



LESSONS LEARNED BRIEF | YEAR 2

Designing for Cross-Partner Dependencies in PFPs Under Public Grant Conditions

GEF-7 Enduring Earth Project



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The GEF-7 Enduring Earth Project

The GEF-7 Enduring Earth Project works with governments and local partners to design and advance Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiatives that secure durable financing and governance for protected and conserved areas at scale.

Funded by the Global Environment Facility, the project catalyses PFP initiatives in Gabon and Namibia and supports the design of a multi-country Durable Finance Mechanism in the Eastern Tropical Pacific region, while strengthening enabling conditions and learning to scale the PFP approach.

Where the Lessons Come From

Drawn from the annual Adaptive Management Workshops held with project Executing Agencies and partners this brief presents the central lessons emerging from Year 2 (January–December 2025) of the GEF-7 Enduring Earth Project. In Year 2, workshops were held in Gabon, Eastern Tropical Pacific and globally with the Enduring Earth Hub.

These workshops are designed to review implementation constraints and identify corrective actions that directly inform the design of the following year's Annual Work Plan.

In Year 2, workshops focused on how managing cross-partner dependencies more effectively can unlock durable results.

Four Lessons on Designing for Cross-Partner Dependencies

Project Finance for Permanence models are co-created with multiple stewards – national governments, conservation trust funds, community-based organisations, technical partners, and funders. When many actors are involved, delivery depends on alignment, timely approvals, and coordinated action across institutions with different mandates and rhythms.

Across Year 2, a shared reality emerged: political cycles brought leadership changes, project activity partners' priorities shifted, and coordination timelines stretched beyond what annual plans anticipated. Under public grant conditions, agencies remain accountable to fixed targets - yet reaching them depends on decisions, approvals, and timelines they do not fully control.

This brief captures lessons from the GEF-7 Enduring Earth project on managing these dependencies to achieve durable solutions – and the unique challenge of doing so within the rigidity of public grants:

1

Design for disruption

2

Adaptive management
still needs systems

3

Build in flexibility

4

Formalise,
don't assume

1

LESSON

Design for Disruption

In government-led PFPs, political cycles and leadership changes are inevitable, disrupting continuity and institutional memory. For example, in Year 2, the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP) PFP, as a multi-jurisdiction initiative, faced four asynchronous government changes. Key lessons from this experience include the importance of designing resilient collaboration systems, managing transitions proactively, and clearly communicating these actions to donors in publicly funded grant programmes.

ACTION POINTS

- Ground key relationships in institutional roles that outlast political transitions (e.g. GEF Operational Focal Points, Steering Committees)
- Establish shared repositories and systematic records of key decisions and shared repositories
- Anticipate several political scenarios and develop engagement strategies with built-in flexibility to respond.
- Under public grant conditions, embedding these mitigation measures visibly within project workplans signals to donors both the anticipated disruptions and the proactive steps being taken by the executing agency

2

LESSON

Adaptive Management Still Needs Systems

The importance of adaptive management is broadly acknowledged, especially within multi-partner programmes where shifting external conditions drive changes in each organisation's priorities. Without structured mechanisms to detect and address such shifts, however, adaptation tends to be reactive rather than deliberate. For example, the Enduring Earth Hub, which leads the project's global knowledge management, identified shifting learning and evidence needs among stakeholders (i.e. conservation trust funds) early in the year by embedding structured reviews into regular partner engagement processes.

ACTION POINTS

- Define clear decision points during the year where plans, activities, and budgets can be formally reviewed and adjusted with partners
- For public grants, strict compliance rules on making changes may be in place. Agree in advance with donors on the latest point at which adaptations can be made without disrupting compliance or delivery

3

LESSON

Build in Flexibility

In publicly funded grant projects, progress is monitored against established annual targets and plans. However, the involvement of multiple partners in co-design and coordination often results in extended timelines and unexpected delays due to partner availability and other constraints. For instance, the Gabon and Namibia PFP planning processes, which were scheduled to complete in Year 2, were extended to ensure thorough conversations and negotiations with partners.

ACTION POINTS

- Build in time in your workplans for time required for consensus-building, multi-partner reviews and approvals
- On setting targets, build in flexibility by measuring the quality of progress rather than simple task completion. For example, rather than counting whether the agreement has been signed, measure the level of stakeholder confidence or satisfaction in the progress

4

LESSON

Formalise, Don't Assume

Complex partnership structures can expose Executing Agencies to accountability risks for deliverables they do not fully control - particularly when roles are not clearly defined. In Gabon, for example, the Conservation Trust Fund serves as the Executing Agency for the project, yet the government is the technical partner responsible for the quality and timely delivery of activities.

ACTION POINTS

- Formalise roles and responsibilities in agreements
- Include dispute resolution mechanisms to strengthen oversight and collaboration
- Designate an activity lead from each implementing partner in the Annual Work Plan

KEY TAKEAWAY

Key Takeaway for PFP Implementers

In PFP delivery, cross-partner dependency is not a risk to be eliminated - it is a structural reality to be managed.

Successful implementation depends on recognising this reality early and designing processes, timelines, and governance structures accordingly.

Learning comes not from avoiding dependency, but from managing it deliberately.

The GEF-7 Enduring Earth project is applying these lessons and tracking the outlined action points using an Adaptive Action Tracker to strengthen delivery in Year 3.



www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/protect-water-and-land/gef-enduring-earth