

52nd GEF Council Meeting
May 22 – 25, 2017
Washington, D.C.

Agenda Item 07

**PROGRESS REPORT OF THE AD-HOC COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON GEF
AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its 50th meeting the Council adopted the following decision:
 - (a) The Council, having reviewed GEF/ME/C.50/02, Evaluation of the GEF Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network, and GEF/ME/C.50/03, Management Response to the Evaluation of the GEF Civil Society Organization Network, decides to set up an ad-hoc working group of interested Council Members to develop an updated vision of the relationship between the GEF and civil society, and a plan to achieve it, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and report back to the Council at its first meeting in 2017. The Council encourages the CSO Network to establish a working group that includes balanced representation of CSO Stakeholder views, to interact with the Council Working Group on a new, updated vision for the Network, including governance, policies, guidelines and cooperation mechanisms.
2. Following the Council meeting, the Ad-Hoc Council Working Group on GEF and Civil Society (the WG) was established in July 2016 with participation from six GEF Council members who expressed their interest as follows: Mr. Leonardo Martinez of the United States (now Peter Wisner), Mr. Carlos Rodríguez of Uruguay, Mr. Tanyaradza Mundoga of Zimbabwe, Mr. Stefan Schwager of Switzerland, Mr. Kees Rade of the Netherlands, and Dr. Mohamed -Yahya Lafdal Chah of Mauritania.
3. This document details the main topics and ideas discussed by the WG as they worked towards developing the elements of an updated vision for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engagement at the GEF, and a plan to achieve it. The WG envisions that this paper will provide a basis for further discussions and consultations in developing a final document for decision at the 53rd Council meeting scheduled for November 2017. This work will be coordinated with related ongoing work to update GEF policies on Public Involvement and Gender Equality, both of which will be presented for decision at the Council meeting in November 2017.

DISCUSSIONS TO-DATE

4. The WG conducted its first teleconference in August 2016 where the US Council member was selected as Chair. Since then, the WG has met eight times via teleconference and once in person and it has corresponded and deliberated over email to carry out its responsibilities under the Council Decision.
5. The WG held a conference call with the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) to discuss the major findings and recommendations of their evaluation of the CSO Network. While the work of the WG focused on civil society engagement, the members believed that understanding the advantages and shortcomings of the current Network oriented system would help inform their work.

6. The IEO highlighted the importance of the CSO Network in disseminating information about the GEF to other stakeholders, but they also provided several recommendations and areas where there is room for improvement. The IEO highlighted that the network needs to modernize to keep pace with the changes in the GEF partnership, which was in line with the WG's discussions to date. In addition to developing a modern vision, the IEO evaluation also suggested the CSO Network:

- (a) Set clear rules for engagement,
- (b) Better define the its's value-added to the GEF partnership,
- (c) Strengthen its governance structure, and
- (d) Establish a working relationship with the GEF Agencies.

7. The WG noted that over the years, the GEF partnership has expanded considerably. While the role played by civil society has evolved, this evolution seems to have responded to operational needs more than to a strategic vision.¹

8. To better understand the views of all CSOs, the WG convened two global consultation meetings via teleconference in January of 2017 with fifty CSOs from both inside and outside the CSO Network.² While several attendees raised project specific questions and comments, the most relevant comments related to an updated vision for civil society and the GEF include the following.

- (a) CSO participation at the country level is weak, partly due to the unwillingness of the government (OFPs) to include this sector in both the definition of projects and the setting of priorities.
- (b) More collaborative and transparent approaches to programming and project design are needed.
- (c) Capacity building of CSOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) is needed in order to ensure their active participation in GEF programming and project execution.

9. Following these calls, the WG discussed the views shared and discussed the following recommendations.

¹ The IEO's Evaluation of the GEF CSO Network. A key theme of the different documents and Council decisions pertaining to civil society and the GEF (and the Network) is that the participation of civil society in the GEF appears to have evolved in an operational manner but without being driven by deliberate strategic decisions.

² Invitations were sent out in December 2016 for 2 teleconferences (scheduled to accommodate two broad time zones) to about 2,000 CSOs that include members of the GEF CSO Network and others that have had contact with the GEF for various activities. About 250 registered to participate and about 50 actually participated in the two teleconferences.

- (a) The GEF should help develop national networks of CSOs and these should be the reference points for civil society as the CSO Network Regional Focal Points have no contact at national level. – *The WG has presented several options for implementing this recommendation in this document.*
- (b) The GEF should encourage a greater relationship between CSOs and the recipient Governments as the current requirements for stakeholder consultation are not consistently followed. – *The WG thought this was a good recommendation and will discuss this at a later date.*
- (c) Additional and dedicated funding should be provided to CSOs in order to guarantee their engagement in GEF projects, from the setting of priorities, to design, execution and monitoring. – *In the interest of cost efficiency, the WG agreed that all changes to civil society engagement at the GEF should fit within the existing budget or should be cost neutral.*

10. In April 2017, the WG reached out to the CSO Network to see what progress its own working group had made in developing a new, updated vision for the Network, including governance, policies, guidelines, and cooperation mechanisms, according to the terms of the Council decision. The Council Working Group requested a meeting with this separate working group on the margins of the Consultations with CSOs prior to the 52nd Council meeting (May 2017).

WORKING GROUP DELIBERATIONS

11. All WG members agreed that CSOs have been a highly valued voice and advocate on a wide range of GEF issues, a source of knowledge and expertise for the work on the ground, and a valuable project executing partner. Civil Society has been an essential member of the GEF partnership since its inception.

12. The WG found the results of a review by the GEF IEO, which highlighted both the need and opportunity to create a contemporary vision of this relationship, to be incredibly helpful throughout their deliberations.³ As was noted in the evaluation, the WG emphasized in their early discussions the need for CSO involvement at GEF Council Meetings to be more locally informed and represent the voice of local CSOs. The current structure of Council engagement was deemed to be lacking in local context, overly scripted, and at times ill-focused. The WG

³ The IEO noted, among other things, the changes in the global environmental commons and the size and complexity of the GEF partnership as a basis for its recommendations, adding that links between the CSO Network and other GEF actors “are either under-explored or overstressed”. It also highlighted the importance of exploring partnerships across traditional lines, for innovation and efficiencies, and other factors (see Council Document GEF/ME/C.50/02: Evaluation of the GEF Civil Society Organization Network).

members agreed that a greater emphasis on local knowledge, project specific comments, and sharing of lessons learned would be valuable additions to CSO involvement at Council Meetings.

13. The WG used these initial discussions (carried out from July 2016 to April 2017) to inform their first task of developing an updated vision for civil society engagement with the GEF. The WG's vision also seeks to build upon the recommendations of the Working Group on Public Involvement.⁴

14. The WG's discussions regarding an updated vision for civil society and the GEF highlighted, inter alia, the following key points:

- (a) The updated vision should take into account the key role that civil society plays in achieving the GEF's mission by contributing to the programming and execution of GEF's financial resources and to stronger governance, accountability and transparency both at the country and global levels.
- (b) The updated vision should respond to the need to enhance the dialogue between local actors and local and national government authorities and implementing agencies.
- (c) The updated vision should seek to improve the role that civil society has played in informing the Council's decision-making related to civil society, women and girls, and Indigenous Peoples.

Updated Vision Statement

15. Principles. The GEF's relationship with civil society should be based on principles of transparency and endeavor to support fair, balanced, and inclusive participation as well as meaningful representation at the appropriate level (national, regional, and/or global).

16. Scope. The updated vision should reach out broadly to the full range of civil society that may have an interest in the GEF's work. Consistently with Council decisions,⁵ a CSO includes the various and diverse types of major groups and organization as set out in Agenda 21 of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, including NGOs, farmers, women, indigenous and local communities, women, the business community,⁶ workers and unions, youth and children, and the scientific and technical community.

⁴ The Working Group on Public Involvement recommended to Council, among other things, to update the GEF Policy on Public Involvement.

⁵ Council Document GEF/C.39/10/Rev.01.

⁶ While the WG was not tasked with reviewing the GEF's engagement with the business community or private sector, members were interested in giving increased attention to the involvement of the private sector within the GEF Partnership.

17. Based on the deliberations to date, the WG's updated vision for the relationship between civil society and the GEF is as follows:

- (a) The overarching objective of engagement between the GEF and civil society is to achieve greater results and impact through improving its collaboration with CSOs.
- (b) In this context, the primary role of civil society within the GEF Partnership is to contribute to, as appropriate, the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEF projects on the ground. Civil society will play an advisory role for the GEF Council on institutional policies and building awareness of the GEF in local communities. Civil society will also continue to disseminate information about the GEF to local stakeholders.

PUTTING THE VISION INTO ACTION

18. Going forward, these efforts should be designed to help meet the key challenges facing the partnership in working to protect the global environment, building on best international practice and the many critical contributions that civil society can make as a partner in the work of the GEF. Key components of this updated vision are noted below.

- (a) *Increasing impact.* Civil society has a key role to play in supporting the transformations needed to bring greater impact and sustainability to GEF investments. This increased impact will also have a positive effect on the results generated from each GEF project. Especially in an environment with a weak public sector, CSOs can provide expertise and increase capacity for effective service delivery.
- (b) *Strengthening projects by providing local knowledge to GEF Agencies and Council.* Civil society participation and input brings knowledge, perspective, and expertise on the full range of environmental and related issues addressed by GEF-supported projects and programs. Civil society participants represent a broad range of stakeholders, including communities, women and girls, indigenous peoples and others. This engagement (which is provided for in relevant GEF and GEF Agency policies, guidelines, and practices) improves the quality of project and program design and implementation, and helps to ensure that programming is impactful and consistent with best practices and standards. CSOs also play a valued role as project executing partners, leveraging financial and technical resources.
- (c) *Monitoring and evaluation.* Civil society complements the GEF's central monitoring and evaluation organs by providing additional sources of feedback, especially directly from the field. Civil society helps fulfill this function not only at the end of implementation, but throughout the life of the program or project.
- (d) *Building awareness and dissemination of information:* Civil society also plays a major role in building awareness of key issues, advocacy, and outreach to inform

organizations, entities and communities about the GEF and the activities of the partnership to address global environmental problems.

POINTS FOR COUNCIL AND STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

19. The updated vision seeks for civil society to engage effectively in the work of the GEF at various levels and in a manner that fully realizes the contributions and role of civil society to the GEF as noted above. The WG would appreciate input from other Council Members and stakeholders on the following issues related to the updated vision of the relationship between the GEF and civil society, and a plan to achieve it.

National Level Engagement

20. During consultations conducted by the WG, CSOs expressed a need to improve the engagement of civil society at the national level.⁷ The IEO evaluation of the CSO Network concluded that the “CSO Network’s activities are distant from the country level where GEF projects make their mark and from where the majority of Network CSOs operate. As such, the Network is compromised in its ability to inform Council with country perspectives and in servicing its members”.⁸ Furthermore, while the CSO Network is most active just prior to and after Council meetings,⁹ its engagement has not been meaningful at the national level.

21. The WG found that this is an important shortcoming of the current model. The updated vision of the GEF’s interaction with civil society puts a greater emphasis on interaction with national-level CSOs related to GEF projects, which are more equipped to effectively provide the essential functions of bringing the voices from the field to the Council room. The GEF can help to make sure the views of these national CSOs are brought to the attention of the Council by supporting their appropriate representation and participation at the Council meetings.

22. Below are three potential structures for the civil society engagement at the GEF that would address the challenges posed by the current model, thereby enhancing engagement of national-level CSOs in the GEF Partnership.

Network of CSOs at the National Level

⁷ This section is not intended to discuss in detail the vision for stakeholder engagement at the project and program levels. These principles and requirements are being reviewed as part of the updating of the policy on stakeholder engagement and access to information to be considered in the November 2017 Council meeting.

⁸ “Although the face (sic) of the Network to Council is clear, the depth of the Network’s reach at a country level is not visible; credibility hinges on this. GEF projects are operationalized at the country level. Country-informed perspectives, and in particular those gained by CSO experiences with GEF operations, are necessary to the strength and value of Network deliberations.” (ibid).

⁹ IEO Evaluation of the CSO Network – 2016

23. In several countries, civil society organizations have already formed national networks organized around the environment and/or development areas. These could be invited to become the GEF national networks for their respective countries. In countries where such networks do not exist, the GEF Small Grants Programme and its cadre of civil society and community based organizations, could help build a broader GEF network. The GEF can help to make sure the views of these national networks are brought to the attention of the Council by supporting their appropriate representation and participation at the Council meetings. This will be discussed further in the following section related to Council Meeting engagement.

Engaging other existing global Networks of National CSOs

24. One possibility would be to engage CSOs through an existing network of civil society organizations that has broad international, regional, and national presence. Examples of networks organized by other international institutions include the United Nations Environment Program's Major Groups Facilitating Committee or the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This would rely on already existing groups with the capacity to organize national level input for Council consideration.

Other arrangements

25. The IEO's evaluation of the CSO Network in its Technical Notes and Annexes includes a comparative table with a number of approaches to CSO engagement used by international organizations and international financial institutions, which may be options for the GEF.¹⁰ However, most of these institutions have dedicated staff and units in charge of the engagement with CSOs, which the GEF currently does not. The WG did not discuss these options in detail given the costs associated with the implementation of such alternatives.

Council Engagement

26. An important means for civil society to interact with the GEF is through its participation in meetings of the GEF governing bodies, i.e. Assembly and Council, as well as meetings in preparation for GEF replenishments.

27. On different occasions, Council members have referred to civil society's role as the GEF's "eyes and ears on the ground", expecting their representatives to provide Council with the valuable perspectives of communities and peoples affected by GEF's projects in the different countries.

¹⁰ See pages 16-21 *Table 1: Methods of CSO Engagement in Analogous bodies* ([https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/GEF%20Council%20CSO%20Technical%20Notes Annexes.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/GEF%20Council%20CSO%20Technical%20Notes%20Annexes.pdf))

28. Over the years, civil society, in particular through the CSO Network, has been involved in Council Meetings and thereby contributing to the work of the partnership. Yet there are opportunities to improve and reinforce this engagement to enhance the key role that civil society can play in informing GEF's decision-making regarding policy and programming priorities.

Implementation of the Updated Vision

29. The operationalization of the approaches discussed above can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Accreditation of CSOs: such as the Green Climate Fund, UNFCCC, and UNEP. In the case of the GCF, accredited CSOs can act as observers in the Board.
- (b) Formal CSO Networks: such as the Adaptation Fund, the GEF, and the Inter-American Development Bank with national CSOs represented in a Consultative Group.
- (c) Self-Selected CSO Representatives/Observers: as in the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), where a limited number of representatives of CSOs are self-selected to observe the Board meetings.
- (d) Other arrangements: with no formal accreditation or Network such as the World Bank, IMF and IFC, where CSOs are engaged on an annual basis through the Civil Society Policy Forum conducted in parallel with the WB and IMF Spring Meetings.

30. The WG seeks input on these options for implementing the updated vision for civil society at the GEF.