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Seventh GEF Assembly
August 24 – 25, 2023
Vancouver, Canada

Agenda Item 15

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLES

OVERVIEW

During the Seventh GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, August 22-26, 2023, eleven high-level roundtable sessions will be organized around key aspects of the GEF-8 programming strategies and vision. The discussions will focus on how the GEF partnership together can tackle pressing environmental challenges and support transformative change under the overarching theme of "Healthy Planet, Healthy People."

The sessions will take place concurrently during two time slots. The first six sessions are scheduled for Thursday, 24 August 2023 at 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT) and another five sessions will run in parallel on 25 August 2023, at 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT).

The roundtables will be composed of a wide range of speakers from different sectors, including government, international organizations, environmental conventions, the private sector, civil society, youth, and Indigenous Peoples. The roundtables have been structured to provide for a moderated, interactive, and free flowing dialogue among the participants.

All Assembly invitees will be able to attend the roundtables, and will be encouraged to participate with questions and comments. For each roundtable, a rapporteur will summarize key recommendations of the discussions at the end of the session and assist the Secretariat in drafting the Assembly Chairperson's Summary that is to be presented to the plenary.

The titles of the eleven roundtables are:

1. Can increasing policy coherence across sectors narrow the nature and climate funding gap?
2. Bridging the Science and Policy Nexus for Healthy Planet, Healthy People
3. Pathways to a Net Zero Nature Positive World
4. Catalysing a Zero-Waste, Circular Economic System
5. Building Cities for People and Planet – Promoting decisive actions on integrating nature in future urban growth
6. Conserving and Restoring Nature
7. Promoting Integrated Approach towards Food Systems transformation
8. Beyond Inclusion: Supporting the Environmental Leadership of Women, Youth, and Indigenous Peoples
9. Managing for Environmental Results and Transformational Change
10. GEF's Future with New Agreements and Emerging Themes
11. Catalyzing Climate Resilience and Adapting to New Realities

Each roundtable is described in more detail further down in this document.

High-Level Roundtable 1

CAN INCREASING POLICY COHERENCE ACROSS SECTORS NARROW THE NATURE AND CLIMATE FUNDING GAP?

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 202

Current international, political, and scientific conversations are converging around the conclusion that global environmental and sustainable goals can only be realized if the funding gap to nature is narrowed. Closing this gap requires – a) increasing financial flows from multiple sources and b) reducing financial needs. In addition to increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other funds through resource mobilization from all sources, a reduction of financial needs can be achieved through the creation of regulatory and policy environments at the national scale that both discourage/eliminate harmful practices and encourage large-scale finance for nature - or policy coherence. Policy coherence - *“the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies, creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives”*, is key to reducing the funds needed for nature-financing.

Improved policy coherence can enable countries to further catalyze the impact of the nature funding flows, enhance domestic resource flows towards the investment required to achieve critical environmental goals, align private and public investment, and eliminate perverse incentives that conflict with nature conservation efforts. Domestic policies that are inconsistent or contradictory with each other and with national/global environmental goals work against the very global environmental benefits that need to be generated. Policy coherence is therefore an essential component of maximizing the benefits of nature investments, and in the sustainability of those benefits.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been consistently and progressively working in the space of policy coherence since its inception. In its current eighth programming cycle, policy coherence is integrated as an underlying cross-cutting principle, including several entry points to facilitate the mainstreaming of this concept. The GEF is well-placed to be the central player in the advancement of the policy coherence agenda at both national and global stages.

This roundtable will provide insights from the perspective of representative decision-makers. They will share their experiences on policy coherence, what they see as the main challenges and enabling conditions for increasing policy coherence, how these conditions can be facilitated at both national and international levels, and their thoughts on any existing or potential innovative instruments, mechanisms, or frameworks that can help to advance this critical agenda of policy coherence.

High-Level Roundtable 2

BRIDGING THE SCIENCE AND POLICY NEXUS FOR HEALTHY PLANET, HEALTHY PEOPLE

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 203

As global environmental changes have become increasingly profound, there is a clear urgency to develop solutions that are driven by the best available science and supported by appropriate policies. The overall GEF-8 architecture is anchored on the *Healthy Planet, Healthy People* framework, which is inspired by the explicit recognition of the interdependency between human well-being and a healthy environment. This interdependency is key to ensuring that GEF investments are targeted toward tackling the breakdown in food, energy, urban, health, and natural systems that underpin human development.

Science, environmental practice, and economic information are indicating that the integration of environmental actions is key to advancing transformative change in these systems. Yet policy options to support such integration remain inadequate across multiple dimensions, from local to national and global. More importantly, policies that are not informed by science tend to undermine efforts to tackle environmental challenges. Bridging the science and policy nexus is therefore a critical need for successful delivery of the *Healthy Planet, Healthy People* agenda.

Since its inception, the GEF has promoted integrated programming as a key strategy for harnessing synergies across focal areas. GEF investment through integrated programs are focused on generating global environmental benefits, and on creating innovative pathways for transforming these systems toward durability and resilience. The thematic scope and geographical coverage of such programs are underpinned by science, and consistent with global aspirations for development pathways that are nature-positive, climate-neutral and pollution free. Integrated programs also allow the GEF to better crowd-in other stakeholders, including the private sector, enhance knowledge sharing and learning, and ensure a more effective use of GEF resources.

Drawing from experiences in the environment and sustainable development sectors, the Roundtable will bring together experts from academia, government, private sector, and civil society to discuss how these principles can be harnessed to bridge the science and policy nexus for a *Healthy Planet, Healthy People*. The overall objective is to highlight examples and practical options that will strengthen ongoing GEF efforts on integrated programming for global environmental and development benefits.

High-Level Roundtable 3

PATHWAYS TO A NET ZERO NATURE POSITIVE WORLD

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 204

Climate change and biodiversity loss are two of the most pressing crisis humanity is currently facing. Responses have been so far largely inadequate and have failed to meet the ambition that would be required to limit temperature increase below 1.5C by the end of this century, while ensuring biodiversity is protected, restored and sustainably accessed. In addition, while there is wide recognition that the climate and biodiversity crisis are deeply interconnected, trade-offs and synergies are often overlooked when crafting responses, increasing the risk that actions to address one crisis end up exacerbating the other one. In short, we currently face two problems: low ambition and lack of coordination between climate and nature action.

What can be done to increase the ambition of climate and nature-related responses while also increasing coordination between actions taken to address the twin crisis? The 2021 *IPCC and IPBES report* does a great job of highlighting the interconnections and proposes recommendations on how to maximize synergies and minimize tradeoffs. But are these recommendations being followed by countries and non-state actors?

The event will explore key questions, including i) What institutional structure are needed for a coordinated and coherent response to the twin crisis? How to achieve a whole of government and whole of society approach? ii) How can long-term decarbonization strategies be made nature-positive, and what investments should be prioritized, and where, to pursue the double dividend of halting climate change and reversing nature-loss? iii) What is the role of public finance and budgeting processes in supporting climate and nature action? What can be done to support alignment? and iv) What is the role of international finance institutions in supporting countries raising ambition in climate and nature, and pursuing greater coordination and coherence in responses?

This event will look to address some of these questions, while showcasing examples from countries that are working to address both ambition and coordination of responses, aligning their national economic and development plans with Pathways to Net Zero and Nature Positive World.

High-Level Roundtable 4

CATALYSING A ZERO-WASTE, CIRCULAR ECONOMIC SYSTEM

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 205

The global economy today is largely based on a linear, take-make-waste model in which over 60 billion tons of natural resources are extracted per year, and over 13 billion tons of waste are disposed into landfills, incinerators, and waterways. Mass extraction, industrial production, consumption and waste are accelerating and resulting in natural resource depletion, greenhouse gas emissions, ecosystem degradation, release of hazardous chemicals into the soil, air and waters, and marine debris. These environmental impacts adversely affect livelihoods, the economy, and society at large.

Tackling this challenge requires shifting to a circular economy, which is a closed loop, regenerative model that keeps products, components, and materials at their highest value and functionality for as long as possible. Based on the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle, the circular economy addresses the entire lifecycle of products, including eliminating unnecessary material production, extending the life of products through reuse, refill, repair, rent, resale, and repurpose, and improving recycling efficiencies, including market demand for recycled material.

Circular economy is recognized as a unique opportunity for the GEF to pursue a suite of environmental benefits through public-private partnerships. Highlighted in the GEF-8 Strategy, the GEF is increasingly investing in circular solutions, including related to plastic pollution, fashion and textiles, the built environment, sustainable cities, food systems, and marine conservation projects.

This roundtable will bring together youth and experienced leadership to consider actions that will be needed in the next decade to significantly advance a zero waste, circular economic system. Intergenerational conversations will build on fire starter talks from the business world – including corporate and small business leaders –and from financiers – including private investors and multilateral development banks – to consider the opportunities, challenges and solutions to catalyzing circularity drawing on examples from fashion, construction, plastics, e-waste, and food systems. The discussion will be engaging and insightful as circular economy is considered as a new operating model for our global economy: one that builds economic and environmental resilience and creates growth that benefits business, society, and the natural environment.

High-Level Roundtable 5

BUILDING CITIES FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET – PROMOTING DECISIVE ACTIONS ON INTEGRATING NATURE IN FUTURE URBAN GROWTH

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 206

With more than half of the world's population living in urban areas, cities have a significant impact on the environment, while being at the forefront of the consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Cities also present immense opportunities to tackle these challenges through appropriate policies, planning, investments, and innovations. These opportunities and their leadership can make them key global actors to achieve global climate, nature, and sustainability goals necessary for healthy planet and healthy people.

Through the Sustainable Cities program, the GEF is collaborating with more than 50 cities in 17 countries, UNEP, the World Bank, city networks and organizations – C40, ICLEI and WRI and other partners – to support integrated approaches, partnerships, and knowledge exchange for sustainable urban transformation. More cities and partners will join the program in the GEF-8 phase of the program.

Convened by the GEF in collaboration with UNEP-led UrbanShift (GEF-7) and the World Bank's Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GEF-6), this high-level Roundtable will explore the ways in which cities can take decisive action and use integrated and nature-based solutions to promote greener and low carbon development and foster a healthier relationship of cities with surrounding ecosystems.

The session will bring together Mayors, national leaders and urban experts working at the intersection of integrated urban planning with nature, sustainable finance, and climate policies, who will share their ambition, innovative ideas, and experiences on how cities can integrate nature and biodiversity and enhance engagement of citizens for transformative action.

High-Level Roundtable 6

CONSERVING AND RESTORING NATURE

August 24, 2023, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM (PDT), Room 207

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the CBD following a four year consultation and negotiation process. This historic Framework, which supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and builds on the Convention's previous Strategic Plans, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.

These international commitments are laudable and necessary, but governments must now work with scientists and all other relevant groups to ensure success in their implementation and evaluation, by using inclusive and evidence-led approaches. Choosing the appropriate areas, increasing representation, and making conservation and restoration effective will depend, among other things, on spatial targeting based on multiple criteria. Better targeted approaches to restoration and protected area establishment are especially needed in ecoregions with inadequate representation of diverse ecosystems and habitats and where shortfalls of suitable land for conservation occur.

Habitat restoration will prove critical if we are to reverse current population declines and extinction rates of threatened species. While the UN General Assembly has declared 2021 to 2030 as the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and the Bonn Challenge aims to place at least 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes under restoration, to date there is little guidance on where to target restoration efforts to support threatened species.

Indigenous peoples' and local community lands cover one-third of Earth's territories. Remarkably, 91% of their lands are in good or fair ecological condition today. This is a testament to the effectiveness of long-term Indigenous stewardship that caters to the needs of humans and their natural landscapes. Working in partnership with Indigenous peoples and local communities enables just and equitable approaches, while promoting system-wide resilience.

Given this wide range of challenges and opportunities, the Roundtable will convene a diverse group of speakers and participants to discuss strategic considerations as well as practical approaches to move the conservation and restoration agenda further along the ambitious pathways set out by the international community. The Roundtable discussions will result in a set of recommendations to feed into the GEF Assembly Plenary.

High-Level Roundtable 7

PROMOTING INTEGRATED APPROACH TOWARDS FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

August 25, 2023, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT), Room 202

Today's food systems generate \$12 trillion in hidden social, economic, and environmental costs. Agriculture occupies about 38% of the world's total land area, and unsustainable agricultural expansion has resulted in significant loss of forests and biodiversity, land and soil degradation, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. It is responsible for up to 90% of global deforestation, and drivers linked to food production cause 70% of terrestrial and 50% of freshwater biodiversity loss.

Unless food systems globally become more sustainable, they will continue to drive loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functions, land degradation and GHG emissions, resulting in reduced production of nutritious food, eventually leading to malnutrition, food insecurity, and migration. Tackling these challenges in isolation will not deliver the desired shift in food systems toward sustainability and resilience for people and the planet. Such transformational change calls for collective engagement by diverse actors involved in food systems, toward integrated solutions across entire supply chains, from supply (production) to consumption to waste or reuse.

Since its inception, the GEF has provided financing to countries for innovative projects seeking to tackle environmental degradation from agricultural production. In the GEF-8 cycle, the food systems integrated program will build on the previous experience to catalyze the transformation to sustainable, regenerative, nature-positive and pollution reduced production systems and efficient value/supply chains covering food crops, commercial commodities, livestock, and aquaculture.

The roundtable will bring together experts from academic institutions, coalitions, UN Agencies, international organizations, stakeholder organizations, civil society, the private sector, etc. to share their stories and good practices, capturing their journey in implementing or supporting food systems transformation activities at national, sub-national, regional, and global levels.

This discussion will be anchored by keynote presentations from leading decision makers, scientists, and practitioners to discuss innovative approaches to food systems resilience and transformation to deliver on healthy people and healthy planet framework.

High-Level Roundtable 8

BEYOND INCLUSION: SUPPORTING THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN, YOUTH, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

August 25, 2023, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT), Room 211

Time and again evidence shows that supporting women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples as environmental leaders is effective and efficient in delivering global environmental benefits. At the same time, barriers to inclusion are varied and numerous ranging from legal structures to institutional and family dynamics. The GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) has served as the principal way for grassroots organizations to receive GEF support. However, accessing GEF and other large donor funding can be particularly challenging for organizations that are new, small, grassroots, informal, or otherwise lack required capacities. At points, even approaches put in place to support inclusion, such as completing formal social and environmental safeguards processes, can create additional barriers to supporting diverse organizations. Beyond the environment, inclusion is key to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and permanent results will come from changing social norms, stereotypes, and traditional practices. Therefore, to respond to the urgent planetary crises, the GEF and partners must be proactive in moving beyond inclusion in projects to projects that support diverse leadership.

This roundtable will focus on identifying ways for the GEF, the wider GEF partnership including governments, and similar institutions to support diverse leadership in addition to inclusion. The session will build on the ideas and recommendations developed during Partnerships Day while adding new voices to the conversation. Panelists will come from CSOs, Indigenous organizations, youth groups, women's organizations, GEF partner agencies, and governments with opportunities for discussion with attendees. Because the challenges are varied, the solutions and approaches will also be varied and range from mundane operational issues to transformation of the activities the GEF supports.

By learning from examples and working to identify specific gaps and opportunities both to provide resources to and build capacity of diverse organizations, the goal of this roundtable is for attendees to take home ideas they can implement as well as to develop guidance for the GEF and partners.

Interpretation in English, French and Spanish will be provided.

MANAGING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

August 25, 2023, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT), Room 204

A push for environmental results is at play across the GEF partnership. A growing number of countries are monitoring the progress of their investments and evaluating their impact in more effective ways. Community-led initiatives generate global environment and socio-economic benefits and use data to hold governments accountable for tangible results. Conventions also embark into managing for results by setting ambitious goals for the planet, while donor countries encourage providers of financing to devise more impactful strategies. The GEF has been at the forefront of managing for environmental results for three decades, with integrated approaches now in place to achieve transformational change.

To accelerate and enhance the impact of its \$10 billion active portfolio, the GEF has set ambitious targets and established a results management architecture that builds on its results experience, culminating with the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework. This framework integrates the imperative of ensuring accountability for results with the highest value for money by keeping the focus on select environmental results areas and strengthening its oversight on portfolio performance. It underpins how the GEF measures its progress and leads to innovative work that strengthens accountability—the GEF Geospatial Platform will be launched during this roundtable.

Designed to encourage openness, inventiveness and the sharing of information, the roundtable features interventions from thought leaders through two distinct discussion topics:

- *Unlocking Innovation and Managing Risk for Heightened Impact*
If the world is to achieve a genuine, nature-positive, carbon-neutral and pollution-free transformation, it cannot be business as usual. Innovations abound to bring about system change, but they come with risk and results tradeoffs for countries and partners. This session looks at these aspects, including the role of the private sector, and will further highlight the importance of risk-informed programming for the GEF.
- *Harnessing Data and Results Ecosystems for the Planet*
Global goals for the planet compel the GEF and countries to explore new approaches for heightening and accelerating impact. They present opportunities for Agencies to strengthen implementation and for countries to reinforce data infrastructure. This session focuses on these elements, including role of conventions, country action and support of international financing institutions.

High-Level Roundtable 10

GEF'S FUTURE WITH NEW AGREEMENTS AND EMERGING THEMES

August 25, 2023, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT), Room 205

Building on recent landmark decisions on the high seas agreement and biodiversity, as well as the ongoing discussion on plastic pollution including the marine environment, the GEF Assembly offers an opportunity for a critical stocktaking for the future of the GEF with new agreements/landmark decisions and for exploring emerging modalities and innovative approaches to address these emerging themes for the global environment.

The new and emerging global agreements and frameworks that are relevant to the future of the GEF, include the Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution, and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Panelists will exchange views and perspectives on how the partnership can evolve as the GEF's mandate expands and will include a panel on new and emerging agreements and a second panel on emerging modalities and innovative approaches. The global agreements may compel the GEF to explore new modalities and approaches for programming, partnership, and governance. They may present strategic opportunities for the GEF to evolve further. This session focuses on these elements, including private sector engagement, role of multilateral development banks and international financing institutions, and innovative financing instruments. Perspectives from countries will also be shared.

High-Level Roundtable 11

CATALYZING CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

August 25, 2023, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (PDT), Room 206

Climate change is one of today's most urgent, complex and insidious challenges, impacting water and agricultural security, natural hazards, infrastructure, and poverty and health. For the GEF, which seeks to explore integrated solutions to the world's most challenging environmental problems, it is crucial to ensure that solutions being conceptualized today for the developing world will be able to withstand climate change impacts and enhance climate resilience in the long term. This requires science and innovation, human and institutional capacity, and scaled-up, predictable funding. It also requires collaboration and partnership within and across a range of stakeholder groups, including youth and women, and the private sector. The GEF has approved over \$2 billion in grant finance for adaptation to date and seeks to ensure its support is catalytic in effecting and sustaining resilience gains at scale, looking ahead.

This Roundtable event will highlight opportunities for catalyzing innovation and investment in climate change adaptation and resilience through forward-looking GEF programming in the remainder of GEF-8 and into GEF-9. In particular, it will focus on strengthening the integrated vision for adaptation programming in whole-of-society approaches to financing climate adaptation and resilience. It will explore local and national actions for resilience. Models for private investment and action in adaptation and resilience will also be profiled, including equity investment funds, green banking, and fintech solutions for climate adaptation and resilience supported by the GEF-managed Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).

The session brings together speakers from civil society organizations, the private sector, multilateral development banks, donors and recipient-country governments. The event will offer participants an opportunity to challenge the panelists and share their own insights about opportunities for forward looking GEF programming on climate adaptation and resilience.