



# National Capacity Self-Assessments

Results and Lessons Learned for  
Global Environmental Sustainability

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Global Support Programme to the National  
Capacity Self-Assessments  
Global Environment Facility  
United Nations Development Programme  
United Nations Environment Programme

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>ACM</b>	Adaptive Collaborative Management
<b>BD</b>	Biodiversity
<b>CB</b>	Capacity Building
<b>CB-2</b>	Cross-Cutting Capacity Development Projects
<b>CBD</b>	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>CBPAR</b>	Community Based Participatory Action Research
<b>CCA</b>	Common Country Assessment
<b>CCD</b>	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
<b>CD</b>	Capacity Development
<b>CDG</b>	Capacity Development Group
<b>CDI</b>	Capacity Development Initiative
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>ECIS</b>	Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>EEG</b>	Energy and Environment Group
<b>EIA</b>	Environmental Impact Assessment
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse Gas
<b>GSP</b>	Global Support Programme
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and Caribbean
<b>LDC</b>	Least Developed Country
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MEA</b>	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>NCSA</b>	National Capacity Self-Assessment
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PEI</b>	Poverty-Environment Initiative
<b>POPs</b>	Persistent Organic Pollutants
<b>REDD</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
<b>SEA</b>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>SLM</b>	Sustainable Land Management
<b>SPREP</b>	South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDG</b>	United Nations Development Group
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme





The misty forests of Sierra Gorda, Mexico. Photo by Kevin Hill.

**They are beautiful in their peace, they are wise in their silence. They will stand after we are dust. They teach us, and we tend them.** Galeain ip Altiem MacDunelmor

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# Foreword



In 2002, a decade after the Rio Earth Summit, policymakers in both the developing and developed world were looking to provide greater clarity to countries who wanted efficient and meaningful ways to support sustainable development at the local level for global benefit.

Enter the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which in its capacity as the financial mechanism for key United Nations environmental agreements, funded the first National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSA). Our vision then was to help countries find the best way to frame resources by first determining their own capacity development needs to implement conventions related to biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and other global challenges.

In 2003, the GEF Council adopted the Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building, which outlined guiding principles and a programmatic approach to develop and sustain achievements that meet the objectives of these 'Rio' Conventions. To this end, NCSAs are first and foremost locally driven tools that help policymakers pinpoint the challenges that continue to complicate commitments to global environmental objectives.

Today, through our financial support of the NCSAs to 146 countries, the GEF has played a pivotal role in ensuring that capacity development priorities and recommendations are fully country-owned, coherent with existing country systems, and promote partnerships. At the same time, GEF investments to the NCSAs have been a cost-effective investment for donors and taxpayers as guided by the principles and goals of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. This is not just a bureaucratic exercise: NCSAs recognize that each country has its own environmental priorities but these assessments also help decision-makers better recognize the important links between the conventions for maximum impact.

Over time, NCSAs have identified priority capacity development needs to meet Rio Convention objectives. They have also highlighted the fact that these same capacity needs, whether they be stakeholder engagement, information management and knowledge, environmental education, organizational capacity, environmental financing or monitoring and evaluation, cut across all focal areas.

Through the NCSA experience, we know that some effective ways forward can include a greater emphasis on environmental education, environmental fiscal reforms, and strategic environmental mainstreaming. A number of countries also have taken the additional step of assessing and prioritizing capacity development needs of other international environmental conventions, such as those framed by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depletion.

In this light, we are proud to present this synthesis report to you, which represents an important summary baseline of countries' key capacity development priorities in near-term. The findings from the NCSAs also reinforce the strategic investments that we plan to pursue during the GEF 5 business cycle in order to help countries meet and sustain global environmental commitments.

**Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson of the GEF**

# Preface

This report is an important milestone of the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) that began in 1998. At the time, governments, donors and practitioners recognized that achieving environmental sustainability of development interventions required a more targeted and in-depth assessment of countries' underlying capacities. With a focus on meeting and sustaining global environmental objectives, as framed by the Rio Conventions on biodiversity, climate change, and desertification and drought, the CDI set the stage for the Global Environment Facility's Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building in 2003. As the first new programmatic pathway of the Strategic Approach, the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) was a country-driven Enabling Activity that catalyzed a systematic and cross-cutting analysis of individual, organizational and systemic capacities. These Enabling Activities were built on the principle of learning-by-doing as a strategy to institutionalize the capacity assessment process. To support countries' NCSA, a Global Support Programme (GSP) was established in 2005 and jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

With most of the NCSAs now completed, and almost a decade after inception of the first NCSAs, important lessons are to be learned on countries' challenges and opportunities to meet and sustain global environmental objectives. As a summary of the results and lessons learned from 82% of the 146 NCSAs, this report is a critical contribution to our knowledge of the types of capacities countries need to meet Rio Convention objectives. When compared to the strategic programming of development support, the results and analysis in this report reaffirms the support being provided by UNDP and UNEP with funding from the GEF, not to mention the support being provided by many other development partners and donors throughout the NCSA process.



**YANNICK GLEMAREC**

Executive Coordinator  
Global Environment Facility Unit  
Energy and Environment Group,  
Bureau for Development Policy  
United Nations Development  
Programme

There have been a number of important studies and assessments of countries' environmental capacities, and this report serves to complement these. In particular, this report serves to update the "state of global environmental sustainability", providing a strong rationale for the new strategic GEF programming of for the 2010-2014 period. We have known for a long time that countries need to improve public awareness of the global environment, mainstream environmental priorities into sectoral development policies, programmes and plans, and undertake environmental fiscal reform. What we have learned from this report is the extent of the global need and demand of the critical cross-cutting capacities that are central to meeting and sustaining global environmental objectives.



**MARYAM NIAMIR-FULLER**

Director  
Div. of Global Environment  
Facility Operations  
United Nations Environment  
Programme

The next pathway of the capacity assessment phase focuses on targeted cross-cutting capacity development, otherwise known as CB-2s, with 23 projects initiated under GEF-4. This report highlights the need to better link the programming of CB-2s during GEF-5 to other strategic cross-cutting programming by countries for greater synergies and cost-effectiveness. The results of the NCSAs have clearly demonstrated that in the GEF capacity building should not be seen as a separate silo, but part of a strategic set of interventions to enable countries to meet shared global environmental objectives.

# Executive Summary

A strategic partnership in the late 1990s between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat and UNDP led to the creation of the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI). This was a central part of the process to formulate and promote a conceptual framework for the assessment and development of countries' environmental capacities. Based on an assessment of capacity development in the GEF portfolio, the CDI's recommendations formed the basis of the GEF's strategic programming on capacity development. This led to the creation of the National Capacity Self-Assessments.

The first National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSA) began in 2002 with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), some being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with others by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The primary objective of the NCSAs was to determine the challenges of countries' underlying capacities to meet their global environmental commitments, commitments that are framed by the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The total value of the NCSA portfolio was US\$ 28.9 million, with an average allotment of US\$ 200,000 per NCSA

across focal areas; and (iii) the capacity development programme in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Since 2002, a total of 153 out of 166 eligible countries received GEF funding to implement an NCSA. UNDP was the implementing agency for 76% of these NCSA projects, followed by UNEP with 23%. The World Bank was responsible for Nigeria's NCSA. In 2004, the GEF approved the Global Support Programme (GSP) to provide methodological assistance to the NCSA country teams, as well as to produce learning materials. This included the NCSA Resource Kit, which outlined the basic approaches to NCSA implementation, including consultative requirements, assessments and analyses to be undertaken. The GSP also produced guidelines to monitor and assess capacity development, which would be used as the first stage of a three-point, time-series outcome evaluation of cross-cutting capacity development projects.

**The NCSAs called for countries to identify their priority environmental issues such as combating deforestation, promoting sustainable land management, or minimizing their vulnerabilities to the impact of climate change.**

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