

Measuring Engagement: Lessons from the GEF IEO Evaluation of Support to Marginalized Groups

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The GEF: A Global Environmental Fund with an Inclusion Mandate

- One of the world's largest multilateral environmental funds -- projects spanning biodiversity, climate, land, chemicals, and water focal areas
- GEF policies **require** engagement of marginalized groups
- This evaluation is timed to inform the GEF-9 Whole of Society approach for upcoming replenishment period



GEF IEO Mandate



Accountability

To ensure transparency
and impact



Learning

To foster continuous
improvement



● Independence is the cornerstone of the IEO's role in the GEF

The Measurement Challenge

HISTORICAL APPROACH

A narrow, surface-level lens

- **Anecdotal examples**
- **Binary coding:** is the group mentioned? Yes / No
- Gender exception (coding/framework)



The Social Inclusion Assessment Tool (SiAT)

Improves on the historical approach by measuring:

Depth inform vs. consult vs. collaborate (for different groups)

Follow-through design intent vs. implementation reality

Outcomes whether engagement delivers tangible benefits

THE SIAT FRAMEWORK — THREE DIMENSIONS OF INCLUSION



SYSTEMIC MEASURES

What Enables Meaningful
Engagement?



PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

How People Are
Engaged



SOCIOECONOMIC CO-BENEFITS

Consideration of co-
benefits at design



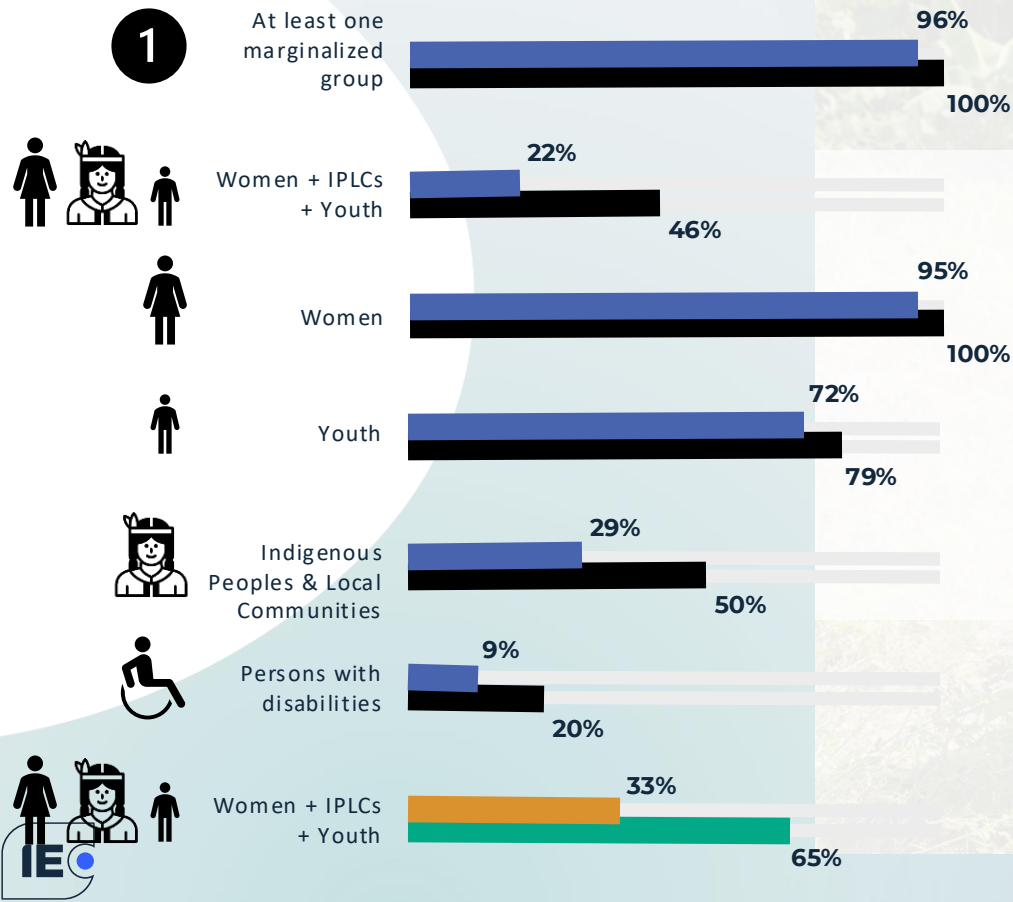
Methodology

Applied SiAT across the portfolio

- 200 closed projects with terminal evaluations
- 100 ongoing projects
- Stakeholder interviews
- Online surveys
- Five country case studies
- GIS Analysis
- Efficiency Analysis
- Regression Analysis



PORTFOLIO TRENDS: ENGAGEMENT IS BROADENING BUT PROGRESS VARIES



Linking Inclusion to Outcomes

200

completed projects

GEF-5/6

study period

97

countries

INPUTS

TREATMENT VARIABLE

Engagement breadth × depth

CONTROLS

Size · Sector · Geography · Fragility

ANALYSIS

MODEL

Ordinal logistic
regression

ratings are ordered

RESULT

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Project outcome rating (6-
point scale)

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT IS ASSOCIATED WITH BETTER OUTCOMES



Planned and implemented participation



More types and more groups involved



Systems → participation → marginalized co-benefits



Engagement of marginalized groups can offset fragility in FCS

From Compliance to Performance: Shifting the Conversation

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

All three recommendations adopted by the GEF Council — June 2026

1

Expand guidance to other marginalized groups, leaving no one behind

2

Ensure tracking through implementation, improve indicators

3

Improve knowledge management efforts on inclusion of marginalized groups

BIGGER PICTURE

- First empirical evidence **linking engagement practices to project outcome ratings** at portfolio scale
- Reframes inclusion: not a safeguard checkbox, but a **driver of environmental results**
- Provides a replicable methodology for the broader evaluation community

Reflections

WHAT WORKED

- SiAT enabled comparability at scale
- Two-point coding revealed the follow-through gap
- Ordinal regression supported causal-adjacent claims, still with some caveats in interpretation

CHALLENGES

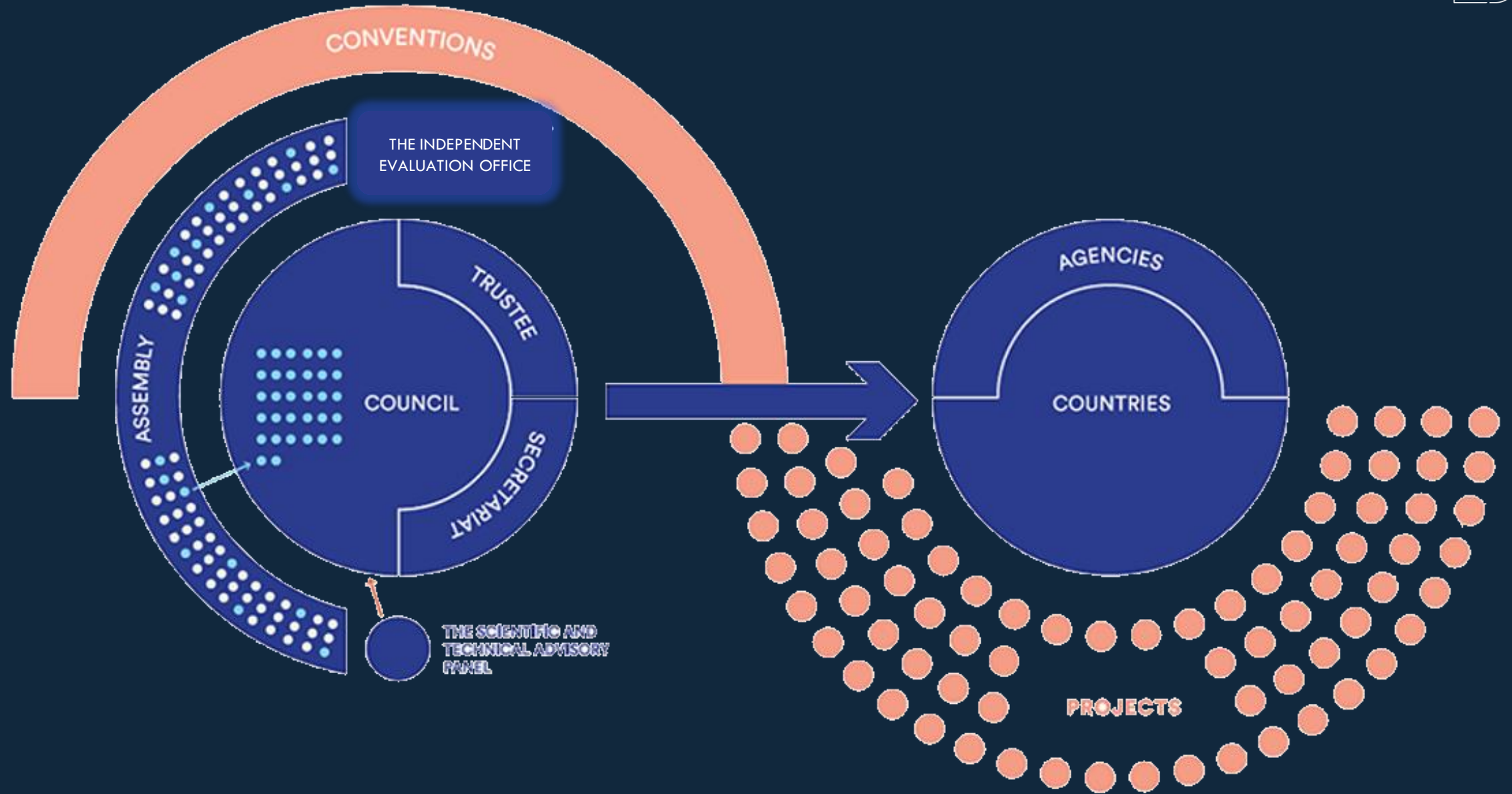
- Some groups too underrepresented for group-specific regression
- Sequencing of analysis and case studies

Inclusion is measurable and matters for results



- Full report and SiAT Framework available in the evaluation report annexes
- Gefieog.org

Annexes/Additional Information



Evaluation Theory of Change: Pathways linking inclusion to sustainable global environmental benefits

