



# SCALING UP COMMUNITY ACTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL WATERS MANAGEMENT

**EXPERIENCES FROM  
THE GEF SMALL  
GRANTS PROGRAMME**



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The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided \$14.5 billion in grants and mobilized \$75.4 billion in additional financing for almost 4,000 projects. The GEF has become an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations, and private sector to address global environmental issues.

The GEF's 18 implementing partners are: Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (AFDB), Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Conservation International (CI), Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Foreign Economic Cooperation Office - Ministry of Environmental Protection of China (FECO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Fundo Brasileiro para a Biodiversidade (FUNBIO), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), West African Development Bank (BOAD), World Bank Group (WBG), World Wildlife Fund U.S. (WWF).



The Small Grants Programme (SGP) is a corporate programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1992. SGP grantmaking in over 125 countries promotes community-based innovation, capacity development, and empowerment through sustainable development projects of local civil society organizations with special consideration for indigenous peoples, women, and youth. SGP has supported over 20,000 community-based projects in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, prevention of land degradation, protection of international waters, and reduction of the impact of chemicals, while generating sustainable livelihoods.

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# FOREWORD

BY ADRIANA DINU

The world today is facing unprecedented environment and development challenges, among which is the need for sustainable management and protection of water resources and oceans. Yet, these challenges come with great opportunities to halt and even reverse the trends, with the adoption by heads of states of the Sustainable Development Goals. Never before have governments, civil society organizations, donors, scientists and other actors been so united in realizing the severity of the environmental degradation and its impact on human and other life forms on earth, and resolute in taking urgent actions at all levels, from the community to global.

In its partnership with the Global Environment Facility, UNDP has been at the forefront of efforts to support and promote the sustainable management of the world's fresh water and marine resources. UNDP is proud to have served as the Implementing Agency for the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) for the last quarter century, bringing to light the important perspectives and knowledge of grassroots communities, and helping to catalyze local action to protect the world's fragile water and ocean resources. Communities who rely on the water and natural resources, as well on the many ecosystem services and benefits provided by international rivers, lakes, and seas have a tremendous stake in the process and are often among the first to clamor for environmental protection. Since they see firsthand the effects of degradation of fragile ecosystems, the loss of fisheries, reductions in water quantity, and the degradation of water quality on their livelihoods and health, local communities are among the strongest advocates for environmental action.

SGP takes an integrated approach to tackle environment and development issues at the community level in a holistic way by addressing the crucial dimensions of environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods. SGP has supported the implementation of regional Strategic Action Programmes with 1,027 small grant projects in more than forty transboundary waterbodies around the World. Our experiences show that communities when empowered to take action can implement



concrete measures to reverse environmental degradation trends. The ten cases in this publication further highlight the way in which diverse communities from Cuba to Cape Verde, and Mauritius to Malaysia have tackled critical water and ecosystem management challenges with limited resources, to achieve environmental protection hand in hand with crucial benefits to local livelihoods, health and wellbeing. The local alliances and coalitions developed through these small grants have laid the foundations for wider advocacy through the demonstration of workable and effective solutions, which have in turn led to the mobilization of expanded partnerships for barrier removal and investment of additional resources.

The lessons learned presented in this publication provide valuable guidance on supporting community innovations and then their eventual scaling up through multiple partnerships and links with larger projects. Complementing the global and regional aspects of International Waters work with local elements that empower and sustain is what we need to do if we are to achieve SDG 14 – our “Life Below Water” goal.

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# FOREWORD

BY GUSTAVO FONSECA

Water is the key ingredient for life. It is therefore not surprising that most communities have historically thrived along river basins, lakes and coastal areas. As a result, they not only have a great stake in the sustainability of these waterbodies and their associated resources, but have also accumulated knowledge and information required for their effective management, including more recently on how to deal with a rapidly changing climate.

The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), implemented by UNDP on behalf of the GEF partnership, was launched in 1992. It is rooted in the belief that local communities, when empowered, can be the best stewards of natural resources and ecosystems they depend on. With its vision of “local action, global impact”, SGP has supported more than 1,000 community-based projects dedicated to the protection and sustainable management of international waters – meaning transboundary freshwater basins and rivers, as well as coastal marine resources. These actions have strengthened the control of development decisions and resources to local and often vulnerable communities which is a requirement for the long-term improvement of local livelihoods. Many of the accounts documented in this publication highlight that they have been not only highly successful at the local scale but have led to wider and broader results through their advocacy, demonstration impact, and potential for scaling up.

This publication offers experiences and lessons learnt from SGP in upscaling community development from 10 community initiatives in managing international waters. Scaling-up takes different forms, pathways and mechanisms, and varies in the extent, coverage and results on the ground. It also requires working with long time horizons, maintaining a focus on continuous support to expand the reach of the interventions, and finally influencing policies and changing people’s behaviors.



Ultimately, successful upscaling and mainstreaming is achieved through partnerships, at the local, national and regional levels. I hope this publication will inspire communities, civil society organizations, governments, development agencies and other actors to work together in planning, fostering and nurturing scaling up systematically and patiently. I look forward to working with SGP and all GEF partners to promote integration, growth and scaling up of community experiences in addressing global environment and development issues.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and strokes.

**Gustavo Fonseca**  
Director of Programs  
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