

53rd GEF Council Meeting
November 28 – 30, 2017
Washington, D.C.

Agenda Item 08

**UPDATED VISION TO ENHANCE
CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GEF
(Prepared by the Ad-hoc Council Working Group on Civil Society)**

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01, *Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement with the GEF*, approves its recommendations to implement the Updated Vision, and requests the GEF Secretariat to present a progress report on the implementation of the Updated Vision for information to the 55th Council in the fall of 2018.

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2015-2016, at the request of Council, the IEO conducted an evaluation of the GEF Network of Civil Society Organizations (GEF CSO Network) and recommended, among other things, that “a contemporary vision for the CSO Network should be created within the new GEF architecture.” While recognizing the value of the Network, particularly at the global level, the evaluation 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. . .”
2. In consideration of this evaluation, during its 50th meeting in June 2016, the Council decided 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.” In this same decision, the Council “. . . encourage[d] 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.”
3. This document presents the results of the ad hoc working group of interested Council Members, including an updated vision of the relationship between the GEF and civil society, and recommendations to implement this vision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Strong and active engagement by civil society is fundamental to the GEF partnership. It is a cornerstone of the GEF Instrument, and set out in a number of GEF policies and programs. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the public more generally have been a highly-valued voice and advocate on a wide range of issues, a source of knowledge and expertise, and a valuable project executing partner.
2. A recent evaluation by the GEF's Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) highlighted the importance and effectiveness of the GEF CSO Network in GEF's work over the years, particularly at the advocacy and policy formulation levels. At the same time, it found that there is a need to develop an updated Vision of the engagement of the Network and of civil society going forward, to ensure full effectiveness and address some issues and gaps in the existing system.
3. In this light, and drawing upon consultations with civil society and other GEF partners, this document provides an updated Vision for the GEF's engagement with civil society. It includes an updated set of objectives and principles to provide an overall guide to this engagement. At an operational level the document focuses in particular on certain key elements of this engagement, including engagement during GEF Council meetings.
4. This updated Vision is designed to complement and reinforce other key dimensions of civil society engagement with the GEF, including in the design and implementation of GEF projects and programs. These are addressed in more detail in existing and about-to-be updated GEF policies and guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality, Access to Information and Indigenous Peoples, in the GEF Country Support Program, and in the GEF Small Grants Program. The updated Vision Statement is set out below:

Vision Statement

- A. *The overarching objective of engagement between the GEF and civil society is to achieve greater results and impact through improving its collaboration with civil society organizations (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 programs and projects, through (amongst others) engagement in projects on the ground, building awareness of the GEF in local communities, dissemination of information about the GEF to stakeholders, engagement with recipient country governments and participation with Council members.*
- C. *In addition, civil society plays an advisory role for the GEF Council on institutional policies and guidelines and helps formulate strategies effectively. To this end, the CSO Network plays a key role in advocacy and outreach to civil society at the global level, by supporting the dissemination of information about the GEF as well as contributing to policy and strategy development.*

Summary of Recommendations

Continued support of civil society engagement at the national and regional levels

5. In accordance with paragraph 5 of the GEF Instrument, and relevant GEF policies and guidelines, including GEF Policies on Public Involvement and Gender (now being updated), civil society and other stakeholders shall be engaged consistently during upstream consultations in each recipient country regarding programs and projects proposals. In addition, as part of ongoing efforts to increase participation of civil society in GEF operations, the GEF will continue providing opportunities for civil society organizations to participate in national and regional activities organized as part of the Country Support Program, managed by the Secretariat.

Continued strengthening of civil society to engage with the GEF

6. As part of continued efforts to strengthen collaboration with civil society, the GEF will continue to provide civil society with the opportunity to participate in several key processes and activities of the GEF partnership, such as the GEF Assembly and the CSO Forum, the GEF Replenishment process, the workshops and meetings organized under the Country Support Program, and relevant task forces and working groups led by the Secretariat. The program will provide new training and new tools to GEF Government Representatives and Convention Focal Points and civil society representatives to be more effective in their work with the GEF and facilitate the knowledge exchange and learning around GEF project design and implementation at both country and regional levels, among others. The Secretariat will also continue to make available on its website (including the CSO section of the website) readily accessible information on how the GEF works, opportunities for civil society engagement at all levels of the GEF's work, and the GEF conflict resolution function.

Selection of CSO Representation at Council Consultations and Meetings

7. The Working Group recommends the GEF secretariat will be responsible for the selection of sponsored CSOs for Council consultations and meetings to ensure that CSO representatives are sharing the voices of CSOs from the field, while maintaining robust engagement on policy issues. This selection will be done in a transparent manner, based on clear criteria and in consultation with the CSO Network, Operational Focal Points (OFPs), the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) to establish a comprehensive list of CSOs from which to draw those to be sponsored to attend the Council Meetings. The Working Group suggests that two groups of CSOs will be sponsored to attend the biannual Council Meetings: regional CSO representatives and local CSOs with experience in a technical or geographical area. In addition, other CSOs, including international NGOs whose work is of relevance to the GEF, are welcome to attend the meetings as self-sponsored participants.

8. The selection from meeting to meeting will aim to: (i) include those CSOs presenting on the selected topic for the CSO consultation; (ii) track, to the extent possible, the Council Meeting Agenda; (iii) enable a healthy rotation of CSO representation that balances the needs of

inclusion, expertise and opportunities for in-depth discussions with participants; (iv) foster engagement by local and national-level CSOs, as recommended in the IEO evaluation. The number of CSOs sponsored to attend each Council Meeting will be a streamlined number of individuals, depending on the agenda and budget, recognizing that adjustments can be made in light of specific considerations for a particular Council meeting. It is important to note also that the GEF continues to support CSO participation in other activities of the partnership, including activities under the Country Support Program (e.g., Expanded Constituency Workshops), the GEF Small Grants Program, and the GEF Assembly and Replenishment process.

Structure of Council- CSO Consultations before Council Meetings

9. The Working Group proposes that the Consultations between the GEF Council and CSOs be more structured than in their current form. The Council will invite CSOs to present on specific topics – chosen by the Council, with input from CSOs and the GEF Secretariat – intended to highlight the experiences of local CSOs during project implementation while also seeking to align with the Council Meeting Agenda. To allow for adequate preparation, the GEF Council will select Consultation Meeting topics around 6 months (or one meeting) before each Consultation Meeting, as appropriate, recognizing that topics can be updated within the 6-month period in light of new circumstances and needs that may arise. The Working Group suggests that the time allotted to these topics take up roughly half of the consultation’s agenda, with the rest allotted to topics chosen by CSOs. However, the time will be also made available for civil society and indigenous peoples’ representatives to directly discuss critical issues related to the Council meeting and agenda.

Structure of CSO Participation During Council Meetings

10. The Working Group also suggests that CSO participation in Council Meetings be more integrated with the discussion of Council members. Currently, CSOs are invited to speak at the end of each agenda item, once the Council members have spoken. To encourage more meaningful participation, the Working Group recommends that the CSOs be given the floor during Council discussions in the order in which they ask to speak, together with Council members.

Council Review of how this Updated Vision is Working

11. The above recommendations will change certain important aspects of the GEF engagement with civil society. The intent is to enhance and reinforce this engagement, consistent with the updated Vision and taking into account overall resource availability. In the light of the above, and given the importance of the matters addressed, the Working Group suggests that Council reviews this revised decision in four years’ time, in consultation with stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Civil Society has been an essential member of the GEF partnership since its inception. The importance of civil society to GEF's work is a cornerstone feature in the GEF Instrument, and is set out in a number of GEF policies and guidelines that have been in place for many years.¹ Civil society organizations (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.

2. The GEF Network of Non-Governmental Organizations was formed in 1995 as a voluntary structure of environmental and sustainable development oriented CSOs working in at least one of the GEF focal areas.

3. The main objective that the GEF Council mandated from the then NGO Network—subsequently the CSO Network—was: “to prepare for and report on the GEF Council meetings and NGO consultations to the wider CSO community at the national, regional and international levels.”

4. In 2005, at the request of the Central Focal Point of the CSO Network, the GEF Secretariat financed an independent review of the Network. The review concluded that the Network was operating ineffectively, and that it lacked a long-term vision for effective engagement and service delivery. The recommendations made and accepted by the NGO Network included strengthening accountability and effectiveness, outreach and the partnership with the Secretariat as well as capacity building needs for NGOs engaging with the GEF.

5. In 2008 and 2010, the Council approved recommendations that the GEF Secretariat presented regarding enhancement of civil society engagement in the GEF. This included the following:

- reviving the Voluntary NGO Trust Fund to act as a funding mechanism to support the Network;
- replacement of the CSO accreditation to the GEF with membership in the Network.

6. These measures have been implemented with relative success. However, over the past twenty-five years, the GEF partnership has expanded considerably, and while the role played by civil society has evolved and the GEF has made strides to enhance its engagement in its

¹ GEF Instrument, paragraph 5; GEF Policies on Public Involvement, Gender Mainstreaming, Indigenous Peoples, among others.

operations, a strategic vision regarding civil society's role in the GEF partnership has not been established.²

7. In 2014-2015, at the request of the GEF Council, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO) conducted an evaluation of the CSO Network and recommended, among other things, that "a contemporary vision for the CSO Network should be created within the new GEF architecture."

8. During its 50th meeting in June 2016, the GEF Council adopted the decision "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."

9. Following the Council decision, 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 Mr. Peter Wisner), Mr. Carlos Rodríguez of Uruguay, Mr. Tanyaradzwa Mundoga of Zimbabwe, Mr. Stefan Schwager of Switzerland, Mr. Kees Rade of the Netherlands (now Ms. Carola van Rijnsoever), and Dr. Mohamed -Yahya Lafdal Chah of Mauritania.

10. In the context of an expanded GEF partnership, the vision for civil society needs to be revised and brought up to date to reflect the role that this sector plays in GEF operations, particularly at the country level, where programs and projects are designed and implemented.

11. The GEF Secretariat is leading two parallel processes that are related, albeit distinct from the updating of the vision for civil society and the GEF: the updating of the Policy on Stakeholder Engagement and the updating of the Policy on Gender. In addition, the GEF is issuing a Policy on Access to Information, which will set out the guiding principles and mandatory requirements for public access to information with a view to ensuring the transparent governance and operation of the GEF.

12. The Policy on Stakeholder Engagement will establish guiding principles and mandatory requirements for stakeholder engagement in GEF's governance and operations, at different stages of the program and project cycles. The present paper will complement the Policy on Stakeholder Engagement and focuses on the role that civil society should play at the GEF's governance level, i.e. by informing GEF's decision-making regarding policy and programming

² 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.

priorities, and representing the needs of a broad range of stakeholders, including communities, women and girls as well as Indigenous Peoples.

13. One aspect of this role is the participation of civil society in Council meetings, including the preparatory activities leading up to these meetings.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Brief history of the role of CSOs in the GEF

14. For the purpose of this paper, and consistent with the upcoming Policy on Stakeholder Engagement, civil society comprises non-stake actors, including not-for-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmers, women, the scientific and technological community, youth and children, Indigenous Peoples and their communities, business and industry, workers and trade unions.³

15. The relationship between the GEF and CSOs goes back to the inception of the GEF, when NGOs, in particular, demanded active participation of civil society in the GEF. This ultimately led to the NGO-Participants Consultation which took place one or two days prior to the formal Participants' Meetings.⁴

16. The consultations evolved into a meeting among the NGOs from different regions of the world where common positions and presentations to Participants were formulated. In 1993, a Tripartite Task Force (Council Members, NGOs and Agencies) made recommendations regarding the NGO Consultations and concluded that the consultations should be organized in a more systematic manner with a proper agenda and written statements from the NGOs.

17. In 1995 the NGOs formed their own Network of accredited NGOs and Council approved criteria for the selection of NGOs to attend or observe Council meetings and NGO consultations.⁵

18. The GEF Network of Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter the CSO Network) was formed as a voluntary association of non-governmental organizations working in the fields of

³ 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.

⁴ The Participants' Meeting later became the Council meeting. In 1994, with the restructuring of the GEF, the rules of procedures of the GEF Council authorized the head of the Secretariat to invite five NGOs to attend the Council meetings and five others to observe the meetings and to convene an NGO Consultation prior to each Council.

⁵ Per this decision, five NGOs would be invited to participate in Council and five to observe it. A wide representation of views and expertise and balanced representation from local, national and international organizations would be sought.

environment and sustainable development aligned with the GEF mandate. A NGO Voluntary Trust Fund was established in order to finance participation of CSOs in the Consultations and Council meetings.

19. The main objective that the GEF Council mandated from the CSO Network was: “to prepare for and report on the GEF Council meetings and NGO consultations to the wider CSO community at the national, regional and international levels.”⁶

20. In 2005, at the request of the Central Focal Point of the then NGO Network, the GEF Secretariat financed an independent review of the Network in order to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of the Network. The review concluded that the Network was operating ineffectively, and that it lacked a long-term vision for effective engagement and service delivery. The recommendations made and accepted by the NGO Network included strengthening accountability and effectiveness, outreach and the partnership with the Secretariat as well as capacity building needs for NGOs engaging with the GEF.⁷

21. Both the CSO Network and the Secretariat adopted a number of short term and long term measures in response to the review’s recommendations.

22. In consequence, in 2008 the GEF Council approved the following decisions: a) recreating the Voluntary NGO Trust Fund and increasing the financial support provided for the participation of eligible Network representatives at Council meetings;⁸ b) the replacement of the NGO accreditation system operated by the GEF Secretariat with a membership system operated by the Network, whereby the Network took on the task of accrediting and managing the membership of CSOs in the Network while the GEF Secretariat stopped accrediting new CSOs.⁹

23. The Council’s mandated objective for the Network has remained valid. Over the years, the Network has developed an independent orientation, setting its own objectives, as follows: a) enhancing the role of civil society to safeguard the global environment, b) to promote effective engagement of CSOs in GEF operations and c) to strengthen the capacity of CSO members to participate in GEF-related activities.¹⁰

⁶ In parallel, the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) administered by UNDP, started to build an active network of program grantees from NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). The Steering Committees in each of the countries where the Programme has been active, are composed by different sectors of which the majority are civil society representatives.

⁷ GEF/C.27/Inf.5: *Review of the Non-Governmental Organization Network of the GEF*, 2005.

⁸ From the 50,000 US dollars per Council meeting set in 1995 to 70,445 US dollars per Council meeting in 2008.

⁹ *Enhancing Civil Society Engagement and Partnership with the GEF*. (GEF/C.34/9) October 14, 2008

¹⁰ GEF Independent Evaluation Office: *Evaluation of the GEF Civil Society Organization Network*, May 2016

24. In 2015-2016, at the request of Council, the IEO conducted an evaluation of the GEF CSO Network and recommended, among other things, that “a contemporary vision for the CSO Network should be created within the new GEF architecture.” While recognizing the value of the Network, particularly at the global level, the Evaluation 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.”¹¹

25. As a result, during its 50th meeting in June 2016, the Council adopted the following decision:

“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.”

The Ad-Hoc Council Working Group on Civil Society

26. 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 Mr. Peter Wisner), Mr. Carlos Rodríguez of Uruguay, Mr. Tanyaradzwa Mundoga of Zimbabwe, Mr. Stefan Schwager of Switzerland, Mr. Kees Rade of the Netherlands (now Ms. Carola van Rijnsoever), and Dr. Mohamed -Yahya Lafdal Chah of Mauritania.

27. The WG conducted its first teleconference in August 2016 where the US Council member was selected as Chair. Since then, the WG has met 10 times via teleconference and twice in person and it has corresponded and deliberated over email to carry out its responsibilities under the Council Decision.

28. 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

¹¹“Although the face 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)

understanding the advantages and shortcomings of the current Network oriented system would help inform their work.

29. 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 its value-added to the GEF partnership,
- (c) Strengthen its governance structure, and
- (d) Establish a working relationship with the GEF Agencies.

30. To get a better understanding of the views of 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.¹² 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 in some countries is weak, partly due to the unwillingness of the government via the 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.

31. Based on the information revised, its deliberations and consultations conducted, the WG prepared and presented a progress report to the 52nd GEF Council meeting in May 2017. The report contained a summary of the activities conducted by the Working Group towards developing the elements of an updated vision for civil society organizations engagement at the

¹² 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.

GEF and a plan to achieve it. Elements of a draft Vision Statement for the participation of civil society in the GEF were presented 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.

32. This progress report was used as a consultation note to collect views and feedback from both Council members and CSOs and other participants during the GEF Consultations with Civil Society on the day prior to the 52nd Council meeting and at the Council meeting.

33. In addition, the WG met with the CSO Network's own working group in the margins of the GEF Consultations with CSOs and had a very constructive discussion about the ideas presented in the paper as well as the Network's efforts to strengthen its capacity to engage at the country level, among other matters.

34. During these consultations, the following were the main comments and feedback received:

- (a) Civil society plays a valuable role in GEF's operations and in informing Council decisions regarding the programs and projects on the ground;
- (b) Civil society can help bridge the gap between country level activities and decision-making activities at the Council level;
- (c) Civil society engagement varies across countries. There are capacity issues which restrict effective engagement of CSOs at the national level;
- (d) The role of civil society in the GEF partnership should reflect the evolving and unique portfolio of the GEF;
- (e) There is a role for agencies and governments in the engagement of civil society at the national level;
- (f) Coordination and capacity building of CSOs require dedicated funding.

35. Taking into account this feedback, the WG produced a second draft of the paper which was posted on the GEF website for public consultation for a 3.5- week period. In addition, two separate calls were organized with civil society members to consult on this second draft as well as with members of the Network's Working Group.

36. During these consultations, the Working Group received inputs in support of some aspects of this draft, while urging a different approach on others:

- (a) CSOs welcomed the recommendation regarding the interactive approach to participation of CSOs during Council meetings.
- (b) A number of CSOs supported the changes proposed to the selection process for CSOs to be sponsored to attend Council meeting and Consultations, noting that this was a step towards ensuring greater inclusion and arguing the need to have a transparent procedure for selecting those CSOs to be sponsored.
- (c) CSO expressed their concerns with having the number of sponsored CSOs reduced.¹³
- (d) CSO Network members expressed their disagreement with the process of selection of CSOs to be sponsored, arguing that the Network had been empowered by Council to undertake that task.¹⁴
- (e) CSOs expressed the need to expand the scope of the paper to include engagement of civil society beyond Council and Consultations and its participation in national and regional capacity building activities.

AN UPDATED VISION FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GEF

Updated Vision statement

37. Based on the deliberations and consultations, 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 civil society organizations (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 programs and projects on the ground, through (amongst others) engagement in projects on the ground, building awareness of the GEF in local communities, dissemination of information about the GEF to stakeholders,

¹³ In recent years, an average of 30 CSOs have been sponsored to participate.

¹⁴ In 2008, Council replaced accreditation to the GEF with membership in the Network (GEF/C.34/9: *Enhancing Civil Society Engagement and Partnership with the GEF*). The decision did not include any specific arrangements for the Network to undertake the selection process.

engagement with recipient country governments and participation with Council members.

- C. In addition, civil society plays an advisory role for the GEF Council on institutional policies and guidelines and helps formulate strategies effectively. To this end, the CSO Network plays a key role in advocacy and outreach to civil society at the global level, by supporting the dissemination of information about the GEF as well as contributing to policy and strategy development.

Principles and objectives

38. **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).

39. **Objectives.** The key objectives for this updated Vision are: strengthening projects through local knowledge, increasing impact of GEF investments, strengthening the monitoring and evaluation functions of GEF's project implementation and performance,¹⁵ improving transparency and awareness of the GEF at the local and national level and enhancing GEF's policies and strategies.

- (a) **Strengthening the design of GEF projects by providing local knowledge to GEF Agencies and Council.** As civil society represents a broad range of stakeholders, including communities, women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, private sector and others, it can bring knowledge, perspective, and expertise on the full range of environmental and related issues addressed by GEF-supported projects and programs. In addition, civil society, by virtue of its reach to communities in the potential project areas, can provide considerations regarding the appropriate engagement of these communities to project design.
- (b) **Increasing impact.** It is expected that when civil society is included in the design, this will result in greater impact and enhanced social, environmental and financial sustainability to GEF investments. This engagement (which is provided for in relevant GEF and GEF Agency policies, guidelines, and practices) improves the quality of project and program implementation, and helps to ensure that programming is consistent with best practices and standards. CSOs also play a valued role as project executing partners, leveraging financial and technical resources.

¹⁵ NGOs and civil society organizations may play an important role in monitoring project or program activities, as well as in providing feedback as beneficiaries or as representatives of community groups.

- (c) **Monitoring and evaluation.** Civil society complements the GEF's central monitoring and evaluation functions (conducted by the Secretariat and the IEO, respectively) 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 supports the GEF's forthcoming Access to Information Policy by building awareness of key issues, advocating for CSO involvement, and performing outreach to inform organizations, entities, and communities about the GEF and the activities of the partnership to address global environmental problems.
- (e) **Enhancing GEF's policies and strategies.** In the formulation of GEF policies and strategies, civil society can, through sharing their expertise and experiences from working with other organizations and with projects in the field, add value and increase effectiveness, by bringing the perspective of stakeholders that may be affected by those policies and strategies.

40. As mentioned in the introduction, the updated Policy on Stakeholder Engagement will establish mandatory requirements related to stakeholder engagement, including civil society, in GEF operations. The objectives set forth here are expected to be reinforced by the Policy, which encompasses the entire GEF project cycle.

IMPLEMENTING THE UPDATED VISION

41. This updated Vision for the relationship between the GEF and civil society encompasses multiple forms of engagement: engagement at national and regional levels, Council Meeting participation, consultations in preparation for Council Meetings, participation in GEF Assembly and Replenishment meetings, and activities to strengthen their capacity.

Continued support of civil society engagement at the national and regional levels

42. As mentioned above, the revised Policy on Stakeholder Engagement will establish mandatory requirements to GEF Agencies for stakeholder engagement, including civil society's participation at the program and project levels.

43. In addition, the GEF's Country Support Program will continue providing opportunities for regional, national and local CSOs to participate and interact with government officials, agencies, GEF Secretariat staff and other CSOs in each GEF region, share experiences, lessons learned and strengthen their ability to engage with the GEF. Thus, the Secretariat will support active engagement of civil society at the national level in the Expanded Constituency Workshops, National Dialogues and other relevant workshops and events.

CSO Involvement in the Identification, Execution and Evaluation of GEF Programs and Projects at the Country and Local Levels

44. Consistent with the upcoming Policy on Stakeholder Engagement, the GEF Secretariat engages with civil society and other stakeholders in national and regional activities executed by the GEF Secretariat. This includes participation and other activities of the Country Support Program. The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Policy on Stakeholder Engagement, which will be formulated following the approval of the Policy, will provide clear mechanisms and best practices for civil society and stakeholder engagement throughout the GEF's program and project cycles.

Continued Strengthening of capacity of civil society to engage with the GEF

45. As mentioned above, in order to strengthen civil society's capacity to effectively participate in the GEF, the GEF Secretariat will continue to sponsor the participation of civil society organizations in the regional workshops organized under the Country Support Program. The program will provide new training and new tools to GEF Government Representatives and Convention Focal Points and civil society representatives to be more effective in their work with the GEF and facilitate the knowledge exchange and learning around GEF project design and implementation at both country and regional levels, among others.

46. More specifically, the GEF Secretariat will continue to provide support to an annual regional meeting of civil society organizations prior to the ECWs, to discuss issues pertaining to GEF programs and operations in their constituencies. These meetings will be coordinated with the CSO Network's regional representatives.

47. In addition, the GEF Secretariat will continue to maintain up to date information on the GEF's website pertaining to civil society's engagement in the GEF¹⁶ and will give the opportunity for members of the CSO Network and the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) to participate in the various multi-sectoral working groups and task forces, such as the Knowledge Management Advisory Group, the GEF Gender Partnership and the Working Group on Public Involvement. In addition, the GEF Secretariat will continue publishing training materials, such as the publication A-Z to the GEF, which provides information and guidance to CSOs on how to work with the GEF, and the GEF User Guide: Indigenous Peoples and GEF Project Financing.

Selection of CSO representation at Council Consultations and Meetings

48. CSO participation at Council Meetings will focus on sharing the voices of communities and other stakeholders in the field, while still maintaining robust engagement on policy issues. For this reason, Council will invite two groups of CSOs to its biannual meetings: 1) regional CSO representatives and 2) local CSOs with expertise in a technical or geographic area, as per Council

¹⁶ See <https://www.thegef.org/partners/csos>

recommendations during the previous meeting. It is expected that, together, these representatives will possess knowledge of the GEF as well as project specific insights that will add value to Council consultations and discussions.

49. The GEF secretariat will be responsible for the selection of sponsored CSOs for Council consultations and meetings to ensure that CSO representatives are sharing the voices of CSOs from the field, while maintaining robust engagement on policy issues. This selection will be done in a transparent manner, based on clear criteria and in consultation with the CSO Network, Operational Focal Points (OFPs), the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) to establish a comprehensive list of CSOs from which to draw those to be sponsored to attend the Council Meetings. The Working Group suggests that two groups of CSOs will be sponsored to attend the biannual Council Meetings: regional CSO representatives and local CSOs with experience in a technical or geographical area. In addition, other CSOs, including international NGOs whose work is of relevance to the GEF, are welcome to attend the meetings as self-sponsored participants.

50. The selection from meeting to meeting will aim to (i) include those CSOs presenting on the selected topic for the CSO consultation; (ii) track, to the extent possible, the Council Meeting Agenda; (iii) enable a healthy rotation of CSO representation that balances the needs of inclusion, expertise and opportunities for in-depth discussions with participants; (iv) foster engagement by local and national-level CSOs, as recommended in the IEO evaluation. The CSOs invited should be able to provide input to the GEF Council in relevant areas where the perspectives from CSOs are most valuable regarding programming, project execution and policy formulation.

51. The number of sponsored CSOs invited to each Council Meeting will be a streamlined number of individuals, depending on the agenda and budget. The Secretariat will strive for a balanced representation of local and regional CSO at each Council Meeting, and appropriate representation from women's and Indigenous Peoples groups. Other CSOs, including international NGOs, will be welcome to attend the Consultations and present on the topics as appropriate as well as observe the Council meetings as self-sponsored participants.

52. At every meeting, except the first meeting following the endorsement of this document's recommendations, half of the CSOs invited to attend should have attended a GEF Council Meeting in the past. This will help build knowledge of the GEF's governance process that can then inform CSOs interventions and presentations during the meetings.

53. Basic criteria for selection of regional CSO representatives for participation at Council meetings are:

- (a) Member of a well-established not-for-profit, non-governmental organization (CSO);
- (b) CSO's alignment with the GEF's mission;

- (c) Experience with GEF projects, or projects similar to those the GEF funds;
- (d) Demonstrated relations to other Networks of CSOs or coordination capacity with other civil society organizations at the regional level
- (e) General knowledge of the GEF's work, past and present

54. Basic criteria for selection of local CSO representatives for participation at Council meetings are:

- (a) Member of a well-established not-for-profit, non-governmental organization (CSO);
- (b) CSO's alignment with the GEF's mission
- (c) Demonstrated relations to other Networks of CSOs or coordination capacity at the local or national level
- (d) Experience engaging with or implementing GEF projects at the local or national level
- (e) Desire to engage more actively in GEF projects in their country

55. Additional criteria may be considered depending on the topics of the consultations and the agenda of the Council meeting.

56. Before the selection, the Secretariat will circulate the potential participants to the CSO Network for information and comment related to relevance or expertise. Based on this process, the Secretariat will select the sponsored CSOs to participate in the Council meeting. Self-funded CSOs will continue to be welcome to attend the CSO consultations and GEF Council Meetings.

57. It is important to note as well that substantial additional resources are devoted to support CSO participation in other activities of the partnership, including activities under the Country Support Program (e.g., Expanded Constituency Workshops), the GEF Small Grants Program, and the GEF Assembly and Replenishment process.

Preparations leading up to Council meetings

58. Consultations on Council documents and preparations for the Council Meeting will occur virtually amongst the selected CSOs. The Secretariat will facilitate these preparations, together with Agencies. The CSO Network, GEF SGP and GEF Agencies will be asked to provide updated contact lists of its recipients and partners ten weeks before each Council Meeting, to assist with communications and the dissemination of information.

59. Regional CSO representatives should consult with their constituencies in order to provide content for representative's Council interventions.

60. The regional representatives will develop an outline of their Council Meeting comments, seek input from their regional constituency, and submit their written comments to the Secretariat for Council distribution.

61. Given the valuable work that the CSO Network has performed, particularly in terms of its contribution to GEF's policy formulation and advocacy, it is recommended that the Network continues performing that role at the global level, by providing input and comments to the discussion regarding these matters.

Structure of Council-CSO Consultations before Council Meetings

62. The CSO Consultation with GEF Council and other participants will continue to be held on the day prior to Council and will be open to a limited number of self-funded and sponsored CSOs.

63. All Council members are encouraged to participate in the CSO Consultations. During the Consultations, CSOs will be invited to present on topics as chosen by the Council, with input from CSOs and the Secretariat. These topics will be chosen at the GEF meeting at least 12 months (or two Council meetings) before the Consultations and will seek to align with the Council Meeting Agenda. The Working Group suggests that the time allotted to these topics take up roughly half of the consultation's agenda, with the rest allotted to topics chosen by CSOs.

64. The Consultations will be jointly Chaired by one Council Member or Alternate Council Member and one regional CSO representative.

Structure of CSO Participation during Council Meetings

65. The *Rules of Procedures for the GEF Council* provide that the GEF "CEO may, in consultation with the Council, invite representatives of other organizations and entities, including non-governmental organizations, to attend or observe the Council meetings."¹⁷ According to current practice, CSOs are invited to speak at the end of each agenda item, once the Council members have spoken. In order to encourage more meaningful participation and following practices of other international organizations, it is recommended that the CSOs be given the floor during Council discussions in the order in which they ask to speak, together with Council members.

CSO Engagement at the GEF Assembly

¹⁷ Rules of Procedures for the Global Environment Facility (October 2007), paragraph 22.

66. The GEF Secretariat will continue to sponsor a civil society forum during the GEF Assembly¹⁸ which will gather civil society organizations, private sector, GEF agencies, Council members and other stakeholders to discuss issues of special interest to civil society in the context of the global environment and the future of the GEF. The civil society forum will be co-organized by the GEF Secretariat, the GEF CSO Network, the GEF Small Grants Programme and other civil society organizations and relevant stakeholders. In addition, the GEF will sponsor a limited number of CSOs engaged in GEF programs and projects to participate in the Assembly to exchange lessons learned and best practices with other CSOs, agencies and governments.

Participation of CSOs in the GEF Replenishment Process

67. The GEF Replenishment negotiations are conducted every four years in preparation of the new GEF cycle. They provide an opportunity for Contributing Participants to review GEF's performance, evaluate progress, and decide on strategic, programming and policy directions for the future. Donors assess the funding needs going forward, and agree on the financing framework which includes the size, financial and payment arrangements for the new replenishment.

68. As it has been the practice in the past two GEF replenishments, two NGO/CSO representatives, one representing a developed country-based NGO/CSO and another representing a developing country, will continue to be invited to participate in the replenishment process. These representatives will be selected in a transparent manner by the members of the CSO Network, following a consultative process and they will be responsible for channeling the opinions and contributions of civil society in their respective constituencies to the proposed directions for the following GEF cycle.

Council Review of how this Updated Vision is Working

69. The above recommendations will change certain important aspects of the GEF engagement with civil society. The intent is to enhance and reinforce this engagement, consistent with the updated Vision and taking into account overall resource availability. In the light of the above, and given the importance of the matters addressed, the Working Group suggests that Council consider at a future date how it is working in practice, in consultation with stakeholders, and whether there is a need for further review and related adjustments.

NEXT STEPS

70. Once this proposal is approved by Council, the Secretariat will start a process to implement the new arrangements for CSOs consultations and preparatory work leading up to

¹⁸ The GEF Assembly is the only governing body of the GEF in which representatives of all member countries meet every four years to review and evaluate the GEF's general policies, the operation of the GEF, and its membership, as well as considering and approving proposed amendments to the Instrument.

Council, including reaching out to Agencies, the GEF SGP, the CSO Network and recipient Countries in order to constitute a list of CSOs to be contacted and engaged.

71. The Secretariat will present a progress report to Council in the Fall of 2018 regarding the implementation of the proposed actions.

72. In addition, the Secretariat will ensure that any changes in the process of selection of CSOs to attend Council meetings and Consultations do not translate into an increase in the approved and current budget allocated to support civil society in these meetings.