

# 9 The Mediterranean Region

## Lebanon and the Balkans

This chapter highlights the effects of conflict and fragility on programming in the Mediterranean region funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), with a focus on Lebanon and the Balkan nations. Since its founding in 1992, the GEF has launched 49 projects in Lebanon and 195 projects in the Balkans. Considering the environment and conflict linkages and the risks posed by armed conflict, portfolio-level reviews of projects in these two situations sought to evaluate the extent to which projects have taken into account conflict risks and how conflict sensitivity in project design and implementation affects project outcomes.

The research indicated that active social and violent conflict affected the reviewed GEF-funded projects in Lebanon in different ways and generally had the greatest impact on projects' sustainability criterion rating. In contrast, the violent conflict in the Balkans was further temporally removed from the programming, which allowed the reviewed GEF-funded projects to serve as avenues for increased cooperation and communication among previously hostile groups.

### **Regional Background**

Lebanon has experienced intermittent violent conflict and widespread social unrest since gaining independence from French rule in 1943. From 1975 to 2000, Lebanon experienced a devastating civil war that erupted as a result of mounting demographic and political changes and external pressures from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The civil war resulted in approximately 120,000 deaths and displaced almost 1 million people. It also contributed to widespread environmental degradation, especially in the country's south. This environmental devastation was further amplified during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War; up to 1 million unexploded cluster bombs in the south continue to pose a threat to the environment and to people whose livelihoods are linked to the land (Bechner, 2006). A long history of sectarian conflict has hindered the development of good environmental governance in Lebanon, although environmental protection has become a priority issue, with dozens of environmental NGOs having emerged to combat the environmental damage caused by violent conflict.

Throughout the 1990s, western Balkan nations witnessed war and massacres following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The region suffered devastating social, political,

economic, and environmental harm. Many people fled or were displaced, adding to environmental stress. Although conflict in the region has ceased, former Yugoslav nations are still recovering from the past conflicts. Partly because of the destruction of environmental infrastructure during the war, the 2000s brought devastating climate change-related effects, particularly in the form of flooding and drought. Environmental projects are a unique opportunity for formerly warring parties to cooperate on a mutually beneficial endeavor.

Using the methodology described in Chapter 2, nine projects were selected in Lebanon and eight in the Balkans for in-depth analyses using project documents and interviews with agency staff and stakeholders. The evaluation assessed the relationship between a project's management of conflict risk and project outcomes, using the four evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

The reviewed Lebanon projects generally performed well in relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness and received less favorable sustainability ratings. In particular, the evaluation found the impacts of conflict risks and sociopolitical instability on several projects' sociopolitical and financial sustainability. Key findings from the conflict-sensitivity analysis included:

1. conflict affected GEF Lebanon projects in different ways, suggesting that conflict dynamics and GEF projects operate in context-specific environments;
2. the type of conflict affecting projects varied between violent conflict and social unrest; and
3. adaptive management strategies, such as flexibility in choosing project sites, enabled projects to be more successful in achieving their outcomes.

Many of the GEF projects in the Balkans received favorable scores for relevance and effectiveness. Efficiency ratings were also generally favorable, but results were mixed on sustainability. Documentation and interviews for the selected GEF projects in the Balkans indicated that they addressed previous conflict in three ways:

1. providing an opportunity to cooperate;
2. addressing the economic impact of the wars; and
3. addressing regional and domestic communication problems.

### **Environmental Background: Lebanon**

Although the environment and natural resources were not direct contributors to conflict in Lebanon, both the civil war from 1975 to 1990 and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War contributed to environmental degradation and economic instability. During the 15 years of Lebanon's civil war, the country experienced large-scale environmental devastation. In response, the Ministry of Environment was created in 1993, and the Lebanese Environmental Forum, a national NGO coordination committee, was formed (Kingston, 2001). Despite a renewed interest in environmental protection, environmental degradation accelerated in the postwar reconstruction period,

catalyzed by industrial pollution, unregulated urban expansion, and the unchecked building of road networks connecting previously untouched areas (Maqdisi, 2012). High levels of urbanization and environmental degradation also damaged Lebanon’s water resources through groundwater contamination and unregulated waste discharge into rivers and streams (Maqdisi, 2012). Despite these issues, environmental protection was not a main priority for the Lebanese government in the postwar period; as a result, environmental protection became a priority issue outside of the government, with NGOs emerging to rebuild the environment after the war (Kingston, 2001).

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War also severely affected the environment, with the environmental consequences of this conflict still felt today. Land mines and unexploded ordnance continue to pose a risk to both the environment and people in affected areas. It is estimated that up to 1 million unexploded cluster bombs remain (Conca & Wallace, 2009), hampering restoration efforts and inhibiting livelihoods that are dependent on the environment. The presence of unexploded ordnance has also disrupted local natural resource management and displaced people into fragile ecosystems (Conca & Wallace, 2009). This posed a security risk to several GEF projects in southern Lebanon and prevented project staff from accessing target sites. The Israeli bombing of the Jiyeh Power Station during the 2006 conflict also contributed to environmental degradation by causing a large oil spill in the Mediterranean Sea (Conca & Wallace, 2009).

**GEF Involvement in Lebanon**

Since 1992, the GEF has launched 49 approved projects in Lebanon, spanning six GEF focal areas: biodiversity, chemicals and waste, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and persistent organic pollutants (see Figure 9.1). Several projects had multiple focal areas, such as international waters and biodiversity. From this portfolio, nine projects were selected for in-depth analysis (see Table 9.1), aiming to optimize diversity in conflict categories, project results, and project focal areas. These projects were selected based on how well they fit into three categories: projects that did not substantially address conflict dynamics and received unfavorable evaluation ratings, projects that addressed conflict dynamics

Table 9.1 Lebanon Projects Analyzed in Depth

<i>GEF Project ID</i>	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Focal Area</i>	<i>Project Dates</i>	<i>Category</i>
216	Strengthening of National Capacity and Grassroots In-Situ Conservation for Sustainable Biodiversity Protection	Biodiversity	1995–2004	1
400	Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agro-Biodiversity of the Fertile Crescent	Biodiversity	1998–2005	1

(Continued)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

<i>GEF Project ID</i>	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Focal Area</i>	<i>Project Dates</i>	<i>Category</i>
410	Conservation of Wetland and Coastal Ecosystems in the Mediterranean Region	Biodiversity	1999–2006	1
1707	Integrated Management of Cedar Forests in Lebanon in Cooperation with other Mediterranean Countries	Biodiversity	2003–2007	2
2600	Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem-Regional Component: Implementation of Agreed Actions for the Protection of the Environmental Resources of the Mediterranean Sea and Its Coastal Areas	Persistent organic pollutants; international waters	2008–2016	2
3028	SFM Safeguarding and Restoring Lebanon's Woodland Resources	Land degradation	2008–2014	3
3418	Mainstreaming Biodiversity Management into Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Production Processes	Biodiversity	2008–2013	3
9491	Mainstreaming Conservation of Migratory Soaring Birds into Key Productive Sectors along the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway (Tranche II of GEFID 1028)	Biodiversity	2017–present	3
9607	Mediterranean Sea Programme (MedProgramme): Enhancing Environmental Security	International waters, biodiversity, chemicals and waste	2016–present	2

*Note:* Categories: 1. Projects did not substantially address conflict dynamics and received unfavorable terminal evaluation scores. 2. Projects addressed conflict dynamics but did so only in passing and did not significantly evaluate risks social and/or violent conflict could pose to project outcomes. Projects also did not address mitigation measures that could be taken to lessen the impact of the project on conflict. 3. Projects addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks that they posed to the success of project outcomes and discussed mitigation measures that could be taken to reduce the impact of the project on latent social conflicts.

only in passing, and projects that substantially addressed conflict dynamics and received mostly favorable evaluation ratings, where applicable.<sup>1</sup>

### **Environmental Background: The Balkans**

The conflicts in the Balkan region—known as the Wars in the Balkans, Wars in the Former Yugoslavia, or the Yugoslav Wars—lasted from 1991 until 2001. The former Yugoslavia was created after World War II as a federation of six

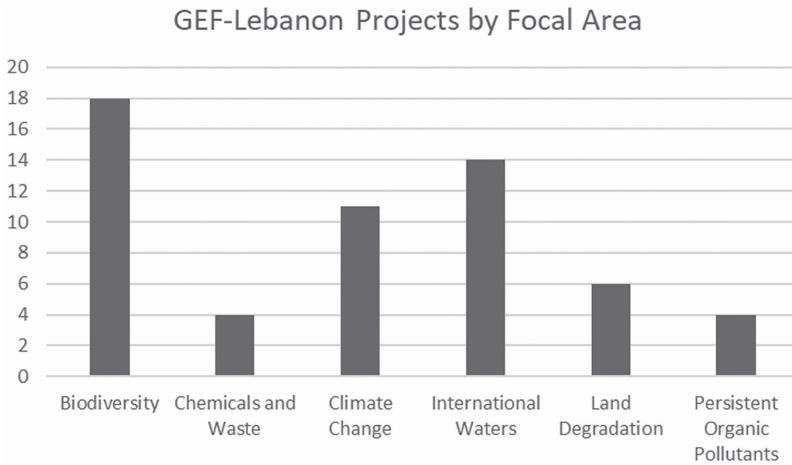


Figure 9.1 GEF Lebanon Projects by Focal Area

republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia (Voice of America, 2017). The ethnic groups who lived there included Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Albanians, and Slovenes, and the conflicts stemmed from increasing ethnic tensions, growing nationalist sentiments, and calls for autonomy (BBC News, 2016). After Croatia and Slovenia declared independence in 1991, the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army worked with Serbs in Croatia to expel Croats (ABC News, 2011). Shortly after, Bosnia's Muslims and Croats advocated for autonomy, but Bosnian Serbs pushed back, driving Bosnian Muslims and Croats from their homes in an ethnic cleansing that continued despite United Nations interventions. The war ended after NATO bombed the Bosnian Serbs in 1995 (BBC News, 2018).

Human rights abuses and war crimes were common, including civilian attacks, systematic rape, and incarceration in concentration camps. An estimated 140,000 people died, and 4 million people were displaced (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2011).

Environmental issues were not a driver of the Balkan conflicts, but the environmental repercussions of the conflicts' violence and unrest are widespread. Media coverage of post-conflict pollution, particularly from the bombings, prompted international environmentalists to advocate for an environmental assessment. A 2001 Committee on the Environment report noted direct and indirect damage caused by weapons, destruction of infrastructure, contamination from toxic substances, and population displacement (Council of Europe, 2001). Bombings destroyed facilities such as oil refineries and industrial sites. The toxic substances released into the ground contributed not only to soil pollution but also to water and air pollution (Lasaridi & Valvis, 2011). Warplanes aggravated air and rainfall contamination from toxic fuel additives (Edeko, 2011). In targeted sites, UNEP found evidence of widespread surface contamination from depleted uranium. Although

UNEP determined the radiological and toxicological risks to be low, the program acknowledged that areas with heavy amounts of depleted uranium faced the possibility of uranium infiltration into groundwater at levels exceeding accepted health standards (UNEP, 2002).

A UNEP-led assessment found damage to vegetation from the bombings but concluded that long-term effects for biodiversity in the Balkans would be minimal (UN, 1999). The assessment reported on the unexploded weapons in national parks and protected areas and their effect on the region's ability to manage these areas and reap their economic benefits. More than 250 hectares of forest were entirely burned and thousands of hectares of land were rendered unfit for agriculture by destruction or pollution. Population displacement also led to environmental degradation as refugees fled to Albania and Macedonia, neither of which had the resources to sustain a population influx. Refugee camps caused environmental damage through inadequate sewage, tree cutting, trash dumps, and wastewater infiltration in groundwater aquifers (Edeko, 2011). Bombing of electric facilities had a significant impact on the environment because the resulting power shortages meant utilities could not provide fresh water or run sewage and wastewater treatment systems (Council of Europe, 2001).

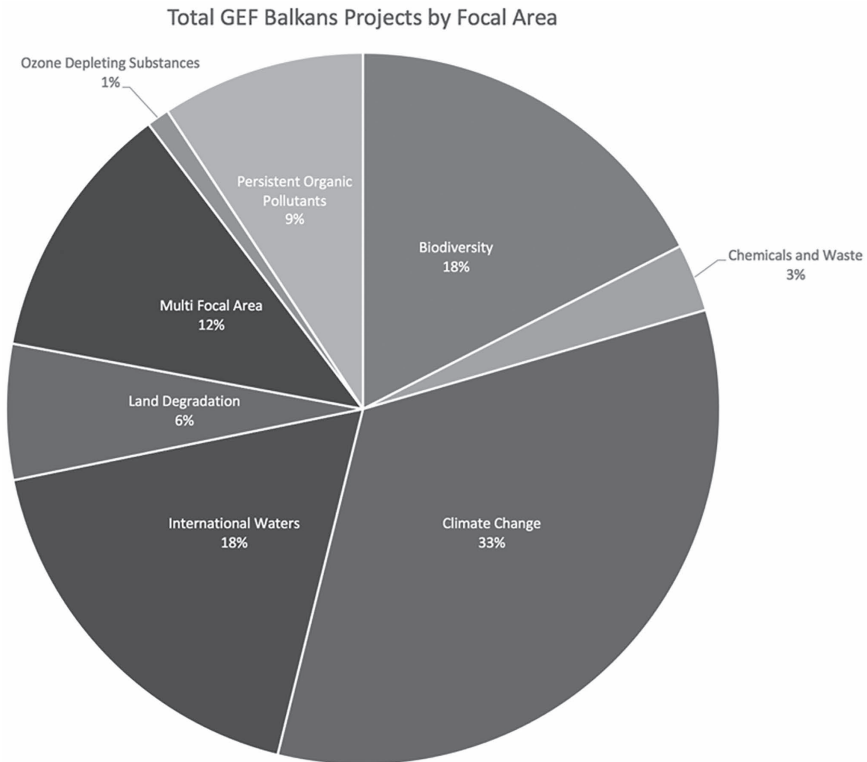
### ***GEF Involvement in the Balkans***

The GEF has supported 195 projects in the Balkans, seven of which were global. Most single-country projects have been in Bosnia and Herzegovina (29), Macedonia (27), and Serbia (28). Almost a quarter of the GEF projects in the Balkans (45) have been regional. Of these, more than half focused on regional waters. Climate change has been the overriding focus for GEF projects in the Balkans, with 65 projects, a third of all interventions, having climate change as their focal area. Figure 9.2 presents the focal areas of projects in the Balkans.

From this project portfolio, eight Balkans projects were selected for deeper analysis to get an overarching view of conflict sensitivity over time and across focal areas (see Table 9.2). Although the projects represent a diversity of focal areas, locations, and scope, they are not representative of the variety of projects in the Balkans. All eight projects were analyzed for conflict sensitivity and project stakeholders and implementers were interviewed about conflict sensitivity and their experiences in managing conflict in the projects. The interviews with Bosnian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian officials indicated that the former Yugoslav nations are oriented to the future, hoping to put the conflict behind them. GEF-supported programming provides opportunities to realize that vision by funding projects in which formerly warring states work together.

## **Results**

The two in-depth analyses of projects in Lebanon and the Balkans provide qualitative illustrations of the ways in which GEF-supported projects in the Mediterranean region addressed conflict risks in their design and whether these risks affected project outcomes. Examination of the interaction between conflict and the selected



*Figure 9.2* GEF Balkans Projects by Focal Area

projects used the four evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. The analysis also assessed the impacts of non-conflict-related factors on project outcomes. Table 9.3 presents examples of how, in Lebanon projects, conflict and instability interacted with the different elements of the GEF evaluation criteria.

### **Relevance**

A project's relevance refers to "the extent to which the objective and outcomes of a project are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies" (OECD DAC, 2002). The GEF evaluates relevance based on how well the project aligns with local and national environmental challenges and policies and with the GEF's global priorities.

All of the completed Lebanon projects received favorable ratings for relevance. For the most part, relevance was evaluated without reference to the broader conflict context and was scored on how well the project addressed Lebanon's environmental priorities and barriers to achieving environmental goals. A project on

Table 9.2 Balkans Projects Analyzed in Depth

<i>GEF Project ID</i>	<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Dates</i>
5604	Technology Transfer for Climate Resilient Flood Management in the Vrbas River Basin	2014–present
32	Mini-Hydropower Project	1999–2006
2143	DBSB Water Quality Protection Project, under World Bank–GEF Strategic Partnership for Nutrient Reduction in the Danube River and Black Sea	2005–2017
2372	Forest and Mountain Protected Areas Project	2008–2014
5723	West Balkans Drina River Basin Management Project	2014–present
9114	Capacity Development for Improved Implementation of Multinational Environmental Agreements (MEAs)	2016–present
9670	Enhancing Regional Climate Change Adaptation in the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas	2016–present
9607	Mediterranean Sea Programme (MedProgramme): Enhancing Environmental Security (2016–present)	2016–present
<b>Other Balkans projects mentioned in this chapter</b>		
3688	Strengthening the Sustainability of the Protected Areas System of the Republic of Montenegro	2008–2017
3947	Catalyzing Financial Sustainability of the PA System (Montenegro)	2009–2016
3946	Ensuring Financial Sustainability of the Protected Area System	2009–2016
495	Kopacki Rit Wetlands Management Project	1998–2004
4187	Capacity Building for Environmental Policy Institutions	2010–2016
3759	Support to Sustainable Transportation System in the City of Belgrade	2009–2015

safeguarding and restoring Lebanon’s woodland resources received a rating of highly relevant because it “addressed issues of inappropriate land uses, specifically deforestation and forest degradation” that were identified as pressing environmental challenges (GEF IEO, 2016c, p. 7). Several of the projects noted in general terms that the Lebanese Civil War had negative impacts on the environment (e.g., GEF, 1995, 2008), but their evaluations did not make clear whether these environmental impacts influenced their relevance ratings. A project on mainstreaming biodiversity management into medicinal and aromatic plants production processes received a favorable relevance rating because it aligned with the GEF mission and national priorities and “remains pertinent in the light of the current levels of threat” (Rijal, 2014, p. 28). However, the evaluation did not specify whether the mentioned threats included threats posed by conflict risks. In general, all of the projects selected for analysis were found to be relevant to the GEF’s global priorities and Lebanon’s national goals; however, the documents did not mention conflict as a factor that either added to or detracted from a project’s relevance.

Many of the GEF projects in the Balkans received favorable ratings for relevance to policy frameworks and governments already in place. Project documents



Table 9.3 Examples of how Conflict Interacted with Evaluation Criteria in Lebanon Projects

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Project ID</i>	<i>Example</i>
Relevance	3418	The TE and project identification form acknowledge that the 2006 conflict had a detrimental impact on the Lebanese economy and livelihoods, therefore making a project that focused on contributing to both of these a national priority (p. 37, p. 3). “The socio-economic impact of the war has given increased urgency” to a government reform agenda that emphasized reducing unemployment, improving livelihoods, and restoring the environment (TE, p. 36).
	9491	The volatile security situation in some target countries will likely direct attention away from conservation issues, thus extending the time frame for engagement (Revised PD, p. 14).
Effectiveness	2600	The project’s implementation was hampered by “many challenges at the national level, including limited human/institutional capacity, political conflicts, and civil war” (TE, p. 16).
	3418	The presence of cluster bombs in many areas in southern Lebanon meant these sites were inaccessible and could not be included in the project (interview).
Efficiency	2600	Work in the transboundary Lebanese-Syrian Orontes River basin was suspended in 2012 to due the outbreak of war (TE, p. 32).
	9491	Recent political/economic turmoil has led to the delay of some aspects of project implementation (interview with Assad Serhal).
Sustainability	3028	The TE noted that “the social and political situation in Lebanon is somewhat fraught internally and through the broader unstable situation in the region,” suggesting that the achievement made by the project were likely to be negatively affected by unstable governance and the risk of conflict. This jeopardizes commitments made to the project’s objectives (TE, p. 43).

*Note:* PD = project document; TE = terminal evaluation.

also revealed deliberate inclusion of policymakers and stakeholders and a determination to work within established frameworks. For example, the Mini-Hydropower Project began as a Macedonian idea and worked in the interests of both the GEF and the Macedonian government. The project aligned with Macedonia’s political interests in the country’s National Environmental Action Plan, which identified air pollution as the country’s most significant environmental threat. The development of small hydropower plants was part of Macedonia’s investment plans, so the project also aligned with the government’s financial interests (GEF IEO, 2014b). Another project, focused on forest and mountain protected areas, incorporated three components to conserve natural ecosystems in Bosnia and Herzegovina (GEF IEO, 2014c): improving existing protected areas, establishing new ones, and

working at local and state levels to promote sustainable practices. A final example of project relevance is a project in Serbia that aimed to promote multinational environmental agreements (MEAs) by incorporating environmental provisions into existing programs (GEF, 2016b). For both projects, incorporating relevant policies and local interests encouraged stakeholders and policymakers to take ownership, having the co-benefit of increasing the likelihood of the last core evaluation criterion, sustainability.

### *Effectiveness*

The effectiveness of a project is the extent to which it has achieved its given objectives or the likelihood that they will be achieved (GEF IEO, 2019).

Of the six Lebanon projects with documents evaluating project effectiveness, five received favorable ratings in this category, with one project's effectiveness rated as moderately unsatisfactory. The documents made little to no mention of how or whether the broader conflict context in Lebanon could have affected the project's outcomes. This was true even if other parts of the evaluation made explicit references to conflict. For example, although the evaluation of Integrated Management of Cedar Forests in Lebanon in Cooperation with Other Mediterranean Countries noted that activities were interrupted by the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Lebanon in July 2006 (Asmar, 2008, p. 12), it did not mention whether or how this outbreak affected the project's ability to achieve its expected outputs. Instead, assessment of the project's effectiveness centered around "the extent to which the project has directly or indirectly assisted policy- and decision-makers to apply information supplied by biodiversity indicators in their national planning and decision-making" (Asmar, 2008, p. 47). During a project focused on the Mediterranean large marine ecosystem, activities in Libya, Syria, and Tunisia had to be relocated or cancelled because of security concerns emerging from the Arab Spring (GEF IEO, 2016a). Nevertheless, the project received a rating of highly satisfactory for effectiveness and made no mention of how the broader conflict context might have negatively affected the project's outcomes, in Lebanon or elsewhere.

Some Lebanon project evaluations identified conflict as affecting some of the evaluation criteria but not the project's effectiveness. For example, Lebanon's unstable sociopolitical context was stated to have negative impacts on one project's sustainability; however, the project's effectiveness received a favorable rating because the project largely achieved its objective of "developing a strategy for safeguarding and restoring Lebanon's woodland resources" (GEF IEO, 2016c, p. 3). The potential implications of the unstable sociopolitical situation mentioned elsewhere were not acknowledged with respect to effectiveness.

Two Lebanon projects that received favorable effectiveness ratings were noted as being directly affected by the consequences of violent conflict. Both sets of project documents (GEF, 2007, 2009) stated that the presence of unexploded cluster bombs hindered accessibility to target sites in southern Lebanon, corroborated in 2020 interviews with project staff members. Specific threats mentioned in one of the project's design documents (GEF, 2009) included the presence of unexploded

ordnance from the 2006 conflict, while identified threats to the outcomes of the other project included unexploded cluster bombs, the removal of which was estimated to take 12 months (GEF, 2007). Interviews with project staff confirmed that unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon did indeed pose an obstacle to the implementation (and, therefore, effectiveness) of both projects but added that the bombs did not end up affecting project outcomes. Data from the interviews suggested that a combination of adaptive management and the selection of alternative project sites overcame these potential barriers.

Although the majority of GEF-funded Balkans projects focused on climate change, the eight selected for in-depth study represent diverse foci. Common among their objectives was an emphasis on local involvement and cooperation, and scores for effectiveness, when available, were generally favorable. For example, the Danube/Black Sea and Mediterranean Basin (DBSB) Water Quality Protection Project aimed to reduce pollution in waterways by working with local utilities and creating a joint Bosnian and Croatian commission. It also sought to promote trans-boundary cooperation in repairing damaged wastewater infrastructure after the conflict. This project was especially effective in encouraging cooperation between states and in promoting a joint Croatian and Bosnian working group that yielded positive results, according to the project's indicators and targets (GEF, 2018). A project focused on sustainable transportation in the city of Belgrade was the only Balkans project that received an unsatisfactory rating for effectiveness. The project set unobtainable goals for greenhouse gas emissions reduction; however, it worked successfully with the local government and policymakers to complete some project objectives by promoting the city's sustainable transport systems (GEF IEO, 2015).

### *Efficiency*

The efficiency of a project refers to the extent to which the project "achieved value for resources, by converting inputs (funds, personnel, expertise, equipment, etc.) to results in the timeliest and least costly way possible, compared to the alternatives" (GEF IEO, 2019, p. 13).

Only five of the nine studied Lebanon projects were evaluated for efficiency, with four of these receiving favorable scores. For the most part, efficiency was not related to conflict. However, interruption by the outbreak of conflict decreased the cost-effectiveness of the project focused on cedar forests because training and capacity-building activities had to be extended (GEF IEO, 2010). Across all of the Lebanon projects, efficiency evaluations emphasized cost-effectiveness. The project Conservation of Wetland and Coastal Ecosystems in the Mediterranean Region, which received the lowest efficiency score, was rated as moderately unsatisfactory because "the availability of data in an accessible and useful format, and the systematic storage of available data by the project teams and UNDP COs, leaves a lot to be desired" (GEF IEO, 2010, p. 3).

Among the Balkans projects evaluated for efficiency, ratings were generally favorable; most received rating of moderately satisfactory with a few rated moderately unsatisfactory. The problem was not projects' inability to adhere to budgets

but rather their lack of organization. For example, the mini-hydropower project, while well under budget, was completed two years later than scheduled, and project documents provided no explanation for this delay (GEF IEO, 2014b). The Kopacki Rit Wetlands Management Project, which also received generally favorable ratings, made slow progress, especially in the beginning (GEF IEO, 2014a). Two other projects received moderately unsatisfactory ratings for efficiency due to organizational issues. One, on capacity building for environmental policy institutions, faced implementation delays and, while not exceeding its budget, spent funds on activities deemed unnecessary for project completion (GEF IEO, 2017). The Belgrade project on sustainable transportation ran into problems finding a project director and, therefore, in creating a successful project design. As a result, the project objectives and outcomes required reevaluation (GEF IEO, 2015).

### ***Sustainability***

The sustainability of a project refers to the continuation or likely continuation of “positive effects from the intervention after it has come to an end, and its potential for scale-up and/or replication” (GEF IEO, 2019, p. 13). Sustainability is evaluated along four dimensions: financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and environmental.

All of the studied GEF Lebanon projects with sustainability scores received favorable ratings for environmental sustainability, while the ratings of other dimensions of sustainability were more mixed. When evaluating a project’s financial sustainability, evaluators determine the level of financial risks that may jeopardize whether a project can have continued impact once it ends. Negative financial sustainability ratings of two projects in Lebanon were directly linked to the unstable political situation in the country and tied to the government’s ability to continue providing necessary funding. In the cedar forests project, the ability of activities designed to increase sustainable tourism and provide a source of funding to support the continued fulfillment of project objectives was “jeopardized by the instability in the country and in the region” (Asmar, 2008, p. 17). Likewise, the financial sustainability of the woodland resources project was rated as moderately unlikely because in “the current political situation in Lebanon, support for the techniques and methods promoted by the projects are not supported universally within the central government” (GEF IEO, 2016c, p. 5). However, because of the likelihood of funding from multilateral agencies such as USAID, the project’s financial sustainability rating was later revised to moderately likely (GEF IEO, 2016c).

The evaluation of a project’s sociopolitical sustainability assesses how favorable the target country’s sociopolitical climate is relative to the broader sustainability of a project’s outcomes, including the likelihood that all stakeholders will continue to show an interest in the project’s initiatives after completion. All but one of the Lebanon projects that were evaluated for sustainability received favorable ratings in the sociopolitical dimension. With the exception of Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agro-Biodiversity of the Fertile Crescent, all of the evaluated projects acknowledged that Lebanon had experienced periods of instability

prior to project implementation. The projects differed in terms of the basis for the evaluations of sociopolitical sustainability. For example, documents for the cedar forests project noted “no risks of any social or political changes that could jeopardize the sustenance of the project” (Asmar, 2008, p. 18) because of strong stakeholder commitments to continuing the project’s benefits. Similarly, sociopolitical sustainability in the wetland and coastal ecosystems project was linked to a “change in attitudes and to modified approaches to resource management in coastal and wetland areas” (GEF, 2007, p. 3), while the project on medicinal and aromatic plants production linked sociopolitical sustainability to the “empowerment of local communities” (Rijal, 2014, p. 38). Other projects, however, linked the instability in Lebanon and the region directly with risks to sociopolitical sustainability. For instance, the sociopolitical sustainability of the woodland resources project was rated unfavorably because instability posed a “threat to sustainability of project outcomes, as it leads to changes in government at both the national and local level, jeopardizing commitments made to the project’s objective” (GEF IEO, 2016c, p. 6). As it relates to GEF-funded projects, sociopolitical sustainability is associated with a broad array of factors, of which the broader conflict context is only one part.

The selected Lebanon projects generally performed well in terms of institutional and environmental sustainability. The institutional dimension of sustainability measures how well projects developed the institutional capacity necessary to sustain the project. Environmental sustainability refers to a project’s contributions to sustaining environmental benefits. Conflict was not mentioned in any of the project institutional and environmental sustainability evaluations. Rather, institutional sustainability was linked to the degree of capacity building and development of institutional frameworks to support the accomplishment of project objectives (see GEF IEO, 2016a, 2016c). Environmental sustainability was linked to the level of risk that the project’s activities posed to the environment, with most of the projects posing little to no risk (Rijal, 2014).

The analysis of the Balkans projects did not break out sustainability along the four categories. Of projects receiving sustainability scores, five scored favorably, but three that focused on strengthening protected area systems in the region did not. Sustainability was deemed financially unlikely for a Montenegro project because local institutions had not designated funds for its continuation (GEF IEO, 2016b). For the other two projects, sustainability was considered unlikely because of sociopolitical factors. For a Serbian project, both the lack of local ownership and the institutional and political upheaval at the time worked against the project’s long-term sustainability (GEF IEO, 2016c). Another project in Montenegro did not attain institutional ownership; its focus on biodiversity was not a government priority at that time. The project failed to garner significant continued support from stakeholders because they had no external assistance (Kasperek & Katnić, 2015). In contrast, the Forest and Mountain Protected Areas Project also focused on biodiversity and protected areas, yet its sustainability was rated highly, likely because the Bosnia and Herzegovina government had a strong commitment to the project and expressed interest in continuing project activities. Local stakeholders and

donors were also committed to supporting that project's biodiversity conservation efforts (GEF, 2006). The DBSB Water Quality Protection Project also exhibited likely sustainability, promoting the joint Bosnian-Croatian working group that continued to collaborate with institutions in Serbia and Montenegro even after project completion (GEF, 2018).

As with other GEF projects, project success and sustainability among the Balkans projects correlated with an understanding of the conflict and the involvement of local institutions and stakeholders. Each of the projects selected for review thoroughly considered the political context and often the conflict context in preliminary and concluding project documents. Those executed on a regional or global scale had less conflict sensitivity specific to the Balkans. The ongoing project Enhancing Regional Climate Change Adaptation in the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas was the only project to include fewer than 20 conflict-related terms in its documents. Documents for the Mediterranean Sea Programme: Enhancing Environmental Security included several conflict-related words, but most focused on other countries involved in the ongoing program (GEF, 2016a). In an earlier iteration from 2008 to 2015, the MedPartnership project that also supported the Mediterranean Sea Programme Action Plan (MAP) itself faced conflict- and institution-related obstacles to implementation, and the need for conflict mitigation was noted in its draft evaluation report (UNEP, 2016). However, the Balkans projects showed a thorough understanding of their locations, including sensitivity to conflict and associated risks.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Projects in Lebanon***

In terms of the four evaluation criteria, the studied Lebanon projects generally performed well in relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency and received more mixed results in their sustainability ratings. Conflict was only mentioned as affecting project outcomes a few times across all four evaluation criteria. Most often, conflict was mentioned as negatively affecting a project's financial sustainability and its effectiveness. When conflict was mentioned in the evaluations, it was usually linked to only one evaluation criterion. This suggests that the conflict context interacts differently with each criterion. For example, the outbreak of conflict during the woodland resources project negatively affected its effectiveness because of the presence of cluster bombs that disrupted project implementation; however, the project was still successful in building institutional capacity and a strong sense of ownership within the country (GEF IEO, 2016c), indicating that conflict does not affect a project in an all-or-nothing way.

The selected projects were affected by different types of conflict. Lebanon has seen periods of violent conflict (such as the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War), but it has not witnessed widespread violent conflict since the end of its civil war in 1990. Long-term political instability characterized by social unrest and sectarian conflict has dominated the Lebanese landscape. Therefore, it is important to distinguish

between the types of conflict that affected projects and how resilient the projects were to this type of conflict.

The two main types of conflict that affected GEF projects in Lebanon were violent conflict and social conflict. Operating during 2006, the cedar forests project was the only one of the nine studied in depth to have been directly affected by violent conflict, halting project activities between July and September 2006. Analysis of documents and interviews with project staff members revealed that two other projects were affected by the consequences of violent conflict; for both, unexploded bombs posed a security threat that was overcome through a combination of pre-implementation risk assessment and adaptive management strategies that emphasized flexibility in the choice of project sites. Social conflict was also mentioned as impacting projects, with the societal pressures caused by the Syrian refugee crisis noted as a risk to the sustainability of the woodland resources project. More recently, large-scale protests in Lebanon were noted as hindering some project activities in Mainstreaming Conservation of Migratory Soaring Birds into Key Productive Sectors along the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway, with a BirdLife International staff member reporting in 2020 that road closures forced on-the-ground activities to shift direction. The same interviewee also noted that recent economic hardships caused a change in Lebanese bank policies that made project partners unable to access their accounts, endangering the project until emergency funding was secured. All interviewees recognized the risks posed by the sectarianism that is prevalent in Lebanon, and all stated that projects were able to mitigate these risks by avoiding contentious issues such as land ownership and by carefully selecting project sites to maximize sectoral representation.

The in-depth analysis of selected GEF projects in Lebanon demonstrated the variable risk that conflict (in its different forms) posed to the projects. Some project evaluations did not mention conflict or its associated risks; others directly linked conflict with negative implications on project effectiveness and sustainability. From this analysis, several key findings emerge. First, conflict affected GEF projects in different ways, suggesting that conflict dynamics and GEF projects operate in context-specific environments and that the interactions between the two need to be evaluated on an individual basis. Different projects identified different risks, even when they were implemented in similar time periods. Second, the type of conflict affecting GEF projects in Lebanon varied, with violent conflict and nonviolent forms of conflict such as social unrest having markedly different impacts. Projects were found to be more resilient to risks stemming from nonviolent conflict than from violent conflict. Third, adaptive management strategies such as flexibility in site selection and careful consideration of Lebanon's sectoral context enabled projects to be more successful in achieving their outcomes.

### ***Projects in the Balkans***

The selected projects in Balkan countries represent a diversity of focal areas and locations, with both regional and country-specific projects significantly affected by the 1990s wars.

### ***Enhanced Cooperation***

One key theme that emerged from the in-depth review is that GEF-funded projects in the Balkans furthered cooperation among Balkan countries.

The project Technology Transfer for Climate Resilient Flood Management in the Vrbas River Basin required cooperation and communication between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The war in the 1990s destroyed the Vrbas River Basin's flood prevention infrastructure, and this project was an opportunity for the previously warring sides to cooperate and enhance technology for a climate-resilient flood prevention system.

Cooperation was also a focus of the DBSB Water Quality Protection Project, which fostered "transboundary cooperation and building trust between states (Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia), helping to unlock a complex and long-lasting marine resource and/or freshwater-use conflicts," according to the project's implementation completion and results report (World Bank, 2018, p. 16).

The goals of the West Balkans Drina River Basin Management Project are "to enhance multi-state cooperation to balance conflicting water uses in transboundary Drina waters while mainstreaming climate adaptation measures [and] develop a shared vision and technical cooperation framework" (GEF, 2014, p. 8). Country officials interviewed in 2019 said that they do not perceive past conflict to be a risk to this project's success. One Serb official expressed belief that the project has "improved regional relations and cooperation."

### ***Economic Problems Caused by Previous Conflict***

Many Balkan nations are still recovering from the economic impact of the 1990s wars, which has had repercussions for GEF-supported projects. Once conflict ceased, countries focused on development, sidelining environmental investment. A World Bank official said in a 2019 interview that the conflict had such a severe economic impact that the level of cooperation on environmental projects has depended on which country would receive the most funding.

One project document noted that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the war caused \$2 billion in damages to the forest sector (World Bank, 2008). Postwar economic policies promoted rapid development by exploiting natural resources, according to the project appraisal document, and many seminatural landscapes were abandoned. The implementation completion and results report for the Drina River basin management project noted that "the economy of many communities in the [Drina basin] tends to be depressed due to difficult transportation links, comparatively long distances to markets, and the perilous state of many of the old, local industries and infrastructure" (World Bank, 2021, p. 1).

### ***Addressing Communications Problems***

When the newly emerged post-conflict states were reorganized, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and Brcko District. Each has its own ministries and forms of government,



making project implementation difficult because all parties must be consulted. Projects create opportunities for environmental ministries and institutions to work together, such as in the Technology Transfer for Climate Resilient Flood Management in the Vrbas River Basin project. A Bosnian representative for the Agency for the Sava River said in a 2019 interview, “When we all have the same problem, we unite. We are all colleagues.” GEF projects can help fill communications gaps between ministries in Bosnia and Herzegovina and regionally.

In a 2019 interview on conflict sensitivity related to the Drina River basin, a representative from the Serbian Republic Directorate for Water noted that “conflict was not considered a risk, but lack of information was.” Information sharing between nations can be a problem. A lack of trust among formerly warring groups impedes information sharing and project success in the region. However, since the end of the wars, the Balkan nations have made significant progress in building trust through organizations, such as the Sava River Commission, and other environmental projects that require cooperation and communication across jurisdictional boundaries.

### ***Other Outcomes***

Many Balkans projects addressed regional issues caused by past conflict or yielded benefits to ameliorate regional difficulties. Projects have increased cooperation, communications, and economic growth, with many improving all three. Projects encouraged cooperation on several levels, such as between the Federation of Bosnia and the Republika Srpska in improving resilient flood-prevention technology in Bosnia and Herzegovina; promoting transboundary cooperation for improving water quality; addressing conflicting water use and enhancing climate mitigation strategies; and building ethnic group cooperation in meeting Macedonia’s electric needs.

Projects providing economic benefits included the Forest and Mountain Protected Areas Project, which worked to conserve biodiversity and natural resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the conflict’s expensive environmental damage; the Drina River Basin project, in which resolution of water-use conflicts would improve transportation and infrastructure and consequently reap economic benefits; and the project to build mini-hydropower plants that generate income for the towns involved.

Improved communications go hand in hand with cooperation. Of the studied Balkans projects, one encouraged communication between the Federation of Bosnia and the Republika Srpska around a shared goal of climate resilient flood management. Another required communication and trust building from several states and promoted information sharing among them. And a third strengthened a joint Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatian working group, which collaborated with institutions in Serbia and Montenegro.

The role of the World Bank as one of the agencies on many GEF Balkans projects increased the project documents’ attention to the previous conflict, due to the World Bank’s use of risk analysis for all projects, according to a 2020 interview with a representative of the organization. The risk analysis addresses conflict, fragility,

political risk, and weak governance among the risks in their Balkans projects. The World Bank risk assessment does not have a tool to analyze conflict specifically.

Stakeholders concurred that the COVID-19 pandemic created difficulties for ongoing projects because of the challenges of transferring to online platforms and achieving regional cooperation. Some projects are difficult to continue, such as the development of a hydraulic model due to border closures, according to a 2020 interview with a Montenegrin advisor to the Directorate for Water Management.

This case analysis found that conflict sensitivity and context comprehension correlate with success in the Balkans projects. When projects take conflict into account, they can mitigate risks, affect cooperation with local governments and institutions, and increase opportunities to overcome conflict-caused obstacles in the region, such as lack of cooperation, economic difficulties, and poor communication.

## Note

1 Two selected projects in the latter two categories were not complete and, therefore, did not have terminal evaluation scores.

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