



# CASE STUDY ON EVALUATION OF GEF SUPPORT IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

This Case Study is from "Toolkit on Monitoring and Evaluation of Environmental Peacebuilding 2023"

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The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a multilateral trust fund that provides support to developing countries to implement multilateral environmental agreements. The GEF's work is organized around five focal areas: biodiversity loss, chemicals and waste, climate change, international waters, and land degradation. In previous evaluations, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the GEF had observed concerns regarding the work that the GEF supports in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Despite the GEF's programming in such contexts, the GEF lacked a definition, policies, and procedures for designing and implementing projects in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

The IEO commissioned the Environmental Law Institute to undertake an evaluation of GEF support in fragile and conflict-affected situations. The evaluation sought to answer four questions:






- How prevalent is conflict and fragility in the context of GEF-supported projects?
- Does the conflict or fragile context affect the outcomes of GEF-supported projects?
- To what extent do GEF-supported projects take into account the conflict or fragile context in their design and implementation?
- What conflict-sensitive measures could the GEF, its Agencies, and partners adopt to improve the performance and outcomes of GEF-supported interventions?

In undertaking the evaluation, staff expressed potential concern that they might be evaluated on actions (or inactions) that are outside their mandate, expertise, and control. The GEF is neither a peacebuilding nor conflict-management organization. To preemptively address such concerns, the evaluation was framed not as an evaluation of whether projects were fulfilling their obligations but as an evaluation to learn whether there are systemic factors that may influence intervention success and identifying measures that could address those factors.

Evaluation methodology. The evaluation assessed the impacts of conflict and fragility on the design and implementation of GEF interventions on three scales: globally, at the country and regional levels, and at the project level. At the global level, the evaluation examined the full GEF portfolio, considering the extent, nature, and results of GEF-funded interventions in countries affected by fragility and major armed conflict (i.e., conflicts with more than 1,000 battle deaths) vis-à-vis other countries. At the country and regional levels, the evaluation selected seven situations of focus using criteria such as regional diversity and presence of major armed conflict since 1989. The selected situations were Afghanistan the Albertine Rift (including parts of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia), the Balkans (including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, (North) Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), Cambodia, Colombia, Lebanon, and Mali.

## AT A GLANCE EVALUATION

- Programmatic Evaluations
- Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings

	PHYSICAL INSECURITY	SOCIAL CONFLICT AND MISTRUST	ECONOMIC DRIVERS	POLITICAL FRAGILITY AND WEAK GOVERNANCE	COPING STRATEGIES
					
Negative impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impedes access to project site</li> <li>• Physical safety of project staff and partners</li> <li>• Difficulties hiring staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land tenure issues</li> <li>• Sensitivities hiring project staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illicit extraction and trade of natural resources</li> <li>• Competition over resources can drive conflicts and put staff and parties at risk</li> <li>• Currency depreciation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional capacity and legitimacy</li> <li>• Financial capacity</li> <li>• Corruption and rule of law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict between internally displaced persons/refugees and local communities</li> <li>• Decreased carrying capacity</li> <li>• Vulnerability enhanced by climatic stressors</li> </ul>
Positive impact		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects designed to increase cooperation among groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects focused on livelihoods and sustainable natural resource management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects designed to align with governmental priorities, including implementation of peace agreement</li> </ul>	

In each situation, the evaluation team reviewed the available project documents for all projects and then selected 6-10 illustrative projects for further analysis. The analysis utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition to review of project documents, the evaluation team conducted a literature review and undertook interviews with project staff, former employees, GEF Secretariat staff members, GEF Agency staff, and civil society informants.

### Findings

The evaluation (GEF IEO 2020) found that the vast majority (88 percent) of GEF projects occur in countries affected by fragility. As of July 2020, the GEF had invested \$4 billion (> 1/3 of its portfolio) in countries affected by major armed conflict. Second, the evaluation found that fragility has a statistically significant impact on all performance indicators, and conflict and fragility had statistically significant impacts on a project being cancelled or dropped, as well as increased duration of delays. Third, many GEF projects had already innovated ways to manage the risks associated by conflict and fragility.

Typologies. Drawing on GEF innovations and experiences, the evaluation organically developed two notable typologies. The typologies were based on the observations collected during the evaluation, including the findings of the in-depth analysis of designing and implementing GEF projects. The first typology presents the key pathways by which conflict and fragility affect GEF projects: insecurity, social conflict, economic drivers, political fragility and weak governance, and coping strategies (see below). The second typology identified the approaches to conflict-sensitive programming that GEF projects have innovated in the absence of a broader GEF approach to managing conflict- and fragility-related risks: acknowledgment, conflict avoidance, mitigation of risks, engaging in peacebuilding, and learning. These typologies were particularly notable for drawing upon a substantial evidence base of GEF experiences, while also being consistent with the broader literature.

COVID-19. While the evaluation was under way, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted. Travel restrictions hindered GEF project staff from working on the ground, affecting the ability of projects to establish trust with the local populations. Such restrictions made it difficult to undertake consultations to develop a project or build public consensus. The resort to virtual communications over the phone or internet rendered the projects more removed from local communities. While the pandemic had some modest effect on the evaluation (affecting travel), it had a broader relevance, highlighting the importance of adaptive approaches to GEF programming. Indeed, one of the notable findings of the evaluation was that it was often difficult for projects to adapt nimbly to fragile and conflict-affected contexts that are often volatile and dynamic. COVID-19 reinforced the broader relevance of the findings and recommendations related to adaptability as being important far beyond fragile and conflict-affected contexts.



## The evaluation made five key recommendations

The GEF Council discussed the evaluation and its findings, and endorsed the five recommendations.

1

The GEF Secretariat should use the project review process to identify conflict- and fragility-related risks to a proposed project and develop measures to mitigate those risks.

2

The GEF Secretariat could develop guidance for conflict-sensitive programming.

3

The GEF Secretariat and the Agencies should leverage existing platforms for learning, exchange, and technical assistance to improve conflict-sensitive design and implementation of GEF projects.

4

The current GEF Environmental and Social Safeguards could be expanded to provide more details so that GEF projects address key conflict-sensitive consideration.

5

The GEF Secretariat could consider revising its policies and procedures to enable projects to better adapt to rapid and substantial changes in fragile and conflict-affected situations.