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35<sup>th</sup> LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting  
February 8, 2024  
Washington D.C., USA

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE INCLUSIVE GEF ASSEMBLY CHALLENGE PROGRAM  
UNDER THE SPECIAL CLIMATE CHANGE FUND (SCCF)  
AND  
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FUND (LDCF)**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program (henceforth referred to as “The Program”) was presented at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) / Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) Council meeting on December 2, 2022 based on the Information Document Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program.<sup>1</sup> The LDCF/SCCF Council welcomed the initiative in the lead up to the Seventh GEF Assembly and expressed their appreciation and support.<sup>2</sup>
2. The aim of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program is to recognize and support the vital role being played by community based/civil society organizations in delivering inclusive benefits for people and ecosystems; and advance whole-of-society approaches by providing resources and knowledge to scale up their initiatives. The Program builds on the successful Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation supported by the LDCF and SCCF.
3. The Program adopts a three-pronged approach to meet its objective:
  - (a) Global recognition: Select a cohort of high impact, inclusive initiatives through a process outlined in the next section and facilitate their representatives to attend the GEF Assembly to share their work under a flagship high-level event and build networks.
  - (b) Implementation support: Provide catalytic grant financing to the winning initiatives up to \$100,000 to support scaling up their action and strengthening inclusion and innovation in their project activities.
  - (c) Partnership, knowledge creation and peer-learning: Build a knowledge and partnership platform to facilitate cross learning, generate knowledge from grassroots action and strengthen capacity of the winning institutions. It will facilitate South-South exchange and lead to development of a network of community-based actors which can catalyze more action for inclusive global environmental benefits.
4. The Program involves engagement of the broader GEF Partnership, notably the GEF Constituencies, Science and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), member countries, GEF operational focal points (OFPs), GEF agencies, Civil Society (CSO) Network, Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG), and other stakeholders at various stages to implement the program.
5. Based on the above, on April 28, 2023, the GEF Secretariat announced a Call for Submissions to select winners of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program. By May 29, 2023, 587 submissions were received from across all regions, and by mid-July, 23 initiatives were selected after a rigorous and inclusive selection process involving GEF Constituencies and a selection committee. Winning organizations were then invited to attend the Seventh GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada which took place during August 22-26, 2023. Thirteen

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<sup>1</sup> GEF, 2022, [Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program](#), GEF/LDCF.SCCF.33/Inf.04.

<sup>2</sup> GEF, 2022, [Highlights of the Council's discussions](#), GEF/LDCF.SCCF.33/Highlights.

representatives participated in the Assembly in person and were recognized during a high-level event with the participation of the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) at Global Affairs Canada, the STAP Chair, and the GEF CEO and Chairperson. The event was webcasted, which enabled other winners to participate virtually. More details can be found on the [Announcement at the Seventh GEF Assembly](#) section of this document.

6. An essential aspect of the program is to develop two medium-sized projects (MSPs) to support the winners in LDCs and non-LDCs through LDCF and SCCF to deliver the program’s approach as outlined in the paragraph three above.

7. This information document presents an update on progress to date of the Program, including an analysis of submissions and next steps.

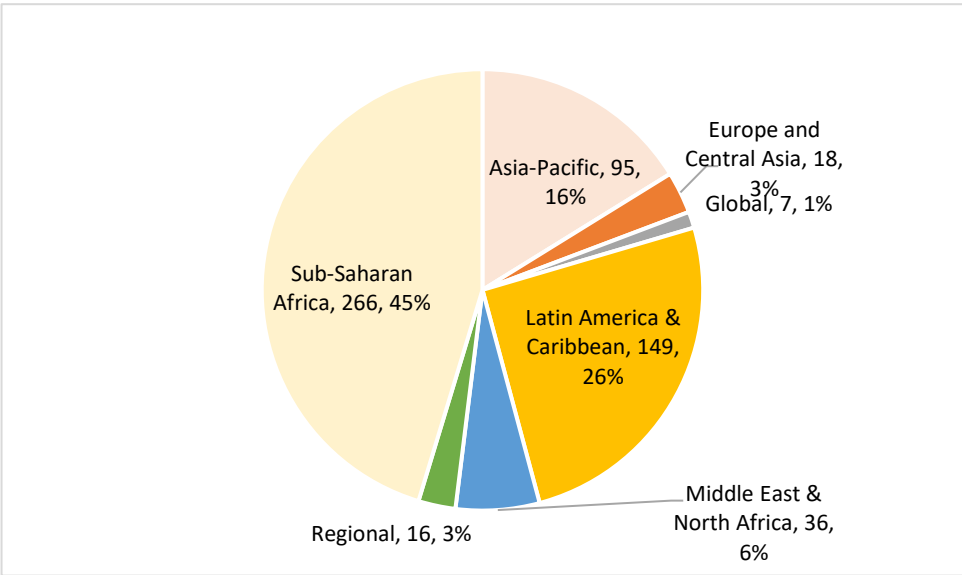
**OVERVIEW OF ALL SUBMISSIONS**

8. In April 2023, the GEF Secretariat announced a call for submission of initiatives to select winners of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program with a deadline of end of May. By the deadline, 587 submissions were received from various regions globally.

9. Of the 587 submissions, the vast majority were grassroots CSOs/NGOs which was the intended outcome of this program. Submissions received ranged from eligible developing countries in different regions and sought to engage a variety of groups and organizations. These included local communities, LGBTQ2S+, civil society, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and people living with disabilities.

10. The distribution of 587 submissions is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Regional Distribution of All Submissions**



## REVIEW AND SELECTION OF INITIATIVES

11. To make the program inclusive, the GEF Secretariat followed an inclusive process to engage key stakeholders for the selection of winners of the program.
12. A diverse selection committee was constituted with representatives from the GEF CSO Network, IPAG, youth group, the STAP, along with GEF gender and civil society focal points.
13. The GEF Constituencies were consulted for their nomination of the initiatives and at the final stage for their consent on the finalized winners of the program.
14. The engagement of stakeholders followed a step-by-step process which is summarized below:
  - (a) Out of 587 submissions, 202 submissions were longlisted by the GEF Secretariat based on the basic eligibility criteria – particularly to ensure initiatives were from eligible organizations and countries, they were ongoing as opposed to unproven new concepts, and that they were relevant to GEF objectives.
  - (b) The 202 longlisted submissions were then sorted by GEF Constituencies and further analyzed to ensure the sectors and target beneficiary group(s) were accurately identified. All relevant GEF Constituencies were then contacted by the GEF Secretariat, which shared the longlist and a scoring matrix to request the GEF Constituencies to make their nominations.
  - (c) 71 submissions were then shortlisted based on the recommendations by Constituencies. Some Constituencies delegated this shortlisting to the GEF Secretariat.
15. These 71 submissions were then reviewed by the Selection Committee for final selection. Following criteria were considered by the Committee:
  - (a) Whether the initiative directly addressed global environmental and climate change issues and was aligned with GEF’s objectives;
  - (b) Initiative’s impact and extent of engagement of groups or organizations including local communities, LGBTQ2S+, civil society, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and people living with disabilities;
  - (c) Level of innovation e.g., implementation model, technology, partnership, and business model;
  - (d) Sustainability of the initiative and potential of scaling up; and
  - (e) Clarity, quality, and feasibility of the proposed activities and budget.
16. In addition to the above-noted criteria, the committee also considered regional and sectoral distribution in the selection process. Further, initiatives from diverse set of proponents

were also considered for example, initiatives that were either led or targeted women and girls, youth, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+, etc.

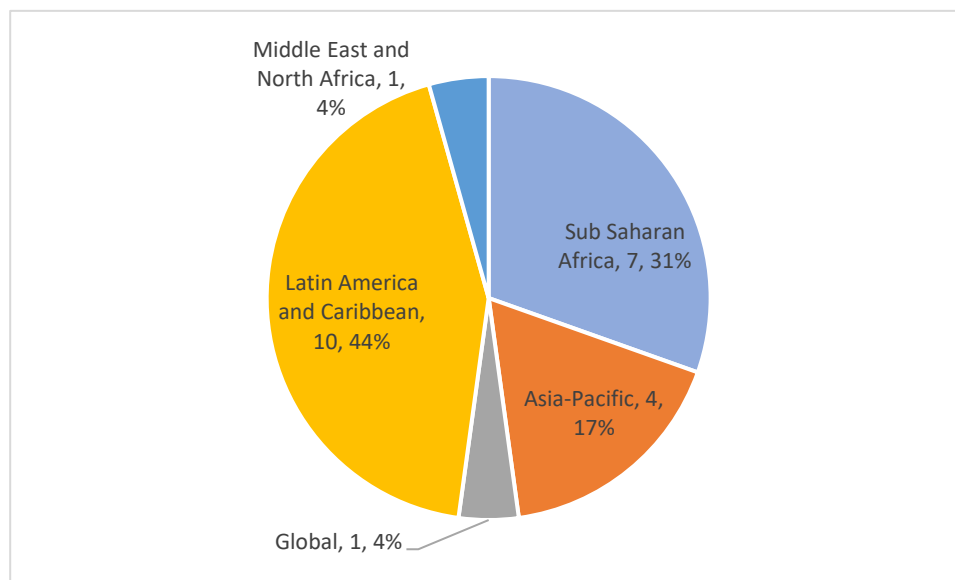
17. The GEF Secretariat convened a meeting in July 2022 of the Selection Committee for a moderation meeting to arrive at a consensus on the final list of winners. The meeting was conducted virtually and chaired by the LDCF/SCCF Manager. All committee members participated in the meeting.

18. The selection committee assessed and recommended 23 initiatives as the winners of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program. The recommended initiatives were then sent to the GEF CEO and Chairperson who supported the recommendation.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE 23 WINNING INITIATIVES

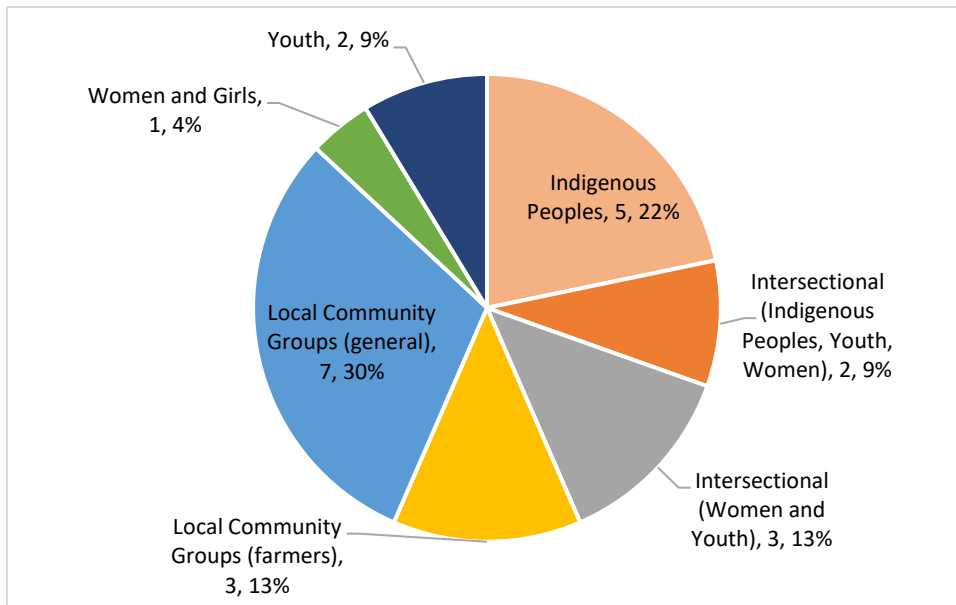
19. Initiatives across all regions were selected, with a greater percentage from Latin American and Caribbean (LAC), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), along with one global initiative (Figure 2). Among these, seven (30%) are in Least Developed Countries and three (13%) are in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This is broadly proportional with the number of submissions.

**Figure 2: Regional Distribution of 23 Selected Initiatives**



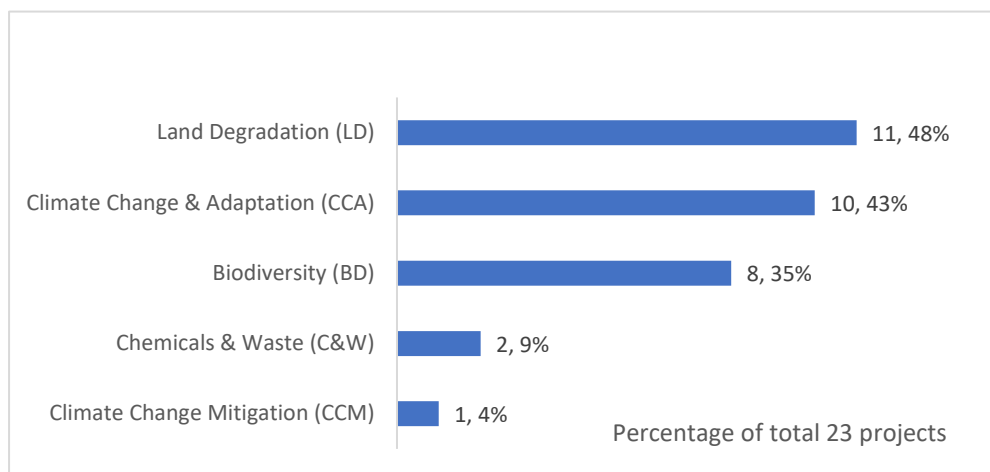
20. Given the emphasis on inclusion to advance environmental benefits, all the initiatives selected had an intersectional lens when it came to the communities benefited and engaged. The majority targeted various local community groups, followed by indigenous peoples, and women and youth. Figure 3 shows the distribution of initiatives as per their primary targeted beneficiaries.

**Figure 3: Distribution of Selected Initiatives across Targeted Beneficiaries**



21. Several initiatives were cross-cutting and as a result, addressed more than one environmental challenge, hence the higher number count (Figure 4). Addressing Land Degradation has the highest percentage, followed closely by Climate Change Adaptation, Biodiversity, Chemicals and Waste, and Climate Change Mitigation.

**Figure 4: Sectoral Distribution of 23 Selected Initiatives**



22. A summary of the 23 initiatives selected is provided in [Annex 1](#).

## **ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE SEVENTH GEF ASSEMBLY**

23. A high-level event was organized on Day 2, or August 23, 2023, of the Seventh GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada to announce the winners and recognize them for their exemplary work in delivering climate adaptation and environmental benefits in an inclusive manner.
24. Inclusion was one of the key themes of the Seventh GEF Assembly and this program was one of the flagships events given that it emphasized the need to support inclusive spaces for ideas and action, notably by engaging with civil society and community-based actors for transformative impacts at the local level.
25. All the winners of the Program were invited to attend the GEF Assembly to engage with the broader GEF partnership and participate at this high-level announcement event. 13 winners were able to participate in person with travel and accommodation support provided by the GEF Secretariat.
26. At the high-level event, a vibrant discussion took place that included an announcement of the winners by Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) at Global Affairs Canada, with a video featuring all the winning initiatives. All representatives of the winning initiatives present at the Assembly were invited onstage to share their views and present their work briefly.
27. The Manager of the LDCF/SCCF moderated a panel of key stakeholders and experts to discuss the importance of inclusion and role of civil society organizations in advancing GEF's vision. The panel featured Assistant Deputy Minister at Global Affairs Canada, the Chair of STAP, the GEF Operational Focal Point (OFP) for St. Kitts and Nevis and outgoing GEF Council member for the Caribbean constituency, along with two winners of the Inclusive Change Program.
28. The session ended with concluding remarks from the GEF CEO, who emphasized to the audience the significance of inclusion to advance environmental benefits.
29. The event was well-received and set a positive tone of meaningful engagement and inclusion for the remainder of the Assembly.
30. As the GEF Assembly is one of the largest gatherings of key GEF stakeholders in the world, this provided a platform for the selected proponents to showcase their innovation and leadership.
31. The winners onsite were introduced to their respective GEF Operational Focal Points (OFPs) and they were also provided the opportunity to share their views during the roundtable discussions – both as participants and panelists alike.



**Figure 5: The Winners Present Onsite alongside the GEF CEO and Members of the GEF Secretariat**



**Figure 6: Panel Discussion during the Announcement of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program**



## **STATUS UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS**

32. All the winners selected through the initiative will be provided up to \$100,000 grant to advance their work at the grassroots level with added innovation and impact. To facilitate this, the GEF Secretariat identified UNIDO as the GEF Agency to formulate two medium-sized projects (MSPs) which will enable funding the initiatives and to create a global platform to facilitate cross learning and knowledge generation.

33. At the time of this report, all selected initiatives are connected to the implementing agency (UNIDO) and the country Operational Focal Points, to facilitate the development of MSPs and prepare necessary documents for submission to the GEF Secretariat for final approval. These MSPs will be developed using one-step MSP approval process following GEF's policies and guidelines. The expected timeline for this to be completed is March 2024, subject to endorsement by the respective country OFPs of the winning initiatives.

34. Following the selection of the winners and identification of the GEF Agency UNIDO, two initial virtual workshops for 23 winners were organized by UNIDO and the GEF Secretariat on September 21, 2023 to accommodate the different time zones of winners. In the workshop, an overview of the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program was explained to winners, including the program objective, structure, and timeline to finalize the CEO endorsement document package.

35. In terms of the MSPs development, all winners have provided necessary information to UNIDO for including in the project design. The first draft design of both MSPs is also prepared. Request for letters of endorsement (LOEs) have been sent to all the 21 OFPs. Two initiatives are global in nature and thus do not require specific country OFP endorsements. As of January 4, 2024, LOEs have been received from 14 OFPs. Once all the LOEs are received, the GEF Agency will submit the projects through the GEF portal.

**ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES SELECTED AS PART OF THE INCLUSIVE GEF ASSEMBLY CHALLENGE PROGRAM**

Organization	Objectives	Country
Adoptacoastline	<p>Title: Women and Girls Coastal Stewardship and Wellness Initiative.</p> <p>Goal: To partner with four women and girl specific sports, youth, or community groups to adopt a coastline to steward for one year in Antigua and Barbuda and expand into neighboring territories St Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and the Grenadines.</p>	Antigua and Barbuda
Belize Wildlife & Referral Clinic (BWRC)	<p>Title: Wildlife Ambassador Program – One Health Awareness, Wildlife Conflict and Crime Prevention and Mitigation with Wildlife Emergency Response.</p> <p>Goal: To reduce risk of zoonosis while mitigating &amp; preventing biodiversity loss from Human Wildlife Conflict &amp; Illegal Wildlife Traffic through improved awareness, training and engagement with communities, governments, and other stakeholders.</p>	Belize
Green Hope Foundation	<p>Title: Providing water security to indigenous communities in the Pacific islands of Kiribati using innovative clean technology.</p> <p>Goal: to provide water security to the Indigenous communities in Kiribati, through the implementation of innovative and easily scalable clean technology solutions, through inclusive on-the-ground actions, thereby improving their socio-economic conditions.</p>	Kiribati
Fondation pour la Protection de la Biodiversité Marine (FoProBiM)	<p>Title: Implementation of Nature-based Solutions for the rehabilitation, improved management, and protection of Marine Protected Areas in Haiti.</p> <p>Goal: Within a year of implementation through NbS by local communities, advance the protection and management of coastal and marine natural resources, and the economic resilience of coastal communities to deal with climate change issues.</p>	Haiti
Hand2Earth Inc (non-profit)	<p>Title: Vetiver Systems Technology Applications for Food Security through Sustainable Recovery and Natural Hazard risk management of farmlands occupied by Indigenous peoples in St. Vincent’s Red and Orange Zones.</p> <p>Goal: Improve the livelihoods of rural farmers through farmland soil regeneration by engendering environmental and community resilience, restoration of agro-ecological heritage, climate change mitigation and sustainable recovery and protection of farmlands from the impact of natural disasters in St Vincent’s indigenous communities.</p>	St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Organization	Objectives	Country
The Kenyan Youth Biodiversity Network (KYBN)	<p>Title: Mangroves and Inland Wetlands Restoration to advance Regional Climate Adaptation and Resilience [via regional cooperation to advance] implementation Target 8 of the CBD Kunming-Montreal Framework.</p> <p>Goal: Promote climate adaptation and resilience at community level in six African countries through enhanced utilization of mangrove ecosystems and terrestrial wetlands as natural solutions to climate change. Local CSOs are to work closely with respective governments to ensure the role of mangrove ecosystems and wetlands as natural carbon sinks, and as strategic investments, is underlined in revised National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPs) and implementation plans, to help meet the 2030 global climate target and Target 8 of the Kunming-Montreal Framework.</p>	Africa
The Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA)	<p>Title: Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project - Urban Greening Component #FreetownTheTreeTownCampaign</p> <p>Goal: To increase the capital city's green space and vegetation cover with the planting of Indigenous trees and shrubs, as nature-based solutions to tackle environmental degradation in Freetown, through partnerships with local communities, and using innovative, disruptive, low-cost digital technology for tree-tracking, and creating green jobs, especially for women and youth.</p>	Sierra Leone
JADD MADAGASCAR (Jeunes Actifs pour le Développement Durable or Actives Young for Sustainable Development Madagascar)	<p>Title: Promoting inclusive led approaches to Nature-based Solutions Initiatives within the territories and areas conserved by local communities in Madagascar.</p> <p>Goal: Engage and empower young people, women and people with disabilities from local communities through the promotion of local actions focused on NbS approaches to preserve ecosystems and strengthen resilience. Promoting entrepreneurship, advocacy, partnerships with universities/CSOs to carry out research.</p>	Madagascar
Base Net	<p>Title: Promoting Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Energy (Pro-CCASE) in Juba and Magwi Counties South Sudan.</p> <p>Goal: Advance gender-responsive climate change adaptation and resilience among vulnerable rural and marginalised groups supporting food, income and energy security - via increase seedlings, cooking stoves, advocacy capacity building, beekeeping, among others.</p>	South Sudan
U-recycle Initiative Africa	<p>Title: PlasticWize Fellowship by U-recycle Initiative Africa (Scale Up).</p> <p>Goal: Scale up fellowship - a transformative leadership development programme tackling marine plastic pollution by empowering young women to lead and influence behavior change across tertiary institutions</p>	Nigeria

Organization	Objectives	Country
	in Nigeria. The PlasticWize Fellowship multifaceted structure comprises over ten strategies geared towards tackling plastic pollution holistically.	
Justdiggitt	<p>Title: Restoring Rangelands in Kenya’s Southern Rift Valley.</p> <p>Goal: Collaborate with Maasai communities and the South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO) to restore degraded rangelands. Through water harvesting interventions, women-led grass seed banks (GSBs), good governance and community engagement, the project aims to enhance ecosystem resilience, improve livelihoods, and conserve biodiversity in the region.</p>	Kenya
Kesho Trust (KT)	<p>Title and Goal: Increase acceptance and use of Indigenous Maasai traditional knowledge towards management of community land and resources for enhanced resilience to climate change in the Ngorongoro and Kilindi Districts, northern Tanzania.</p>	Tanzania
The Rutu Foundation	<p>Title: “Pass it on!” Initiative. The Indigenous-Led Education Global Network as Catalyst of Community Resilience and Youth Empowerment Towards Climate Adaptive Natural Resources Management.</p> <p>Goal: Boost local knowledge transfer through networking, a small grants fund and youth fellowships by enabling traditional knowledge/sharing, donor engagement and small grants, Indigenous fellowships, among others.</p>	Global (Philippines, Thailand, Kenya, Uganda, India, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru and Ecuador)
Les Amis de CAPTE Tunisie (LACT)	<p>Title: Scaling up the C6 Initiative Corridor Carob tree CAPTE Carbone Climate Change A Nature based Solutions and agriculture climate change Initiative.</p> <p>Goal: Improve the resilience and strengthen the adaptation of Tunisia's agricultural sector to climate change by introducing and promoting agroforestry cultivation of the carob tree and deploying NbS.</p>	Tunisia
CELCCAR	<p>Title and Goal: Climate adaptive management and beekeeping management in agroforestry systems of coffee production to provide additional income to peasant communities led by women in the municipality of Caranavi.</p>	Bolivia
Humy	<p>Title: Community-based reforestation in the Andes Mountains of Colombia with the Pasto Indigenous communities in Nariño, through an innovative and replicable model.</p> <p>Goal: Reforest and limit the anthropic pressure on the alto-andine forests in order to preserve the páramos ecosystem and the water resource, with the Pasto Indigenous communities.</p>	Colombia

Organization	Objectives	Country
Forever Costa Rica (FCR)	<p>Title: Rural youth, entrepreneurship and climate-smart conservation in La Cruz, Costa Rica.</p> <p>Goal: Build a rural network of green and blue youth entrepreneurs (ages 17-25) in La Cruz. The network will focus on strengthening entrepreneurial skills of 30 young adults to create climate smart business ventures that sustainably use ecosystem-based services around marine and terrestrial protected areas.</p>	Costa Rica
AIDER	<p>Title and Goal: Alliance for Indigenous forests in the Peruvian Amazon "Nii Kaniti": inclusive cooperation for indigenous communities' empowerment for sustainable forest management. Nii Kaniti means "Forest and Development" in Indigenous languages.</p>	Peru
FOREVER LUNG Foundation	<p>Title and Goal: Socioeconomic and organizational strengthening of Tagua-collecting communities in Ecuador for the conservation and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity associated with these species. [Particular focus also given to interventions that are] gender sensitive and tap into ancestral knowledge.</p>	Ecuador
Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda	<p>Title: Querétaro Low Emissions Seal, a strategy for landscape regeneration.</p> <p>Goal: Consolidate the Querétaro Low Emissions model, which demonstrates that there are opportunities beyond markets by generating a sub-national financing mechanism that allows valuing forest and soil services in favor of landowners using a Local Protocol.</p>	Mexico
Songkhla Community Foundation (SCF)	<p>Title: Citizen science for community empowerment, climate adaptation and locally led environmental monitoring in coastal zones.</p> <p>Goal: Empower coastal communities, particularly women, youth, and vulnerable groups, to play a critical role in knowledge co-production, driving community-based climate adaptation and locally led management of coastal ecosystems and environments, and by adopting co-developed citizen science methodology and platform to promote bottom-up decision-making and planning processes.</p>	Thailand
South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE)	<p>Title: AFLOAT HEAL: Float-farming for Horticultural Entrepreneurship and Adaptive Livelihood.</p> <p>Goal: Naturalize hydroponic float-farming and integrated aquaculture as an adaptive, climate-resilient agricultural contrivance for coastal vulnerable communities of South Asia that find themselves in climate-poverty trap. The objective is to move towards sustainable livelihood, food and nutrition security and inclusive growth. The initiative leverages carbon benefits from circularity, renewable energy intervention and regenerative farming practices.</p>	India and Bangladesh

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Country</b>
Shan Shui Conservation Center (SSCC) is	<p>Title: Prototyping Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in China.</p> <p>Goal: Establish a system for recognising, reporting, and supporting OECMs implemented by non-state actors in China, contributing to the global target of having 30% of the world’s land and ocean area protected by 2030, while promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable management practices.</p>	China