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INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

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INCLUSIVE GEF ASSEMBLY CHALLENGE PROGRAM

Table of Contents

Context.....	1
Aim of the Inclusive Assembly Challenge Program.....	1
Program Approach.....	2
GEF Constituency Engagement.....	3
Selection Committee.....	4
Funding	4
Key Next Steps	5
Annex I: Draft Call for Proposals	7

CONTEXT

1. Held every four years, the Assembly is the GEF's highest governing body and gathers representatives of all its 184 member countries, 18 implementing agencies, conventions, civil society organizations (CSOs), Indigenous Peoples (IPs), academia, media and business leaders to celebrate achievements. The event is a landmark occasion to share knowledge, ideas and solutions to some of the world's most pressing environmental issues.
2. The Government of Canada will host the seventh GEF Assembly in 2023. The vision for the Assembly includes commitment to inclusive engagement, including meaningful participation of IPs, youth, women and girls, CSOs, and communities engaged in delivering global environmental benefits and building resilience to climate change through inclusive and innovative approaches.
3. In this context, the GEF Secretariat aims to support initiatives that aligns with the vision of the GEF Assembly, by identifying, bringing together and supporting selected number of initiatives that embody inclusive action through an Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program. This document describes this Program, including its aim, approach, requested GEF constituency engagement, and resource provision.

AIM OF THE INCLUSIVE ASSEMBLY CHALLENGE PROGRAM

4. The aim of the Inclusive Assembly Challenge Program, or the Program, is to recognize and support the vital role being played by a range of community based/civil society organizations in delivering inclusive benefits for people and ecosystems; and advance the whole-of-society approach by providing resources and knowledge to scale up their initiatives. The Program builds on the successful Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation with the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).¹
5. Specifically, the Program aims to select high impact and innovative projects which contribute to the GEF's goals by systematically involving CSOs, IP groups, youth, and women and girls as stakeholders and solution providers/implementers. With a focus on inclusion, the program will identify and support initiatives at the intersection of various thematic priorities aligned with local challenges and opportunities, as well as linked with pressing global environmental degradation issues and climate change challenges.
6. For example, these small-scale and locally led initiatives could address topics such as climate action, nature-based solutions, sustainable land and water management, water security, sustainable agriculture and livelihoods, institutional empowerment, knowledge management and other innovative solutions.
7. The program also aims to mobilize the broader GEF Partnership towards greater integration of inclusion in GEF's operations by strategically involving the GEF Constituencies,

¹ GEF, 2022, [Update on the Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation under the Least Developed Countries Fund and Special Climate Change Fund](#), Council Document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.32/Inf.04.

CSO Network, agencies, member countries, bilateral agencies of key Council members and other collaborators. Their participation is on a voluntary basis.

8. The announcement of the selected initiatives will be made at the GEF Assembly in a flagship event. With targeted implementation support through a dedicated project funded by the SCCF, the Program will showcase GEF's stewardship and commitment to work with non-state actors aligned with its mission of healthy planet and healthy people.

PROGRAM APPROACH

9. The Challenge Program strives to highlight the importance of inclusion and provide catalytic support to locally led initiatives through a three-pronged approach.

1. **Global recognition:** The Program will identify a cohort of high impact, inclusive initiatives through a process outlined in the next section. Selected proponents and their representatives will be invited to attend the GEF Assembly to share their work under a flagship high-level event with GEF CEO, a Ministerial level representative from the host country and other speakers. As the GEF Assembly is one of the largest gatherings of key stakeholders in the world, it will provide an effective platform for the selected proponents to showcase their innovation and leadership, and influence other actors. The engagement of the GEF constituencies in the process also raises mutual recognition between the existing GEF partners and countries, and selected institutions/actors that are active beyond the traditional GEF partnership.
2. **Implementation support:** The selected initiatives will likely be in early implementation stage or at a stage of scaling up their action. The Program aims to provide catalytic financing to these initiatives through a GEF medium-sized project (MSP) funded by the SCCF and implemented by a GEF Agency. The MSP will include a dedicated fund to support the initiatives with a grant of up to \$100,000 to be implemented over a period of maximum three years. The GEF Agency will provide coordinated assistance to all the selected initiatives and work with the project proponents to design and implement their project activities.
3. **Partnership, knowledge creation and peer-learning:** Under the MSP, a global coordination and knowledge platform will be created to facilitate partnership between selected initiatives, support North-South and South-South exchange and capacity building, create a knowledge base emerging from their field work and support dissemination and peer learning. This will lead to development of a network of community-based non-state actors which can inspire and catalyze more high impact and innovative solutions for inclusion and global environmental benefits. It will also ensure sustainability of the GEF support by empowering the participants in the program and by creating an open space for additional stakeholders to advance the inclusion agenda.

10. The approach of the program has been developed by the GEF Secretariat in consultation with the host country of the GEF Assembly and with the GEF CSO network.

GEF CONSTITUENCY ENGAGEMENT

11. For the identification and selection of initiatives and proponents, the Challenge Program will request the engagement of the 32 GEF Constituencies across the world. With effective engagement of these Constituencies, the Challenge Program will encourage and select diverse and context specific initiatives by local actors and institutions with high potential to deliver transformative impacts for vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

12. The global call for submission of initiatives will be organized by the GEF Secretariat, to streamline the process. A draft call for initiatives is attached as Annex I.

13. The engagement of GEF Constituencies and the process of selecting the initiatives, as envisaged, is outlined below:

- (a) The GEF Secretariat announces the call for submission of initiatives and promotes it through its constituencies for active participation by project proponents.
- (b) The GEF Secretariat receives all the submissions and pre-screen them based on the selection criteria.
- (c) All pre-screened initiatives will then be categorized based on the geographic location of the initiative and proponents.
- (d) These will then be shared with respective GEF Constituencies for their review and nomination.
- (e) Only those initiatives which are taking part in developing countries will be selected for this program. Constituencies in developed countries can include nominations for projects being implemented in a developing country, with or without the engagement of partners in the developed country constituency.
- (f) The nominations from the GEF Constituencies will then be reviewed by a Selection Committee (described below) for final selection of initiatives under the program.
- (g) The winners will be supported to refine their concepts and will be invited to present at a special event at the GEF Assembly. The GEF Constituency members will also be invited to the event.

14. The participation of the GEF constituencies will be voluntary, and those requesting logistical support for screening and/or nominations will be provided with assistance by the GEF Secretariat. Any constituency has an option to delegate the decision-making to the GEF Secretariat and the Selection Committee.

15. The Program will be open to and encourage engagement of constituencies through their extended institutions including country embassies, high commissions, bilateral funding institutions and other departments in the target regions. For example, some countries may have their own opportunities and programs to support similar initiatives. If these are aligned sufficiently with the aim of the Challenge Program, the possibility for bilateral contributions and

partnership to enlarge the pool of finalists or to raise the level of support may be explored. Such an engagement will ensure alignment of GEF's global vision with national and regional priorities of its constituencies, ensure policy coherence towards inclusion and global environmental benefits, and leverage their existing and planned initiatives at the intersection of community and the ecosystems.

16. The GEF Secretariat will include representatives of extended constituency partners in the Assembly event upon request.

17. The GEF CSO Network will be invited to engage in the process and be part of the global coordination, knowledge generation, sharing and peer-learning activities.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

18. The GEF Secretariat will constitute a Selection Committee, tasked with identifying and agreeing on the finalists to receive project level support and to engage in the global component. The Committee members will consist of representatives of: the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), the CSO Network and one more expert from a youth-based organization. If agreed, the Selection Committee could also transition to the Steering Committee of the MSP with potential additional members.

FUNDING

19. The Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program will seek to utilize the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) budget for implementation. The fund's specific focus on innovation and experience of supporting the Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation makes it the most relevant for this initiative.

20. The total budget for the initiative is US\$3.75 million, which has been secured from a new donor. The funds will be used for the following activities:

- Project funding for the selected initiatives under a global MSP
- Support for mentoring, coordination, and network building, as part of the global MSP
- Travel and accommodation of finalists' participation at the GEF Assembly
- Organization of the GEF Assembly event
- Promotion materials and outreach events
- Organizational support by the GEF Secretariat

21. The resources will be utilized both as a project (as an MSP²) and as the GEF Secretariat-executed activities. The GEF Secretariat will include the total budget in the Fiscal Year 24 business plan and annual budget for the LDCF/SCCF, to be presented to Council in spring 2023.

22. The GEF Secretariat will engage with various constituency members to seek their interest in providing/approving additional resources for the program as well as identifying opportunities for co-financing the selected initiatives through their bilateral or other global programs. Given the focus on community groups, IPs, youth and women and girls, it is expected that many of the initiatives could be aligned with their priorities to deliver results and therefore potentially benefit from additional, optional co-financing.

KEY NEXT STEPS

23. The GEF Secretariat has identified the following key steps and tentative timeline to proceed with planning:

- (a) After receiving inputs from the 33rd LDCF/SCCF Council on this information document, the program will be further refined and shared with all the constituencies. *November 2022.*
- (b) A virtual session will be organized with the interested representatives of the GEF constituencies to discuss the Program, solicit additional inputs and request for their active participation to enhance the impact and visibility of the initiative. The CSO Network will also be engaged and invited in the session. *Mid December 2022.*
- (c) The document may be updated based on feedback from Constituencies prior to, and during Council. Any updates will be posted on the GEF Website. *By end of December 2022.*
- (d) The GEF Secretariat will post the call for concepts for the Inclusive Assembly Challenge Program in early January 2023, on the GEF website, and also send notification to all constituencies and GEF operational focal points (OFPs). The call will be open for four weeks. *Until end February 2023.*
- (e) The GEF Secretariat will discuss with an appropriate GEF Agency to develop a global MSP to provide support to the initiatives and to support global coordination, networking and lesson sharing efforts. *February 2023 onwards.*
- (f) The GEF Secretariat will prescreen the submissions and send the shortlisted initiatives to Constituencies, requesting their nomination. *Until end March 2023.*
- (g) The selection committee will review the Constituency submissions and agree on the list of finalists, with potential modifications to be made. *By mid April 2023.*

² For programming support, MSPs are envisaged to enable expedited support provision. Given the timing of the Assembly and upcoming Council meetings, it will be logistically challenging to program resources as a full-sized project with Council approval.

- (h) The winners will be contacted and supported to develop presentations to be made at the Assembly. The GEF Secretariat will develop a brochure compiling key information of the selected initiatives. It will also develop an agenda for the high-level event in consultation with Canadian government counterparts and other participants. *End-April to June 2023.*
- (i) The winners will be announced at the Assembly at a high-level event. *July 2023.*
- (j) The winners will be supported through the MSP funded by the SCCF. *From August 2023 onwards.*

ANNEX I: DRAFT CALL FOR PROPOSALS³

Challenge Program for Inclusive GEF Assembly

Deadline for submission of project concepts: February 24, 2023 (TBC)

Background

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Today, the GEF is an international partnership of 184 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
2. The Government of Canada will host the Seventh GEF Assembly in July 2023. Held every four years, the Assembly is the GEF's highest governing body and gathers representatives of all its 184 member countries, 18 implementing agencies, CSOs, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), academia, media, and business leaders to celebrate achievements. The event is a landmark occasion to share knowledge, ideas, and solutions to some of the world's most pressing environmental issues.
3. Canada's vision for hosting the GEF Assembly includes its commitment to inclusive engagement, including meaningful participation of IPs, youth, women and girls, CSOs, and communities engaged in delivering global environmental benefits and building resilience to climate change through inclusive and innovative approaches. In this context, the Assembly presents an opportunity to engage non-state actors in GEF's mission by recognizing and supporting their work at the grassroots level on transformative solutions for the planet and the people.
4. To realize this vision, the GEF Secretariat is launching an Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program with the engagement of GEF Constituencies, with support from the Government of Canada as the host of the Seventh GEF Assembly. The objective of this Challenge Program is to catalyze inclusive and innovative on-the-ground action, to be implemented by a wide range of partners, that addresses global environmental priorities and climate change challenges. This could cover topics such as climate action, nature-based solutions, sustainable land and water management, water security, sustainable livelihoods, institutional empowerment, knowledge management and other innovative solutions.
5. This special initiative for the GEF Assembly builds on the experiences and success from the Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation, which has been implemented since

³ The call for proposals may be revised based on inputs from the LDCF SCCF Council and Constituency Members

2019 in alignment with the *GEF-7 Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)*, and to be expanded in the GEF-8 period.^{4,5} The objective of the Challenge Program is to catalyze innovation to harness the power of private sector actors for achieving adaptation results. This program aims to test, validate and highlight scalable investment approaches, business models, partnerships, and technologies. The program also seeks potential for replication and upscaling in cooperation with investors and other sources of climate adaptation finance. With two calls for proposals, the Challenge Program is currently supporting close to 20 highly innovative proposals that are proposed and executed by a wide range of partners, including CSOs, philanthropic organizations, start-ups, private sector partnerships, micro-finance providers, among others.

Call for Proposals

6. The GEF is organizing a call for proposals to be supported by the Challenge Program for Inclusive GEF Assembly. Each initiative will be provided up to \$100,000 of funding support. A total of \$2 million is made available for the Challenge Program which includes a set aside fund for a global coordination project and agency fees.
7. The submitted initiatives will be prioritized and nominated with the engagement of the 32 GEF constituencies.
8. To be eligible for support, proposed activities to support the initiatives need to be implemented in a developing country/countries, and/or with participation of developing country personnel and/or institutions. Institutions from developed country constituencies are allowed to propose concepts, as long as the activities are implemented in/for developing countries with benefits. Furthermore, proposals may also support north-south partnerships and networks/cross-learning opportunities, where some active participants may be from developed countries.
9. Project concepts around the initiatives can be developed and implemented by public and private entities, CSOs, IP Groups, youth, and women and girls groups/institutions. Submissions from these organizations with activities implemented in all developing countries are eligible to benefit from SCCF funding under the Challenge Program. The support to selected projects will be grant-based, while the grant resources can also be utilized as micro-finance and other forms of blended finance.

⁴ GEF 2018, [GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF and the SCCF and Operational Improvements](#), Council document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.24/03.

⁵ GEF 2022, [GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF and the SCCF for the GEF-8 Period of 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2026 and Operational Improvements](#), Council document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.32/04/Rev.1.

Selection Criteria

10. The selection process will identify and prioritize projects and programs that are aligned with the goals of the Challenge Program. The number and financing of the concept notes invited to be submitted through the formal cycle will match the funds that are available through this Call for Proposals. The following criteria will be used for the selection:

- (a) Potential for addressing global environmental and climate change problems and their impacts;
- (b) Potential to enhance inclusiveness of stakeholders and solution providers to address these problems with relevant scope and scale;
- (c) Degree of innovation, including potential to contribute to inclusive, blue and green recovery; and
- (d) Commitment to build networks, influence partners, and share experiences;

11. Concepts will be rated based on these criteria and selected to ensure a diverse and balanced distribution among eligible countries and regions, as well as a range of stakeholders and proponents (i.e., CSOs, youth, women and girls, IPs). It is expected that the submissions will be based on an existing ongoing initiative instead of just a concept.

12. With a view to maximizing innovation and impact across all projects, robust knowledge-sharing and synergy creation efforts will be a strong dimension of this Challenge Program, particularly through south-south and north-south learning. Support activities will be financed as part of the MSP to enhance learning outcomes among selected institutions supported through this Challenge Program.

Application Modality

13. Concept notes can be developed by any public, private, civil society, indigenous, women/girls organizations. Concept notes should include the basic information indicated below, totaling 1,500 words or less. The concept notes will be pre-screened by the GEF Secretariat based on the key selection criteria indicated above and then the shortlisted projects will be shared with Constituencies for their nomination. GEF Secretariat will constitute a Selection Committee which will review the nominations and make the final selection. The Selection Committee will comprise of the GEF Secretariat, STAP, the CSO Network and one more expert from a youth-based organization.

14. The concept notes submitted will be invited to further develop proposals for consideration of support by the SCCF and will also receive capacity and network building

support. All the selected proposals will receive support from a single medium-sized project (MSP), managed as per the GEF Project and Program Cycle Policy⁶ and Guidelines.⁷ An identified GEF partner Agency will submit the project as per standard GEF procedures for the review of the GEF Secretariat via the GEF Portal.

15. GEF finance for the project supported through this Challenge Program will be outside any GEF related country allocations or caps, and therefore will not affect them. Letters of endorsement from the GEF Operational Focal Point are not required for the submission of concept notes, but may be required prior to the agreement to include it in the medium-sized project and CEO Approval packages, as per the standard GEF policy.

Timeline

January 2023	Opening date of submissions for concept notes.
End February 2023	Submission deadline.
Early April 2023	Agreement on the list of finalists by the Selection Committee.
Mid April 2023	Notification to applicants of the outcome of selection. Successful concept notes will be invited for further development and refinement, within the MSP, and OFP endorsement (if applicable).
End May to June 2023	Arrangements for Assembly participation of winners and support under the MSP.
Early July 2023	Special Event at the GEF Assembly to announce finalists of the Challenge Program, with participation of representatives of winning concepts.

⁶ [Project and Program Cycle Policy](#), Policy/OP/PL/01, December 20, 2018.

⁷ GEF, 2020, [Guidelines on the Project and Program Cycle Policy](#), GEF/C.59/Inf.3 July 20, 2020.

Elements to include in the project concept note

16. Project concepts should be a maximum of four pages or 1,500 words, and concisely address the following points:

- Proponent⁸
- Geographic scale and focus (global, regional, multi-country, country, community)
- Target stakeholders/beneficiaries: youth, women, indigenous peoples, CSOs, etc.
- Global environmental issues and climate change challenge to be addressed
- Strategy to address the stated challenges and priorities
- Approach to enhance inclusiveness in the initiative
- Innovative nature of the project
- Expected impact
- Amount of GEF project finance requested

Submission and contact

17. Proposals are to be submitted by email at challengeprogram@thegef.org . Any questions regarding the call for proposals should be directed to this e-mail.

⁸ The proponent can be any public, private or civil society institution, organization or company with legal standing in its respective jurisdiction.