

GEF Council Meeting  
November 16 – 18, 2010  
Washington D.C.

Agenda Item 16

**ENHANCING THE ENGAGEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANIZATIONS IN OPERATIONS OF THE GEF**

**Recommended Council Decision**

The Council, having considered document GEF/C.39/10/Rev.1, *Enhancing the engagement of civil society organizations in operations of the GEF*, welcomes the proposal. The Council requests the GEF Secretariat to work with countries, agencies, the GEF NGO Network and other partners to implement proposed activities through regular GEF operations.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This document provides a review of policies and actions implemented by the GEF to streamline public involvement and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) participation in the GEF funded projects. The document also provides future options for enhancing GEF's engagement with CSOs through its operations.
2. Since the inception of the Global Environment Facility, opportunities for the GEF to work together and partner with CSOs have steadily increased. Historically, CSOs have been involved with the GEF in the following fields: (a) Governance and policy formulation and development through CSO representation at consultations and Council meetings; (b) Project preparation and execution in countries; (c) Advocacy, awareness, and outreach on global environmental issues; and (d) Monitoring.
3. A comprehensive review of the Council decisions and deliberations during different events including the Fourth GEF Assembly is provided. The review highlights the progress of the partnership between the GEF and CSOs.
4. Public involvement is essential for strengthening a sense of country and local ownership in GEF projects. Thus, the document mentions the actions to this effect already approved in the GEF5 programming process as well as new ideas, including:
  - a. That the organization of stakeholder consultations be an integral part of the process of programming GEF funds and a brief Stakeholder Engagement Plan be part of the project document.;
  - b. That Operational Focal Points program at least one yearly meeting with the members of GEF NGO Network in their country to enhance cooperation.
  - c. That the publication called "A to Z Guide to the GEF for NGOs" be updated to provide information and guidance to all CSOs on GEF policies for public participation and partnership opportunities.
  - d. In order to make Council consultations with CSOs more interesting, effective and results oriented, the Secretariat in consultations with the GEF NGO Network will consider different options.
  - e. That the GEF NGO Network present a yearly report for information to the Council at its Fall session describing its overall activities, with specific sections dedicated to the work carried out by its Central Focal Point, Regional Focal Points and Indigenous Peoples' representatives indicating objectives defined and results achieved.
  - f. That Agencies share their public participation policies for dissemination through GEF.
  - g. That further work is done on Indigenous peoples and mainstreaming gender issues in GEF.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Effective public involvement at all levels of the GEF is critical to its success, as the skills, experiences, and knowledge of the community of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) plays a key role in the development of GEF policies and practices, in the formulation and implementation of sustainable GEF projects and in the maintenance of partnerships with key stakeholders.
2. Since the inception of the Global Environment Facility, opportunities for the GEF to work together and partner with CSOs have steadily increased. Historically, CSOs have been involved with the GEF in the following fields: (a) Governance and policy formulation and development through CSO representation at consultations and Council meetings; (b) Project preparation and execution in countries; (c) Advocacy, awareness, and outreach on global environmental issues; and d) Monitoring.
3. The value of having civil society contribute to GEF projects is explicitly recognized in the “Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured GEF”. Paragraph 5 of the Instrument states that: “GEF-financed projects shall provide for full disclosure of all non-confidential information, and consultation with, and participation as appropriate of, major groups and local communities throughout the project cycle.”
4. The term “civil society organization” is broad, and includes various types of organizations. Recognizing the definition of major groups agreed by Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, civil society consists of nine major groups: Non-Governmental organizations, farmers, women, the scientific and technological community, youth and children, indigenous peoples and their communities, business and industry, workers and trade unions and local authorities. In this context the basic principle, as approved by the GEF Council in 1995 (GEF/C.3/5), is that CSOs/NGOs attending / observing Council meetings are defined as “non-profit organizations whose mandate, experience, expertise and capacity are relevant to the work of the GEF.”
5. Public involvement is also essential for strengthening a sense of country and local ownership in the GEF projects. At its meeting in April 1996, the GEF Council approved a policy on public involvement in GEF-financed projects (GEF/C.7/6). The policy calls for public involvement to consist of three related, and often overlapping processes: (a) Information dissemination: the availability and distribution of timely and relevant information on GEF-financed projects; (b) Consultation: the sharing of information among governments, GEF agencies and other stakeholders; and (c) Stakeholder participation: the collaborative engagement, as appropriate, of stakeholders in the identification of project concepts and objectives, the selection of sites, the design and implementation of activities and the monitoring and evaluation of projects.
6. A record of GEF engagement with CSOs can be found in “The GEF and Civil Society Organizations: A Strategic Partnership” (May 2010); “Indigenous Communities and Biodiversity” (April 2008) and “Mainstreaming Gender at the GEF” (October 2008).

## **RECENT GEF DELIBERATIONS ON CIVIL SOCIETY**

### **November 2008 Council Decision**

7. In November 2008, the Council considered document GEF/C.34/9, *Enhancing Civil Society Engagement and Partnership with the GEF*, and welcomed the steps taken by the GEF Secretariat and the GEF NGO Network (the Network) to strengthen the GEF's partnership and engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).
8. The Council applauded the efforts of the Network in developing the Strategic Operational Plan for 2008-10, encouraged donors to support it and invited the GEF Secretariat, GEF agencies and GEF focal points to support its implementation.
9. To this effect, the Council approved reviving the Voluntary NGO Trust Fund to act as a funding mechanism to support the Network; the Council also approved the replacement of the CSO accreditation to the GEF with membership in the Network.
10. Since November 2008, the Network has worked with the Secretariat to advance these issues. It has actively worked with all GEF partners in the process of the GEF-5 Replenishment and has formally taken over the administration of membership/accreditation of CSOs in March 2010. Some progress has been made in implementing aspects of the Network Strategic and Operational Plan – but this is still constrained by inadequate resources.

### **GEF 5 Replenishment**

11. In the process of the Replenishment of GEF 5 there was considerable discussion of the important role of CSOs in working with GEF and the need to strengthen the engagement of CSOs in the GEF-5 processes and mechanisms. The Final Policy recommendations for the Fifth Replenishment of the GEF which were adopted by the 37<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the GEF Council in May 2010 included the following: *“Participants acknowledge the positive and influential roles played by civil society organizations (CSOs), both through the GEF-NGO Network and through the participation in the design and implementation of GEF projects. In order to further enhance the cooperation between the GEF partnership and CSOs, the Secretariat shall, in cooperation with the appropriate GEF entities and the GEF-NGO Network, undertake a review of the policies and programs for engaging CSOs in the work of the GEF, and prepare a proposal for enhancing such engagement for Council review in November 2010”*.

### **Fourth GEF Assembly**

12. The CSO Forum on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2010 at the Fourth GEF Assembly was attended by more than 300 participants from all regions of the world. The Forum reviewed a wide range of topics including the role of civil society organizations in safeguarding the global environment at national, regional and global levels; the special role of indigenous peoples and local communities; successes challenges and opportunities from CSO experience of GEF in the Latin

America region; and reviewed the expectations and options for reforms to enhance the effective participation of civil society in GEF-5 (2010-2014).

13. The key conclusion from the Forum was:

*Civil society organizations have been one of the most important partners of GEF since its inception and have pioneered innovative approaches to effectively engage civil society in safeguarding the global environment, but declines in support levels over the past four years and insufficient mechanisms to effectively empower civil society are now jeopardizing the key results.*

14. It was also recognized that:

- The GEF Secretariat and Council have in the past two years started to give enhanced access and recognition to civil society and the GEF NGO Network in GEF-policy making at the global level – but this needs to be balanced by effective action and engagement at local, national and regional levels.
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities have been the key custodians of natural resources and the environment for thousands of years and their effective empowerment is the key to achieving sustainable, long term management of natural resources.
- CSOs can provide many unique contributions including – establishing and strengthening partnerships between stakeholder groups, strategic analysis, information exchange and raising awareness.
- GEF financing for CSO action through projects has been very important to support effective long term action by civil society in achieving GEF objectives.

15. The Forum called for immediate action to:

*Put in place further reforms and redouble efforts by all stakeholders (including civil society organizations, governments, GEF agencies and the GEF Secretariat) to enhance the effective participation of civil society in all stages of project design, execution and evaluation of GEF programs and projects.*

16. The Forum also made a number of specific recommendations including:

- The GEF Public Participation Policy (1996) needs to be further refined, elaborated and fully implemented and civil society must be more actively and effectively involved in the identification, execution and evaluation of GEF programs at country and local levels.

- CSOs and GEF should actively work to strengthen recognition of rights of indigenous peoples and local communities including conformity with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and higher importance should be placed on gender and social issues and use of traditional knowledge.
- Outreach and knowledge sharing to CSOs and the general public on the importance of protecting the global environment and on experience and lessons learned from GEF projects needs to be enhanced.
- CSOs demand that equitable access should be ensured to GEF resources by CSOs such that at least 15% of GEF resources be allocated to CSO-led medium and full sized projects (similar to the levels in the GEF-2 and GEF-3) through appropriate set-asides and incentives; furthermore, the Small Grants Programme (SGP) should also be maintained and strengthened.
- The GEF NGO Network should be further strengthened and empowered to act as the major CSO mechanism to promote the effective engagement of civil society in GEF and the GEF NGO Voluntary Fund approved by the November 2008 Council should be made fully operational.

17. The Fourth GEF Assembly in May 2010 also emphasized the important role of civil society in the implementation of GEF programs.

#### **ENHANCING THE ENGAGEMENT OF CSOs WITH THE GEF**

18. While over the past 14 years there have been changes in the way GEF operates, the key elements of the 1996 GEF Public Involvement policy remain valid and new ways to fulfill and strengthen it are required. In this context some actions that can significantly improve the engagement and empowerment of civil society within the GEF have already been decided in the GEF-5 programming process and they are mentioned here; while other new specific actions are proposed under the appropriate headings below:

#### **CSO involvement in the identification, execution and evaluation of GEF programs at country and local levels.**

19. The CSO community has been requesting that the public participation approach be applied consistently during upstream consultations in the project cycle. Therefore countries are encouraged to invite all members of the Network, as well as other appropriate CSOs, all to participate in the process of programming GEF funds, as appropriate. This includes participation in national dialogues, National Portfolio Identification Exercises and when specific project ideas and Project Identification Forms (PIFs) are being developed. This will also allow for CSOs to propose project ideas and offer their services to execute projects as a whole or project components thus allowing Governments to tap into their expertise, experience and technical potential. It will also allow the stakeholders to identify which project ideas are most appropriate



for CSO engagement and provide guidance to project proponents on planning stakeholder engagement when developing the project. Subsequently, PIFs will identify key stakeholders involved in the project and their respective roles, as applicable, as a basis for consultation and engagement during project formulation and implementation. A brief stakeholder engagement plan should also be incorporated as part of the project document.

### **CSO engagement in the Country Support Program**

20. As part of the GEF-5 reforms, the Country Support Program (CSP) will be implemented by the Secretariat. One of the new elements of the GEF-5 CSP is the transformation of the Sub regional Workshops into Expanded Constituency Workshops where participants will include the GEF focal points, the convention focal points and one CSO representative from each country. Therefore, as already agreed by the Council, national CSO representatives will be invited to participate in these Expanded Constituency Workshops. To this effect, the members of the Network in a country shall determine which organization among them will represent them in those workshops. The Regional Focal Points of the Network will ensure that this coordination takes place within each country in their region through an open and consultative process.

### **CSO engagement at the national level**

21. Another one of the components of the CSP is the provision of support to the work of Operational Focal Points on the basis of a work program agreed with the Secretariat. In this context, Operational Focal Points will be required to include in this work program, at least one meeting a year with the CSOs that are members of the Network in the country concerned. The experience gathered from these meetings can be shared at the Expanded Constituency Workshops and Consultations with the Council leading to the development of guidance and tools for OFPs on how to engage effectively with CSOs.

### **Publication specific for CSO engagement**

22. At the end of GEF-3 a very useful publication designed with CSOs in mind was produced by the Network with support from the Secretariat providing information and guidance to CSOs on how to work with the GEF. It is therefore proposed that the Secretariat will update the publication called "*A to Z Guide to the GEF for NGOs*" so that it will provide revised and complete information and guidance to all CSOs on GEF policies for public participation and partnership opportunities.

### **GEF Council consultations and engagements with CSOs**

23. In accordance with the decision of the GEF Council in 1995, on the day before the GEF Council meets, a GEF Council consultation with CSOs is organized by the Network and administratively supported by the Secretariat. These meetings provide a key opportunity for interaction among Council Members, GEF Agencies, CSOs and other GEF stakeholders and normally discuss topics related to the associated Council meeting. This consultation and its preparation meeting are a critical part of the process to enhance CSO understanding of GEF

policy issues and provide a forum for CSOs to debate directly with other key GEF stakeholders. Over the years these consultations have proved to be of lesser interest for Council members. In order to make these consultations more interesting, effective and results oriented different options will be considered including, inter alia, the possibility that different CSOs are selected to organize them.

### **GEF NGO Network engagement with the Council**

24. In addition to the Council consultations with CSOs, CSO representatives are invited to participate in Council meetings, except during executive sessions, and to present the views of the CSO community on the issues being discussed. In order that the Council is better informed of the activities of the Network, it is proposed that the Network will present a yearly report for information to the Council at its Fall session describing its overall activities, with specific sections dedicated to the work carried out by its Central Focal Point, each of its Regional Focal Points and its Indigenous Peoples Focal Points indicating objectives defined and results achieved. The report will contain an updated list of all its members per country with the contact details. In addition, the Network will provide this information to the Secretariat every quarter in an excel table with all updates so that the country profile page of the GEF website may reflect the most current information, so that they may be invited to CSP activities and so that Operational Focal Points may be able to contact them.

### **Voluntary NGO Trust Fund**

25. In 1996 a Voluntary NGO Trust Fund (the Trust Fund) was established to support NGO consultations. It was dormant for several years and in 2008 the Council decided to recreate it to support regional consultations and the Network's operational plan. This Trust Fund holds unspent balances totaling \$38,619.15 from six donors (Sweden - \$8,373.87; Switzerland - \$7,217.44; Australia - \$11,052.90; Canada - \$997.99; France - \$997.99; and MacArthur Foundation -\$2,694.58). These donors are hereby requested to agree that their remaining donations be transferred to a "CSO window" in a new multi-donor trust fund to be established to accept contributions from donors to support already approved GEF Secretariat activities. The remaining \$ 7,284.38 is the balance left from the GEF's initial contribution that came from its corporate budget and will therefore be transferred to the new trust fund. This new trust fund will be established in the World Bank and will follow all World Bank applicable rules. Contributions to the "CSO window" will be used to support the work of the Network to achieve heightened engagement by CSOs in the GEF through results oriented activities with an emphasis on more effective engagements at the local and regional levels. All donors are encouraged to contribute to the new "CSO Window" of the soon to be established new trust fund.

### **CSOs under paragraph 28 of the Instrument**

26. In the paper that the Council will discuss concerning the operationalization of paragraph 28 of the Instrument, CSOs are included as a category of those institutions that can apply to be registered as project executing agencies.

## **CSO participation through GEF Agencies**

27. The GEF Agencies have widely varying approaches and mechanisms to ensure the effective participation of civil society in the development and implementation of GEF projects. There is therefore a need to better understand and disseminate information on these various approaches. To that effect, each Agency will provide a copy of its applicable policies that will be posted on the GEF website, the Network website and included in future publications.

## **CSOs in GEF monitoring and evaluation processes**

28. The GEF Evaluation Office will continue to engage civil society stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation including through the CSP and by organizing regional consultations as necessary.

## **GEF and Indigenous Peoples**

29. The GEF Secretariat has reviewed its overall engagement with the indigenous peoples through its projects and programs, particularly in the biodiversity focal area, and presented the results in a publication: "Indigenous Communities and Biodiversity". The review also identified, among others, possible steps to further strengthen GEF's approaches and tools to strengthen the engagement. Through the Secretariat's focal point on indigenous issues and the Network's Indigenous Peoples' representatives, dialogues between the GEF and the indigenous communities have been initiated to identify possible further improvements in GEF policies and the project cycle. Some steps have been taken, for example the PIF now includes a specific section to describe the consultation and participation of the indigenous communities in the project. In the framework of the ongoing dialogue between the GEF and the Network on the policy and process for engagement, it is expected that the IP Focal Points of the Network will produce an issues paper on that will outline different options for enhanced engagement with the IP.

## **GEF and Gender Mainstreaming**

30. The GEF Secretariat also conducted an assessment and review of how gender mainstreaming has been addressed in GEF projects and programs, and what further actions are required to strengthen the approach. The review has been compiled into a publication: "Gender Mainstreaming in GEF Projects." Based on the review, further steps have been taken, including: 1) assign a gender focal point at the GEF Secretariat and coordinate with the gender focal points of the GEF Agencies; 2) an evaluation on gender mainstreaming, under the OPS4, by the GEF Evaluation Office; 3) an addition of a specific section in the PIF to identify gender elements in GEF projects; and 4) engaging a consultant to develop a gender mainstreaming guideline for developing, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating GEF projects that will be ready for further consultation by the end of the year.

