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**EVOLVING CONTEXT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN MULTILATERAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND COMPARABLE ORGANIZATIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. This document provides an overview of GEF engagement with civil society and a review of the evolving context of civil society roles in the processes of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and its engagement in comparable organizations. The review is an initial step, among others, of the GEF Secretariat to respond to the IEO Evaluation of the Institutional Policies and Engagement<sup>1</sup> and the GEF Secretariat's management response<sup>2</sup> committing the GEF Secretariat to provide Council with a review of similar organizations' civil society outreach practices.

2. During the GEF-8 Replenishment negotiations, the GEF Secretariat reiterated the importance of a renewed effort from the GEF Partnership to enhance engagement of non-state actors. It described the need to strategically engage new organizations and partners at the global and local levels to deliver on the GEF ambition to contribute to a green and blue recovery and a healthier, more productive and resilient planet. The IEO Evaluation and recommendations are timely and supportive of the GEF's broader ambition to enhance its engagement with civil society, in particular youth, women, indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), LGBTQ+, and other key stakeholder groups in GEF-8 and beyond.

3. This document revisits GEF policies and mandates related to its engagement with civil society, reviews the evolving context of civil society engagement in the MEAs<sup>3</sup> and takes stock of stakeholder engagement in comparable organizations. It further identifies some tentative conclusions and lessons learned to inform pathways leading to the GEF Assembly and the GEF's longer-term ambition to enhance engagement with civil society and non-state actors. This includes:

- Increasing financing to civil society organizations (CSOs) and actors through, for example, the expanded Small Grants Programme (SGP) financing envelope and complementary windows to support civil society through the SGP CSO initiatives (Microfinance Initiative and Challenge Program).<sup>4</sup>
- Developing partnerships with civil society engaged with the Conventions, including an intermediate step to facilitate consultations with the CSO networks and constituencies in the MEAs.
- Enhancing civil society engagement in project design, implementation, and monitoring through, for example, engaging civil society in line with the new visions

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1\\_0.pdf](https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> GEF/E/C.60/09 (<https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Policies%20Management%20Response.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> The Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN\\_GEF.C.62.08.Rev\\_01\\_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23\\_0.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF.C.62.08.Rev_01_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23_0.pdf)

expressed in the Country Engagement Strategy and through activities supported by the Country Support Program;

- Strengthening broad society engagement in the GEF Council, Assembly, and relevant events through both the CSO Network and a broader engagement with other civil society actors and networks. Along this path, the GEF will continue to strengthen engagement with the CSO Network as a key partner to bring diverse civil society perspectives into the GEF Council and the GEF Partnership; a key step in this direction was Council approval in June 2022<sup>5</sup> of a new dedicated GEF Secretariat budget line in FY23 for additional support for civil society engagement.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF GEF CSO ENGAGEMENT**

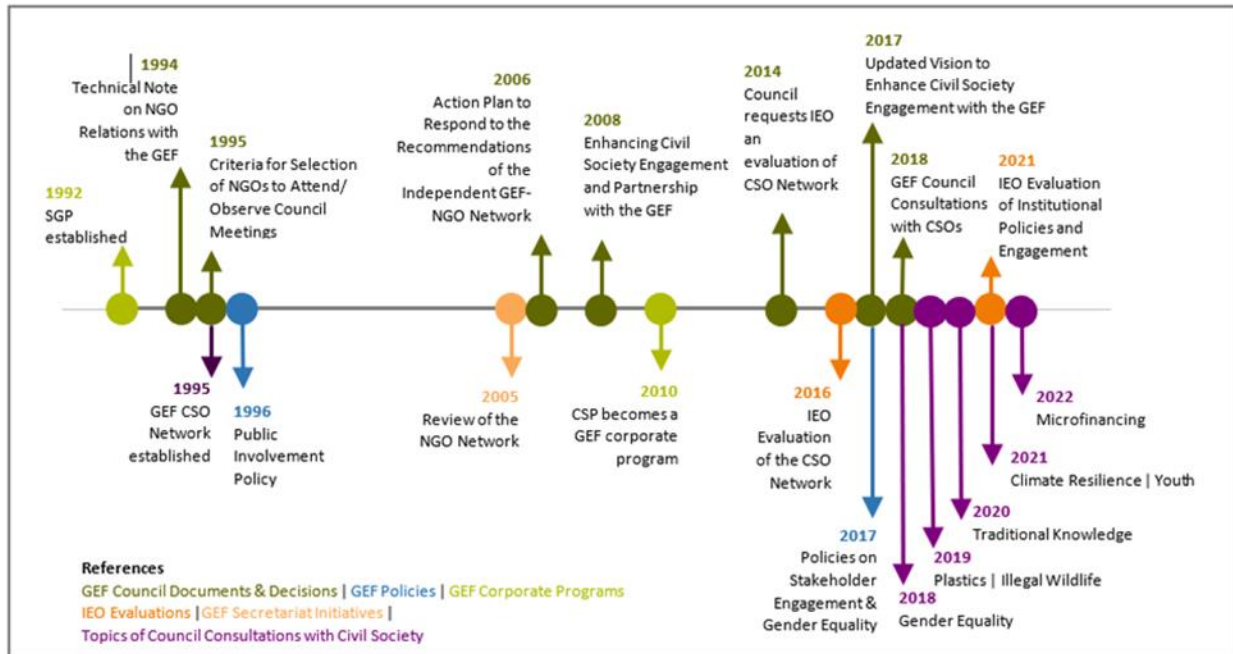
4. The GEF has long acknowledged the importance of engaging with CSOs, promoting meaningful stakeholder consultation and engagement with civil society in its operations and through projects and programs: from consultations in the formulation of GEF strategies, policies and guidelines to consultations and direct participation in project identification, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The GEF has increasingly strengthened the engagement of civil society, in particular IPLCs, women, and youth through the Country Support Program (CSP), civil society forums at the GEF Assemblies, the biannual GEF Council meetings and the Pre-Council CSO Consultations.

5. A timeline of relevant Council decisions, policies, and evaluations related to civil society engagement in the GEF is summarized in Figure 1.

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<sup>5</sup> GEF Corporate Budget for FY23, para 35-36) [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN\\_GEF.C.62.08.Rev\\_.01\\_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23\\_0.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF.C.62.08.Rev_.01_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23_0.pdf)

**Figure 1. Timeline of GEF Engagement with Civil Society**



### *GEF Policies and Guidelines*

6. The GEF Instrument acknowledges the importance of civil society to the GEF’s mission. 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 valuable project partners. In accordance with the policies, procedures, and guidelines (see above figure), the GEF has mainstreamed stakeholder engagement across the GEF Partnership and operations, through templates, documentation, and reporting requirements, criteria for project and program review, and the Secretariat’s ongoing outreach to countries and civil society. The three new policies approved by the Council in GEF-7—Stakeholder Engagement (2017),<sup>6</sup> Gender Equality (2017),<sup>7</sup> and Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) (2019)<sup>8</sup>—all recognize the importance of stakeholder engagement, including civil society actors and organizations.

7. The Policy on Stakeholder Engagement defines civil society as “non-state 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”. It sets out core principles and mandatory

<sup>6</sup> GEF Stakeholder Engagement Policy (SD/PL/01, October 10, 2017), which is available [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> Policy on Gender Equality (SD/PL/02, November 30, 2017), which is available [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards (SD/PL/03, June 13, 2019), which is available [here](#).

requirements for stakeholder engagement in GEF governance and operations, with a view to promoting transparency, accountability, integrity, effective participation, and inclusion.

8. The Policy on Access to Information (2017)<sup>9</sup> sets out guiding principles and mandatory requirements for public access to information with a view to ensuring the transparent governance and operation of the GEF.

9. The Policy on ESS stipulates stakeholder engagement as an important process to identify and mitigate environmental and social risks and impacts of the projects. The policy recognizes CSOs as key stakeholders and requires meaningful consultation with them in a culturally appropriate format and relevant local language(s).

10. The Policy on Gender Equality considers CSOs as key stakeholders and underlines the importance of stakeholder engagement as part of the guiding principles to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

#### *GEF CSO Network*

11. In 1994, the GEF Council affirmed the importance of consultations with and participation of CSOs in its meetings.<sup>10</sup> This critical step paved the way for the CSOs' self-organization into the GEF CSO Network, based on expected roles and responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> Since then, the GEF CSO Network has been a longstanding partner of the GEF. It provides feedback to the GEF Council in the development and adoption of relevant policies and guidelines, conducting or taking part in activities such as consultations and workshops, as well as playing an active role in GEF Assemblies, among other roles.

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<sup>9</sup> GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01 [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN\\_GEF.C.55.06\\_Policy\\_on\\_Access\\_to\\_Information.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.55.06_Policy_on_Access_to_Information.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [Technical Note on NGO Relations with the GEF](#) (GEF/C.1/4) was approved by the GEF Council in 2014. The Note affirmed the importance of consultations with non-governmental organizations for governments and implementing agencies.

<sup>11</sup> [Criteria for Selection of NGOs to Attend/ Observe Council Meetings and Information on NGO Consultation](#) (GEF/C.3/5); and [Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement with the GEF](#) (GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01): Roles and responsibilities of CSOs included advocacy and outreach to the wider civil society community, by supporting the dissemination of information about the GEF, the Council meeting, and Consultations.

### Box 1: Overview of the GEF CSO Network

The GEF CSO Network is a voluntary network of CSOs interested in the GEF, organized around Regional Focal Points, Chair, Vice Chair and a Network Secretariat. Initially, the Network gathered views from other CSOs on GEF policies and projects in the field to present them to the Council, and to disseminate information to accredited and interested CSOs on the GEF and the Council discussions.

Over time, the Network refined its scope as an independent global alliance of CSOs working to address global environmental challenges in areas linked to the GEF focal areas. Its mission is to safeguard the global environment by strengthening civil society partnership with the GEF by enhancing informed participation, contributing to policy development and stimulating local action.

12. Over the years, gaining lessons from the CSO Network's engagements with the GEF and several IEO recommendations, several Council decisions and action points were taken, including:

- replacing accreditation to the GEF with CSO membership in the Network with the approval of Enhancing Civil Society Engagement and Partnership with the GEF;<sup>12</sup>
- enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to fully participate in the GEF Partnership and make better use of GEF resources through the CSP, a GEF corporate program since 2010;
- developing a contemporary vision for the CSO Network that outlines a shared understanding among all the GEF Partnership on the role of the Network and clear rules of engagement between the Secretariat and the CSO Network;<sup>13</sup>
- defining the roles of civil society within the GEF Partnership in the Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement ("Updated Vision") with the GEF,<sup>14</sup> including (i) CSOs' contribution to the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEF programs and projects; and (ii) the advisory role for the GEF Council on institutional policies and guidelines.

13. The Updated Vision, approved by Council in 2017,<sup>15</sup> provided renewed guidance on how the GEF should engage with civil society, including the CSO Network, through GEF-led events, GEF Council meetings, and related consultations, as well as the GEF Assembly. The document also set out renewed guidelines for CSO participation in the GEF's CSP and other activities led by the Secretariat related to their role in the development of GEF policies and strategies. The Updated Vision further defines the primary role of civil society within the GEF Partnership: to

<sup>12</sup> [Enhancing Civil Society Engagement and Partnership with the GEF](#) (GEF/C.34/9)

<sup>13</sup> [Evaluation of the GEF CSO Network, 2016](#) (GEF/ME/C.50/02)

<sup>14</sup> [Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement with the GEF](#) (GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01)

<sup>15</sup> GEF/C.53/10/Rev.01: [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN\\_GEF.C.53.10.Rev.\\_01\\_CS0\\_Vision\\_0.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.53.10.Rev._01_CS0_Vision_0.pdf)

contribute to, as appropriate, the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEF programs and projects.

14. The Updated Vision stressed, among other things, the importance of enhancing engagement of civil society during GEF Council meetings. Since its approval, the Council has invited CSOs and the GEF Secretariat to facilitate Council Consultations with local CSOs to highlight their experiences during project implementation and relevant topics prior to GEF Council meetings. To date, the GEF has held seven consultations with CSOs on topics approved by Council.

**Box 2: Topics of GEF Council consultations with civil society**

2018	1. Connecting Environmental Impact and Gender Equality ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Agenda%20Council-CSO%20Consultations%20rev_December%2013.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Agenda%20Council-CSO%20Consultations%20rev_December%2013.pdf</a> )
2019	2. Plastics Management to Avoid Pollution: Experiences by Civil Society and Community-Based Organizations ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Agenda%20for%20CSO%20Consultations%2056th%20Council-June%209%20final.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Agenda%20for%20CSO%20Consultations%2056th%20Council-June%209%20final.pdf</a> ) 3. Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Civil Society Perspective ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/FINAL%20Agenda%20for%20CSO%20Consultations%2057%20Council.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/FINAL%20Agenda%20for%20CSO%20Consultations%2057%20Council.pdf</a> )
2020	4. The Application of Traditional Knowledge by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, Stewards of the Global Environment ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Final%20Agenda%20CSO%20Consultation%20TK%20%20Simple%20Dec2_Final.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/Final%20Agenda%20CSO%20Consultation%20TK%20%20Simple%20Dec2_Final.pdf</a> )
2021	5. Enhancing Climate Resilience and the Role of Civil Society, Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples; and Engaging Young People in promoting GEF's Mission ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/events/CSO%20Consultation_ClimateResilience%20Concept%20Note_Ver_June1.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/events/CSO%20Consultation_ClimateResilience%20Concept%20Note_Ver_June1.pdf</a> ) 6. Youth-led Solutions to the Planet's Environmental Crisis ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021-12/2021_12_03_Consultations_Civil_Society_Flyer.pdf">https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021-12/2021_12_03_Consultations_Civil_Society_Flyer.pdf</a> )
2022	7. Expanding Microfinancing to Support Local Actors and Actions for the Environment in GEF-8 and Beyond ( <a href="https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-inclusive-microfinancing">https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-inclusive-microfinancing</a> )  <i>Upcoming: Civil Society Engagement with the Global Environmental Conventions</i>

15. In 2021, as part of the Seventh Overall Performance Study (OPS-7), the IEO conducted an Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF,<sup>16</sup> which included an update

<sup>16</sup> [Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF](#) (GEF/E/C.60/06)



to the 2016 Evaluation of the GEF CSO Network.<sup>17</sup> The 2021 evaluation concluded that the position of the GEF CSO Network within the GEF Partnership has weakened since 2016. It pointed out that the Updated Vision presented an opportunity to build the Network as a mechanism for strengthening civil society participation in the GEF and to further develop its own governance. The evaluation noted, however, that the Network struggled to mobilize resources to carry out the roles outlined in the 2017 Updated Vision, diminishing its expected value for its members and GEF Partners. The IEO Evaluation further found that most CSO Network members continue to see the Network as a structure that enables effective and efficient sharing of information and a platform where major stakeholder groups are fairly represented. However, the “perceptions of these aspects are less favorable today than was the case in 2016.”

16. The IEO recommended that the GEF Secretariat further review its relationship with the CSO Network and define its roles and responsibilities. The GEF Secretariat is engaging with the Network to support its ambition to increase its relevance and impact and to help build a stronger and productive relationship between the GEF CSO Network and the GEF Secretariat. In June 2022, the Council approved an FY23 budget line that allows the GEF Secretariat to provide additional support for civil society engagement.

#### *Civil society engagement in GEF projects*

17. Civil society engagement in GEF projects involves information on planned activities, consultations on project development, and participation in project execution.<sup>18</sup> In line with GEF policies and guidelines, consultations are an integral part of the design and development of all GEF-funded activities. They aim at informing and seeking comments, knowledge, and expertise from civil society. Early consultations are critical but do not always engage civil society in project implementation. It is vital to engage with civil society in the early stage of project concept and design to encourage participation in GEF projects as the Executing Partner and Executing Entity.

18. A GEF Secretariat analysis of the GEF Trust Fund project portfolio found increasing opportunities for CSOs to actively participate in GEF projects.<sup>19</sup> CSOs are involved in project execution and as Executing Entities, or partner to implement specific components of a project. Over the last two GEF cycles, the number of CSOs involved in GEF projects has increased from 30 percent (195 of 659 projects) in GEF-6 to 38 percent (210 of 548) in GEF-7 (Figure 2).

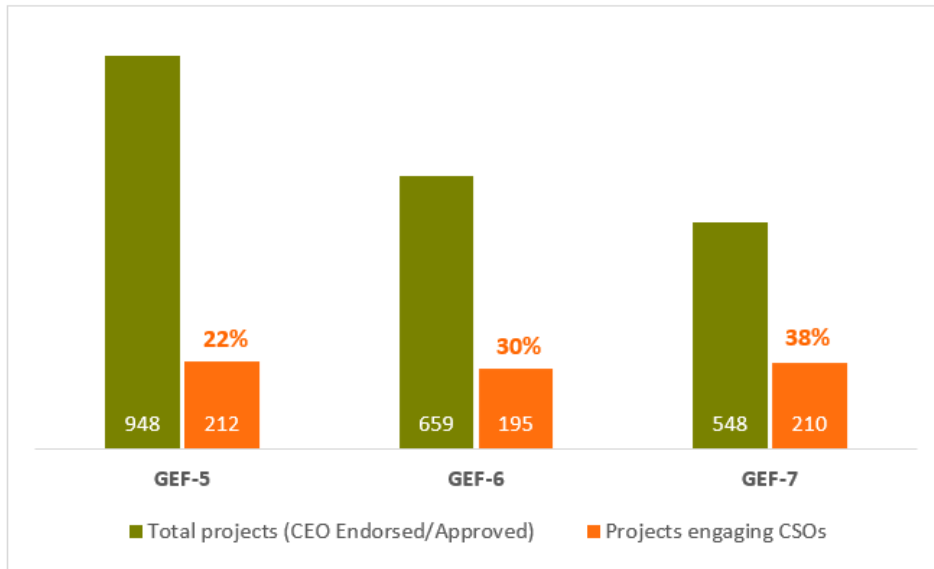
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<sup>17</sup> [Evaluation of the GEF CSO Network, 2016](#) (GEF/ME/C.50/02)

<sup>18</sup> GEF Stakeholder Engagement Policy (SD/PL/01)

<sup>19</sup> The GEF analysis is based on a review of more than 2,000 project documents. Projects included in the analysis are those at CEO endorsement stage i.e. all projects which have been either CEO endorsed (FSPs) or CEO approved (MSPs and EAs). When available, Mid-term evaluations, Terminal evaluations and Project Implementation Reviews were also reviewed.

**Figure 2. Civil Society Engagement in GEF Projects by Cycle**



19. Box 3 shows one example of CSO engagements in GEF projects, including as Executing Entities.

**Box 3: The GEF Inclusive Conservation Initiative**

GEF Council approved the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) in 2019 as a \$25 million pilot project to conserve biodiversity, deliver other global environmental benefits, and provide development benefits. ICI is the GEF’s first targeted initiative to directly support indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) to enhance their efforts to steward land, waters, and natural resources to deliver global environmental benefits.

Out of the 400 Expressions of Interest received following the call launched in March 2020, nine IPLC-led projects were selected to support IPLC stewardship of over 9 million hectares in areas of high biodiversity importance. The projects will also mitigate 141 million tCO<sub>2</sub>e in Argentina, Chile, Cook Islands, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal, Panama, Peru, Tanzania, and Thailand. The project’s executing partners are local IPLCs organizations from these 12 countries. The project will provide resources, enhance capacities, and support “hands-on” experiential learning that will enable IPLCs to define and demonstrate an inclusive model for conservation. This will recognize and empower IPLCs as decision-makers and key actors at all levels of conservation action - local action on the ground, national policies that impact their rights, global forums that define conservation and sustainable development targets and approaches for environmental action. Given the great potential to generate biodiversity and other global environmental benefits through supporting IPLCs and a strong demand for this support, the GEF will provide an additional \$25 million grant for ICI over the next four years, bringing total direct support to IPLCs to \$50 million.

The project, developed in consultation with IPLCs, includes one important component to build capacity of IPLCs to strengthen their engagement in relevant regional and international decision-making processes across Rio Conventions.

*GEF ID 10404, CI and IUCN*

20. Serving as Executing Entities is one of the key roles CSOs play in GEF projects. A Project Executing Entity is defined as an "organization that executes a GEF Project, or portions of it, under the supervision of an Agency, including national or subnational government agencies, CSOs, private sector entities, or academic institutions, among others."<sup>20</sup> Its key responsibilities include "the management and administration of the day-to-day activities of projects in accordance with specific project requirements in an agreement with the GEF Agency responsible for implementation."<sup>21</sup>

21. Engaging with CSOs as Executing Entities in GEF projects is an important entry point for capacity building of local CSOs and communities, including training and raising awareness on global environmental benefits. The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (see Box 3 above), for example, demonstrates the important role indigenous-led CSOs can play in empowering remote communities. This approach will ensure socio-economic benefits and food security of local communities, secure land tenure, strengthen local governance and resilience of local communities, empower local communities, revitalize traditional knowledge, and ensure participation of women, youth, and vulnerable communities, among other benefits.

22. The broader GEF Secretariat analysis of the GEF portfolio reveals that over the last three GEF replenishment cycles, the number of projects with CSOs serving as Executing partners has increased. The data suggest an upward trend from GEF-5 to GEF-7<sup>22</sup> of CSOs accessing financing from GEF financed projects, from a total of \$163 million in GEF-5 to \$189 million in GEF-6 and \$390 million in GEF-7 (a two-fold increase compared to GEF-5).<sup>23</sup> The GEF Secretariat analysis further found that while international CSOs have benefitted more than others, there are growing examples where national CSOs are serving as GEF Executing Entities and accessing resources through GEF Financed projects, examples include Kehati Foundation, Guyra Paraguay, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, and Fundacion Natura.

#### *The GEF Small Grants Programme*

23. The SGP Corporate Program continues to provide a highly important avenue for the GEF to work closely with CSOs and community-based organizations in support of the GEF's mission and mandate. It has served as an essential piece of the GEF's larger and increasing efforts to support inclusion and strong engagement of civil society stakeholders and partners. It provides

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<sup>20</sup> [Project and Program Cycle Policy](#), OP/PL/01 (2018)

<sup>21</sup> [Guidelines on the Project and Program Cycle Policy \(2020 Update\)](#), GEF/C.59/Inf.03 (2020)

<sup>22</sup> From 46 projects in GEF-5 and 43 projects in GEF-6 to 79 projects in GEF-7.

<sup>23</sup> From these totals, international CSOs have served as Executing Entities the most, including organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society, Nature Conservancy, World Resources Institute, Island Conservation, BirdLife International (the three international NGOs that are accredited GEF implementing Agencies – World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US), Conservation International and the International Union for Conservation of Nature are excluded in these totals)

finance, as well as technical and capacity building support, to local communities, indigenous peoples, women, and youth.

24. By providing support directly to these actors, the SGP has achieved global environmental benefits. At the same time, it has addressed important socio-economic objectives of improving livelihoods, reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and empowering women.

25. The SGP has gradually expanded from 33 to 128 participating countries. Since its inception in 1992, the SGP has implemented 26,429 projects, providing grants totaling \$724.9 million.<sup>24</sup> It plays an important role in meeting the objectives of the MEAs and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. In each participating country, the SGP is facilitating close linkages and synergies with MEA-related policies and strategies such as National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans, National Action Plans, and Nationally Determined Contributions. To that end, it emphasizes the importance of engaging wider stakeholders, including CSOs, local communities, and indigenous peoples to achieve the objectives.

26. The IEO Evaluation of the GEF SGP<sup>25</sup> concluded that it has adopted and aligned its integrated approaches to the GEF programming directions, the targets of the United Nations Development Programme Strategic Plan and MEAs.

#### **EMERGING ROLES AND MODALITIES RELATED TO CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN MEAs**

27. Each of the Conventions that the GEF serves—United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Minamata Convention, and Stockholm Convention—engage with non-state actors/non-state stakeholders<sup>26</sup> in different ways.

28. Interest in the work and implementation of the environmental Conventions has grown exponentially over the years. The UNFCCC, for example, has now more than 2,000 registered observers (non-state actors, excluding the United Nations system) to its intergovernmental processes. The UNCCD has 600 registered observers, while the Minamata Convention has over 180.<sup>27</sup>

29. This section describes the ways by which the Secretariats of the five Conventions engage non-state stakeholders in their processes, including at the sessions of their Conference of the

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<sup>24</sup> The full Annual Monitoring Report prepared by UNDP and the SGP implementing unit is available at: [www.sgp.undp.org](http://www.sgp.undp.org).

<sup>25</sup> GEF/E/C.60/01, Joint Evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Programme (2021)

<sup>26</sup> Non-state actors are used here to encompass the broad spectrum of stakeholders that are accredited observers to the five Conventions. Please note the UNFCCC has local governments and municipal authorities as one of its recognized “constituencies”. Industries, the private sector, academia and research institutions are also observers.

<sup>27</sup> Minamata COP Rules of Procedure (rule 7) notes: “Any body or agency, whether national or international, governmental or non-governmental, which is qualified in matters covered by the Convention, and which has informed the secretariat of its wish to be represented at a meeting as an observer, may be so admitted, unless at least one third of the parties present object.”

Parties (COPs), inter-sessional meetings, working group or committee meetings, workshops, and other events, specifically:

- outlining the process of accreditation and participation of non-state stakeholders;
- describing the engagements of stakeholders at intergovernmental and other meetings, as well as their role in implementing the Conventions;
- presenting current practice with regard to support, including financial support, provided by the Secretariats of these Conventions to their accredited stakeholders.

### *Accreditation and Participation*

30. The primary step to engage in the Conventions' processes is through accreditation.<sup>28</sup> The information on a specific meeting disseminated by the Conventions' Secretariats contains guidance on the registration of stakeholders as observers, according to the Rules of Procedure of their COPs. Typically, non-state stakeholders must fill out an application form on the group/organization and their activities related to the areas of the Conventions and any network or groups they are associated with. The Secretariats review the application based on their set criteria and confirm acceptance of the stakeholder as an observer thereby allowing participation in their meetings.

31. As observers, stakeholders take advantage of their presence in intergovernmental meetings in several ways. They make interventions at Plenaries and in contact groups when the Rules of Procedure allow. They attend secure meetings with high-level actors (Presidency, high-level champions, heads of the Conventions' Secretariats, Heads of State/government attending meetings, Ministers, etc.). They interact with Parties and provide them with inputs, expert advice on issues discussed in the meetings. They participate actively in contact groups by closely monitoring the discussions and maintaining close interactions with key Parties. They organize events, exhibit spaces to raise visibility of the issues they are advancing. They engage with UN entities and other multilateral organizations, financial mechanisms, and other partners to explore partnership opportunities and mobilize resources. Finally, they explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration with other non-state stakeholders.

32. As in all intergovernmental processes, non-state stakeholders can be influential in terms of their messages and "asks". However, as observers, they need the support of Parties for their interventions or proposals to count or be taken up in the formal process. In the CBD process, interventions by stakeholders in Plenary meetings or in contact groups, when supported by at least one Party, are reflected in the official record of the meeting. They are then considered as Party proposals. Stakeholder statements are, in general, reflected in meeting reports as observer statements.

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<sup>28</sup>Most of the Conventions engage with stakeholders in implementation, some intersessional processes, and other activities in which they are full participants and not observers as per COP ROP.

33. The Parties and non-state stakeholders (or broadly, observers, including the UN and other groups) understand this rule of engagement and there is a fluid interaction between them. Stakeholders approach Parties and present their ideas of textual proposals to decisions and request their support. There are instances when Parties, recognizing the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders, reach out to them for advice, data, or even language proposals.

**Box 4: Stakeholders actively engaging in the UNFCCC, UNCCD and Minamata Convention processes**

The successful adoption of UNCCD'S COP 14 [decision 26/COP14](#) on land tenure was due in large part to the advocacy and ground work by non-state actors represented by the UNCCD CSO Panel. With the CSO Panel at the helm, non-state stakeholders in the UNCCD process built the evidence and worked with Parties at the national level and during the negotiations to adopt decision 26. This directed the UNCCD Secretariat on three priority areas of work: i) *Policy* to improve responsible governance of tenure throughout the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality; ii) *Awareness-raising* to increase public knowledge of responsible land governance as the key aspect of combating desertification, land degradation, and drought, particularly among vulnerable populations such as indigenous peoples; and iii) *Reporting* to improve available knowledge on the status of land governance by better capturing gender dimensions of land tenure in the UNCCD national reporting.

The Women and Gender Constituency (W&G) in the UNFCCC actively engages in all the workstreams of the UNFCCC. The development and adoption of the first UNFCCC Gender Action Plan was, in large part, realized through the active engagement of the W&G. The W&G was able to tap on the Women Delegates Fund,<sup>29</sup> which provided resources to fund the participation of a significant number of women from developing countries to participate in the COPs. Many of these women were able to get accreditation as part of their governments' official delegation. The Women Delegates' Fund supported the women delegates' training and capacity on UNFCCC negotiations, in particular, on gender mainstreaming in the various areas of negotiations. The funded and trained women delegates, and the strong advocacy of the W&G and other gender advocates engaging in the UNFCCC (including UN Women and IUCN), were critical in the successful adoption of the first UNFCCC Gender Action Plan in 2016.

At the Minamata Convention inter-sessional expert groups, observers, which include non-state stakeholders, actively provide scientific and expert input. When they are part of a coalition of CSOs, such observers often bring coordinated inputs based on consultations among themselves. This provides technical value and strategic clarity to the inter-sessional expert group discussions.

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<sup>29</sup>The Women Delegates Fund supported the participation of women from the global South to COPs. It also funded training and capacity building for these women on matters relating to the UNFCCC negotiations and strategies to integrate gender perspectives into the negotiations.

## *Stakeholder Groupings*

34. There is increasing demand to participate and to actively engage in the Conventions' processes. The Rio Conventions processes have agreed an organized mechanism is needed to ensure all critical voices are presented and heard in global discussions and decisions.

### **UNFCCC:**

Over the years, the engagement of observer organizations, which includes non-state stakeholders, has increased by many folds. There are more than 2,000 admitted observer organizations in the UNFCCC process. A "constituency system", has been established to maintain effective interaction with interested stakeholders. There are now nine recognized constituencies in the UNFCCC process, representing more than 90 percent of all groups admitted during each COP: Business and Industry (BINGO), Environmental (ENGO), Trade Union (TUNGO), Research and Independent (RINGO), Local Government and Municipal Authorities (LGMA), Farmers, Women and Gender, Indigenous Peoples (IPO) and Youth (YOUNGO). Each of the nine constituencies select their focal points. Six of the groups have one focal point (BINGO, ENGO, TUNGO, RINGO, LGMA, and Farmers); three (Women and Gender, IPO, and YOUNGO) have two focal points. These focal points facilitate the exchange of information between the Secretariat and the admitted observer organizations. Participation in a particular constituency is through self-selection and is optional.

There are several potential benefits to belonging to one of the constituencies, including the possibility of making an intervention at the Plenary meetings, allocation of secondary badges when a site access limit is imposed, receipt of informal advanced information from the Secretariat, timely information through constituency daily meetings, occasional invitation to Ministerial receptions by host governments, access to bilateral meetings with officials, and an invitation by the Secretariat to limited-access inter-sessional workshops.

### **UNCCD:**

The UNCCD civil society panel (UNCCD CSO Panel) was established by the COP in 2011 to ensure that the civil society community is involved in a more systematic way with the Convention. The five members of the UNCCD CSO Panel represent the five regional groupings recognized by the UNCCD. These members are democratically elected for a two-year period. The CSO Panel's objectives are as follows: i) promote and increase active involvement of CSOs on the implementation of the Convention and the negotiations undertaken at the COP; ii) encourage local, national and regional CSOs to seek their accreditation; iii) increase communication and knowledge exchange among CSOs; and iv) raise awareness of UNCCD activities.

For the current biennium, the UNCCD CSO Panel identified these three priority areas of work: involving civil society in the achievement of land degradation neutrality (LDN)<sup>30</sup>; bringing to the attention of decision makers the importance of protecting land rights; and ensuring communication with all stakeholders. Specifically, the CSO Panel has identified key COP decisions where it would like to strengthen CSO involvement and their interaction with other stakeholders at the regional, national or subnational level. These decisions relate to land governance, land tenure and sustainable development included in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) adopted at the COP.

The UNCCD Secretariat's CSO Focal point serves as ex-officio Secretary of the CSO Panel and facilitates interaction with the CSO Panel through regular meetings.<sup>31</sup>

#### **CBD:**

In the case of the CBD, the formation of stakeholder groupings took on a “bottom-up” process, not formally organized through a decision or with conscious effort from the Secretariat. There are about ten major stakeholder groups in the CBD process, with some more organized than others. The IPLCs have a different status in the CBD process. Although created organically, their regular representation as a group in the CBD context institutionalized the practice of recognizing them as groupings. They are allocated priority speaking slots for observers at meetings of the CBD. They are also assigned pavilions in designated locations during CBD COPs, providing them space to raise their visibility and to hold meetings, events, and exhibit their work. The CBD Secretariat recognizes the key role of these groupings in facilitating coordination between the CBD Secretariat and stakeholder groups. Instead of reaching out to individual group stakeholders, the Secretariat works with the stakeholder grouping/constituency to disseminate information to or collect information from the members of the grouping.

35. In the processes of the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions, there are no equivalent formal stakeholder bodies. Each accredited non-state stakeholder represents its own organization or network of partners. Despite this, the Minamata Convention, has had active stakeholder engagement,<sup>32</sup> including of formal coalitions of stakeholders that work together to influence policy outcomes. This was actively facilitated by the INC Chair and more recently the COP Presidencies, and the Secretariat to strengthen input from stakeholders.

#### *Secretariat Support to Non-State Stakeholders*

36. The Conventions' Secretariats provide non-state stakeholders with a range of support. This includes constituency/grouping offices during COPs and rooms to hold their

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www2.unccd.int/cso-panel-publications>

<sup>31</sup>The UNCCD CSO panel for the biennium 2022-24 includes representation from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe.

<sup>32</sup>During both the INC/negotiating phase, and at COPs, in addition to intersessionally and in implementation.



constituency/group meetings (UNFCCC, UNCCD, Minamata Convention, and Stockholm Convention Secretariats). They also give them priority in assignment of exhibit booths or action spaces during COPs (UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD).

37. The UNCCD, UNFCCC, CBD, and Minamata Convention Secretariats support the travel of select non-state stakeholders, depending on availability of funds. These are mainly Special Trust Funds, not regular resources (or general funds). In the case of the UNCCD, the provision of financial support to non-state stakeholders at their COPs and other meetings is mandated in the same decision that created the CSO Panel. The UNCCD Secretariat relies on the CSO Panel to select and nominate stakeholders who will receive travel funding support from the UNCCD Special Trust fund for participation.

38. The Rio Conventions' Secretariats also mobilize resources and/or receive donor funds to help non-state stakeholders carry out activities to implement the Conventions or their Gender Action Plans. To complement these efforts, non-state stakeholders are encouraged to mobilize resources themselves. Donors often support activities or work programs aligned with or supportive of priorities of the Conventions' Secretariats and generally include active stakeholder partnerships and engagement.

39. The Stockholm Convention Secretariat awards small grants to Parties with criteria to demonstrate how the Party/government will work with CSOs and regional centers in the implementation of the grant money. The Minamata Convention's Specific International Programme and other capacity building efforts, including those in collaboration with the multi-stakeholder Global Mercury Partnership, further encourage stakeholder engagement in implementation. The Conventions consider that CSO engagement helps ensure the project or program's sustainability.

40. Stakeholders in the Conventions play important roles in global policy discussions and in shaping intergovernmental outcomes and directions to advance sustainable, people-centered environmental actions. These stakeholders represent the voices of women, men, young people, IPLCs, environmental defenders, disabled people, and other marginalized groups, among others. As such, they are all key players in safeguarding the environment and in pushing for more ambition for the protection and benefit of peoples and the planet. They provide real-time information and evidence, based on their own experiences and expertise and their geographic reach, on specific thematic areas considered by the five Conventions. They inform global decision-making through evidence from the ground. They also play an active role in disseminating and implementing decisions adopted by the Parties to the Conventions. These dual roles make them indispensable actors in the realization of the vision and objectives of the Conventions.

41. As key players in the work and implementation of the objectives of the Conventions, Parties to and the Secretariats of the Conventions, and the CSOs engaging in these processes, have worked closely together and clearly defined CSOs' rules of engagement or participation. During their interactions, engagements have evolved to include CSOs organizing themselves as groups or networks to better facilitate the sharing of a collective message in intergovernmental

processes. CSOs' engagements have been facilitated by providing direct support to their participation in intergovernmental processes and/or to carry out activities to support implementation of decisions and the Conventions' objectives. The Secretariats to these Conventions, as well as CSOs themselves, have mobilized resources.

42. The expansion of non-state and other stakeholders' interest in the work and implementation of the environmental Conventions has intensified over the last couple of years. This includes changes to the practices of organizing stakeholders into groups representing their constituencies. The UNFCCC's nine constituencies and the UNCCD's CSO Panel were formally created by the Parties, while the CBD's groupings emerged more organically. The GEF Secretariat desktop analysis suggests these groups have become the voice of close to 4,000 registered observers to the five Conventions.<sup>33</sup>

43. The Conventions' Secretariats have applied different means of engaging, exchanging information, and consolidating the voices of these non-state stakeholder groups. In most Conventions, civil society groups coordinate their respective group's positions, statements, views, and actions, with little support from the Conventions' Secretariats. Funding for civil society participation to the Conventions' processes in most cases depends on availability. Many civil society actors and organizations mobilize resources for their participation, as well as for their related actions and programs at the country level.

44. The GEF Secretariat may further examine the practice of these constituency groupings and organizations. Examining perceived constraints, gaps, or asymmetries in participation of actors may offer further insight into enhancing the GEF's own engagement with CSOs and non-state stakeholders.

#### **OVERVIEW OF CSO AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN COMPARABLE ORGANIZATIONS**

45. Similar to their engagement in the MEAs, stakeholders' engagement varies in environmental and climate finance facilities, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the Adaptation Fund (AF), and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).<sup>34</sup>

##### *The Green Climate Fund*

46. The GCF has a two-tiered observer mechanism. Accredited institutions to the GCF are designated "observers". Among these, the GCF Board admits "active observers" to its board meetings, drawn from accredited institutions—two each from CSOs and two from private sector entities representing developed and developing countries. The representatives serve for period of two years, which is renewable.

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<sup>33</sup> Number based on desktop review and interviews with the Convention Secretariats of UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD, Minamata, and the Stockholm conventions.

<sup>34</sup> Andres P. Falconer, *Stakeholder Engagement in Climate Finance Climate Fund Observer Mechanisms and Practices* (2022).

47. CSOs and PSOs select their respective active observers and replacements, per GCF guidelines. The civil society constituency is self-organized under an independent GCF CSO Network. It is open to a wide range of CSOs that may not necessarily be accredited observers of the GCF. Members interact on their online platform GCF Watch.

48. The GCF has policies to ensure stakeholders are engaged at every stage of project preparation. Stakeholder engagement is an important part of its Revised Environmental and Social Policy.<sup>35</sup> This requires that its accredited agencies develop stakeholder engagement plans based on principles provided for in the policy. Engagement is also reflected in their updated Gender Policy<sup>36</sup> and Indigenous Peoples' Policy.<sup>37</sup> Countries can request support to prepare stakeholder engagements through the GCF readiness programme. GCF support include support to engage stakeholders at national and subnational levels for government, non-government, and private sector actors as well as technical assistance.

### *Climate Investment Funds*

49. CIF engages its stakeholders—civil society, private sector, and indigenous peoples' constituencies in a variety of ways, most notably through its Stakeholder Observer Program, which was created in 2010. Representatives from these constituencies numbering over 40 (plus alternates) serve as Observers in the various Trust Fund committees and sub-committees. Observers are elected through a process normally managed by an independent third party. Observers may self-nominate, followed by online voting by peers. They typically serve for three years.

50. While there is no formal CIF CSO network, the CIF supported the establishment of the Stakeholder Advisory Network (SAN) in 2016. The SAN is a peer-led network of stakeholder observers of major climate and environment financing facilities that promotes non-state stakeholder engagement in these institutions, builds capacity and shares knowledge among current and former observers.

51. CIF is hosted by the World Bank and accessed through the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). All financed projects under CIF follow the policies of the host and of the MDBs for safeguards, in addition to the CIF's own, such as on gender equality.<sup>38</sup> These policies outline requirements to advance the equal and effective participation of women and of indigenous peoples through their *Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities* (DGM).<sup>39</sup> DGM was created by self-selected representatives of IPLCs to enhance their role in forest management and climate action. It operates at the country level through national projects with a global project to coordinate learning and knowledge sharing.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/document/sustainability-guidance-stakeholder-engagement-may2022.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b22-06>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/indigenous-peoples-policy>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cif.org/knowledge-documents/cif-gender-policy>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.dgmglobal.org/>

## *The Adaptation Fund*

52. Civil society representatives are a key stakeholder of the AF. While there is no formally established observer mechanism, CSOs and IPOs are consulted and may participate in the Board meetings, contributing to the development of strategies and policies. As part of its Board meetings, the AF has a standing agenda item to have dialogue with civil society on the first day of the Board meetings. This provides an opportunity for CSOs to share their findings related to AF project implementation.

53. In addition to the participation of CSOs in Board meetings and other panels, the Adaptation Fund Civil Society Network (AF CSO Network) serves as an informal coalition of several CSOs. To that end, it engages in discussions and debate on AF policies, closely following AF projects' planning and implementation. This independent coalition of CSOs, established in 2010, has since formalized its role and governance framework.<sup>40</sup> It includes a Steering committee and regional hubs, as well as a Secretariat that serves the network.

54. The AF's Environment and Social Policy<sup>41</sup> and its updated Gender Policy<sup>42</sup> provide guidelines for the participation of civil society, including indigenous peoples in the project cycle. Stakeholders are encouraged to be involved in project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The involvement of local actors is a key feature of the Fund's direct access and enhanced direct access modalities. Stakeholders are also invited to provide comments on emerging policies. CSOs can also get involved in the work of the AF through its readiness activities, commenting on project proposals and using their grievance mechanism to channel any complaints and concerns. The AF Medium-Term Strategy 2018-2022 incorporated effort to explore further engagement strategies and collaboration with civil society.

## *The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility*

55. The FCPF is a global partnership of governments, businesses, civil society, and indigenous peoples. It is focused on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, forest carbon stock conservation, the sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries, activities commonly referred to as REDD+.<sup>43</sup> The FCPF supports REDD activities through the Forest Carbon Fund and the FCPF Readiness Fund, which are managed by the World Bank. The Readiness Fund helps design national REDD+ strategies, as well as management arrangements, including proper environment and social safeguards.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> [https://af-network.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Governance%20Arrangements%20for%20the%20Adaptation%20Fund%20Civil%20Society%20Network\\_0.pdf](https://af-network.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Governance%20Arrangements%20for%20the%20Adaptation%20Fund%20Civil%20Society%20Network_0.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/document/opg-annex-3-environmental-and-social-policy-amended-in-march-2016/>

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/OPG-Annex-4\\_GP-and-GAP\\_approved-March2021pdf-1.pdf](https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/OPG-Annex-4_GP-and-GAP_approved-March2021pdf-1.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/about>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/about>

56. Stakeholders (including CSOs, private sector organizations, indigenous peoples and forest-dependent constituencies) play an important role as official observers in the FCPF Assembly and Committee. Observers are self-selected by their respective regions and are expected to report back to them. The two Funds have different constituent types. The Readiness Fund is more focused on indigenous peoples and representation of forest dwellers from different geographic regions. It also has four civil society observers from different regions, and a gender observer. The Carbon Fund has one observer each for Northern, Southern, and indigenous peoples.

57. In 2008, the FCPF set up the Capacity Building Program for Forest-Dependent Indigenous Peoples and Southern Civil Society Organizations (CBP). It works with indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities, as well as southern CSOs, aiming to increase their understanding of REDD+ issues and engagement in readiness and implementation. This program is evolving into the Climate Emissions Reductions Facility.

58. The FCPF has also looked at the engagement of women and opportunities for gender empowerment and inclusion in REDD+. Several reports, studies, and meetings have looked at constraints and opportunities for women in land and forest tenure. They continue to look at the best ways to ensure that women are involved in REDD+ financing programs.

59. CSOs are key stakeholders and partners across all comparable Funds to the GEF. The mandates, roles, and process of civil society engagement vary across all Funds just as they do in the MEAs. While CSOs have observer status in the meetings of most Funds, the process for selecting CSO representation is different across all the Funds. In some Funds, the Board or a third party approves representation, while in others the CSOs self-select. In most Funds, the CSO representatives are funded to attend Committee, Board, and Council meetings. There seems to be common and uniform requirement across all comparable Funds on the requirement of stakeholder consultation and civil society engagement in project development and implementation.

60. The different approaches and practices of having observers from accredited organizations or independent coalitions of CSOs, with active links to the formal observers, could be a lesson for the GEF Partnership as it broadens its engagement with non-state actors, including youth, women, and IPLCs in GEF-8 and beyond.

61. Across the Funds, the GEF desk analysis revealed some common challenges faced by civil society. These include i) managing communications and coordinating among stakeholders and the vast constituencies they represent; ii) engaging in the fund project cycle, particularly linking governance-level participation (through observers) to local beneficiaries and communities; and iii) meeting the full expectations of their role, given the voluntary nature of their engagement in these processes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Andres P. Falconer, Stakeholder Engagement in Climate Finance Climate Fund Observer Mechanisms and Practices (2022).

62. These challenges suggest a need for additional efforts to share lessons learned across the Funds. They also call for more analysis on best practices to enhance the engagement and role of CSOs and actors.

#### **INTERMEDIATE APPROACH AND ACTIONS TO ENHANCE THE GEF'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY**

##### *Increasing Financing to Civil Society Organizations and Actors*

63. During the GEF-8 Replenishment negotiations, the GEF Secretariat reiterated the importance of enhancing engagement of non-state actors and strategically engaging new organizations and partners at the global and local levels to deliver on the GEF-8 Strategy. As such, the GEF-8 Strategy, policy agenda, and recent Council decisions have included several targeted efforts to increase financing to civil society. First, an expanded SGP financing envelope and complementary windows support civil society through the SGP CSO initiatives, including a Microfinance Initiative and Challenge Program.<sup>46</sup> Second, a new line item in the GEF Corporate Budget FY 23 provides additional basic support for civil society engagement to enhance engagement of CSOs at country and regional level in GEF-8.<sup>47</sup> Third, the Country Engagement Strategy Implementation Strategy for GEF-8<sup>48</sup> includes a new financing opportunity for youth as part of the Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program. Leading up to the GEF Assembly, the GEF Secretariat will continue consultations and engagement and support to youth groups. For example, it will organize a GEF Assembly Challenge Program to support small-scale initiatives that contribute to the GEF's goals. CSOs, IP Groups, youth, and women and girls will be engaged as stakeholders, and solution providers and implementers.

##### *Enhancing Partnership with Civil Society Engaged with the Conventions that the GEF serves*

64. The GEF Secretariat will continue to learn from and be guided by the engagements of civil society actors in the MEAs, as well as in other climate and environment financing mechanisms. An intermediate step toward broadening engagements with CSOs is facilitating consultations with the CSO networks and constituencies in the MEAs and with the CSOs or networks serving as observers in the climate and environment Funds or mechanisms. Expected outcomes are concrete suggestions to harness complementarities among these CSOs and identify opportunities to enhance GEF engagement and support to these networks and constituencies. These CSO constituencies can serve an important role to bridge the GEF and the MEAs. In this regard, the GEF Secretariat will, leading up to the GEF Assembly, work to further identify entry points to enable participation of CSO "constituency representatives" in relevant

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<sup>46</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/EN\\_GEF\\_C.63\\_06\\_GEF%20Small%20Grants%20Programme%202.0%20Implementation%20Arrangements%20of%20GEF-8.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/EN_GEF_C.63_06_GEF%20Small%20Grants%20Programme%202.0%20Implementation%20Arrangements%20of%20GEF-8.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN\\_GEF.C.62.08.Rev\\_01\\_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23\\_0.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF.C.62.08.Rev_01_Business%20Plan%20and%20Corporate%20Budget%20for%20FY23_0.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/EN\\_GEF\\_C.63\\_05\\_Country%20Engagement%20Strategy%20Implementation%20Arrangements-CG.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/EN_GEF_C.63_05_Country%20Engagement%20Strategy%20Implementation%20Arrangements-CG.pdf)

international meetings and Conventions and/or by supporting their efforts to implement the Conventions on the ground.

#### *Enhancing Civil Society Engagement in Project Design, Implementation, and Monitoring*

65. In line with the GEF Policy on Stakeholder Engagement, as well as the Updated Vision, the Secretariat will continue to monitor and exchange lessons learned on civil society engagement in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEF programs and projects. While many CSOs are engaged as project partners, there are opportunities to further engage the GEF CSO Network members to play a more proactive role at the country level, including facilitating connections among country CSOs and other GEF Partners. Among other things, the GEF Secretariat will work with the CSO Network to engage civil society in line with the new strategic visions expressed in the Country Engagement Strategy, including information and knowledge sharing on new financing opportunities for civil society in GEF projects and the SGP 2.0. In addition, through knowledge exchange with GEF Agencies and Operational Focal Points, the GEF Secretariat will work to further improve collaboration with local CSOs in the project design, implementation, and monitoring activities.

#### *Strengthening the Relationship with the CSO Network as Key Partner*

66. To bring diverse civil society perspectives into the GEF Council and Partnership, the Secretariat will in line with the IEO Evaluation (2021) strengthen its efforts to improve the relationship with the CSO Network and support its basic operational needs. Following dialogues between the CSO Network leadership and the Secretariat, tentative plans for greater collaboration are underway. These include financial support for the Network's ambition to strengthen its operations, work, and impact at the regional and national level and efforts to improve the relationship with the GEF Partnership. These activities aim to elevate the CSO Network to a higher level of relevance and ability to support GEF's increased ambition to engage civil society at country and regional level in GEF-8 and beyond.

#### *Enhancing Civil Society Engagement in the GEF Council, Assembly, and Relevant Events*

67. The Updated Vision (2017) provided strong guidance in relation to the responsibility of the GEF Secretariat to ensure civil society engagement in the GEF Council and the GEF Assembly. This includes selecting CSOs for Council consultations and meetings, ensuring voices of CSOs from the field, and maintaining robust engagement on policy issues. It also dictated close collaboration between the GEF Secretariat, the GEF CSO Network, the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group, and the GEF SGP in the selection of topics for the CSO consultation, as well as the planning and organization of the CSO Consultations at the margins of GEF Council meetings. While the Updated Vision remains the guiding framework, the GEF Secretariat will draw on the review and findings of the IEO Evaluation of the Institutional Policies and Engagement<sup>49</sup> to deepen relations with MEAs and comparable Funds. This will aim to exchange lessons learned and identify opportunities to improve the relationship with the CSO Network

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<sup>49</sup> [https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1\\_0.pdf](https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/gef-policies-2020-vol1_0.pdf)

and broaden engagement and opportunities with other civil society actors and networks, including those engaged with MEA processes.