



EIGHTH GEF ASSEMBLY
SAMARKAND 2026
UZBEKISTAN

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8th GEF Assembly
June 4-5, 2026
Samarkand, Uzbekistan

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLES

OVERVIEW

1. This Assembly will explore the urgent actions needed in the final stretch toward achieving the global environmental goals set for 2030 and the role the GEF plays in this agenda. The assembly will focus on the implementation of the GEF-9 (Global Environment Facility's 9th replenishment) agenda. With less than five years remaining to 2030, the Assembly will highlight how GEF-9 is strategically investing in nature-based solutions and climate action to accelerate progress on biodiversity conservation, land restoration, chemical clean-up, and climate resilience through the transformation of key economic systems for sustainable and lasting outcomes at scale. It will bring together policymakers, implementers, local stakeholders, the private sector and funders to discuss challenges, share best practices, and strengthen collaboration to ensure that the goals of the Nature-Climate-Pollution agenda are met within this critical timeframe.

2. The non-business portion of the Assembly will consist of nine roundtables that will feed into a final High-level Plenary to present visionary and forward-looking solutions to the Nature-Climate-Pollution crisis. These nine themes represent the diverse yet interconnected pillars necessary to deliver on the Nature-Climate-Pollution ambitions of the GEF-9 agenda in the final push toward 2030. Each roundtable brings together key stakeholders and experts to delve into critical dimensions that collectively shape the global environmental response. These sessions are not isolated discussions; rather, they serve as strategic inputs into a high-level plenary, where the synthesized insights, gaps, and opportunities are presented to VIP participants, including ministers, heads of international organizations, and other influential decision-makers.

3. Thematic integration is central to this process. For instance, the roundtables on blended finance and ODA funding explore the future of environmental finance from different but complementary angles - examining how public and private capital can be better aligned. Meanwhile, discussions led by GEF Agencies and Execution Partners focus on maximizing the effectiveness of these funds through better planning, monitoring, and coordination. Together, these conversations inform the broader financing narrative that will be elevated during the plenary, urging high-level actors to commit to more coherent and scalable funding strategies.

4. At the same time, leaving no one behind is emphasized through dedicated roundtables on vulnerable countries (SIDS, LDCs, and fragile states) and key local stakeholders (CSOs, women, and Indigenous Peoples). These sessions will highlight on-the-ground realities, ensuring that voices from communities most affected by environmental change are heard and reflected in decision-making. The roundtable featuring recipient countries investing in policy coherence and resource mobilization underscores national leadership and innovations, reinforcing the importance of country ownership. Insights from these dialogues will feed directly into the high-level plenary, challenging VIPs to make the final sprint to 2030 one that is both broad and impact-driven.

5. Ultimately, the roundtables will not only generate technical and political recommendations but also build momentum and alignment across stakeholders. The high-level plenary will serve as a culmination of these conversations, where VIP participants can respond to the key findings, commit to action, and demonstrate leadership in delivering the GEF-9 agenda with urgency, equity, and ambition.

GEF Assembly 2026: The Last Sprint towards 2030 - Implementing the Nature-Climate-Pollution GEF-9

6. Roundtable themes and concepts:

- 1) Science, Integration and Systems Transformation
- 2) How can the GEF leverage the Conventions and its Family of Funds to deliver on the 2030 goals?
- 3) How can blended finance and the private sector bridge the funding gap?
- 4) How can the GEF increase its resources mobilization by leveraging its public ODA funding in the future?
- 5) Accelerating delivery for environmental outcomes.
- 6) Leaving no country behind: SIDS, LDCs, Fragile and Vulnerable Countries.
- 7) Leaving no one behind: CSO, women, IPLCs.
- 8) Leading the way from the ground –GEF Recipient countries investing whole of government approaches and in policy coherence for scale.
- 9) Forging partnerships for land and water in Central Asia and Beyond.

High-Level Roundtable 1

SCIENCE, INTEGRATION AND SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

June 5, 2026, 9:00 AM-12:00 AM (CET+5), Ballroom

As the world's leading financial entity for investing in the planet, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has nearly 35 years of programming experience across all dimensions of the global environment. GEF financing is channeled through five focal areas that align with its mandate as financial mechanism for major multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs): biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, international waters, and chemicals and waste. These focal investments have resulted in considerable global environmental benefits ranging from protected areas to greenhouse gas mitigation, sustainable land management, elimination of tons of hazardous chemicals, and improved management of coastal fisheries.

To further strengthen its mandate, GEF has taken steps to align programming with growing need (from countries and the global community) for transformative change in human and natural systems. For over a decade now, the focus has been on advancing integrated approaches to influence shifts in five such systems: nature (i.e. how it is used and managed), food (production and supply/value chains), urban (planning and sustainability), energy (transitioning to low carbon), and health (human-environmental interface). Although the integrated approach is well documented in scientific literature, the GEF programming represents the first time a major financial entity is advancing the practice through support to developing countries.

With progress and achievements now made with integrated approach programming, particularly in relation to the natural, food, and urban systems, this presents an opportunity for the GEF to engage with experts on potential pathways for advancing transformative change. This is key for GEF to take advantage of its significant comparative advantage or unique characteristic of operating across multiple domains and hence having an opportunity and mandate for achieving efficient outcomes from integrating across them.

The proposed roundtable will focus on exploring how the science and practice of integration can be harnessed for GEF programming to advance transformative changes in systems. The roundtable will be organized as three sequentially moderated panels, each for 45 minutes and with speakers representing countries (including IPLCs), GEF agencies, private sector, and technical institutions, and discussing perspectives on potential entry points and pathways for achieving systems transformation. The panels will be preceded by a keynote speaker who will set the stage and outline key priorities for exploration toward delivering tangible outputs and recommendations for the GEF to take forward.

High-Level Roundtable 2

HOW CAN THE GEF LEVERAGE THE CONVENTIONS AND ITS FAMILY OF FUNDS TO DELIVER ON THE 2030 GOALS?

June 4, 2026, 4:30 PM-6:00 PM (CET+5), Ballroom (Session 1)

June 5, 2026, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (CET+5), Agate room (Session 2)

With only four years remaining to 2030, the global community faces a decisive moment in delivering on commitments under multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). As the financial mechanism for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Stockholm Convention, Minamata Convention, and the BBNJ Agreement, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) plays a central role in mobilizing resources and enabling countries to meet these targets.

The GEF-9 period coincides with the last meaningful window for course-correction before 2030 targets close. Upcoming COPs provide concrete moments to accelerate environmental action and provide strategic guidance for GEF-9.

- UNFCCC COP31 will set direction on climate finance and enhanced ambition, directly shaping how GEF-9 climate investments are deployed.
- UNCCD COP17 will define priorities for drought resilience and land restoration requiring accelerated GEF programming.
- CBD COP17 will evaluate progress against the 23 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets and discuss adequate financing.
- BBNJ COP 1 will agree on a MoU with the GEF.
- The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, expected to conclude by the end of the year, may establish a new role for the GEF as part of its financial mechanism.

Together, these political processes define a critical “last sprint” toward 2030 and provide essential direction for aligning GEF-9 investments with evolving global priorities.

Delivering on these converging commitments will require more than ambition; it will require the right financial architecture. The GEF's family of funds (comprising the Trust Fund, LDCF, SCCF, CBIT, NPIF, and GBFF) offers precisely that: a coordinated platform capable of providing integrated and targeted support across multiple environmental agendas simultaneously.

The roundtable runs across two 90-minute sessions over two days of the Assembly, feeding directly into the High-Level Plenary.

These two sessions will identify how GEF-9 can be deployed more strategically, and we collectively can help shape the global sprint towards reaching the targets of the 2030 agenda.

The first session will bring together COP Presidencies, including BBNJ Co-Chair and INC Chair, and MEA Executive Secretaries, to share priorities and expectations for GEF responsiveness. In the second session, country representatives will explore how GEF can better deliver integrated solutions to reach 2030 targets.

High-Level Roundtable 3

HOW CAN BLENDED FINANCE AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR BRIDGE THE FUNDING GAP?

June 4, 2026, 14:00- 15:00 PM (CET+5), Ballroom

June 5, 2026, 11:30 AM-1:00 PM (CET+5), Emerald and Zircon Rooms (in-parallel)

Global environmental ambition is rising across Multilateral Environmental Agreements, with new quantified targets for biodiversity and climate requiring a step-change in financing from all sources. KMGBF Target 19 calls for mobilizing \$200 billion per year for biodiversity, while UNFCCC COP-29's New Collective Quantified Goal targets at least \$300 billion per year in finance from developed to developing countries by 2035, with total climate finance in developing countries reaching at least \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035. Meeting these goals will require scaling and diversifying instruments beyond ODA, including private capital mobilization through blended finance.

GEF-9's strategic vision responds directly to this context by aiming to generate lasting GEBs with greater use of blended finance approaches and deeper private sector engagement. The GEF Programming Directions set an ambitious target: 25% of GEF programming will seek to mobilize private finance at scale - reflecting the growing emphasis on leveraging additional sources of financing to meet the large funding gap in environment finance. A major focus in GEF-9 will be mainstreaming blended finance across the broader GEF Trust Fund and the wider GEF Family of Funds.

The use of blended finance will increasingly be woven into the standard financing toolkit available to countries as they work to meet their commitments under global environmental conventions. The plenary roundtable on June 4th will showcase blended finance projects from the private sector and partner countries that have successfully mobilized private capital. The roundtable will provide a platform to hear firsthand from recipient countries, private banks, and investors on their perspectives - and what it takes to successfully mobilize private capital.

The roundtable also includes two breakout sessions on June 5th that will provide:

- (i) a broad overview of private sector engagement through collective action, multistakeholder platforms, value chains alliances and GEF examples, and
- (ii) a more detailed session on "how to" structure blended finance in private and sovereign operations with specific case studies.

High-Level Roundtable 4

HOW CAN THE GEF INCREASE ITS RESOURCES MOBILIZATION BY LEVERAGING ITS PUBLIC ODA FUNDING IN THE FUTURE?

June 5, 2026, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM (CET+5), Zircon Room

Central to the achievement of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) that the GEF serves is the provision of public financing at levels pledged and agreed at the COPs negotiations. Commonly such provisions include target amounts mobilized from developed to developing countries, in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA), both bilateral and multilateral.

As the largest multilateral fund dedicated to global environmental benefits, the GEF plays a critical role in providing reliable, predictable grant funding to eligible GEF recipient countries from the public ODA financing provided by GEF donors. This grant funding catalyzes investment at scale to support biodiversity conservation, mitigation of climate change and land degradation, improved management and conservation of international waters, both marine and freshwater, and pollution prevention and management of hazardous chemicals and waste.

It is broadly recognized that this public ODA funding is necessary but not sufficient to meet and sustain the environmental outcomes that the GEF supports. Consequently, GEF policies require that GEF financing be matched with co-financing from public and non-public sources at a 1:7 ratio.

Since its founding in 1991, the GEF has programmed over \$27 billion in public funding in the form of grants and leveraged \$155 billion co-financing from a wide range of partners to enable GEF recipient countries to pursue environmental goals of global importance, aligned with MEA commitments.

This roundtable will explore how the GEF can utilize public (ODA) funding most effectively to leverage concessional and private financing from development finance institutions, the private sector, and philanthropic organizations. Discussions will focus on scaling blended finance, de-risking private investment, strengthening partnerships with multilateral development banks and aligning public finance with transformative environmental outcomes.

Participants will share practical experiences, innovative financing models, and partnership approaches that can help multiply the impact of GEF resources, accelerate implementation of integrated nature-climate-pollution solutions, and support the ambitions of GEF-9.

High-Level Roundtable 5

ACCELERATING DELIVERY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES.

June 4, 2026, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (CET+5), AGATA Room (Session 1)

June 5, 2026, 11:30 AM-1:00 PM (CET+5), AGATA Room (Session 2)

With less than five years remaining to 2030, the effectiveness of the global environmental agenda will be determined by implementation. GEF-9 is designed to accelerate delivery across biodiversity, climate, land, and pollution, yet ambition alone will not secure results. The decisive variable is how rapidly and efficiently resources are translated into outcomes on the ground. The GEF enters this final sprint with a strong comparative advantage: a results architecture that links country-driven programming, co-financing leverage, and portfolio-level accountability. At the same time, implementation constraints continue to shape performance. Projects still face start-up delays, fixed sequencing, and financing arrangements that can limit timely course correction. In a resource-constrained environment, these frictions carry real opportunity costs—delayed environmental benefits, foregone co-financing, and slower progress toward global targets.

This roundtable positions implementation as a central lever for maximizing the environmental and socio-economic returns of GEF-9. It focuses on how accelerated delivery, adaptive results management, and scaled finance can jointly raise ambition while safeguarding value for money. The discussion recognizes that transformational change is rarely linear. Achieving it requires real-time decision-making, empowered national institutions, and financing models that match the pace and complexity of system change.

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

- **Delivery at Speed, Results at Scale.** This session explores how faster and streamlined delivery can strengthen - rather than compromise - results at scale. Drawing on operational experience, the discussion will focus on strategic choices that enable timely start-up, effective sequencing, and decisive execution, and on where greater simplicity has translated into lower transaction costs and increased impact. Panelists will reflect on leadership, adaptive management and course correction in safeguarding value for money while accelerating implementation.
- **Making Finance Deliver: Execution, Evidence and Enduring Impact.** This session examines the challenge of scaling finance from an implementation and results perspective, focusing on how finance translates into higher and more durable impact. It will explore how credible results, strong execution, and capable country crowd in public and private capital beyond initial commitments. The discussion will highlight practical constraints, risk considerations, and enablers to realizing co-financing at scale, including but not limited to blended finance approaches, while underscoring how coordinated implementation supports country priorities.

High-Level Roundtable 6

LEAVING NO COUNTRY BEHIND: SIDS, LDCS, FRAGILE AND VULNERABLE COUNTRIES.

June 4, 2026, 4:00 PM-6:00 PM (CET+5), Onyx Room

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations home to over 1 billion people stand at a critical juncture. While these nations steward some of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems and serve as the frontline of action for a sustainable environment, they face disproportionate environmental and economic vulnerabilities. Yet within this challenge lies opportunity: when environmental finance is done right, it can serve as a powerful catalyst - not just for conservation, but for sustainable livelihoods, job creation, and resilient futures.

This roundtable aims to explore how to strengthen engagement with, and provide impactful support to, small island developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), and countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS) towards nature-positive futures.

The GEF family of Funds (GEF Trust Fund, Least Developed Countries Fund, Special Climate Change Fund, and Global Biodiversity Framework Fund) occupy a unique position in global environmental finance: grant-based, country-driven, and specifically designed to deliver environmental benefits and address national priorities aligned with global targets for multilateral environmental agreements, while advancing national development priorities. For SIDS, LDCs, and fragile states, the GEF provides foundational support, bridging the gap between sustainability and economic opportunity, and between immediate needs and long-term transformation in the following ways:

- **Nature as Economic Foundation:** Protected coral reefs support fisheries and tourism; sustainably managed or restored watersheds provide water security and agricultural productivity; conserved forests maintain the water cycle, prevent soil erosion, and offer vital resources, as well as carbon finance opportunities and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Climate Adaptation as Development Pathway:** Adaptive social protection systems account for climate shocks; nature-based infrastructure can be both resilient and cost-effective; locally-led adaptation builds community capacity and ownership.
- **Environmental Stewardship as Global Contribution:** These countries manage ecosystems of planetary significance –from carbon-sequestering blue forests to biodiversity hotspots—making their environmental work a contribution to global stability.

It is also important to acknowledge, these countries are active architects of global environmental policy and leaders in the environmental arena, shaping multilateral negotiations and driving innovative solutions. With four years remaining to achieve various multilateral environmental commitments, the question is not whether these countries can be supported, but how quickly and effectively support can be scaled.

High-Level Roundtable 7

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: CSO, WOMEN, IPLCS.

June 5, 2026, 9:00 AM-12:00 AM (CET+5), Diamond Room

Three convergent reasons make this Roundtable timely and necessary. GEF-9 launches in 2026 with the strongest WOS commitments in GEF history. The Assembly is the first public moment to ground these commitments in community and civil society experience, and to begin shaping how they will be implemented. The global policy architecture demands it. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Targets 22 and 23), the Paris Agreement, and UNCCD commitments all require the full and effective participation of IPLCs, women, youth, and civil society. GEF-9 must demonstrate how it translates these mandates into programming.

The evidence base is growing, but not yet action-ready. GEF IEO evaluations confirm that community-led approaches improve sustainability. What is still needed is a clearer pathway from this evidence to GEF project design, country eligibility criteria, and financial instruments

This Roundtable directly activates the following elements of the GEF-9 Programming Directions:

- Inclusiveness pillar: the recognition that all people are stewards of nature and must participate in conservation decisions and benefit from nature for their lives and livelihoods.
- ICI expansion: increased funding and scope for the Inclusive Conservation Initiative under the Biodiversity Focal Area, with IPOs as executing partners.
- Increased ambition in programs: to focus on women's empowerment and gender equality in programming
- SGP GEF-9 priorities: strengthened CSO participation, expanded grantee eligibility, and enhanced community of practice platforms.
- Country Engagement Strategy: National Steering Committees to include ministries responsible for IPLCs and CSOs, with consultative mechanisms for inclusive decision-making.
- Blended finance + WOS intersection: the GEF-9 ambition to link community-led entrepreneurship with private sector and micro-finance instruments for financial sustainability beyond the project cycle.

Objectives:

- Affirm that civil society, IPLCs, women, and youth are indispensable partners in delivering GEF-9 outcomes.
- Showcase evidence of successful community-led, IPLC-driven, and women-led approaches delivering environmental and livelihood benefits.
- Identify key barriers to meaningful WOS engagement and extract lessons for GEF-9 design.
- Generate actionable recommendations to operationalize WOS commitments across GEF-9 programming, operations, and policies.

High-Level Roundtable 8

LEADING THE WAY FROM THE GROUND – INVESTING IN WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACHES AND IN POLICY COHERENCE FOR SCALE.

June 5, 2026, 9:00 AM-12:00 AM (CET+5), Onyx Room

Global efforts to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution will continue to have limited impact unless policies and actions are aligned with one another and with global sustainability goals. Policy coherence, defined as the “the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies, creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives” is key to ensuring that global environmental benefits are not undermined by contradictory policies and investments.

Nature Positive Governance represents the ideal institutional setting needed to shift from nature-negative to nature-positive pathways. This transition requires a paradigm shift towards stronger policy coherence, so that decisions across all sectors and levels consistently reinforce, rather than counteract, each other. Policy coherence is increasingly recognized in global frameworks as essential for achieving environmental goals. The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development calls for enhanced policy coherence for sustainable development (Target 17.14). The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework promotes whole-of-government approaches and the reform of harmful subsidies (Target 18), contributing to increased resource mobilization (Target 19). Similarly, UNCCD COP16 decisions emphasize integrated and coordinated action and the reform of environmentally harmful subsidies has been a key discussion point at the UNFCCC COPs.

Elements of policy coherence have featured in GEF projects since its inception, with its explicit integration in GEF-8 programming. Through GEF-8 and looking ahead to GEF-9, GEF programming is being framed in a whole-of-government approach that fosters policy coherence as a cross-cutting element and through dedicated projects. Policy Coherence is also an integral part of the GEF’s Country Engagement Strategy. The establishment of GEF National Steering Committees supports participatory decision-making, strengthens country ownership, and facilitates more effective cross-sector coordination of national environmental strategies and activities. Moreover, engagement with countries, agencies, and the wider GEF partnership promotes policy coherence within the GEF portfolio, facilitates knowledge exchange, and supports the replication and scaling up of best practices.

This Roundtable will provide insights from diverse perspectives to examine how policy coherence at different levels of scale is imperative to the generation of lasting global environmental benefits. Drawing on their experiences, speakers will reflect on policies, institutional settings, and financing mechanisms that enable coherent action across sectors and levels of governance. The discussion will surface key challenges, enabling conditions, and emerging lessons focusing on both higher-level political leadership and on-the-ground implementation.

High-Level Roundtable 9

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS FOR LAND AND WATER IN CENTRAL ASIA AND BEYOND

June 4, 2026, 4:00 PM-5:30 PM (CET+5), Diamond room

Central Asia is in the heart of Eurasia and includes five independent countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. More than 80 percent of the region's territory is occupied by deserts and steppes, namely the Karakum Desert, the Kyzylkum Desert and the Muyunkum Desert. Approximately 60 percent of the Central Asian population lives in rural areas - especially in the region of the Aral Sea Basin, formed by the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers— and is engaged in agriculture, making it the main driver of most of Central Asia's economic development.

Over the past century, there has been a significant increase in human-induced pressure on land, evident in deforestation, expansion of irrigated lands, heightened water extraction for industrial and domestic purposes, substantial growth in the animal population, and consequently, increased grazing pressure on pastures. All these factors, combined with the arid climatic conditions, have resulted in land degradation, a reduction in productive water resources, and the depletion of fertile soils, and consequently, increased grazing pressure on pastures. To address these issues, regional collaboration and nexus approaches are crucial due to the intertwined nature of drivers and underlying causes for land degradation, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and climate change. Strategies and decisions must take these interconnections into account and identify opportunities for collaboration across sectors and national boundaries. In this way, these approaches contribute to more impactful and sustainable results.

Countries in Central Asia have been at the forefront of nexus approaches since 2006, when the first phase of Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) was developed in GEF-4. Lessons learned from this program have helped the next generation of integrated regional programs, exemplified through the GEF-8 Central Asia Water Land Nexus (CAWLN) Program. The CAWLN program will promote water-land nexus approaches and facilitate their implementation in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins to enhance water security, increase resilience, and improve rural livelihoods. To this end, it aims to overturn the baseline of self-reinforcing degradation trends within the basins by fostering an enabling environment for integrated natural resources management transformation, strengthening regional cooperation, building capacities for evidence-based decision making and participatory management, and effectively coordinating efforts across sectors.

The purpose of the high-level roundtable is to discuss nexus approaches to addressing environmental challenges in the region as well as the opportunities for their wider application globally. Furthermore, the event will celebrate the official launch of the CAWLN program's implementation phase.