

REMOVING BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

Around the world, land continues to degrade, with natural resources—biodiversity, forests, soil, vegetation, water—changing for the worse. This leads to the loss of arable soil and forests, affecting both economic and ecological functions. Often, the underlying causes of land degradation are complex, and solutions require both systemic and systematic approaches.

In this environment, countries face barriers to implementing sustainable land management processes. The challenge for policymakers is to make informed decisions about the use of natural resources without jeopardizing the resilience of the ecosystems.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds activities to remove barriers to the adoption of sustainable land management practices by helping countries develop institutional and human resource capacities, strengthen policy and regulatory environments, promote economic incentives, and disseminate lessons learned and best practices.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

Limited individual, institutional, and systemic capacities frequently undermine a developing country's commitment to instituting sustainable land management. At the national and regional levels, government institutions and ministries often lack personnel with technical or policy skills. At the same time, inter-institutional and intersectoral coordination and cooperation is lacking as is local-level empowerment. Further, good governance strategies for natural resource management are generally weak or nonexistent.

Extension services—the link between the national and local levels—often suffer from budgetary cuts and low capacities.

In some developing countries, legislation is based on top-down command and control regulations that rely on compliance and enforcement. In others, the government's inability to enforce the law properly often leads to perverse behavior by local land users. In these cases, laws and regulations are often poorly understood, ineffectively enforced, and subject to varying interpretations.

To tackle these challenges, GEF assistance is helping countries remove institutional and governance barriers. The GEF also supports incorporating sustainable land management principles into institutional and governance structures.

STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY

Many developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states, lack the financial resources to change land management policies and practices. With insufficient budgetary allocations, the goal of sustainable land management remains elusive because it often conflicts with priorities related to poverty reduction, epidemics, peacekeeping, and economic growth.

In many developing countries, rural development priorities for increasing gross domestic product and exports often clash with those that promote sustainable rural development. This situation can result in perverse economic incentives and unbalanced and sector-focused subsidies that lead to unsustainable land use practices.

The GEF promotes the mainstreaming of environmental concerns into production programs and policies, as well as into cross-cutting sectors, such as economic planning and territory management. With GEF assistance, regular sector budgets become available to promote environmentally sound management of a country's natural resources. At the local level, the GEF supports small credit schemes for farmers and herders and lifts barriers faced by small and medium enterprises.

INCREASING SOCIAL CAPACITY

Poverty and illiteracy are important causes of land and environmental degradation. Therefore, people can be a major asset in preventing and reversing land degradation if they are healthy, politically motivated, and economically empowered to care for the land.

The GEF supports activities that promote environmental education as a priority in achieving sustainable development goals. These programs provide opportunities to explore linkages among population dynamics, land use change, and environmental impact.

STRENGTHENING TECHNOLOGICAL AND KNOWLEDGE CAPACITIES

At the local level, the stakeholders' knowledge of sustainable land management practices relies on time-tested traditional techniques and knowledge that has been transferred through generations. In some cases, what might have been a sustainable land use practice in the past may not be viable anymore. New technologies and information on how to adapt traditional technologies to the new challenges are key priorities. For example, many farmers in developing countries live and work in isolation, without access to data and information that are essential for choosing the right crop variety, estimating the right amount of irrigation water, and preparing for a potential natural disaster.

The GEF supports improved access to clear and easily understandable information—such as new land management techniques, information on new and more resilient crop varieties, access to early warning systems, and data trends on the local climate. Such information helps local communities make informed decisions on how to use their land in the best way.

GEF SUPPORT IN BHUTAN: A PROJECT EXAMPLE

Bhutan is a small, landlocked country in the eastern Himalayas. Bhutanese people must make their living within fragile and inherently unstable ecosystems. In areas of intensive use, soil erosion, landslides, deforestation, and diminishing soil fertility on agricultural land are becoming increasingly visible, and accelerating degradation of the land.

In 2005, the GEF approved a project to promote innovative mechanisms that enhance sustainable land management practices in Bhutan. The project, which the World Bank will implement, is focused on securing livelihoods for rural people while protecting fragile ecosystems.

The project will remove barriers for sustainable land management by

- harmonizing planning procedures and improving coordination among line agencies to improve cross-sectoral reviews of proposed investments and environmentally friendly alternatives,
- expanding the participation of local governments and other stakeholders (private sector and local residents) in decentralized natural resource planning and management, providing access to information on proposed activities, and ensuring full involvement in the environmental review process,
- setting up an environmental information and monitoring system,
- identifying hazard-prone and environmentally risky areas as well as alternative sites that are more suitable for proposed development investments,
- identifying and managing the risks of planned and unplanned development,
- assessing, identifying, and promoting sustainable land management options and technologies through local practice, adaptation, experimentation, and dissemination.

These are some of the ways in which GEF and its partners are promoting sustainable management practices in developing countries.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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