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**PROGRESS REPORT
ON THE
GEF GENDER IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. The GEF Policy on Gender Equalityⁱ was approved by the 53rd GEF Council in November 2017. In 2018, the Gender Implementation Strategyⁱⁱ (here forth, Strategy) was approved by the 54th GEF Council, with a request by the Council for the Secretariat to provide annual reports on progress in the implementation of the Strategy.
2. The three reportsⁱⁱⁱ that have been prepared since the adoption of the Policy and the Strategy pointed to a positive trend and incremental gains in incorporating gender equality and women's empowerment in the design of projects and programs submitted during the GEF-7 replenishment period.
3. This fourth report captures all projects and programs submitted under the GEF-7 replenishment period at the PIF stage^{iv}, as well as those that have been submitted for CEO endorsement and approval until September 15, 2022.
4. Mirroring past reports, this fourth report provides an overview of progress in integrating gender perspectives at the project design stage and features best practice examples. It presents some key lessons learned in the implementation of selected GEF-6 projects as reported by Agencies in their mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations.^v The report also includes updates on activities undertaken by the Secretariat to support the implementation of the Policy and advance gender equality. It concludes with salient points from the GEF-8 Policy Directions^{vi} and the Independent Evaluation Office's report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement on emerging opportunities to further GEF's work on gender equality.^{vii} The last section charts a way forward that will ensure that the GEF continues its leadership in advancing global environmental benefits and transformational change through gender-responsive and inclusive projects and programs.
5. The recorded incremental gains in the reflection of gender perspectives in projects and programs since the adoption of the Policy and Strategy in 2018 is a clear indication that having clear policy guidance matters. The Policy and the Strategy provided a set of principles and specific guidance for the GEF Secretariat and implementing agencies. The common template for reflecting gender perspectives in the project design provided a set of key gender-responsive measures that each project should include: gender analysis, gender action plan, gender-sensitive indicators, sex-disaggregated data, improvements in women's empowerment with respect to participation and governance, access to and control of resources, and socio-economic benefits and services.
6. At the end of the GEF-7 project cycle, **all 528 PIFs** included in the Work Program **had undertaken gender analysis** that informed the initial project design. This is an important step in ensuring the substantive integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in the elaboration of the project at CEO Endorsement/Approval stage. Indeed, this report's review showed that **100 percent of projects at CEO Endorsement/Approval stage** had very **detailed gender analysis and all planned to include gender-responsive results framework**. These are critical bases for the implementation of gender-responsive projects and programs on the

ground and for ensuring that women and girls are acknowledged as agents and beneficiaries of environmental actions.

7. **In the coming year and into GEF-8**, the GEF Secretariat's gender-related work will be guided by the lessons learned and best practices from GEF-7, the GEF-8 Policy Directions, and the IEO report (2020).^{viii} The broad headings of this future direction, which is elaborated in the section *Charting the Way Forward* include:

- **Promoting the inclusion agenda:** A starting point will be a gap analysis of GEF policies and guidelines, for the consideration of the Council at their 64th Meeting in June 2023. The gap analysis will pay special attention to: a) people marginalized by virtue of their sexual orientation or gender identity and provisions to protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, b) youth as effective change-makers, and c) disability inclusion.
- **Enhancing gender equality gains:** The GEF Secretariat and partners, will strive towards a more systematic approach to address gender equality in projects. A starting point is through a global study capturing the wealth of knowledge and evidence on key gender equality aspects of the GEF's thematic areas and Integrated Programs. This will underpin the development of a comprehensive metrics to capture transformational gender equality results in GEF projects.
- **Leveraging network of partners:** The GEF Secretariat will leverage the expertise and comparative advantage of partners including the GEF Gender Partnership, women's and youth organizations and implementing agencies to strengthen gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in Integrated Programs and multifocal area projects and programs.
- **Knowledge sharing and awareness-raising:** The GEF Secretariat will lead in sharing and disseminating knowledge and best practices through Country Support Program events, GEF Agency Retreats, Regional Workshops, e-Courses and other learning events. The GEF Secretariat will leverage the attendance of the GEF CEO in COPs of the Conventions through their participation in gender-related high-level, high-profile meetings and related events.
- **Connecting with implementors and women participants/beneficiaries:** This is an important step to validate the impact and results of GEF's efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in projects and programs to beneficiaries on the ground. The GEF Secretariat will facilitate the holding of on-site visits and discussions with women and girls on the sidelines of GEF Secretariat-organized Regional Workshops and/or national dialogues.
- **Internal capacity: strengthening the GEF Secretariat's human and financial capacity** to deliver gender equality goals. With the GEF-8 policy direction pointing towards greater social inclusion and policy coherence, the GEF Secretariat will be guided by the IEO Report's (2020)^{ix} recommendations around strengthening the GEF

Secretariat's capacity through allocation of dedicated financial resources and staff complement for gender mainstreaming work.

- **Supporting the Conventions' gender-related work:** To ensure cross-fertilization and complementarity with respect to the gender-related work of the Conventions that the GEF serves, the GEF Secretariat will engage in the Conventions' work and collaborate with the Conventions' gender focal points in joint capacity-building and training, production of knowledge and learning materials and information dissemination and communications.

Box 1. Best practices and lessons learned from GEF-7

- **Comprehensive gender analysis is key to a meaningful reflection of gender perspectives** throughout the project concept note and in mainstreaming of gender equality in the project components.
- **A good mainstreaming practice has gender equality throughout:** in the project description, objectives, theory of change, baseline analysis, project components, outputs and indicators, global environment benefits, innovation, project risks, stakeholder engagement.
- **Inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators** in the project components is a **best practice** because this provides a better understanding of how results can be captured or measured.
- **Addressing systemic or structural gender inequalities in the projects are considered transformative.** Some projects addressed issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, unpaid care and domestic work, discrimination and abuse.
- **Making women central actors in project implementation** means providing lending and investment opportunities, supporting value chain development, advancing work on land tenure or access to land, continuous capacity building and taking into account unpaid care work, limitations in working with men, mobility and participation issues, among others.
- **Inclusion of a detailed gender action plan**, with specific budget and a **monitoring and reporting plan**, ensure better monitoring and reporting of results and adjusting interventions based on lessons learned in implementation.

PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Quality at Entry

8. The review of the GEF-7 projects and programs highlights compliance with requirements introduced with the Policy on Gender Equality. This validates the importance and value of the Policy and the Gender Implementation Strategy in providing a framework for implementing agencies to substantively integrate gender equality considerations into the various components of the project. This point was corroborated by the IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and

Engagement which underlined implementing agencies' feedback that the Policy on Gender Equality helped facilitate the agencies' work in integrating gender dimensions in project design and implementation. Moreover, the Policy's requirement on "gender tags"^x specified priority gender inequalities to be addressed and "made project staff think about gender differently" and helped them better integrate gender issues in their projects.^{xi}

9. The analysis of **528 PIFs^{xii} included in the GEF-7 Work Program showed 100 percent compliance** in considering gender issues in the initial project design phase. While there continues to be observed differences in terms of the depth and breadth of coverage of gender issues, it is worth noting that more projects – 96 percent compared to last report's 93 percent considered that their projects would address at least one of these three gender inequalities: women's unequal participation in decision-making and governance processes; women's lack of access to livelihood and other income-generating opportunities; women's unequal or lack of access to or control of natural resources. More importantly, 92 percent of PIFs indicated that they expect to develop gender-sensitive indicators. This is up by 5 percent from last year's 87 percent.

10. All these positive indications are not only encouraging; they also eventually get reflected in how gender equality and women's empowerment are embedded in CEO endorsement / approval documents, and by extension, in gender-responsive implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

11. A review of **274 FSPs and MSPs submitted for CEO Endorsement or Approval** during the period April 1, 2021 to September 15, 2022 showed that **all of the projects presented a gender analysis or assessment**. A great majority of the submissions included in their analysis specific gender inequalities observed in the project location, for example, constraints to women's participation and access to resources due to customs and cultural practices and the inhibiting aspect of women's unpaid domestic and care work. Gender dimensions of projects were expanded to cover not only the negative impacts of environmental degradation to women but also women's role and contributions as stewards of the environment, seed preservers, agriculture workers or their role in the fishing value chain.

12. Many projects have included gender action plans that detail how the identified gender inequalities would be addressed through the project components or relevant activities. In many instances, beneficiaries were disaggregated by sex to qualify how many women would receive training or livelihood or financing opportunities, for example. Some projects provided information on how the project team's capacity with regard to gender issues would be enhanced and how they plan to interact with stakeholders representing women and/or with gender experts. The development and dissemination of gender-responsive knowledge products, tools, manuals and communications materials were incorporated in many projects. Most projects also included gender action plans and indicators to monitor results on gender.

13. There was a marked improvement in projects that indicated that they plan **to include gender-sensitive indicators – 95 percent, up by 10 percent** from last year, and **gender-responsive results framework – 100 percent** compared to last year's 85 percent.

14. Moreover, **all of the projects reviewed confirmed plans to address at least one of the following gender issues:** (i) improve the participation and decision-making of women in natural resources governance (96 percent), (ii) target socio-economic benefits and services for women (98 percent), (iii) contribute to more equal access to and control of natural resources (77 percent). The figures on socio-economic benefits and access to natural resources were a marked increase from last year's 69 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

- **Participation of women** is ensured, for example, in developing gender-responsive forestry and land restoration plans and national adaptation plans, by ensuring that consultations and dialogue are scheduled at times and days that allow for women's participation (i.e., timing outside of women's household and care work, for example). FAO's Dimitra Clubs facilitate the self-mobilization of communities and train them for leadership, self-advocacy and conflict-resolution. Some projects select partners with human resources policies that encourage women's engagement and reduce the barriers to their participation in the workforce. The analysis also shows that many projects are keen to learn from their experiences and assessments and are prepared to adjust their activities to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. They have indicated hiring or assigning gender experts to facilitate the conduct of the gender analysis and stakeholder consultations. Most projects have specified that women are active participants in or beneficiaries of workshops, trainings, awareness-raising and learning activities. Many have plans to develop knowledge products, tools, manuals, training modules, blogs and other communications media that cater to the needs of women and are gender-responsive.
- Be it on climate mitigation, wildlife conservation, combating land degradation or chemicals and waste management, most projects with **socio-economic components** include women as beneficiaries. For example, in a wildlife conservation project, 40 percent of women were identified to benefit economically from participation in livelihood cooperatives to be set up by the project. Women's active engagement in setting-up the livelihood cooperatives are ensured through community consultation and shared-learning approaches. Other projects engage women in off-farm sustainable enterprises such as homestead gardening, bee-keeping and improved food value chains. Biodiversity-friendly income generating activities directed to women such as climate-smart agricultural production, handicraft production, processing of raw materials into secondary products, seed banking, establishment of nurseries, harvesting forage materials, medicinal products, cosmetics and fragrances) are financed through microcredit. One project noted as innovative the fact that women are central actors in the project which focuses on land degradation neutrality and sustainable land management. As such, the project provides women with lending and investment opportunities to govern and manage their own livelihood development. The project facilitates capacity building, training, provision of green inputs, marketing and value chain development. Ongoing support

throughout the project cycle is envisioned to ensure that capacity is genuinely build and can also cascade within the communities.

- Women's **access to resources** are supported by projects through strengthening land tenure systems, for example. Projects provide direct and indirect incentives for obtaining land titles for women, young people, and vulnerable groups and at the same time integrating gender equality considerations into the communal planning and/or territorial development plans. Supporting activities undertaken include: diagnostic of land tenure arrangements for those having access to land assets or benefiting from land use, identification of barriers to tenure such as access, conflicting interests, enforcement of laws and regulations, lack of monitoring; and soil quality analysis to help ensure that women are also given favorable parcels of land. Some projects have put in place activities to improve women's access to finance. Others support credit models developed by women's organizations and local platforms to facilitate women farmers' access to basic factors of production such as seeds, equipment and labor and the modernization of the value chains.

15. Among the **key lessons learned** and good gender mainstreaming practices from projects and programs are presented below. The **boxes that follow present best practice examples** from concrete projects.

- ***A comprehensive gender analysis is key*** to a meaningful reflection of gender perspectives throughout the project concept note and in mainstreaming of gender equality in the project components. The review has shown that projects that conducted a thorough had substantively incorporated gender equality considerations in almost all sections of the project.
- With a well-planned gender analysis, projects were better able to ***mainstream gender equality throughout the project document***, specifically in the project description, objectives, theory of change, baseline analysis, in most of the project components, outputs and indicators, global environment benefits, innovation and sustainability, project risks, stakeholder engagement.
- ***Inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators*** in the project components is a **best practice** because this provides a better understanding of how results can be captured or measured. Most indicators were on the proportion of women as beneficiaries but more substantive indicators include: gender-responsive policy frameworks, plans, tools knowledge products, training modules, microfinance incentives, among others.
- ***Addressing systemic or structural gender inequalities in the projects are considered transformative.*** Some projects have demonstrated greater ambition with respect to addressing gender inequalities or promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. They have included and addressed in their projects, issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, unpaid care and domestic work, discrimination and abuse.

- ***Making women central actors in project implementation.*** Projects have put women at the center of their projects by: providing lending and investment opportunities to augment their livelihood, supporting value chain development, advancing work on land tenure or women’s access to land, facilitating continuous capacity building and training. These projects also take into account social inequalities such as women’s time constraints, labour stressors, including unpaid care work, challenges in transportation, social limitations in working with men.
- ***Inclusion of a detailed gender action plan,*** preferably with specific budget to carry out the plan. This should go hand-in-hand with a presentation of a ***monitoring and reporting plan,*** with specific timeframe and deliverables. A gender action plan with details on how gender equality and women’s empowerment will be advanced or achieved for each output or activity allows for monitoring and reporting of results and adjusting interventions based on lessons learned in implementation.

Box 2. Recognizing the roles of women in different stages of chemical and waste value chain to understand their risks and opportunities

The project *Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in Small Island Developing States (ISLANDS)* recognized that gendered norms play out through the entire value chain of waste management. A gender assessment revealed that even if hazardous substances, chemicals, and wastes reach and expose populations equally, factors such as poverty and socioeconomic status, gender-based and customary norms, health access and equity, and overall representation in decision-making processes relating to chemicals and wastes, determine the extent of their repercussions and ramifications on population subgroups.

Identified gender perspectives to take into account in the project include ensuring that the roles of women are fully defined and understood in relation to the import of chemicals. In this regard, equal representation of women and men needed to be ensured in training and capacity-building activities and women are key stakeholders in discussion of policy solutions on hazardous chemicals and waste policies, and developing new product labelling standards. The project acknowledged efforts such as establishing regional and national systems for dismantling, recycling and management of hazardous waste such as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), End of Life Vehicles (ELVs) and Polyvinyl chlorides (PVCs) have to take into account gender equality considerations.

The project recognized that in some Caribbean SIDS, the most vulnerable groups in the waste management value chain are waste pickers living around dumpsites. It was thus essential that women’s groups can access and benefit from any levies implemented as part of the projects, and that women are not disadvantaged economically from losing access to informal recyclers for their collected materials.

Box 3. Promoting synergies with the Conventions

The project *Strengthening the Capacity of Institutions in Chad to comply with the Transparency Requirements of the Paris Agreement* makes an important linkage between the transparency work and the gender-related work within UNFCCC, which the GEF Secretariat supports and promotes. One of project outputs included “assistance provided to countries with integrating the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan into enhanced transparency frameworks” which is complementing the approved GEF project “*Global Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) Platform Phase II A: Unified Support Platform and Program for Article 13 of the Paris Agreement.*”

In the project *Strengthening Malaysia's Capacity in Implementing and Tracking Ambitious Climate Change Actions*, the implementing agency reflects on lessons learned from implementing previous projects related to National Communications and Biennial Update Reports. Those projects had gaps in obtaining sex- disaggregated data and fostering a stronger integration of gender elements into the NCs and BURs.

Learning from these experiences, the implementing agency noted to undertake a gender analysis, the findings of which will further inform the project design and adjustments to the project work will be done accordingly.

Box 4. Innovation: A focus on women’s agency and empowerment in a land and biodiversity project

The project *Land Degradation Neutrality for biodiversity conservation, food security and resilient livelihoods in the Peanut Basin and Eastern Senegal (Dékil Souf)* notes the *innovative aspect* of the project will be *to make women central actors in LDN/SLM implementation*. The following relevant actions are included: providing women with lending and investment opportunities to govern their own livelihood development, facilitate capacity building, training, green inputs, marketing and value chain development and advance work that has been done nationally on land tenure, and seek out tenure-positive arrangements and agreements.

The project will target its M&E exercises on measuring the qualitative aspects of gender empowerment and equality and go beyond just a head-count approach. Ongoing support will be provided to ensure that capacity is truly gained and can be applied and shared within communities. This project will also take into account social aspects of women, that often go ignored in projects: access to time, labour stressors, challenges in transportation, social limitations in working with male extension services, and land insecurity.

Box 5. Strengthening women’s participation, decision-making and socio-economic benefits through a robust gender assessment and action plans

The gender assessment of the project *Restoring ecological corridors in Western Chad to mitigate climate change – RECONNECT* revealed that women were socio-culturally marginalized and almost excluded from decision-making in natural resource management. The gender assessment analyzed women’s role in governance and natural resource management, assessed the impact of their actions and involvement in natural resource management, and identified the needs, constraints and opportunities that differ between women and men.

The project design took these into consideration and included in project outputs the following: i) participation of women in the Simple Management Plans of the forest blocks and taking account of their perspectives in the use of forest resources; ii) holding awareness-raising activities to encourage and ensure women’s effective participation in the project’s activities noting that women have historically been under-represented in leadership positions within community organization; iii) enhanced women’s active participation in all agricultural activities and particularly in the harvesting and marketing of timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs); and iv) giving priority to proposals from women’s organizations in micro-projects funding to secure economic, social, and environmental benefits for women.

Quality at Implementation

16. A select number of Midterm Reviews (MTRs) and Terminal Evaluations (TEs) were reviewed to obtain a sample of results reported on implementation of gender equality and women’s empowerment. The GEF-6 projects were developed before the Policy on Gender Equality and Implementation Strategy came into effect. It would be expected that those projects had a limited reflection of gender perspectives. Nevertheless, some projects reported on implementation of gender considerations. A few examples of the reports are presented in the table below. Key messages that could be drawn from these reports are:

- **Participatory approach and active involvement of women** in project implementation and management engenders ownership of project interventions and outcomes and enhances project performance and the achievement of sustainable project results. One project reported that regular consultations with women resulted in their high participation and active engagement in project activities. The terminal evaluation reported that it exceeded expectations and planned targets with 339 village savings and loans association created in 214 communities, with membership of 6,852 women and 2,622 men.
- **Women should be targeted as specific beneficiaries of the project.** A project aimed at promoting energy and labor-saving technologies addressing gender inequalities reduced the disproportionate workload of women and freeing up some of their time for socio-political roles. Over time, women’s participation and executive role in decision-making increased by 50 percent in commodity user groups and project’s

technical/coordination committee. The project also provided gender-equitable livelihood options for at least 70 percent of the population in project landscapes.

- **Gender-specific indicators and the systematic collection and storage of sex-disaggregated data are important for measuring results** and impact over time. One project noted inadequate disaggregated data as a key constraint in collecting and recording data that will allow for an analysis of progress on achieving gender equality objectives over time.
- **Mid-term reports serve an important role in revisiting project implementation activities and revising them** to address concerns. This was the case for the project in Guyana's ASGM sector where cases of abuse and exploitation of women, and trafficking were documented based on the Gender assessment report. The recommendations from the report informed the revision of the gender and safeguards workplan and the implementation of the project going forward.
- **Templates and guidance in the integration of gender perspectives** and women's empowerment consideration, both in project design and in reporting of results are **critical in ensuring the substantive consideration of gender equality issues in projects** and programs and eventually, to ensuring that women on the ground benefits and that gender inequalities are addressed and not perpetuated.

17. It is interesting to note that **some reports clearly mentioned that the fact that no gender analysis was undertaken in the project design reflected on the poor implementation of gender-related results.** It is to be expected that with the stronger reflection of gender perspectives in project design as a result of the strict adherence to and application of the Gender Implementation Strategy and related guidelines and activities deployed in GEF-7, reporting on gender results across GEF-7 project and programs will be more robust moving forward.

18. As the GEF continues to support the effective implementation of the Policy, a shift of focus towards monitoring and reporting is bound to happen. As the Secretariat reviews more MTRs, it will capture lessons learned. Together with agency representatives and in the context of the work of the GEF Gender Partnership, a guidance document or template may be developed to have some common parameters and approach of reporting to the GEF Secretariat on gender responsive measures, results and indicators, and other efforts to advance gender equality including through collaborative activities around capacity-building, development of manuals and tools and knowledge sharing with Agencies and partners.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

19. The Strategy has identified the following action areas to guide implementation:

Action Area 1: Gender-responsive approaches and results are systematically promoted in GEF programs and projects

Action Area 2: Strengthened capacity of GEF's Secretariat and its partners to mainstream gender and seize strategic entry points to promote gender equality and women's empowerment

Action Area 3: GEF's collaboration with partners to generate knowledge and contribute to learning on links between gender and the environment are improved

Action Area 4: GEF's corporate systems for tracking and reporting on gender equality results are enhanced

20. On **Action Area 1**, the **Secretariat's rigorous review of projects and programs** at PIF and CEO Endorsement/Approval stages **has proven effective** in ensuring that the requirements set out in the Policy are substantively incorporated in project design and development. The findings of the analysis of GEF-7 PIFs and CEO Endorsement/Approvals, as presented above demonstrate the effectiveness of the Secretariat's efforts to strictly apply the Policy and provide adequate guidance in the incorporation of gender perspectives and gender-responsive approaches in projects.

21. Key inputs of the Secretariat to strengthen the gender dimensions in project design include strengthening the reflection of gender perspectives in the project components through gender-specific deliverables in project outputs or through gender-disaggregated data or the use of gender-specific indicators; the engagement of women's groups and gender experts in stakeholder consultations and ensuring that women are beneficiaries of interventions; and the conduct of detailed gender analyses to inform project development and the dedicated project gender action plans. Many projects reviewed have developed gender action plans that detail how gender equality considerations and women's empowerment are advanced in each of component, output and activity of the project. This is a good practice that that will help complement future reporting on gender-specific achievements of the project.

22. On **Action Area 2**, the Secretariat has continued **supporting activities to build greater awareness and capacity** among GEF staff, Agencies and partners, to operationalize the Policy. Within the Secretariat, the selection of a Senior Gender Specialist with broad experience and understanding of the gender perspectives in the Rio Conventions is an important complement to the Secretariat's growing pool of staff advancing the gender equality agenda. Moreover, the Secretariat has raised awareness through the participation of the GEF CEO, Managers and other staff in meetings of the Conference of the Parties of the Conventions that the GEF serves including UNCCD, CBD and UNFCCC.

23. The Secretariat has shared information and expertise on the linkages of gender and environment and GEF's work in various information-sharing and capacity building events. At the 2022 Agency Retreat, a dedicated gender mainstreaming session was held to share best practice examples, lessons learned and constraints in integrating gender equality considerations in projects and in their implementation. In Regional Workshops on Integrated Programs held during the latter part of the year, the priorities as set out in the GEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Implementation Strategy were included in the presentations to focal points and other stakeholders.

24. Concurrently, the Secretariat has facilitated an assessment of Agencies' compliance with the minimum standards outlined in the Policy on Gender Equality through Agency Compliance Assessments^{xiii} and Third-Party Review of Agencies' Compliance with GEF Minimum Standards.^{xiv} The assessments inform the development of a concrete, time-bound action plan for agencies falling short of the Policy's requirements and to support them achieve compliance.

25. On **Action Area 3**, the GEF continues to actively promote the Open Online Course on Gender and Environment, designed to raise awareness and build capacity among GEF partners to mainstream gender in environmental policies, programs and projects. The Course contains close to 10 hours of instructive material covering thematic areas such as biodiversity, land degradation, climate change, international waters, and chemical and waste. It continues to attract attention among a broad set of constituencies – national and local government officials, non-governmental organizations, academia, UN and other international organizations. As of June 30, 2022, a total of 31,275 people had enrolled; double the enrolment as of June 2020 at 15,526. 24,549 certificates of participation were issued; almost double that of the 2020 figure at 12,636 certificates. The Course is now available in French, Spanish and Lao.

26. For two years, constraints caused by Covid-19 has put to a pause collaboration with the **GEF Gender Partnership (GGP)**. Acknowledging the wealth of expertise and experiences on the nexus of gender equality, women's empowerment and the environment across the GEF partnership, GGP **remains a critical platform in generating knowledge** and contributing to learning on the links between gender equality and the environment. In this regard, the Secretariat has organized a dedicated gender mainstreaming session during the October 2022 Agency Retreat to reinvigorate the Partnership and kick-off discussions on the GGP's work ahead. Initial response from the GGP members has been positive. Some have already scheduled to meet or expressed interest in meeting with the Secretariat on joint activities in the coming months. Many GGP representatives conveyed interest to convene a face-to-face meeting given the cancellation of a planned meeting in 2020 due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

27. On **Action Area 4**, the Secretariat continued to **upgrade of GEF Portal** to include gender-specific data. The Extended General Reports can now extract gender-specific data included in the CEO endorsement/approval templates. This facilitates better reporting and analysis, and support learning and exchange of information.

28. The Secretariat **will continue to review ways to more systematically analyze the report on gender results during implementation**. Currently, the report is in a narrative format which

does not allow for analysis of aggregated results. Going forward, the Secretariat, in consultation with implementing agencies, will introduce changes to the reporting modules to allow agencies to specify elements included in their reports, for examples, questions on whether or not the report included lessons or constraints on gender data, capacity to implement gender-related activities; and specifying gender-responsive measures implemented (e.g., improving women's participation, women's access to resources, and socio-economic benefits for women).

CONCLUSIONS

29. The data trends and analysis over the GEF-7 period (Dec 2018-September 2022) unequivocally demonstrate progress in the consideration of gender perspectives and gender mainstreaming in projects and programs submitted for funding. At the initial design phase, all projects included some gender analysis and projected 51% and 49% women-men distribution of beneficiaries.

30. Beyond the numbers, a qualitative assessment of a select sample of projects reviewed for endorsement/approval shows substantial progress in reflecting gender equality and women's empowerment in project design. Among the best practices noted include:

- A more thorough and comprehensive gender analysis and/or assessment underpinning gender mainstreaming efforts in the project and in the development of a gender action plan for the project;
- Gender equality considerations are weaved into the project design, with gender perspectives reflected in the project description and objectives, theory of change, description of benefits, innovation and sustainability of projects;
- Project components incorporate gender-specific outputs and/or activities, and gender-sensitive indicators which are crucial for reporting on implementation;
- Increasing attention to gender considerations beyond improving women's participation or consulting women. Over the years, projects are being more proactive in ensuring that women are beneficiaries of projects activities and are empowered as a result of being recipients of training and capacity building activities, access to micro-financing or livelihood opportunities;
- Projects are paying more attention to structural inequalities that perpetuate gender inequalities, for example, issues relating to patriarchal systems impacting on women's access to or control over resources and representation in governance and decision-making processes relating to natural resources management; women's disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work; and issues such as gender-based violence and sexual harassment in project sites;
- Projects have dedicated staff / gender experts to oversee implementation of gender-related results;

- Gender action plans provide details of how gender equality considerations are to be addressed in each of the project components' activities. Specific activities such as trainings, provision of microfinancing, supporting livelihood activities, etc. are indicated, as well as deliverables such as plans that incorporate gender perspectives or knowledge products that highlight women's specific circumstances and roles in each of the project components. Gender-specific indicators are also included. All these would allow for better implementation and monitoring of results.

31. These gender mainstreaming gains at the level of project design could be attributed to a number of factors but to a large extent, **having the Policy on Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Implementation Strategy in place and ensuring compliance to those were critical.** As noted above, the IEO Report^{xv} has found the Policy on Gender Equality as "a facilitator for agencies" in integrating gender dimensions in the design of their projects and programs. The guidance from the Secretariat and the system of "tagging" gender-responsive measures have raised awareness among agencies and enhanced their understanding of gender issues. This has helped them better integrate gender considerations in the projects as well as in implementation.

32. For its part, the GEF Secretariat ensured compliance through its thorough review of the projects from a gender perspective, development of guidance, tools and templates, holding discussions and capacity-building sessions, among others. The Implementing Agencies' strengthened capacities and their respective agency's corporate prioritization to contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment as a global goal were a crucial factor too.

33. All these efforts are further complemented by the efforts of the Conventions that the GEF serves to systematically address gender equality and women's empowerment in their processes, including through having in place gender policies and gender action plans. All the Rio Conventions and the BRS have gender actions plans and the Minamata Convention is developing one, for adoption at its Conference of the Parties in 2023.

CHARTING A WAY FORWARD

34. The GEF Secretariat's work to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the coming year and onto GEF-8 will be guided by:

- The policy directions for GEF-8, in particular, considerations towards social inclusion and a human rights-based framework;
- The lessons learned over GEF-7 in implementing the GEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Implementation Strategy;
- The IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement; and
- The imperative to support the work of the Conventions that the GEF serves towards gender-responsive implementation of the Conventions' objectives.

Moving Towards Greater Social Inclusion

35. Building on the strong and solid foundation that was created with the adoption and implementation of key institutional policies on Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality and Environmental and Social Safeguards, the GEF-8 Policy Directions^{xvi} directs the GEF Secretariat to leverage these policies and identify points of synergies with respect to principles and requirements that would catalyze **greater social inclusion** as the GEF moves towards GEF-8 roll-out and the successful completion of projects under implementation.

36. To support this ambition of an inclusive agenda which also respond to human rights principles of non-discrimination and participation, **a gap analysis** of relevant GEF policies and guidelines will be prepared for consideration by the GEF Council at its 64th meeting in June 2023. The gap analysis will focus on: a) people marginalized by virtue of their sexual orientation or gender identity and provisions to protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, b) youth as effective change-makers, and c) disability inclusion. The analysis will identify areas that the GEF Secretariat may need to strengthen with regard to its approach and guidance for an inclusive GEF programming.^{xvii}

Enhancing Gender Equality Gains

37. A critical entry point for strengthened gender mainstreaming and gender equality outcomes is through the Integrated Programs and multifocal area projects and programs. The GEF Secretariat will work closely with implementing agencies in the design of PFDs to ensure the substantive integration of gender perspectives in program components and that gender equality considerations and the participation of women, youth and other marginalized groups are key considerations in delivering global environmental benefits.

38. On the GEF Policy on Gender Equality, while the existing policy has proven effective in promoting gender equality in projects and programs,^{xviii} the IEO Report recommends conducting a review of gaps in the Policy, the Implementation Strategy, reporting templates and guidance documents and determine further action based on findings from the review. The GEF Secretariat's actions in this regard will be further informed by the gap analysis referred to in paragraph 35 and the GEF Secretariat's commitment to place greater attention on inclusion in its GEF-8 programming direction and policy agenda, including efforts to better capture GEF co-benefits including socio-economic benefits.^{xix}

39. Within the GEF Secretariat, all Program Managers are knowledgeable of the minimum requirements set out in the Policy, Strategy and updated templates. Bilateral meetings with staff on specific gender-related discussions, or as part of their on-boarding, also takes place regularly.

Leveraging Network of Partners, Including the GEF Gender Partnership

40. The Secretariat will continue to leverage its network of partners, their expertise, wealth of information and knowledge and experience, and play a facilitative role in knowledge-sharing and capacity-development. It will build on the successes of the GEF Gender Partnership and will

continue to use the Partnership as a platform of exchange on best practices in addressing gender issues in policies and programs.

41. In the coming months, the Secretariat and the GEF Gender Partnership will review and update the terms of reference (TOR) of the Partnership and develop a work program for the Partnership in line with GEF-8 Policy Directions. The revised TOR and work program will define concrete deliverables for the Partnership within a specific timeframe. It will also identify milestones to advance gender equality objectives in consideration of key global developments, and discussions in and outcomes of the Conventions that the GEF serves. In addition, it will explore ways by which the Partnership and other stakeholders, including women's and youth organizations, can play a role in supporting implementation, as well as in monitoring and reporting on the gender-specific results of GEF projects and programs.

42. A consideration for the GEF Gender Partnership's future role is its expansion beyond a community of practice and a network of experts, to a knowledge hub. This knowledge platform will serve as database for best practices, evidence and data, tools and methodologies, training and guidance materials, modules, roster of experts. It could also be an interactive tool to respond to questions and other technical assistance required from users.

43. In addition, the GEF Secretariat will work closely with implementing agencies to strengthen gender mainstreaming and social inclusion particularly in Integrated Programs and multifocal area projects and programs.

Leading in Developing and Disseminating Knowledge and Best Practices

44. The Secretariat will continue to raise awareness, prepare knowledge products including best practices and disseminate information on the GEF Secretariat's work and efforts in ensuring that gender equality is advanced and that women are key beneficiaries in programs receiving GEF resources. It will utilize existing platforms such as the Country Support Program, GEF Agency Retreats, Regional Workshops, e-courses and other learning events. It will tap the global knowledge and partnership platforms of IPs to cross-fertilize key evidence and best practices in advancing gender equality and social inclusion in GEF projects. In addition, the GEF Secretariat will also leverage the attendance of the GEF CEO and other staff in the Conference of the Parties (COPs) of the Conventions that the GEF serves by securing their participation in gender-related events and sessions in these meetings and in other high-level, high-profile meetings, global events and conferences.

45. The GEF Secretariat will aim to organize at least one gender-specific learning, exchange and capacity-building event, preferably in the margins of the 2023 GEF Assembly targeted to all GEF partners and stakeholders. The event will be a combination of learning and exchange and a stocktaking of progress, constraints and lessons learned in implementing environmental programs which are gender-responsive.

Connecting with Implementors and Women Participants/Beneficiaries

46. To appreciate the work being done on the ground and to better understand how the policy, strategy, guidelines are applied at the project level, and to meet the implementors and beneficiaries of projects, the GEF Secretariat^{xx} will more actively engage in Regional Workshops and learning missions, as well as implementing agency project visits. On-site visits and discussions with stakeholders, in particular, women beneficiaries will promote better understanding of how women and girls, and communities are benefitting from GEF-funded projects and what lessons can be learned from the projects' implementation. These visits are critical in informing and guiding GEF's future direction and approach in engaging with and supporting women's groups and in integrating gender considerations in GEF projects and programs more broadly.

Strengthening the GEF Secretariat's Human and Financial Capacity to Deliver Gender Equality Goals

47. GEF Secretariat's shift towards greater social inclusion, policy coherence and a better understanding of how GEF projects benefit women and advance gender equality require strengthening the Secretariat's capacity to carry out gender mainstreaming work. The IEO Report's^{xxi} review of comparator organizations' (CIF, AF, GCF, UNIDO) practices in carrying out their work on gender equality and women's empowerment noted that the GEF Secretariat is not aligned with the best practices implemented by these organizations in that the GEF Secretariat 1) did not have a stand-alone budget line allocated for gender mainstreaming work; and 2) lacked dedicated human resources to implement the gender policy/strategy.^{xxii} The GCF, AF, CIF, and UNIDO all allocate financial and human resources for the implementation of their gender policies. The GEF Secretariat will review these findings and address them accordingly to ensure that the Secretariat will continue to lead and/or complement efforts to promote women's empowerment and advance gender equality in GEF projects.

Supporting the Conventions' Gender-Related Work

48. Finally, the Secretariat will step up its efforts to enhance coherence and promote synergies in the gender-related work and mandates of the Conventions that the GEF serves. This will be done through a systematic and regular participation in the Conventions' sessions, in particular, when there are specific discussions on gender. The Rio Conventions' Conference of the Parties sessions have agenda items where gender issues are discussed, including the review of their Gender Action Plans. The Minamata Convention is developing its gender action plan to be adopted at its 2023 COP. These Conventions negotiate and adopt decisions that have gender-specific implications in terms of differentiated impacts to women and girls, for example, due to drought, land degradation or sea level rise, or the introduction of renewable energy and other climate-mitigating technologies. Issues of access to climate finance, in particular, for women, indigenous peoples and local communities and the youth, or gender-responsive financing of environmental projects and programs are a mainstay in the discussions of these Conventions.

49. There is thus an opportunity for the GEF Secretariat, as a leading environmental funding facility, to showcase how it is advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through its

projects and programs relating to climate change, biodiversity, land, chemicals and wastes, international waters, and its Integrated Programs and Small Grants Programme.

50. There are significant strategic entry points to collaborate with the gender focal points of the Conventions Secretariats. The gender team of the UNFCCC has reached out to the GEF Secretariat for support in organizing a session on climate finance and women-led environmental projects. Parties to the CBD will adopt the post-2020 Gender Plan of Action and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Opportunities to collaborate in the implementation of the gender action plans of the Convention can be done through joint capacity-building and training, including at the regional and country levels, production of knowledge and learning materials and information dissemination and communications, among others.

51. The GEF Secretariat's enhanced engagement and understanding of the developments in the Conventions that the GEF serves will be critical in ensuring that the GAPs of the Conventions, as well as other gender-specific mandates from related decisions adopted by Parties, are incorporated in programs and projects submitted to the GEF.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/Gender_Equality_Policy.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.54.06_Gender_Strategy_1.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ 1st Progress Report: GEF/C.56/Inf.03. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.56.Inf_03_Progress%20report%20on%20the%20GEF%20Gender%20Implementation%20Strategy.pdf; 2nd Progress Report: GEF/C.58/Inf.05. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.58_Inf.05_Progress%20Report%20on%20the%20Gender%20Equality%20Implementation%20Strategy.pdf; 3rd Progress Report: GEF/C.60/Inf.09. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.60.Inf_09_Progress_Report_on_the_GEF_Gender_Implementation_Strategy_1.pdf

^{iv} The review does not include Enabling Activities.

^v Although the GEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Gender Implementation Strategy were adopted before the GEF-6 cycle, the Secretariat is looking at GEF-6 mid-term reviews and terminal evaluation reports relating to gender equality as a baseline for future reviews and to capture some lessons learned that could inform future reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment in GEF projects and programs.

^{vi} https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf; https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_32_Revised_Policy_Recommendations.pdf

^{vii} https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf

^{viii} GEF-8 Policy Directions: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf; https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_32_Revised_Policy_Recommendations.pdf; The IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf.

^{ix} Ibid., pages 120-121.

^x Gender tags are a way for agencies to indicate which of the three gender-responsive measures the project seeks to undertake (to address gender inequalities): supporting women's improved access to and control of natural resources; enhancing women's participation in natural resources-related decision-making processes and targeting women as beneficiaries for better access to socioeconomic benefits and services.

^{xi} The IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf.

^{xiii} https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF_C.62_Inf.06_Progress%20Report%20on%20Agencies%20Compliance%20with%20Minimum%20Standards%20in%20the%20GEF%20Policies.pdf

^{xiv} This document will be presented at the 63rd GEF Council meeting.

^{xv} The IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement

https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf

^{xvi} https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_31_GEF-8_Policy_Directions.pdf; https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-04/GEF_R.08_32_Revised_Policy_Recommendations.pdf

^{xvii} The gap analysis will be informed by the IEO Report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement (https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf) which recommended, among others, preparing an overarching narrative on inclusion highlighting the complementarities of the policies on Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality and Environmental and Social Safeguards and how these policies catalyze social inclusion in the GEF project cycle.

^{xviii} See Box 2 of the IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement

https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf

^{xix} Management Response to: Evaluation of Institutional Policies and the Engagement of the GEF -

<https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Policies%20Management%20Response.pdf>

^{xx} The GEF Secretariat appointed a new Senior Gender Specialist in May 2022.

^{xxi} The IEO report on GEF Institutional Policies and Engagement

https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf, pages 120-121.

^{xxii} Currently, the GEF Secretariat has a dedicated Senior Gender Specialist and can rely on occasional ad hoc support from other staff. Demands on the GEF Secretariat to deliver on gender-responsive GEF-funded projects will only grow, in particular as the GEF-8 programming directions point towards a broader social inclusion and human-rights based framework. The GEF Secretariat may consider adopting the best practice from the comparator agencies presented in the IEO Report, in particular, to allocate a stand-alone budget line for gender mainstreaming work and to have one additional staff to support the work on gender.