

3rd GBFF Council Meeting

December 20, 2024

Virtual

Opening of the Meeting

**Introductory Remarks by
Carlos Manuel Rodríguez,
GEF CEO and Chairperson**

As Delivered

Dear GBFF Council members, colleagues, and friends,

Welcome to the 3rd meeting of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) Council. I am pleased to open this session on a positive note, reflecting on the impressive progress we have made in implementing the GBFF in less than 18 months since its launch in August 2023 during the GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, and I am looking forward with great optimism to the future of the fund and the investments that will go through it.

A lot has been achieved since the milestone COP15 in Montreal in December 2022. I feel very proud to have the GBFF fully established and operationalized, and with programming already taking place in key countries.

In 2024, for your information, we conducted three selection rounds and programmed virtually all the resources of the first programming tranche opened last February.

All GBFF proposals are selected based on technical merits relative to the criteria set by this Council.

In a little over one year since the establishment of the GBFF, \$202 million, or 96% of the resources available in the first tranche, have been approved or set aside for a total of 40 projects, including four projects that are already moving towards implementation.

These projects are contributing directly to the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework at the national level.

Among these four projects, two are in Brazil, each with \$9.9 million in GBFF financing.

One aims to restore, protect, and maintain the biodiversity of Indigenous lands, through support to Indigenous communities implementing Territorial and Environmental Management Plans.

The other aims to translate the very successful ARCA project – that the GEF was one of the most relevant founding partners – that established a complex of large protected areas in the Amazon. Now, we want to bring that experiment to another very important biome in Brazil that is highly threatened and very unique, which is the Caatinga biome. The project will target endangered species conservation and combat wildlife trafficking in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

For the third project, in Mexico, we had a very beautiful launch in Cali, during COP16, with the presence of the Secretary of the Environment of Mexico, Alicia Bárcena. This project aims to support the achievement of “30x30” in Mexico by expanding almost 100 million hectares of protected areas. The goal of the project is to work through sustainable financing actions within protected areas in partnership with local authorities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The fourth project, in Gabon, is extremely important. It addresses an outstanding barrier in the achievement of 30x30 in the country by integrating the issue of human-wildlife conflict in an on-going Project Finance for Permanence approach that is also supported by the GEF and is very much aligned with another global initiative called Enduring Earth. The GEF is one of the key donors to this global effort in providing strategic funding so countries can create the right domestic financial mechanisms to good management of protected areas and the implementation of GBF Target 3.

Earlier this month, we approved the latest 18 Project Preparation Grants, or PPGs, allocating \$91 million, and leveraging anticipated co-financing of more than \$300 million.

In total, this round includes 17 countries, with nine being Least Developed Countries or Small Island Developing States.

The biggest PPG was for the Biomanglar project in Colombia, dedicated to the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of mangroves on its Pacific coast. It focuses on empowering Afro-Colombian communities that manage 90% of these mangroves through collective land tenure.

It is noteworthy that this project matches exactly one of the main outcomes promoted by the COP16 presidency in Cali with respect to Colombian and Afro-Colombian communities and IPLCs.

Other several significant PPGs were approved in SIDS and LDCs. A total of almost \$15 million of GBFF resources are programmed for Madagascar on locally managed Marine Areas, and on targeted action in protected areas covering high-priority Biodiversity Areas.

Another \$7.3 million are programmed to support Papua New Guinea in empowering local communities and Indigenous groups for the conservation and sustainable use of some 700,000 hectares of pristine, very valuable unique ecosystems.

I am pleased to highlight our steady progress in meeting the GBFF's portfolio targets related to resource allocation for SIDS, LDCs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and through International Financial Institutions (IFIs), one of the most relevant decisions that we took in Brasilia a year ago.

The total funding programmed through the three selection rounds include 36 percent of resources for SIDS and LDCs, amounting to \$73.3 million.

Additionally, 20 percent of the total GBFF resources programmed, or \$40.3 million, have been programmed through IFIs. Although this is below the 25 percent target, the IFI share has increased significantly from 6 percent between the first and second selection rounds to this third round in December.

We are on track to surpass the aspirational target of allocating 20 percent of the GBFF resources to support IPLCs, with \$63.5 million, or 31 percent of the resources, programmed for their actions towards conservation, sustainable use, restoration, and management of biodiversity.

The GBFF has made considerable progress in setting its governance structure. The Auxiliary Body held its first meeting earlier this month, selecting two co-chairs and currently comprising 11 members from eight constituencies representing 53 countries. We invite the remaining 12 eligible constituencies to submit their nominations promptly.

Progress has also been made in constituting the Advisory Group of Non-Sovereign Participants. The Province of Quebec, which as I just briefly indicated, has become the first non-sovereign contributor to the GBFF, has confirmed its interest in becoming a member of the Advisory Group, which is now established.

All of these achievements mobilize critical and much needed resources towards the goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework. This has only been possible with the collective hard work of each and every one of you.

And I would like us to celebrate this achievement together.

On resource mobilization, what a heartwarming moment it was during our Ministerial Dialogue and Pledging Session in October at the CBD COP16 in Cali, when \$163 million was mobilized in additional voluntary contributions from seven countries.

This was also a milestone moment in welcoming the first-ever contribution to any GEF fund by a sub-national government – which is a significant moment for all of us.

Dear Council members,

As we continue to hear, the GEF needs to improve, evolve, and do some things very differently from what we have done in the previous 30 years.

As you have seen this week in other discussions, we are committed to continuing to improve our processes and finding new ways of doing things, so that all funding entrusted to us supports relevant actions in a quick, efficient, and fair manner.

To that end, the GBFF is also providing us with a space for innovation and incubation.

One tangible example of this is the streamlined GBFF project cycle, which has inspired one of the key streamlining measures of the GEF Trust Fund that we discussed earlier this week.

As you can see, the GBFF is paving new ways of doing business for the GEF and will continue to break new ground.

Each milestone, from Council meetings, auxiliary body constitution, to selection rounds, is advancing the effectiveness and impact of the GBFF, and generating insights and lessons for the rest of our family of funds.

As we did for the streamlined project cycle, we will continue to learn from these experiences and adapt them where possible.

Dear friends,

The sobering reality is that only six years remain to meet the 2030 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

At the same time, the GBFF gives us the opportunity for hope, and room for optimism.

It is a great privilege to have the GBFF as the latest member of the GEF's growing family of funds.

The GBFF was entrusted to us at COP15 only two years ago, and we have proven that, together with you, the GBFF Council and Observers, we are ready to deliver and generate better results and impact.

As I said before, together, we established and operationalized in a very innovative way this new way of funding the GBFF.

And together, we are very proud of being where we are, which is programming resources to recipient countries.

This proves that the GBFF exemplifies the GEF's ability to be more effective and more impactful, delivering funding swiftly, and enabling national action that is aligned with global goals.

What has been achieved so far with the GBFF shows its tremendous potential in delivering the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Looking ahead, let us collectively realize this potential.

Let us continue to write this growing story of success together.

Thank you.