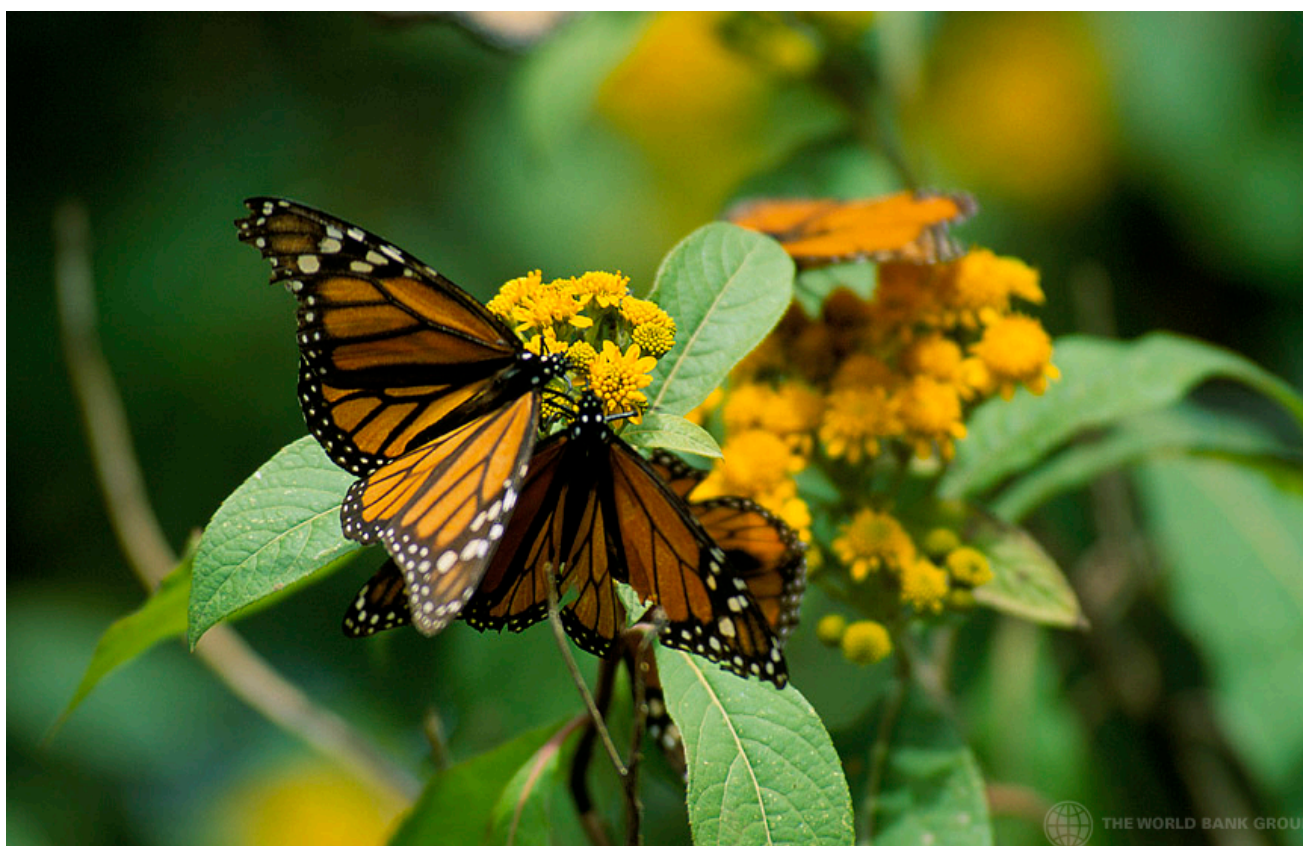


Professional Peer Review of the Independent Evaluation Function of the Global Environment Facility 2019



December 2019

**Third Professional Peer Review of the Independent Evaluation
Function of the Global Environment Facility**

Final report

8 April 2020

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Acronyms and abbreviations

APR	Annual Performance Report/s
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPE	Country Portfolio Evaluation
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECG	Evaluation Cooperation Group
ECWs	Expanded Constituency Workshops
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEB	Global Environmental Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KM	Knowledge Management
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
MAR/s	Management Action Record/s
MR/s	Management Response/s
OFP/s	GEF Operational Focal Point/s
OPS	Overall Performance Study/Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF
PFP/s	GEF Political Focal Point/s
PR	Peer Review
SAER	Semi-Annual Evaluation Report
SCCE	Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
TE/s	Terminal Evaluation/s
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WB	World Bank

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. The evaluation function in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) helps the GEF to become more effective in its pursuit of Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) and has two overarching objectives:
 - a. Promote accountability for the achievement of GEF objectives through the assessment of results, effectiveness, processes and performance of the GEF Secretariat and GEF partners involved in GEF-financed activities;
 - b. Promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned from evaluations of GEF-financed activities as a basis for decision making on projects, programs, program management, policies, and strategies; and to improve performance.
2. The peer review of an evaluation function is a mechanism developed by the professional networks of the evaluation functions of the UN and Multilateral Development Banks,¹ that intends to identify good practices and opportunities to further strengthen the evaluation function. In 2009 and in 2014, two peer reviews of the GEF evaluation function were carried out and presented to the GEF Council, as independent contributions to the overall assessment of the GEF. Their recommendations and suggestions were discussed and acted upon as deemed appropriate.
3. In December 2018, the GEF Council endorsed IEO's proposal that a third Professional Peer Review (PR) be carried out in 2019/2020, following both UNEG and ECG standards. The primary audiences for the Peer Review are the GEF Council, GEF Secretariat, the Independent Evaluation Office and GEF Partnership. The report will be made publicly available through the Web sites of the GEF Council, GEF IEO, ECG and UNEG.

Purpose, scope and methodology of the peer review

4. The main purpose and objective of this PR were the following: *'to enhance the evaluation function in the GEF partnership, by reviewing IEO's mandate, role and performance'*; and *'to clearly identify IEO's main strengths and those areas where improvement is necessary.'*
5. The Panel conducted its analysis and structured its key findings, conclusions on the performance of the GEF evaluation function by the three overarching PR criteria of Independence, Credibility and Utility, and by each of the five main topics that had been identified as key in the performance of the GEF evaluation function.
6. The PR was conducted in line with both UNEG and ECG relevant guidelines and was characterized by extensive and cordial dialogue between the Panel and IEO staff and an open and transparent approach with all other stakeholders within the GEF Secretariat and across the GEF Partnership. Main tools included: interviews with 92 informants from among members and staff of: GEF Council, GEF Secretariat, GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), IEO, coordination and evaluation units in partner Agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs); e-survey questionnaire to GEF Operational Focal Points and Political Focal Points, GEF coordination and evaluation units in partner Agencies, Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Conventions for which the GEF acts as financing mechanism and IEO evaluation consultants; desk-review of relevant GEF and IEO documents and of a purposefully selected sample of 50% of the evaluation reports issued by IEO in the period 2015-2019.

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Independence

7. IEO is a fully independent office from the GEF secretariat in terms of mandate, reporting lines, work program development, internal work organization and management of human resources and budget. The GEF Council provides the necessary enabling environment to safeguard the independence of the function; and the natural tension between IEO and the GEF Secretariat is broadly well managed.

¹ IEO is a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and an observer of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG).

8. The organizational independence of IEO is explicitly acknowledged in the GEF Instrument and throughout all GEF policies that directly or indirectly address the evaluation function. The Memorandum of Understanding between GEF Secretariat and IEO also effectively regulates the administrative and financial transactions between the two parties and is a safeguard for IEO's independence.

9. With regard to behavioural independence, IEO Management Team and staff all abide by the evaluation principles of rigour, independence, impartiality and absence of bias and conflict of interest. Nevertheless, for reasons that probably stem mostly from a vision of evaluation where contribution to learning is emphasised more than accountability, IEO evaluations tend to be slightly off-balance in their assessment of positive achievements versus weaknesses and gaps in implementation and results.

Credibility

10. Across the GEF partnership and in the international evaluation community, the credibility of IEO is high. IEO evaluation reports are respected and referred to by most stakeholders, from the GEF Council to Civil Society Organizations. The Office is perceived to be on the cutting edge of innovation in the field of environmental evaluation and to be rigorous in conducting its evaluations.

11. The Panel recognizes the satisfactory quality of a many IEO's evaluations, but also identified several steps and approaches in the conduct of evaluations where IEO can significantly improve and enhance the credibility of its work.

Utility

12. The utility of IEO evaluations was found to be quite variable across the different products of the Office and the perspective of each group of stakeholders in the GEF Partnership. This was to be expected, considering the variety of interests of each group and, to some extent, the diversity of reports issued by IEO. Council members, participants in the GEF Replenishment negotiations and Partner Agencies assessed OPS as a highly useful and informative document. On the other hand, the Council's low attention to Management Responses and Management Action Records reduces the utility of the overall function.

13. GEF Senior Management acknowledged that OPS and other evaluations have been useful, though they also linked utility to the quality of the evaluation and the robustness of the findings and conclusions. However, evaluations focus on the past, whereas Management needs immediate feedback on what works and what does not. This is a legitimate request that should be rather met through adequate levels of strategic monitoring.

14. Within the GEF Secretariat, focal area studies are useful for technical experts and Agencies that focus on that specific area of work. However, IEO evaluations do not meet the needs for evaluative evidence of Partner Agencies, which tended to miss evaluations that provide guidance for improved project design; and most importantly, of Recipient countries that would like to see IEO evaluations better addressing the country level.

Governance of the GEF evaluation function

15. The GEF Council, which is co-chaired by GEF Chief Executive Officer and by one council member elected at the beginning of each session, has the role of oversight of the evaluation function and guardian of its independence, and evaluation is a standing agenda item in all Council sessions. The Council also appoints a professionally competent director to lead IEO, upon indication by the Selection and Review Committee of the Council itself (SRC) which is also tasked with assessing the performance of the incumbent. No issues have emerged in this respect and the mechanism has worked smoothly so far. The 2019 Policy calls, however, for a decision by Council with respect to the term of assignment of the future IEO Director, which had not been specified at the time of writing this report. The current trend in international organizations for such posts is of one single-term, five or six years long.

16. The GEF Secretariat's tasks with regard to evaluation comprise, in a recipient position; discussing and contributing proposals to IEO for the evaluation work program; commenting on evaluation approach papers or ToRs; providing information through documents, interviews, discussions; commenting on draft evaluation reports and receiving final evaluation reports. The Secretariat cannot approve, hold back, request changes,

or otherwise modify draft and final evaluations. However, the GEF evaluation policies hold the Secretariat responsible, at the end of each evaluation process, for the preparation of a Management Response, for implementing accepted recommendations and for reporting on the related outcomes.

17. Overall, the institutional framework within which the evaluation function in the GEF operates, safeguards the institutional independence of IEO, as its core unit, and the management of its human resources and budget. The framework also enables IEO to plan and conduct rigorous evaluations and produce and disseminate independent evaluation reports, while maintaining the necessary degree of proximity to the GEF Secretariat and ensures that the GEF Council gives due attention to evaluations.

18. Some features of the governance system, however, have a direct effect on the utility of the function and represent a threat to its independence. First, the Council does not fully exercise its role of oversight of the evaluation function by giving very limited attention to the Management Responses to evaluations and the Management Action Record tools, which are key, respectively, for the adequate use of evaluations and for enhancing accountability across the organization. In addition to diminishing the utility of IEO evaluations for improving the performance of the GEF, this appears to have occasionally exposed both the GEF Secretariat and IEO to negotiations and compromises that may be perceived as affecting the independence and transparency of the evaluation process. Also, a more appropriate language for the Council would be to 'receive and consider' evaluation reports and recommendations, rather than endorsing them.

Recommendation 1. To the Council, IEO and Secretariat, on the follow-up to evaluations

GEF Council, GEF Secretariat and the Independent Evaluation Office should jointly establish an agreed procedure or mechanism that:

- a) enables the Secretariat to prepare robust and articulate Management Responses and Management Action Records that can be used for a transparent decision-making process about follow-up to recommendations and allows progress in their implementation to be transparently recorded; and
- b) ensures adequate consideration by Council to the Secretariat's Management Responses and to the Management Action Records. As part of this step, Council should only receive evaluation reports and related recommendations, while endorsing - or not - only Management Responses and Management Action Records.

GEF evaluation policy

19. In November 2010, the Council approved the second GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. In 2015, IEO, in collaboration with the GEF Secretariat and the GEF agencies, launched an analysis of Council's decisions since 2010 to identify issues that should be addressed in a revised version of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. Initially planned for December 2015, the draft GEF Evaluation Policy was presented to the Council in June 2019 at the same time as the GEF Monitoring Policy. Evidence shows that the process for the preparation of the new policy was adequate and included a systematic consultation with the Partnership.

20. The Panel's analysis indicates that both the 2010 and the 2019 GEF evaluation policies comply with the internationally agreed standards for this type of document and define an adequate framework for the independence, credibility and utility of the GEF evaluation function. The two policies are also reasonably well aligned with other GEF policies and with the Partnership's goals and objectives. Nevertheless, the 2019 Evaluation Policy has several gaps that detract from its highly positive features and affect the overall performance of the evaluation function.

Recommendation 2. To the Council, IEO and Secretariat, for a revised evaluation policy

IEO should propose to the GEF Council and Secretariat a revised version of the GEF Evaluation Policy, that considers all the issues and adjustments identified in this report. The Policy should include:

- a) explicit reference to IEO as the core of a GEF Partnership-wide evaluation function;
- b) explicit integration of the human rights perspective as one of the evaluation lenses for assessing the work of the GEF;
- c) explicit clarification on the origin and size of IEO budget;
- d) explicit mention of the independence of IEO Director for all budgetary and human resources matters;
- e) explicit reference to the minimum requirements that apply to the entire evaluation function, IEO included;
- f) explicit clarification on the disclosure approach that applies to the IEO evaluations;
- g) explicit reference to the GEF Results Architecture;
- h) the terms of engagement of future IEO Director as decided by the Council.

The revised Policy should also avoid any language that attributes responsibilities to IEO Director that may represent a conflict of interest and a breach in the expected segregation of functions between management and evaluation.

Positioning and performance of IEO within the GEF evaluation function

21. IEO has a central role in the evaluation function of the GEF. It fulfils at the same time an evaluative function, which entails the independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEF at the project, program, portfolio, and institutional levels; and a normative function, by setting minimum evaluation requirements and standards for the GEF partnership to ensure improved and consistent measurement of GEF results.

22. IEO perceives itself and performs, at an adequate level, as being the evaluation unit of the GEF Secretariat. This led the Office to only partially fulfil its normative function for the Partnership, and to engage with its different members in a manner that on the one hand, does not adequately verify the quality of Terminal Evaluations; and on the other, misses opportunities, both for enhancing the relevance, quality and utility of its own evaluations and for broader learning across the Partnership.

23. The 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy included an oversight function for IEO, to “..provide quality control of the minimum requirements of monitoring and evaluation practices in the GEF, in full cooperation with relevant units in the GEF Agencies, and track implementation of Council decisions related to evaluation recommendations”. This function was not included in the 2019 Evaluation Policy. Conversely, the Panel, after analysing the structure of the GEF Partnership and the roles and responsibilities of each group of stakeholders, considers that IEO’s role and mandate should be those of the core unit of a Partnership-wide evaluation function and should include again the oversight role. Such a shift, which will entail major changes on the entirety of IEO’s mandate and work, appears necessary to ensure the relevance, credibility and utility of the entire evaluation function and to enhance its positive impacts on the performance of the GEF at all levels.

Recommendation 3. To IEO, on its role as the core of a Partnership-wide evaluation function

IEO should recognize and reinforce its role and mandate as the core of a Partnership-wide evaluation function that includes the Member Countries, the Secretariat, the STAP, the MEA Convention Secretariats and the Agencies. This should be achieved by engaging in a consistent and sustained manner with each group of Partners and by embedding this perspective in all IEO's work and modus-operandi. Actions should include inter-alia:

a) With the GEF Recipient countries:

i) use the ECWs as key opportunities for discussions and engagement among IEO senior staff, Member Countries and other stakeholders at the regional/sub-regional level on evaluation issues; **ii)** increase the number of countries, across all regions where the GEF operates, included for direct assessment in IEO's evaluations, and ensure that the respective OFPs/PFPs are fully involved in the planning and conduct of the country missions; insofar as possible, a restitution session should also take place at the end of each country visit; **iii)** developing country-specific Knowledge Products, along the lines of the recently prepared Country Notes, that synthesise the findings, recommendations and lessons learned from all relevant TEs and IEO's evaluations, aimed at more strategic partnership between the country and the GEF; and **iv)** at the completion of the three Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations planned for OPS-7, carrying out an independent cost-benefit analysis of this approach, compared to country portfolio evaluations; this should include the views of Recipient Countries on the advantages and disadvantages of the two models;

b) With all Partners, strengthen collaboration in the preparation of IEO work program; with the Secretariat, this should also consider the potential information generated by the suggested Secretariat strategic monitoring system, looking for complementarities based on respective comparative advantages and avoiding duplications;

c) With all Partners, involve them as members of evaluation Reference groups, peer reviews and quality assurance efforts, as appropriate;

d) With the STAP, coordinate the respective programs of work, exchange on methodological approaches and early sharing of findings and conclusions;

e) With Partner Agencies:

i) based on the findings and conclusions of the upcoming evaluation of Agencies' evaluation systems and arrangements, re-visit the policy of mandatory Terminal Evaluations for all projects with budget above USD 500,000, and identify with each Partner Agency the most efficient and effective mechanism for both accountability and lessons learning; **ii)** identify and adopt measures aimed at raising and harmonizing the quality of TEs of GEF-funded projects and programs; options may include: selectively conducting joint TEs, the development of more articulate tools and guidelines and systematic discussions and experience sharing across the Partnership on how to conduct TEs and how to rate criteria; any other mechanism that guarantees quality and independence of these key evaluations; **iii)** enhance the transparency of the validation process, also by interacting with partner Agencies during the process and by providing feedback on the final assessment; **iv)** use Terminal Evaluations as a source of findings and lessons learned to be shared with all Agencies, on themes for which there is a significant demand from partner Agencies; **v)** analyse systematically all the TE recommendations that have a relevance for GEF Secretariat, and integrate them into the Annual Performance Report or other IEO evaluations, as appropriate; and **vi)** develop guidelines on aspects of evaluation work and resources for which there is a significant demand from partner Agencies.

Relevance, effectiveness and quality of IEO's evaluation work

24. IEO conducts evaluations that aim at assessing the work of the GEF from different levels and perspectives. The 2019 Evaluation Policy lists seven distinct categories of evaluation, in addition to the project Terminal Evaluations that are responsibility of the GEF Agency. In practice, clearly distinct products are the OPS, IEO's flagship product that encompasses the evaluation of a large section of the GEF's activities and performance every four years, drawing on TEs, other IEO evaluations and specific studies. Focal area studies, country portfolio evaluations and strategic country cluster evaluations are clearly defined products too. Most other evaluations, however, do not really fit any specific category, partly because some evaluations

may start with a limited scope and become larger exercises during the process, and partly because a few exercises do not fully meet the definition of evaluation.

25. The relevance, effectiveness and quality of several IEO evaluations are satisfactory and overall, the credibility of the Office is high. OPS, is widely read and appreciated; a number of evaluations issued by the Office since 2015 have been effective in influencing change in GEF policies and operations; and the Office has been innovative on methods and tools in the field of evaluation of environmental topics, which has led to more robust evaluative findings.

26. But several other IEO's evaluations fall short of quality standards, are less relevant and have a lower overall utility. Issues that were identified as contributing to this situation include; the absence of systematic quality assurance mechanisms for all IEO evaluations; the limited engagement with most stakeholders in the Partnership in the evaluation cycle; the small samples of countries used in IEO evaluations for first-hand data gathering in the context of corporate evaluations and the limited transparency of the criteria used for their selection; a vision of evaluation where contribution to learning is emphasised over contributions to accountability; the strong reliance in IEO evaluations, in APRs and eventually OPS, on the ratings of TEs in the absence of adequate mechanisms to robustly verify the quality of the TEs and the comparability of the ratings.

27. IEO has given attention to Knowledge Management, and for example, IEO staff frequently participate in international conferences and events, to present methodological innovations and evaluation results. However, a number of weaknesses were found in the Office's approach to this area of work, with respect to their strategic planning and use, as well as quality.

Recommendation 4. Quality of IEO evaluation products

IEO should ensure that all its evaluation reports meet established standards of quality, in line with the international UNEG and/or ECG standards. This should include inter-alia:

- a) establishing a systematic internal quality assurance mechanism for evaluation approach papers and draft reports;
- b) improving the evidence base of its evaluations through larger samples and more interviewees across all groups of stakeholders, in particular at country level;
- c) based on the evaluation purpose, define its business model in terms of approach, methods, scope, terminology, staffing profile, and financial resources;
- d) improve the extent and quality of gender and socio-economic analysis and in mainstreaming both gender equality and human rights perspectives in its work;
- e) develop adequate standards and guidelines for internal use, to ensure harmonization of approaches;
- f) improve compliance with the GEF policies in the conduct of its own evaluations and in the guidance provided to partner Agencies for Terminal Evaluations;
- g) following consultation with Council and Secretariat, propose a revised model for the scope and contents of the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF, to make it a more focused and robust product;
- h) develop a communication and dissemination strategy aimed at ensuring the excellence of IEO's Knowledge Management products; this should define the profiles and quality of IEO's standard products, rationalizes the use of financial and human resources dedicated to this stream of work and ensures a broader dissemination of IEO evaluations.

IEO efficiency and organization

28. IEO is a productive office, with solid skills and competences in conducting evaluations of great complexity, a balanced mix of staff in terms of background, experience, gender and geographical representation. Current IEO leadership has been innovative in introducing new approaches to evaluation and office management.

29. Since 2016 IEO works through a two-layered pyramid, with all staff in the bottom layer and the Management Team in the upper layer. The Director mostly focuses on IEO's external relationships, including the Council, the Secretariat, the STAP and the international evaluation community, and the Deputy Director

is responsible for the internal office management and management of evaluation work. This led to some positive results, as well as to challenges that impacted on the internal overall efficiency. There is thus significant room for improving the internal modus-operandi of IEO, including in terms of clarity of roles and responsibilities at all levels, efficiency of the reporting lines, set-up for operational support.

Recommendation 5. To IEO, on its work organization

IEO should enhance the efficiency, effectiveness of the Office as a whole, by enhancing internal cooperation and collegiality, revising its working arrangements and the roles and responsibilities of its staff, and ensuring that its human resources match its evaluative and operational needs while taking into account the role of the World Bank as a Trustee. This should include, inter alia:

- a) re-define the roles and responsibilities of the Management Team, to focus on more inclusive programming, realistic planning, supporting staff doing evaluations and fostering collaboration;
- b) establish evaluation management procedures that build on the skills and competences of the Director, the Deputy Director and senior evaluators, with the aim of defining the most appropriate business model of each evaluation, of steering each evaluation process and ensuring the quality of the Office's evaluative outputs;
- c) re-structure and rationalize IEO's resources dedicated to carry out the various 'operations' functions, whilst making better use of the corporate WB support functions and mechanisms available;
- d) develop clearer terms of reference for the different roles in each evaluation team, assign tasks accordingly, and establish reporting lines within each team.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Peer Review

1. The evaluation function in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) helps the GEF to become more effective in its pursuit of Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) and has two overarching objectives:²

- a. Promote accountability for the achievement of GEF objectives through the assessment of results, effectiveness, processes and performance of the GEF Secretariat and GEF partners involved in GEF-financed activities;
- b. Promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned from evaluations of GEF-financed activities as a basis for decision making on projects, programs, program management, policies, and strategies; and to improve performance.

2. Within the GEF Partnership,³ the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) represents the core of the evaluation function. The Office is an independent unit of the GEF Secretariat,⁴ that reports directly to the GEF Council and has the mandate to independently evaluate GEF programs and activities, including those funded and implemented through the Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF),⁵ and provide guidance to GEF partner Agencies regarding the evaluation of GEF-funded initiatives. IEO is also responsible for validating the Terminal Evaluations (TEs) of GEF-funded projects and programs carried out by GEF partner Agencies, but it is not accountable for the institutional arrangements of Agencies' evaluation functions beyond what is committed to in the memorandum of understanding or agreement signed by each Agency with the GEF Secretariat.

3. IEO is a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and an observer of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG).⁶ The two networks have developed internal mechanisms to support professional Peer Reviews of the evaluation function of their member organizations. Peer Reviews intend to identify good practices and opportunities to further strengthen the evaluation function in the agency under review, with a view to contributing ultimately to improved performance in international development cooperation, including its normative aspects, and humanitarian assistance.

4. The first Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of the GEF was conducted in 2009, as an independent assessment of the role and performance of the GEF Evaluation Office within the overall framework of the Overall Performance Study-4 (OPS-4) that was led for the first time by the Office.⁷ Upon decision of the GEF Council, the findings and recommendations of the Peer Review and the comments made by Council members were integrated into a revised version of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, issued in 2010. In May 2014, the report of the Second Professional Peer Review of the GEF Evaluation Function (hereinafter referred to as the 2014 Second Peer Review) was presented to the GEF Council at the same time as the final report for OPS-5 and with a similar purpose as the first Peer Review. Upon the Council's request, the findings and recommendations of the Peer Review and the comments made by Council members were integrated into the Work Program of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) for GEF-6.

² Adapted from GEF Evaluation Policy, June 2019, at http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.ME_C56_02_Rev01_GEF_Evaluation_Policy_June_2019_0.pdf.

³ The GEF Partnership includes a variety of organizations and institutions, see Section 3 of the report.

⁴ From the "Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility", September 2019, paragraph 11.

⁵ The report will refer to IEO's evaluative work for the LDCF/SCCF whenever differences in findings will require so.

⁶ The two networks bring together most evaluation units of the UN System and of the Multilateral Development Banks, respectively. UNEG also maintains with the OECD-DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) a Joint Task Force to support professional Peer Reviews of the evaluation function of UN organizations.

⁷ The OPS-4 report issued in April 2010 includes among its annexes the Executive Summary of the 2009 Peer Review report.

5. In December 2018, the GEF Council endorsed IEO's proposal that a third Professional Peer Review be carried out in 2019/2020, following both UNEG and ECG standards. The primary audiences for the Peer Review are the GEF Council, GEF Secretariat, the Independent Evaluation Office and GEF Partnership. The report will be made publicly available through the Web sites of the GEF Council, GEF IEO, ECG and UNEG.

6. This is the final report of the third Peer Review (PR), that takes into account IEO's comments and observations and factual corrections by the GEF Secretariat on earlier drafts. Each concerned entity, consulting with each other as appropriate, will prepare a Management Response to the report and its recommendations. The GEF Council will receive the report and the Management Response/s for discussion at its 58th session in June 2020, to discuss and agree on any change in the mandate, direction or structure of the IEO and/or of the evaluation function as it will consider appropriate .

1.2 Purpose and scope of the third Peer Review

7. As stated in its Term of Reference,⁸ the main purpose of the PR is to enhance the evaluation function in the GEF partnership, by reviewing IEO's mandate, role and performance. The objectives are to clearly identify IEO's main strengths and those areas where improvement is necessary. The PR is expected to provide the Council with information on the effective performance of the GEF IEO, and with findings that may apply to the evaluation function of the GEF partnership.

8. The scope of the PR was defined by IEO's institutional mandate and scope. Thus, the Panel assessed the performance of IEO in carrying out its mandate, including the extent of interaction, collaboration, exchange and guidance between the Office and GEF partner Agencies, but did not include any analysis of the Agencies' evaluation functions and products.

9. With regard to its temporal scope, this PR analysed the evaluation function in the GEF and the work of IEO since the 2014 second Peer Review. This corresponds to IEO's evaluative work that contributed to the preparation of the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS-6), OPS-6 itself and evaluations and events since its release, up to the end of 2019. Whenever necessary, to pursue the aim of better understanding and framing the more recent context, a longer-term perspective was applied.

1.3 The Peer Review Panel

10. Several important considerations informed the selection of the Panel members. These included: i) relevant professional experience; ii) to avoid any potential or alleged conflict of interest or partiality, the Panel members should not have had any close working or financial relationship with the GEF and IEO over the last five years that might influence their assessments, deliberations and conclusions; and iii) balanced regional and gender representation. The same principles were applied for the selection of an Adviser to the Panel, responsible for the data-gathering and analytical work and drafting the report. Finally, Panel membership was to reflect the status of IEO in UNEG and ECG.

11. With basis on the above, the Panel comprised:

- Dr Saraswathi Menon, former Director of UNDP Independent Evaluation Office and former Chair of UNEG (Chair of the Panel);
- Dr Marvin Taylor-Dormond, Director General of Independent Evaluation, Asian Development Bank;
- Dr Michael Spilsbury, Director, Evaluation Office, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- Ms Tullia F. Aiazzi (Adviser), senior evaluation expert.

⁸ Please see Annex 1, Third Professional Peer Review of the Independent Evaluation Function of the Global Environment Facility, Final Terms of Reference, July 2019.

2 The Peer Review framework and methodology

2.1 The normative framework

12. The 2011 UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations⁹ suggests that whenever applicable, a normative framework for a peer review should be derived from the UNEG Norms and Standards. Taking into consideration the engagement of IEO with both UNEG and ECG, in this PR the normative framework was based on both UNEG Norms and Standards and the ECG Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in Multilateral Development Banks.¹⁰

13. The framework was developed around the standard three core principles of peer reviews - Independence, Credibility and Utility¹¹ - and included topics and issues that originated from: preliminary proposals by IEO itself, a brief initial analysis by the Panel of the 2010 GEF Evaluation and Monitoring Policy and the very recently approved 2019 GEF Evaluation Policy, as well as initial discussions between IEO Management and the Panel. Issues that had been raised by the 2014 Second Peer Review were included,¹² together with the suggestions generated by an IEO internal self-assessment, carried out in August 2019 with all staff to identify the topics and issues of greater concern and interest for them.

14. This process led to identify five main topics of analysis, further articulated in sub-topics, each of these related to one or more of the three core PR principles, as shown in Box 1 below.¹³

Box 1. Key elements of the PR normative framework

Main topics of analysis	Peer Review Core Criteria		
	Independence	Credibility	Utility
<i>Governance of the GEF evaluation function</i>	X	X	
<i>GEF evaluation policy</i>	X	X	X
<i>Positioning and performance of IEO within the GEF evaluation function</i>	X	X	X
<i>Relevance, effectiveness and quality of IEO's evaluation work</i>	X	X	X
<i>Efficiency and internal organization of IEO's work</i>		X	X

15. The resulting matrix provided the basic analytical tool of the PR and guided the preparation of all data gathering and analytical tools, as well as the formulation of the PR conclusions and recommendations in Section 6 of the report.¹⁴ In parallel, the Panel also synthesised all its findings against the three core criteria, presented in Section 5.

2.2 Methodology and process

16. This PR was conducted in line with both UNEG and ECG relevant guidelines and was characterized by extensive and cordial dialogue between the Panel and IEO staff. This open and transparent approach also informed the interaction with all other stakeholders within the GEF Secretariat and across the GEF Partnership.

17. IEO, on behalf of the GEF, prepared the first draft of the Terms of Reference for the PR, which was finalized by the Panel after initial discussion with IEO Management. The ToRs were presented to the GEF Council and shared with stakeholders, ahead of the meetings planned with the Panel members.

18. The Panel used the following tools and approaches:

⁹ Document available at <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/945>.

¹⁰ Documents respectively available at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>; and <https://www.ecgnet.org/document/review-framework-evaluation-function-multilateral-development-banks>.

¹¹ Please see UNEG Framework at <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/945>.

¹² The report cross-references the topics raised in the 2014 Second Peer Reviews that were retained in the PR Normative Framework.

¹³ The Framework includes 6 main topics, with the evaluation policy listed as a sub-topic. During the analysis, based on the canvassed evidence, the Panel decided to focus on the five topics listed in Box 1.

¹⁴ Please see Annex 3 for the final version of the Framework.

- Analysis of background documents and Web site pages on the GEF and its evaluation function;¹⁵ among others, the Panel analysed in depth the 2010 GEF Evaluation and Monitoring Policy and assessed the GEF performance against it, though only with regard to evaluation, because the GEF evaluation function operated within this Policy until June 2019, when a new Policy was approved by Council;
- Desk-review of a purposefully selected sample of 18 out of 36 evaluation reports issued by IEO in the period 2015-2019, including country portfolio and strategic country cluster evaluations, focal area studies, impact, process and thematic evaluations. The main criteria for selection were year of completion, with priority given to most recent reports, and inclusion of all types of IEO evaluations and products; related Management Responses, Council Joint Summaries of the Chairs and Highlights and Management Action Records were also analysed for each product. The Panel also assessed OPS-5, issued in 2014, and OPS-6, as well as a number of Knowledge Products made available by IEO;
- Review of all IEO's Annual Performance Reports (APRs), Semi-Annual Evaluation Reports (SAERs) and related Management Responses and Council Joint Summaries of the Chairs and Highlights since 2015;
- Semi-structured interviews, carried out face-to-face or via skype/phone, using check-lists prepared for the different categories of stakeholders; in total, the Panel interviewed 92 informants from among members and staff of: GEF Council, GEF Secretariat, GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), IEO, coordination and evaluation units in partner Agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs);¹⁶
- In-depth discussions and exchanges with IEO: one or more Panel members conducted individual interviews over phone/skype in August 2019 with all IEO staff; these were complemented in October 2019 with face-to-face meetings between the Panel and IEO staff grouped by function, in GEF headquarters; and extensive discussions between IEO Management Team and Panel members throughout the entire process;¹⁷
- A peer-exchange session between IEO staff and the Panel, in December 2019 in GEF headquarters; this consisted of a two-hour long informal and open discussion on jointly selected aspects of the IEO's work, drawing on the experience of the Panel members within their own or other organizations;¹⁸
- Questionnaires for different groups of stakeholders, reaching out through an e-survey platform to 434 e-mail addresses including GEF Operational Focal Points and Political Focal Points (OFPs/PFPs), GEF coordination and evaluation units in partner Agencies, Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Conventions for which the GEF acts as financing mechanism and IEO evaluation consultants.¹⁹ The e-survey results have been integrated in the overall narrative of the report;
- Findings from each source of information were analysed, compared and discussed in depth by all Panel members and the report reflects the agreed views and opinions of the entire Panel.

19. The PR was conducted in the period June 2019-April 2020. The Panel members met three times: in Istanbul in June 2019 with IEO Management, for a two-day inception workshop; in GEF headquarters in October 2019, for ten days, to carry out interviews with the GEF Secretariat and some Agencies; and in December 2019 for a week, to hold meetings with GEF Council Members and observe the GEF Council session dedicated to evaluation. In-between meetings, the Panel worked and interacted from the respective members' locations.

¹⁵ Please see Annex 4, Bibliography and reference documents. When edited and unedited versions were available, both were assessed.

¹⁶ Please see Annex 5, List of interviewed stakeholders.

¹⁷ The IEO Management Team includes IEO Director and Deputy Director.

¹⁸ Peer exchange sessions have been a feature of several peer reviews of UN evaluation functions.

¹⁹ Please see Annex 6 for key data on the e-survey questionnaire.

2.3 Limitations

20. The main limitation of the PR was the limited interaction with GEF Member Countries, due to the decision made not to carry out country visits, for both time and financial resources considerations. Mitigating measures included the questionnaire through an e-survey platform, that reached virtually all OFP/PFPs, and face-to-face interviews carried out with 19 Council members, including representatives of 7 multi-country constituencies. However, the Panel had no interaction with the private sector and other national stakeholders in the GEF Member Countries.

3 The Global Environment Facility and its evaluation function

21. The evaluation function in the GEF is a responsibility, to different extent and in different ways, of many elements of the GEF Partnership, as shown in Box 2 below. In addition, the function is relevant for the Member Countries, where GEF projects and programs are implemented, the Secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) Conventions and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP). This section briefly describes the roles, responsibilities and interactions of each of these elements vis-à-vis the evaluation function.²⁰

Box 2. Simplified flowchart of Monitoring and Evaluation in the GEF from the 2019 Evaluation Policy

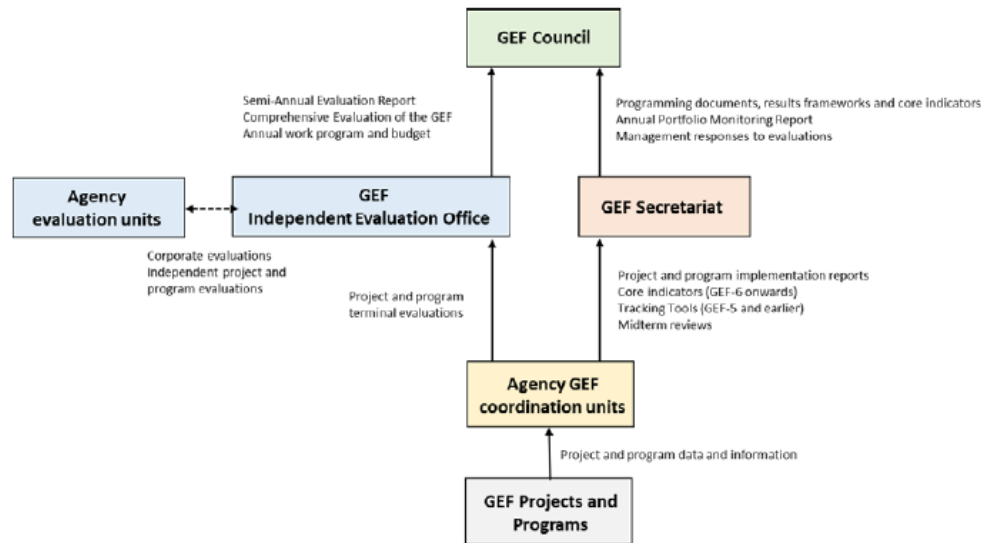


Figure 1: Simplified Flowchart of Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting in the GEF

3.1 Overview

22. An independently operating financial organization, the GEF provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of international environmental conventions and agreements. The GEF has a broad structure organized around an Assembly, the Council, the Secretariat, the Evaluation Office, the STAP and 18 GEF Agencies.

23. In addition, the GEF serves as a financial mechanism for five MEA conventions, namely the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Stockholm Convention on Persistent

²⁰ This section draws factual information on the GEF from the GEF Web site. This was complemented with evidence canvassed by the Panel about the evaluation function.

Organic Pollutants and the Minamata Convention on Mercury;²¹ and is associated with many global and regional multilateral agreements that deal with international waters or transboundary water systems.

24. GEF-funded projects are implemented by 18 GEF Agencies that include UN organizations, Multilateral Development Banks, National Agencies and International CSOs, and address biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, the ozone layer, persistent organic pollutants and mercury. The GEF also launched three Integrated Programmes, on sustainable forest management, food security, and sustainable cities. Projects and programs are carried out in partnership with Member Countries, international institutions, CSOs and the private sector.

25. The World Bank (WB) is one of the 18 GEF Agencies and serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund. Interactions with IEO mostly concern advice on Human Resources and support to budget management and administrative and financial rules and procedures.

26. Since its establishment in 1992, the GEF has provided close to US\$20 billion in grants and mobilized an additional US\$107 billion in co-financing for more than 4,700 projects in 170 countries. Through its Small Grants Programme, the Fund has also provided support to nearly 24,000 civil society and community initiatives in 128 countries. Every four years, the GEF strategies and work program and budget for the following Replenishment cycle are discussed and agreed through a set of meetings, typically four carried out during the last year of the on-going cycle. These meetings bring together existing and potential participants, other Member Countries, GEF Secretariat, and CSO and private sector representatives.²² The highest Replenishment figure so far was US\$4.34 billion, allocated to GEF-6 for the period 2014-2018. The amount available for GEF-7, from 2018 to 2022, was set at US\$4.1 billion.

3.2 The Assembly and the Member Countries

27. The GEF Assembly comprises all its Member Countries, currently 183, and meets every three to four years at the ministerial level to: review general policies; review and evaluate the GEF's operations based on reports submitted to Council; review the membership of the Facility; and consider, for approval by consensus, amendments to the "Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility" (hereinafter referred to as the GEF Instrument) on the basis of recommendations by the Council, also with regard to evaluation matters. The Assembly receives the OPS prepared by IEO as a working document.

28. Each GEF Member Country appoints a Political Focal Point (PFP), i.e. a government official who serves as the liaison with the Secretariat and the GEF Agencies responsible for GEF activities in the country. Recipient Countries also appoint an Operational Focal Point (OFP), who coordinates and oversees the GEF portfolio at the national level. There is some variability in the institutional arrangements at country level and in some Member Countries both roles are held by the same person.

29. Recipient Countries are the direct recipients of GEF-funded projects and programs and it is in these countries that GEF contributions to Global Environmental Benefits have to be assessed and measured in terms of results and impacts. Hence, Recipient Countries are key stakeholders of the evaluation function, including as Council members. At country level, the main interlocutor for IEO evaluations is usually the OFP. GEF evaluation policies²³ establish that all projects and programs will engage with OFPs for monitoring and evaluation and that OFPs should be fully consulted with and informed by the GEF Agencies and IEO on the planning, conduct, and results of any evaluation activity performed in their country. OFPs should play a key role in keeping national stakeholders involved with GEF projects informed about up-coming and on-going evaluations and in facilitating access to and interaction with them during evaluation missions, as well as in following-up on recommendations relevant to their mandate and role.

²¹ Moreover, although not linked formally to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (MP), the Facility supports the implementation of this Protocol in countries with economies in transition.

²² Since its inception, GEF has received contributions from 39 Donor Countries.

²³ For the sake of simplicity, the term 'GEF evaluation policies' comprises the three GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policies approved since 2005.

30. GEF Member Countries, in addition to convening at the Assembly, Council and Replenishment meetings, also interact with each other, with the GEF Secretariat and with other GEF partners at the annual regional Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs), where the focus is on learning about and discussing GEF-related issues. ECWs take place in the respective regions, typically last one week and include a two-hour session dedicated to evaluation run by IEO.²⁴

3.3 The Council

31. The GEF Council is the main governing body of the Facility and comprises 32 Members appointed by constituencies of GEF Member Countries (14 from developed countries, 16 from developing countries and 2 from economies in transition). The Council meets twice per year to develop, adopt and evaluate the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities, making decisions by consensus. The Council is co-chaired by the GEF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and by one council member elected at the beginning of each session.

32. Since early-on in the life of the Facility, the Council has had the role of oversight of the evaluation function and guardian of its independence, and evaluation is a standing agenda item in all Council sessions. The 2019 GEF Evaluation Policy lists the Council's main responsibilities in its oversight role, as follows:²⁵

- It provides an enabling environment for evaluation activities in line with internationally accepted standards and guarantees the independence of IEO and evaluators, who have the freedom to conduct their work without repercussions for career development;
- It establishes the GEF Evaluation Policy upon proposal by IEO;
- It approves the IEO's work program and budget and ensures that adequate resources are allocated to the function;
- It receives the independent evaluations conducted by IEO, including OPS, and ensures that adequate time is dedicated to discussion of evaluation issues at Council meetings; it decides on follow up actions from evaluation recommendations;²⁶
- It considers findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons from IEO evaluations for decision making on GEF programs and policies.

33. The Council also appoints a professionally competent director to lead IEO, upon indication by the Selection and Review Committee of the Council itself (SRC) which is also tasked with assessing the performance of the incumbent. No issues have emerged in this respect and the mechanism has worked smoothly so far. The 2019 Policy calls, however, for a decision by Council with respect to the term of assignment of the future IEO Director, which had not been specified at the time of writing this report. The current trend in international organizations for such posts is of one single-term, five or six years long.

3.4 The GEF Secretariat

34. The GEF Secretariat, led by the CEO, has a staff of approximately 100 including; directors, subject matter specialists, administration and operations officers. The Secretariat is responsible for a wide array of tasks,²⁷ including monitoring the implementation of the various GEF-funded activities and the contribution

²⁴ Please refer to Section 4.9 for a more in-depth analysis of IEO's role in the ECWs.

²⁵ The list of Council's responsibilities was synthesised by the Panel, based on the original.

²⁶ The evaluation agenda item at Council is chaired by the Co-chair elected for the session.

²⁷ The 2015 version of the GEF Instrument lists the following responsibilities, synthesised by the Panel: : a) implements the decisions of the Assembly and the Council; b) coordinates the formulation of and oversees the implementation of program activities; c) in consultation with the implementing Agencies, ensures the implementation of the operational policies adopted by the Council through the preparation of common guidelines on the project cycle; d) reviews and reports to the Council on the adequacy of arrangements made by the Implementing Agencies in accordance with the guidelines; e) chairs interagency group meetings to ensure the effective execution of the Council's decisions and to facilitate coordination and collaboration among the Implementing Agencies; f) coordinates with the Secretariats of other international bodies, in particular, the

of the GEF to the GEBs. Until June 2019, the GEF regulated the monitoring and evaluation functions through the same policy.

35. With regard to the evaluation function, the GEF Secretariat's tasks comprise; discussing and contributing to proposals to IEO for the evaluation work program; commenting on evaluation approach papers or ToRs; providing information and data through documents, interviews, discussions; commenting on draft evaluation reports and receiving final evaluation reports. However, the Secretariat cannot approve, hold back, request changes, or otherwise modify draft and final evaluations. In carrying out these responsibilities, the Secretariat is in a recipient position and is not the entity responsible for initiating the actions. At the end of each evaluation process however, as explicitly stated in the GEF evaluation policies, the Secretariat is responsible for; the preparation of a Management Response, to propose follow-up actions to the accepted recommendations; and of a Management Action Record, to reporting on the related outcomes.²⁸

3.5 The Independent Evaluation Office

36. In November 2013, the GEF Council agreed to the proposal made by the Director of the then Evaluation Office to formally strengthen the independence of the Office in the GEF Instrument and to rename it as Independent Evaluation Office, in line with the trend in international organizations.²⁹ This was also reflected in the GEF Instrument, which states that within the Secretariat *'there shall be an independent evaluation office headed by a director, appointed by and reporting to the Council, whose responsibility it is to carry out independent evaluations consistent with decisions of the Council'*.³⁰

37. IEO has a central role in the evaluation function of the GEF. It fulfils at the same time an evaluative function, which entails the independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEF at the project, program, portfolio, and institutional levels; and a normative function, by setting minimum evaluation requirements and standards for the GEF partnership to ensure improved and consistent measurement of GEF results. As part of its mandate, IEO: plans and conducts evaluations of the GEF; validates Terminal Evaluations of GEF-funded projects and programs carried out by the GEF Agencies to ensure that the ratings are consistent with the evidence and that the methods applied are consistent with the relevant GEF guidelines; triggers the preparation of the Secretariat's Management Response to each evaluation; contributes to the Secretariat's reporting on the implementation of Council's decision on evaluation recommendations; maintains a Web site where all evaluation reports are publicly available; and diffuses findings and lessons learned that emerged from its evaluations.

38. The Director of IEO: independently prepares and submits the evaluation work program and budget for approval to the Council; issues evaluation reports; drafts evaluation policies for Council's discussion and approval; and participates in Council sessions on monitoring and evaluation. S/he is solely responsible for managing the Office, including all staffing decisions and for avoiding any potential conflict of interest in the conduct of evaluations. The current incumbent took on office in late 2014; his mandate was renewed in 2019 and will come to an end in late 2024.

39. IEO conducts evaluations that aim at assessing the work of the GEF from different levels and perspectives. The 2019 Evaluation Policy lists seven distinct categories of evaluation, in addition to the

Secretariats of the MEA conventions; g) reports to the Assembly, the Council and other institutions as directed by the Council; h) provides the Trustee with all relevant information to enable it to carry out its responsibilities; and performs any other functions assigned to the Secretariat by the Council.

²⁸ Please refer to Section 4.8 for an in-depth analysis of the process.

²⁹ See the "Progress Report of the GEF Evaluation Office Director, including the OPS5 Progress Report" at http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/GEF.ME_.C.45.03.Rev1-ProgressReport_5.pdf.

³⁰ See <http://www.thegef.org/documents/instrument-establishment-restructured-gef>. The same text is included in the 2015 and 2019 versions of the Instrument, paragraph 21.

project Terminal Evaluations that are responsibility of the GEF Agency.³¹ In practice, clearly distinct products are the OPS, a very specific endeavour that encompasses the evaluation of a large section of the GEF's activities and performance every four years, drawing on TEs, other IEO evaluations and specific studies. Focal area studies, country portfolio evaluations and strategic country cluster evaluations are clearly defined products too. Most other evaluations, however, do not really fit any specific category, partly because some evaluations may start with a limited scope and become larger exercises during the process,³² and partly because a few exercises do not fully meet the definition of evaluation.³³

40. In this respect, the 2014 Second Peer Review had suggested '*reviewing the IEO's product mix and prioritisation according to the demand from the primary stakeholders, i.e. the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agencies and the programme countries.*' Evidence indicates that although IEO has revised to some extent its product-mix, priority has been given to Council's requests, to GEF Secretariat to some extent, and limited attention has been given to the demand from GEF Agencies and Recipient countries. In particular, programme or Recipient Countries, lament the lack of country focus in IEO's evaluations since country portfolio evaluations have been terminated.³⁴ IEO's program of work for 2019-2020 included three Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations (SCCEs). At the time of writing this report only one SCCE had been completed and the Panel could not assess whether this type of evaluation, will provide an analysis that will be found useful by Recipient countries, reflect their perspectives and cover critical country issues to provide lessons for future GEF work.

41. IEO is a productive office.³⁵ Between mid-2014 and December 2019, IEO issued 36 evaluation reports, excluding the five Annual Performance Reports (APRs) and OPS-6.³⁶ Most evaluations were presented to the Council as part of the Semi-Annual Evaluation Reports (SAERs) or integrated in OPS-6, though a few were also made available as self-standing reports. In the same period, IEO published three guidance documents and the 2019 Evaluation Policy as well.³⁷

42. In addition, IEO actively attends and makes presentations at the ECWs, GEF conferences, MEA Convention Conference of the Parties (CoPs) and other international events to share findings and lessons learned and diffuse its experience in innovating on evaluation approaches and tools. In this context, IEO manages Eval-Earth, a platform for exchange of lessons and experience in environment-related evaluation. The Management Team and evaluation staff also dedicate time to publishing articles in scientific journals.

43. Regarding the financial resources available for IEO, its budget has increased over the last three Replenishment cycles: within GEF-5, the budget of the Office was approved at US\$18.5 million; in GEF-6, it was approved at US\$19 million but actual expenditure was US\$20.2 million, due to the WB's increase in overhead costs (staff benefit recovery charge, regular salary adjustments) from 50% to 70%. In June 2019, the Council approved the requested IEO budget, for a total amount of US\$24.5 million.

³¹ Types of evaluation listed in the 2019 Policy include: program evaluations, performance evaluations; country and country cluster evaluations; process evaluations, impact evaluations, thematic evaluations and the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS). The 2010 Policy also included 'ad-hoc reviews' as a category.

³² One such case was the initially intended Knowledge Product on the GEF's efforts towards scaling-up, which was presented to the GEF Council as the Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling-up Impact in June 2019.

³³ Within the sample of 18 evaluations quality-assessed by the Panel, two exercises are called evaluation although their analytical frameworks do not include any of the standard evaluation criteria.

³⁴ The most recent IEO country portfolio evaluation was presented to the Council in June 2016. IEO Management Team informed the PR Panel that country portfolio evaluations were too expensive compared to their scope.

³⁵ No robust benchmarking can be made with other evaluation units within the UN and the MDB systems, due to the lack of relevant data and the significant diversity in the scope and complexity of evaluations conducted by different units.

³⁶ Semi-Annual Evaluation Reports, which are progress reports on IEO's work, were not included in the calculation.

³⁷ Namely, the 2014 Guidance Document: Monitoring and Evaluation in the LDCF/SCCF; the 2017 Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluation for Full-sized Projects and the 2019 Evaluative Approach to Assessing GEF's Additionality.

44. The IEO budget represents approximately 0.5% of the total GEF replenishment.³⁸ Fixed costs (salaries, premises, utilities) represent approximately 60% of IEO budget, which is lower than the WB experience. The remaining 40% is for actual evaluation expenditures (travel, consultants, dissemination). The reported average costs for IEO evaluations look reasonable for the different types of exercise and IEO stated its commitment to achieve efficiencies through strict budgeting and planning in compliance with the WB cost-saving measures, including travel, developed during the Expenditure Review.

45. Since 2015 IEO also submits to the LDCF/SCCF Council a four-year budget; for the period 2020-2023 the proposed and approved budget has been of US\$ 340,000.³⁹ Moreover, IEO receives some funds from many GEF Donor Countries contributing to the GEF Special Initiatives Trust Fund, which has the main objective of supporting capacity development activities, including the Community of Practice Earth-Eval.

3.6 The Multilateral Environmental Conventions

46. The MEA Conventions provide broad strategic guidance to the GEF Council and Assembly and the Council converts this, in collaboration with the Secretariat and other partners, into operational criteria and guidelines for GEF projects. The Convention Secretariats are stakeholders in IEO evaluations for learning purposes on the performance, results and impacts of relevant GEF-funded projects informed by their own guidance.⁴⁰

3.7 The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)

47. The GEF STAP comprises seven expert advisers supported by a Secretariat, who are together responsible for connecting the GEF to the most up to date, authoritative and globally representative science. The STAP Chair reports to every GEF Council meeting, briefing Council members on the Panel's work and emerging scientific and technical issues. Advice to Council includes writing primers or leading in-depth analyses on themes influencing the sustainability of the global environment and development and appraise all project and program proposals before they are included in the work program for Council. In addition, STAP reviews and/or co- authorships GEF Policy papers where there are significant scientific or technical issues.⁴¹ The STAP Secretariat is hosted by UNEP and located at the Programme's Regional Office for North America in Washington DC, USA.

48. STAP relates to IEO as a peer. As per the 2019 Policy, IEO can request the STAP for scientific and technical advice, data or other information that may be useful to evaluations and STAP members may be requested for direct support to an evaluation while respecting the independence of the IEO.⁴²

3.8 The GEF Agencies

49. The 18 GEF Agencies are the operational arm of the GEF. They work closely with project proponents that can be government agencies, CSOs and other stakeholders, to design, develop and implement GEF-funded projects and programs. GEF Agencies are also responsible for monitoring and reporting to the GEF Secretariat on the implementation of the GEF-funded projects and programs entrusted to them. Most Agencies have established GEF coordination units to liaise between the Agency and the GEF Secretariat. The coordination units come together once per year, at the inter-agency meetings organized by the GEF Secretariat, to discuss procedural and technical matters. GEF coordinators also attend Council sessions.

50. GEF Agencies, as part of their responsibilities regarding the evaluation of the GEF-funded projects and programs they implement, must conduct independent TEs and/or validate them in compliance with the

³⁸ A possible benchmark is with IFAD Independent Office of Evaluation, which has a budget of around 0.8% of the Fund's overall replenishment.

³⁹ Information available indicates that the annual allocation to evaluation represents approximately 6% of the total annual LDCF/SCCF program budget, which appears adequate considering it also covers a share of IEO staff costs.

⁴⁰ Please refer to Section 4.4.3 for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between IEO and the MEA Conventions.

⁴¹ From the STAP Web site: <http://www.stapgef.org/about-us>.

⁴² Please refer to Section 4.4.4 for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between IEO and STAP.

relevant GEF guidelines and share the reports with IEO.⁴³ Agencies' evaluation units are involved in this process, whenever they hold responsibilities in the Agency's project evaluation process. Alternatively, GEF coordination units oversee the conduct of the terminal evaluations, also called self-evaluations, similar to their arrangements for mid-term reviews. For some Agencies, the requirement to conduct TEs for all the GEF-funded projects independently from budget-size,⁴⁴ may not be in line with their own policies for project evaluation and represent a major effort in terms of human and financial resources.⁴⁵

51. The 2018 Minimum Fiduciary Standards for GEF Agencies list the related duties,⁴⁶ which are spelt out in more detail in the 2019 GEF Evaluation Policy with the Minimum Requirements for Monitoring and Evaluation 1 to 3. The Requirements entail that project designs must include costed monitoring and evaluation work plans, that these are properly implemented, and that all full- and medium-sized projects and all programs must be evaluated at the end of implementation, through TEs that should be carried out following the relevant GEF guidelines.

52. Agencies are also requested to support IEO by responding promptly and fully to requests for information or support relating to evaluation of GEF activities, and by making project and program documentation available to the IEO.⁴⁷

4 Assessment of the performance of the GEF evaluation function

53. This section provides evidence on and discusses the performance of the GEF evaluation function, as implemented by the key actors according to their roles and responsibilities. The analysis, which draws from documents, interviews with stakeholders at various levels and the e-survey conducted by the Panel, is structured by the topics identified in the PR Normative Framework.

4.1 GEF evaluation policies, 2010 and 2019

54. In 2003, the GEF Council had developed and approved the Terms of Reference for an Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, which would directly report to the Council itself. In 2005, the Council approved the first GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy which strengthened the independence of the function, and the renaming of the Office of Monitoring and Evaluation into Evaluation Office (EO). The Council also requested that the GEF Instrument reflect the Office's independent status.

55. As mentioned earlier in the report, in November 2010 the Council approved the second GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.⁴⁸ The drafting process had included consultation with GEF Partners through meetings and requests of feedback on early drafts; the monitoring section had been jointly prepared by the Evaluation Office with the Secretariat. The 2010 policy also integrated major GEF policy changes, including Results-Based Management.

56. As part of the follow-up to the first Peer Review, in October 2009 the GEF Secretariat and the Evaluation Office had also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Coordinated Resource Management and Administrative Support, which clarified that the Evaluation Office would independently handle all issues related to its human resources and budget. The MoU was explicitly referred to in the 2010 policy, still holds valid at the time of writing this report and has provided an adequate framework regulating the relationship between the parties on these matters.

⁴³ GEF Agencies must also conduct and share with the GEF Secretariat, as part of their monitoring tasks, mid-term reviews (MTR) of programs and full-sized projects, as well as annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) and focal area tracking tools for pre-GEF-6 projects.

⁴⁴ Only GEF Enabling Activities are not subject to mandatory Terminal Evaluations. GEF enabling activities are funds provided to Recipient Countries to prepare Convention reports, and have a ceiling of USD 500,000 (source: GEF Web site, consulted on 8 March 2020).

⁴⁵ Please refer to Sections 4.3 and 4.4.5 for more analysis on this aspect.

⁴⁶ See http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/Fiduciary_Standards.pdf, section I.4.

⁴⁷ Please refer to Section 4.4.5 for a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between IEO and the Partner Agencies.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-monitoring-and-evaluation-me-policy-2010>.

57. The Panel's analysis of the 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy concluded that overall, the Policy met UNEG requirements in terms of explicit recognition and protection of the independence of the Office and function, including avoidance of conflict of interest in the conduct of evaluations. The Policy also clearly stated the purpose of evaluation in the GEF, the criteria that would be used for the assessment and the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder.⁴⁹

58. Two main discrepancies were identified, when compared with most evaluation policies of UNEG and ECG members. First, addressing monitoring and evaluation in the same policy is not considered the best approach considering the confusion this can generate about the respective reporting lines and the consequent potential reputational risk this could pose to the independence of the evaluation function, even though sufficient guarantees were in place in the GEF in this regard. However, the Panel did not identify any related negative consequences on the evaluation function. Despite the provision made for the Evaluation Office to have an oversight role in the monitoring function of the GEF, which would have created a conflict of interest, the two functions have been adequately segregated throughout and evaluations across the GEF Partnership appear to have been able to independently assess and comment on the GEF monitoring system as for any other topic or activity.

59. The second major gap was the absence from the Policy of virtually any reference to gender equality and human rights as part of the GEF evaluation framework. The 2005 UNEG Standards repeatedly stressed the need for integrating both gender and human rights issues across the evaluation process,⁵⁰ but the 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy only refers to gender as a potential cross-cutting issue. The Panel is aware that neither topic featured strongly in the GEF narrative at the time, as it started to be part of the GEF framework only in 2011, as part of its Minimum Standards.⁵¹ Nevertheless, there would have been scope for the influential Evaluation Office to spearhead and champion the inclusion of gender and human rights in the GEF vision and strategies.⁵²

60. In 2015, as foreseen in the 2015-2019 Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office - GEF-6 approved by the Council, IEO, in collaboration with the GEF Secretariat and the GEF agencies, launched an analysis of Council's decisions since 2010 to identify issues that should be addressed in a revised version of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. Initially planned for December 2015, the draft GEF Evaluation Policy was presented to the Council in June 2019 at the same time as the GEF Monitoring Policy.

61. Evidence shows that the process for the preparation of the new policy was adequate and inclusive, in line with the 2014 Second Peer Review's suggestion for IEO to consult more systematically across the Partnership. IEO and GEF Secretariat worked together on a revised GEF Monitoring and Evaluation policy until the two parties agreed that, for the sake of clarity, two separate policies should be drafted, though still in close consultation and with explicit and frequent cross-references. A GEF inter-agency session was held in March 2019 to share both draft policies; in addition, IEO shared and discussed the draft Evaluation Policy at the ECWs in early 2019 and asked for comments from all GEF Agencies.⁵³

62. The Panel analysed in detail the 2019 Policy in terms of alignment with international standards and provisions for an adequate framework for the function, taking into account the specificity of the GEF.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Please see Annex 7, Comparison of the 2010 and 2019 GEF evaluation policies against the 2016 UNEG Norms and Standards and the ECG Standard Operational Practices.

⁵⁰ UNEG Standards, 2005. For example, among several other references, Standard 4.8 states that evaluation reports should assess the extent to which 'gender issues and relevant human rights considerations were incorporated where applicable'.

⁵¹ See GEF Policies on Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Mainstreaming, 2011, sections on Minimum Standards and Indigenous People.

⁵² Please refer to Section 4.7.3 for a more in-depth analysis of gender in IEO's evaluations.

⁵³ IEO prepared an Audit Trail Matrix of the comments received, which shows 8 units actively contributing.

⁵⁴ Please see Annex 7, Comparison of the 2010 and 2019 GEF evaluation policies against the 2016 UNEG Norms and Standards and the ECG Standard Operational Practices.

Overall, also this Policy is in line with both UNEG Norms and Standards and the ECG Best Practices and three main positive aspects were identified: the exclusive focus on evaluation; clear attention given to gender equality in evaluations; and inclusiveness of the evaluation process as one of the principles guiding evaluation in the GEF. A need for adjustments and improvement was nevertheless identified on various aspects, as follows:⁵⁵

- the Policy does not include the human rights perspective neither as a criterion nor as a cross-cutting theme of evaluations, although this has been part of GEF's Minimum Standards since 2011; this appears to be a theme that GEF evaluations would need to address, in consideration of the negative impacts of environmental degradation and climate change on the extended human rights of the beneficiaries of the projects it finances;
- the Policy is not explicit on the origin and size of IEO budget, although it recognizes the Council's authority in its approval; for the sake of clarity, it would be useful to specify from where IEO budget is sourced as well as an indicative range for its magnitude;
- the Policy does not adequately protect the independence of IEO and of its Director with regard to IEO budgetary and human resources matters;⁵⁶
- the Policy attributes a responsibility to IEO Director, along with GEF Council and CEO, for '*the use of evaluation products including the systematic consideration of findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and lessons, for decision making on GEF programs and policies.*'⁵⁷ If this were to happen, it would represent a conflict of interest and a breach in the expected segregation of functions between management and evaluation. The Panel found no evidence that this ever occurred, thus this appears to be simply a matter of inaccurate wording that requires amendment;
- the Policy correctly establishes Minimum Requirements for project and program monitoring and evaluation, among which Minimum Requirements 3 and 4 set appropriate standards for the conduct of TEs; several of the listed requirements also apply to IEO evaluations and there would be a merit in making this explicit;
- the Policy states that, as per the 2018 GEF Policy on Access to information states, IEO together with the World Bank Trustee and the Ethics Officer, '*continue to follow the World Bank Policy on Access to Information*'; however, the referred WB Policy does not fully provide for a disclosure approach that is consistent with the requirements of a truly independent evaluation function, whereas the Independent Evaluation Department (IEG) of the World Bank Group has its own disclosure policy. It would thus be more appropriate for IEO to develop its own disclosure policy, possibly as part of a revised Evaluation Policy, and for the GEF to amend its own policy accordingly;
- the GEF Results Architecture would need to be referred to in the 2019 Evaluation Policy, as a topic on which IEO should provide timely guidance to GEF Agencies with regard to the relevant evaluation criteria to be used;
- as discussed earlier, the terms of engagement of IEO Director as decided by the Council need to be included in the Policy.

63. Finally, when looking at the role of IEO within the GEF evaluation function and the entirety of its functions and responsibilities as defined in the GEF evaluation policies, it emerges that the Office's standard-setting function strongly mirrors the responsibility of the GEF Secretariat vis-à-vis the entire Partnership, as detailed in the GEF Instrument, albeit in the evaluation arena. In fact, out of the 10 Secretariat's functions

⁵⁵ The list comprises GEF-specific issues, as well as other issues that are typically addressed in the evaluation policies of UN agencies, e.g. budget size and origin, terms of engagement, human rights as a criterion of evaluation.

⁵⁶ The revised policy should aim to capture the provisions currently articulated in the existing Memo between the CEO and the IEO Director.

⁵⁷ 2019 GEF Evaluation Policy, paragraph 41. The same text is included in the 2014 Guidance Document: Monitoring and Evaluation in the LDCF/SCCF. A very similar text was also in the 2010 Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.

listed in the 2015 version of the Instrument, more than half can easily apply to IEO and to the evaluation function and could be formulated as follows:⁵⁸

- a. implement effectively the decisions on the evaluation function of the Assembly and the Council and report to both;
- b. coordinate and oversee the evaluation of program activities;
- c. ensure the implementation of the Evaluation Policy through the preparation of relevant common guidelines;
- d. review and report to the Council on the adequacy of arrangements made by the Agencies for evaluation of GEF-funded projects and programs;
- e. chair interagency group meetings to facilitate coordination and collaboration among the GEF Agencies evaluation functions aimed at ensuring the effective evaluation of the implementation by the Secretariat and GEF Agencies of the Council's decisions.

64. In this respect, the 2010 Monitoring and Evaluation included an oversight function for IEO, whereby the Office *"provides quality control of the minimum requirements of monitoring and evaluation practices in the GEF, in full cooperation with relevant units in the GEF Agencies, and tracks implementation of Council decisions related to evaluation recommendations"*.⁵⁹ Conversely, in its paragraph 42, the 2019 Policy only identifies the evaluative and normative functions and misses the 'quality control of minimum requirements of evaluation practice' which on the contrary, appears to be an important role of the Office. The Panel considers that the policy should be revised to include this type of function, while clearly excluding the monitoring practices which should not be an oversight responsibility of IEO.

4.2 Governance of the evaluation function

65. The GEF Council is responsible for the oversight of the GEF evaluation function, and its tasks in this respect were listed in section 3.3 above. In this role, the Council is the first client and stakeholder for IEO, which is well acknowledged by all stakeholders, including IEO staff. Similarly, all Council Members interviewed by the Panel stated their great appreciation for the usefulness of IEO's work, as well as for the Office's responsiveness to their own requests for specific evaluations or information on various related issues. Evidence from interviews shows that the relationship between Council and IEO is characterized by mutual respect, collaboration and cordiality. Non-Council stakeholders also recognized that, vis-à-vis the Council, IEO is listened to and 'has clout with the Council'. Reportedly, IEO Director also maintains contacts with some Members in-between Council sessions, mostly for update on evaluation progress.⁶⁰

66. In June 2015 and June 2019, the Council received for approval the Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office. Since June 2015, IEO has presented a SAER to each Council session with synthesis of completed evaluations and an update on IEO's work-progress; the June version of the report typically includes the annual budget for the Office, also for Council's approval. In November 2017, the Council received the final draft version of OPS-6. Occasionally, some evaluation methodological papers and individual evaluation reports have been presented. Within IEO, the decision of what to present as a Working Document, besides the standard reports just mentioned, appears to be mostly dictated by the time available for presentation.⁶¹

67. GEF rules establish that Council documents should become publicly available on the Council Web site four weeks before the session. In practice, delays occur for many GEF Council documents including IEO

⁵⁸ This is an adaptation by the Panel of six out of 10 GEF Secretariat's functions listed in the 2015 and 2019 version of the GEF Instrument, that IEO should carry out for the GEF evaluation function. The other four do not apply to IEO.

⁵⁹ 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, paragraph 40.

⁶⁰ The 2014 Second Peer Review suggested that changes to the way Council and IEO interact should be made; this has yet to happen.

⁶¹ In the view of the Panel, this was the case at the December 2019 57th Council Session, when IEO presented in lengthy detail a methodology for post-completion assessment that could have been dealt with in much shorter time with no harm to the topic and the interest of the audience in the topic.

documents, and several Members complained that they have too little time for analysing and ‘digesting’ the evaluations. This might also be due to the number of evaluations that IEO presents to Council, either as self-standing documents or described in detail in the SAER. This has the added disadvantage of the Council having less time to focus on more important evaluations and their management responses.

68. According to the Panel’s observations, the GEF Council fulfils all its foreseen responsibilities, adequately engages with IEO and relies on its evaluations to guide its decision-making process. Nevertheless, there seems to be room for improving the operational efficiency of Council when dealing with evaluation matters during its session. An alternative approach would be presenting evaluations for discussion at Council sessions that address key issues for the function and for which Council Members have expressed specific interest at the time of approval of the four-year and/or annual program of work and budget. This would increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of Council sessions on evaluation.

69. Two other aspects require attention in the view of the Panel. First, the balance in the Council’s attention and time to the various steps of the evaluation process is uneven. Typically, the Council dedicates a good level of attention to the evaluation reports, in terms of time and questions, but it does not discuss the Management Response to any extent and the agenda item is usually closed with a ‘blanket’ endorsement of the recommendations without any discussion and clarification about what will be the follow-up for any of them. Also, Council is not giving adequate attention to the Management Action Record, that should report on progress in implementing the agreed follow-up actions. Second, Council endorses evaluation reports and their recommendations. International practice however suggests that the Council’s role would be to receive evaluation recommendations and seek clarifications as required, rather than ‘endorsing them’ because the function is independent, and evaluation reports should not be subject to any form of endorsement once issued by IEO Director.

70. A more appropriate process would entail that Council, after ‘taking due note’ of evaluation findings and recommendations, analyses and discusses in detail the actions proposed by GEF Secretariat for the follow-up to the accepted recommendations, or its arguments for rejecting them. The final result would be that Council approves the proposed actions, if needed with adjustments, or requests a new proposal to be discussed at a later stage. The Council would thus exercise its oversight role of the evaluation function including its follow-up; and would safeguard both the independence of the evaluation function and the right of Management to propose its preferred line of action and pursue it if adequately argued. This process automatically diffuses potential tensions on evaluation recommendations that may arise between the evaluation function and management on evaluation findings and recommendations. Conversely, the current practice whereby the Council automatically endorses all evaluation recommendations, can lead to an impasse in the case of potential disagreements between Secretariat and IEO wherein one of the parties will be pressured to compromise beyond what is regarded as reasonable, at the cost of either independence of evaluative judgment or non-transparent follow-up by Management to a Council’s decision.⁶²

71. The Panel considers this to be a key issue that risks undermining the independence of IEO and the well-deserved trust it enjoys from the Council. In addition, the Council might consider developing a mechanism that allows the chair of the evaluation sub-session, who is the co-chair with the GEF CEO of the entire session, to play this role in a more structured manner. A possible approach would be the appointment of the co-chair for at least two Council sessions. This would also enable the Co-chair to conduct consultations on evaluation matters between sessions, should such a need arise.

4.3 The GEF Policies

72. The GEF evaluation function is independent, though obviously both IEO and the function are bound to comply with GEF policies and standards and; hence, IEO and GEF Agencies should have some common understanding on how to address the various policies.

⁶² The episode in June 2019 at the 56th Council Session about the Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling up Impact was a good example of this dynamic.

73. The Panel identified several policies that have a direct bearing on the GEF evaluation function, and analysed, in so far as possible, to which extent each was complied with through IEO's evaluations and across the function. Commendably, some evaluations have influenced the development of GEF policies, as discussed later in the report (see Section 4.6.2) and overall IEO adequately complies with most in the conduct of its evaluations. Nevertheless, IEO has not always adapted guidelines on evaluations for Agencies, for them to internalize the new GEF policies as appropriate, although clear and timely guidelines are critical to transmit expectations for TEs of projects approved under the relevant results architecture. Findings were the following:

- The 2012 GEF Policy on Indigenous People states that evaluations, in particular those addressing Biodiversity and Protected Areas interventions, should engage with Indigenous People, on the preferred terms of the concerned groups themselves; evidence from the evaluation reports suggests that this happened in the Focal Area Study on Biodiversity and in the Impact Evaluation of GEF Support to Protected Areas and Protected Area Systems but did not in the Evaluation of GEF support to biodiversity mainstreaming;⁶³
- the 2011 and 2019 GEF policies on Environmental and Social Safeguards: the former established Minimum Standards including human rights, as already mentioned, and the latter includes minimum standards for reporting on Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts and on adverse gender-related impacts, as well as a specific reference to evaluation in the case of Minimum Standard 3, Biodiversity Conservation and the Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources;⁶⁴
- the GEF policy on stakeholder engagement, effective as of 1 July 2018, applies '*to all annual project implementation reports as well as mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations submitted after one year from the date of effectiveness*';
- the GEF Results Architecture and indicators and sub-indicators should be applied in all Terminal Evaluations of project approved within each specific framework.

74. At the time of writing, IEO had not yet developed specific guidelines for GEF Agencies on how to integrate the policies listed above in their evaluations, nor for integrating them in its own evaluations. The Office, reportedly, is waiting for all policies to be updated before issuing new guidelines. This is undoubtedly a rational approach, but it entails the risk that the updating process may take a long time and result in evaluations not dedicating attention to key issues. This could be addressed by developing light operational guidance documents for each policy, in consultation with the GEF Secretariat, that could be consolidated in a single revised guideline for TEs to be issued every four-five years.

4.4 Positioning and engagement of IEO within the GEF partnership

4.4.1 IEO and the GEF Secretariat

75. The GEF Instrument states that IEO is an independent unit of the GEF Secretariat.⁶⁵ All relevant documents, namely the GEF Instrument, the three GEF evaluation policies approved between 2005 and 2019, as well as the 2007 MoU between the Secretariat and IEO on administrative matters, made this very clear including when the unit was named differently. This is also recognized by virtually all the stakeholders interviewed by the Panel, including GEF Secretariat staff, Council Members and GEF Agencies, who perceive

⁶³ IEO stated that the evaluation of GEF support to mainstreaming biodiversity did actively engage with IPs and local communities (including Minority groups & tribes) and captured their views through the evaluation and site visits. However, the two reports available online, one for Council and one unedited, refer to: "interviews with key stakeholders including government officials, implementing and executing agency staff, civil society organizations and project beneficiaries" and there is no other indication about who the project beneficiaries were.

⁶⁴ The 2019 Policy applies "to all new GEF-financed projects and programs submitted on or after the date of effectiveness of July 1, 2019. For GEF-financed projects and programs under implementation, the Policy applies to all mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations submitted after one year of the date of effectiveness", i.e. July 2020.

⁶⁵ See Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility, September 2019, paragraph 11.

IEO to be structurally independent from the GEF Secretariat. A solid majority of respondents to the e-survey also agreed (62%) in this respect, although 35% answered that they did not know sufficiently about the issue.

76. The issue of IEO behavioural independence from the Secretariat, and impartiality and absence of bias in evaluations, is more complex. The GEF Secretariat is the second most important client for IEO and an object in most IEO evaluations. In this context, both parties must act so as to allow simultaneously, sufficient separation for IEO to operate in full independence of decision and judgement, and sufficient proximity for IEO to identify relevant evaluation themes, have adequate access to required information and engage with the Secretariat so as to generate the latter's interest in, ownership of, and willingness to learn from, evaluations.

77. The evidence gathered by the Panel through extensive interviews with GEF Secretariat and IEO staff, and with other members of the Partnership, indicate that overall, the interaction between the two parties is frequent and constructive at both senior management and technical level and distance and proximity are in balance most of the time.

78. Some 'deviations' towards what was considered to be too much, or too little independence and distance / separation were however noted. On the one hand, too great a separation between IEO and the GEF Secretariat appears to have affected the relevance of some evaluations.⁶⁶ In this respect, some GEF staff considered that the separation from IEO had diminished the usefulness of evaluations because the evidence provided by the Secretariat had not been taken into due consideration leading to conclusions and recommendations being regarded as not sufficiently robust and credible. A few non-Secretariat stakeholders, and the Panel's own analysis also pointed out that the evidence base in some IEO evaluation reports was in need of strengthening.⁶⁷

79. On the other hand, potential weaknesses in IEO behavioural independence vis-à-vis the GEF Secretariat were also noted by the Panel and by a variety of observers. This was also confirmed across all groups of respondents to the e-survey, wherein 57.7% agreed that IEO shows behavioural independence and 8.2% disagreed with the statement. Although the responses expressing 'disagreement' responses were few, and the 'agreement' responses were the majority, these rates represented for this group of questions the highest share of negative responses, and the lowest share of positive responses respectively. This suggests that the Partnership currently has a higher level of trust in IEO's structural independence, as shown above (62% of respondents), than in its behavioural independence.

80. The June 2019 episode, when IEO, in order to resolve an impasse with GEF Secretariat on one evaluation report, modified its recommendations, was still very fresh in the minds of stakeholders during the work of the Panel. At the June Council session itself, several members had raised their concerns and questioned what had happened. Concerns were also raised by most Council members from Donor Countries in their interviews with the Panel in December and by other interviewees and observers through the open-ended responses to the e-survey questionnaire. Although other factors have come into play in this event as explained above,⁶⁸ the episode raised doubts on the behavioural independence of IEO for many stakeholders.

81. Also related to behavioural independence is the serious commitment within IEO since 2015 to strengthen the learning element of the evaluation function, in contrast with the more accountability-oriented style of the previous IEO management. The Panel welcomes the effort, which had also been suggested by the 2014 Second Peer Review. Current findings however show that the current 'incentive for learning' in IEO evaluations mostly consists of looking for and stressing positive examples of performance while downplaying weaknesses, gaps and failures. This may enhance the learning potential of an evaluation but may also diminish the accountability element of the function. The statement by one interviewee that '*IEO wants GEF to be [regarded as] successful*', corroborated by the Panel's own analysis of many IEO evaluation reports, indicates that IEO may need to guard against perceptions of bias in its selection of countries and ensure that

⁶⁶ Please refer to section 4.6 for an in-depth analysis on the relevance of IEO's evaluations.

⁶⁷ Please refer to Section 4.7.

⁶⁸ Please refer to Section 4.2.

both well-performing and poorly performing programmes are adequately covered and that attention is paid to positive and negative findings.⁶⁹

82. Overall, the Panel did not find that the real or perceived ‘deviations’ towards too much or too little independence have seriously undermined the soundness of the relationship between IEO and the GEF Secretariat, or that bias pervades many IEO’s evaluations. The Office operates along solid principles of rigour, independence, impartiality and absence of bias and conflict of interest, by which its Management Team and all staff abide.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, attention should be paid by both IEO and GEF Secretariat to avoid even an occasional over-stepping of these principles, for the sake of the best performance of the evaluation function and ultimately of the GEF itself.

4.4.2 IEO and the GEF Member Countries

83. The Panel interacted with GEF Recipient Countries through meetings with Council members and the e-survey questionnaire addressed to all PFPs and OFPs.⁷¹ One question about the relationship between IEO and recipient Member Countries was also included in the questionnaire for other groups of stakeholders. One caveat in the survey and in the meetings was that the rotation of PFPs, OFPs and Council Members from Recipient Countries is very high, which unavoidably affects the institutional memory of respondents and interviewees.

84. Through the e-survey, OFPs and PFPs indicated that overall, they have limited contact with IEO, though Donor Countries reported more interactions than Recipient Countries. Occasional contacts occurred by email with 58% of respondents. Among the 23 responding Recipient Countries, only three had been members of Reference Groups for IEO evaluations and only 5 had been asked to comment on IEO’s and GEF Agencies’ draft Approach Papers and/or evaluation reports. In this respect, it is worth noting that corporate level evaluations also have consequences for all Member Countries but mostly for Recipient Countries. Their contribution to reference groups would enrich the diversity of contributions and perspectives in the evidence available for any evaluation.

85. Most responding OFPs/PFPs agreed that IEO is fully independent, institutionally and behaviourally from Member Countries, 70% and 67% respectively. Regarding the statement ‘IEO is too distant from Recipient Countries’, 48.5% of the respondents agreed, 40% did not know and 12% disagreed. One quarter (25%) of respondents from all other groups of stakeholders also agreed that IEO is too distant from Recipient Countries, though 53% did not know and 21% disagreed. Several reasons may have led many respondents to choose the ‘Do not Know’ answer, e.g. i) the question was not clear; ii) IEO is not seen to be close to the Recipient countries but it is not known whether this means that it is too distant; iii) in general, very little is known about how IEO works at country level. Furthermore, some stakeholders within the GEF Secretariat also noted that IEO is distant from the Recipient Countries.

86. The limited engagement with Recipient Countries was also confirmed in the interviews with their Council members. While they appreciate the work of IEO, and some mentioned that corporate evaluations and OPS provide useful information on GEF Agencies and GEF achievements, all stressed that evaluations should be closer to the ground to be useful to them. The favoured perspective for Recipient Countries would be the country portfolio evaluation, but these were discontinued in 2016 and neither TE nor thematic evaluation can be a substitute for this type of evaluation. As already mentioned, it was too early at the time of writing, to determine the added value for Recipient Countries of the Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations. One Member Country appreciated that IEO had made the effort, in 2019, to prepare Country Notes, but suggested that the Notes should be a synthesis of findings and lessons from the TEs of national projects financed by the GEF, rather than focusing on data about the GEF country portfolio. Other Recipient Countries

⁶⁹ Please refer to section 4.7 for an in-depth analysis of the quality of IEO’s evaluation reports.

⁷⁰ The 2007 IEO Ethical guidelines provide detailed guidance on the procedures to follow during an evaluation process to ensure impartiality and absence of bias. The 2017 TE Guidelines cross-reference to the 2007 Ethical Guidelines.

⁷¹ Recipients of GEF support are developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Two thirds of the replies came from Recipient Countries, although the response rate from this group was the lowest. The Do not Know responses were systematically in the range of 30-40% of responses.

asked, as a minimum, that the executive summaries of IEO evaluations be translated in other languages to enable uptake and use. Comments along these lines also emerged in the “IEO Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge Needs Assessment” presented to GEF Council in December 2019 (hereinafter referred to as the 2019 IEO survey).

87. Indirectly, similar evidence emerged from the Panel assessment of IEO evaluations. With exceptions made for the recently completed and on-going SCCEs, most IEO evaluations typically include a maximum of three countries as case studies, across the entire membership. Costs and time issues were mentioned, though a contributing factor may also be the strong focus of IEO on the corporate rather than the country level. A case in point is that information in evaluation reports indicate that engagement with country level stakeholders in the countries visited in the context of corporate evaluations is very limited, with small number of interviewees and a tendency not to be comprehensive of all stakeholder groups. For example, with the exception of the Evaluation of the GEF CSO Network which extensively engaged with CSO representatives, CSO leaders were very rarely among the people met at country level. However, the extra cost and time required to conduct a few additional interviews once in a country would be minimal. Conversely, the country portfolio evaluation assessed by the Panel indicated a good level of interaction with national stakeholders at all appropriate levels.

88. As mentioned earlier in the report, the ECWs are a good opportunity for IEO to interact with Recipient Countries, with 61% of responding Recipient Countries stating they had attended IEO sessions at ECWs. The most recent examples available of IEO presentations at ECWs include a mix of information on monitoring and evaluation, IEO and results of evaluations of relevance to the Constituency. IEO staff reported having tested different participatory techniques to interact with participants, aimed both at informing on the evaluation function, providing feedback from evaluations relevant to the audience and obtaining views and opinions on potential evaluation topics and issues. Among respondents to the PR e-survey, 51.5% had found the ECWs to be a useful contribution to develop the national evaluation capacity, whereas 39% agreed that IEO had contributed to national evaluation capacity development through its evaluations. Respondents to the 2019 IEO survey also confirmed the usefulness of the ECWs.

89. IEO staff acknowledged during their self-assessment for the PR that ECWs are important ECWs for a more strategic engagement with both regional and country-level stakeholders. Evidence however suggests that although presentations at ECWs by all IEO staff have been appreciated, IEO presence at ECWs in more recent times has not always been at the level of seniority that best enables effective interaction and follow-up with Government representatives. Overall, there seems to be room for improvement on IEO’s engagement with GEF Recipient Countries. ECWs represent a major opportunity in this sense.

4.4.3 IEO and the MEA Convention Secretariats

90. The Panel interacted with the MEA Convention Secretariats only through the e-survey questionnaire, which was responded by four out of five Secretariats. In the Panel’s interviews with IEO staff, IEO’s relationship with the MEA Conventions was also raised.

91. IEO mentioned consultation with the Convention Secretariats on evaluations that are of high relevance to the latter, in addition to several presentations in plenary and at side events during the Conferences of the Parties of most Conventions. Conversely, the responding MEA Convention Secretariats stated that since 2015, communication with IEO has been either non-existent or occasional and that none of them has been asked to comment on IEO’s evaluation draft approach papers and reports or to be a member of reference groups. All agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that IEO is fully independent and too distant from the Conventions. Only in the case of one of the responding Secretariats, IEO has been frequently hosted to make presentations at its Conference of the Parties.

92. The reasons for the diverging views between IEO and the responding Convention Secretariats on the extent of consultation and engagement remained unclear. Nevertheless, the Panel noted a low level of attention in IEO’s evaluations to the Conventions, with few exceptions. A contributing factor to this situation may have been the shift of the GEF Secretariat towards multi-sector programmatic approaches, wherein the work in support of each individual Conventions becomes more integrated and therefore, less easy to be

assessed individually. This however seems to go beyond a simple missed opportunity considering it has partly affected the evaluative coverage of the GEF work, as was the case of the partial neglect in OPS-6 of the GEF's contribution to the implementation of the Conventions.

4.4.4 IEO and the STAP

93. The Panel interacted with the STAP through interviews with its Chair and Secretariat's staff, in addition to discussing this relationship and collaboration with IEO Management Team.

94. The 2010 Monitoring and Evaluation Policy foresaw a role for STAP within the GEF evaluation function, namely providing advice on the IEO work program related to evaluations with science and technology components and proposing subjects for evaluation. It also stated that STAP 'may also provide opinions on the evaluability of scientific aspects and related methodologies for measuring global environmental impacts in response to evaluation approach papers, terms of reference, or reports.'

95. The interviews indicated a reasonable level of mutual respect and recognition of respective roles and contributions to the GEF Secretariat, underpinned nevertheless by some sense of competition. Overall, exchanges appear to be cordial, especially at the top. Both entities have drawn at times on the other's products and work, though reportedly, in more recent years this seems to have happened in an ad-hoc and mostly ex-post fashion, when reports are made public.

96. The mandates of the two bodies suggest there is space for some joint brainstorming and coordination at the programming level of respective studies and researches, in particular on methodological aspects, and for discussing findings and conclusions. This however does not happen, and the limited collaboration has recently led to some overlap of effort on the definition of what sustainability and durability mean in the GEF context. Overall, in the view of the Panel, the relationship between IEO and STAP falls short of its potential for more constructive synergies between the two entities.

4.4.5 IEO and the GEF partner Agencies

97. The Panel interacted with GEF Agencies through face-to-face and phone interviews with the GEF coordination units and evaluation units of 9 Agencies, and through the e-survey questionnaire which was responded by 19 respondents out of a total of 28.⁷² The engagement with GEF Agencies was also discussed at length with IEO staff. Although there are similarities, differences in the relationship between IEO and coordination and evaluation units were noted and are reported, as relevant.

98. One caveat in the assessment of IEO's relationship with the GEF Agencies is that among the eight organizations that joined the GEF during the last expansion process, by late 2019 only two had completed the first terminal evaluations of the GEF-financed projects they implement. This means that until then, there had been no real need for interaction between IEO and these Agencies.

99. With regard to IEO's normative role vis-à-vis the GEF Agencies, the Office is expected to set minimum evaluation requirements and standards for the GEF partnership to ensure improved and consistent measurement of GEF results, in line with the GEF results architecture and associated guidelines. The latest version of the GEF Guidelines for Terminal Evaluations of GEF-funded projects issued in 2017 was the result of three years of negotiation. Among other requirements, the Guidelines recommended that project evaluation frameworks be based in the project's Theory of Change. Reportedly, the UNDP and WB GEF coordination units, which oversee the conduct of TEs, resisted the recommendation in the absence of a matching increase in the GEF Agency fee.

100. A solid majority (13 out of 19) of the GEF Agencies responding to the e-survey agreed that the 2017 Guidelines are useful and clear. There is some evidence as well that the Guidelines have initially contributed to improving the quality of TEs and to develop some related evaluation capacity among the units responsible for commissioning or conducting the TEs. At the same time, requests for making the document clearer and

⁷² GEF Agencies are 18; 10 have a GEF coordination unit separate from the evaluation unit, and 8 have a single unit dealing with both coordination and evaluation, for a total of 28 potential respondents. Despite several attempts, the Panel was unable to reach two selected national GEF Agencies.

more detailed were raised during the interviews with the Panel. In addition, a few among respondents and interviewees lamented the lack of IEO guidelines for conducting mid-term reviews, evaluations of programmatic approaches, lessons learned, monitoring and evaluation systems and other related issues.⁷³ This suggests an interest among GEF Agencies for getting guidance from IEO for improving the quality of the TEs of projects and programs, which should be built upon.

101. In 2018, IEO also issued the document “An Evaluative Approach to Assessing GEF’s Additionality” and the 2019 Evaluation Policy requires that TEs report on this criterion using the evaluative approach provided in the document. The guidance provided, however, in the view of the Panel is too vague and generic to be of practical use. Furthermore, as was the case for the recommendation on the Theory of Change-based approach, including ‘additionality’ to a TE entails more complexity and time. This is linked to the issue of the financial resources required for TEs, which are a pillar of the GEF evaluation function.⁷⁴ Direct evaluation costs, which typically cover consultant fees, staff time as evaluators, travel, per diem, and related expenses, have to be included in the project/program budget as a separate item. A few GEF Agencies have established internal consultation mechanisms through which the evaluation function indicates the amount required for TEs, but this does not seem to be consistent across all Agencies and changes to that budget line may happen in any case when a project enters final negotiation with the GEF Secretariat. At the same time, as mentioned above, IEO has included new requirements for TEs that raise the complexity and cost of evaluations for projects approved several years before. This however was not supported by an increase in the resources allocated for evaluations. Indicative guidance from IEO on the minimum requirements to include in project designs in terms of human resources, geographical scope and thematic analysis required for a robust and credible TE would be highly useful to both the GEF Secretariat and the Agencies, all the more so if it took into account the variety of GEF-funded projects that have to be evaluated. In the absence of this type of guidance, Agencies may allocate significantly different resources to TEs which may affect, as a consequence, the thoroughness and depth of the work carried out. Such diversity may in turn affect the quality of the many IEO evaluations that draw a large share of their evidence base from TEs.

102. With regard to the resources available for managing TEs, the GEF “2012 Fee policy for GEF Partner Agencies” defines the fixed percentage of project and program budgets allocated to GEF Agencies to manage the entire project and program cycle, including evaluation. Thus, the decision on how to share management fees is internal to each Agency and beyond the responsibility of IEO and of the GEF Secretariat. Nevertheless, a few GEF Agencies raised the issue in their interactions with the Panel.

103. As already mentioned, within the 2010 Monitoring and Evaluation Policy IEO also had an oversight function whereby the Office would provide quality control of the minimum requirements of evaluation practices in the GEF, in full cooperation with the Agencies. The Policy also mentioned that IEO should ‘review’ the Terminal Evaluations of GEF-funded projects and programs carried out by the Agencies. Information available indicates that IEO organized a session on evaluation for the new GEF Agencies when these joined the GEF. No follow-up was reported, although one Agency mentioned that IEO provided support on the conduct of TEs when this was requested.

104. In practice, the foreseen ‘oversight function’ has taken the exclusive form of the validation by IEO of GEF Agencies’ TEs. IEO validates all the TEs from 15 Agencies and revises their ratings as considered appropriate, and it validates a sample of TEs from UNDP, UNEP and WB without changing the original ratings. The validation process entails a consultant assessing, against a detailed guideline and form, the TE and all available related documents, including the Project Document, Mid-term Review, the Implementation/Project Completion Report,⁷⁵ the Agency’s own validation report when this exists, etc. The Validation Report is revised by an IEO internal or external peer reviewer, who finalizes the ratings for both project and TE. Ratings

⁷³ The Panel is aware that some of these are not within the remit of IEO, but this is an opportunity to bring such requests to the attention of the GEF.

⁷⁴ Please refer to Sections 4.4.5 and 4.7.2 for a more in-depth analysis of the use of TEs in IEO evaluations.

⁷⁵ These are called self-evaluations in the GEF.

are then consolidated in the IEO database and used for statistical analysis of the performance of the GEF projects which is reported in the Annual Performance Report and used as evidence in many IEO evaluations.⁷⁶

105. The validation of project completion/implementation reports produced by management teams, is used by several evaluation units in the UN and MDB systems, including many GEF Agencies. Its purpose is to enable evaluation units to assess the terminal reports of large numbers of completed projects, at a fraction of the cost than would be incurred if final evaluations were to be carried out for each project.⁷⁷ However, a credible validation of a project completion/implementation report requires experienced evaluators who also know, at least to some extent, the thrust of the projects in question, the context of implementation and have the opportunity to interact at least with project managers and other easy-to-reach informants. Furthermore, experience also shows that no matter how accurate, the desk-based review of any project final report or evaluation has limited scope for properly assessing how a project actually performed.⁷⁸ Hence, some Agencies complement validation results with randomly selected final project evaluations managed by the evaluation units, or similar lighter exercises that still allow the independent assessment of directly collected evidence of performance and achievements.

106. IEO does not usually contact the coordination or evaluation units to discuss the TEs, as was established by the 2010 Policy, and has no mechanism for field-based validation of project evaluations as a means of comparison. This appears to be a major missed opportunity for enhancing the quality of future TEs and for establishing a more constructive rapport with the Agencies. This also implies that IEO uses TE ratings about achievements and performance of projects about which it only has an indirect knowledge and that have been produced through heterogenous evaluation processes about which the Office has limited information. Arguably, TE procedures may be more standardized in GEF Agencies that have fully independent evaluation functions and that internally validate TEs carried out by management or carry-out TEs themselves, than in GEF Agencies that do not have such independent evaluation units. Nevertheless, and as a partial consequence of the limited interaction, the ratings do not appear to be fully comparable across TEs conducted by different GEF Agencies, despite the rubrics for each criterion included in the 2017 guidelines.⁷⁹

107. The last section in the 2017 Guidelines does briefly explain the use made by IEO of the TE rating and that validation reports are available but most GEF Agencies interviewed by the Panel did not seem to be aware of the IEO validation process and the use made of ratings. Unless an Agency actively looks for the validation report in the IEO database, as one interviewee reported doing, there is no feedback whatsoever to the Agencies on the quality of their evaluations. Among the GEF Agencies responding to the e-survey, only seven out of 19 (37%) agreed with the statements that the validation process of TEs is transparent and fair; a few (4) disagreed and eight replies were 'do not know'. The high number of 'Do not Know' responses matches the information canvassed through interviews, that many GEF Agencies are not well-informed about the validation process. Hence, overall, the IEO validation process is not well-known and understood, which may eventually affect the credibility of any evidence that is drawn from it.

⁷⁶ TE ratings are also used by the GEF Secretariat as a data point in the Country Performance Index in the STAR allocation formula.

⁷⁷ In most GEF Agencies, TEs of GEF-funded projects are conducted by management and validated either by the independent evaluation unit, as is the case in several MDBs, or by the GEF coordination unit. Only the evaluation units of a few GEF Agencies (FAO, UNEP, UNIDO; IFAD occasionally) directly manage or conduct TEs of GEF-funded projects. However, IEO treats both types of TE as if they all were 'self-evaluations' and validates them all, with the exception of TEs from UNDP, UNEP and WB.

⁷⁸ The desk-based validation of a TE can only credibly assess whether the report meets the ToRs, how evidence is presented, the internal logic between evidence reported, conclusions and recommendations. In the absence of direct interaction with stakeholders and analysis of first-hand evidence, a validation cannot assess whether: the evaluation process was transparent and inclusive; all key stakeholders have been duly listened to; there were gaps in the data collection; and if the report reflects in a thorough and balanced manner the actual performance and achievements of the evaluated project.

⁷⁹ The rubrics in Annex 2 of the 2017 Guidelines are very basic and open to a certain degree of interpretation, as confirmed by some Agencies.

108. Low levels of interaction between IEO and Agencies' coordination units emerged through the e-survey responses and interviews. Most responding coordination units stated having occasional e-mail contacts with IEO, with only two of them reporting 'frequent' email contacts and just one referring to a more meaningful and proactive interaction. In the case of the three responding Agencies which have both functions in the same unit, communication was less frequent. Still, responding coordination units have received from IEO, frequently or occasionally, draft evaluation approach papers or reports for comments.

109. The responding evaluation units reported that verbal and email contacts with IEO were mostly 'occasional' and less frequent and substantive when compared with frequency reported by coordination units. Since 2015, only one out of 8 responding units had received from IEO a draft evaluation approach paper or report for comments. This was also confirmed through the Panel's interviews. Good relationship and interaction were mentioned in the case of UNDP IEO, including through the joint evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Program, UNEP and UNIDO evaluation units. Other units, apart the occasional discussion on specific aspects of the approach to evaluate GEF-funded projects, reported no other interaction.

110. The large majority of respondents from both types of units agreed that IEO is institutionally and behaviourally independent from GEF Agencies and 10 out of 19 respondents agreed, to different extent, that IEO is too distant from the Agencies, with the remaining respondents split between Do not Know and disagreement. One Agency stated that '*IEO is not closed, but it is not proactive in its relationship with us*'. All the evaluation units interviewed stated they would like to receive feedback on the TEs and have access to the lessons learned across the partnership.

111. The low level of engagement with GEF Agencies was confirmed by IEO staff, who tend to consider this a time-consuming activity with little added value. The Office communicates as necessary with Agencies' coordination units for organizing interviews and/or country visits in the context of corporate evaluations and in these cases, it also shares draft evaluation approach papers and reports for comments. Until 2015, IEO organized inter-agency meetings with evaluation units, but these were discontinued due to low attendance. The fact that more interaction exists with coordination than evaluation units suggests a relationship aimed at solving logistics and institutional issues rather than a partnership and a collaboration aimed at strengthening the evaluation function. The exception represented by the constructive collaboration with UNDP, UNEP and partly the World Bank IEG seems to be mostly due to the large GEF portfolio with these organizations.

112. In synthesis, the working culture and attention of IEO focus almost exclusively on the Office's own evaluations, and the evaluation function exercised at the level of the Agencies is regarded as beyond IEO's responsibility. This vision however may be risky for the quality of the evaluations across the entire Partnership, partly because Agencies do not receive any feedback nor support for improving their methods and approaches for TEs, which incidentally they would appreciate; and partly because IEO uses TE ratings with only limited understanding, at best, of how projects perform and evaluations are conducted.

113. In the view of the Panel, there is room for significant improvement in how IEO engages with the GEF Agencies, for example by proactively sharing the validation reports, discussing proposals for IEO work-program, resuming the annual inter-agency meetings of Agencies evaluation functions, providing guidance on TE costs, among others. A first opportunity in this sense emerged in 2019, following the request by Council and GEF Secretariat for IEO to carry out an evaluation of Agencies' so-called 'self-evaluation systems', which addresses the self-evaluations by Agencies of their projects throughout all of the reporting requirements of the GEF project cycle. This evaluation could represent a break-through in the engagement between IEO and the Agencies by allowing all the concerned parties to identify respective strengths and weaknesses and jointly identify mitigating measures.

4.5 IEO program of work

114. As already mentioned, IEO submits a four-year program of work and budget to the Council for approval. This typically happens one year into the Replenishment cycle to allow IEO to develop a program

that captures the key emerging issues in the on-going cycle.⁸⁰ On an annual basis, usually in the June SAER, IEO seeks Council's approval for the annual budget, supported by an update on progress in the implementation of the four-year work program. Council typically endorses, usually with limited comments, though it is not unknown for Council to request in other sessions additional studies or evaluations to contribute to OPS. In these situations, IEO seems to have been less than successful in managing expectations about what can be achieved and at what level of quality without major changes to the overall programme of work.

115. The IEO four-year work program is a complex endeavour, that reportedly starts with consultation within IEO to identify the main potential topics. The Office's approach for the identification of evaluation topics has changed over time. In June 2015, the Council '*welcomed the new approach to the IEO Four-Year Work Program*',⁸¹ which had been developed around the main issues in GEF-6, including multiple benefits, programmatic approaches and the drivers of global environmental change. The IEO 2019-2023 four-year work program, that will feed into OPS-7, followed a similar approach and includes topics relevant to GEF-7.

116. The second step is to engage with GEF Secretariat at the senior level to capture their views and suggestions. As mentioned earlier in the report, senior management in the GEF Secretariat recognize that interaction with IEO on its work-program has significantly improved with the current Director, although they would still like to see a stronger uptake of their suggestions and views in it.⁸² Among all the 97 respondents to the e-survey from all categories of stakeholders, only 10 Member Countries stated having received a draft for comments, and all in their capacity as Council members. During the interviews and through the e-survey, GEF Agencies, STAP and MEA Conventions stated that consultation on IEO's work-program would be a useful initiative towards improving the relevance of IEO's evaluations.

117. Two aspects of this process appear deserving attention in the view of the Panel. First, a systematic consultation with the Partnership, including the STAP, MEA Convention Secretariats, Agencies and the CSO Network, would likely enhance the relevance and utility of IEO evaluations. Second, IEO's decision to formulate its program of work based on the contents required for OPS appears to be fully justified and rational as there is no doubt that OPS is the flagship product of the GEF evaluation system and is one of three main documents used during the GEF Replenishment discussions to decide thematic and programmatic priorities for the following cycle. This however means that the OPS report must be available as early as possible in the discussion process, which takes place in the fourth year of the cycle.⁸³ As a consequence, some of the evaluations that contribute to OPS are carried out very early in the implementation process of the on-going GEF work, which strongly limits the possibility of capturing anything beyond incipient steps of new approaches or programs at best.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ The current Replenishment cycle started in July 2018 and Council discussed the four-year evaluation plan in June 2019.

⁸¹ See Highlights of the Council's Discussions, 48th GEF Council Meeting, June 02-04, 2015, Washington, D.C. at http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.48_Highlights_4.pdf.

⁸² The Second Peer Review in 2014 had noted weaknesses in the consultation on the programme of work with the GEF Secretariat too.

⁸³ OPS-6 was delivered in a very timely manner, as acknowledged by Council itself. The first Replenishment meeting in March 2017 received an update on progress, a presentation and briefs for all completed evaluations, which also included recommendations. Council members had already received and discussed the completed evaluations, which facilitated handling the huge amount of information. In September 2017, in time for the Second Replenishment meeting, a draft final OPS-6 report and a Findings document were shared with members. The same draft was presented at the 53rd session of the Council in November. The final report was presented at the Third Replenishment Meeting in January 2018.

⁸⁴ A case in point was the Formative Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) Programs, carried out in 2017 and included in OPS-6, which was presented to the Council in December 2017 in its advanced draft version. The evaluation was started less than three years into the IAP operationalization. The Review is in practice an appraisal of the relevance of the concept and program design, with very little evidence about actual implementation.

118. In other words, the request by Replenishment meetings participants to have evaluative feedback for their deliberations on what does and does not work in recently launched processes risks undermining, by default, the robustness and depth of some of the evaluative findings that feed into OPS. A possible way forward was suggested by an interviewee from the GEF Secretariat, who thinks that OPS should exclusively focus on the work implemented by GEF Secretariat during the previous cycle and earlier, as required. Feedback by IEO on the on-going work should be limited to very light exercises, more akin to evaluability assessments that analyse to what extent certain approaches can be adequately evaluated in due time, than to reviews. This would clearly require that GEF Secretariat establishes its own strategic monitoring mechanism to capture emerging issues and trends. OPS would still be made available in time for the Replenishment process, with contributions from evaluations and studies carried out on more 'mature' work.

119. At the same time, the OPS report appears to be a somewhat over-burdened product, that includes 'by default' a number of topics and analysis that may not deserve sustained evaluative attention every four years. IEO already started assessing focal areas in depth for OPS over longer timeframes⁸⁵, and this approach could be extended to other topics.⁸⁶

120. Once the program of work is endorsed by Council, IEO starts its implementation. Internal multi-annual work-plans are developed, whereby evaluations are assigned to evaluation team leaders within IEO. This may occasionally lead, and correctly so, to adjustments as was the case in August 2019, when two evaluations were dropped because other evaluations could cover the issues at stake.

121. In other instances, evaluative studies planned under a certain format have evolved into something else, for example Knowledge Products that became fully-fledged evaluations; and some studies appear to have been carried out only because of the availability of students' time, although they still require time and attention and their relevance to IEO's work could be debatable. Moreover, IEO programs of work typically do not include any contingency plan for funding these ad-hoc products, and financial and human resources must be re-allocated, which has tended to happen, reportedly, in a less transparent manner. It appears that these departures from the OPS-anchored program of work can easily lead to a dispersion of resources on evaluative efforts that may not meet expectations, may not be fully relevant or may have low final utility. In the medium-to long-term, the limited quality and utility of these products carries some reputational risk. Arguably, if IEO carried out evaluability assessments at the time of developing its four-year program of work, and carefully defined the business model to be applied to each evaluation, time and resources could be used in a more efficient manner.

4.6 Relevance and effectiveness of IEO evaluations

4.6.1 Relevance

122. Council Members expressed overall satisfaction with the alignment of IEO's strategic directions with the GEF's vision and priorities and Donor countries appeared to be satisfied with the relevance of IEO's work. A few OFPs and PFPs in Recipient Countries reported using OPS and APRs to learn about the major trends and performance of GEF Agencies, though all miss the country dimension and perspective they need for their strategic decisions.

123. Senior staff in the GEF Secretariat agree that IEO has raised attention to interesting and relevant issues. At the same time, it was noted that the rapid evolution of GEF's approaches and frameworks make it a constantly moving target that cannot be easily captured by evaluations in a timely manner for feedback and further decision making. However, in the view of the Panel, GEF Senior Management's legitimate need for real-time feedback on current new programs and approaches should rather be met through some form of strategic monitoring carried out by the GEF Secretariat, as discussed in Section 4.5 above.

⁸⁵ Focal areas were covered in detail in OPS-3 lightly in OPS4, not covered in OPS-5, and covered in detail in OPS-6.

⁸⁶ The 2014 Second Peer Review had suggested to 'Select evaluation subject strategically—reduce burden on system', which appears to still hold valid.

124. The relevance of IEO's evaluations was also questioned to some extent by GEF Agencies and Recipient Countries. The Panel fully recognizes that the diversity of GEF stakeholders impacts 'by default' on the possibility of each IEO evaluation to be relevant for all members of the Partnership. At the same time, the relevance of some IEO's evaluations may have been affected by ad-hoc decisions to pursue certain lines of work without comprehensive analysis of their relevance and utility. It would thus be a matter of better understanding the needs for evaluation of the different groups of primary stakeholders – as also suggested by the 2014 Second Peer Review - and propose a mix of products that 'reasonably' meets them all.

4.6.2 Effectiveness

125. Evidence canvassed through interviews, survey and document analysis shows that many IEO's evaluations have been effective in providing opportunities to stakeholders for learning and suggesting evidence for improvement. Several GEF staff stated that thematic evaluations and focal area studies in their respective areas of work had been instrumental for further funding and have provided useful insights for steering their programs. At the corporate level, policies that have been influenced by earlier evaluations include the CSO Policy, the 2017 GEF Gender Policy, the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) and the 2018 GEF policy on stakeholder engagement.

126. Effectiveness is also a function of engagement with the evaluation process and consequent sense of ownership for the process and product. One GEF Secretariat staff appeared to have a strong sense of ownership for one of IEO's Focal Area studies, while a few others had intensively used specific evaluation reports, which was the closest to a statement of 'ownership' encountered by the Panel. Among GEF Agencies, only two interviews suggested that interlocutors had any feeling of ownership for IEO evaluations.

127. Among e-survey respondents from all categories of stakeholders, 61% and 70% agreed that IEO evaluations were useful for accountability and learning purposes and a small majority (53%) agreed that recommendations and lessons from IEO's evaluations had been integrated in the respondent's policies and operations. By comparison, the usefulness for accountability and learning of GEF Agencies' own evaluations was positive, respectively, for 54% and 57% of all respondents; whereas only 35% of the respondents agreed that recommendations and lessons from GEF Agencies' evaluations had been integrated in related policies and operations. This suggests that IEO evaluations have been more effective in terms of learning and accountability than the GEF Agencies' TEs, which is a very positive finding for IEO. This was also confirmed through the 'disagreement' responses, i.e. that evaluations were not useful, that were higher, at 38%, for Agencies' own evaluations, against 18% for IEO's evaluations.

128. The Panel also heard anecdotal evidence about the integration of IEO evaluation lessons and recommendations in new project design. A GEF coordinator reported having shared across his organization, one IEO evaluation that was highly relevant for both the projects they were implementing and the new ones under design. At the same time, some interviewees and respondents stated that IEO evaluations do not provide useful guidance for project design and that more is required in this sense.

129. Overall, the entire evidence collected shows that both relevance and effectiveness of IEO's evaluations are satisfactory although not all findings and recommendations are used in practice. Learning seems to receive greater emphasis than accountability. Improvements on the relevance and effectiveness criteria may be achieved mostly through a deeper engagement with stakeholders across the Partnership when developing the programme of work, scoping each evaluation, canvassing information and views on performance and achievements, as well as soliciting ideas to address the problems identified.⁸⁷

4.7 Quality of IEO's evaluation products

4.7.1 Overall quality of IEO's evaluations

130. The PR canvassed the views of the different groups of stakeholders, through interviews and the e-survey, on the quality of IEO's evaluations. In addition, as already mentioned, the Panel, being a team of

⁸⁷ The 2014 Peer Review as well had noted weaknesses in IEO's engagement with stakeholders along the entire evaluation process.

senior evaluators, carried out its own assessment of the quality of 18 evaluation reports across all categories of IEO products, in addition to OPS-5 and OPS-6. The rated criteria were: Type and breadth of evidence used; Robustness and credibility of the analysis; Strategic relevance of key findings, conclusions and recommendations and Clarity of language and presentation. All APRs since 2014 were also analysed in detail, though they were not rated.

131. The large majority of respondents to the e-survey, with percentages varying between 69% and 76% for the different groups of stakeholders, agreed through a set of questions that IEO evaluations: are robust in terms of evidence canvassed and analysed; draw conclusions and lessons well based on the presented evidence; formulate useful recommendations; and that the overall quality is good. These highly positive responses were still slightly less enthusiastic than the responses by a much larger set of respondents including the same stakeholder groups to the 2019 IEO survey, which reported overall satisfaction with IEO evaluation products by 96% of respondents.⁸⁸

132. With regard to state-of-art-approaches and innovative methods in IEO's evaluations, the Office has dedicated significant efforts to innovate on evaluation methodologies and tools, for example the use of geo-spatial data to assess changes over time in the state of environmental resources that may be attributed to GEF interventions.⁸⁹ This is appreciated by the Partnership at large and IEO is perceived as a leader at the cutting-edge of evaluation of environmental topics among most GEF Agencies. A small majority of respondents to the Panel's e-survey, 57-58%, appreciated IEO's achievements in these areas, although more than a third of respondents were not sufficiently informed. STAP, a few Agencies and the MEA Conventions also welcomed this type of tools and methods that enhance the credibility of IEO evaluation reports, though they also noted that IEO evaluations cannot substitute for scientific monitoring of the GEBs and that more realism and caution might be appropriate in statements about actual impacts and benefits.⁹⁰

133. The Panel's quality assessment of the evaluation reports showed that excluding OPS, five out of 18 evaluations were rated 'satisfactory' across most criteria.⁹¹ However, the average rating for all 18 evaluations was 'satisfactory' only for one criterion, 'Clarity of language and presentation', and 'less than satisfactory' for the other three criteria. Reportedly, some evaluations were under-resourced, and methodologies and approaches had to be significantly curtailed.

134. In the Panel's view, a major concern was the variability in the quality, approaches and presentation of IEO's evaluation reports, well beyond what would be the expected diversity given the wide range of topics assessed and scope of each evaluation. For example, several recurrent weaknesses were noted, as follows:

- i. IEO uses interchangeably, though in an inconsistent manner, various terms for defining its evaluations, ranging from study and review to formative evaluation and knowledge product; this creates confusion as different products have different purposes and entail different approaches and methodologies;
- ii. As already mentioned in 4.4.2, low inclusiveness of stakeholders at country level affects the evidence base; reference groups, that could partly compensate with regard to diversity of perspectives, were established only for few evaluations and there seem to be no guidance on their composition; all these factors affect the credibility of the evidence brought to bear in the analysis and the final utility of an evaluation;

⁸⁸ See at <http://www.thegef.org/council-meeting-documents/ieo-stakeholder-engagement-and-knowledge-needs-assessment-survey-results>. In addition to different sample sizes, with IEO reaching out to a much larger number of respondents and to stakeholder groups not included in the PR e-survey, the main difference in the responses about IEO's evaluations may stem from the different structure of the questions raised in the two surveys, i.e. a request for an objective assessment of quality in the Panel survey, and a personal assessment in the IEO survey.

⁸⁹ IEO also sought additional funding for trying out new methods and Norway contributed USD 500,000.

⁹⁰ The 2014 Second Peer Review had suggested that IEO should 'Continue efforts to measure impact', though in close collaboration with STAP and GEF Agencies.

⁹¹ The Panel used for its assessment the six-point scale that IEO uses for TE ratings.

- iii. Recommendations across IEO evaluation reports, sometimes called ‘suggestions’ with no explanation of the difference, are formulated in very diverse styles, at different levels of complexity and detail; in addition to making the preparation of a Management Response more complex, this suggests a lack of shared understanding and agreement within the Unit about what a useful’ or SMART recommendation is;
- iv. IEO evaluations often largely rely on results about the performance of GEF projects and programs that emerge from the statistical analysis of TE ratings, despite the absence of a reasonable knowledge of the evaluation procedures underpinning the TEs and the limited comparability of data;
- v. IEO definition for criteria is not fully aligned with the internationally accepted terminology, which creates some confusion;⁹² in consideration of the Partnership-based nature of the evaluation function in the GEF, it might be more appropriate if IEO used the same definitions as the international evaluation community;
- vi. Other weaknesses that were noted more than once include the very diverse and sometimes confusing report structures, for example executive summaries and conclusion sections that present new findings; some cases of weak links between findings, conclusions and recommendations; absence of explicit discussion of basic assumptions in a few highly technical reports, that moreover do not fully meet the definition of evaluation.

135. Some interviewees in various positions and organizations commented on the quality of some of IEO’s evaluations too, raising various issues including: the participation in evaluation teams of consultants who proved to be biased; the tendency to ‘water down’ findings and present an over-rosy picture of the GEF performance; the lack of reference, in IEO’s evaluations, to the GEF indicators for assessing progress against baselines; the limited transparency in the selection of evaluation samples and in the use of evidence available to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations; the variability across evaluations in approaches, methods and reporting styles, largely left to the decision of the evaluation team leader.

136. IEO staff themselves, during the self-assessment retreat for the PR, had identified weaknesses in the evaluation processes they conduct, including inconsistencies in the process for developing approach papers and low engagement with stakeholders. Inclusiveness of the evaluation process was also a concern. They had also agreed on some remedial actions, including the preparation of process guidelines for each type of IEO product and efforts to develop recommendations better linked to evidence and through a participatory process with stakeholders. The Panel can only praise IEO staff for their objective analysis and encourages the Office to effectively act upon its own decisions.

137. Many of the weaknesses identified seem to originate in the lack of an adequate quality assurance mechanism within IEO. Evidence shows that apart from OPS reports that are typically peer-reviewed by at least two external consultants, the most frequent quality assurance mechanism for all other IEO evaluations and studies is supervision by the IEO Management Team.⁹³ This does not seem to have been sufficient to ensure a reasonable level of harmonization and coherence in approaches and products and to meet quality standards across all products. Also, ensuring that OPS reports are quality assured through a proper mechanism, without applying the same procedure to the evaluations that contribute to OPS itself, appears to be inconsistent.

⁹² In both 2010 and 2019 policies, IEO’s definitions of effectiveness and results were inconsistent with the international definitions, overlapping with the typical stand-alone criterion of ‘impact’. In this respect, the November 2019 revised evaluation criteria by the OECD/DAC might be a useful reference also for IEO, see <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

⁹³ Out of the 18 evaluations assessed by the Panel, only 3 had established a quality assurance mechanism comprising peer reviewers and in one case, a reference group. The limited size of the sample did not allow identifying a relation between the quality assurance process and the overall quality of the report.

4.7.2 Quality and utility of OPS and APR

138. The two evaluation products that are best known across the GEF Partnership are the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF, or OPS, and the Annual Performance Reports (APR). OPS reports are highly appreciated by a good range of stakeholders: Council members and other participants in the Replenishment discussions, who rely on its findings and recommendations for programming the following cycle; coordination units in partner Agencies and CSOs, who canvass OPS reports for trends and emerging issues; newly recruited GEF Secretariat staff, who stated finding a wealth of information in the OPS about the GEF.

139. The Panel's assessment of OPS-6 resulted in rating 'satisfactory' the criterion 'Type and breadth of evidence used' and 'moderately satisfactory' the other three criteria. Despite a number of positive features, such as clarity of language and structure and a very extensive evidence base, two weaknesses were identified:

- i. The report is highly appreciative of the performance of the GEF, with gaps or weaknesses in performance almost hidden; this, as discussed earlier in the report, may undermine the report's contribution to both learning and accountability;
- ii. Most of the conclusions and recommendations are relevant and usually properly target strategic issues. Nevertheless, these are not formulated at a level above the individual evaluations and reports on which OPS draws. This raises questions as to the added value of the effort that goes into its preparation.

140. APRs are typically presented to the Council at the Spring session. The format of APRs has been quite stable since 2015. The core content of the report is the statistical analysis of the ratings of the established evaluation criteria generated by the validated TEs of GEF projects and programs. IEO has developed a ratings-database over time, which included 1566 validated TEs by the time of the 2019 APR. Every APR analyses the ratings of the most recent cohort of completed projects and compares it with previous ones for each of the standard evaluation criteria and for other parameters, e.g. co-financing. In consideration of the fact that every year the overall results change little because of the small number of new TEs when compared to the entire database, the 2019 APR correctly minimized the statistical analysis. This appears to be a more efficient use of time and resources. APRs also include an in-depth analysis or evaluation of a specific topic, which had emerged as worth of further evaluative effort from the statistical analysis of TE ratings,⁹⁴ and most APRs include the MAR.

141. In addition to the interest of a wider set of stakeholders for the specific topic addressed in each APR, as was the case of GEF Council members and Secretariat for the analysis of the sustainability of the GEF portfolio, Panel's interviews showed that the statistical analysis of TE ratings is appreciated by a small group of staff of GEF coordination and evaluation units in partner Agencies who canvass the reports and the IEO database of validation reports for feedback on agency performance, benchmarking with others, and areas of work where improvement is required within their agencies.

142. In the view of the Panel, APRs meet an important accountability and learning function about the performance of the GEF portfolio, by representing the interface where the evidence from all the TEs is brought together in one single comprehensive tool and made available to the entire Partnership. However, as discussed in Section 4.4.5 above, the limitations identified on the IEO validation process and on the comparability of TE ratings, diminish the utility of APRs.

143. An additional weakness identified relates to the exclusive focus of the APRs on the quantitative ratings of the TEs, with insufficient attention to the more qualitative findings, recommendations and lessons learned that are included in these evaluations.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ These were the Evaluation of the GEF Sustainable Transport Portfolio in the 2019 APR, an analysis of sustainability in the GEF portfolio in the 2017 APR; and a review of the GEF focal area tracking tools in the 2015 APR. The 2016 APR was presented as part of OPS-6 and not as a self-standing document.

⁹⁵ Please refer to Section 4.9 for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

4.7.3 Integration of socio-economic and gender perspectives in IEO's evaluation

144. The GEF approved its first Policy on Gender Mainstreaming in May 2011, with the main objective of *'...further the goal of gender equity in the context of GEF operations'*. This policy did not include any specific provision for gender mainstreaming in evaluations, besides the minimum requirement for the entire project cycle that *'Consultation with experts and key stakeholders'* should take place. In October 2014, the GEF Council approved the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP), which aimed, among other things, to operationalize the gender mainstreaming policy.

145. In May 2017, the IEO Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in the GEF was presented to and endorsed by the Council. One of its recommendations addressed the need to revise the Policy to *'better align it with international best practice standards'*. This led, in October 2017, to the Council's approval of the GEF Policy on Gender Equality. The IEO Gender evaluation is frequently referred to in the paper presenting the Gender Policy to the Council and, IEO staff contributed to the process leading to its preparation. The Policy foresees that a gender-responsive approach be mainstreamed in all GEF-financed activities, evaluation included, at the level of the Secretariat and the Agencies. Also, effective as of 1 July 2018, it applies *'to all annual project implementation reports as well as mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations submitted after one year from the date of effectiveness'*.

146. Whereas the 2010 GEF Policy on Monitoring and Evaluation, as already mentioned, included gender only as a cross-cutting theme and the first version of the TE guidelines did not make any reference to gender issues, the 2019 Evaluation Policy and the 2017 guidelines for the conduct of TEs include gender analysis among the Principles for evaluation in the GEF.⁹⁶ Similarly, IEO form and guidance for the validation of TEs as well do not include any reference to gender issues, but APR 2017, issued in 2018, includes an in-depth analysis of gender issues across one cohort of TEs.

147. Furthermore, the 2014 IEO "Guidance Document: Monitoring and Evaluation in the LDCF/SCCF" states that projects funded by these two funds will address gender equality and socio-economic issues, hence the evaluations will also look at these aspects. In late 2015 IEO also produced a guidance document to address gender in evaluation approach papers.⁹⁷ Albeit a positive initiative, the proposed approach was very low-key and there is no evidence that it made a significant impact on IEO's evaluations. As of October 2019, the document was still in draft format.

148. One IEO senior evaluation officer works more systematically on gender issues and IEO Director is committed to mainstreaming gender analysis across IEO's work, but there is no dedicated expertise on gender, social development and human rights issues among IEO staff.⁹⁸

149. Most respondents to the e-survey from all categories of stakeholders (66%) agreed that IEO evaluations adequately integrate gender and socio-economic issues. The Panel's quality assessment of IEO evaluation reports, however, showed that out of 17 evaluations,⁹⁹ eight did not include any reference to gender issues,¹⁰⁰ two were assessed as moderately unsatisfactory, three as moderately satisfactory and four, as 'satisfactory'. Also, the focus in the evaluations so far has largely been on policy compliance, with little analysis of results and impacts from a gender perspective. Socio-economic data were either not discussed in any of the assessed evaluations, or at a negligible level.

⁹⁶ The Panel did not assess the quality of TEs, but most Agencies have gender policies and gender issues are usually among the criteria foreseen by the evaluation policies.

⁹⁷ Addressing Gender in Evaluations, Guidance for Approach Papers, September 2015.

⁹⁸ The Office voluntarily reports to the UN Gender SWAP, but the reports do not provide a full picture of gender mainstreaming across IEO evaluations because only few reports are included in the rating.

⁹⁹ The Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in the GEF was also assessed by the Panel but was not included in this group.

¹⁰⁰ The Panel could not assess whether gender analysis in these eight evaluations would have been useful. An informed opinion suggests that only four of these could be considered 'gender-neutral'.

150. Better inclusion of gender issues was found in both OPS-5 and OPS-6, each comprising a sub-section on gender issues. OPS-6 also addressed gender mainstreaming in the GEF with one of its recommendations. The Council, which frequently gave attention to gender issues in its discussion, welcomed the integration of this topic in OPS and in IEO Work Program and Budget.

151. Overall, the evidence available suggests that improvements in mainstreaming a gender perspective in IEO evaluations are visible. Still, the Office has not yet adequately internalized the importance of gender issues in the contribution to the pursuit of GEBs and adjusted evaluation approaches accordingly. Moreover, the limited or lack of attention in IEO's evaluations to socio-economic aspects, with the exception of OPS-6, and to human rights in the context of the work of the GEF represents a gap in assessing the contribution of the Facility towards both the GEBs and the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.8 Management Response and follow-up to IEO's evaluations

152. This section analyses the steps in the evaluation cycle that are under the responsibility of the GEF Secretariat. It provides a description of the process 'as it should be' and then compares it with what currently happens in the GEF. It is important to remember that this process did not apply to OPS-6, which was directly delivered to the Replenishment participants and does not receive a formal Management Response.

153. A fundamental step of the evaluation process is the preparation by the evaluated entity, be it at the project or corporate level (hereinafter referred to as Management), of a Management Response (MR) to evaluation reports. A MR is an articulate document wherein Management; states whether it accepts the proposed recommendations, fully or partly, or rejects them explaining the reasons; proposes a work-plan and/or measures for follow-up, within a set timeline, usually one or two years; and indicates responsibilities for implementation. A reasonable timespan for the preparation of a credible MR is four weeks, to allow adequate consultation and planning at various levels, though some organizations allow longer.

154. After the governing body endorses the follow-up to recommendations,¹⁰¹ Management should act accordingly and in due time as planned, report back to the governing body on the outcomes. The extent of monitoring and validation of progress varies across organizations. A frequent approach is the Management Action Record (MAR), which is a report for the governing body prepared by Management on the actual progress in implementation of recommendations, complemented by the evaluation unit with its own comments about progress. Any follow-up depends on the relevance of the issues at stake in the view of the governing body.

155. The Panel, using as reference the process described above and based on an attentive analysis of MRs, MARs and Council documents, in addition to various interviews and direct observation of the Council at its 57th session in December 2019, considers that the approach to the Management Response and MAR steps followed by the GEF in the evaluation cycle is flawed at several levels, as discussed in the following paragraphs. It is important to note that IEO made some adjustments to the MAR procedure in 2015, mostly related to the criteria for eventually 'exiting' an evaluation from the MAR report, in response to weaknesses in the way the GEF used the MAR that had been identified by the 2014 Second Peer Review.

156. First, the GEF Secretariat has only two weeks to prepare a MR, for all evaluations regardless of their scope and complexity. Although meetings between IEO and Secretariat that take place to discuss recommendations before finalising an evaluation report may trigger some initial thinking and planning, two weeks is a short time for developing a realistic plan of action on recommendations that at times require complex responses.

157. Second, since 2015 most MRs prepared by the GEF Secretariat typically comment at a very general level on the evaluation methodology and findings and possibly on a few recommendations but do not provide any indication of the actions planned for implementing the accepted recommendations, let alone of those that are not mentioned. The Panel only identified two cases where GEF Secretariat explicitly rejected findings and recommendations in IEO evaluations: the 2019 Evaluation of GEF Support to Scaling up Impact, already

¹⁰¹ Please refer to Section 4.2 on this specific aspect of the process.

mentioned; and the Evaluation of GEF's support to transport systems, where the MR rejected one recommendation and did not accept IEO's methodology and conclusions on the highly technical issue of measurement of GHG emissions. On the other hand, explicit and detailed commitment to a course of action in response to IEO recommendations was also uncommon. At the same time, as mentioned in Section 4.2, the limited attention given by the Council for MR is de facto a disincentive for the Secretariat to engage in the process of preparing a comprehensive MR.¹⁰²

158. Every year, IEO presents a MAR to the Council, often, as mentioned, as a section of the APR. The Secretariat initiates the document, describes the actions taken as a follow-up to each recommendation of the past 'pending' evaluations, with an assessment of the extent of progress in implementation. IEO, in turn, complements the document with its own description and assessment of progress made in implementation. When both parties agree that a recommendation has been fully implemented, or that it has been superseded by time and events, the recommendation is 'retired' from the MAR. Records of discussions and interviews with Council Members indicate that MARs receive very limited consideration by Council.

159. The main weakness in the MAR mechanism implemented by the GEF stems from the lack of explicitly stated commitments and actions to implement a recommendation in the MR, against which progress should be tracked. Moreover, MARs since 2015 showed some additional flaws which included: discrepancies between Council's decisions as reported in the Joint Summary of the Chairs and in the MAR itself; in the absence of deadlines for implementing follow-up actions, MARs include evaluation recommendations that have become obsolete; the absence of an explicit methodology underpinning IEO's assessment of the progress made by the Secretariat in follow up to the recommendations. These seem to exist independently from the introduction of the SAER model to present evaluations findings and reports.

160. The various flaws in the process just described mean that the evaluation process for several individual IEO evaluations comes to an abrupt end at Council because of the absence of explicit commitments to follow-up on their findings and recommendations, unless they are picked up again during the Replenishment discussions. This reduces the utility of the entire function. Furthermore, even when the GEF Secretariat agrees in principle on the recommendations, the absence of agreed actions and the low attention given to the MAR by all stakeholders, cause accountability on recommendation implementation to be low and erratic.¹⁰³ The Panel considers this to be a serious hindrance to a well performing GEF evaluation function.

4.9 Evaluation Knowledge Management

161. The GEF evaluation policies stress the importance of disseminating the lessons learned through evaluations. The 2019 Policy also defines Knowledge Management (KM) in its broadest sense, as *'the process by which organizations within the GEF partnership generate value and improve performance from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets'* and states that knowledge sharing from GEF evaluations aims at promoting learning, the application of lessons and feedback into projects and programs.

162. IEO Management gives significant attention to KM, although the Office has not developed yet a communication or a KM strategy. In 2015 and in 2019, the Office carried out two e-surveys reaching out to the entire GEF Partnership to understand the needs for evaluation products and information of the various groups of stakeholders. The Office comprises among its staff a Knowledge Management officer, who dedicates part of her time to evaluation work as well.

¹⁰² The Panel found two MRs issued by GEF Secretariat that come close to the definition of comprehensive MR. These were the MR to the 2015 Joint GEF-UNDP Small Grants Programme Evaluation, presented to Council at its 48th Session in June 2015, as part of the Management Response to the Semi-Annual Evaluation Report of the GGEF Independent Evaluation Office: June 2015; and the Management Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation of the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources, presented to Council at its 45th Session in November 2013.

¹⁰³ Within the sample of evaluation reports assessed in depth for by the Panel, information on progress was available only for 2 out of 11 due for reporting in the 2019 MAR.

163. Despite some confusion in IEO terminology on what a KM product is, as already discussed,¹⁰⁴ the main KM products by IEO include:

- Presentations to the Council, to ECWs and at various conferences: these products, generally of satisfactory quality, differ depending on the nature of the event and of the audience;
- Evaluation briefs for all evaluations, well appreciated by several stakeholders as also reported by respondents to the 2019 IEO survey;
- The, already mentioned, platform Eval-Earth;¹⁰⁵
- As part of country portfolio evaluation processes, IEO organized formal restitution workshops which came to an end when this type of evaluation was suspended; recently, reportedly upon a request by the countries themselves, IEO has prepared two Country notes providing a description of the GEF portfolio in the country and some findings from the relevant TEs. The documents were formulated at a generic level which is unlikely to help the national stakeholders to learn operational and strategic lessons aimed at improving performance and impacts of their partnership with the GEF. Although it is well acknowledged that a desk-based document cannot substitute the depth of analysis and recommendations that can be generated through a country portfolio evaluation, there might be ways to develop an intermediate product that meets the national demand for focused feedback and cost-efficiency concerns.

164. IEO issues a Newsletter twice per year and has occasionally produced infographics, videos and webinars on different topics. In the Panel's assessment, the quality of these products is variable and none of these products appeared to be known and used among the interviewees consulted by the Panel. On one occasion, IEO organized a workshop to present an evaluation report and reportedly, this was successful and this modality for sharing evaluation results was mentioned as useful and efficient by some stakeholders.

165. Evaluation reports, briefs and information on IEO's activities are systematically posted on the IEO Web site, which is managed by the Office, is self-standing and has a visible link from the GEF main Web page. Reports are not shared by email with Agencies and other Partners, although would help in raising attention and interest. In this respect, and despite an internal established deadline of three months, significant delays were noted in publishing evaluation reports after presentation at Council, which does not help diffusion and use.¹⁰⁶ Council Members of Recipient Countries made a good case that translations into French and Spanish of at least the Executive Summaries of evaluation reports should be made available, both to facilitate their own preparation for Council and for more extensive use at country level.

166. The IEO Web site was rated among the most effective knowledge sharing channels by respondents to the 2019 IEO survey. The Panel however, during its work, found it to be less user-friendly than desirable in some search modalities. Unless a user knows that a given guideline, evaluation brief and report exist, it is challenging to find them.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, there are no direct links to the Management Responses to evaluations, which reduces the transparency of the evaluation function.¹⁰⁸

167. The IEO Management Team and staff frequently participate in international conferences and events, to present methodological innovations and evaluation results. Staff also mentioned that there is a culture of encouragement in IEO towards publishing in scientific journals. On average, since 2015 IEO attended two events per month, including webinars and book launches. Most events were clearly important and useful opportunities to engage with the GEF Partnership and Member Countries, including ECWs (50) and GEF and Partnership related meetings and Conference of the Parties (20). Similarly, attendance of ECG, DAC and UNEG conferences would be expected and useful (9). However, it is difficult to assess whether more than seven 'other' events/year were useful arenas for dissemination and it may be debatable that the

¹⁰⁴ Please refer to Section 4.7.1.

¹⁰⁵ Please refer to Section 3.5.

¹⁰⁶ In two cases, the delays were of 18 and 24 months.

¹⁰⁷ One section of the IEO Web site has not been updated since 2016.

¹⁰⁸ MRs are only available from the lists of Council documents.

preparation and delivery of a two-day workshop for the Shanghai International Program for Development Evaluation Training (SHIPDET) should be a priority for IEO. Overall, this stream of activity represents a significant commitment in terms of time and financial resources, with unclear linkage, in some cases, to its contribution to IEO's core mandate.

168. In 2019 IEO also co-organized with IDEAS¹⁰⁹ the Third Conference in Evaluating Environment and Development held in Prague. This was a good example of the Office's role in promoting and diffusing approaches to evaluation of environment and development interventions. Interviewed participants found it interesting and useful and the partnering with IDEAS was a brilliant solution for visibility. Reportedly, 9 partner Agencies attended, but no other members of the GEF Partnership did and many reported not having heard about it. This may have been a missed opportunity for better engagement.

169. At the same time IEO, as already briefly mentioned,¹¹⁰ has been much less attentive to the potential wealth of findings and lessons learned available in the TEs of completed GEF-funded projects and programs. Although TEs may refer to projects possibly approved up to a decade before, hence designed and implemented under quite different frameworks and contexts, they are the source of insights on issues regarding the actual delivery of results at the project maturity point. At a minimum, patterns across lessons and recommendations in TEs should highlight the most significant and relevant results and issues that arose in project implementation and that need 'to be learned'. The 2014 APR had included a specific sub-study to analyse the lessons identified in TEs, at an adequate level of depth and articulation. Unfortunately, the analysis was not carried out again in other APRs, though it may have happened through other evaluations.¹¹¹ Since the APR 2015, the exclusive focus of APRs on quantitative ratings means that the most important contents, the core substance of all TEs, are not mined and consolidated for analysis and shared with the Partnership, though this has occasionally happened for IEO evaluations.¹¹² Interestingly, partner Agencies expressed a strong interest for the possibility of having access and discussing TE findings and lessons learned across the Partnership.

170. Quite importantly, the limited use by IEO of the wealth of information in TEs also concerns the TE recommendations that have a relevance for the GEF Secretariat; this appears to be a serious gap in the accountability and learning at the level of the GEF Partnership-wide evaluation function.

4.10 IEO structure

171. As of October 2019, IEO staff included: the Director, the Chief Evaluator/Deputy Director, four Senior Evaluation Officers, one of whom is supported by Japanese Government under the Donor Funded Staffing Program, one Senior Operations Officer, four Evaluation Officers of whom two had just joined the Office, three Evaluation Analysts, one Knowledge Management officer, one Information Officer, one Research Assistant, one Senior Executive Assistant and one Program Assistant, for a total of 19 staff members. Most IEO staff members have a post-graduate degree in science or environment-related subject and some of the more junior staff have also attended specialized courses in evaluation. Almost all evaluators had working experience in evaluation before being recruited by IEO. The staff mix was balanced in terms of gender and nationality. Over time, some turn-over among evaluators has happened, though most senior evaluators have been in their position for a decade or more and previous junior consultants have been recruited as staff.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ IDEAS (International Development Evaluation Association) is a global professional evaluation association which focuses on international sustainable development.

¹¹⁰ Please refer to Section 4.7.2.

¹¹¹ The methodology was based on earlier work by UNEP EO and is explained in detail in the APR itself.

¹¹² A good such example was the 2019 Evaluation of the GEF Sustainable Transport Portfolio, which analyses in depth a smaller set of projects and related TEs that were identified as addressing sustainable transport drawing on both quantitative ratings and qualitative information mined from the TEs. The evaluation was presented as part of the 2019 APR.

¹¹³ In this regard, the Panel would like to highlight that a regular and progressive rotation of staff allows for new expertise and experience to re-energise and capacitate the office, while maintaining institutional memory.

172. Data from IEO indicate that in the period July 2014-late 2019, IEO signed 166 consultancy contracts with 143 different experts. Of these, the large majority were linked to evaluation work, with a small share of the contracts, 11%, for support services such as editing, IT and Knowledge Management.¹¹⁴ The pattern of recruitment closely followed IEO's evaluation cycle, with 68% of the consultants recruited between 2015 and 2017, when IEO was fully engaged in conducting evaluations that would contribute to OPS-6. Overall, in consideration of both the variety of subject matter expertise required to evaluate GEF's activities and performance and the cyclical pattern that characterizes the work of IEO, reliance on consultants for evaluation peak-times seems to be an efficient approach, if not a 'must'.

173. Since 2015 the size and staffing of IEO has gone through little change, whereas the internal arrangements for assigning and conducting evaluations were significantly modified with the arrival of the incumbent Management Team. The previously existing four evaluation teams, each led by a Senior Evaluation Officer and responsible for one or two categories of evaluations and referred to as 'silos structure',¹¹⁵ were abolished and a so-called 'flat structure' was introduced. This means that new teams have been set-up for each evaluation, largely based on the interest of individual staff members without necessarily considering experience and skills. More junior staff have been providing services to one or more teams at a time, and middle-level staff can lead evaluations. Only Operations Team maintained its structure, comprising the support functions including budgeting, operations, and IT. More recently, it also included communication. All staff members report to the Deputy Director, excluding the Senior Executive Assistant who also carries out operations for the entire Office, and the Deputy Director herself.

174. In practice, the structure is a two-layered pyramid, with all staff in the bottom layer and the Management Team in the upper layer. The Director mostly focuses on IEO's external relationships, including the Council, the Secretariat, the STAP and the international evaluation community, and the Deputy Director is responsible for the internal office management and management of evaluation work. The preparation of OPS-6 was, reportedly, a joint endeavour of the Management Team plus contributions from evaluation officers and/or external consultants. In the case of evaluations led by the Deputy, the Director is responsible for quality assurance.

175. In the view of virtually all IEO staff, the 'flat structure' has resulted in; pronounced centralization in decision-making, in a manner perceived as lacking a transparent flow of information, that has led to inefficiencies and bottlenecks; and very little delegation of authority disempowering evaluation team leaders. Although the flat structure has opened-up opportunities to more junior staff to engage in more challenging assignments, it has created a certain degree of competition within the Office, some confusion in staff roles and in the prioritization of tasks within evaluation teams, and some loss in the sense of staff ownership for the assigned evaluations.

176. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the single reporting line for all staff has, de facto, led to double reporting lines for more junior staff - to both the Deputy and the evaluation team leader. This seems to have arisen from, among other factors, the absence of firm work-plans for staff providing 'services' to various evaluation teams and of agreed procedures and guidelines on how to manage the evaluation process as well as from a lack of a 'culture' of collaboration across teams. Other related effects include; gaps in communication, inefficient use of time and insufficient shared knowledge about who does what.

177. The already mentioned IEO internal self-assessment for the PR was an opportunity for what appears to have been an open discussion of issues that staff had raised during their individual interviews with the Panel. Most of the remedial measures identified on that occasion by IEO staff were eminently sensible in the view of the Panel. Among others, the lack of a collegial spirit of collaboration among IEO staff had also emerged as a major factor affecting the performance of the Office and the quality of its work. IEO had already started to implement some of these as of late 2019, which deserves praise and will hopefully continue.

¹¹⁴ The two contracts issued for the current PR were not included in this total.

¹¹⁵ IEO staff who experienced the 'silos structure' tended to agree that this was too inflexible and prevented exchange across silos and personal professional growth.

178. Based on the evidence available and its analysis, the Panel identified two additional issues related to the organization of IEO's work and its internal set-up, where there is room for improving the Office's efficiency and effectiveness. These are the evaluation business model and internal arrangements for the management and operational functions, discussed here below.

179. With the change to the 'flat' structure, the role of IEO evaluators also changed to some extent. In the previous set-up, IEO evaluators could play at the same time the role of evaluator, either as leader or member of a team, and the role of manager of fully or partly externally commissioned evaluations, depending on the workload and the type of evaluation. In the current model, IEO evaluators are either team leaders or team members and no longer operate solely or mostly as evaluation managers.

180. The potential advantages of the new model include a stronger control on the quality, continuity of approach and possibly overall lower evaluation costs because of lower transaction costs and fees. At the same time, the overall production of the Office may decrease, as there are only so many evaluations that a staff member can simultaneously lead or take part in. All IEO evaluations have been conducted with a mix of IEO staff and external consultants, which is usually a sound approach. There might, however, be scope for balancing the internal and external members of an evaluation team, based on the topic. In some cases, a prevalence of IEO staff may be required, whereas in others, external consultants or consulting firms might be better equipped, technically and methodologically, for conducting evaluations of highly specialized topics, or to the contrary, simpler evaluations that can be run along a well-tested methodology and process, e.g. country portfolio evaluations. A more efficient model might be achieved through the identification, on a case by case basis, of the most suitable business model for each evaluations, based on the analysis of the topic and its scope through light evaluability assessments, at the time of developing the work-program.

181. Regarding IEO internal work distribution, the Panel found that roles and responsibilities within the Management Team were not sufficiently clear or consistent to address the following functions:

- Setting vision and strategy;
- Building a collective culture of excellence in IEO;
- Managing in a transparent manner all evaluation processes;
- Ensuring achievement of quality standards in all evaluations;
- Effective and efficient deployment of human and financial resources;
- Building partnerships internally and externally.

182. Similarly, the Office staffing and set-up for the support function in 2019 did not seem to adequately reflect the fact that the World Bank is the Trustee for the GEF and provides back-office support for the needs of IEO in these areas of work. On the one hand, the Office appeared over-staffed on administration and budget, above the required level to serve as effective liaison to the WB-provided functions. On the other hand, important functions like Communication, Knowledge Management and IT as a tool for evaluation, albeit covered, did not appear to be so at the required level.

4.11 Compliance with the 2010 GEF Policy on Monitoring and Evaluation

183. This section synthesises the evidence discussed in the previous sections, analysing it in terms of compliance of the GEF evaluation function with the 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation, as mentioned in the Methodology section.

184. The main positive achievements of the GEF evaluation function in complying with the key features of the 2010 Policy were the following:

- a. The GEF Council has exercised its oversight role of the evaluation function and enabled the independence of the function, has requested and approved evaluation policies as appropriate, has given due attention to IEO's evaluation products and extensively used OPS-6 reports in the Replenishment for GEF-7;
- b. IEO has: completed many independent evaluations of the GEF, several of which of satisfactory quality; delivered OPS-6 in a highly timely manner; regularly reported to Council in a suitable

- manner; set minimum requirements for the Terminal Evaluation of GEF projects and programs; and contributed to evaluative knowledge sharing and dissemination among some groups of stakeholders;
- c. GEF Secretariat and IEO have duly complied with the MoU signed in 2009 on the administrative and budgetary independence of the Office.
185. At the same time, some weaknesses were identified in the application of the 2010 Policy, as follows:
- d. lack of adequate attention by GEF Council, GEF Secretariat and IEO to the Management Response and Management Action Record steps in the evaluation cycle;
 - e. inconsistent establishment of quality assurance mechanisms for IEO's evaluations;
 - f. lack of compliance by IEO with the foreseen oversight function and subsequent quality control of the minimum requirements of evaluation practices of partner Agencies;
 - g. limited use by IEO of the wealth of potential learning material represented by the TEs and sharing generated knowledge across the Partnership.
186. Two instances were also identified of 'positive' lack of compliance with the Policy:
- h. The Policy had provisions for IEO to have an oversight role of the monitoring function of the GEF and responsibility for the use of evaluation products; the lack of compliance with these provisions correctly avoided a context of conflict of interest and loss of independence of IEO due to lose segregation between the management and evaluation functions;
 - i. The Policy gave limited attention given to the integration of gender issues as a key criterion in the GEF evaluation practice; since 2017, nevertheless, IEO has produced solid benchmark analysis on the extent of integration of a gender perspective in the work of the GEF and started integrating gender issues in its own evaluations, albeit still in a somewhat light and scattered manner.
187. Thus, overall, the 2010 Policy has been adequately implemented with regards to the evaluation function. Among the 'negative' gaps identified, only two, 'd' and 'e' above are addressed by the 2019 Evaluation Policy and have been acknowledged as requiring attention.¹¹⁶ Gaps 'f' and 'g' have been disregarded in the new version of the Policy, which reflects the current vision of IEO regarding its own role. This however limits the quality and credibility of the entire GEF evaluation function, unless adequately addressed.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

188. The Terms of Reference of the third Professional Peer Review of the GEF independent evaluation function defined its main purpose and objectives as '*to enhance the evaluation function in the GEF partnership, by reviewing IEO's mandate, role and performance*', and '*to clearly identify IEO's main strengths and those areas where improvement is necessary.*'

189. With basis on the findings discussed in Section 4, this section presents the conclusions of the Panel on the performance of the GEF evaluation function against the three overarching PR criteria of Independence, Credibility and Utility, as per the matrix in Box 1 above. These 'overarching' conclusions are complemented by specific conclusions for each of the five main topics that had been identified as key in the performance of the GEF evaluation function. Finally, the Panel has formulated five recommendations, one for each key topic, that are presented in this section to the GEF for its consideration and follow-up.

Independence

190. IEO is a fully independent office from the GEF Secretariat in terms of mandate, reporting lines, work program development, internal work organization and management of human resources and budget. The

¹¹⁶ The report discusses both issues in detail in other sections.

GEF Council provides the necessary enabling environment to safeguard the independence of the function; and the natural tension between IEO and the GEF Secretariat is broadly well managed.

191. The organizational independence of IEO is explicitly acknowledged in the GEF Instrument and throughout all GEF policies that directly or indirectly address the evaluation function. The MoU between GEF Secretariat and IEO also effectively regulates the administrative and financial transactions between the two parties and is a safeguard for IEO's independence.

192. The Panel's assessment of the behavioural independence of IEO resulted in a more complex picture. IEO Management Team and staff all abide by the evaluation principles of rigour, independence, impartiality and absence of bias and conflict of interest. Nevertheless, for reasons that probably stem mostly from a vision of evaluation where contribution to learning is emphasised more than accountability, IEO evaluations tend to be slightly off-balance in their assessment of positive achievements versus weaknesses and gaps in implementation and results. This however may not help the GEF Partnership in learning from and addressing its own weaknesses.

193. A compounding factor in this respect has been the less than optimal attention dedicated by the Council to the Management Response and the Management Action Record mechanisms, which are key tools for safeguarding the independence of the evaluation function and enhancing accountability across the organization. In overlooking the role of MRs and MARs, the Council has not fully exercised its role of oversight of the evaluation function and diminished to some extent the utility of IEO evaluations for improving the performance of the GEF.

Credibility

194. Across the GEF partnership and in the international evaluation community, the credibility of IEO is high. IEO evaluation reports are respected and referred to by most stakeholders, from the Council to CSOs. Also, the Office is perceived to be on the cutting edge of innovation in the field of environmental evaluation and to be rigorous in conducting its evaluations.

195. The Panel recognizes the satisfactory quality of a many IEO's evaluations, but also identified several steps and approaches in the conduct of evaluations where IEO can significantly improve and enhance the credibility of its work. In the view of the Panel, the most important issues, all at the same level of importance, are:

- the absence of systematic quality assurance mechanisms for all IEO evaluations;
- the limited engagement with most stakeholders in the Partnership in the evaluation cycle; this also includes the small pools of interlocutors at all levels when conducting evaluations, in particular but not only at the country level;
- the small samples of countries used in IEO evaluations for first-hand data gathering in the context of corporate evaluations and the limited transparency of the criteria used;
- the strong reliance in IEO evaluations, in APRs and eventually OPS, on the ratings of TEs in the absence of adequate mechanisms to robustly validate the quality of the TEs and the comparability of the ratings.

Utility

196. The utility of IEO evaluations was found to be quite variable across the different products of the Office and the perspective of each group of stakeholders in the GEF Partnership. This was to be expected, considering the variety of interests of each group and, to some extent, the diversity of reports issued by IEO. At the level of Council members and participants in the GEF Replenishment negotiations, OPS was assessed as a highly useful and informative document. On the other hand, the Council's low attention to Management Responses and Management Action Records reduces the utility of the overall function.

197. GEF Senior Management acknowledged that OPS and other evaluations have been useful, though they also linked utility to the quality of the evaluation and the robustness of the findings and conclusions. The concern expressed about the low utility of evaluations is also possibly due to the evaluation focus on the

past, whereas Management needs immediate feedback on what works and what does not. This is a legitimate request that should however be met through adequate levels of strategic monitoring carried out by the GEF Secretariat itself.

198. Within the GEF Secretariat, and for other groups of stakeholders, the assessment of the utility of IEO's evaluations varied and was largely linked to the subject of each evaluation. For example, focal area studies are useful for technical experts and Agencies that focus on that specific area of work. Partner Agencies also use OPS for understanding trends and drivers that will influence future funding, though they tended to miss evaluations that would provide guidance for improved project design. Most importantly, all interviewed Recipient countries and many respondents to the e-survey would like to see IEO evaluations better addressing the country level.

199. The low utility of IEO evaluations as expressed by Recipient countries, and by Agencies for improved project design, mean however that IEO evaluations do not meet the needs for evaluative evidence of two major groups of GEF stakeholders.

Governance of the GEF evaluation function

200. The Panel concludes that overall, the institutional framework within which the evaluation function in the GEF operates, safeguards the institutional independence of IEO, as its core unit, and the management of its human resources and budget. The framework also enables IEO to plan and conduct rigorous evaluations and produce and disseminate independent evaluation reports, while maintaining the necessary degree of proximity to the GEF Secretariat and ensures that the GEF Council gives due attention to evaluations.

201. Some features of the governance system, however, have a direct effect on the utility of the function and represent a threat to its independence. First, the Council does not fully exercise its role of oversight of the evaluation function by giving very limited attention to the Management Responses to evaluations and the Management Action Record tools, which are key, respectively, for the adequate use of evaluations and for enhancing accountability across the organization. This not only diminishes the utility of IEO evaluations for improving the performance of the GEF, but also appears to have occasionally exposed both the GEF Secretariat and IEO to negotiations and compromises that may be perceived as affecting the independence and transparency of the evaluation process. Also, a more appropriate language for the Council would be to 'receive and consider' evaluation reports and recommendations, rather than endorsing them.

Recommendation 1. To the Council, IEO and Secretariat, on the follow-up to evaluations

GEF Council, GEF Secretariat and the Independent Evaluation Office should jointly establish an agreed procedure or mechanism that:

- a) enables the Secretariat to prepare robust and articulate Management Responses and Management Action Records that can be used for a transparent decision-making process about follow-up to recommendations and allows progress in their implementation to be transparently recorded; and
- b) ensures adequate consideration by Council to the Secretariat's Management Responses and to the Management Action Records. As part of this step, Council should only receive evaluation reports and related recommendations, while endorsing - or not - only Management Responses and Management Action Records.

GEF evaluation policy

202. The Panel found that both the 2010 and the 2019 GEF evaluation policies comply with the internationally agreed standards for this type of document and define an adequate framework for the independence, credibility and utility of the GEF evaluation function. The two policies are also reasonably well aligned with other GEF policies and with the Partnership's goals and objectives.

203. This notwithstanding, the 2019 Evaluation Policy has several gaps, discussed in detail in the report, that detract from its highly positive features and affect the overall performance of the evaluation function.

Recommendation 2. To the Council, IEO and Secretariat, for a revised evaluation policy

IEO should propose to the GEF Council and Secretariat a revised version of the GEF Evaluation Policy, that considers all the issues and adjustments identified in this report. The Policy should include:

- a) explicit reference to IEO as the core of a GEF Partnership-wide evaluation function;
- b) explicit integration of the human rights perspective as one of the evaluation lenses for assessing the work of the GEF;
- c) explicit clarification on the origin and size of IEO budget;
- d) explicit mention of the independence of IEO Director for all budgetary and human resources matters;
- e) explicit reference to the minimum requirements that apply to the entire evaluation function, IEO included;
- f) explicit clarification on the disclosure approach that applies to the IEO evaluations;
- g) explicit reference to the GEF Results Architecture;
- h) the terms of engagement of future IEO Director as decided by the Council.

The revised Policy should also avoid any language that attributes responsibilities to IEO Director that may represent a conflict of interest and a breach in the expected segregation of functions between management and evaluation.

Positioning and performance of IEO within the GEF evaluation function

204. The Panel concludes that IEO perceives itself and performs, at an adequate level, as being the evaluation unit of the GEF Secretariat. This however led the Office to only partially fulfil its normative function for the Partnership, and to engage with the different members of the Partnership in a manner that on the one hand, does not adequately verify the quality of Terminal Evaluations; and on the other, misses opportunities, both for enhancing the relevance, quality and utility of its own evaluations and for broader learning across the Partnership.

205. Conversely, the Panel, after analysing the structure of the GEF Partnership and the roles and responsibilities of each group of stakeholders, considers that IEO's role and mandate should be those of the core unit of a Partnership-wide evaluation function. This, incidentally, was implicitly stated in the 2010 GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. The Panel is aware that such a shift in role and mandate will entail major changes on the entirety of IEO's mandate and work. However, such a shift appears necessary to ensure the relevance, credibility and utility of the entire evaluation function and to enhance its positive impacts on the performance of the GEF at all levels.

Recommendation 3. To IEO, on its role as the core of a Partnership-wide evaluation function

IEO should recognize and reinforce its role and mandate as the core of a Partnership-wide evaluation function that includes the Member Countries, the Secretariat, the STAP, the MEA Convention Secretariats and the Agencies. This should be achieved by engaging in a consistent and sustained manner with each group of Partners and by embedding this perspective in all IEO's work and modus-operandi. Actions should include inter-alia:

- a) With the GEF Recipient countries:
 - i) use the ECWs as key opportunities for discussions and engagement among IEO senior staff, Member Countries and other stakeholders at the regional/sub-regional level on evaluation issues; ii) increase the number of countries, across all regions where the GEF operates, included for direct assessment in IEO's evaluations, and ensure that the respective OFPs/PFPs are fully involved in the planning and conduct of the country missions; insofar as possible, a restitution session should also take place at the end of each country visit; iii) developing country-specific Knowledge Products, along the lines of the recently prepared Country Notes, that synthesise the findings, recommendations and lessons learned from all relevant TEs and IEO's evaluations, aimed at more strategic partnership between the country and the GEF; and iv) at the completion of the three Strategic Country Cluster Evaluations planned for OPS-7, carrying out an independent cost-

benefit analysis of this approach, compared to country portfolio evaluations; this should include the views of Recipient Countries on the advantages and disadvantages of the two models;

- b)** With all Partners, strengthen collaboration in the preparation of IEO work program; with the Secretariat, this should also consider the potential information generated by the suggested Secretariat strategic monitoring system, looking for complementarities based on respective comparative advantages and avoiding duplications;
- c)** With all Partners and the GEF Secretariat, involve them as members of evaluation Reference groups, peer reviews and quality assurance efforts, as appropriate;
- d)** With the Secretariat and STAP, enhance the information flow from IEO, e.g. with regards to the use of IEO's TE databases and analyses to enhance monitoring and Knowledge Management.
- e)** With the STAP, coordinate the respective programs of work, exchange on methodological approaches and early sharing of findings and conclusions;
- f)** With Partner Agencies:
 - i)** based on the findings and conclusions of the upcoming evaluation of Agencies' systems and arrangements for the evaluation of GEF-funded projects and programmes, re-visit the policy of mandatory Terminal Evaluations for all projects with budget above USD 500,000, and identify with each Partner Agency the most efficient and effective mechanism for both accountability and lessons learning; **ii)** identify and adopt measures aimed at raising and harmonizing the quality of TEs of GEF-funded projects and programs; options may include: selectively conducting joint TEs, the development of more articulate tools and guidelines and systematic discussions and experience sharing across the Partnership on how to conduct TEs and how to rate criteria; any other mechanism that guarantees quality and independence of these key evaluations; **iii)** enhance the transparency of the validation process, also by interacting with partner Agencies during the process and by providing feedback on the final assessment; **iv)** use Terminal Evaluations as a source of findings and lessons learned to be shared with all Agencies, on themes for which there is a significant demand from partner Agencies; **v)** analyse systematically all the TE recommendations that have a relevance for GEF Secretariat, and integrate them into the Annual Performance Report or other IEO evaluations, as appropriate; and **vi)** develop guidelines on aspects of evaluation work and resources for which there is a significant demand from partner Agencies.

Relevance, effectiveness and quality of IEO's evaluation work

206. The Panel's assessment is that the relevance, effectiveness and quality of several IEO evaluations is satisfactory and that overall, the credibility of the Office is high. IEO's flagship product, OPS, is widely read and appreciated; a number of evaluations issued by the Office since 2015 have been effective in influencing change in GEF policies and operations; and the Office has been innovative on methods and tools in the field of evaluation of environmental topics, which has led to more robust evaluative findings.

207. At the same time, several other IEO's evaluations fall short of quality standards, are less relevant and have a lower overall utility. Several issues were identified as contributing to this situation, including the absence of systematic quality assurance mechanisms for all IEO evaluations; the limited engagement with most stakeholders in the Partnership in the evaluation cycle; the small samples of countries used in IEO evaluations for first-hand data gathering in the context of corporate evaluations and the limited transparency of the criteria used for their selection; a vision of evaluation where contribution to learning is emphasised over contributions to accountability and leads to some imbalances in the assessment of positive achievements versus weaknesses and gaps in implementation and results; the strong reliance in IEO evaluations, in APRs and eventually OPS, on the ratings of TEs in the absence of adequate mechanisms to robustly verify the quality of the TEs and the comparability of the ratings.

208. Furthermore, the Panel identified a number of weaknesses in IEO's Knowledge Management products, with respect to their strategic planning and use, as well as quality.

Recommendation 4. Quality of IEO evaluation products

IEO should ensure that all its evaluation reports meet established standards of quality, in line with the international UNEG and/or ECG standards. This should include inter-alia:

- a) establishing a systematic internal quality assurance mechanism for evaluation approach papers and draft reports;
- b) improving the evidence base of its evaluations through larger samples and more interviewees across all groups of stakeholders, in particular at country level;
- c) based on the evaluation purpose, define its business model in terms of approach, methods, scope, terminology, staffing profile, and financial resources;
- d) improve the extent and quality of gender and socio-economic analysis and in mainstreaming both gender equality and human rights perspectives in its work;
- e) develop adequate standards and guidelines for internal use, to ensure harmonization of approaches;
- f) improve compliance with the GEF policies in the conduct of its own evaluations and in the guidance provided to partner Agencies for Terminal Evaluations;
- g) following consultation with Council and Secretariat, propose a revised model for the scope and contents of the Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF, to make it a more focused and robust product;
- h) develop a communication and dissemination strategy aimed at ensuring the excellence of IEO's Knowledge Management products; this should define the profiles and quality of IEO's standard products, rationalizes the use of financial and human resources dedicated to this stream of work and ensures a broader dissemination of IEO evaluations.

IEO efficiency and organization

209. The Panel concludes that IEO is a productive office, with solid skills and competences in conducting evaluations of great complexity, a balanced mix of staff in terms of background, experience, gender and geographical representation. Current IEO leadership has been innovative in introducing new approaches to evaluation and office management.

210. At the same time, the Panel concludes that there is significant room for improving the internal modus-operandi of IEO, including in terms of clarity of roles and responsibilities at all levels, efficiency of the reporting lines, set-up for operational support.

Recommendation 5. To IEO, on its work organization

IEO should enhance the efficiency, effectiveness of the Office as a whole, by enhancing internal cooperation and collegiality, revising its working arrangements and the roles and responsibilities of its staff, and ensuring that its human resources match its evaluative and operational needs while taking into account the role of the World Bank as a Trustee. This should include, inter alia:

- a) re-define the roles and responsibilities of the Management Team, to focus on more inclusive programming, realistic planning, supporting staff doing evaluations and fostering collaboration;
- b) establish evaluation management procedures that build on the skills and competences of the Director, the Deputy Director and senior evaluators, with the aim of defining the most appropriate business model of each evaluation, of steering each evaluation process and ensuring the quality of the Office's evaluative outputs;
- c) re-structure and rationalize IEO's resources dedicated to carry out the various 'operations' functions, whilst making better use of the corporate WB support functions and mechanisms available;
- d) develop clearer terms of reference for the different roles in each evaluation team, assign tasks accordingly, and establish reporting lines within each team.