The Secretariat of the Global Environment Facility: From Network to Bureaucracy

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The Global Governance Project is a joint research programme of eleven European research institutions. It seeks to advance understanding of the new actors, institutions and mechanisms of global governance, especially in the field of sustainable development.

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Abstract
Recent Scholarships has questioned the adequacy of the existing organizational architecture for global environmental governance. Little research, however, has yet been directed to the questions what the actual effects of international environmental organizations are and how international organizations achieve these effects. The paper explores these questions by analyzing and explaining the influences of the GEF secretariat on national and international environmental governance. It directs the attention towards to the secretariat of the GEF and not the GEF projects on the ground, as the Secretariat interacts between the different actors involved in the GEF network. The paper is part of the research project MANUS – Managers of Global Change, which analyses the influence of international bureaucracies in global environmental governance. In line with the analytical framework of the MANUS project, this paper distinguishes thee dimensions of influence: cognitive, normative and executive. Bureaucracies can act as 'knowledge-brokers', as 'negotiation-facilitators', and as 'capacity builders'. The variables which may explain possible influences are integrated into three clusters: the external problem structure, the polity set by the bureaucracies' principals within which the bureaucrats operate; and the activities and procedures that the staff of the bureaucracies develops and implements within the constraints of problems structure and polity framework. The analysis shows that the GEF secretariat has been able to generating influences on “adjacent” bureaucracies. The secretariat’s polity that positioned it between powerful implementing agencies while maintaining drafting rights under low supervision and decision power over the allocation of GEF grants, explains the normative and the limited executive effects. In addition, among the internal factors, leadership represented through the chief executive officer El-Ashry serves as explanation for the analyzed normative influence. Nevertheless, other features of its polity—mainly the narrowly defined role in the project cycle and its role as an agent in the background and the lacking knowledge management within the GEF network—hinder the secretariat to fully develop its influence.

Citation

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Foreword

This working paper was written as part of the Global Governance Project, a joint research programme of eleven European research institutions that seeks to advance understanding of the new actors, institutions and mechanisms of global governance. While we address the phenomenon of global governance in general, most of our research projects focus on global environmental change and governance for sustainable development. The Project is co-ordinated by the Department of Environmental Policy Analysis of the Institute for Environmental Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and includes associate faculty members and research fellows from eleven European institutions: Science Po Bordeaux, Bremen University, Freie Universität Berlin (Environmental Policy Research Centre), The Fridtjof Nansen Institute Oslo, London School of Economics and Political Science, Lund University, Oldenburg University, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Institute for European Studies) and Wageningen University (Environmental Policy Group).

Analytically, we define global governance by three criteria, which also shape the research groups within the Project. First, we see global governance as characterised by the increasing participation of actors other than states, ranging from private actors such as multinational corporations and (networks of) scientists and environmentalists to public non-state actors such as intergovernmental organisations (‘multiactor governance’). These new actors of global governance are the focus of our research group MANUS—Managers of Global Change.

Second, we see global governance as marked by new mechanisms of organisation such as public-private and private-private rule-making and implementation partnerships, alongside the traditional system of legal treaties negotiated by states. This is the focus of our research group MECGLO—New Mechanisms of Global Governance.

Third, we see global governance as characterised by different layers and clusters of rule-making and rule-implementation, both vertically between supranational, international, national and subnational layers of authority (‘multilevel governance’) and horizontally between different parallel rule-making systems. This stands at the centre of our research group MOSAIC—‘Multiple Options, Solutions and Approaches: Institutional Interplay and Conflict’.

Comments on this working paper, as well as on the other activities of the Global Governance Project, are highly welcome. We believe that understanding global governance is only feasible through joint effort of colleagues from various backgrounds and from all regions of the world. We look forward to your response.

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1 Introduction

When the international community decided to take action against global environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification in the early 1990s, the need for a multilateral funding mechanism was obvious to many in the field. Already one year before the 1992 Rio summit, a Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established to fund projects that address global environmental problems. However, through its centralized structure that bundled financial mechanisms for several environmental problem areas as well as through its closeness to the World Bank, the GEF raised concerns with numerous groups. Strong criticism from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and developing countries led to the restructuring of the GEF in 1994. The GEF now has a unique institutional structure that draws on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Bank. Today, it serves as the financial mechanism for four environmental conventions, namely the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The GEF receives its funds from countries that have committed themselves to assist developing countries under these conventions. It then channels funds to eligible projects, which are designed and executed by the three implementing agencies UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank. The administration of all GEF-related processes rests with a small secretariat in Washington, DC.

The case of the GEF secretariat differs from the group of secretariats of intergovernmental environmental treaties through its legal status and its position between the powerful implementing agencies. Even though the secretariat serves similar political and technical functions, it addresses several environmental problems and serves different roles in terms of the interaction with the other bodies of the GEF network.\(^1\) Given this variation in central explanatory factors, namely problem structure and policy, the GEF secretariat was of particular interest for the comparative analyses in this MANUS project.

Scholars from political science, international law, and organization theory became interested in both its institutional arrangements and its development over time. Nearly all reflect on the extraordinary institutional structure of the GEF (Keohane and Levy 1996; Silard 1995; Ehrmann 1997; Payne 1998; Jordan 1995; Reinicke and Deng 2000; Matz 2005). While Werksman (2004) focuses on the secretariat’s inability to enter into formal legal relationships with other international bureaucracies, Streck (2000) analyzes the particularities of the network structure and GEF’s strong partnerships with international bureaucracies, NGOs, and to some extent the private sector. Other authors focus on GEF projects (Gerlak 2004) and their effects in specific regions such as China (Heggelund, Andresen, and Ying 2005). The dominant focus of this literature, however, is on the “GEF network” comprising of the assembly, the GEF council, the GEF secretariat, the three implementing agencies, the science and technical ad-

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\(^1\) In the following sections, the expression “GEF” relates to the GEF network, whereas the term “secretariat” refers to the narrower focus of the research objective.
visory panel as well as the connected conventions and their secretariats. Yet the par-
ticular role and influence of the GEF secretariat remained outside the central focus of
these studies.² As an integral part of the network, the secretariat closely interacts with
GEF units in the implementing agencies and has thus remained the “centerpiece of the
GEF galaxy” (de Chazournes 2003, 13).

This case study analyzes the autonomous influence of this bureaucracy and at-
ttempts to provide explanations for the observed influence. The analysis will not focus
on the effectiveness of GEF projects on the ground as for example the study conducted
by Heggelund, Andresen, and Ying (2005). Data for this study has been collected dur-
ing a field visit to the GEF headquarters in Washington DC. Personal interviews have
been conducted with eight staff members. A second round of interviews was held by a
research colleague. It was complemented by telephone interviews. Additional data on
stakeholder perceptions of the influence of the GEF secretariat were provided by the
expert survey (Tarradell 2006).

2 Analytical Framework

This research is part of the comparative research project MANUS-Managers of
Global Change, which studies the influence of international bureaucracies in global
environmental governance. This paper thus follows the overall analytical framework
that has been developed by the MANUS project team (Biermann and Bauer 2005;
Biermann and Siebenhüner 2006). The MANUS project distinguishes the influence of
international bureaucracies in three dimensions: cognitive, normative, and executive.
Bureaucracies may act as "knowledge-brokers" that gather, synthesise, process, and
disseminate scientific or other forms of knowledge and change the knowledge or belief
systems of other actors (cognitive dimension). They may perform as "negotiation-
facilitators" that create, support, and shape norm-building processes for issue-specific
international cooperation and can thus influence the outcomes of international coop-
eration (normative dimension). And they may operate as "capacity-builders" that assist
countries in their efforts to implement international agreements and thereby help
countries to comply with international rules or even shape domestic policies (executive
dimension).

To explain any observed cognitive, normative, or executive influences, this pa-
er paper explores the explanatory potential of three groups of variables that have been iden-
tified in the MANUS project as affecting the capability of international bureaucracies to
change the behaviour of other actors: polity, problem structure, and people and proce-
dures. These factors have been derived from different bodies of literature, namely in-
ternational relations theory, organizational theories, and management studies (see in
detail Biermann and Bauer 2005; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2006). Polity refers to
the formal structures, the legal and institutional setting within which international bu-
reaucracies operate, as well as the competencies and resources at the secretariat’s
command. Problem structure refers to the stakes and costs involved in addressing, or
not addressing, a given problem, its saliency and urgency, and its complexity in terms

² A prominent exception to this rule is a book by Zoe Young (2002), who provides a detailed description
of the GEF secretariat’s functions and roles.
of the availability and feasibility of solutions. People and procedures comprises four variables: 1) expertise, that is the ability of international bureaucracies to generate and process knowledge; 2) organizational structure, that is the formal structures of bureaucracies and the formalized internal rules and procedures that assign tasks and positions in the hierarchy; 3) organizational culture, that is the processes of decision-making, professional cultures and backgrounds of the staff members in the international bureaucracy; and 4) leadership, that is the specific behaviour of staff members, in particular of the executive level, vis-à-vis external actors.

3 Structure and Activities

After lengthy debates on how to implement a financial mechanism for global environmental problems, a joint initiative by the French and the German government led to the foundation of the GEF in 1991. Three institutional features characterized its “pilot phase.” First, the GEF was limited to a three year operating phase as an experiment in the funding for global environmental protection and sustainable development (GEF 1992). Second, the GEF had informal, loosely structured and non-bureaucratic governance rules: participation by interested governments was voluntary, the members met twice a year to review and approve GEF projects, decisions were taken by consensus, and the final project approval was left to the three implementing agencies (Fairman 1996). Third, the three implementing agencies administered and jointly executed GEF’s operations according to their comparative advantages. No single GEF bureaucracy had been established at this stage.

During the pilot phase, relationships between the three implementing agencies deteriorated, as the World Bank and UNDP competed over power, control, and financial resources (Fairman 1996). In addition, NGOs and developing countries strongly criticized the GEF for its close association with the World Bank and its lack of transparency and accountability (Streck 2001). By 1992, it was clear that the GEF would need to change its structure and operational modalities if its mandate was to be extended beyond the pilot phase and if it was to become the formal financial mechanism of the biodiversity and climate conventions (Sjöberg 1996). After a negotiation process that lasted almost two years and following an independent evaluation of the pilot phase, 73 member countries and the three implementing agencies signed the “Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility” in 1994 (in the following the “instrument”), which laid down the rules and the institutional arrangements for the future operations of the GEF.

The mandate remained unchanged as compared to the pilot phase. It assigned the GEF to “operate, on the basis of collaboration and partnership among the implementing agencies, as a mechanism for international cooperation for the purpose of providing new and additional grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental costs of measures to achieve agreed global environmental benefits in the following focal areas” (GEF 2004b, paragraph 2): biological diversity; climate change; international waters; ozone layer depletion; land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation (added in 2002); and persistent organic pollutants (added in 2002).

The GEF operates under the guidance of and is accountable to the conferences of the parties of all four conventions, which decide the policies, program priorities, and
eligibility criteria of their respective convention processes. At the annual conferences of
the parties to the conventions, the GEF receives new guidance and reports about former
activities and achievements. In partnership with the Montreal Protocol, GEF grants are
eligible for countries in central and eastern Europe (which do not qualify for funding
from the Montreal Protocol) to phase out the use of ozone-depleting chemicals. Re-
geonal water agreements influence GEF’s initiatives to protect international waters.

One of the major changes compared to the pilot phase was the strengthened in-
stitutional structure of the GEF. This includes the assembly consisting of representa-
tives of all participating countries (176 countries as of 2004). The assembly meets every
three years to review GEF’s general policy. The council, meeting bi-annually, is the
main governing board responsible for developing, adopting, evaluating operational
policies, and approving all full-scale GEF projects. Since 1994 the assembly and the
council can take decisions by a double weighted majority, that is, approval of decisions
requires 60% of the votes of all countries, as well as votes representing 60% of the con-
tributions.³

The three implementing agencies carry out GEF projects and are accountable to
the council for their GEF-related activities. Since 1999, seven executing agencies
(mostly regional development banks) have also gained access to GEF funding and can
execute GEF projects.⁴ The implementing agencies work with the recipient countries
together to assist in project identification, to manage project preparation, and to superv-
ise project implementation.

Another crucial innovation compared to the pilot phase was the establishment
of the functionally independent secretariat. The problems that the GEF was designed to
address have been “so closely tied to intergovernmental negotiations that policy deci-
sions could hardly be delegated to a set of implementing agencies” (Fairman 1996, 78).
Therefore, the founding states had emphasized the need for a “neutral” intermediary
body between the governments and the implementing agencies in the form of a secre-
tariat. The major tasks of this GEF secretariat include, to:

- “Implement effectively the decisions of the assembly and the council...”
- “Coordinate the formulation and oversee the implementation of program activi-
ties...”
- “In consultation with the implementing agencies, ensure the implementation of
the operational policies adopted by the council...”
- “Review and report to the council on the adequacy of arrangements made by the
implementing agencies...”
- “Coordinate with the secretariats of other relevant international bodies...” (GEF
2004b, paragraph 21).

³ “The council shall consist of 32 Members, representing constituency groupings formulated and distrib-
uted taking into account the need for balanced and equitable representation of all Participants and giv-
ing due weight to the funding efforts of all donors. There shall be 16 Members from developing coun-
tries, 14 Members from developed countries and 2 Members from the countries of central and eastern
Europe and the former Soviet Union” (GEF 2004b, paragraph 16).
⁴ The status as the executing agencies enables them to prepare and implement GEF projects on behalf of
the GEF, to submit project proposals directly to the GEF and not through an implementing agency, and
to receive grants from the GEF Trustee (Heggelund, Andresen, and Ying 2005).
One of the main assignments of the secretariat is to serve the council and to interpret the conventions’ guidance, and, based on this, develop operational policies that lay down the foundation for GEF’s efforts in the six focal areas. The latter is carried out through inter-agency taskforces with the GEF units of the implementing agencies. Although GEF projects are initiated, prepared, implemented, and evaluated by the respective implementing agency, the secretariat has a significant review role throughout the project cycle. The main function is to review the project proposals according to their conformity with GEF policies and to decide whether they are eligible for council approval. Furthermore, the secretariat prepares most of the documents for the bi-annual council meetings such as project reviews, operational policies, and other information reports. It is also responsible for reporting to the related conferences of the parties. The relatively small secretariat consists of a chief executive officer, a deputy, and eight teams, totaling about fifty staff as of 2004. Since 1996, the secretariat also hosts the monitoring and evaluation unit for GEF project reviews.

Although the GEF governance structure is complex, the secretariat is crucial to the overall performance of the GEF. The following section will analyze whether, where, and how the secretariat has generated a meaningful influence on GEF activities.

4 The Influence of the GEF Secretariat

The secretariat is intended to serve as the permanent bureaucracy of the GEF network. Therefore, it can be expected to have an influence mainly on the diverse entities of the GEF network and less so at the actual project level or on broader international environmental politics.

This analysis only reflects the influence of the GEF secretariat in relation to other bureaucracies involved in GEF activities. This does not imply that the GEF in terms of its grants has not helped to ameliorate some of the problems it addresses. As stated in its annual reports, GEF projects achieved a wide range of important environmental improvements such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions or the expansion of protected areas in selected countries (GEF 2004a). According to Heggelund, Andresen, and Ying (2005), the GEF contributed to effectively combating environmental problems in China and also yielded global environmental benefits. The analytical approach taken in this paper, however, restricts the analysis to the actual role of the secretariat that can only indirectly impact on environmental conditions through the funding mechanism.

Cognitive Influence

The official task of the secretariat is to serve as a “facilitator” among the several institutions involved in GEF activities rather than to influence the international discourse. Thus, in the narrow sense the secretariat has no function to have cognitive influence in terms of changing the understanding and rising the awareness of environmental problems.

5 Front office (CEO and his deputy), corporate team, finance and administration, communication and outreach, biodiversity, land and water resources, climate change, and persistent organic pollutants.
Nevertheless, the secretariat represents the GEF network to the external world, as it is responsible for the webpage and GEF publications. To achieve this, the secretariat collects and administers the environmental knowledge gained at all stages of GEF’s projects. Together with the monitoring and evaluation unit, the secretariat prepares and publishes reports on GEF activities, for example thematic reviews or reports for international conferences.

Although the secretariat has produced several publications and maintains a comprehensive webpage, public awareness of the GEF is limited according to interview sources and the expert survey. Its visibility is still low amongst governments (particularly in developing countries) or other potentially relevant groups such as the private sector. Staff members assert that the GEF secretariat is not yet perceived as an actor in its own right. According to the expert survey, the influence of GEF publications on environmental discussions is moderate and neither media coverage nor public awareness has been increased through the communication strategies of the secretariat (Tarradell 2006). The chief executive officer Leonard Good reflects on this issue: “I’ve had this comment made to me as well—that the GEF is not that well known or understood. I’ve met people from the private sector and people within the IMF who have not actually heard of the GEF. I don’t think we’re that well known in donor countries, not very well at all” (Good 2003).

In sum, the secretariat has hardly managed to present the GEF to the international community. Until now, the GEF is too little known to have cognitive influence on the international community in terms of changing their knowledge and belief systems.

**Normative Influence**

The GEF as such can be considered a “joint international effort,” for which the instrument lays down the common rules and institutional arrangements. According to the instrument, the secretariat serves the council by preparing the documents for the council decisions. In this function, the secretariat translates and operationalizes decisions by the conferences of the parties and, based on this guidance by the conventions and in cooperation with the implementing agencies, develops strategies and operational programs for all GEF-related activities. In doing so, the secretariat fulfils similar functions as other treaty secretariats, with the sole difference that the products of negotiation are not binding international treaties, but general policies for the GEF activities. However, as the following two examples demonstrate, the secretariat has been able to influence the modalities on how to prioritize and implement GEF grants.

The first is the “operational strategy” developed by the secretariat and approved in 1995, which lays the foundation for GEF efforts in four focal areas, namely climate change, biodiversity, international waters and ozone depletion. The strategy incorporates guidance from the conventions for which GEF serves as the financial mechanism. In 2002, it had to include the two new focal areas land degradation and persistent organic pollutants. Consistent with this, the secretariat established “operational programs” to provide strategic frameworks for the development of projects. As of March 2003, 15 operational programs had been developed, which include policies, strategies, eligibility criteria and program priorities for the respective thematic focus such as “arid

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6 Author’s interview with GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
and semi-arid zone ecosystems” pertaining to the focal area biodiversity. According to a senior program officer, the operational programs have been an important step in the history of the GEF to clarify and focus with regard to its mandate and the focal areas. The secretariat was central in these processes as coordinator of the process among the different agencies involved.

A second major achievement has been the “strategic priorities” developed by the secretariat and approved in 2003. Until 2000, the GEF relied on so-called eligibility criteria. At this time, the demand for GEF projects by far exceeded the supply and the addition of new focal areas rendered the situation even more complex. As a consequence, the secretariat was assigned by the council to improve the management of demand and supply. Consequentially, it effectively introduced 22 strategic priorities for project selection and funding. They reflect the major themes and approaches under which resources are programmed within each of the focal areas. The strategic priorities regarding climate change, for example, aim to accelerate the shift from technology-based approaches towards those that are market-based and application-oriented, emphasizing policies and institutions that enhance sustainable development benefits. One priority is for example to foster the “increased access to local sources of financing for renewable energy and energy efficiency.” According to interview sources, the strategic priorities significantly changed the ways how GEF projects are administered and managed in all implementing agencies. It was the secretariat itself which developed the strategy and promoted its implementation within the network.

The secretariat as the core bureaucracy within the GEF network acts as the institutional advocate for GEF policies. Its prime target group is the implementing and executing agencies. With them, the secretariat generates normative influence in their decision making process on project designs and funding. The secretariat effectively urges them to adhere to the respective GEF criteria that have been developed under the responsibility of the secretariat.

In sum, the secretariat’s normative influence is mainly related to the facilitation of the modalities of the GEF itself. The positive influence is executed through setting up strategies and operational policies on how to manage and implement the scarce GEF resources. These policies manifested themselves in subsequent re-allocation of resources and competences among the different organizations involved in the implementation of GEF projects. By actively promoting these GEF policies, the secretariat has an ongoing normative influence with the relevant GEF entities.

**EXECUTIVE INFLUENCE**

With regard to executive influence, the GEF secretariat is mostly focused on strategic capacity building issues such as the definition of operational guidelines for national capacity needs. These strategic issues have gained increased attention in the early 2000s. The actual “capacity building” on the ground is left to the implementing agencies, among others the World Bank and UNDP.

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7 Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
8 Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
9 For the World Bank example see Marschinski and Behrle (2006).
Given its diverse institutional arrangements, the GEF at large has not succeeded in developing an integrated and systematic approach for its capacity building activities. From the side of the conventions, it is complain that the capacity needs of recipient countries should be addressed more systematically to enable countries to effectively implement the conventions (GEF 2001). Following a request by the GEF council, the secretariat took the lead in the collaboration with the implementing agencies and developed a “strategic approach to enhance capacity building” in GEF activities. The secretariat thereby used the opportunity to shape and influence the activities of the other partners in the GEF network regarding capacity building. As of 2003, a proposal was submitted that mainly focused on “national capacity self-assessment” projects (GEF 2003b). It contained an operational program for national self-assessment projects and a guideline for the GEF decision-making process on where capacity building projects are most urgently needed and have to be funded. For the countries, the approach provided the opportunity to gauge their capacity needs and priorities based on systematic self-assessments. This element became fully operational in 2004. The same year, 50 countries submitted their proposals complying with the new strategic approach, while another 100 countries testified their interest. The secretariat is required to further elaborate on this strategic proposal and to develop targets and indicators for measuring results.

In sum, the influence of the secretariat regarding capacity building has merely conceptual components. As such, the influence in this field is rather indirect. By means of its unified strategy, the secretariat developed direct leverage to shape and focus the capacity building activities of the implementing agencies and the target countries. This also shows how the secretariat develops a new strategic approach and promotes the GEF capacity building approach among the implementing agencies.10

5 Explaining the Influence

This analysis has identified two major fields of autonomous influence in relation to the other agencies of the GEF network, namely normative and indirect executive influence. It shows that the secretariat has no role as an executive bureaucracy and is not expected to have a direct influence as such. Its influence in this field is merely indirect through the provision of strategic guidelines for the other implementing agencies. The subsequent sections will develop an explanatory pattern for the observed normative and indirect executive influence of this bureaucracy.

PROBLEM STRUCTURE

The secretariat deals with six different environmental topics. Besides the four convention issues climate change, biodiversity, land degradation and persistent organic pollutants, the secretariat deals also with water issues and ozone layer depletion. These environmental areas are very diverse in terms of their problem structure; most of the topics are dealt with by the case studies of the secretariats in this project. As it is hardly

10 The following webpage provides detailed information about the national capacity self-assessment projects: http://ncsa.undp.org/about.asp (accessed November 2005).
feasible to separate the influence of the secretariat regarding the six issue areas, the
problem structure of each of the focal area does not serve as an explanatory factor for
the secretariat’s influence in particular in normative and executive fields. Nevertheless,
the plurality of problems the secretariat addresses at once renders it difficult for the
small bureaucracy to formulate and implement targeted awareness raising campaigns.
Interview sources confirmed that the secretariat deals with too many problems at the
same time and thus has not enough resources to clearly focus in depth on one of the
environmental concerns. Hence, the wide scope in terms of the issue areas can serve as
an explanation for the little cognitive influence of the secretariat.\textsuperscript{11}

**Polity**

**Competences.** The legal status of the GEF is a source of much debate among
international law scholars (Ehrmann 1997; Werksman 2004) and features of it can ex-
plain the influence of the secretariat, particularly in terms of its normative influence.
Zoe Young (2002) emphasizes that the GEF secretariat has many principals, namely all
the members of the GEF network. Yet legally, the council is the most relevant. The rela-
tionship between the council and the secretariat is crucial for understanding what the
formal competences of the secretariat are and why they confine the secretariat’s
autonomous influence.

The secretariat has strict terms of reference, although it enjoys the liberty of in-
terpreting guidance by the conferences of the parties and of preparing most documents
for council decisions. While more fundamental matters require council decisions, the
day-to-day operations are left to the secretariat, not least because the council meets
only twice a year. Therefore, the secretariat has considerable leeway through the draft-
ing of most council decisions, for instance the operational programs or the 22 strategic
priorities. These competences apply particularly to technical matters. When controver-
sies arise that do not allow for a final decision, the secretariat is regularly asked to pre-
pare new drafts for the following council meeting. In doing so, it is the secretariat’s
“central task [to] balance the political needs of major interests in the GEF” (Young
2002, 105). The council members approve other proposals that need less discussion
during the bi-annual meetings.

Formally, decision-making in the council requires a double-weighted majority.
The majority of both the donor countries and the recipient countries need to agree to a
final decision and to resolve disputes. In practice, the council has never resolved a con-
flict by majority vote but by consensus building among all parties. The latter process
offers the secretariat as a mediating bureaucracy the opportunity to build trust and
provide common grounds for the conflicting parties, similar to other convention secre-
tariats.

**Resources.** The budget for the GEF secretariat amounts to $8.3 million
(2004). This has almost doubled from its 1995 level ($4.3 million). Each year, the
council approves the budget for the secretariat as part of the overall GEF budget. Addi-
tionally, the overall budget provides the annual funding for all core corporate manage-
ment activities in the GEF units within the implementing agencies. They are paid for
their support in developing and reviewing GEF operational policies. Costs incurred

\textsuperscript{11} Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
through project preparation and implementation are covered by a separate budget. Since 1999, a new fee-based system has been installed to ensure better control over these compensation costs.

Mostly OECD countries finance the GEF through replenishments of the Global Environmental Trust Fund every four years. However, GEF’s role as a catalyst for the mobilization of additional resources has been a key objective since its foundation. Co-financing arrangements with one of the three implementing agencies is the predominant pattern of GEF funding. GEF projects must include a sustainable source of non-GEF funding. Therefore it only funds the “incremental costs,” that is, the part of a project that will bring global environmental benefits. Up to 2004, the GEF has provided US$4.5 billion in grants for over 1,300 projects in 140 countries and generated about US$14.5 billion in co-financing from other partners.\(^{12}\)

The financial resources of the secretariat are restricted and decided annually by the council. Staff members face these constraints through, for example, limited travel expenses and restrictions on other necessary research and monitoring tasks (Young 2002, 158). Several secretariat members emphasized the high workload. However, additional staff is not anticipated in future budgets in order to keep the secretariat lightweight and to avoid overlap with the implementing agencies. The secretariat receives secondments from donor countries, which keeps wage costs down and allows the secretariat to fill key staff positions with well-qualified individuals.

The council in its position as the governing board decides upon GEF projects and thus upon the resource allocation in terms of implementing agencies and focal areas. Nevertheless, as indicated above, the secretariat reviews the project proposals at four stages of the project cycle for conformity with GEF operational programs and accordance with general project review criteria (GEF 2003a, 7). Besides this, the chief executive officer of the secretariat is entitled to approve medium-sized projects (those below US$ 1 million) and part of the enabling activities (those below US$ 350,000), which approximately amounts to 5% of GEF grants, but about 47% of GEF projects as of 2005.\(^{13}\)

At first sight, the material resources at the disposal of the secretariat appear to be small. However, the influence of the secretariat on the project cycle and therefore on the allocation of GEF grants and the right to decide upon small-sized projects provides an explanation for the normative influence in terms of promoting GEF policies within the GEF network.

**Embeddedness.** Besides the broadness of the environmental problems addressed, the secretariat operates in a narrowly defined working environment. The GEF itself has been set up as a network rather than a new organization in its own right. It is explicitly defined as the financial mechanism of the four conventions. Hence, the GEF secretariat solely channels grants for GEF projects to implementing agencies. Likewise, the secretariat has no regional outreach as it only disposes of its office in Washington.

As a consequence, the close cooperation between the secretariat as the permanent body of the GEF and the other organizations involved is paramount. Some schol-

\(^{12}\) According to the GEF project database: [www.gefonline.org](http://www.gefonline.org) and the GEF webpage: [www.gefweb.org](http://www.gefweb.org) (accessed July 2005).

\(^{13}\) According to the GEF project database: [www.gefonline.org](http://www.gefonline.org) (accessed May 2005).
ars emphasize the strengths of the network character of the GEF (Streck 2000). The secretariat is, according to Zoe Young, “at the centre of the wheel with many spokes” (2002, 105), with close and good relationships and information exchanges particularly with other international bureaucracies.

However, this network character of the GEF does not always deliver the desired outcomes. Although the secretariat maintains contacts with all member states, the cooperation with the operational focal points in recipient countries has been ineffective in several cases. According to an overall performance study, the operational focal points lack information, capacity, and financial resources. Furthermore, the secretariat does not provide simple information and easily accessible documents (GEF 2002b). The fact that the secretariat itself is not present in the recipient countries renders the communication more difficult to manage. This undermines the awareness for the GEF itself and renders the task for the secretariat to increase the awareness of global environmental problems in member states and the wider international community more challenging.

In addition, external stakeholders associate most projects with the implementing agencies rather than with the secretariat or GEF at large. UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank are responsible for the implementation of GEF projects. Therefore, the projects appear to belong to those three organizations. This common external perception also tends to undermine the efforts by the secretariat to increase the awareness of its existence and role as well as of the problems addressed by GEF.14

Closely related to this, the GEF at large and the secretariat in particular are often seen as instruments of the World Bank. Even after it was restructured in 1994, several countries and NGOs still perceived it as such, because the World Bank supports the secretariat in an administrative sense. Its human resources department manages the secretariat’s staff contracts. The secretariat also shared email-addresses with the World Bank until 2003. In 2001, the secretariat prepared a document on the institutional authority proposing increased autonomy for the secretariat. This document has not been supported by any implementing agency, since it appeared as if they have a “common concern that GEF’s consolidating role should not expand to the extent that it becomes an institutional rival” (Werksman 2004, 49). Although the legal status has not changed, arrangements are under preparation between the GEF secretariat and the World Bank to increase its functional independence (GEF 2002a). According to a senior program officer, the strategic priorities introduced in 2002 strengthened the role of the secretariat, as it now decides which projects are to be introduced in the GEF-portfolio. The introduction of the fee-based system in 1999 for the implementing agencies and the integration of seven executing agencies to directly access GEF funds increased its self-confidence (Streck 2001). Consequently, the secretariat gained some new means to influence the implementing agencies. In the end, however, the implementing agencies remain powerful in the actual implementation of GEF policies. They have to internalize them into their work programs and implement the projects according to general GEF policies, giving the secretariat only an indirect leverage on actual project implementation.

This sheds light on the influence of the secretariat according to the promotion of GEF policies within the GEF network, in particular the implementing agencies. Regard-

14 Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
ing material resources, the intervention into the project cycle and the approval of small-sized projects provides the secretariat with means to influence other actors. These financial means are supported by the increased independence of the secretariat through the strategic priorities. Notwithstanding, the implementing agencies are accountable to the council and revert to their expertise for issues related to the implementation of projects.

The embeddedness of the secretariat between highly autonomous bureaucracies of the GEF network also explains the absence of direct executive influence. Through the institutional set up and the limited competences of the secretariat, its normative influence is largely restricted to a strategic level, leaving the operational decisions to the implementing agencies.

**People and Procedures**

**Organizational Expertise.** The small size of the secretariat does not guarantee that it has experts for all relevant topics. For short-term tasks, it relies on the support of consultants. Although the network character of the GEF can lead to complex institutional relations, the secretariat has the possibility to build partnerships for each respective task in terms of gaining expertise. Through the science and technical advisory panel\(^\text{15}\), the secretariat has access to a roster of technical and scientific experts. The close coordination with the three implementing agencies provides the secretariat with very specific expertise necessary for relevant activities. Therefore, the close coordination of the GEF with other international bureaucracies allows the secretariat to draw on external expertise when necessary.

This lack of own technical and scientific expertise provides one part of an explanation for the lack of cognitive influence. The secretariat has not come to represent a competence centre for any of the focal areas. Thus the international community will hardly refer to this bureaucracy when expertise on any of the covered environmental problems is needed. This function is mostly occupied by the convention secretariats.\(^\text{16}\)

While most technical and scientific expertise rests outside the secretariat, its field of expertise is largely procedural. As mediator and administrator of the GEF project approval and the GEF funding procedures, the secretariat has developed significant expertise with regard to the management of processes. In addition, the acceptance of its strategic priorities and the operational strategy can be credited to the external perception as being a rather neutral agent with expertise in matters of process design and negotiations.

**Organizational Structure.** The GEF secretariat is small in size and characterized by its flat hierarchy and the dominance of informal working arrangements and short bureaucratic procedures. Staff members of the secretariat have well defined responsibilities, but this does not fully apply to decision-making. The style of leadership and the decision-making has changed since 2003 under the new chief executive officer Lennart Good. It developed from a top-down into a more consultative approach. However, the responsibility of who takes the final decision is not well defined. In many

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\(^\text{15}\) The science and technical advisory panel provides independent strategic advice to the GEF on relevant science and technology issues.

\(^\text{16}\) See the chapters by Bauer, Busch, and Siebenhüner (2007) as well as Sandford (1996).
cases, the final decision is left to the chief executive level. Nevertheless, the secretariat seems quite able to organize itself in order to respond to given tasks. This might contribute to the explanation of the influence in terms of its normative effects, namely the elaboration of GEF policies and their operational framework.

It is often argued that the GEF has “a strong ability of adaptation to a changing environment” (Streck 2001, 71), or is a “work in progress” (de Chazournes 2003, 24). Looking at the evolution of the entire GEF since 1991, several changes to the institutional structure and processes took place, which were mostly triggered by external demands. The most fundamental change has been the restructuring, which was completed in 1994. Since then, GEF has institutionalized several instruments to review and critically analyze its activities. Every four years, external reviewers carry out an overall performance study on all issues concerning the GEF. The monitoring and evaluation unit effectively conducts critical annual portfolio reviews and evaluates GEF’s performance at the program level.

Despite the several instruments to review GEF activities, the entire GEF network struggles with a non-working feedback mechanism and an ineffective knowledge management. Lessons from GEF projects are learned by the implementing agencies. They are fed back to the secretariat by means of annual portfolio reviews or the inter-agency task forces. Nevertheless, the secretariat is criticized for its inefficient internal knowledge management and lack of “feedback loops.”17 The chief executive officer addressed this issue in his first speech to the council: “I think there’s a huge unexplored potential in the area of knowledge management. We learn so much from our work on the ground” (Good 2003). While the secretariat has failed to overcome the communication problems of the network structure, it plays a major role in developing and implementing the strategy for the knowledge management of the entire GEF.

The effective implementing of the lessons learned, however, remains problematic. The institutional setting of the GEF provides for tensions when it comes to internalizing proposed changes and learning from experience. The project cycle, including reporting and evaluation, takes time, and once lessons are identified, several similar projects have already been approved without taking note of these lessons. A former GEF senior program officer concluded that the secretariat is “good in listening and absorbing things... it can less act upon and translate what it is told to do.”18 In addition, the institutional arrangements with numerous bureaucracies involved inhibit the implementation of improvements.

These difficulties have implications also for the external influence of the secretariat as such. Firstly, the well-established means to absorb knowledge and feedback from project work and the implementation process has an effect on the quality of GEF policies. These are regarded as well founded and based on thorough assessments. Therefore, parties in the council are willing to approve documents and suggestions of the secretariat giving it some normative influence. Secondly and contrastingly, the limited expertise and the insufficient knowledge management within the GEF network contribute to the explanation of the secretariat’s limited cognitive influence within the GEF family as well as beyond the network.

17 Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
18 Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
Organizational Culture. The organizational culture of the secretariat cannot explain much of its normative and indirect executive influence. The staff composition might give an indication about an organizational culture that is shaped by professionals from academic backgrounds. Technical specialists and natural scientists form the majority among all staff members. This culture at times produces problems with implementing agencies with differing organizational cultures, such as UNDP. Restraints on the secretariat’s influence on them can also be attributed to these differences.\textsuperscript{19}

Organizational Leadership. The former chief executive officer, Mohamed El-Ashry, managed to put the secretariat in the position to play a key role in the political navigation between the different actors within the GEF network. He was a central figure in the secretariat’s interaction with the council members, the conventions, and the implementing agencies. Accordingly, the behavior of the executive officer has been crucial for the strategic and operational work the secretariat undertook. He was most active in managing the modalities of the entire GEF.

Consensus building among council members had been one of the major challenges faced by El-Ashry. Before council meetings, he regularly consulted the different member states in order to develop consensual positions. Persistent patterns in the behavior of the charismatic chief executive officer were to treat southern states like “kings” (Young 2002, 10), but being aware that donor states pay their shares. Once characterized as the “stage manager” (Young 2002, 156), El-Ashry had much influence on the discussion at the council meetings, and on the entire course of the GEF construction. He had been in office since the foundation of the GEF secretariat in 1994 and is still known as the person with the best institutional knowledge on the GEF. Among staff members, he was a well-respected and “very much present” leader.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1994, most GEF member states opposed the idea of creating a new distinctive bureaucracy. Nevertheless, soon after its creation the secretariat counted 30 employees. The development of the secretariat regarding personnel and functions is observed critically not only by implementing agencies, but also by council members. Both are concerned that this development leads to duplication of activities and that the original idea of relying on existing organizations becomes obsolete. By contrast, El-Ashry pushed for the well-staffed, separate, and independent agency trying to establish his “own kingdom.”\textsuperscript{21}

The personal skills and abilities of El-Ashry had a significant influence on the way the secretariat operated and on decisions made prior and during the bi-annual council meetings. Therefore, in order to understand the mainly normative influences the secretariat exerted on its target group, notably the council and the implementing agencies, the leadership of El-Ashry has to be seen as a crucial factor.

\textsuperscript{19} Differences to the World Bank and its organizational culture hardly occur due to the vicinity of both agencies, the support by the World Bank in administrative matters, and the fact that staff often switches back and forth between the Bank and the secretariat.

\textsuperscript{20} Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.

\textsuperscript{21} Author’s interview with senior GEF officer, Washington DC, May 2003.
6 Conclusion

The GEF secretariat has some normative influence, however not in a sense directly comparable to other bureaucracies in international environmental politics. It influences the facilitation of the modalities of the GEF itself instead of the actual negotiations of environmental treaties. Successful formulation and implementation of strategic policies and programs for the GEF operations manifest this influence. The secretariat also influences the behavior of the implementing agencies in terms of promoting the policy guidelines for GEF projects. This generates an indirect executive influence on capacity building processes. However, for the time being, the secretariat has not been able to generate any direct influence on the implementation of projects on the ground.

Regarding cognitive influence, the secretariat acts as a public mouthpiece for the entire GEF. It takes responsibility to reach the wider community dealing with environmental problems mainly through the webpage. Although not its core function, the analysis shows that the awareness among the public for the GEF itself and its objectives is not satisfactory. The secretariat thus had hardly any observable cognitive influence.

Features of its polity, but also its procedures and the people involved in it, can explain these normative and indirect executive influences. The limited but well-detectable normative influence regarding the modalities of the GEF can be understood as a consequence of the secretariat’s relatively extended competences with regard to technical matters. The secretariat translates the broad policy guidelines of its principals into strategies and operational programs, and benefits from a great leeway in shaping these programs. In addition, it operates under low supervision as the council meets only twice a year. Regarding its people, the former chief executive officer El-Ashry played a major role as well. Through his leadership skills and very good institutional knowledge, El-Ashry had an important function in maneuvering the secretariat between conflicting actors. He urged for an independent bureaucracy in the form of the secretariat in order to have a body representing the GEF. His abilities to convene the parties at one table and to establish a well-functioning secretariat strongly contributed to the secretariat’s influence in terms of managing the modalities of the GEF. These features assist the secretariat in developing effective GEF policies.

Promoting GEF policies and project criteria is another major task of the secretariat. According to its very mandate, the secretariat shall influence the implementing agencies as they implement GEF projects. Thus, the secretariat ensures that these projects comply with GEF policies. With regard to material resources, the secretariat occupies a powerful position through the four review points in the project cycle and the right of approval of the chief executive officer for smaller GEF projects. This constitutes an incentive for the implementing agencies to accept and adopt GEF requirements. Yet, the secretariat is not fully perceived as an actor in its own right, which undermines its influence in terms of promoting GEF policies among powerful implementing agencies such as the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. Its organizational embeddedness with some overlap of responsibilities and resulting institutional rivalries significantly limits the overall autonomous influence of the secretariat and the leverage on project implementation and capacity building in particular.

To understand the very small cognitive influence, one will also have to turn to the polity of the secretariat. The competences of the GEF do not allow for larger research or awareness raising activities. Nevertheless, the secretariat is responsible for
representing the GEF in the international environmental community. Operating as a largely technocratic agent in the background, the secretariat has not yet lived up to this ambition. Nevertheless, the secretariat is the permanent actor and hence the public mouthpiece for the GEF as such. Due to limited competences, restricted material resources and the close observation through the implementing agencies, the secretariat faces difficulties in promoting public awareness. Moreover, the diversity of the problems addressed render the formulation of targeted awareness raising campaigns a most difficult task hardly to be accomplished by a small bureaucracy. The lack of high-profile in-house scientific and technical expertise and the problems in terms of the internal knowledge management add to this.

In conclusion, it is remarkable that an institution that was not intended to become an independent bureaucracy has nevertheless taken significant steps towards generating influences on “adjacent” bureaucracies. The secretariat’s polity that positioned it between powerful implementing agencies while maintaining drafting rights under low supervision and decision power over the allocation of GEF grants, explains the normative and the limited executive effects. In addition, among the internal factors, leadership represented through the chief executive officer El-Ashry serves as explanation for the analyzed normative influence. Nevertheless, other features of its polity—mainly the narrowly defined role in the project cycle and its role as an agent in the background and the lacking knowledge management within the GEF network—hinder the secretariat to fully develop its influence.
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