reduction or avoidance from GEF support of climate change, but the GEF has introduced the topic in these countries and has influenced markets, particularly in energy efficiency.**

Only in the case of Egypt was quantitative information available about carbon dioxide–equivalent emissions reduction or avoidance resulting from GEF support. It is estimated that, through energy efficiency, the GEF has been able to contribute to the cumulative reduction of 16.8 million tons of

carbon dioxide in Egypt. All three country portfolio evaluations provide evidence that market transformations have taken place in energy-efficient lighting, energy services companies, energy-efficiency appliances, and efficiency management systems for power generation plants. The Egyptian and Syrian governments are now considering laws dealing with energy-efficiency standards and codes. The SGP provided alternatives to communities for energy generation, particularly through projects in biogas.

The topic of climate change was introduced through GEF support in the three countries, particularly through the enabling activities and projects in the area of energy efficiency. Egypt is the only one of these three countries that has received GEF support for adaptation through a recently approved project funded by the Special Climate Change Fund.

**Conclusion 3: Results in the other focal areas have been limited to setting up the foundation for national and regional action plans and policy development, and enhancing national capacity.**

GEF support in international waters was substantial in Egypt while very limited in Cameroon and Syria. International waters projects in Egypt (about 15 national and regional projects in all) have laid the foundation for collaboration among countries and demonstrated innovative technologies for and approaches to water conservation. For example, the national projects piloted and stimulated research in the areas of wetlands engineering and groundwater resources. GEF support has reached all of the main transboundary water bodies in Egypt: the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Nile River, and the Nubian aquifer. These regional projects have stimulated a dialogue among the countries of the region that might not have taken place otherwise on a very strategic, political sensitive, and important issue: water



resource management. However, Egypt's country portfolio evaluation found that these regional initiatives have exhibited weak coordination among national institutions, limited information dissemination and utilization, and highly variable local capacities making implementation more complex.

The three countries have received funding from the GEF to prepare national implementation plans for the initial collection, verification, and analysis of their persistent organic pollutants situation and of options to inform relevant decision making at all levels. GEF support has managed to put this important environmental issue on the governments' agendas; however, none of the plans has yet been implemented.

Combating land degradation is a key national priority in these three countries, but GEF support has been limited to Cameroon as of the end of December 2008. Even so, the support to Cameroon (one national project, Sustainable Agro-Pastoral and Land Management Promotion under the National Community Development Program Support Program, and participation in a regional support project to develop a national plan) has not yet produced direct environmental impacts. Furthermore, Cameroon is not participating in the GEF's TerrAfrica initiative, the Strategic Investment Program for Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt is one of the countries addressed by the recently approved MENARID Program: Integrated Nature Resources Management in the Middle East and North Africa Region; but as of this writing, there is no national component or activities approved for this country.<sup>1</sup> Syria is not participating in this project, and no projects in this focal area have been supported by the GEF

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<sup>1</sup>A national project under MENARID was initially planned but had not materialized at the time of the Egypt Country Portfolio Evaluation.

in this country: a national land degradation proposal supported by the Syrian government was not approved by the GEF.

The limited support provided to this focal area can be explained by the fact that, although the GEF received guidance from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to prioritize Sub-Saharan Africa, worldwide demand for GEF resources has exceeded available resources. Given the shortcomings of the GEF-4 replenishment, there have not been sufficient funds within the GEF to provide this support. The International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations—both GEF Agencies with a comparative advantage in this focal area—have substantial programs in these countries with no GEF components.

#### **Conclusion 4: Long-term sustainability of achievements remains a challenge.**

The three country portfolio evaluations found several factors that affect the sustainability of achievements so far:

- There has been inadequate planning and insufficient resource allocation at all levels.
- Private sector involvement to mobilize financial resources has been insufficient due to lack of engagement and/or development of appropriate mechanisms to meaningfully leverage or interest the private sector.
- Exit strategies, including hand-over of project results to their final national institution destinations, take place too late in the project cycle.
- National counterpart resources are introduced too late in the project cycle.
- Dissemination of project outcomes and outputs to policy makers, executive bodies, and

the public does not receive adequate attention. Short operational lifetime of a project often limits the degree of dissemination that can be achieved.

- The potential for replication needs to be better incorporated into project design in order to reap the full benefits of the knowledge and experience generated by projects.
- Large-scale and long lead-time changes to national policies—for example, in the case of Syria, the development of financial instruments to sustain achievements in biodiversity—present challenges and require additional institutional reforms.
- Risks develop as a consequence of insufficient management capacity and oversight.
- There are insufficient local benefits and/or incentives for communities to support conservation and environmental protection.

The three country portfolio evaluations did illustrate several good examples of measures for ensuring sustainability. In Egypt, there has been a shift from a portfolio largely driven by technological approaches to one that now involves more community-oriented mechanisms. In both Egypt and Syria, the development and passage of energy-efficiency laws will provide the necessary legal framework for the sustainability of achievements in that area. In Cameroon, the long-term budgetary support approach used in the Forest and Environment Sector Program provides an opportunity for the government, civil society, the private sector, and communities to collectively engage in an effort to address environmental governance and underinvestment in the sector. The Cameroon country portfolio evaluation also identified a potential for significant economic displacement risks associated with enhanced enforcement of environmental laws in managing protected area systems.

## 2.2 Relevance

Relevance of GEF support is assessed against the country's national development and environmental agendas, the GEF mandate, and the country's responsibilities and obligations toward the global conventions.

**Conclusion 5: GEF support is relevant to national environmental priorities and to the conventions to which the GEF serves as the financial mechanism even though there is no GEF country-specific framework or vision.**

As concluded in previous country portfolio evaluations, GEF support was found to be directly relevant to the national environmental priorities of the countries examined. This relevance is manifested in different ways: either GEF support provides the funding to develop national priorities (for example, through prioritization and inventory exercises funded by enabling activities), or it provides the funding to implement an already established national priority, or it is applied within an existing framework (for protected areas, energy efficiency, and so on).

An additional finding from these three country portfolio evaluations is that, since bilateral support to environmental issues has decreased over the years, GEF support has become more relevant than in the past. At least the GEF has increased its share of official development assistance for the environmental sector.

Although the GEF has been relevant to national priorities, not all national priorities have been prioritized by the GEF, in particular land degradation (which has received very little GEF support in all three countries) and freshwater resource management, particularly in Syria.

Finally, the three evaluations found that these countries still do not have a clear GEF coun-



try framework that provides a roadmap for GEF activities in the countries. Even if the GEF does not require such a framework, the country portfolio evaluations found that the relevance, country ownership (see below), and integrated impacts of GEF-supported activities could be enhanced if they were developed within a national GEF framework rather than responding to GEF strategies, global conventions, and sectoral national strategies.

**Conclusion 6: Country ownership of the GEF portfolio varies, with many project ideas driven by GEF Agencies and external factors, including global issues; this is particularly true for regional and global projects.**

As found in previous country portfolio evaluations, country ownership of GEF support varies by focal area. Ownership also seems to vary by modality, particularly with regard to the scale of GEF support. The evaluations in Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria found that ownership seems to decrease with increasing size from SGP projects with seemingly full ownership at the local and national levels; to national projects, whose ownership level varies by focal area; to regional and global projects, whose ownership becomes less apparent, particularly in the biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation areas.

An issue of perception pertains between global versus national priorities and issues. While biodiversity and climate change issues are considered to be responding more to a global or international agenda, the focal areas related to water and land management are perceived as fully national priorities.

## 2.3 Efficiency

The efficiency of GEF support is assessed against the time, effort, and financial resources needed to

prepare and implement GEF projects; the different roles and responsibilities of the various GEF stakeholders (national, international, and local) and the synergies between projects and these stakeholders; and the particular role of the GEF focal point mechanism.

**Conclusion 7: The potential benefits of the new project cycle have not yet reached the country level.**

The GEF is still perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect project proposals and implementation processes. The findings from the three country portfolio evaluations confirm the findings of previous evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office. Project preparation, particularly project document writing, is often delegated to GEF Agencies by governmental authorities. The new project cycle guidelines and benefits, particularly the 22-month project cycle established for GEF-4, have not materialized at the country level yet. Any streamlined processes established by the GEF have been overshadowed by the multiple project proposal revisions (both in substance and form). It is perceived that these long project preparations are not a value added to project design and implementation but are merely a procedural burden.

One issue of concern, also raised by other evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office, in particular the annual performance report, is that many projects set unrealistic objectives for project duration and thus project completion dates have to be changed. In Syria, project extensions vary from 60 to 120 percent of planned project duration.

**Conclusion 8: Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank and the regional banks do not have programs there.**

This conclusion is applicable only to Syria from among these three country portfolio evaluations

but may be applicable to other countries in the Middle East and other regions. Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies compared to other countries in the region and the world. The only agency with which Syria participates is the International Fund for Agricultural Development, since the World Bank has not had a lending program or country strategy since 1986 and Syria is not covered by the Asian Development Bank.

**Conclusion 9: The efficiency of the focal point mechanism is directly correlated to the size of the country's GEF portfolio.**

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The three country portfolio evaluations have different GEF portfolio sizes, with Egypt having the largest and Syria the smallest. The establishment of the GEF Unit and National Steering Committee in Egypt has improved the approval process of GEF projects, which is now more systematic, follows clear priorities, and is more country driven.

## 3. Recommendations and Observations

### 3.1 Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: The GEF should address the significant gap of available resources for combating land degradation to support key challenges facing countries such as Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria.**

The possibility of additional allocations for activities in the field of sustainable land management should be further explored by all main partners in the GEF. There is widespread demand in Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria for activities in the area of combating land degradation. GEF-supported projects have concentrated on biodiversity and climate change, with land degradation receiving basically no support despite being a high national priority.

**Recommendation 2: The GEF should focus attention on countries such as Syria that have limited access to international financial institutions.**

Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, and other countries may be in a similar circumstance. The GEF should conduct an inventory

of such countries and develop proposals on how these countries could be supported through other institutions.

### 3.2 Observations

1. Databases of GEF activities maintained by the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies, and national focal points are still not accurate.
2. As requested by the Council, the GEF should continue to monitor the results of Cameroon's Forest and Environment Sector Program budgetary support approach to see whether it could be followed in other countries. The program is still not sufficiently mature to enable definitive judgment on its results. The country portfolio evaluation recognized that the program offers a potentially beneficial alternative to the short time horizons of traditional project-based approaches in terms of providing greater flexibility for financial, institutional, and individual capacity development; catalytic changes in behavior; and harmonization of donor efforts in the long term.



# Annex A. Main Conclusions and Recommendations to the GEF Council from the Three Country Portfolio Evaluations

Conclusions			Recommendations
Results	Relevance	Efficiency	
<b>Cameroon</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The GEF portfolio has the potential to generate global environmental benefits in biodiversity conservation. Although local benefits are visible, these are not yet able to provide substantial incentives to support conservation activities.</li> <li>The GEF is enabling Cameroon to address other environmental issues, particularly in the international waters and land degradation focal areas.</li> <li>The results of the GEF portfolio in Cameroon are at risk because of weak financial, institutional, and socioeconomic sustainability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GEF support is relevant to Cameroon's national and international environmental agenda.</li> <li>Although the GEF portfolio is relevant to national and international priorities, project identification and preparation are externally driven, and enhancing country ownership is challenging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The findings of the Joint Evaluation of the GEF Activity Cycle and Modalities were confirmed in Cameroon: the complexity and inefficiency of the GEF Activity Cycle have presented barriers to project development.</li> <li>Knowledge management and lesson learning are weak, and there are opportunities for enhancement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The GEF should continue to monitor the results of the Forest and Environment Sector Program budgetary support approach to see whether it could be followed in other countries.</li> <li>The GEF should develop a strategy to improve capacities to address global environmental issues in Sub-Saharan Africa.</li> <li>The GEF should consider further supporting trust funds as an approach to improving the sustainability of global environmental benefits.</li> </ul>
<b>Egypt</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GEF support to biodiversity in Egypt has been of strategic importance.</li> <li>Climate change activities have achieved results, particularly in energy efficiency.</li> <li>International waters projects have laid the foundation for collaboration among countries and demonstrated innovative technologies and approaches for water conservation.</li> <li>GEF support to Egypt in the areas of land degradation and persistent organic pollutants has been limited.</li> <li>The long-term sustainability of achieved results remains a challenge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In general, GEF projects and activities address national priorities and coincide well with the environmental agenda in Egypt.</li> <li>GEF support in Egypt has been of particular strategic importance as compared to other donors in the field of the environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In line with earlier findings of the evaluation of the project cycle, the project preparatory phase in Egypt is often too long, running the risk of altered country priorities as well as GEF priorities by the time of approval and implementation.</li> <li>Project supervision and/or steering committees need to be more proactive and responsive to address problems and facilitate implementation in a timely manner.</li> <li>The delivery of functions of the focal point mechanism in Egypt has improved since the establishment of the GEF Unit and the GEF National Steering Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The GEF Council should address the significant gap of available resources in land degradation to support key challenges facing countries such as Egypt.</li> </ul>

Conclusions			Recommendations
Results	Relevance	Efficiency	
<b>Syria</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEF's support to biodiversity conservation has shown some impacts but has specifically contributed to the formal protection of globally significant biodiversity and strengthened management systems.</li> <li>• There are no data to estimate the direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but GEF support has influenced national energy-efficiency laws with potential long-lasting impacts.</li> <li>• Results in other focal areas are limited to establishing the foundation for national action plans and policies and developing national capacities.</li> <li>• Long-term sustainability of achievements continues to be a challenge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEF support addressed national priorities in the biodiversity and climate change focal areas; however, other national priorities have not been addressed, such as inland international waters and land degradation.</li> <li>• Outcomes of SGP projects are more likely to be sustained by local communities.</li> <li>• Country ownership of the GEF portfolio is strong for national projects and, to a lesser extent, for regional and global projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The GEF is perceived by national stakeholders as overly complicated and inefficient in ways that negatively affect project proposals and implementation.</li> <li>• Syria has limited access to GEF investment agencies, since the World Bank does not have a program and Syria does not belong to any of the regional banks with direct GEF access.</li> <li>• The focal point mechanism is overly centralized within the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs with no clear mechanism for developing and approving GEF-supported projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEF should increase its funding for land degradation and water management issues, both high priorities for countries such as Syria.</li> <li>• The GEF should focus attention on countries in exceptional situations concerning limited access to GEF investment agencies.</li> </ul>

## Annex B. Management Response

*This annex presents the management response to this report, which was presented to the GEF Council in June 2009 as GEF/C.35/ME/2. Minor editorial corrections have been made.*

We have taken note of the “Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2009.” It was prepared by the Evaluation Office on the basis of country portfolio evaluations conducted in three countries: Cameroon, Egypt, and Syria.

We welcome the principal conclusions of the evaluation, in particular the GEF’s contribution toward solving global and national environmental issues and improving capacities. We concur with the conclusion that GEF support to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use has been of strategic importance and has generated significant impacts. In both Syria and Egypt, foundational support has contributed to raising awareness on biodiversity issues and raised their profile on the political agenda and leveraged resources.

In the climate change focal area, we note the conclusion of the difficulty in directly quantifying greenhouse gas emission or avoidance of emissions. However, in the case of Egypt, it was estimated that through energy efficiency, the GEF contributed to the cumulative reduction of 16.8 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. We are also pleased that improved capacity, public awareness, and the enabling environment across

focal areas was achieved, and that the GEF has influenced market transformations in the energy-efficient sector.

While the evaluation concludes that the results in the other focal areas have been limited to setting up foundational capacity and enhancing national capacity, we confirm the appropriateness of these results for international waters and persistent organic pollutants projects. We welcome the conclusion that GEF support is relevant to national environmental priorities and the conventions. These findings confirm the relevance of the GEF’s mandate and contribution to achieving national environmental priorities.

Thus, we find the comment regarding land degradation to be slightly contradictory. Underfunding is an issue that applies across the whole GEF portfolio, and we note that land degradation is not the only area where a higher resource level would help countries to better meet their environmental priorities.

We are committed to working with countries to increase country ownership across the GEF portfolio. The GEF-funded Country Support Programme is just one step to provide support to focal points. In addition, subregional workshops and constituency meetings are organized, where focal points receive updated information about the evolution of the GEF and its procedures from

GEF Secretariat and Agency resource persons. Another important measure was noted by the evaluation: the establishment of the GEF Unit and National Steering Committee in Egypt. We will continue to work with countries to ensure familiarization with GEF processes and to foster learning and exchange.

We note the findings that improvements in the GEF project cycle and the overall impact of the Council-approved reforms have not yet percolated to the local level. As a concrete measure to narrow this gap, we support and are already acting on Recommendation 2 to proactively engage with countries to arrive at more flexible country-based approaches.

The GEF Secretariat launched a new project management information system (PMIS) after undertaking a thorough cleanup of the database. However, reconciliation with the Trustee on project data is still under way, and the lack of a direct connection between the Trustee and the GEF Secretariat leads to continuing difficulties to balance the budgets. Current efforts will ensure more reliable data in the PMIS, but it should be

realized that the inconsistencies of data among the PMIS, Agencies, and focal points are multi-fold, including among other things: the timing of the data entry to the record, the definition of fund utilization, and the unused remaining funds. The GEF Secretariat has provided definitions of key financial terms to all Agencies; however, full adoption of unified definitions is still in progress. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure full consistency and use of key financial terms. We feel that these efforts will eliminate a major source of discrepancies in the data for all stakeholders.

The new GEF project cycle introduced a streamlining of the approval process, as well as shortening the project cycle. However, the achievement of the streamlining effort takes time and requires the efforts of all parties involved. The multiplicity of rounds of project reviews stemmed from lack of clarity either from the project reviewer or from the respondent to the issues raised. While the project cycle provided the structural change for efficiency, its strategic and careful implementation should be strictly enforced in order to achieve the objectives of the streamlining efforts.



## GEF Evaluation Office Publications

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>
<b>Evaluation Reports</b>		
49	GEF Annual Performance Report 2008	2009
48	GEF Annual Impact Report 2008	2009
47	Midterm Review of the Resource Allocation Framework	2009
46	GEF Annual Report on Impact 2007	2009
45	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Cameroon (1992–2007)	2009
44	GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2008	2008
43	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: South Africa (1994–2007)	2008
42	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Madagascar (1994–2007)	2008
41	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Benin (1991–2007)	2008
40	GEF Annual Performance Report 2007	2008
39	Joint Evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Programme	2008
38	GEF Annual Performance Report 2006	2008
37	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Samoa (1992–2007)	2008
36	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: The Philippines (1992–2007)	2008
35	Evaluation of the Experience of Executing Agencies under Expanded Opportunities in the GEF	2007
34	Evaluation of Incremental Cost Assessment	2007
33	Joint Evaluation of the GEF Activity Cycle and Modalities	2007
32	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Costa Rica (1992–2005)	2007
31	GEF Annual Performance Report 2005	2006
30	The Role of Local Benefits in Global Environmental Programs	2006
29	GEF Annual Performance Report 2004	2005
28	Evaluation of GEF Support for Biosafety	2006
	Third Overall Performance Study	2005
	GEF Integrated Ecosystem Management Program Study	2005
	Biodiversity Program Study	2004
	Climate Change Program Study	2004
	International Waters Program Study	2004
<b>Evaluation Documents</b>		
ED-3	Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations	2008
ED-2	GEF Evaluation Office Ethical Guidelines	2008
ED-1	The GEF Evaluation and Monitoring Policy	2006



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