



**The Global Environment Facility
The 6th Biennial International Waters Conference
Raising the Bar: 20 Years of GEF Transboundary Water Results**

**Plenty Done. Plenty to Do.
The International Waters Conference Comes to an End**

Dubrovnik, Croatia, October 2011 – There's plenty to be proud of and plenty left to do.

That was the message sent from the Global Environment Facility's project managers, partners, and leaders on the final day of the 6th *GEF Biennial International Waters Conference*.

"The past has been valuable and will continue to be as we look to the future," said Denise Forrest, project coordinator for the Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management.

Forrest made her comments during a panel discussion, the final event of the four-day conference that gathered about 300 participants from 80 countries. The conference stakeholders involved in the 71 active projects that make up GEF's current International Waters portfolio.

The theme for the conference was *Raising the Bar: 20 years of GEF International Waters Transboundary Results*. The panel was charged with discussing GEF's results and achievements and suggesting improvements for the future.

"Innovation is related to taking the risk," said Ivan Zavadsky of the GEF Secretariat, who moderated the session. "We think we have this mandate in the GEF."

The session started out with a video presentation with comments from project managers. From the panel, participants pointed out some of GEF's strengths throughout its history.

For Yannick Glemarec, the executive coordinator with United Nations Development Programme, GEF's ability to leverage its investments into much larger financial contributions stood out as a major achievement.

"This is truly unique and unfortunately it is not a story that is well known," he said.

From a global view, Mark Smith of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature said that after 20 years of work, GEF had changed the face of the planet.

But for him, there was a burning question: Was GEF working fast enough?

“It is not doing it fast enough,” he said. “How do we use the kinds of networks and relationships and activities and processes that GEF is so good at building as a way of tripling the rate of progress?”

The comment led to the discussion of GEF’s future path with suggestions for ways the independent financial organization can be even better in the next 20 years.

“I think it would be irresponsible to rest on past laurels,” said Wendy Watson-Wright, UNESCO Assistant Director General and Executive Secretary of its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

The future of GEF-funded projects, many said, would be complicated by climate change and population growth.

Some suggested that the organization would have to become more flexible in its processes. It would have to look beyond the International Waters focal area to make connections with land-based environmental efforts and other kinds of ecosystems. It would also have to work to incorporate the people of local communities in their processes.

“We will have to sail through undiscovered waters,” Zavadsky said.

Others had specific suggestions for the future.

“International waters is building on its initial successes in terms of focusing on large marine ecosystem approaches, focusing on nutrient reduction best practices, and focusing on stress reduction and trying to get results on the ground through its small grants program,” said Tracy Hart, senior environmental specialist with The World Bank.

But GEF could put more emphasis on fresh water programs “such as its work in the Nile basin initiative and its work with the Mekong River - with those freshwater rivers, basins lakes where there are still tough challenges,” she said.

Though GEF must remain innovative, it also cannot abandon its strengths and ongoing successes, said Akiko Yamamoto, regional technical advisor for Water Strategies and Adaptation with the United Nations Development Programme.

“The body of the environment that we are working on is so huge that it takes a long time to see results,” she said. “Yes we have to keep moving on but we have to have a bit of patience.”

The official conference came to a close with the ceremonial passing of responsibility to the Caribbean, the area selected for the next international waters conference in two years.

“Now we have the challenge of selecting the country to host and seeing how we can do it,” said Nelson Andrade Colmenares, coordinator of the Caribbean Environmental Program. “It is big shoes to fill. We will try to do our best with our Caribbean hospitality.”

As the International Waters portfolio of GEF moves on it will do so with one less leader. Senior Advisor Alfred M. Duda expects to retire next year. The end of the conference was dedicated to a tribute to him for being “a pioneering visionary,” and a “godfather” of international waters programs.

For Duda, though, the tributes should be spread liberally among those he had worked with through the years.

“I’m just so proud of everything everyone has done,” he said. “But more importantly I hope all you are proud of the things that you’ve done. What you really should be doing is celebrating that you and your countries have really made all sorts of progress.”

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ABOUT GEF

The Global Environment Facility is an independent financial organization that provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to address global economic problems. It unites 182 member governments that work in partnership with 10 agencies, non-governmental organizations, international institutions and private companies. The partners are the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, The World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Inter-American Development Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development and United Nations Industrial Development Organization. GEF-funded projects target six focal areas: biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, the ozone layer, persistent organic pollutants and international waters. Since it was founded in 1991, GEF has invested \$9.2 billion in grants, leveraged \$40 billion in co-financing. It has supported more than 2,700 projects in 168 countries.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL WATERS FOCAL AREA

The GEF International Waters (IW) focal area targets transboundary water systems including river basins, lakes, groundwater and large marine ecosystems. Since its founding in 1991, the portfolio has comprised about 170 projects in more than 149 countries worldwide. IW grants have amounted to more than \$1.2 billion. The investment has led to \$7 billion in co-financing.

CONTACT

Mishal Hardenberg Hamid, International Waters: Learning Exchange and Resource Network, 095 844, 9273, +1 202 657 5290, or mish@iwlearn.org

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