Evaluation Policy for GEF Funded Projects

Context

Conservation International helps society adopt the conservation of nature as the foundation of development. We do this to measurably improve and sustain human well-being. We believe humanity’s survival and prosperity depend on a healthy and sustainable development model in which society conserves nature – valuing, protecting, and sustainably managing it for the benefit of current and future generations. Since our founding in 1987, CI has a history of monitoring the performance of our actions. The organization’s early focus on biodiversity conservation involved periodically assessing vulnerability and extinction risk of species to guide action and evaluate progress. Institutional measures such as extinctions avoided, key biodiversity areas protected, and corridors connected were promoted on this basis, and CI continues to measure, document and report these indicators through several programs. CI has also participated in performance evaluations in recent years by others.

With a mission that goes beyond species to encompass other ecosystem services that support human well-being, our existing metrics framework has been refined to monitor our contribution towards a broader set of goals including climate resilience, freshwater, food security, and livelihoods. This metrics framework supports our ability to monitor the effectiveness of our actions and communicate our impact in achieving healthy, sustainable societies. To complement our monitoring efforts, a consistent evaluation policy and standards are required. In our commitment to an evaluation policy, CI recognizes the process of evaluation, as defined in Box 1 below, as a key mechanism for generating knowledge on project outcomes, promoting transparency in our investments, and fostering a culture of learning and adaptive management within our organization.

Scope and purpose of policy

An institutional evaluation policy responds to our need to efficiently evaluate the contribution of our actions in achieving goals defined by our mission. It also serves to meet demands and expectations of donors, partners, governments, and beneficiaries engaged by CI in providing transparent and credible documentation of our decision making and results. This policy establishes standards and guidelines for promoting accountability, organizational learning, and advancing knowledge within the organization through evidence-based results reporting. It is focused on evaluations at project-level, though CI’s other levels of analysis including program-, division- and organization-level evaluations could supplement and reinforce this when appropriate.
While CI does have a history of conducting evaluations of projects using outside expertise, no previous evaluation policy existed to date to standardize and guide project or program evaluations. CI’s Evaluation Policy was developed as part of the recommendations from the GEF Accreditation Panel and aligns with the GEF’s Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. As a Project Agency, CI will have a new role with increased responsibility and accountability within the GEF partnership and will initially conduct only project-level evaluations for all GEF-funded projects. With an expanding project GEF funded portfolio, information at portfolio level will be required as well to assess whether the portfolio is on the right track and what the portfolio’s contribution is to achieving GEF’s and CI’s overall goals.

This policy is intended to provide clarity to Executing Entities of GEF funded projects, partners, and stakeholders about the purposes of evaluation; the types of evaluation conducted; and evaluation standards to be followed for GEF-funded projects. It is intended to explain the concept, role, and use of evaluation within GEF funded projects, and define the institutional framework and responsibilities of the Project Agency and Executing Entities. Specifically, it establishes guidelines for planning, implementing, and using evaluations in line with international principles, norms, and standards. Although financial management aspects and performance are part of any evaluation, this policy does not address systems for financial oversight and auditing. Protocols and procedures for financial reporting are addressed through the Project Agency’s budget, financial reporting, and internal auditing processes. Outcomes of these processes will serve as an input to evaluations.

This policy is formulated in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC) guidelines for evaluation, and informed by minimum requirements for evaluation described by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Purpose of evaluation
The practice of evaluation for CI projects has three primary purposes: accountability, knowledge generation, and learning.

**Accountability**

The organization has a responsibility to our donors, partners, collaborators, and stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of our projects, their relevance, and the efficiency of our efforts. Evaluation promotes greater transparency in our decision-making by documenting resources allocated, results achieved, lessons learned, and best practices.

**Knowledge generation**

Evaluation generates knowledge on many aspects of project design, planning, implementation and reporting including progress in meeting broader institutional goals, selection of interventions based upon which ones are working and others that are less successful, and factors that influence effective project outcomes. Results from evaluations have the potential to build and strengthen existing evidence on effectiveness of different actions, decisions, or policies. Evaluation is useful in not only enhancing institutional knowledge, but also improving evidence used by other development and conservation organizations.

**Learning**

Knowledge gained from informative evaluations can foster learning and strengthen decision-making by the Project Agency, Executing Entity and partners through adaptive management. Dissemination and integration of evaluation conclusions and recommendations into future projects will enable the organization to replicate successes, avoid mistakes, and enhance best practices.

**Evaluation criteria**

The performance of projects is assessed according to one or more evaluation criteria governed by standards (described in section 6). These criteria are based on the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance.

- **Relevance**: the extent to which the project activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient, and donor.

- **Effectiveness**: A measure of the extent to which a project activity attains its objectives.

- **Impact**: the positive or negative changes produced by a project intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.
**Efficiency**: a measure of the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. It measures the extent to which the project maximizes results at minimum cost. It generally requires comparison of alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs.

**Sustainability**: a measure of whether the benefits of an activity or project are likely to continue after donor funding ceases.

**Institutional framework, roles and responsibilities**

Conservation International works in countries that are engaged in or poised for a transition to healthy, sustainable societies. Our geographic portfolio reflects countries we have identified as strategic for field and policy engagement, investment, and relationship development with key regional and global partners. Projects are conducted by the Executing Entity which is the primary operating unit and responsible for executing projects, monitoring project activities, and cooperating with an evaluation team.

Key evaluation functions of the organization lie within the Office of the General Counsel (GCO). The Senior Director for Compliance and Risk Management coordinates the evaluation functions to measure CI’s organizational performance, provides guidance and advice in the design and implementation of evaluation plans in line with donor requirements, ensures adherence to CI’s evaluation standards, and communicates evaluation results to the Board, donors and other key stakeholders.

The activities of the Senior Director for Compliance and Risk Management aim to improve the overall effectiveness of the Project Agency portfolio as well as generate knowledge on conservation impacts of relevance to broader conservation and development sectors. This position in the General Counsel’s Office serves as a coordinating entity in evaluations. Evaluations are conducted by an independent evaluation team of external consultants, who are not involved in any aspects of policy-making, delivery or management of project activities. The primary function of the General Counsel’s Office in evaluation is to develop evaluation standards to be followed by the external evaluators, ensure compliance of external evaluations with GEF and CI standards, and to synthesize conclusions and recommendations across multiple evaluation reports for presentation to GEF and senior CI leadership.

Conservation International, as a GEF Project Agency, is responsible for oversight and monitoring of CI’s GEF portfolio and for reporting Project Agency’s project, program, and portfolio progress, results, learning, and lessons. On project completion, CI’s GEF Project Agency will notify the General Counsel’s Office to begin the evaluation process. Recognizing that evaluations need to be independent, the GEF Project Agency will only participate in evaluations as requested by the GCO and the independent consultant conducting the evaluation.

**Executing Entities**: As outlined in the [GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 2010](#), depending on the project and their role in the identified project, the following groups should be included in evaluations: national project or program executing agencies, groups contracted to conduct activities at various stages of the project or program, and other civil
society groups including local community members who may have an interest in the project or program or who are living in the project or program area, or who are dependent for part of their livelihoods or in times of stress on the natural resources of the project or program area.

Evaluations are funded by specific allocations within project budgets. All project-level evaluations are conducted by independent consultants complying with norms and standards based on guidance provided by the General Counsel's Office, and guidelines produced by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) and OECD DAC and existing evaluation policies of the Global Environment Facility and the US Agency for International Development.

**Table 2.** Key roles and responsibilities in project-level evaluation for GEF-funded projects.

| CI Executive Management Team | • Policy making on evaluation  
| • Oversight of evaluation functions  
| • Enabling environment for evaluation  
| Metrics Unit | • Develop monitoring plans and performance and results indicators for projects and programs  
| • Review of monitoring activities in project proposals  
| CI's GEF Project Agency | • Monitor the Project Agency GEF portfolio  
| • Report CI’s project, program, and portfolio progress, results, learning, and lessons to the GEF  
| • Ensure monitoring at the project and program levels  
| • Adaptive management of project and program implementation  
| • Communicate to Executive Management Team and General Counsel’s Office on project completion  
| • Support knowledge sharing and follow-up on GEF evaluation results and recommendations  
| • Systematically involve national partners and share project M&E information at the national level  
| • Liaise with GEF Secretariat as required  
| The Office of the General Counsel | • Set minimum CI evaluation norms and standards  
| • Selection of independent consultant to conduct evaluations  
| • Synthesize conclusions and recommendations across multiple evaluation reports for presentation to GEF and senior CI leadership  
| • Facilitate uptake of evaluation results and institutional learning  

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<tr>
<th>Independent consultant(s) (&quot;Evaluation team&quot;)</th>
<th>Executing Entity</th>
<th>GEF Evaluation Office</th>
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<td>• Quality control of research methods and analyses&lt;br&gt;• Oversight of ethical integrity of evaluation designs and implementation&lt;br&gt;• Oversight on quality of project evaluations&lt;br&gt;• Liaise with GEF Evaluation Office as necessary</td>
<td>• Prepare evaluation plan&lt;br&gt;• Adhere to CI and GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy norms and standards for evaluation and GEF Evaluation Office guidelines on conducting terminal evaluations&lt;br&gt;• Inform Executing Entities and other stakeholders of evaluation design, questions, approach and methods&lt;br&gt;• Prepare independent midterm and terminal evaluation of projects&lt;br&gt;• Compile evaluation report with conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>• Development of M&amp;E plan and budget&lt;br&gt;• Identification of performance indicators and baselines for projects&lt;br&gt;• Implement relevant monitoring activities and report monitoring results&lt;br&gt;• Data management and warehousing for evaluation purposes&lt;br&gt;• Full cooperation with Evaluation team</td>
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**Evaluation standards**

Evaluations as requested by the Project Agency will adhere to a set of standards drawn from best practice in evaluation, based upon internationally recognized professional norms and standards defined by the UN Evaluation Group and the OECD DAC and informed by existing evaluation policies by the Global Environment Facility and the US Agency for International Development. They are intended to guide the institutional framework, management of the evaluation functions within CI, and the conduct and use of evaluations.
Independence
Evaluation of GEF funded projects will be impartial and consider potential conflicts of interests or biases in measurement. To ensure that members of evaluation teams are independent from policy-making process and delivery and management of project activities, oversight of the evaluation function sits in the General Counsel’s Office. Evaluations will be conducted externally with TORs reviewed by the GCO.

Credibility
Evaluations will use sound qualitative and quantitative social science research methods that generate rigorous and credible evidence that corresponds to evaluation questions being asked. In addition, methods are selected based upon time and budget available and other practical considerations. Selection of appropriate methods and analyses will be informed by current research in the appropriate fields, and determined by empirical strength and feasibility of application of available tools or methods. Analysis will be based upon reliable data and/or observations. Use of sex-disaggregated data and considerations of gender in evaluation methods should be conducted with respect to principles described in CI’s gender policy. Evaluations will abide by professional and ethical guidelines and codes with respect to research on human subjects as described in CI’s human research ethics policy and be mindful of differences in culture, language, customs, religious beliefs and practices of all stakeholders. Evaluation reports shall require consistency and dependability in data, findings, judgments, and lessons learned with reference to the quality of the instruments, procedures, and analysis used to collect and interpret information.

Utility
The purpose and scope of evaluations should be developed to serve information needs of intended users. Intended users should be clearly identified in the evaluation plan, and evaluation questions framed accordingly. These include project staff in field programs, managers of specific programs, and peer organizations using similar approaches. Information needs of users might include knowledge on project impacts, information on project design and delivery or factors influencing effective implementation across different contexts.

Transparency
To meet the purpose of evaluation in strengthening our institutional accountability, evaluation reports including a description of methods, key findings, and recommendations will be available to the public online in a fully searchable form. With exceptions of where reasonable protection and confidentiality of stakeholders or proprietary material is required, CI commits to full and active disclosure. Results will be available within six months of an evaluation’s conclusion.

Integration into design of projects
For each project, consideration of a performance evaluation will be given from the outset at the proposal development stage and subsequent planning and design of project activities. Sufficient
budget and staff time will be allocated for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. Projects will identify key evaluation questions at the outset which will strengthen project design and guide data collection required to inform subsequent evaluation. Furthermore, projects will collect and synthesize appropriate baseline data which will inform subsequent project-level evaluations as well as broader institutional performance monitoring. Partners and sub-grantees will also be required to collect necessary monitoring data related to project activities. A system for data management and warehousing should be internalized into project design and administration.

**Evaluation Guidelines**

A detailed explanation of the process and methodologies used for conducting project-level performance evaluations are provided below. The guidelines describe the minimum requirements for all project-level evaluations.

**Level of analysis**
Evaluations will be conducted at the project level of analysis. Evaluations at other levels of analysis, including program, portfolio and organization, are considered separately.

**Design of evaluation**
All evaluations must be designed and supported by a concrete and fully budgeted M&E plan, in line with donor requirements and guidelines. The design and planning of the evaluation is intended to ensure timely, valid and reliable information. It also provides the project team and stakeholders associated with the project a clear roadmap for how the evaluation team intends to proceed. Key elements of the M&E plan should include:

1. Context and rationale for the evaluation
2. Purpose of the evaluation
3. Scope – what will be covered, and not covered, by the evaluation
4. Evaluation criteria (such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, or sustainability)
5. Key evaluation questions
6. Methodology including approach for data collection and analysis as well as stakeholder engagement
7. Work plan, organizational set, roles and responsibilities, and budget
8. System for data management and maintenance of records
9. Intended products and reporting procedures

These elements will be described clearly in Terms of Reference provided to the evaluation team. The GCO will ensure adherence by contractors to these guidelines. Furthermore, the GCO will verify that adequate budget and timeline is outlined for completion of a high quality evaluation.
**Approach and methodology for evaluation**

The purpose, scope and objectives will determine the most appropriate approach and methodology for evaluation. The focus of project-level evaluation will be on assessment on performance of projects – tracking implementation of project activities, results achieved by activities, and perceptions of stakeholders of those results. A range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including before-after comparison, case study analysis, semi-structured interviews, closed questionnaires, focus groups, and context analysis, for performance evaluation might be used. Selected approaches and methods should adhere to a set of standards to ensure credibility of information generated by evaluations:

1. Selection of methods guided by scope of evaluation questions
2. Use of data collection and analytical methods that ensure replicability
3. Different result levels are distinguished: input, output, outcome, and impact
4. Selection of SMART indicators for tracking progress (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely)
5. Data disaggregated to clarify differences between sexes
6. Data collection and analyses should comply with ethics standards as described in CI’s gender policy and human research ethics policy.

In addition to the guidance outlined in CI’s Evaluation Policy for GEF funded projects, the consultant must follow all “Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations” (GEF Evaluation Office, 2008). In addition, the consultant should use the GEF Evaluation Policy as a resource.

**Communication and engagement**

Processes and mechanisms need to be included to ensure openness in the conduct of the evaluation. A written summary of the evaluation design should be shared with the Executing Entity, project staff and stakeholders including identification of key questions, methods, features of data collection instruments, data analysis plans, and dissemination plan. This should inform project staff, partners, and stakeholders about the initiation, scope, and timing of evaluation. Participation of local researchers should be encouraged in the design and implementation of the evaluation. Project staff should also be briefed in advance by the evaluation team on expectations for their participation and cooperation in the conduct of evaluation, e.g., availability for interview, preparation and access to project documentation. Project staff and stakeholders should also receive the evaluation report in a timely manner (within three months after completion of the evaluation) and be provided an opportunity to respond to the conclusions and recommendations given by the evaluators.

**Data management**

All quantitative and qualitative data collected by the Executing Entity, contracting agencies or subgrantees for purposes of an evaluation must be uploaded and stored in a central database. A system for data management and storage should be described with the evaluation plan.
Evaluation implementation and reporting

A transparent and open procurement procedure should be conducted to select the evaluation team, i.e., independent consultants, in alignment with CI’s Procurement Policy. The evaluation team should have appropriate expertise in social research methods and evaluation reporting procedures. The team should be independent from policy making or management decisions associated with project activities and have no conflict of interest with CI business. Any conflicts of interests or potential biases should be declared. Evaluators should also be knowledgeable about GEF operational programs and strategies and about relevant GEF policies such as those on project life cycle, M&E, incremental costs, fiduciary standards and environmental and social safeguards.

Based on GEF requirements, a mid-term review (mid-term evaluation) will be conducted halfway through the project. For GEF projects, a terminal evaluation will be done for all GEF full-size projects and medium-size projects six months after project completion.

A final evaluation report should be shared with the Project Agency, Executing Entities, project staff, senior CI management and the GEF Evaluation Office within three months of the evaluation’s completion. The evaluation report should include the following elements:

1. Overall scope of evaluation
2. Basic data on the evaluation
3. Basic data on the project or program
4. Results, conclusions, and recommendations
5. Lessons of broader applicability
6. Terms of reference of the evaluation (Appendix)

The report should provide action-oriented, practical and specific recommendations. The evaluation report will be made available to project staff, the Executive Management team and governing bodies in three months.

Follow-up on recommendations

Evaluation is useful only insofar as it provides evidence that informs decision making. The importance of learning from project experiences cannot be underestimated. Specific mechanisms and functions should be developed to ensure evaluation results feed into organizational learning and knowledge management systems. The General Counsel’s Office together with the Project Agency will be responsible for synthesizing recommendations from completed evaluations and reporting implications to CI senior leadership. CI’s Executive Management team decides whether recommendations are accepted or not and how recommendations will be integrated in daily operations of the Project Agency, and Executing Entity in the case the Executing Entity is a CI program.
Disclosure and dissemination

A summary of the evaluation including the purpose of evaluation, evaluation questions, a description of methods and approach, conclusions, and recommendations will be made publically available with exceptions where protection of proprietary material is required. Results from the report should be shared with stakeholders and other partners within six months of project completion and made publicly available in an accessible form.