

## INTEGRATING THE MANAGEMENT OF RIVER BASINS, COASTAL ZONES, AND MARINE WATERS: THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY'S OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

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The world's water resources are under enormous stress, and the ecosystems, people, and economic development that depend on them face an uncertain future. The oceans have been fished out, estuaries have become entrophic, and coastal zone wetlands have been drained, filled, or converted to agriculture. Marine mammals and aquatic birds have become laden with toxic chemicals; diversions of water for agriculture have dried up rivers and lakes; pollution discharges have created public health problems; and groundwater systems have become overpumped and contaminated.

Progress in building effective institutional arrangements to address transboundary cases of these environmental concerns has been disappointing. While there have been many site-specific regional conventions addressing the transboundary water issues, no single freshwater conventins exists and the complex web of marine conventions has yet to be proven effective. Sovereignty and political concerns among nations may continue to inhibit development of effective global conventions for sustainable water resources management, and progress will need to come from regional approaches. While the Law of the Sea sanctions such waterbody-based regional approaches, linkages among freshwater basins, coastal zone and marine interests remain weak.

A new way of managing water resources is required if sustainable development is to be achieved. A more comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach is needed. Cross sectoral and cross disciplinary linkages to land and water management must be established and nurtured. No longer can marine resources, freshwater resources, fisheries, or coastal zone professionals maintain their parochial interests. In order to protect the viability of coastal and marine ecosystems that drive our economies and feed our peoples, new approaches that link freshwater basin, coastal zone and marine resource management are essential for both The North and The South.

### The Global Environment Facility

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is playing a catalytic role in assisting countries in making the transition to these more comprehensive approaches. This presentaatn describes how the GEF has embraced these needed changes and is fostering them through its work in developing countries and those in economic transition. Through the GEF and the regular programs of its three implementing agencies, recipient countries are making progress in setting water-related environmental priorities. They are also moving forward toward the goal of integrating local, national and regional sustainable development needs with the urgent mandate for protecting the global environment.

Two years before the Earth Summit, the GEF was established as a pilot program to test new approaches and innovative ways to respond to global environmental challenges in its four focal areas of climate change, biodiversity conservation, ozone depletion, and international waters. In March 1994, after 18 months of negotiations, agreement was reached in Geneva to transform the GEF from its pilot phase into a permanent financial

mechanism. The restructured facility, with its \$2 billion trust fund, is open to universal participation (currently 160 countries) and builds upon the partnership between the United National Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank -- which are its implementing agencies.

In restructuring the GEF, Governments ensured that it fully embodied the principles that were set out in the Rio conventions as well as Agenda 21. The GEF serves as a mechanism for international cooperation for the purpose of providing new and additional grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental costs of measures that achieve global environmental benefits in the four focal areas. In October 1995, the GEF Council adopted an operational strategy, which represents and strategic framework for actions of the GEF in its four focal areas. According to the strategy's principles, the GEF will fund projects and programmes that are country-driven and based on national priorities designed to support sustainable development.

In the international waters area, GEF's objective is to contribute primarily as a catalyst to the implementation of a more comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach to managing international waters and their drainage basins as a means of achieving global environmental benefits. Many of its projects focus on integrated management of freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. The GEF implementing agencies assist countries to find means of collaborating so that they change the ways human activities are undertaken in different economic sectors so that transboundary conflicts and environmental problems can be resolved. The goal is to help groups of countries use the full range of technical, economic, financial, regulatory and institutional measures needed to operationalize sustainable development strategies for transboundary water bodies and their contributing drainage basins.

The operational strategy outlines priorities to be addressed in this focal area. GEF activities focus on threatened transboundary waterbodies and the most imminent threats to their ecosystems. Five types of actions are targeting these hazards:

- Control of land-based sources of pollution that degrade the quality of international waters.
- Prevention and control of land degradation where transboundary environmental concerns result from desertification or deforestation.
- Prevention of physical and ecological degradation of critical habitats (such as wetlands, shallow waters and reefs) that sustain biodiversity.
- Improved management and control measures that better guide the exploitation of living and non-living resources and address such problems as overfishing or excessive withdrawal and diversion of freshwater from transboundary basins.
- Control of ship-based chemical washings and non-indigenous species which are transferred in ballast water and can disrupt ecosystems or human health.

## Programming GEF Resources

Over the first five years of GEF activities, (three in a pilot phase and two following restructuring), approximately US\$1.334 billion in grant funding has been allocated to the focal areas to accompany the \$3.3 billion leveraged in cooperative funding. Approximately 100 developing countries and those in economic transition have been funded to participate in or to undertake preparation of GEF international waters projects. A wide variety of situations in all five economic development regions of the world are represented in the portfolio and most of the projects are still in the strategic or preparation phases. An emphasis placed on large marine ecosystems (LMEs) and integrating the management of riverine inputs and their coastal zones. Examples of LMEs receiving GEF funding include: Gulf of Guinea, Western Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Benguela Current, and South China Sea.

GEF encourages submissions by countries of international river basin proposals that have linkages to LMEs as part of potential programmatic benefits of GEF interventions. For example, projects exist for the Danube River basin and the Dneiper basin as well as biodiversity protection in the Danube Delta and other wetland ecosystems with the aim of having sufficient catalytic effect for the Black Sea that significant on-the-ground action is leveraged. Another example is the Mekong River and South China Sea. A third is the series of international waters projects in the Mediterranean linked with wetland biodiversity protection projects. Also included for programmatic benefits would be the Plata Maritime Front in Argentina and Uruguay and its linkage with projects in Plata River tributaries and the Patagonia Shelf LME. Biodiversity protection projects supported by GEF in Patagonia add to the catalytic effect..

As these samples show, countries have the opportunity through partnerships arranged with GEF and its implementing agencies to program a series of concrete projects that together may link basin management with coastal zones and marine ecosystems. GEF seeks to develop partnerships and coalitions so that the cause of sustainable development and the goals of Agenda 21 are achieved.