



From Ridge to Reef

WATER, ENVIRONMENT, AND COMMUNITY SECURITY
GEF ACTION ON TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET



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FOREWORD: SECURING OUR WATERS AND OCEANS IN TIMES OF GLOBAL CHANGE



Monique Barbut
CEO and Chairperson

Water is at the heart of our planet's natural resource base. We need water to produce food, power industry, quench thirst, and nurture ecosystems. For too long water systems have been taken for granted, but times are changing.

We are living in a period of rapid global change that is putting our water resources at serious risk. Global financial and trade pressures, population increases and migration, and a warming planet are worsening an already critical situation. These multiple problems cannot be addressed in isolation through piecemeal programmes that have limited impact. Instead, they must be solved in an integrated manner, through effective and adaptive institutions.

For nearly two decades the GEF International Waters programme has helped countries work together to secure a wide range of economic, political, and environmental benefits from shared surface water, groundwater, and marine systems. Through its programming the GEF has played a catalytic role in helping 172 countries work together on shared water systems by leveraging \$1.1 billion in GEF grants and \$4 billion in cofinancing. Today, the GEF remains the world's largest financier of transboundary water collaboration.

In this publication you will find many examples of the powerful impact that cooperation on water can have on the political landscape. Before the Danube River Convention was signed, the GEF was working in the river basin with the United Nations Development

Programme, and continued to provide assistance during a period of armed conflict. As part of the Middle East Peace Accords the GEF and the World Bank supported Jordan as it undertook land-use reforms with its neighbors to protect the sensitive shared coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba.

In the Nile Basin the GEF has been the largest contributor, with \$79 million in grants to improve conditions for peace, security, and stability through eight innovative and cross-boundary water projects. The GEF is also facilitating cooperation in the South China Sea, the Orange River Basin, the Okavango River Basin, the Kura-Aras Basin, and the Sistan Basin shared by Afghanistan and Iran. Time and time again these initiatives have proven to be an important first step in supporting dialogue and cooperation where there were once disputes and conflict.

The importance of GEF support for water-related institutional development is clear, not only in terms of action at the multicountry political level, but also at the community level. Balancing competing uses of water, fisheries, oceans, and habitat improves local food security, livelihoods, water protection, and human health for the world's most vulnerable people. Still, the full potential of the GEF International Waters focal area has yet to be reached.

During these times of global change, achieving sustainability will depend on fostering trust among governments, building good working relations among ministries, and establishing institutions capable of undertaking adaptive

management at different scales. The GEF International Waters focal area is helping to build this needed trust in these harsh economic times through its integrated programming approach designed to address the linked issues of water, land, and climate change — perhaps the most daunting challenge of our time.

Our coasts and oceans have become degraded almost to the point of no return with the depletion of oceanic fish stocks, creation of coastal “dead zones” from pollution, and loss of coastal habitat. These large water systems cover most of our planet but, if we continue to manage them in a national and fragmented way, this will endanger the food supply and livelihoods for billions of people.

The world does not need a new set of adaptation programmes operating in a

vacuum through competing organizations to address sea-level rise, coastal storm vulnerability, drought, or floods. What is needed is to integrate these newly recognized stresses into the work of institutions focused on integrated water resources management (IWRM) or integrated coastal management (ICM), proven approaches that balance multiple demands on water and marine resources in a participative and adaptive manner.

The GEF as a unique, networked institution is poised to deliver this integrated approach to address climatic variability in concert with existing interventions supported under our International Waters programme. We stand ready with our network of public and private sector stakeholders to support countries as they work collectively with their neighbors to sustain shared freshwater and marine resources for a secure and stable economic future.



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