GEF/C.71/02/Rev.03
May 28, 2026

71st GEF Council Meeting
May 31-June 3, 2026
Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Agenda Item 2

SUMMARY OF NEGOTIATIONS OF THE NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF THE GEF TRUST FUND*

*Revision 01: Added Cote d' Ivoire's contribution in Annex III – Attachment I

Revision 02: Included the agreed aspirational target on 20 percent of GEF-9 programming towards actions by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (see Objective 4.p in the Policy Directions document – Annex II).

Revision 03: Added Ireland's contribution in Annex III – Attachment I

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having considered document GEF/C.71/02/Rev.03, *Draft Summary of Negotiations of the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund*, welcomes the successful conclusion of the replenishment, takes note of the Summary, and endorses the programming directions (Annex I) including the allocations of resources set forth therein, the policy recommendations (Annex II), and the Draft Replenishment Resolution (Annex III).

The Council requests the CEO/Chairperson of the Facility to transmit this Summary to the World Bank with a request that the World Bank Executive Directors be invited to adopt Annex III to this Summary, Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX] The Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources, thereby authorizing the World Bank, as Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund, to manage the resources made available under GEF-9.

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Summary of Negotiations

1. Participants to the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund agreed to this Summary of Negotiations for transmittal to the GEF Council, along with the attached documents: Programming Document for the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (Annex I), Policy Recommendations for the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (Annex II), and Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX] Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources (Annex III).

2. This Summary highlights the main items that were considered during the replenishment negotiations. It is not a comprehensive report of all the detailed discussions that took place during the negotiating process. The discussions at specific meetings are detailed in the Co-Chairs' summaries of the replenishment meetings and information documents are included in the replenishment's dedicated webpages.

The Replenishment Process

3. At the December 2024 meeting, the GEF Council requested the Trustee of the Global Environment Facility ("the GEF"), in cooperation with the Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson of the Facility, to initiate discussions on the Ninth replenishment of resources of the GEF Trust Fund ("GEF-9") to fund activities during the four- year period from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2030.

4. Accordingly, the Trustee and the GEF Secretariat initiated the process by circulating a discussion note to prospective Participants regarding participation, proposed timetable and core GEF-9 replenishment topics. Participants agreed on the preliminary schedule of subsequent replenishment meetings. In addition, agreement was reached on the overall work plan for such discussions as well as the arrangements for participation in the replenishment discussions. Participants agreed to invite the following entities as Observers: five representatives from non-donor recipient countries representing Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe/Central Asia, Latin America, and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), two NGO/CSO representatives - one representing a contributing country based NGO/CSO and another representing a recipient country based NGO/CSO, one representative of the private sector, one representative from the Green Climate Fund Secretariat, one representative from the Adaptation Fund Secretariat, and one representative from the Climate Investment Funds Secretariat. In addition, Participants invited representatives of GEF Agencies and the Conventions for which the GEF serves as a financial mechanism as observers. In the first replenishment meeting an additional observer was included to represent Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG). Further, comments were invited from GEF Council Members on policy and programming documents prepared for replenishment discussions. The following replenishment meetings were held: May 2025, Paris, France; October 2025, Kasane, Botswana; January 2026, Bonn, Germany; April 2026 [Virtual].

Eighth Overall Performance Study of the GEF (OPS8)

5. The Independent Evaluation Office prepared OPS-8, providing an important context for the discussions.

6. Participants welcomed the OPS-8 report and underscored its relevance for guiding GEF-9 implementation, noting with satisfaction that the GEF Secretariat has accepted all its recommendations. A central theme in the discussion was the need to strengthen private sector engagement. Participants highlighted that private capital mobilization remains below potential and encouraged deeper collaboration with the private sector arms of multilateral development banks, expanded use of blended finance, further development of the Non-Grant Instrument portfolio, and clearer risk-management frameworks that can accommodate innovation while maintaining accountability.

7. Support for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and SIDS remained a high priority. Participants stressed the need for tailored approaches that enhance sustainability from project design onward, strengthen domestic resource mobilization, and ensure policy coherence. Delegations agreed that integrated programming shows promise for addressing systemic, cross-sectoral challenges and enabling transformational change. They also noted challenges, including the need for long-term capacity building, embedding reforms in country systems, expanding private sector engagement, and strengthening knowledge management.

8. Participants welcomed the continued focus on inclusive conservation, engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and growing attention to the participation of women and youth. They also supported reviewing the terms of reference of STAP and emphasized broadening the donor base, including outreach to emerging economies, to sustain the GEF's financial foundation.

Programming Directions

9. Participants considered a proposal for Programming Directions in the Ninth Replenishment period to cover four years (FY26 – FY30) of GEF operations and activities in its five focal areas and other programming areas.

10. Participants welcomed the GEF-9 Programming Directions as a further step in the pursuit of global environmental goals to which countries have committed under the six conventions that the GEF serves and recognized the urgency of decisive action at scale to achieve these 2030 sustainable development milestones. The Programming Directions are a strategic response to the accelerating global environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Anchored in the vision of a *Healthy Planet, Healthy People*, GEF-9 aims to catalyze systemic change through integrated, comprehensive, and scalable programming aligned with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other key international frameworks. Participants also

noted the waning of global commitments to international development assistance and the fragmentation of global environmental financing as important constraints that must be overcome to ensure a robust Ninth Replenishment, while further emphasizing the imperative of mobilizing non-sovereign investments from the private sector to help meet the nature funding gap. Participants noted the importance of integration across focal areas and across the GEF family of funds to enhance GEF efficiency and to capture economies of scale in supporting recipient countries to achieve lasting global environmental benefits. Participants also noted the GEF's track record of achieving results at scale, as demonstrated in the GEF-7 and GEF-8 cycles in focal areas, integrated programs and global programs covering the full spectrum of environmental challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of the GEF Non-Grant Instrument as a means of leveraging greater magnitudes of sovereign and private investment, noting the need to mainstream blended finance and increase support for International Financial Institutions positioned to mobilize private sector engagement. A strengthened Country Engagement Strategy that supports a whole of government engagement through national steering committees and aligned donor investment through country platforms was welcomed by participants. Participants similarly appreciated the GEF-9 whole of society approach as a means of ensuring the effective engagement and partnership of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth. Increased support for Indigenous Peoples as key GEF partners for stewardship of the world's remaining natural ecosystems their wealth of biodiversity and ecosystem services was welcomed. Finally, some Participants appreciated the proposed expansion of the Small Grants Programme as a central vehicle for supporting civil society actions on the front lines of conservation.

11. The GEF-9 Programming Directions are attached as Annex I to this Summary.

GEF-9 Policy Recommendations

12. To support the programming approach outlined above, Participants discussed a set of Policy Directions for the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund and based on this, participants agreed on the GEF-9 Policy Recommendations and implementation timeline, attached as Annex II to this Summary.

13. The GEF-9 Policy Recommendations contain a set of actions structured around five strategic themes that, taken together, outline the measures needed to enhance the GEF's reach, catalytic role, effectiveness, and efficiency, maximizing its transformative impact and optimizing resource use. These include measures to accelerate and streamline delivery of GEF resources, scale up and leverage GEF financing, provide the enabling conditions for a whole-of-society approach, and ensure appropriate architecture across the GEF Partnership to deliver results in GEF-9 and beyond.

14. Participants agreed on the results management framework and risk management approach reflecting the ambition of GEF-9 and on updates to the country allocation methodology (STAR).

15. Participants agreed that a revision of the allocation model should be considered in GEF-10.

GEF-9 Financing Framework

16. In reviewing the programming of resources for GEF-9, Participants agreed to the indicative distribution of resources among the GEF focal areas, corporate programs, and other activities set forth as Table 1 in the programming scenarios attached as Annex I to this summary. In discussions on programming areas, Participants reiterated support for a robust GEF replenishment. The Indigenous Conservation Initiative was agreed at US $100 million.

17. The financing framework for the GEF-9 was agreed during the course of the replenishment meetings, resulting in a replenishment level for programming in the amount of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) 2,857.41 million (USDeq. 3,902.43 million).

18. Participants agreed on the six-month averaging period for setting reference exchange rates (July 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025) for use in the GEF-9. These exchange rates are used to translate Participants' contributions to GEF-9 between SDR values and their respective national currency values.

19. Participants supported a strong and effective GEF-9 replenishment. While many Contributing Participants faced challenging national circumstances, significant efforts were made to achieve the highest possible GEF-9 replenishment level.

20. Pledged contributions to the GEF-9 are reflected in Attachment 1 in Annex C: Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX], Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources. These pledged contributions amount to SDR 1,767.91 million (USDeq 2,414.47 million) including credits for accelerated cash payments and note encashments. Additional resources that may become available for programming during the GEF-9 replenishment period include projected investment income to be earned during the GEF-9 replenishment period (FY2027 – FY2030) in the amount of SDR 386.10 million (USD 527.30 million), carryover of previous GEF replenishment resources in the amount of SDR 633.34 million (USDeq. 864.96 million) and projected reflows from Non-Grant Instruments during the GEF-9 replenishment period in the amount of SDR SDR 70.07 million (USDeq. 95.70 million).

21. Participants also confirmed that new or additional pledges to the GEF-9 not reflected in Attachment 1 of Annex III, Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX], Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources, would also be welcomed

and reported in the GEF Trust Fund Financial Reports to be prepared by the Trustee for Council meetings. In addition, on an exceptional basis for GEF-9, the allocation table will be adjusted annually, as needed, to proportionally reflect additional resources received during the replenishment cycle in line with the allocation of resources agreed for the USD 4.5 billion envelope.

Replenishment Resolution

22. Participants approved the Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX], Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources, which is in the form of a World Bank resolution and attached as Annex III to this Summary of Negotiations, to be considered by the GEF Council and submitted to the World Bank, as Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund, for adoption by the World Bank Executive Directors.

Financial Structure for GEF-9

23. Participants agreed to a minimum contribution of SDR 4.5 million to participate in the GEF-9 negotiations, based on the established methodology agreed during the GEF-6 replenishment negotiations. The minimum contribution is adjusted at the beginning of each replenishment cycle for inflation, measured using the SDR deflator published by the IMF for the four calendar years prior to the start of the replenishment discussions.

24. Participants noted all Contributing Participants to the GEF-9 should make their best efforts to deposit their Instruments of Commitment or Qualified Instruments of Commitment by October 31, 2026. At every Council meeting, the Trustee will inform the Council of the status of Instruments of Commitment and Qualified Instruments of Commitment deposited with the Trustee.

25. Participants agreed that contributions made without qualification shall be paid in four equal installments by November 30 of each replenishment year as set out in the replenishment resolution or as agreed with the Trustee, provided that GEF-9 becomes effective by October 31, 2026. Participants further agreed that Contributing Participants depositing Qualified Instruments of Commitment shall use their best efforts to unqualify sufficient amounts of their contributions to pay their installment amounts by November 30 of each replenishment year.

26. Participants agreed that payment may be made in cash upfront or by the deposit of non-negotiable, non-interest bearing demand notes or similar obligations with the Trustee. Unless otherwise agreed with the Trustee, such notes, or similar obligations, will be encashed on an approximately pro rata basis among Contributing Participants. Encashments will be made in accordance with the indicative encashment schedule as set out in the replenishment resolution document or as agreed with the Trustee.

27. The Advance Contribution Scheme for GEF-9 will become effective on the date when the Trustee has received Instruments of Commitment or Qualified Instruments of Commitment from Contributing Participants whose contributions aggregate not less than SDR 353.58 million. GEF-9 will become effective on the date when the Trustee has received Instruments of Commitment or Qualified Instruments of Commitment from Contributing Participants whose contributions aggregate not less than SDR 1,060.74 million.

28. Participants have continued to make efforts towards clearance of their arrears and agreed to continue to encourage all countries to make timely payments to the GEF.

29. In addition, consistent with the practice in the previous replenishments, the following means of deterring arrears should apply under the GEF-9: (i) Continuation of the requirement, first introduced in the GEF-3 Replenishment Resolution, and set out in Paragraph 4(a) of the GEF-9 Replenishment Resolution, that if a Contributing Participant does not make a scheduled payment to the GEF-9 or a Contributing Participant that has deposited a Qualified Instrument of Commitment is unable to unqualify a scheduled contribution to the GEF-9, then such Contributing Participant shall provide the Council with a written explanation from its Minister stating the reason for the arrears or delay and the steps being taken to resolve it; and (ii) Confirmation of the provision in the Instrument that voting rights accrue only for the actual contributions paid to the GEF, which confirmation is set out in Paragraph 4(b) of the GEF-9 Replenishment Resolution.

30. Noting that funding decisions made by the Council or the GEF CEO are based on available resources in the GEF Trust Fund at the time of the decision, Participants requested the Secretariat to use the full replenishment amount, including arrears, as the target programming level at the outset of the GEF-9 replenishment period, consistent with current practice.

Steps towards Concluding the Process of the Ninth GEF Replenishment

31. Participants requested the Interim CEO/Chairperson of the GEF to forward this Summary, including the attached Annexes, to the GEF Council for review at its next meeting. The GEF Council is invited to take note of the Summary, and to endorse the draft Replenishment Resolution, Annex I of the policy directions, and programming document including the allocation[1] of resources set forth in [Table 1] of the programming document.

32. Participants also invited the GEF Council to request the Interim CEO/Chairperson of the GEF to transmit this Summary to the World Bank, with a request that the World Bank Executive

[1] On an exceptional basis for GEF-9, the allocation table will be adjusted annually, as needed, to proportionally reflect any additional resources received during the replenishment cycle in line with the allocation of resources agreed for the USD 4.5 billion envelope.

Directors be invited to adopt [Annex III] to this Summary, Draft World Bank Resolution No. IBRD [2026-XXXX], Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources, thereby authorizing the World Bank, as Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund, to manage the resources made available under the GEF-9.

Annex I: Programming Directions and Resource Allocation for the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund

GEF-9 PROGRAMMING DIRECTIONS

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ACRONYMS

ABAS: Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States

ABS: Access and Benefit Sharing

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AfDB: African Development Bank Group

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASGM: Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining

BBNJ: Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement

BFP: Biodiversity Finance Plan

BIOFIN: Biodiversity Finance Initiative

BRS: Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

BTR: Biennial Transparency Report

C40: Cities Climate Leadership Group

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity

CBIT: Capacity-Building Initiative for Transparency

CBO: Community-Based Organization

CI: Conservation International

CIF: Climate Investment Funds

CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CMA: Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

CMS: Convention on Migratory Species

COP: Conference of the Parties

COP-MOP: Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties

CPB: Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

CSO: Civil Society Organization

CSRD: Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive

CTF: Conservation Trust Fund

DLDD: Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought

DRRA: Drought Risk and Resilience Assessment Methodology

DSI: Digital sequencing information

D-SLM: Drought-Smart Land Management

EA: Enabling Activities

ECW: Global Environment Facility Expanded Constituency Workshop

EEZ: Exclusive Economic Zones

EPR: Extended Producer Responsibility

ETF: Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement

EUDR: European Union Deforestation Regulation

FA: Global Environment Facility Focal Area

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FCS: Fragile, Conflict-affected Situations

FLP: GEF Fonseca Leadership Program

FTFG: Forest Tenure Funders Group

GBFF: Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

GCF: Green Climate Fund

GEB: Global Environmental Benefits

GEF: Global Environment Facility

GFC: Global Framework on Chemicals

GHG: Greenhouse Gas

GPSC: Global Platform for Sustainable Cities

GRID: Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development

HHP: Highly Hazardous Pesticides

HWC: Human-Wildlife Conflict

IAS: Invasive Alien Species

ICCWC: International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime

ICI: Inclusive Conservation Initiative

ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability

IDB: Inter-American Development Bank

IDRA: International Drought Resilience Alliance

IEO: Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility

IFC: International Finance Corporation

IKI: International Climate Initiative

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IMO: International Maritime Organization

IoT: Internet of Things

IP: Global Environment Facility Integrated Program

IPBES: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPLC: Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

IPM: Integrated Pest Management

IPO: Indigenous Peoples Organizations

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

IUU: Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated

IW: LEARN: International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network

IWT: Illegal Wildlife Trade

KBA: Key Biodiversity Area

KMGBF: Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

KM&L: Knowledge Management and Learning

KPI: Key Performance Indicators

LDC: Least Developed Countries

LDCF: Least Developed Countries Fund

LDN: Land Degradation Neutrality

MCF: Multilateral Climate Funds

MDB: Multilateral Development Banks

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

MEA: Multilateral Environmental Agreements

MFA: Multi Focal Area

MIA: Minamata Initial Assessments

MOPAN: Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network

MRV: Measurement, Reporting, and Verification

MSME: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

MTF: Multi Trust-Fund

NAP: National Adaptation Plan

NAPA: National Adaptation Plans of Action

NBF: National Biosafety Frameworks

NbS: Nature-based Solutions

NBSAP: National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

NDC: Nationally Determined Contributions

NGI: Non-Grant Instrument

NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations

NIP: National Implementation Plans

NSC: National Steering Committees

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OECM: Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

OFP: Global Environment Facility Operational Focal Point

PCB: polychlorinated biphenyls

PES: Payments for Ecosystem Services

PFAS: per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances

PFP: Project Financing for Permanence

POP: Persistent Organic Pollutants

PPP: Public-Private Partnerships

Ramsar: Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

REDD+: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation

RGDRP: Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership

RSF: Resilience and Sustainability Facilities of the International Monetary Fund

SBTN: Science Based Targets for Nature

SCCF: Special Climate Change Fund

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SGP: GEF Small Grants Program

SIDS: Small Island Developing States

SLM: Sustainable Land Management

SME: Small and Medium Enterprises

STAP: Science and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility

STAR: Global Environment Facility System for Transparent Allocation of Resources

TAG: Global Environment Facility Technical Advisory Group

TDA-SAP: Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis-Strategic Action Programme

TFFF: Tropical Forest Forever Facility

TNC: The Nature Conservancy

TNFD: Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures

UNCBD: United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity

UNCCD: United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNEP: United Nations Environmental Programme

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNFF: United Nations Forum on Forests

UNFSS: United Nations Food Systems Summit

WBCSD: World Business Council for Sustainable Development

WCS: Wildlife Conservation Society

WEF: World Economic Forum

WHO: World Health Organization

WMO: World Meteorological Organization

WOAH: World Organisation for Animal Health

WRI: World Resources Institute

WWF: World Wildlife Fund

ZSL: Zoological Society of London

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GEF-9 Programming Directions are a strategic response to the accelerating global environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The GEF-9 Programming Directions document outlines comprehensive strategies, activities, and actions proposed for the Global Environment Facility's ninth replenishment cycle (2026–2030) for the GEF Trust Fund. Anchored in the vision of a *Healthy Planet, Healthy People*, GEF-9 aims to catalyze systemic change through integrated, comprehensive, and scalable programming aligned with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other key international frameworks.

Strategic Vision

The GEF-9 Theory of Change centers on a continuing goal of generating lasting GEBs that are critical to sustaining a Healthy Planet for Healthy People. In GEF-9 we will pursue this goal through four pathways to nature positive development:

1. **Adequate and Effective Funding**: Scaling up financial flows through the GEF Trust Fund and its expanded Family of Funds to meet the needs of developing countries and close the nature financing gap, including with blended finance.
2. **Value of Nature integrated in Development**: Embedding environmental priorities in national development strategies and budgets, aligning development finance and mobilizing domestic resources through the country engagement strategy, policy coherence efforts, and a whole of government approach.
3. **Value of Nature internalized in the Economy**: Mobilizing private capital and aligning public and private investment with MEAs, utilizing blended finance, natural capital accounting, and nature positive value chains.
4. **Whole of Society Engagement**: Empowering civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth as environmental leaders and partners in program design and implementation.

These strategies respond to escalating environmental risks and align with calls for a step-change increase in financing for the global environment, expressed in recent MEA meetings. GEF-9 will place an increased emphasis on mainstreaming blended finance and private sector engagement across all programming. GEF-9 also deepens support for aligning domestic resource mobilization with environmental goals. These pathways reflect a deliberate shift toward greater integration, country ownership, and lasting impact. Grant-based financing remains the backbone of the GEF Trust Fund, fulfilling the non-debt-creating character of support mandated by MEAs. The use blended finance and private capital mobilization are strategies aimed to leverage the GEF's grant-financing to achieve greater magnitudes of investment in achieving lasting Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) and in transforming private sector investments and actions to nature positive forces driving sustainable, resilient development of a healthy planet for healthy people.

Programming Architecture

GEF-9 Trust Fund investments will be programmed through three complementary means:

- **Integrated Programs (IPs)**: System-wide interventions in food, forest, urban, health and economic systems and supply chains to address the root causes of environmental degradation.
- **Focal Areas (FAs)**: Core investments in Biodiversity, Climate Change, Land Degradation, International Waters, and Chemicals and Waste to deliver global environmental benefits.
- **Strategic Initiatives**: Cross-cutting support mechanisms including blended finance, country engagement, and the Small Grants Program (SGP).

Integrated Programs

Integrated Programs (IPs) are a flagship platform for systems transformation in GEF-9. Eight IPs are proposed for GEF-9. Building on lessons from GEF-7 and GEF-8, the IPs in GEF-9 will enhance systems transformation efforts in key ecosystems and sectors. GEF-9 IPs will include Critical Forest Biomes, Global Wildlife for Development, Food Systems, Drylands and Drought Management, Sustainable Cities, Blue and Green Islands, Plastics, and Pollution-free Supply Chains. The IPs are structured around transformational levers, including policy coherence, innovation, financing, governance, and knowledge sharing. GEF-9 IPs will feature refined metrics and results frameworks to better capture systemic shifts, innovation uptake, and behavioral change.

Focal Areas

Focal Areas remain a foundation in GEF-9 programming, as they provide countries with dedicated support to meet their obligations under the MEAs that the GEF serves and to advance shared interests in marine and freshwater ecosystems. GEF-9 focal area strategies reflect the latest global commitments and promote stronger cross-focal area integration and leveraged GEBs. Biodiversity programming focuses on implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through area-based conservation, ecosystem connectivity, and financial realignment. Climate Change efforts prioritize efficiency, transparency systems, and blended finance to accelerate mitigation and protection against climate impacts. Land Degradation programming advances drylands and drought management aligned with voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets. Chemicals and Waste expand to address global plastics pollution and hazardous substances in supply chains, promoting circular economy solutions and compliance with evolving international conventions. International Waters strategies enhance transboundary cooperation and governance innovation across freshwater and marine systems and respond to the BBNJ agreement.

Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Initiatives in GEF-9 will play a vital role in scaling the impact of focal area and IP investments by enhancing GEF recipient country ownership and policy coherence, unlocking leveraged financing, and strengthening civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth action. The Country Engagement Strategy enhances country ownership by fostering whole of government coordination through National Steering Committees and Country Platforms, aligning GEF investments with national priorities, and enabling more strategic, cross-

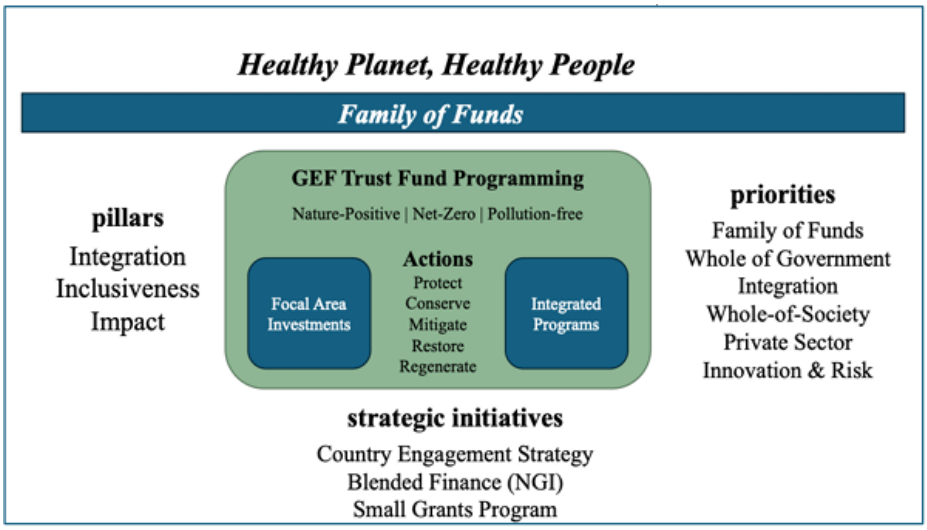
sectoral programming. Blended finance will be upscaled to leverage increasing scales of private sector investment in high-impact, high-risk areas. The GEF-9 blended finance program builds on a strong record of accomplishment in co-financing and expands collaboration with multilateral development banks to catalyze larger-scale investment flows. The Small Grants Program remains a key channel for environmental action, providing funding and capacity building for civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, as well as creating mechanisms to strengthen the engagement of women and youth.

GEF-9 PROGRAMMING DIRECTIONS FRAMEWORK

GEF-9 Architecture

1. The GEF-9 programming architecture builds on GEF-8 progress in integrating programming across the GEF Family of Funds. The *Healthy Planet, Healthy People* framework remains at the core of the overall GEF-9 architecture,[2] recognizing the fundamental interdependency of human well-being and a healthy environment. The programming architecture is anchored on GEF-9 pillars and Cross-cutting priorities, which are translated to action through three programming channels: focal areas, integrated programs, and strategic initiatives (Figure 1).

Figure *1: GEF-9 Architecture*



2. GEF-9 Programming will follow the GEF "Family of Funds" approach, by which the GEF works to align its various trust funds to address the full spectrum of recipient countries' environmental challenges, with important gains in efficiency, coherence, and synergy. The GEF has established experience and learning in Multi Trust-Fund (MTF) projects, which have increased in GEF-8, particularly in LDCs and SIDS, where the issues of nature conservation, mitigating environmental degradation, building resilience, and national development are closely connected. Experience in the MTF and gains in streamlining the processes and standards for GEF investment across the funds will enable increased strategic planning and programming across the GEF Family of Funds: GEF TF, GBFF, LDCF, SCCF, and more, as additional funds are structured.

3. Consistent with GEF-8, programming will focus on shared aims or "pillars" among focal areas, sectors, and funds within the GEF. The *Integration* approach aims to harness synergies and resolve tradeoffs among investments and actions, generating gains in efficiency and economies

[2] See GEF's Strategic Positioning Framework document GEF/R.8/28

of scale, and in amplified impact. The *Inclusiveness*[3] pillar will be a key feature of GEF-9, centered on the principle that all people are dependent upon and are stewards of nature, thus all should participate in conservation decisions and should benefit from nature for their lives and livelihoods. The role of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth will be highly important.[4] These two pillars will inform GEF-9 focal area, IP and strategic initiatives, such that through their orientation towards enhanced integration and inclusion, all GEF investments may maximize the third pillar, GEF's *Impact* in achieving and sustaining GEBs.

4. Cross-cutting Priorities, also described in GEF-9 Strategic Positioning,[5] will orient GEF-9 programming towards meeting integration, inclusion and impact aims, by enhancing policy coherence and leveraged financing, innovation and learning, and mobilizing the whole of society – public, private, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth - while leaving no one behind. As the GEF Council has encouraged a high-risk appetite for *Innovation* in programming and operations, GEF-9 will focus more on innovation identification and deployment. The GEF defines innovation broadly, encompassing technological advances, policy and institutional reforms, and financial and business models.

5. GEF-9 programming will be channeled through the GEF Trust Fund (GEF TF) STAR and non-STAR allocations, which provide predictable, dependable funding for recipient country actions to meet global MEA commitments, and provide the core investments in nature conservation, mitigation of environmental decline, and the revitalization of natural ecosystems and their services. The GEF TF resources in turn will allow countries to invest in Integrated Programs (IPs) and/or Focal Area investments that result in the most impactful portfolio to achieve each country's ambitious aims for global environmental benefits in GEF-9.

6. IPs complement Focal Area investments by addressing major human systems that are the drivers of environmental decline, embedding nature's values and natural assets in production and consumption systems, supply chains, and economies, including through nature-based solutions[6]. Focal Area and IP investments follow the guidance of relevant MEAs and align with recipient country national development plans. They are complemented by Strategic Initiatives, which provide resources enabling effective Country Engagement, Blended Finance efforts, and support to CSOs and IPLCs to advance lasting solutions to environmental challenges. Together, they provide a robust approach to meeting conservation and systems transformation outcomes to sustain a Healthy Planet for Healthy People. (Figure 2).

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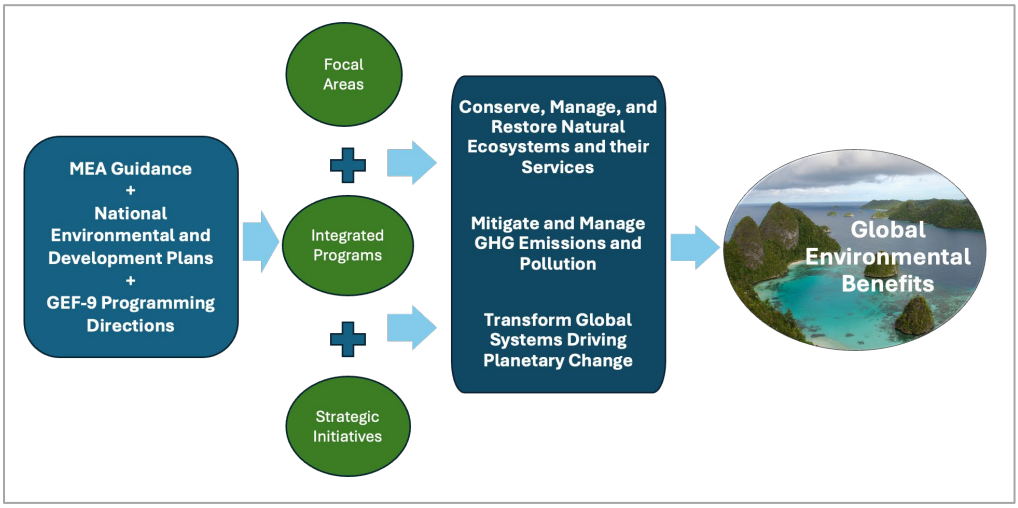
[3] A Whole of Society (WOS) approach refers to framework that engages various actors, including civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth and private sector, as well as governments. The approach recognizes that collaborative action is necessary for meaningful and lasting stewardship of the global environment.

[4] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[5] GEF/R.9/Inf.08 Draft GEF-9 Strategic Positioning

[6] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

Figure 2: Programming of the GEF Trust Fund



INTEGRATED PROGRAMS

Transitioning Integrated Programs from GEF-8 to GEF-9

7. The IPs offer important opportunities for the GEF to address a wide range of drivers and, as highlighted by the IEO's OPS-8 findings, have delivered important benefits.[7] As a result, the IPs were expanded in scope and coverage during GEF-8 to maximize impact at scale. The eleven IPs engaged a total of 98 GEF recipient countries, providing $1.66 billion in GEF financing and generating $11.3 billion in co-financing (Figure 3). A key challenge for GEF-9 is to embed learning and adaptive management in the programs during implementation, while addressing critical gaps for advancing transformative change in the five systems.

8. Through experiences and lessons gained from programming to-date, and from STAP guidance and evaluative learning through the GEF IEO,[8] the IPs are defined by well-established characteristics to enhance consistency and coherence in design and implementation. These were further reinforced during the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings moderated by the GEF Secretariat and STAP, with a group of over 350 global scientific and technical experts. The TAG meetings considered a range of global environmental issues and evolving context for the GEF. In addition to substantive issues for *Healthy Planet Healthy People*, the TAG meetings generated important ideas for consideration in advancing integrated programming in GEF-9. They include:

- *Challenges to address* – While the GEF has demonstrated the importance of integrated programming as an added dimension for fulfilling its mandate, there is a need to increase efficiency and effectiveness. This calls for a focus on specific economic and policy drivers;

[7] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

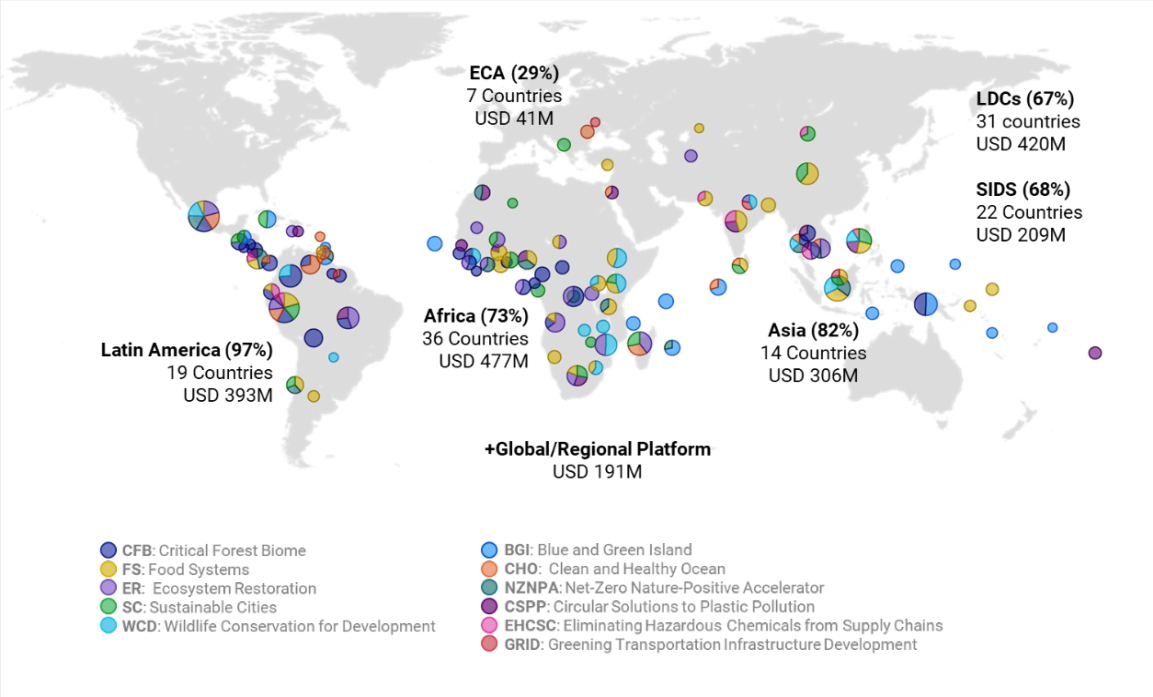
[8] Ibid.

having clear geographical targets for anchoring projects, delivering integrated solutions, and scaling actions by countries.

- *Approaches to embrace* – Considering the urgency and importance or GEF to influence the transformation of systems, the TAGs for integration highlighted the need to further emphasize systems thinking across all GEF programming to internalize strategies for monitoring and reporting transformational change;[9] focus on integrated country-level planning to foster the whole of government engagement; emphasize people-centered and whole of society framing to maximize fairness and increase focus on local beneficiaries; target supply chains; and continue advancing nature positive pathways to systems change.

- *Innovations to advance* - The TAGs also considered emerging opportunities for the GEF to advance innovation. GEF programming should consider catalyzing and scaling solutions, promote technologies to support applications for data, monitoring, communications, and promote adaptive management and learning.

Figure 3: Country participation in the GEF-8 IPs



Note: 98 countries with at least one IP project; 52 countries with multiple IPs. SIDS (68%) and LDCs (67%)

[9] The need to develop indicators for "system-level change" is also identified by MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

9. Drawing on the TAG meeting outcomes, and consistent with the recommendations of the IEO's OPS-8,[10] GEF-9 IP investments will further reinforce the added value of the integrated approach for impactful outcomes and advancing system transformation (Table 1). The proposed enhancements will also enable the GEF to transition the GEF-8 IPs to GEF-9 while promoting experiential learning for greater coherence and consistency in design and delivery.

Table 1: Characteristics of Integrated Programs and Proposed Enhancements for GEF-9

Established Characteristics	Proposed Enhancements for GEF-9
• Integration of actions across sectors, across GEF focal areas, across supply chains • Addressing drivers of environmental degradation at global or regional scales • Complementing country investments with transboundary, regional and global actions • Mobilizing diverse coalition of stakeholders for systems transformation • Promoting private sector engagement • Fostering knowledge sharing and learning	• Explicit application of "systems thinking" in design and implementation • Addressing multiple drivers to maximize synergies and avoid negative tradeoffs • Fostering nature positive pathways in country-level planning • Promoting blended finance opportunities to leverage additional resources • Promoting policy coherence • Promoting interoperability between IP knowledge and learning platforms

Proposed Integrated Programs for GEF-9

10. The TAG meetings included nine (9) integration themes to review substantive aspects of the IPs and identify priority options for consideration by the GEF. Based on outcomes of the TAGs, and consistent with the recommendations of the IEO's OPS-8,[11] the IPs proposed for GEF-9 will address two critical needs: i) transitioning the GEF-8 IPs to harness existing frameworks while accommodating emerging priorities, and ii) addressing critical gaps to further strengthen engagement by countries.

11. With the GEF-8 IPs now fully developed and moving to implementation phase, the GEF Secretariat and agencies have an opportunity to strengthen portfolio-level learning and knowledge sharing for adaptative management. In assessing the GEF-8 IPs for transitioning to GEF-9, the GEF Secretariat has committed to maintaining continuity to harness the potential for learning and knowledge sharing. Hence the GEF-8 IPs were considered for three types of GEF-9 transitions:

- *Evolve* – IPs that have a well-established foundation and track-record of outcomes will evolve further and create opportunities for advancing transformative change by

[10] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[11] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

expanding coverage of drivers targeted, increasing country engagement, and fostering innovation.

- *Mainstream* – This includes IPs with substantive priorities relevant to those IPs that will evolve in GEF-9 that will help strengthen their overall GEB impacts. In particular, the focus on planning and policy processes at country-level for nature positive pathways is critical for promoting a whole of government approach to advance systems transformation.
- *Consolidate* – This includes IPs that have potential for creating synergies and maximizing potential for impact when programmed in specific geographical contexts. This is particularly critical for biomes and ecosystems where negative tradeoffs and isolated investments are likely to undermine environmental outcomes. Consolidating priorities of these IPs into those that evolve will enable countries in those geographical contexts to target additional drivers and promote integrated solutions at scale.

12. Table 2 shows how the GEF-8 IPs will transition to GEF-9, including a brief description of rationale and opportunities for strengthening programming, as highlighted in the TAG meetings. Of the eleven GEF-8 IPs, two (Ecosystem Restoration, and Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator) will be mainstreamed, and two others (Clean and Healthy Ocean, and Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development) will be consolidated. The approach to mainstreaming or consolidation is described as appropriate to each IP in Table 2.

Table 2: Criteria and Rationale for Transitioning GEF-8 Integrated Programs

GEF-8 IP	Criteria	Rationale
Critical Forest Biomes (CFB)	Evolve	Builds on targeted geographies critical for safeguarding primary and intact tropical forests, including frameworks and commitments by countries to foster collective action for improving biome-level integrity. The IP will offer opportunities for countries to address multiple drivers, including infrastructure development, artisanal gold mining, and illegal exploitation. A specific focus will be on mainstreaming ecosystem restoration (ER) by targeting land use practices to increase habitat connectivity in forest landscapes. This includes tree-based practices such as agroforestry and community-based forest management. In addition to mainstreaming ER for ecosystem connectivity, this will also enable countries to also consolidate GRID for infrastructure development.
Global Wildlife for Development (GWD)	Evolve	Builds on existing foundation and global network now in place to tackle drivers of illegal exploitation and trade in wildlife. The IP will address the growing urgency for scaling actions across geographical scales, expand coverage of affected wildlife species, and advance a One Health approach. The IP will also

		emphasize the mainstreaming of ER through land use practices for improved connectivity of habitats for wildlife.
Blue and Green Islands (BGI)	Evolve	Builds on the well-established framework to address specific needs of SIDS for advancing integrated approach to tackle multiple drivers. The program will create opportunities for connecting land-based and ocean issues through a source-to-sea and sea-to-source approach, including emerging innovations to advance transformative change in systems. This will also consider the need to mainstream NZNPA (for country level planning) and ER (for habitat and ecosystem restoration). In line with the source-to-sea framework, the IP will specifically emphasize the critical need to mainstream ER by integrating land use practices that restore degraded coastal landscapes.
Food Systems (FS)	Evolve	Builds on a well-established foundation with food and agricultural commodities. The IP will deepen engagement across spatial (geographies) and vertical (actors, policies, and institutions) dimensions, expand coverage of value chains for crops, livestock, and aquaculture, promote innovations for transformation. The IP will also mainstream ER by prioritizing regenerative practices in production landscapes. This includes agroforestry, conservation agriculture, and agroecological practices for improved soil health and diversification of farmlands. In addition to mainstreaming NZNPA (for country-level planning) and ER (for ecosystem connectivity), it will also consolidate CHO (for agricultural runoff).
Ecosystem Restoration (ER)	Mainstream	While the IP was well-subscribed by countries, the need for investing in ecosystem restoration is deemed critical across all biomes (forests, drylands, coastal) and systems (natural, food, urban, and energy). Restoration plays a major role in production landscapes (for soil health and related ecosystem services), ecosystem connectivity through establishment of corridors, and improving wildlife habitats. Building on GEF-8 experience, these practices will be mainstreamed in all IPs that will evolve and specifically in the CFB, Drylands, Food Systems, Sustainable Cities, Blue Green Islands and EHCSS.
Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development (GRID)	Consolidate	Although the IP was not adequately subscribed by countries, transportation infrastructure is still a leading cause of deforestation and habitat loss. The potential for impact can be greatly enhanced by focusing on systemic, integrated, and multi-disciplinary solutions in targeted geographies where synergies and tradeoffs can be managed. Hence the priorities of this IP will be consolidated into those that will evolve,

		specifically the Critical Forest Biomes, Global Wildlife for Development and Sustainable Cities IPs.
Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator (NZNPA)	Mainstream	This IP was well-subscribed by countries committed to planning and investing in nature positive pathways. The focus on country level planning is crucial for anchoring integrated solutions across sectors that drive environmental degradation. The value-added of this IP is important for advancing the whole of government and whole of society approaches - key priorities for influencing transformational change in systems. It will be mainstreamed across IPs in GEF-9.
Sustainable Cities (SC)	Evolve	Builds on existing foundation and experience, including institutional frameworks to support engagement by sub-national entities in implementation of country commitments to MEAs. The IP will expand coverage of drivers to include those operating in the urban-rural interface and address the resource sheds fueling cities (water, food, energy). In addition to mainstreaming priorities of the NZNPA and ER, the program will consolidate those under the GRID (for infrastructure planning) and CHO (for waste and land-based pollution).
Clean and Healthy Oceans (CHO)	Consolidate	While the IP was well subscribed to by countries during programming, the explicit focus on hypoxia can be best addressed under a larger banner of eutrophication in coastal marine ecosystems. This will be further strengthened by consolidating in other IPs, notably Sustainable Cities (for wastewater improvements), Food Systems (for agriculture runoff and aquaculture systems), EHCSS (for industrial waste).
Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution (CSPP)	Evolve	Builds on existing foundation to expand to countries and expand plastic categories for relevant sectors, such as cities, food, fashion, construction, and tourism. The program evolution will prioritize up and mid-stream interventions while taking a full circular economy approach and designing out plastic pollution from products, processes, and systems.
Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals-from Supply Chains (EHCSS)	Evolve	Builds on the foundation now established for key sectoral supply chains (construction and fashion), with potential for expanding coverage to other sectors such as agriculture and transportation to promote nature positive pathways. Will consolidate CHO priorities to address country-specific needs.

13. TAG discussions also reinforced the need for the GEF to have a dedicated focus on tackling drought, especially in drylands where the impacts are profoundly affecting the lives and livelihoods of IPLCs. To address this need, a new IP is proposed to focus on building drought resilience, particularly in drylands. The IP embraces the recommendation of the

Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought at UNCCD COP16, which requested the GEF to "develop a new integrated programmer that synergically addresses proactive drought prevention and management, taking into account key biodiversity and climate challenges linked to drought causes and consequences".

14. Based on the proposed approach for transitioning GEF-8 IPs and additional consideration for a new IP, the GEF Secretariat is proposing the following as IPs for GEF-9:

a) Critical Forest Biomes
b) Global Wildlife for Development
c) Blue and Green Islands
d) Food Systems
e) Drylands and Drought Management
f) Sustainable Cities
g) Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution
h) Pollution-free Supply Chains

Critical Forest Biomes

15. Tropical and subtropical forests cover just 14% of the earth's land surface but support at least half of all species and offer key ecosystem services. Tropical primary forests offer essential environmental services like freshwater supply and erosion control and exhibit higher resistance. They house more species and store more carbon per hectare than most other ecosystems in the world. Tropical primary forests are also vital for IPLCs which livelihoods, medicine, and cultural identity depend on. This makes these ecosystems in their primary form crucial to meeting global climate and conservation goals. Conserving primary and intact tropical forests, including the health of river basins, is the most efficient nature-based solution[6] for addressing both biodiversity and climate crisis. As a result of human activities, 33% of the biome has already been deforested and 22% degraded globally.[12] According to Global Forest Watch, from 2002 to 2023, there was a total of 76.3 million ha of humid primary forest lost globally whose value is irreplaceable. During this period, total area of humid primary forest decreased globally by 7.4% and there was a total of 138 million ha tree cover lost from forest fires (nearly one-third of this area was burned in just the last four years).[13] In addition to ecosystem services loss, increasing human pressure and land use changes in tropical primary forests heighten the risk of more frequent zoonotic spillover events.

16. Due to various local and global factors, threats to forests are increasing and now impacting even remote areas of high integrity forests. Essentially, no tropical primary forests can be considered as safe anymore unless actions are taken to tackle drivers and protect what remains.[14] Agriculture expansion remains the first driver of deforestation worldwide, but multiple

[12] Hansen, A.J., *et al.* A policy-driven framework for conserving the best of Earth's remaining moist tropical forests. *Nat Ecol Evol* (2020). DOI: 10.1038/s41559-020-1274-7

[13] WRI. 2024. Indicators of Forest Extent – Primary Forest Loss.

[14] Based on the GEF-9 Technical Advisory Group meeting on Globally Significant Forest Biomes, February 19, 2025.

factors reinforce each other, and they should be addressed simultaneously, including those with less direct impact but causing large-scale indirect effects, such as facilitating forest encroachments, infrastructure development, and gold mining[15, 16].

17. To consider all the drivers impacting tropical primary forests, the GEF approach must consider actions at two levels: a focus on national level planning to foster whole of government and whole of society approach for nature positive pathways, building on experience with the GEF-8 Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator IP; and at landscape level to ensure integration of appropriate land uses for forest conservation, building on experience with the GEF-8 ER IP. Actions to support the lasting conservation and sustainable management of Critical Forest Basins are by nature transboundary, requiring cooperation, planning and coordinated investments by all nations managing these vast forest ecosystems.

18. Where the integrity of primary forests is threatened by degradation at landscape scale investing in ecosystem restoration activities can contribute to improving or ensuring the integrity of the primary forests. Furthermore, and with unsustainable infrastructure development as a major cause of deforestation and forest fragmentation in the tropics, the approaches and lessons of the GEF-8 GRID IP, including policy reform, upstream integrated planning and derisking finance for sustainable and nature positive infrastructure will be consolidated into this IP.

19. Beyond regional and landscapes approaches, there is need to include global stakeholders in the strategy such as foreign investors, financing institutions, businesses, civil society, and consumers who can influence these dynamics in one or the other ways.[17, 18] In addition, increasing human pressure and land use changes in tropical primary forests also heighten the risk of more frequent zoonotic spillover events.[19] Figure 4 summarizes key causes of forest loss and severe degradation for each important forest biomes that the IP will prioritize.

20. Current economic models do not recognize the real value of primary forests and the ecosystem services they provide. Lack of recognition and financial resources to pay for the opportunity cost of their conservation further cause their continuous loss and degradation. Low economic valuation of nature and perverse incentives persist and continue creating the conditions of clearing forests for more profitable uses. According to the Forest Declaration Assessment, 100 times more resources are invested in activities that are potentially harmful to

[15] Engert, J. E., et al. "Ghost roads and the destruction of Asia-Pacific tropical forests." *Nature* 629.8011 (2024): 370-375.

[16] Engert, J. E., et al. "Explosive growth of secondary roads is linked to widespread tropical deforestation." Current Biology (2025).

[17] Sylvester *et al*., 2024. Analysis of food systems drivers of deforestation highlights foreign direct investments and urbanization as threats to tropical forests. Sci Rep 14, 15179 (2024).

[18] Witness, Global. "Deforestation Dividends: How global banks profit from rainforest destruction and human rights abuses." *Global Witness. October* 22 (2021): 2021.

[19] Borma, L. S., *et al*. "Beyond carbon: The contributions of South American tropical humid and subhumid forests to ecosystem services." *Reviews of Geophysics* 60.4 (2022): e2021RG000766.

forests than in activities to conserve them ($2.2 billion per year).[20] Policy coherence through adequate governance and policies must therefore be a key element of any strategy to conserve forests.

Figure 4: Analysis of drivers for deforestation fronts

	Cattle Ranching	Large-scale Agriculture	Smallholder Farming	Logging	Mining Operations	Transport	Urban expansion	Fire
	Agriculture			Extractive		Infrastructure expansion		Other
Amazon	↗	→	↗	→	→	↗		↗
Meso-America	↗	↗	↗	↘			↗	→
Congo Basin		↗	↗	→	↗	↗	↗	
Guinean Forest		↘	↗	→	↗	↗		
Southeast Asia		↗	↗	→	→	↗	↗	→

Relative influence	Trends
• Red: Primary cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation • Orange: Important secondary cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation • Yellow: Less important cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation	↗ Increase → Stable ↘ Decrease

Source: WWF report Deforestation fronts: Drivers and responses in a changing world[21]

21. Since its inception, the GEF has allocated an increasing share of its resources to conserve forests as a cross-cutting theme in its biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation focal areas. In total, the GEF supported around 700 forest-related projects with $4.5 billion grants

[20] Forest Declaration Assessment. 2023. Finance for Forests: Theme 3 Assessment

[21] Pacheco, P., *et al*. "Deforestation fronts: Drivers and responses in a changing world." WWF, Gland, Switzerland 125 (2021).

leveraging $25 billion in co-financing.[22] With such experience combined with its convening power, the GEF is well positioned to have significant impact on a global scale.

Framing of the Integrated Program

22. Consistent with the GEF strategy on forests, the overarching goal of the IP is to maintain, preserve, and restore the integrity and functioning of tropical forest biomes. The IP will invest in the conservation and effective governance of globally important forest biomes, focusing on tropical primary forests of high ecological integrity that sustain the health of the planet and flow of vital ecosystem services that underpin human well-being.

23. In GEF-8, GEF recipient countries responded well to the opportunity of an IP to conserve tropical primary forests, with 28 countries in five biomes - Amazon, Congo, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Guinean forests, and Mesoamerica representing a GEF investment of $306 million associated to $1.5 billion in co-financing. Each region is covered with a Regional Coordination Project, offering a framework at the biome level (Figure 5).

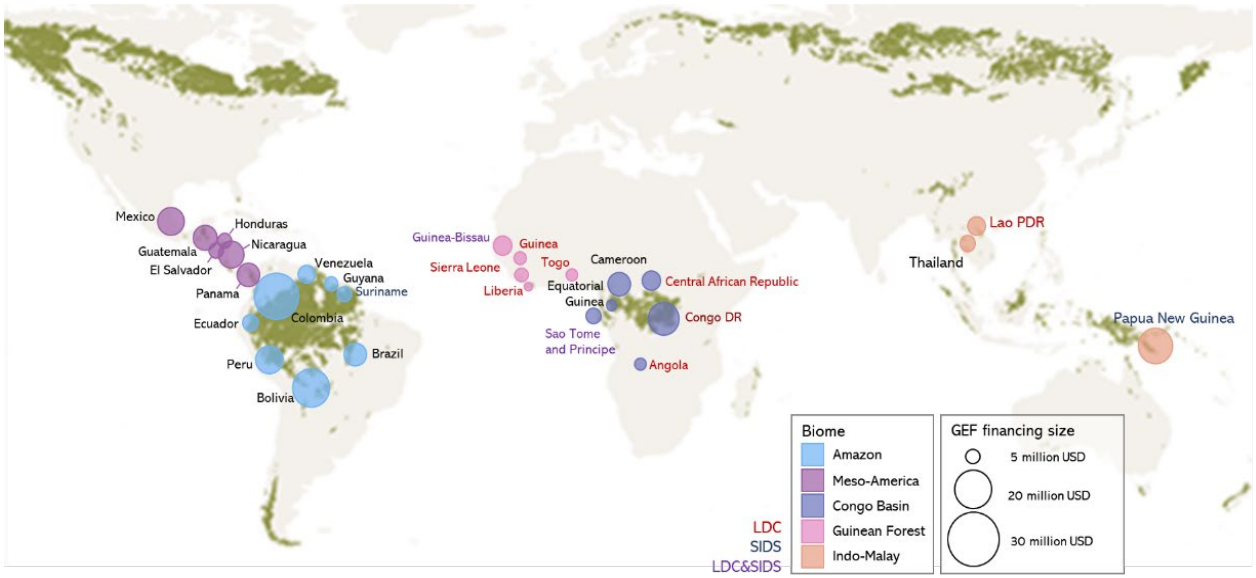
24. Despite the commitment by countries, the conservation of tropical primary forests remains severely underfunded within a complex and fragmented global finance architecture.[23] Financial flows to protect these ecosystems are insufficient, often poorly coordinated, making it challenging to secure stable and long-term support. The GEF, thanks to its convening power, its catalytic role to attract cofinancing, and its integrated programmatic approach can provide its support.

25. Building on GEF-8 IP and the GEF's long track-record of forest related projects, the proposed GEF-9 IP will increase the protection and governance of tropical primary forests in the five critical biomes—Amazon, Congo, Meso-America, Guinean Forests, and Southeast Asia and the Pacific- tackling the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation across multiple scales. In doing so, it will consider the evolving context such as the increased threats due to infrastructure development, mining, forest fires, and organized crime, and create synergies with other relevant IPs to ensure coordination and maximize the impacts. While the IP will address global challenges and issues, it will consider the regional specificities and continue to adopt regional approaches promoting cooperation and synergies between countries sharing the same regional biome. The IP will remain country-driven and responsive to countries' requests; additionally, a fair balance between the different critical biomes will be sought.

[22] https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/publications/gef-strategy-forests-preserving-forests-future-nature-and-people

[23] Watson C. & Schatalek L., 2020. The Global Climate Finance Architecture. Climate Finance Fundamentals 2, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Washington DC, USA. & ODI, London, UK. https://climatefundsupdate.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CFF2-2019-ENG-DIGITAL.pdf

Figure 5: Geography of the CFB with five regional biomes and participating countries



Basemap: Intact Forest Landscape 2020[24]

26. More than ever, GEF-9 will emphasize the importance of a people centered approach, and the empowerment of IPLCs and women, including through enhanced partnerships and their inclusion in decision-making related to land rights and management and to policy and regulatory frameworks.[25] In this regard, the IP will promote forest conservation under different protection regimes including through protected areas, Indigenous and traditional territories, and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). It will also support landscape restoration where it contributes to maintaining or rehabilitating the integrity of ecosystems. To alleviate pressure on forests, sustainable use of natural resources along biodiversity friendly value chains will be promoted, ensuring economic and social inclusion. As in GEF-8, the IP will actively partner with Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' organizations in the design and implementation of the program and respective child projects.

27. To achieve transformation and impact at scale, particular attention will be given to investments strengthening governance and policies, finance mechanisms, multistakeholder cooperation including partnerships, innovation and knowledge management. Targeting these levers will ensure that GEF investments through the IP will contribute to influencing transformational change in natural and food systems. To ensure that these levers of transformation ultimately advance sustainability and scale, the IP will support system-wide,

[24] Potapov, P., *et al*. "The last frontiers of wilderness: Tracking loss of intact forest landscapes from 2000 to 2013." Science advances 3.1 (2017): e1600821.

[25] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

country-driven, people-centered development across people, organizations, institutions, and policies.

28. In each forest biome, at regional level, key-cross-cutting issues are prioritized and mainstreamed as part of the overall design and implementation to be reflected in all country projects. These include policy coherence, multistakeholder platforms, stakeholder engagement, IPLC and women's empowerment, private sector engagement, and knowledge management and learning. The IP will contribute to the creation of jobs related to nature for men, women, and youth, for instance community champions and wildlife rangers.

29. Acknowledging the interconnection between sectors, the IP will contribute to promoting links and synergies within the IP among the different regions and with other relevant IPs such as the Global Wildlife for Development IP. This IP is also complementary to and synergistic with the FS IP which will tackle global commodities as drivers of deforestation and restore degraded productive lands in tropical forests.

30. The IP is strongly anchored in the Biodiversity and Climate Change Focal Areas as its overarching goal is to preserve the forests that have the richest biodiversity and the highest carbon stocks. While the overarching goal of the IP is the conservation of the highest integrity forests, it also will contribute to the Land Degradation Focal Area through supporting sustainable land management and targeted forest restoration where relevant, for example to improve livelihoods, foster ecosystems connectivity between primary forests, and enhance freshwater service provisioning. The IP will also enhance the integration with the GEF portfolio on Chemicals and Waste related to mining, especially small-scale artisanal gold mining and the use of mercury, and the International Waters portfolio related to coordinated approaches in transboundary forests.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

The IP's priority is the protection of tropical primary forests by addressing the identified drivers to safeguard globally significant biodiversity, carbon stocks and sinks, freshwater provisioning

and improve ecological connectivity in the forest biomes at local, national, and regional levels. This focused approach will be supported by:

- Halting deforestation and support achievement of GBF Target #3 (30 x 30).
- Expand the coverage and improve the management of protected and conservation areas in the tropical forest biomes.
- Implementing cost effective Nature-based Solutions[26, 27, 28] to achieve conservation notably outside the protected areas and decrease human pressure on primary forests. This includes improving conservation-friendly livelihoods, including through the bioeconomy initiatives: the use of renewable biological resources to produce food, energy and industrial goods. The IP will also support the conservation or restoration of freshwater ecosystem services and related benefits.
- Promoting integrated land-use planning, addressing competing land-uses while conserving primary forests. This would include demarcation, regularization of land tenure and rights of IPLCs, and supporting co-management arrangements of protected landscapes. This also includes the support to conservation friendly livelihoods at the local level; and the improvement of the "productive" sectors ensuring compatibility with forest conservation and the promotion of deforestation-free commercial commodities. Integrated fire management may also be supported where important threats are observed.
- Supporting forest landscapes restoration where it contributes to primary forest and biodiversity conservation, including biological corridors contributing to maintain tropical primary forest integrity and ecosystem services. This includes enhancing production and landscape revitalization by restoring degraded areas and using natural resources sustainably along biodiversity-friendly value chains, ensuring economic and social inclusion, within a landscape approach. With GEF support, targeted forests can also serve as building blocks for ecosystem restoration at a landscape level.
- Improving policy coherence and whole of society approaches contributing to the conservation of primary forests through policy and institutional reforms and integrated land-use planning, including the reduction of harmful incentives, fostering the development of sustainable infrastructure, strengthening law enforcement, and supporting information and

[26] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

[27] Bierbaum, R. 2020. Nature-based solutions and the GEF. A STAP Advisory Document. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-05/EN_GEF_C69_E_04_GEF_Support_for_NbS_May5_2025.pdf.

[28] In response to GEF IEO, 2025, *Evaluation of the GEF Support to Nature-based Solutions* (Council document GEF/E/C.69/04), the GEF Secretariat is preparing guidance that will clarify potential entry points for effective NbS integration in GEF programming. This guidance will be posted on the GEF website.

monitoring systems to ensure land-use decisions are not made at the expense of primary forests.

- Considering, involving and empowering IPLCs in the proposed strategy to conserve primary forests considering alignment with existing relevant national and international policy frameworks. This includes their involvement in all relevant decision-making processes.
- Increasing resource mobilization through supporting the implementation of financial instruments and approaches that provide long-term and additional resources for the conservation of primary forests. This includes supporting the enabling environment to develop or access instruments and approaches such as PES, CTFs, debt for nature swaps or conversions, Country Platform approaches, Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) and blended finance. Implementation of financial incentives such as REDD+ and non-market initiatives under the UNFCCC. The GEF may support countries using their STAR allocation to participate in blended-finance structures to mobilize private finance, based on countries' demand, including the required capacity building in financial structuring at country level and facilitating coordination among the various stakeholders and government agencies required.
- Harnessing and developing initiatives and partnerships at local and global levels to develop coordination, synergies and efficiency in addressing the drivers of forest loss and degradation and promoting solutions. Strategic partners include financial institutions (including national and regional banks) investing in infrastructure development and production sectors. Improving land tenure, access rights and access to finance of IPLCs to strengthen their crucial role in conserving forests. Supporting analysis and global awareness to enhance the role of primary forests conservation and forest restoration to meet the globally agreed commitments by 2030 made under the Rio Conventions and by the private sector.
- Promoting coordination and synergies with existing financial support from the bilateral, multilateral aid, and non-profit organizations to maximize impact.
- Planning for and building key elements of sustainability for projects, including financial, human and institutional capacity strengthening
- Promoting cooperation among GEF recipient countries, including through the development of the interoperability between GEF regional and relevant global IP platforms. The cooperation includes learning, promoting transparency, sharing success stories, technical exchanges, intergovernmental dialogue, promotion of regional approaches, knowledge management, and communication.

31. Selection criteria for the participating countries and project proposals include:

- Global importance of high integrity forests and willingness to tackle the key threats for primary forest deforestation and degradation.
- Commitment to work on regional and transboundary efforts to maintain and restore the integrity of the forest biomes beyond national boundaries.
- High-level of global environment and social benefits their participation in the IP will provide. This includes the level of contribution to the MEAs. Their commitment to conserve high ecological integrity forests and the efficiency of their strategy including through policy coherence, integrated approaches, and whole of society approaches, with a particular

attention to Indigenous Peoples, local communities (IPLCs), women and youth mainstreaming.

- Systems transformation potential of the proposal harnesses adequate levers of transformation: governance, financial leverage, partnerships, innovation, and knowledge management.
- The whole of government approach and commitment to policy coherence.
- The nature and level of cooperation with other GEF relevant platforms including within the IP and with other relevant IPs.
- The capacity to leverage co-financing, especially resource mobilized, demonstrating coordination and buy-in and direct involvement of the private sector.
- The articulation with other GEF funds (such as GBFF and LDCF) and Focal Areas to maximize scale and synergies.

32. As in GEF-8, this IP will include five regional coordination platforms (one for each biome). These platforms will serve the purpose of coordinating, sharing knowledge and enhancing capacities in the participating countries of their biome. Because this IP will not have a global platform, they will also have the critical responsibility to coordinate and create synergies on themes of common interest with the other regional platforms in close coordination with the GEF Secretariat acting as a global "hub" for the whole IP. Additionally, to maximize the impact in a systemic and transformative approach, the regional platforms will be expected to engage outside the IP with other relevant GEF IP global platforms and other relevant stakeholders and partnerships, developing synergies and scaling up GEF interventions influence.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

33. At the global level:

- Global Platforms: Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits (IAPB), The High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People to develop synergies on the political commitment and target 3 of the KMGBF, and the International Trade Timber Organization (ITTO).
- International Climate Initiatives: Forests and Climate Leaders Partnership, International Climate Initiative (IKI), The Legacy Landscapes Fund, World Economic Forum's One Trillion Trees initiative, the Tropical Forest Alliance, and Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance (LEAF) Coalition.
- Private sector: The Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation (CPIC) initiative, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) Forest Investor Club, International Sustainable Forestry Coalition, and commodity-based platforms.
- Funding and Financial mechanisms such as the TFFF, the High-Integrity Forest Investment Initiative (HIFOR), relevant multilateral and national programs including ODA, and REDD+ funding partners including financial institutions and private sector.
- International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): African Parks, African Wildlife Foundation, Birdlife International, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Conservation International (CI), Rainforest Alliance, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Wildlife

Conservation Society (WCS), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Universal Rangers Support Alliance & International Rangers Federation

- Research Centers: Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF).
- Local Governments Mobilization: The Governors' Climate & Forest Task Force to help mobilize local government where relevant.
- Other Initiatives: The International Caucus for Conservation, The GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group, Forest Tenure Funders Group (FTFG), World Resources Institute Global Forest Watch, Land and Carbon Lab.
- Relevant global biodiversity-related conventions including CMS

34. At the regional level:

- Amazon: Knowledge Platform of the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program (ASL), Leticia Pact, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), IDB's initiative Amazonia Forever, World Bank's Amazon Program, Network of Latin American Technical Cooperation in National Parks, Other Protected Areas, and Wildlife (REDPARQUES), the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program (ARPA).
- Congo: Regional Platform of the Congo Impact Program, Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Central Africa Forest Initiative (CAFI), Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), specialized networks (Network of IPLCs for the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC), and Conference on Dense and Moist Forest Ecosystems of Central Africa (CEFDHAC), African Women's Network for Sustainable Development (REFADD), Youth Network for Central African Forests (REJEFAC).
- Asia Pacific: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Restoring and Sustaining Landscapes Together (RESULT) Asia-Pacific, Grow Asia and regional programs from multilateral and bilateral entities, and NGOs.
- Mesoamerica: Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) for the "5 Great Forests Initiative", The Dry Corridor Initiative.
- Guinean Forests of West Africa: Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), Transboundary Tai-Grebo-Krahn-Sapo Forest, Gola Transboundary Forest Landscape, Cross River-Korup-Takamanda Transboundary Initiative (São Tomé and Príncipe), Mano River Union.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

- UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement: The UNFCCC emphasizes conserving diverse and resilient forests to achieve net zero efficiency by 2050, and the COP28 decision aims to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.[29] By focusing on tropical and primary forests and their high-level carbon stock, the IP will provide a significant and efficient contribution to the net zero

[29] UNFCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.1729

efficiency goal by 2050. In addition, the IP is aligned with the Glasgow Climate Pact[30] which highlights the importance of protecting and restoring ecosystems to act as carbon sinks and protect biodiversity, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and UNFCCC decisions that emphasize ecosystem integrity and integrated climate-biodiversity solutions. The IP also efficiently contributes to article 6.8 of the Paris Agreement on non-market approaches which can include the conservation of forests without involving offsetting and trading of credits.

- CBD: Under the UNCBD, forest biomes are critical for achieving biodiversity targets in the KMGBF targets 1,2 and 3. The IP also aligns very well with the CBD COP16 Decision 16/22[31] Noting "that biodiversity and ecosystem integrity play an important role in combatting climate change and urging governments "to identify and maximize potential synergies between biodiversity and climate actions".
- UNCCD: The IP contributes to the UNCCD and the voluntary Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets by supporting sustainable land management and restoration efforts.
- UNFF: The IP contributes to the UNFF's goals of preventing deforestation, improving governance, and enhancing cooperation. The IP will contribute importantly to these objectives.
- The IP will incorporate practical pollution-prevention measures within its system focus, including policy and regulatory reforms, incentives, and green public procurement that reduce pollution risks (e.g., by avoiding processing of gold with mercury, or by banning such practices, and by preventing the use of hazardous agrochemicals in agriculture adjacent or within the biomes). These actions are intended to reduce broader pollution pressures and create enabling conditions for longer-term improvements. They will also contribute to convention-specific Chemicals and Waste (CW) results (Stockholm/Minamata tonnage reductions), which will be prioritized and reported as additional to those by the CW focal area. Accordingly, child projects will include clearly defined, verifiable convention deliverables with CW results reporting.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

35. The interactions between the private sector and this IP are complex. The private sector has often been seen as a contributor to deforestation rather than a partner in conservation. This lack of involvement is due to various factors, including limited awareness of the benefits of environmentally sound practices, perceived high costs, and the absence of incentives for businesses to invest in forest conservation. The action of the private sector can however be considered as a potential positive element for policy coherence that faces multiple challenges.[32]

[30] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf

[31] https://dev-chm.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-16/cop-16-dec-22-en.pdf

[32] STAP, 2023. Policy Coherence in the GEF. June 2023, 1-24.

36. Private sector engagement is crucial to complementing forest conservation. At the landscape level, companies can invest in improved forestry practices, develop technologies for monitoring forest health, and create market demand for sustainably sourced products. Standards, certification systems, regulations (e.g., EUDR), corporate target setting initiatives for net-zero and nature positive approaches (e.g., SBTN), and more recently disclosure frameworks (e.g., TNFD, TCFD) are promising means to engage the private sector in sectoral and landscape investments.

37. The IP will promote a positive enabling environment for the private sector. This includes capacity building for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and global corporations, supporting nature positive public policies and governance while adhering to the social and environmental safeguards documented in the GEF Private Sector Engagement Strategy[33].

38. Another key entry point to engage the private sector is encouraging financial innovations and providing an enabling environment for policy framework as well as providing capacity building for participating countries and partners. Financial innovations, such as results-based payments (PES[34, 35], carbon and biodiversity credits, outcome payment bonds[36]), de-risking mechanisms (insurance products, guarantees[37]), and capital market mobilization (SLBs[38, 39, 40]) can attract new investments into forest conservation and restoration.

39. Engaging key supply chain companies is crucial for value-chain operations, ensuring forest conservation efforts are integrated from raw material sourcing to final product delivery. For example, the Living Amazon Mechanism project in Brazil[41] uses a blended finance investment mechanism to support conservation activities and strengthen value chains in the bioeconomy.

Global Wildlife for Development

40. Global indicators of wildlife status and population trends signal an accelerating decline across many taxa and increasing loss, degradation and fragmentation of marine, terrestrial and freshwater habitats. On average, global wildlife populations have declined by 73% in the last 50

[33] GEF's Private Sector Engagement Strategy: GEF/C.59/07/Rev.01

[34] Montero-de-Oliveira, F.E., G. Blundo-Canto, and D. Ezzine-de-Blas. "Under what conditions do payments for environmental services enable forest conservation in the Amazon? A realist synthesis." Ecological Economics 205 (2023): 107697.

[35] https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/9139

[36] https://treasury.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/treasury/ibrd/outcome-bonds

[37] https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/11324

[38] https://sslburuguay.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/30690/20/uruguay_sslb_framework__2.pdf

[39] https://www.gov.br/planalto/en/latest-news/2023/11/brazil-announces-first-issuance-of-sustainable-bonds

[40] https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/11/cop27-sustainability-linked-bonds-net-zero-transition/

[41] https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/11327

years, with differences between regions and ecosystem types.[42,43] Given the essential role that wildlife plays in the maintenance and functioning of ecosystems, this significant loss affects both human and ecological communities, decreasing the resilience of ecosystems to Earth system change, threatening food, health, and human security, and jeopardizing livelihoods.[44] The sustainable use of wild species is critical for people and nature, and to addressing biodiversity decline.[45] The conservation and sustainable management of wildlife and wildlife landscapes is essential to meeting global biodiversity, climate, land use, and health goals.

41. The two main drivers of wildlife loss are interconnected: habitat loss and fragmentation; and unsustainable (legal and illegal) overexploitation and trade of wildlife. Although there are regional and sub-regional differences, and the sustainability of the use of wild species is influenced negatively or positively by multiple drivers,[46] the overexploitation of wildlife and destruction of habitat is driven by: illegal and unsustainable consumption and trade of wildlife; other illegal economic activities, such as mining, with the spill-over effects, poor natural resource governance at the local, national, regional and global scales; the underlying demand for wildlife and wildlife products; the undervaluation of natural resources and perverse incentives; and the lack of viable economic alternatives.

42. Global illegal wildlife trade (IWT) is one of the largest global illegal markets after narcotics, human trafficking and counterfeit products. IWT is managed by complex transnational organized crime networks, generating up to $23 billion annually,[47] and is increasingly facilitated online. 15 years after a surge in political and donor attention to combating IWT, much progress has been made on poaching and trafficking of charismatic megafauna through demand- and supply-side efforts. Despite this, attention and investment have stagnated, and an increasing range of taxa are affected by illegal or unsustainable trade. Recent assessments offer no confidence that wildlife trafficking overall is substantially reduced. Furthermore, the legal but unsustainable

[42] World Wildlife Fund (WWF). (2024). Living Planet Report 2024 – A System in Peril. WWF, Gland, Switzerland

[43] Sayer, C.A., *et al.* (2025). One-quarter of freshwater fauna threatened with extinction. Nature. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-08375-z

[44] "Wildlife-based tourism alone now generates an estimated $120.1 billion annually and supports 21.8 million jobs globally "World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). (2019). The Economic Impact of Global Wildlife Tourism. WTTC, London, United Kingdom

[45] Summary for policymakers of the thematic assessment of the sustainable use of wild species of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) https://zenodo.org/records/7411847

[46] Ibid.

[47] UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html

trade and use of wildlife often go unreported and contribute to overexploitation,[48] and efforts to take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species are not on track.[49]

43. Wildlife landscapes and key migration routes are often fragmented by competing land and sea uses, including agriculture, (which accounts for 90% or more of tropical deforestation[50]) and unsustainable infrastructure development, particularly roads and rails, which contribute to wildlife mortality, population pressures, loss of habitat and ecological connectivity.[51]

44. Human-wildlife conflict (HWC**)** is intensifying globally due to habitat loss and fragmentation, rising population pressures, climate change[52] affecting land productivity and shifting habitats, rewilding, unsustainable land use, changes in wildlife behavior and growing competition for resources. Surveys indicate[53] a significant shift in national wildlife conservation priorities, driven by growing concern over HWC in many countries. HWC disproportionately impacts low-income rural communities.[54]

45. Finally, there are rapidly changing forces, threat multipliers and emerging trends impacting both wildlife and humans to which countries, practitioners and communities must respond and adapt. These include online trade, wildlife disease, climate and earth system change, diversification of consumer preferences for wildlife products, and market dynamics. For example, zoonotic spillover, linked to the emergence of infectious diseases and pandemics, is driven by habitat destruction, wildlife trade, and land-use change.

There is growing understanding and awareness of the interconnectedness and complexity of these drivers as they are rooted in economic and human systems that transcend any one site or protected area, and countries and communities face a complex mix of these depending on their national and local context. Systems-based approaches, and coordinated action informed by evidence and learning, are required to effectively address these drivers. Lessons from where progress is being made indicate that holistic interventions at both demand and supply stages can

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[48] Determining the sustainability of legal wildlife trade A. Hughes, *et al.*, Journal of Environmental Management Vol 341 Article 117987 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2023.117987

[49] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/goal-15/ and UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html

[50] F. Pendrill, *et al*. (2022). Disentangling the numbers behind agriculture-driven tropical deforestation. Science 377. DOI:10.1126/science. abm9267

[51] Ament, R., Clevenger, A., & van der Ree, R. (Eds.) (2023). Addressing ecological connectivity in the development of roads, railways and canals. IUCN WCPA Technical Report Series No. 5. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. https://doi.org/10.53847/IUCN.CH.2023.PATRS.5.en

[52] Abrahms, B., *et al*. (2023). Climate change as a global amplifier of human–wildlife conflict. *Nature Climate Change*, *13*(3), 224-234.

[53] According to a 2022 global survey conducted by the Global Wildlife Program, nearly two-thirds (64%) of responding governments identified human-wildlife conflict as a "major" and "serious" issue, with 73% acknowledging that it is on the rise.

[54] Braczkowski, A.R., C. *et al.* The unequal burden of human-wildlife conflict. *Commun Biol* 6, 182 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-023-04493-y

reduce wildlife trafficking, including strong coherence and harmonization across the trade chain.[55] Social and economic dynamics affecting illicit economies should be considered beyond single species solutions. Transboundary cooperation among nations, policy coherence and coordination in execution are key to addressing wildlife loss and its many drivers. Strong international cooperation and a solid evidence base is required.[56] GEF experience through ten years of the Global Wildlife Program supports these conclusions and informs GEF-9 strategy.

46. Wildlife is a critical integrator across health, economy, climate change governance, security, rule of law and the GEF holds a critical and unique position as donor and convenor in the wildlife conservation and IWT space. The Global Wildlife Program is an important foundation on which the GEF and international community can build, evolve and invest in multiple GEBs with concrete human benefits. GEF-8 builds on the significant progress in GEF-6 and GEF-7, and was designed across interconnect aspects of ecosystems, wildlife and human health to deliver multiple GEBs, while addressing drivers of the loss of wildlife and key habitats. The GEF-9 GWD IP will influence transformational change in how we manage natural systems, and address risks of wildlife disease transmission in human health systems.

Framing of the Integrated Program

47. The GEF-9 Global Wildlife for Development (GWD) IP builds on past phases and will address the interconnected drivers of wildlife loss through a holistic, systems-based approach to improve governance, and human and institutional capacity; creates positive incentives for wildlife conservation and sustainable use; fosters transboundary conservation and multi-country collaboration; and applies evidence-based approaches, innovation and technologies to conserving wildlife.

GEF-9 will build on previous phases and meet the current context and go beyond a business-as-usual approach through *integration and inclusion* for *impact* by: increasing emphasis and investment in *transboundary approaches and multi-country collaborations*; *institutionalization of capacity*; increasing *policy coherence by mainstreaming wildlife* at the national, sub-national, local and landscape scale; invest in *locally led actions with direct support to IPLCs*; support the *professionalization of wildlife rangers* [57] as planetary health workers; scale-up the use of *behavior*

[55] Pg 12 of UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html and corroborated by GEF GWP experience.

[56] UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html

[57] According to the International Ranger Federation (IRF), rangers are broadly defined and: "play a critical role in conservation; they are responsible for safeguarding nature, and cultural and historical heritage, and protecting the rights and well-being of present and future generations. As representatives of their authority, organization or community, they work, often for extended periods, in protected and conserved areas and wider landscapes and seascapes, whether state, regional, communal, Indigenous, or private, in line with legal and institutional frameworks." IRF has produced best practice guidelines and resources on ranger capacity/competencies, welfare and conduct: https://www.internationalrangers.org/resources/

change and social science-based approaches;[58] and through the application scaling of *technology and innovation*.

48. The theory of change for the GEF-9 GWD is that if the *connectivity and management of wildlife landscapes* are improved; *human wildlife conflict* is prevented, mitigated and compensated; *unsustainable (both illegal and legal) wildlife taking and trade*[59] are curtailed; and local, national and international *market and non-market incentives* are favorable then over-exploitation and consumption of wildlife will decline, the connectivity and quality of wildlife landscapes will improve, and result in commensurate increases in the biophysical condition of wildlife populations and landscapes, and accrue global environmental and associated benefits for the whole of society.

49. The IP is designed to achieve benefits across multiple focal areas including in the Biodiversity Focal Area (BD FA) through the conservation of globally important biodiversity (species and landscape conservation and sustainable use); the Land Degradation Focal Area (LD FA) through the restoration of key wildlife habitats; the Climate Change Focal Area (CC FA) through greenhouse gas (GHG) avoidance through habitat conservation restoration.

50. The GWD IP in GEF-9 will contribute to achievement of objectives of the Critical Forest Biomes IP and Drought and Drylands IP by mainstreaming and contributing to nature positive development for country-level planning and land degradation neutrality.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

51. The objective of the GEF-9 GWD IP is to conserve wildlife and wildlife landscapes by addressing the drivers of wildlife loss and supporting human-wildlife coexistence. Achieving this requires an approach with countries across transboundary, national and sub-national dimensions, with global coordination and engagement to align with and crowd-in diverse actors and initiatives.

Key program components:

a) **Maintain ecologically connected, robust wildlife landscapes under integrated and coherent management across land uses, jurisdictions and stakeholders, within and across national borders.** Achieving this will require multi-stakeholder approaches, coherence of policy and decision-making across sectors, mainstreaming of wildlife through integrated planning and improved management of and beyond protected areas (including community forests, OECMs, Indigenous and traditional territories, and others), inter-ministerial cooperation to integrate wildlife conservation into agriculture and infrastructure sectoral planning, supporting the development and implementation of IPLC land management, co-management and governance, transboundary and regional cooperation, surveillance and management of wildlife-livestock-human health interface,

[58] Including crime prevention, problem-based policing, demand reduction, zoonotic spillover risk reduction, and other evidence-based and customized approaches.

[59] Illegal trade is known as 'trafficking'.

and sustainable financing at the landscape level. GEF-9 will incorporate lessons from past phases and evidence to support mainstreaming of wildlife and the improved and integrated spatial planning of infrastructure to prevent habitat loss and fragmentation, and wildlife mortality.

b) **Address illegal and unsustainable wildlife taking, trade and use** working along domestic and international supply chains. This builds on past phases of GWP and will focus on strengthening evidence-based approaches, enhancing transparency and addressing corruption and building political will. Potential activities under this component include: wildlife and situational crime prevention and anti-poaching measures; mainstreaming wildlife into law enforcement and the judiciary; community-based-monitoring and engagement; disrupting trafficking through information and intelligence and enforcement coordination within and between countries; addressing financial flows and online sales; changing consumer behavior to reduce demand within and between countries; better regulation and management of supply chains, including to reduce disease risks from wildlife trade.

c) **Prevent and mitigate human wildlife conflict** to reduce negative impacts on humans and wildlife and support human-wildlife coexistence. Country demand for resources and technical support in this area for GEF-8 was significant and will continue to be an area of need. Solutions to HWC must be customized and context specific. In GEF-9 this component will support scaled application of proven approaches, locally led solutions and innovation to address HWC including community-based behavior change measures; analog and digital alert systems; wildlife damage insurance options; and financing tools.

d) **Diversify wildlife positive economic opportunities to** reduce exploitation pressure and improve management of wildlife. Economic opportunities are critical to ensure that IPLCs, women, youth, and national governments value, benefit from and invest in wildlife and habitat conservation. Wildlife positive economic options and job creation can transform dynamics fueling wildlife loss, including through nature-based tourism, landscape revitalization, diversification of livelihoods, and private sector engagement. Sustainable traditional practices of IPLCs will be recognized and promoted. Potential activities under this component include economic activities and innovative financing *specifically designed to contribute to wildlife conservation* gains through diversified enterprise development; job generation, public-private partnerships (enterprises, concessions, technology, etc.); enabling policy environment including increasing and clarifying community and IPLC rights to own, manage and use resources; and financial products from public development banks and insurance products.

52. The IP will include targeted activities in areas that national projects have a challenging time addressing, such as i) international trafficking and transboundary issues; ii) behavior change for reducing consumer demand for illegal or unsustainable wildlife; iii) global and regional donor coordination and knowledge management, with emphasis in South-South collaboration. The four GWD GEF-9 components for national projects will reinforce one another with support of a global platform and targeted regional coordination and engagement.

53. Key approaches-*what is it going to take*? The theory of change and key components for GWD GEF-9 will be delivered through country projects that will be designed based on a situational analysis of the drivers of wildlife loss in their country, dynamics in the region and global forces, and should naturally be customized based on that context, and draw from key approaches to achieve impact. We will continue the successful approaches of GWP and further emphasize:

54. *Adequate and sustained financing*: The gap in financing for wildlife conservation is significant at the community, landscape, national and international levels, and there is a critical need to both narrow this gap and mobilize resources from diverse sources and sectors. In GEF-9 blended finance could be used as a tool to support innovative insurance mechanisms, wildlife friendly SMEs, and wildlife-based outcome payments. Targeted private sector engagement will be used to leverage further financing towards the program objective across components. Where available, BIOFIN biodiversity finance plans should be used as a road map for sustainable financing and proven approaches such as project finance for permanence, CTFs, and PES will continue to play an important role.

55. *Behavior change and applied social-science*: GEF-9 will continue the innovative work of GEF-8 in applying behavior change and social-science approaches to shift human behaviors that are driving unsustainable wildlife consumption and trade demand and increasing zoonotic spillover risk. Aligned with the recommendations of the STAP[60] these approaches are also being used through GWP to prevent and reduce HWC and to build public and political will for conservation. The global coordination platform can support targeted technical assistance to country projects to mainstream the use of such approaches, while also providing global leadership in this area through targeted knowledge sharing events and product creation.

56. *Technology and innovation*: In GEF-9 the GWD will scale-up and support the adoption of technology and innovation through country projects with the support and coordination of the global platform and engagement with existing wildlife tech platforms.[61] There is significant scope for this, for example: using advanced monitoring systems, such as drones and satellite imagery to track animal movements and identify threats to their habitats; AI can help analyze large datasets, providing insights into wildlife populations, behavior, and patterns to improve conservation strategies; smart tracking devices can monitor endangered species in real time, helping to prevent poaching; for countering wildlife trafficking, blockchain technology can ensure the traceability and transparency of wildlife products; predictive modeling, smart containers and x-ray screening can identify the highest-risk maritime and air shipments for illegal wildlife trafficking while securing business continuity; and genetic analysis and machine learning can be used to detect illegal wildlife products at borders.

[60] Why behavioral change matters to the GEF and what to do about it: A STAP Advisory Document December 2020 https://cdn.unenvironment.org/stapgef/public/2021-03/54640%20STAP%20Behavior%20Change_WEB.pdf

[61] Such as WildLabs https://wildlabs.net/

57. *Transboundary action*: Wildlife, transnational organized crime, disease transmission and environmental change know no boundaries or territories, posing unique challenges and opportunities for conservation across borders. A key value-addition of the GEF-9 GWP is supporting cooperation among countries to effectively address cross-border threats and collaboratively manage transboundary landscapes. Previous phases of GWP have supported the management of Transfrontier Conservation Areas, brokered bilateral agreements between countries to combat wildlife trafficking; and strengthened sub-regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks. The selection criteria for participation in the GEF-9 IP will emphasize transboundary cooperation, in particular for countries who are actively working to: halt their country's role in internationally trafficked or unsustainably used species; focus on the conservation of transboundary wildlife landscapes or wildlife populations (including migratory species); and demonstrated national leadership to strengthen international/regional collaboration in wildlife conservation (e.g., wildlife enforcement networks, multi-country MOUs).

58. The global coordination project will continue to support key actions across multiple countries, such as regional collaboration on shared challenges such as HWC in Africa and consumer demand reduction. It has also adopted a "twinning approach" to facilitate cross-border learning and exchange. As has been highlighted by the IEO in a recent evaluation of the GWP,[62] as well as OPS-8 findings,[63] these types of activities are essential to addressing interrelated globalized drivers of wildlife loss that require a coordinated, multi-country approach. Based on this experience and these lessons, transboundary action will be further supported and scaled in GEF-9 through the global platform and targeted action and cooperation amongst countries.

59. *Whole of society, whole of government*: Addressing these challenges requires the engagement of many segments of society from the private sector (e.g. airlines, financiers and tour operators) to scientists and academic institutions, governments at all levels IPLCs, women, and youth, rangers. The GEF-9 program will support and empower those most immediately impacted by loss of wildlife and ecosystems through locally-led actions and solutions (e.g. including direct involvement of local communities in decision-making and governance to strengthen local ownership and ensure that conservation efforts are culturally and contextually relevant). This includes investing in governance and institutional frameworks for sustainable wildlife and landscape management through community rights-based and IPLC governance. In addition, steps such as support for modern surveillance technologies combined with traditional knowledge and methods can increase community engagement in monitoring and enforcement among others.
GEF-9 GWD IP will support the creation of a robust workforce and broad constituency for wildlife conservation. This will include support for building the capacity, welfare and conduct of rangers (broadly defined, as planetary health workers critical to meeting 30X30); engagement of youth

[62] Recommendations 1 and 3 of the Evaluation of the Global Wildlife Program Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office, June 2024 https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-06/EN_GEF.C67_E_02_GWP_Rev.01.pdf

[63] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

(via wildlife conservation corps or similar), women (51% of the global population needs to be empowered) and community champions (support to leaders in the sector, including environmental defenders).

60. GEF-9 will continue to move toward working across ministries and public institutions to identify, reform and create policy, and regulatory environment to that is coherent and mainstream wildlife conservation into policing, judicial system and for holistic decision-making at the national and landscape-scale for wildlife. GWD GEF-9 will support countries on the institutionalization and long-term financing of capacity for wildlife conservation at the national and sub-national level which is essential to deliver and sustain cohorts of competent conservation professionals for wildlife conservation.

Selection criteria:

61. The program will adopt a dual approach with a global project and country specific investments. It will build on the existing program governance structure of previous phases of GWP with a clear value-added proposition to continue to scale impact. The program will consider the following selection criteria for financing: (i) Level of threat to globally significant wildlife populations and habitats from the multiple drivers (ii) Role of the country in unsustainable use and supply chains, including illegal taking of wildlife species; (iii) Potential benefits for conservation and livelihoods from wildlife-based economies and addressing HWC; (iv) Demonstrated or commitment to cooperate with other countries to take transboundary action to address threats to wildlife, habitats and ecological connectivity including cooperation along supply chains (see detail in Key Approaches section); (v) Opportunity for strong multifocal area, interventions producing multiple benefits; and (vi) Testing and scaling innovations for wildlife management, HWC, wildlife monitoring, and enforcement etc. (vii) Demonstrated commitment to institutionalization, mainstreaming and/or policy reform and coherence for wildlife conservation; (viii) Demonstrated commitment to participate and collaborate in an integrated global program.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

62. GWD GEF-9 will serve as a convenor of existing platforms and emerging partners. The program will bring together existing consortia and initiatives to amplify knowledge exchange and learning. The GEF-9 program will engage with various global and regional platforms and alliances to strengthen collaboration between wildlife related actors to address multifaceted environmental, social, economic and health (zoonoses) [64] challenges facing wildlife conservation.

63. It will strengthen collaboration with existing coalitions such as the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC),[65] which is a collaborative effort of five inter-

[64] https://www.woah.org/fileadmin/Home/eng/Media_Center/docs/EN_TripartiteZoonosesGuide_webversion.pdf

[65] https://cites.org/eng/prog/iccwc The partner agencies to ICCWC are the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

governmental organizations working to bring coordinated support to the national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to the sub-regional and regional networks that act in defense of natural resources. Collaboration with groups such as the URSA will continue and collaboration with IPLC platforms and partners including Indigenous Peoples' associations, resource user groups, and conservancies will be strengthened.

64. Under previous phases of GWP, the global coordination project has created a powerful coordination and knowledge platform on which to build that provides technical resources, demonstrates leadership; supports and enables the exchange of lessons learned between country projects to achieve results. This platform will play a critical role in convening and supporting actors across sectors for wildlife conservation in GEF-9.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

65. GWD GEF-9 program components will reinforce each other to deliver multiple global environment benefits for biodiversity, climate change mitigation, restoration and resilience benefits across the GEF's focal areas (BD, LD, CC) and MEAs. GWD will increase the integrity and connectivity of wildlife populations and landscapes by actively addressing the drivers of wildlife and habitat loss, supporting multistakeholder and integrated decision making and improving governance and the rule of law. GWD will support IPLCs to develop diversified sources of livelihood to reduce the stress on wildlife populations and landscapes from unsustainable agriculture practices and resource exploitation and contribute to restoration goals. Further GWD will include activities aimed at preserving and enhancing carbon sinks in natural ecosystems, including targeted habitat restoration and agroforestry, and strengthening the climate-resilience of IPLCs and target areas. Taken together, these activities through GWD will produce multiple GEBs captured by GEF core indicators such as creation and improved management of protected areas; hectares under improved management; hectares restored; GHG emissions reduction; and numbers of human beneficiaries.

66. The program will contribute directly to achieving Targets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 of the KMGBF. In addition to the human health benefits of conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat, this program will also contribute to aligned actions to mainstream health included in the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health[66] for instance: by considering biodiversity/health interlinkages, co-benefits and trade-offs landscape planning and management; reducing HWC; and improving management of interaction among humans, livestock and wildlife to decrease zoonotic disease spillover risk.

67. Although the GEF is not the financial mechanism for the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the World Heritage Convention, or the Ramsar convention, this program will make meaningful contributions aligned with these biodiversity-related conventions.

[66] https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-16/cop-16-dec-19-en.pdf

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

68. The private sector is a key partner to support innovation and transformation for wildlife conservation. GEF financing will incentivize actions by national governments and private sector to expand nature-based tourism and wildlife-based value chains to generate livelihood opportunities that contribute to conservation and reduce conflicts between communities and wildlife. The private sector can also play an important role in protected area management models and concessions, and investment in connectivity and wildlife habitat restoration.

69. The travel, restaurant and retail sectors will be engaged to address the trade and consumption of illegal wildlife and wildlife products. Technology companies will be engaged to support the scaling of innovative solutions that support wildlife monitoring and habitat management, address IWT, influence demand reduction and consumption of wildlife and wildlife products online and off. Corporate commitments to biodiversity, climate change and land degradation present opportunities for channeling resources and enhancing multistakeholder collaborations to protected areas, landscapes and diversified livelihoods.

70. GWP will continue to explore innovative financial solutions and work with the financial sector to curb financial flows to wildlife trafficking. Beyond this, blended finance or outside sources of concessional finance, including from national public development banks, and grant funding for technical assistance could be used to support SMEs and creation of innovative sustainable financing models for wildlife conservation.

Blue and Green Islands

71. Occupying less than 0.5% of the Earth's land surface, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) support some 20% of Earth's terrestrial biodiversity, with many species unique to their locales.[67, 68] SIDS also host 40% of the world's coral reefs,[69] which are among the most biodiverse ecosystems globally.

72. SIDS[70] are also among the most vulnerable countries in the world, due to their small populations and land areas, fragile ecologies and transformed ecosystems, high levels of endemism, and diverse and distinct development trajectories. Increased anthropogenic pressure on natural resources causing biodiversity loss, land degradation, and diminishing freshwater resources in SIDS, coupled with extreme vulnerability to adverse impacts of climate change (such

[67] (2017) SIDS in Numbers: Biodiversity and Oceans https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/sids_biodiversity_and_oceans_2017.pdf

[68] SEI (2017). *Five reasons why small island developing states are bigger than we think.*

[69] UN (2024). *About Small Island Developing States (SIDS)*

[70] Though there are many commonalities, SIDS are not a homogenous group of countries, with each of the geographical sub-regions of SIDS (the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the AIS) having different challenges as well as variations in size, capacity, gross domestic product (GDP), and connectivity. In addition, varying degrees of governance, institutional, and capacity limitations and constraints are also a key factor in the environment and climate challenges SIDS face.

as sea level rise and ocean warming), increasingly affects the health of their natural ecosystems, livelihoods, key economic sectors[71] and exacerbates societal challenges.

73. The economic consequences of unsustainable resource management are further exacerbated by the economic burden of climate change with constant cycles of disaster response and recovery and depreciation of SIDS natural assets due to both slow and quick onset climatic events.[72]

74. Impacts of the triple planetary crisis are profound in a SIDS context, given the strong interconnection between people's well-being and livelihoods and the healthy and productive environment they rely upon. With their small land mass and significant influence on global environmental degradation, SIDS embody the reality of a healthy planet for healthy people.

75. In the face of these daunting challenges, SIDS stand at the forefront of innovative approaches to tackle the planetary crisis. These have included pioneering financial, policy, and institutional solutions to protect their environment, economies and communities. [73]

76. Often characterized as large ocean states, SIDS' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are, on average, 28 times the country's land mass. Ocean and marine resources are central to their economies, culture, and daily livelihoods. This, in turn, can result in outsized impacts for SIDS when such environments are degraded. Much of the attention for supporting SIDS ocean resources has focused on addressing sea-based activities, such as targeting the fishing, shipping, and extractive sectors. There have been efforts to address SIDS ocean health by addressing land-based activities that can result in pollution, sedimentation, and alterations to hydrologic cycles.

77. Environmental and economic challenges in SIDS are often intertwined, including their high dependence on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation and transport, which strains financial resources and jeopardizes their energy security in addition to negative environmental and climate impacts.[74] Heavy reliance on other imports, such as manufactured goods and electronics often containing hazardous substances, is an additional and growing environmental problem. With limited space and capacity for waste management and environmentally sound removal of these substances, SIDS are particularly vulnerable to air, water and soil pollution.[75]

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[71] Tourism, fisheries, agriculture among others.

[72] Climate-related natural disasters affecting SIDS in the Caribbean and Oceania from 1995 to 2022 largely recorded total damages exceeding 10 percent of GDP. Although the larger economies in the Caribbean suffered the greatest total damages, some of the smaller islands suffered the largest losses relative to their GDP, notably Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis and Vanuatu, all of which incurred losses greater than 50 percent of GDP from a single tropical cyclone disaster. World Bank, (2024) Policy Research Working Paper, Climate Change Vulnerability, Adaptation and Public Debt Sustainability in Small Island Developing States

[73] Examples- Seychelles Sovereign Blue Bond, Barbados Debt for climate resilience swap, Fiji ocean accounting

[74] SIDS spend up to 10 times more on electricity generation than mainland territories and countries (IEA, 2024).

[75] SIDS that rely on the tourism sector experience additional stress due to the waste generated by the cruise, hotel and aviation industries.

78. The 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the resulting Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) set the global development agenda for SIDS for the next 10 years. The ABAS highlights priorities of upscaling climate and biodiversity action and increasing conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources, all with resilience as a common thread. The conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources was one of the main actions in the ABAS outcome document. [76]

Framing of the Integrated Program

79. Given the interconnected environmental challenges and drivers in a SIDS context, SIDS have an opportunity to demonstrate the transformational potential of applying a source-to-sea approach to environment and development goals. Within the small island context, this approach is key to delivering enduring change across key socio-ecological systems and to advancing nature positive societies.

80. The program will build on the GEF8 BGI IP to apply a source-to-sea framework[77] that covers a wider range of drivers relative to the national context of SIDS. The holistic approach will foster national level planning through whole of government engagement for net zero, nature positive, and pollution free pathways while at the same time engaging diverse actors through a whole of society approach.

81. Practices which align with the segmentation of policies, procedures and regulations, are often directed toward maximizing local benefits, while missing upstream and/or downstream impacts. This can result in benefits for one economic sector, or in one source-to-sea segment, having negative consequences for another. These consequences are often not adequately accounted for in decisions on governance.[78] By applying a source-to-sea (and sea-to-source) approach, upstream and downstream stakeholders, governance mechanisms and ecosystem management interventions can be brought together to address shared challenges across these

[76] This included:

"b. Addressing biodiversity loss caused by harmful human activities including inadequate waste management and unsustainable production and consumption; including of plastics; overfishing; Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing; introduction of alien invasive species; noise and light pollution; coral bleaching, ocean acidification, eutrophication and Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs); and coastal erosion, including through measures such as inter alia satellite monitoring, and the establishment and strengthened management of area-based management tools, including Marine Protected Areas and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM); and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMS) and locally managed marine areas (LMMAs);"

This also included natural capital accounting, conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, private sector partnerships for innovative financing.

[77] 'Source to Sea' is synonymous with a 'Ridge to Reef' integrated management approach, both describing the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Source to Sea is used here as it implies a broader geo-physical representation capturing the diverse geographical contexts across SIDS. For more information, see STAP (2024): A Summary of Definitions, Guidelines, and Tools on Ecosystem-Based Approaches for Watershed Management

[78] Mathews, R. E., *et al*. (2019). Implementing the source-to-sea approach: A guide for practitioners. SIWI, Stockholm

integrated systems. This approach responds directly to the previous SIDS Evaluations by the GEF IEO, including OPS-8 findings,[79] which emphasize the need for more integrated interventions and highlighted the benefits of whole of island and ridge to reef approaches.[80] This program will seek to ensure that ocean health, land use, and economic resilience are addressed as interconnected issues.

82. The source-to-sea approach fully aligns with the GEF pillars of integration, whole of society, and impact. Through this program countries will be enabled to address barriers to maintaining healthy ecosystems in an integrated manner across different scales: i) horizontally across source-to-sea segments[81] (including ecosystems) and economic sectors cutting across land to sea and; ii) vertically across different levels of governance by putting nature and people at the center of the interventions and as architects of transformational change, fostering multiple environment and socio-economic benefits.[82] This approach will draw from and build on the GEF-8 IP on NZNPA for national level planning, on CHO to target point and not-point sources of pollution, and on ER to mainstream nature-based solutions[83].

83. All relevant stakeholders, including private sector, government, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth will be involved in each country project through sub-regional initiatives, both intra and inter and activities. The program also has the potential to influence transformative change and impact, by harnessing the collective regional action of SIDS for rapid replication across islands and communities; addressing SIDS capacity constraints through integration and policy coherence to accomplish more with fewer policies; and putting cooperation among local communities at the center of nature positive development by promoting a whole of society and source-to-sea approaches.

[79] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[80] GEF/ME/C.57/02, Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of The Small Island Developing States, https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council- meeting documents/EN_GEF.ME_C57_02_IEO_SCCE_SIDS_Dec_2019_F.pdf and

GEF/E/C.68/02, Evaluation of GEF Programs in Pacific Island States https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-11/EN_GEF.C68_E_02_Pacific_SIDS_Evaluation_Report_16Nov24_Final.pdf

[81] Source-to-sea segments are the distinct components of the source-to-sea system: land systems, freshwater systems, deltas, estuaries, coastline, nearshore, adjoining sea, continental shelf and open ocean. https://www.siwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Source-to-sea-guide_webb.pdf

[82] These include water & food security, maintaining livelihoods, health, particularly in low-income and vulnerable communities among other areas.

[83] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

84. The program aims to support countries to embark on blue and green development pathways[84] through the maintenance and restoration of healthy terrestrial and marine ecosystems. In doing so, SIDS can also demonstrate the transformation potential of applying sustainable integrated (land and ocean) management through a source-to-sea approach, for the benefit of the whole of society. National interventions will build on country context to achieve the following:

85. *Ecosystem valuation and accounting frameworks:* Methods for the valuation of nature (ecosystems and ecosystem services) tailored to a SIDS context, can provide a foundation to facilitate policy coherence to transform systems. Under the program this activity could support: accounting models such as ecosystem valuation and/or natural capital accounting within a range of ecosystems along the source-to-sea system, in order to identify the value of ecosystems to society**,** including human well-being, environmental, and socio-economic benefits; ii) decision support systems to internalize ecosystem valuation data and facilitate harmonized policy-making from source-to-sea,[85] and iii) robust data collection, management, and infrastructure to support ongoing ecosystem accounting and evidence-based policy making.

86. *Source-to-sea spatial prioritization and planning*: Policy coherence through integrated spatial prioritization and planning will be needed and will require collaboration across relevant Ministries such as Finance/Economic Development/Planning, Environment, Water, Energy, as well as those representing key economic sectors in SIDS such as, inter alia, fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, and tourism among others. This intervention will aim to utilize valuation data to: i) facilitate the development or updating of integrated land use and marine spatial plans at national and local levels, accounting for source-to-sea linkages and including recognition and support to Indigenous and traditional management; ii) develop potential future land-use or marine-use change scenarios and, their impact on each other to ensure lasting outcomes; and iii) inform and strengthen integrated source-to-sea governance mechanisms, and engage in potential policy reform and inter-ministerial decision making. These may include inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms and Indigenous and community-led governance models that integrate land, water, and ocean resource users among other mechanisms.

87. *Enhancing financing options from the public and private sector:* Facilitating domestic resource mobilization to provide adequate and enduring financing for the preservation of ecosystems and their vital services will be an important program element. This intervention which will be informed by ecosystem valuation data, may include measures to strengthen relevant financial and lending policies to discourage investments which lead to ecosystem degradation; channel public and local and international private funding to activities that enhance

[84] Blue and green development pathways refer to strategies that integrate both water-related and land-based infrastructure and ecosystems, centering nature to achieve sustainable development in SIDS.

[85] A country level platform representing development partners as well as national and local level stakeholders from key segments of the source-to-sea system, could be a key mechanism to support this process.

natural assets and ecosystem services and applying harmonized incentive mechanisms for natural resource management; and provide dedicated technical assistance to increase viable opportunities for private investment.

88. Scaling of land and seascape interventions will also require strengthening the enabling environment of domestic public and private financial policies, institutions and incentives to soundly implement mechanisms such as PES and CTFs. Building the required capacities within the public and private sector to develop blended finance structures, instruments and investments, meeting SIDS needs will also be required at the country level and with the support of the global coordination project. In line with the GEF-9 ambition to mainstream and increase leveraged financing and impact through blended finance initiatives, the IP will consider strategic opportunities to deploy the GEF Non-Grant Instrument for the solutions noted below.

89. *Scaling solutions across the source-to-sea system:* Scaling solutions to address ecosystem degradation in a source-to-sea system will require linkages and harmonized interventions across source-to-sea sectors and segments. Interventions should target critical ecosystems (e.g. surface and groundwater systems, watersheds, mangroves, forests) and/or key flows (such as freshwater, sediment, pollutants, biota, ecosystem services), relevant to local socio-economic needs, and with a potential for replication. Depending on the country context and needs, interventions may include any of the relevant items below:

- Conserving ecosystems and species of global importance
- Promoting and implementation of integrated management approaches, including integrated water resources management, sustainable forest management, and sustainable ocean management, such as integrated coastal zone management, marine spatial planning, and promotion of locally managed marine areas, ecosystem-based fisheries management.
- Enhancing terrestrial, coastal and marine habitats and ecosystems through restoration, to main ecosystem function, reduce alteration of key source-to-sea flows, support livelihoods and deliver co-benefits including for climate adaptation.
- Sustainable use and management of biodiversity through improved marine and terrestrial protected areas management, OECMS, and Indigenous and traditional territories.
- Sustainable land management (SLM), including engaging in activities to maintain, improve and restore agro-ecosystems in support of food production and livelihoods, drought smart land management, and to reduce the risk of flooding and erosion.
- Addressing hazardous chemicals management, to reduce, and prevent the use of hazardous chemicals covered by the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions to curb sources of land-based pollutants and support the implementation of the Global Framework on Chemicals.
- Strengthen i) small scale farmers and fishers and social enterprises to provide innovative ecosystem management solutions; ii) local communities and civil society to support community-based fisheries management and management of productive landscapes.

90. Capacity Building, Knowledge Management, Awareness and Collaborative Engagement- Strengthening local stakeholder and decision-maker capacities will help to ensure that SIDS can

independently apply, manage, and monitor interventions under the program. In addition, the program will support opportunities to capture and utilize local and traditional knowledge related to science, valuation and source-to-sea approaches, knowledge exchange and management will also be supported.

91. The global coordination function of the program will provide technical support, national level capacity building, knowledge management and learning, tools, guidance, and action on:

- Natural capital accounting, valuing ecosystems
- Enabling environmental interventions such as policy coherence, improvement of national financial frameworks
- Development of blended finance mechanisms and private sector engagement
- Engagement with existing sub-regional governance bodies to integrate the source-to-sea approach in regional policy frameworks.

Selection criteria

92. All GEF eligible SIDS may participate in the program, with each country implementing some/all interventions indicated above. The selection of countries will consider the level of ecosystem degradation in the targeted area, species of global conservation concern, relative economic and socio-ecological importance; the ability to apply source-to-sea approach for multiple GEBs, and positive impact for CSOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth. Countries will need to demonstrate how they apply the whole of society principles across project interventions. Countries must also show political will for whole of government action and policy coherence. Participating countries should also commit to engage with global and regional platforms to encourage collaboration, collective action, and partnerships with representatives of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth and private sector.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

93. The program will aim to utilize and build on the global platform and regional nodes developed under the BGI IP. These existing platforms will continue to facilitate cross-learning and to crowd in international private sector engagement and additional financing for improving and maintaining ecosystem health in a source-to-sea context.

94. In addition, there is potential to strength partnerships with the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on SIDS (IAGC), SIDS Coalition for Nature, Global Island Partnership among others, sub-regional bodies such as Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), The Pacific Community (SPC), The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO), the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) as well as funding partners such as Caribbean Biodiversity Fund, Micronesia Conservation Trust, and coalitions related to the private sector and finance, include the SIDS Global Business Network (SIDS-GBN) and the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA).

95. The program may also benefit from the experiences and lessons learned from other source-to-sea work to improve ocean health, including knowledge generated by the GEF-8 CHO IP and its partners as well as other exiting IPs such as the Sustainable Cities through learnings on urban coastal linkages. There will also be opportunities to build on the work of the GEF International Waters Focal Area and the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW: LEARN) and past GEF IW investments, including the Pacific Ridge to Reef Program and in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+). Other potential partners may include UNESCO-IOC, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Regional Seas Programme, Ocean Action 2030, and the Blue Nature Alliance.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

96. The integrated nature of the program and the source-to-sea approach will provide an avenue to support countries to meet their commitments and targets under all the MEAs simultaneously as well as the global SIDS priorities under the ABAS. The program will also contribute to many international ocean priorities, including ABAS priorities that include the conservation and sound management of the ocean and its resources. The program may also support SIDS with ratification the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, including capacity building and awareness raising of the Agreement in the context of larger national integration ocean management efforts.

97. Under the UNCCD, as 27 SIDS have committed to voluntarily set LDN targets and a growing number of SIDS developing national drought plans, the program can contribute to the implementation of these commitments under the Convention and the UNCCD Strategy (2018-2030) through SLM and drought smart land management interventions in productive landscapes.

98. This program will directly address specific objectives of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, primarily Target 3 (30x30), but also Targets 1, 2, 7, 10, 11 and 14 in addition to other biodiversity-related multilateral instruments/agreements, by supporting mainstreaming biodiversity conservation across key terrestrial and marine ecosystems and tackling the causes of habitat degradation and other drivers of biodiversity loss, engaging in ecosystem restoration and reducing land-based sources of pollution for coastal waters including sedimentation from poor agriculture, forestry, and land management practices.

99. Under the UNFCCC, SIDS have committed to enhancing climate resilience and reducing GHG emissions through their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), with the collective goal of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C. As the most directly affected by climate change and sea-level rise, SIDS have also committed to reaching net-zero emissions by mid-century. The Program can support SIDS in embedding climate adaptation and mitigation into their national strategies, helping them achieve these targets and fulfill their commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

100. This program can promote island relevant measures that reduce pollution risks from agriculture, tourism and waste, including improved practices and safeguards in productive landscapes. In this regard, the IP will incorporate practical pollution-prevention measures within its system focus, including policy and regulatory reforms, incentives, and green public and private

procurement that reduce pollution risks (for example, by avoiding products and materials containing hazardous substances and problematic additives, improving standards, and strengthening EPR where relevant). These actions are intended to reduce broader pollution pressures and create enabling conditions for longer-term improvements. They will also contribute to convention-specific Chemicals and Waste results (reductions of persistent organic pollutants and mercury regulated under the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions), which will be prioritized and reported as additional to those achieved by the Chemicals and Waste focal area. Accordingly, IP child projects will include a clearly defined, verifiable convention deliverable with CW results reporting.

101. The program is primarily anchored under the International Waters (IW), Land Degradation (LD) and Biodiversity (BD) Focal Areas, with additional benefits expected under the Climate Change and Chemicals and Waste Focal Areas. Specifically, the IW Focal Area includes source-to-sea support in transboundary basins through Objective 1 and Objective 2. The overall focus of the BGI directly relates to all LD Focal Area objectives and will deliver on these objectives through interventions in integrated landscape planning and management and efforts to address drought.

102. The program aligns with the priorities of BD Focal Area Objective 1 through support to biodiversity mainstreaming in key sectors and integrated governance and spatial planning, ecosystem valuation, as well as the establishment of new and strengthening management of existing terrestrial and marine protected areas OECMs. Under the CC Focal Area, the IP will support the delivery of Objective 1 through interventions on nature-based solutions[86] in natural ecosystems and productive landscapes to generate GHG mitigation benefits. Under the Chemicals and Waste Focal Area, the IP will support the delivery of Objective 4 by eliminating the use of harmful chemicals within productive landscape practices as an integral aspect of nature positive, pollution free supply chains.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

103. Engaging the private sector at the national, sub-regional and global level will be necessary for the success of this program. The private sector has a significant presence across key economic sectors which depend on healthy ecosystems such as tourism, fisheries, and agriculture. These can be used as entry points to develop financial mechanisms to deliver innovative solutions with a source-to-sea lens as well as to develop new innovative technological solutions.

104. The potential for broad coverage of private sector activities in the IP provides an opportunity to align with the major global private sector frameworks, initiatives, standards and protocols which can bring entire industry sectors and value chains together for collective action at all levels in the IP. Recent regulatory frameworks such as the EUDR and CSRD in Europe a, along with corporate commitments to net-zero and nature positive supply chains, are shaping sustainability governance and investments. These can be used to inform private sector engagement and action under the IP.

[86] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

105. The private sector will also be an essential partner in upstream activities to collaborate and provide inputs on strengthening of financial frameworks that integrate nature and at the downstream level for piloting of mechanisms such as PES. There is an opportunity to explore private sector support on knowledge aspects using innovations in digital technology. Digital interventions can be used for data collection and monitoring, decision support tools that optimize the outcome of investments that deliver GEBs, to monitor and track the progress of investments, and to capture and repackage knowledge generated by the projects.

Food Systems

106. Global agrifood systems are vital for health, food security, nutrition, and economic prosperity. However, they also contribute significantly to deforestation, biodiversity loss, land degradation, greenhouse gas emissions, and nutrient pollution. Unsustainable food production also leads to water pollution, impacting aquatic ecosystems and coastal areas. Agriculture accounts for 70% of global freshwater withdrawals and contributes to 78% of global ocean and freshwater eutrophication.[87] The agrifood market, valued at around $10 trillion per year, generates between $6 trillion and $12 trillion annually in hidden social, economic, and environmental costs.[88]

107. Food systems emit approximately 20 GtCO2e annually, accounting for about 35% of global GHG emissions. This is roughly a third of global emission, with the largest contributions from agriculture and land-use change activities (~70%) with remaining emissions coming from other downstream and upstream activities (retail, transport, consumption, fuel production, waste management, industrial processes and packaging). Since global food production is estimated to increase by 15% in coming decades, food systems GHG emissions might increase up to 80% from 2010 to 2050.[89] Globally, 30-40% of total food produced is wasted or discarded. Food loss and waste account for 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions and cost approximately $1 trillion annually. If current trends persist, food loss and waste will double by 2050.[90] Climate change impacts extend beyond production and yields to the nutritional quality of food. Rising atmospheric CO2 concentration has been shown to reduce micronutrient content in staple crops, while projections indicate significant global impacts on the availability of essential micronutrients such as iron, zinc and protein.[91, 92]

108. Conversely, a shift to sustainable and regenerative agrifood systems will provide essential contributions to solving global environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, land degradation and drought, pollution and climate change. Advances in demonstrating the environmental and economic sustainability of food production systems offer robust means of meeting growing human demands, while respecting ecological underpinnings of our productive biosphere and maintaining a safe operating space for humanity within planetary boundaries. Food systems are essential for global food and nutrition security, economic growth, and the

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[87] Poore, J., and T. Nemecek. "Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers." Science 360.6392 (2018): 987-992.

[88] Lever, UNFSS Finance. "Food Finance Architecture: Financing a Healthy, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System." *Document prepared for the United Nations Food System Summit* (2021).

[89] Costa Jr, C., *et al*. "Roadmap for achieving net-zero emissions in global food systems by 2050." *Scientific reports* 12.1 (2022): 15064.

[90] WRI, 2023. The Global Benefits of Reducing Food Loss and Waste, and How to Do It

[91] Smith, M. R., and S. S. Myers. "Impact of anthropogenic CO2 emissions on global human nutrition." *Nature Climate Change* 8, no. 9 (2018): 834-839.

[92] Tigchelaar, M., *et al*. "Nutrition-sensitive climate risk across food production systems." Environmental Research Letters 20, no. 1 (2024): 014046.

livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers. Employing a third of the world's workforce, it has the potential to reduce poverty and create jobs across the value chain. As both a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and highly vulnerable to climate change, transforming food systems through regenerative practices is crucial for sustainability and resilience.

109. The unsustainable management of agricultural areas significantly impacts biodiversity, land, and water resources. Agriculture accounts for 57 percent of tree cover loss. Cattle alone contribute to 36 percent, followed by oil palm, soy, cocoa, and other crops.[93] Poor management of pesticides, fertilizers and food contamination present major human and ecosystem health risks globally. Agricultural encroachment into natural habitats increases the risk of zoonotic spillovers. Animal agriculture systems can also increase the likelihood of high-impact animal diseases and zoonotic disease spillovers. Mainstreaming biodiversity into food systems is essential to mitigate environmental and health risks, and to build resilient and sustainable food production landscapes.

110. "Blue Foods," which include edible aquatic organisms like fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants, are part of the food system and have negative externalities like other major commodities. Despite this, they are often overlooked in key food policy discussions. Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture can provide lower impact alternatives to meat, potentially reducing environmental impacts compared to livestock farming. Additionally, blue food consumption offers nutritional benefits and can help alleviate pressure on land use.[94]

111. The food system comprises three key components: external drivers such as urbanization and climate change, food system processes including production and distribution, and outcomes like healthy diets and sustainability.[95] Food systems are complex and interlinked, shaped by the interaction between external drivers and internal components. Technological innovations must be paired with behavioral incentives to promote adoption. Effective interventions rely on understanding these interactions and aligning activities across public, private, and civic stakeholders. Various incentives can create feasible pathways towards transformation. However, changes within the system may produce unintended consequences and feedback loops, reinforcing or weakening outcomes. [96]

112. Recent legislation such as the EUDR, CSRD in Europe, along with corporate commitments to net-zero and nature positive supply chains, are shaping sustainability governance that will require compliance from the GEF recipient countries and could impose stricter environmental

[93] Goldman, E., *et al*. "Estimating the role of seven commodities in agriculture-linked deforestation: Oil palm, soy, cattle, wood fiber, cocoa, coffee, and rubber." *Technical Note, World Resources Institute* 22 (2020).

[94] Boyd, C. E., A. A. McNevin, and R. P. Davis. "The contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the global protein supply." *Food security* 14.3 (2022): 805-827.

[95] High Level panel of Experts of Food Security and Nutrition

[96] Brouwer, I. D., J. McDermott, and R. Ruben. "Food systems everywhere: Improving relevance in practice." *Global food security* 26 (2020): 100398.

standards on GEF recipient countries. For example, the EUDR aims to minimize deforestation by ensuring that products entering the EU market are deforestation-free.[97]

113. The Food systems IP in GEF-9 builds on the work of the food systems programs launched in GEF-6, GEF-7, and GEF-8, building on the lessons learned thus far generated,[98] many of which have been documented by the IEO.[99]

Framing of the Integrated Program

114. Transforming agrifood systems offers solutions to environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, land degradation and drought, pollution and climate change mitigation and adaptation, relevant to all GEF focal areas and trust funds. This underscores the need for continued and expanded investment in food systems by GEF, building a comprehensive portfolio across multiple replenishment cycles (GEF-6 to 9) to achieve significant transformational impact.

115. The GEF-9 Food Systems IP will focus on scaling solutions that respond to country and regionally specific requirements which guides prioritization and policy optimization. The IP will use a combination of place-based and commodity-based approaches, targeting drivers of negative impacts by regions with specific interventions and investments that can be scaled up and out. Place-based strategies tailor actions to local conditions, such as specific ecosystems or crops - while commodity-based approaches provide a broader framework for scaling successful interventions across regions. Transboundary cooperation among nations, policy coherence, private sector investment scaling and coordination in execution will be encouraged.

116. A critical gap for GEF-8 was the inadequate focus on integrated agricultural systems through crop diversification, intercropping, agro-forestry and other integrated measures, and intensification to maximize efficiency and productivity. For example, integrating crop and livestock systems (ICLS) enhances farm productivity and profitability while building stores of organic carbon, improving nutrient use efficiency and resilience. ICLS closes the loop of resource use by incorporating crop residues as livestock fodder and manure as organic fertilizer, thus reducing both the reliance on synthetic sources of plant nutrition and non-point sources of nitrogen and phosphorous pollution. It provides additional revenue streams, improves working conditions for small landholders, and supports intensification, contributing to food security.[100] In addition, aquaculture and poultry production can complement each other by sharing feed mill and value chain activities, particularly soy and maize.

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[97] European Commission. 2023. Regulation on Deforestation-free Products.

[98] GEF, 2024. Advancing the Integrated Approach Tackle Commodity driven Deforestation.

[99] GEF IEO, 2021. GEF/E/C.60/04, Formative Evaluation of the GEF integrated Approach to Address the Drivers of Environmental Degradation, and Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[100] Sekaran, U., S. Kumar, and J. L. Gonzalez-Hernandez. "Integration of crop and livestock enhanced soil biochemical properties and microbial community structure." *Geoderma* 381 (2021): 114686.

117. When considering the needs of low-income countries, food systems require a comprehensive approach beyond just agricultural production to include food environments and consumption-related components. Efforts will be targeted at farm-level and smallholder farmers, while also addressing demand and financing actors across the global supply chain, including intermediaries. Global actors like corporations, financiers, and dietary demands influence land use decisions. A comprehensive approach beyond production is required, addressing post-harvest handling, processing, storage infrastructure, cold storage, and market access. Beyond emissions savings and sustainability, reducing post-harvest losses of perishable and nutrient-rich foods – such as fruits, vegetables, and proteins – can significantly improve nutrition outcomes by increasing availability and quantity of these foods in markets and diets. The project will also consider mitigating the economic burden of unhealthy dietary patterns, particularly those high in additives and processing.

118. To promote the principle of food systems diversity and maximize potential for generating GEBs, the GEF-9 Food Systems IP will broaden the scope to allow countries to define and propose target food *systems*, subject to the provision of solid arguments on the potential of the interventions to achieve major GEBs and transformational impacts. This includes working with additional crops and commodities and extending the food systems to encompass food and non-food agricultural products. It also covers activities such as food storage, aggregation, post-harvest handling, transportation, processing, distribution, marketing, disposal and consumption.[101] In addition, the strategy will be grounded in the right to food and human rights principles, ensuring that interventions promote equitable access, dignity and participation.[102] Nutrition-sensitive pathways can reduce environmental pressures by incentivizing sustainable production and consumption. The IP will seek private sector partnerships to improve food labelling, packaging innovation, and marketing standards that promote healthy, climate-smart and biodiversity-positive diets.

119. Transforming food systems requires a holistic and systematic approach to mobilize and engage actors across different dimensions of the agrifood systems to avoid trade-offs and enhance synergies, promoting circularity, and focusing on a set of transformational levers:

a) Financial Leverage**:** Financial leverage is crucial for transforming food systems by optimizing public spending and mobilizing private capital to encourage sustainable practices and attract investment. Blended finance, which combines public and private funding, can de-risk investments in agriculture and food systems, making them more attractive to private investors. Leveraging financial resources also includes creating innovative financial instruments and mechanisms to support small-scale farmers and food producers, ensuring they have access to the necessary capital for improved practices. Effective financial leverage can drive large-scale changes, promoting environmental and economic viability, and social equity in food systems.

[101] This is based on FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031.

[102] HLPE. "Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030." (2020).

b) Governance, Policy Coherence and Effective Legal Frameworks: National and local policies and governance models are essential for creating an environment that supports global environmental goals and avoids harmful subsidies. Effective governance includes inter-ministerial coordination and multi-stakeholder involvement at all levels to ensure inclusivity. For transforming food systems, a coherent national legal framework is crucial. It aligns policy measures with legally binding norms, international obligations, and global standards. Legislation ensures coordinated implementation of policies across sectors (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, environment, public health, and land use planning), preventing contradictory interventions. It also assigns rights, defines responsibilities, and facilitates effective cross-sectoral action and coordination. Also, transforming public procurement frameworks to prioritize regenerative and nature positive products and services can create strong market incentives for sustainable practices, aligning public spending with environmental goals, and accelerating adoption of regenerative agriculture and food systems across supply chains.
c) Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues and Coordination: Foster meaningful engagement with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and the private sector based on a set of principles and criteria on effective multi-stakeholder engagement and coordination to ensure that their priorities and needs shape policy and other key processes, as well as to leverage their expertise and resources for innovation and scalability of sustainability solutions. Interventions will consider equity and inclusion, with specific measures and activities to improve access for women, youth, and IPLCs.
d) Innovation and Learning: The catalytic grant of GEF is to be used for innovation (tech, finance, governance, data, civil society, youth, women's and Indigenous Peoples' engagement, etc.), and the project creates mechanisms for the flow of knowledge through sub-national, national and regional networks and the global platform for upscaling.
e) Systemic Capacity Development: To advance and sustain progress at scale, strengthen country ownership and commitment through systemic capacity enhancement that interdependently empowers people, strengthens organizations, institutions, networks, multi-stakeholder processes as well as enhances the enabling policy environment based on country priorities assessment with rigorous tracking of results.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

120. The overall objective of the proposed GEF-9 Food Systems IP is to scale up transformational changes towards nature positive food systems. The IP will seek to reduce environmental degradation and negative externalities in food production systems (food crops, commercial commodities, livestock and dairy, and aquaculture and small-scale fisheries), and on the demand side across supply chains. This will be achieved through the food system approach, from production to distribution and consumption, ensuring nutrient recycling, waste valorization, minimization of emissions and resource efficiency. This transformative approach will ensure that shifts in food systems will benefit natural systems through on-farm diversification and reduced pressure on habitats; urban systems by promoting circularity in value chains, more equitable distribution of value-addition and reduced pressure on habitats; urban systems by promoting

circularity in value chains, energy systems through efficient energy innovations; and health systems through reductions in use of hazardous chemicals such as promotion of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and biological control methods. Through the activities of the program, Indigenous Peoples and local community organizations will be prioritized as partners in project design and execution. In doing so, the IP will deliver results across all FAs (BD, CCM, LD, C&W and IW) and promote links and synergies within the IP among different cycles and with other relevant IPs (Critical Forest Biomes IP for non-timber products, Global Wildlife for Development IP for bushmeat issues, Sustainable Cities IP on public food procurements and (peri-) urban agriculture, and Drylands and Drought Management IP) and GEF programs (FARM+).

121. The IP will apply a multi-stakeholder approach to scale up solutions by integrating innovation across value chains to improve food security and generate GEBs in areas such as climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, land degradation, and water resources. Additionally, it will contribute to food security, livelihoods, and better health and nutrition. Achieving this transformation requires a collective effort from various stakeholders within food systems as well as promoting systemic shifts through innovative actions and policy options. The urgency for transformation in food systems was highlighted in the UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action, as well as the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) +2. These declarations emphasize the need to shift production and supply chain practices towards nature positive, low-emission, and hazardous chemical-free pathways, and to support the implementation of these actions. In line with these declarations, interventions will also focus on behavior change, reducing food waste and promoting dietary shifts towards planetary healthy diets. In addition, the IP will seek to support Indigenous and traditional food systems and techniques that can deliver GEBs.

122. To maximize potential for transformative change, the program will operate at two levels—global and country-level (national or subnational). Globally, the program will establish links with relevant platforms and initiatives that foster multi-stakeholder dialogue and collective action to transform food systems. At country level, the program will draw on the proposed global framework to develop and scale up the innovative projects that demonstrate a holistic and systemic approach to food systems. The GEF-9 Food Systems IP will also promote new strategic directions that go 'beyond the farm, supply chains, and certification to include consumption patterns alongside production and supply chain practices. It aims to strengthen synergies across sectors, align public-private governance, and enhance coordination across levels, including support for countries in developing and implementing repurposing agendas through technical assistance and policy dialogue. The program will move past traditional multi-stakeholder coordination by fostering shifts in practice that empower stakeholders to lead, with anchor companies serving as examples.

123. Key interventions at global level will include:

a) Scaling Impact: Individual countries will deliver substantial benefits through their nationally focused projects; however, the potential for global transformation will require that such impacts be amplified beyond national boundaries. This will be achieved by catalyzing new opportunities across spatial (landscapes) or vertical (supply chain) dimensions to help maximize potential for impact. The program will mobilize and direct

global actors and resources to support country projects, while also gathering, managing, and disseminating the models and knowledge generated by participating countries and communities of practice. This information will be fed into regional, global, and thematic policy forums, influencing the agendas of both public and private actors. Consequently, the impact will extend far beyond the target geographies of the individual projects, initiating processes that "scale out" the impacts on a global scale.

b) Promoting Innovation: The program will achieve large-scale impact by integrating cutting-edge technological, financial, and social innovations to achieve transformational change. The program will also promote novel approaches in policy, finance, technology, management practices, and social change. Digital transformation and technology adoption would include precision agriculture, smart sensors, and satellite imaging to optimize resource use, improve yields, and mitigate environmental impacts. Additionally, it supports agriculture through data-driven insights, enabling farmers to adapt to environmental variability. The development of ecosystem for technological adoption is critical, working with communities and lead farmers as champions, and partnering with technology providers to invest in local youth skills development for providing extension services and technical support.

c) Leveraging Private and Financial Sectors: The program will encourage concrete actions on both the production and demand sides by actors from smallholders and SMEs to global corporates– e.g., traders, manufacturers, commodity buyers and retailers – toward use and expansion of sustainability standards and commitments to environmental and socially responsible sourcing. The program will also engage a spectrum of financiers to shift their investment toward environmental sustainability by capacity building and de-risking their investment. Efforts will be made to mobilize additional and larger scale financing, including through blended finance mechanisms, to maximize country outcomes and increase the program's impact and contribution to transformational change scaling up the proof-of-concept stage investments from earlier GEF investments.

d) Cross-scale support: The program will catalyze access to knowledge, technical expertise and capacity development on issues that represent common challenges across multiple countries or specific geographical regions. The program will support efforts to influence public policy and private actions towards food systems, shifting production and landscape management practices, building effective multi-stakeholder dialogue, and promoting multi-country or regional planning and coordination to improve implementation. The program will also support co-management approaches for natural resources, strengthening inclusive decision-making structures that empower IPLCs, women, and youth.

124. Specific interventions suitable for GEF support at the country level include the following:

a) Sustainable and Regenerative agriculture: The IP aims to create an enabling environment for countries and industries to shift agricultural food production through diverse approaches such as agroecology, agroforestry, regenerative farming, avoiding deforestation, rehabilitating and restoring agrifood production landscapes, diversifying

cropping, increasing productivity, improving watershed management, and promoting sound land and soil management, cognizant of the importance of enhancing biodiversity in agricultural areas and agrobiodiversity itself. The focus will be on commercial commodities causing significant deforestation in the tropics (soy, palm, coffee, beef, and cocoa) and globally important food crops (rice, wheat, and maize), whose production results in negative environmental externalities. Restoration efforts will focus on revitalizing degraded lands and ecosystems to enhance their productivity and ecological health. Additional crops that are highly nutritious, traditional and/or neglected and underutilized species may be included for crop diversification. The additional crops should demonstrate that they contribute to systems transformation through nature positive and hazardous chemical-free production, enhancing agrifood system sustainability and nutrition benefits (for millets, sorghum, other underutilized species, various fruits, commercial sugar cane, and non-food crops like cotton and leather/wool).

b) Livestock and Dairy Management: The livestock sector contributes 90% of agricultural GHG emissions, with 20% from the dairy sub-sector. Dairy industry GHG emissions are 67% from enteric fermentation (methane), 31% from poor manure management (nitrous oxide), and 2% from feed and processing facilities.[103] Reducing the environmental impact of livestock production involves improving productivity on existing pastureland, increasing genetic diversity, supporting integrated crop-livestock systems, restoring degraded pastures, and enhancing manure management. Restoration efforts will focus on restoring degraded pastures to enhance their suitability for livestock grazing, ensuring better forage quality and availability, and improving overall productivity and ecological health. Key strategies include introducing policies and incentives for better practices, promoting certification standards and traceability, improving disease prevention and control, supporting diversified diets, moderating animal product consumption, and increasing alternative protein production.

c) Aquaculture and Fisheries: The program will prioritize nature in delivering affordable, low-footprint fish and other aquatic protein and health improvements by investing in improved aquaculture linked to land-based practices affecting freshwater and coastal ecosystems. Success in aquaculture relies on integrated investments connecting feed production to milling and market operations. The GEF will support smallholder feed production and integration with commercial millers, fostering cross-sector collaboration. Blue foods, including fish, aquatic plants, and shellfish, are crucial for diets and can reduce reliance on destructive protein sources.[104] By combining aquaculture and fisheries, including artisanal and inland fisheries, and promoting ecosystem-based fisheries management, improved traceability, and disease prevention, the program will foster multistakeholder platforms. These platforms will enhance food security, drive innovation, and attract investment through public-private partnerships. GEF-9 will promote sustainable and climate-resilient blue-food systems by addressing overfishing, pollution,

[103] FAO. 2020. Greenhouse Gas Emission for the Dairy Sector : A Life Cycle Assessment.

[104] UN DESA. 2021. Sustainable Blue Foods are Vital to Global Food Security

habitat degradation, and climate impacts on aquatic ecosystems. For aquaculture, the program will prioritize spatial zoning, quality seed production, strong distribution systems, disease-resilient strains, and improved biosecurity.

Selection criteria

125. Since GEF-6, 49 countries have participated in food systems-related programs. Building on this experience, the GEF-9 Food Systems Integrated Program will consider recipient countries capable of scaling up efforts and catalyzing systemic change. The GEF will prioritize countries demonstrating potential for transformational change based on the following criteria:

a) Science-based Strategy: The country strategy should be science-based with clear long-term pathways to meet national development needs, generate high-impact GEBs, and contribute to global food systems transformation.
b) Enabling Policy Environment: The policy and regulatory environment such as EUDR should support positive results through program implementation, fostering cross-ministerial support and policy coherence, including the realignment of public finance and investment policies.
c) Private Sector Engagement: Active involvement of private sector entities, including companies and SMEs in the supply chain, and financial institutions to leverage capital for scale-up using innovative financial mechanisms.
d) Blended Finance: country projects should include blended finance structures that demonstrate clear benefits for advancing sustainable and regenerative agriculture, as well as investments that support the development of the bioeconomy.
e) Nature Positive Practices: Focus on crop diversification, intercropping, and integrated crop and -livestock or aquaculture systems that protect biodiversity directly (on-farm) or indirectly (by reducing expansion of agricultural areas at the expense of natural ecosystems). This includes conserving genetic resources both in situ—in natural habitats—and ex situ—through seed and gene banks—to support resilient and diverse food systems.
f) Support for Vulnerable Populations: Promote inclusive, nature-based agricultural systems that support food security and sovereignty for vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, involving them in planning and decision-making.
g) Scalability: Ensure results from smallholder, farm, and landscape levels can be scaled up to subnational and national levels
h) Digital Transformation: Invest in digital public goods and infrastructures to provide scalable solutions for smallholder farmers and vulnerable communities, as well as link to digital platforms to track practices and products.
i) Environmental Safeguards: Implement strong safeguards to prevent negative environmental impacts or leakage.
j) Food Loss and Waste Reduction: Prioritize reducing, reusing, and preventing food loss and waste along the food systems' value chain – for example, through cold chain improvements and better handling practices and promote behavioral change strategies (community education, digital campaigns, school-based initiatives, and public

procurement) to encourage planetary health diets, increase uptake of organic and agroecological products, and reduced food waste.

k) Nutrition Outcomes: Proposals should demonstrate how interventions will increase access, availability, and/or affordability of nutritious and nutrient-dense foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, pulses, animal-source foods, and aquatic products). This criterion ensures that food systems transformation delivers not only environmental benefits but also improved dietary diversity and nutrition security, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

126. Numerous global initiatives and organizations are collaborating with previous GEF's food systems programs (GEF-6,7&8) to address various aspects of development in the agricultural and food sectors. Additional initiatives and coalitions include but are not limited to:

127. The Coalition on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems, recognized at the UNFSS, is led by Indigenous Peoples and supported by UNFSS member states and other stakeholders as well as its coalitions and initiatives. The Global Health Security Agenda addresses emerging infectious disease risks, including zoonotic spillover, through the UN system's "Tripartite+" collaboration (World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), and UNEP. The Sustainable Food Systems Programme of the One Planet Network, a multi-actor partnership focusing on catalyzing urgent transformation towards sustainable food systems. Strengthening partnerships with relevant food systems and nutrition-focused UNFSS coalitions and initiatives to broaden impact, accelerate action (e.g. Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, Zero Hunger Coalition, School Meals Coalition, Agroecology Coalition, Access to Nutrition Initiative), and key partner such as Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in advancing nutrition-sensitive food systems, supporting efforts to improve access to affordable, safe, and nutritious diets improve access to nutrition, especially for vulnerable populations.

128. The Global Agricultural and Food Security Program (GAFSP) launched a $75 million investment program to catalyze access to affordable finance for smallholder farmers, producer organizations, innovative startups, and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the agrifood sector. The WBCSD is a global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses. The World Economic Forum (WEF) brings together leaders from business, government, academia, and media to shape global, regional, and industry agendas. The Global Dairy Platform promotes sustainable dairy practices and enhances the dairy industry's contribution to global food systems.

129. Other significant initiatives include the Blended Finance Taskforce, which mobilizes private finance for development in developing countries, and the Global Food and Farming Network (GFFN), which supports developing-country governments in designing policies and provides grant funding for various projects. Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) supports young professionals in agricultural development, emphasizing the importance of equipping them with skills needed for the growing food and beverage markets, projected to be worth $1 trillion by 2030.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

130. Many global environmental conventions and agreements emphasize sustainable agriculture and forestry. The Food Systems IP aims to improve landscape management, contributing to climate goals under the Paris Agreement and the UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action..

131. From the biodiversity perspective, the IP will promote biodiversity-rich agricultural systems, support genetic diversity and in-situ conservation of agricultural species, especially those based on Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and with unique and valuable market attributes. This program is crucial for meeting several KMGBF targets under the UN CBD. These targets include Target 4, Target 10, which focuses on the sustainable management of agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry; Target 7, to support reduction of nutrient losses to the environment, and decrease the risks from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals through agroecology, integrated pest management, and improved fertilizer efficiency; Target 16, which aims to encourage sustainable consumption choices and reduce global food waste; and Target 18, which seeks to reform harmful incentives and subsidies for biodiversity.

132. Additionally, the IP will play a vital role in achieving LDN targets under the UNCCD by avoiding new land degradation and ensuring that land resources remain productive and capable of supporting ecosystem functions and food security. This can support the implementation of the CBD Initiative of the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity.

133. The IP will incorporate practical pollution-prevention measures within its system focus, including policy and regulatory reforms, incentives, and green public procurement that reduce pollution risks (for example, by avoiding products and materials containing hazardous substances, including highly hazardous pesticides and problematic additives, improving standards, and strengthening EPR where relevant). These actions are intended to reduce broader pollution pressures and create enabling conditions for longer-term improvements. They will also contribute to convention-specific Chemicals and Waste results (Stockholm/Minamata tonnage reductions), which will be prioritized and reported as additional to those achieved by the Chemicals and Waste focal area. Accordingly, IP child projects will include a clearly defined, verifiable convention deliverable with CW results reporting.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

134. Involving the private sector in the GEF-9 Food Systems IP would be crucial for driving innovation, efficiency, and durability. The private sector has been hesitant to engage in sustainable agriculture due to a misalignment of goals—long-term versus short-term returns—and perceived high risks and uncertainties. Where private sector engagement has succeeded, it is often driven by the need for sustainable sourcing, supply security, reduced ecological impact, and access to premium markets. GEF-9 will encourage partnerships with retailers and food companies to align labelling, packaging, and marketing practices with planetary health diet principles and reduced environmental footprints.

- Align policy and finance frameworks**:** Support the alignment of policy and finance frameworks to create a conducive environment for scaling improved practices. Advocate for policy

reforms that favor sustainable agriculture and provide technical assistance to governments. Support industry working groups to improve the food system finance frameworks

- Engage stakeholders: Actively involve various stakeholders, including governments, financial institutions, agribusinesses, and SMEs, in the transformation of food systems through workshops, roundtables, and forums.
- Capacity building for local financial institutions: Provide capacity-building activities to local financial institutions to help them manage risks in agricultural lending and design credit and investment products tailored for farmers engaging in regenerative and durable agribusiness.
- Develop impact investment ecosystem**:** Support the development of an ecosystem of impact investors focused on food systems with catalytic capital and technical assistance. Partner with anchor companies in agribusiness value chains, investors, and financial institutions to leverage their resources and expertise.
- Promote data-driven business models: Develop data-led, evidence-based business models for scaling up nature-based solutions[6] and improved agriculture, livestock, and aquaculture practices. Increase credibility and reduce risk for investors and financial institutions to invest in the sector.
- Pilot blended finance, financial incentives and risk mitigation: Offer financial rewards such as reimbursable grants, low-interest loans, and outcome payments for improved agricultural practices; utilize GEF resources to mitigate risks and reduce costs through a blended finance or matching program for upstream value chain investment; and provide guarantees, insurance products, and other risk mitigation tools to attract private investors with different risk appetites.

Drylands and Drought Management

135. Drylands, encompassing approximately 40% of the world's land area, support two billion people, contain 44% of the world's agricultural land and about 60% of the world's food production. More than 30% of urban areas and 34% of the urban populations are in dryland regions, which also host over one quarter of the global biodiversity hotspots.[105] Water scarcity is a defining characteristic of drylands, to which their biodiversity, crops and production systems are inherently adapted. Intense or prolonged dry periods can exceed adapted tolerance limits, however.

136. With Earth system change intensifying, drought has emerged as a critical global challenge. The STAP described why drought matters for the global environment and its implications for GEF's work in an information note.[106] Droughts have significant environmental impacts: driving soil degradation, reducing water availability, and contributing to biodiversity loss, which in turn lead to severe ecosystem disturbances, endanger agricultural systems and food security, and

[105] World Atlas of Desertification. https://wad.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

[106] STAP 2024. Why drought matters for the global environment. Information note.

undermine the livelihoods of communities.[107] Drought also disrupts the water cycle, increases the risk of flash floods, sand and dust storms, depletes groundwater reserves, and increases competition for water resources. Drought also results in significant socio-economic consequences, particularly in low-income and vulnerable communities. Consequences may include food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, health impacts, large-scale migration, and conflict.

137. Based on data from the 2022 UNCCD reporting process, 1.84 billion people in 101 countries are affected by drought, with 4.7% facing severe or extreme drought conditions. Eighty-five percent of those affected by drought reside in low- or middle-income countries. With approximately 40% of the world's population already facing water scarcity and up to 700 million people at risk of displacement by 2030,[108] urgent global action and collaboration is needed.[109] Given the magnitude and urgency of the global drought challenge and its core environmental underpinnings, the GEF recognizes the similar urgency of scaling up investment in integrated drought management efforts.

Framing of the Integrated Program

138. The recent IEO Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: GEF Support to Dryland Countries[110] and OPS-8 findings[111] have confirmed that the evolution in the GEF toward systems-based approaches and integrated programming is highly relevant for drylands, where a wider landscape approach allows for aligning environmental and development priorities. An integrated approach to address water scarcity and drought in drylands is essential to mitigate environmental and socio-economic impacts, to improve the well-being of affected people, and to enhance their prospects of sustainable development.

139. The IP responds to recommendations of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought made at UNCCD COP16 in their report, [112] which specifically request the GEF to "develop a new integrated programme that synergically addresses proactive drought prevention and management, taking into account key biodiversity and climate challenges linked to drought causes and consequences". It will adopt a framework that integrates prevention, preparedness, and management including early warning systems and adaptation actions, drought-smart land management, aquifer recharge and effective water allocation to comprehensively address

[107] European Commission Joint Research Centre and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, World Drought Atlas. 2024

[108] WMO 2023. State of the Global Climate Report.

[109] Stefanski, R., Toreti, A., Aich, V. *et al.* Drought resilience demands urgent global actions and cooperation. *Nat Water* 3, 127–130 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1038/s44221-024-00373-9

[110] IEO (2024): https://www.gefieo.org/evaluations/scce-drylands

[111] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[112] UNCCD COP16: Final report by the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2024: https://www.unccd.int/official-documents/cop-16-riyadh-saudi-arabia-2024/documents/iccdcop1620

drought challenges and promote improved water management and increased resilience of communities.

140. It will be designed as an integrated, multi-focal area, and multisectoral approach with a group of countries that wish to prioritize drought management as their national priority and engage in close collaboration with the existing global platforms. The IP, through its global coordination project, will be essential to foster close collaboration with existing global platforms such as the RGDRP and enhance co-financing opportunities through new partnerships. Transboundary cooperation among nations, policy coherence, private sector investment scaling and coordination in execution will be encouraged.

141. The efforts made under the IP go far beyond individual focal area elements as it will target systems change and tackle drought at national scale spanning mitigation and adaptation and include elements of all GEF focal areas, as well as promoting Multi-Trust Fund investments across the GEF Family of Funds. Globally, challenges of drought are expanding and intensifying, from historic dryland regions to newly climate stressed, increasingly arid regions including in traditional areas of important agricultural production. As such, the program will be global in scope.

142. The Drylands and Drought Management integrated program will promote a systems approach to common challenges posed by drought across different sectors and political boundaries and will facilitate investments to address drought and dryland resilience across the GEF Family of Funds. The IP will elevate and enhance the efforts made under the LD FA objective 2: Support implementation of National Drought Plans and drought related policies" through an integrated, multi-focal area, and multisectoral approach with a group of countries that wish to prioritize drought management investments and engage in close collaboration with the existing global platforms. The efforts made under the IP will target systems change and tackle drought at scale spanning mitigation and adaptation and include elements of all GEF focal areas.

143. The IP will operationalize a paradigm shift towards proactive drought management. Early action on drought can save lives, livelihoods, and financial resources – before disaster relief becomes the only option. Historically, drought management has been reactive, and crisis driven while this IP is suggested to emphasize preparedness, addressing risk mitigation, and resilience.

144. The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD and the UNCCD secretariat have been supporting countries in formulating National Drought Plans (NDPs). More than 70 countries have developed or are engaged in the process of designing national-level plans of action.[113] A stocktaking of drought-related policies and plans by the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on Drought[114] revealed the importance of other Conventions related planning processes to identify priority actions for drought management, including NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs, and NAPAs.

[113] https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/drought/drought-planning

[114] UNCCD 2022: Stocktaking of existing drought and related policies.

145. The IP will help countries and communities better prepare for, monitor and assess, mitigate, and respond to the cascading effects of drought. GEF investments will promote the improved management of land and water resources, including groundwater. Efforts will also support ecosystem-based measures to manage drought and biodiversity conservation. This integrated approach to drought follows a systems approach addressing interconnected ecological, social and economic factors and enhancing collaboration across sectors. The GEF has been supporting transformational change in dryland regions through the GEF-7 Drylands Sustainable Landscape Impact Program (DSL-IP) focusing on dryland forests, savannahs and grasslands in eleven participating countries. Prior to that, the GEF-6 Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) program on Resilient Food Systems was explicitly focused on drylands in Sub-Saharan Africa, to tackle degradation affecting smallholder farmers. At the same time in Africa, the GEF has a long history of investing in the Great Green Wall Initiative to address dryland degradation and drought effects in the Sahel. By further addressing drought challenges in drylands, the GEF aims to build on this experience and further expand its programmatic approach to enhance the adaptive capacity of affected communities and deliver GEBs with positive impacts on development, national security, and economic prosperity.

146. The empowerment of women and girls as well as youth is very important to achieving the goals of the UNCCD, UNFCCC, and CBD. Therefore, the IP is committed to improving the conditions of women through secure tenure and access to resources, services and opportunities, and strategic interventions to foster women's and youth participation and empowering women's representation in decision making bodies at all levels.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

Goals and objectives

147. The main objective of the IP is to proactively manage drought and enhance ecosystems in selected dryland countries. Drought is a global meteorological phenomenon that is not limited to drylands; however, an initial focus on drylands is proposed to address drought challenges in an integrated way and within the mandate of the GEF to generate global environmental benefits. The IP will therefore address the multifaceted environmental challenges in drylands with a specific emphasis on drought. It will support countries in implementing the three pillars of integrated drought management: (i) monitoring and early warning, (ii) risk and impact assessment, and (iii) risk mitigation, preparedness, and response, the program will generate significant GEBs, socio-economic benefits, and secure local livelihoods. The integration of drought-smart land management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems, groundwater management, and other land-water nexus considerations will ensure a comprehensive approach to building drought resilience in dryland regions. Effective drought policies and early warning systems are crucial to strengthening drought response measures.

148. The IP aims at strengthening existing and forging new partnerships in the global efforts to address drought and helping to catalyze finance in collaboration with the recent pledges made

by the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership and with other emerging funds related to drought. In this context, the UNCCD estimated the total funding needs for implementing drought plans at $210 billion.[115] The IP will contribute to narrowing the funding gap.

Key interventions

149. Effective drought policies and early warning systems are key enabling factors to strengthen drought response measures, as reactive interventions alone often fail to tackle underlying causes and vulnerabilities.[116] Leveraging Indigenous and traditional knowledge and experience is crucial for effective drought management,[117] while enhancing tools and methods to monitor drought impacts on social-ecological systems supports better planning and preparedness. Drought presents significant disaster risks, and disaster risk management (DRM) plays a crucial role in mitigating these risks by integrating drought-specific approaches into development efforts and building community resilience, aside from Early Warning Systems. Additionally, aligning with and leveraging existing processes, partnerships and plans, such as NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs, and NAPAs, will ensure policy coherence, resource optimization, and integration of drought management into broader development efforts.

150. Capacity development and engaging all levels of society, from policymakers to local communities, are crucial for achieving interconnected systems transformation to ensure lasting drought management efforts.[118] Moreover, a review of 67 GEF LDN projects across 56 countries highlights the importance of inclusivity and context-specific stakeholder engagement, particularly with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth Therefore, the IP will promote activities and inclusiveness related to secure tenure rights and equitable access to land and water resources in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land Tenure and the UNCCD COP decision 26/COP.14 on land tenure.

151. At the field level, the program will work with and address the needs of smallholders and pastoralists to introduce drought-smart land management practices, such as landscape and habitat restoration, agro-ecological approaches for drought-resilient food systems, drought and fire-resilient fodder varieties, integrated pest management, rangeland and pasture management, soil erosion control, and the conservation of pollinators. The introduction of drought-tolerant and drought-resistant trees and shrubs, crops, and livestock species, and adoption of water-saving and water-harvesting measures can help mitigate drought impacts and improve land

[115] UNCCD (2024): Investing in Land's Future – Financial Needs Assessment for UNCCD

[116] Sass *et al*. (2024) Enhancing drought resilience and vulnerability assessment in small farms: A global expert survey on multidimensional indicators.

[117] Reichhuber *et al*. (2019) The Land-Drought Nexus: Enhancing the role of land-based interventions in drought mitigation and risk management.

[118] Petzold *et al*. (2020) Indigenous knowledge on climate change adaptation: a global evidence map of academic literature.

productivity.[119] In addition, on-grid and off-grid technologies that are essential for drought resilient agriculture need to be factored in.

152. Improved water management and conservation practices, including efficient irrigation techniques like drip irrigation and water storage infrastructure, e.g., small reservoirs and check dams, aquifer recharge, rainwater harvesting systems[120] and nature-based solutions.[121] Recognizing that natural water storage capacity has been dramatically reduced through deforestation and degradation of wetlands, and the critical role of soil moisture in mitigating drought impacts underscores the need for comprehensive water conservation plans. Although efficient irrigation can alleviate shortages, it does not address the root causes of water scarcity. Implementing strategies like rainwater harvesting, water recycling, and improved irrigation practices is crucial to enhancing water security,[122] especially in times of water scarcity. Adopting a framework that integrates prevention, preparedness, and management including aquifer recharge and effective water allocation—can help create a robust response to drought challenges and promote improved water management and increased resilience of communities.

153. Actions to prevent overextraction and pollution of groundwater include raising awareness, increasing knowledge, promoting better management approaches, and strengthening legal institutions by improving the capacity to monitor groundwater extractions. For example, creating protected areas for groundwater, monitoring contamination sources, and having action plans for spills. Allowing transparent groundwater withdrawals and setting sound limits can help address over-extraction. Aligning incentives across different sectors to value groundwater and its importance for health, livelihoods, and economies is also crucial. Regional and transboundary collaboration on this topic will be emphasized.

154. Ecosystem-based adaptation and restoration, which involves restoring, reconnecting and conserving natural ecosystems like wetlands, watersheds, forests, grasslands, and desert ecosystems, can also play a vital role in buffering against drought impacts. This may include measures to improve water security and groundwater sustainability, with support for community-led recharge and watershed restoration. Indigenous Peoples and local communities' organizations and knowledge will be key partners for the development and implementation of

[119] International Organization for Migration and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2019; IPCC 2019; Reichhuber *et al*. (2019) The Land-Drought Nexus Enhancing the role of land-based interventions in drought mitigation and risk management; UNCCD (2022) Global Land Outlook 2nd edition.

[120] For example, Knutson (2008) Methods and Tools for Drought Analysis and Management; Kosmowski (2018) Soil water management practices (terraces) helped to mitigate the 2015 drought in Ethiopia; Ragab and Hamdy (2004) Water management strategies to combat drought in semiarid regions; Chartzoulakis and Bertaki, (2015) Sustainable Water Management in Agriculture under Climate Change; Álvarez-Berríos *et al*. (2018) Correlating drought conservation practices and drought vulnerability in a tropical agricultural system & Srivastav *et al*. (2021) Climate-resilient strategies for sustainable management of water resources and agriculture.

[121] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

[122] Zaveri *et al*. (2023) Droughts and Deficits: The Global Impact of Droughts on Economic Growth.

the activities. Harnessing dryland biodiversity in ecosystem restoration can help communities respond to the threat of drought as well as climate change. Enhancing species' functional diversity and controlling the spread of water-demanding invasive plant species are additional strategies.[123]

155. Biodiversity conservation measures are important for mitigating the impacts of drought and enhancing ecosystem health. Biodiversity conservation helps buffer against drought impacts and supports ecosystem robustness.[124] Enhancing species functional diversity, such as through intermediate short duration grazing in grasslands, can improve drought management and preparedness.[125] The ability of ecosystems to recover from drought is influenced by factors such as drought duration, frequency, post-drought wetness, and bioclimatic conditions.[126]

Selection criteria

156. The IP will provide opportunities for countries seeking to engage in a strategic and systematic approach to transforming their drought plans and related policies into tangible, bankable investments moving from policy to action through integrated, cross-sectoral approaches. The program encourages policy coherence through a whole of government approach, integrating drought management actions and investments across relevant ministries and implementing coherent project strategies from national to local institutions. The program will be anchored on stakeholder engagement and inclusion of all affected sectors of society, particularly in education, capacity building, technical and technology assistance, and the adoption of drought-smart land management practices.

157. Participating countries must show ambition for effective and coherent land and water policies and governance across sectors, optimizing their resources and investments. They are interested in a structured approach to assessing drought risk, resilience, and investment priorities, and in doing so, a process for bridging silos between sectors, jurisdictions, and institutions. The IP recognizes that drought management efforts are often most urgent in fragile, conflict-affected situations (FCS) and will take recommendations made by the IEO[127] and STAP, as well as GEF Council guidance.[128]

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[123] Cavaleri *et al*. (2014) Height is more important than light in determining leaf morphology in a tropical forest; Caldeira *et al*. (2015) Synergy of extreme drought and shrub invasion reduce ecosystem functioning and resilience in water-limited climates.

[124] Falk *et al*. (2022) Mechanisms of forest resilience.

[125] Loeser *et al*. (2007) Impact of grazing intensity during drought in an Arizona grassland; Griffin-Nolan *et al*. (2019) Shifts in plant functional composition following long-term drought in grasslands.

[126] Jiao *et al*. (2021) Observed increasing water constraint on vegetation growth over the last three decades.

[127] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[128] See: GEF/E/C.59/01, GEF/STAP/C.66/Inf.03, GEF/C.66/09

158. While it is acknowledged that drought is a global phenomenon that is not limited to drylands, priority will be given to countries in dryland regions with high drought frequency and risks and systems' vulnerabilities, such as high incidents of poverty, low coping capacity, and groundwater dependent ecosystems.[129] Attention will be given to countries with dryland areas that overlap with areas of global biodiversity significance or ecosystems supporting endangered or endemic species, as these ecosystems are increasingly vulnerable to threats from land-use pressures and climate change. Further, pilot countries may be selected outside dryland regions to test proactive drought management approaches addressing future drought scenarios, including in SIDS.

159. Furthermore, the IP will be designed for optimal regional coherence and linkages. Regional and transboundary collaboration opportunities will be criteria for the selection of participating countries. Experience under the GEF-7 DSL-IP highlights the value countries place on support for investments that enhance regional alignment and economies of scale. The program's regional coordination mechanisms have been instrumental in fostering coherence, direction, and collaboration among countries facing similar dryland challenges. Regional synergies will also enhance efficiency in the provision of capacity development initiatives and facilitate meaningful knowledge sharing, joint financial mobilization efforts, and multi-stakeholder dialogues.

160. Participating countries must be willing to engage with global and regional platforms to closely collaborate with neighboring countries, international partners, and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the program aligns with the needs of people in vulnerable situations, CSOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth, including smallholder farmers and pastoralists, and responds to their perspectives and all relevant standards.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

161. Established in 2018, the UNCCD Drought Initiative promotes a proactive approach to drought through strengthening vulnerable populations and ecosystems. A central part of the Drought Initiative is the Drought Toolbox which countries can use to develop and strengthen their national drought plans, The UNCCD developed the Drought Toolbox in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), FAO, Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Union, the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) of the University of Nebraska, and UNEP-DHI. More recently, UNCCD also partnered with the Freshwater Challenge (FWC). These existing platforms and partnerships and other relevant partners will be extremely useful for collaboration with the GEF-9 program.

162. The Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP) is a joint initiative between the Global Water Partnership and WMO. The scope of the IDMP is to build climate resilience, reduce economic and social losses, and alleviate poverty in drought-affected regions of the world through an integrated approach to drought management, which cuts across sectoral, disciplinary

[129] Rohde, M.M., *et al.* Groundwater-dependent ecosystem map exposes global dryland protection needs. *Nature* 632, 101–107 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07702-8

and institutional jurisdictions and is responsive to specific regional and national needs and requirements. The IDMP does not provide funding; however, it serves as a community of practice providing technical support, sharing knowledge and experience.

163. Launched at the UN Climate Summit in November 2022 by the Prime Minister of Spain and the President of Senegal, the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) is a global coalition comprising 41 countries and 28 international organizations partnering to mobilize political, technical and financial capital to enhance drought management in countries, cities, and communities. IDRA is a collaborative platform for building political momentum, knowledge exchange, innovative financing mechanisms, and a common framework for action. Its secretariat is housed by the UNCCD.

164. The Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP), launched at UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, aims to build drought resilience in 80 of the world's most vulnerable countries by leveraging public and private finance and shifting from reactive relief to proactive preparedness. The partnership has attracted $12.15 billion in pledges, including $10 billion worth of pledges from members of the Arab Coordination Group. Further, other public and private sector funds for drought are in preparation, e.g. the Drought Resilience Investment Facility initiated by Luxembourg and the UNCCD. The GEF-9 program will seek close collaboration with the RGRDP and other emerging funds in leveraging the pledged funding towards comprehensive investments that cover both the upfront soft investments, and the physical investments needed for building drought resilience.

165. Several GEF agencies are involved in drought related projects and programs, such as the World Bank, the AfDB, FAO, UNEP, IUCN, and UNDP. For example, recent World Bank efforts in context of the development of the Drought Risk and Resilience Assessment Methodology (DRRA) provide a framework for action that can help governments proactively address drought risks, fostering holistic drought management and promoting more cross-sectoral and cross-institutional operations that support longer-term, coordinated engagement with countries.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

166. The IP is anchored in the LD focal area (LD-2: Support implementation of National Drought Plans and other drought related policies) and will collaborate with and complement efforts of countries addressing desertification, land degradation and drought outside the IP.

167. The IP also addresses objectives of the IW focal area through its work on shared water resources, including groundwater, as well as objectives of the BD and CC focal areas. The IP will support Article 7 of the Paris Agreement by enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change while also supporting Article 5 to conserve and enhance sinks and reservoirs in soils and vegetation. Furthermore, the program will seek close alignment with the programming strategies for LDCF and the SCCF responding to goals and objectives of the UNFCCC.

168. As noted, the IP responds to the decision on the collaboration with the GEF from UNCCD COP16 which "*invites* the Global Environment Facility, under its ninth replenishment, considering the increased frequency and severity of drought, which poses a global challenge in the context of climate change, to prioritize the allocation of resources to proactive drought management to support Parties in the implementation of their actions."

169. Integrating efforts with the UNCBD is vital to addressing the global importance of drylands for biodiversity and the escalating pressures they face. The IP will contribute to the implementation of the KMGBF, particularly Target 2 on restoration of degraded ecosystems, and Target 8 which focuses on promoting nature-based solutions. Through its emphasis on land use and agricultural practices, the IP also supports Target 10, which calls for enhancing biodiversity and sustainability in productive ecosystems, and Target 7 to reduce the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals through integrated pest management.

170. Addressing drought management through the IP will not only mitigate immediate negative impacts but will also bolster long-term environmental and socio-economic progress and will make GEF investments more durable in the long-term.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

171. Engaging the private sector in proactive drought management can drive innovation, improve efficiency, and scale up successful interventions. Private companies can invest in technologies and practices, such as drought-tolerant crops, efficient irrigation systems, and energy security solutions. In this context, on-grid and off-grid energy required for powering drought-resistant technologies such as early warning systems, water pumping, irrigation systems, will require private sector investments and technological innovation.

172. Private sector involvement is essential to link smallholder producers and pastoralists to markets, introduce viable supply chains, and create stable revenues with dryland commodities such as cotton, wool, leather, cashmere, dates, nuts, fuelwood, charcoal, shea, and gum Arabica. The program can leverage opportunities for improved value chain collaboration, building on the sustainability objectives of global platforms in food systems, fiber and fashion while enhancing income-generating activities to improve farmers' livelihoods and economic well-being. The IP will explore opportunities for public-private partnerships (PPPs), where the necessary preconditions are in place, to leverage resources, share risks, and promote business management models that benefit both the environment and local communities. The implementing countries are encouraged to take measures to ensure that preconditions are in place to attract private sector involvement.

173. In addition to value chain approaches, the IP will seek partnerships with private sector entities that have long-term interests in landscape sustainability and water management. These include resources companies with climate and nature commitments, and those industries reliant on water resources including the beverage sector and utilities.

174. The IP will seek to increase the amount of finance available to drylands and drought, through collaboration with key funds, the private sector, and the resource mobilization efforts of the relevant conventions, including at a national and a regional level, through thematic

approaches (supply chains, commodities, water resources) and importantly at the global level, leveraging the whole portfolio of countries in the IP and working beyond the sum of the national project parts.

175. Blended finance opportunities can help to advance innovative financial tools such as index-based insurance and performance-based bonds with indicators related to drought management (e.g. soil moisture). Further, GEF will support countries using their STAR allocation to participate in blended-finance structures to mobilize private finance, based on countries' demand, including the required capacity building in financial structuring at country level and facilitating coordination among the various relevant stakeholders and government agencies required.

Sustainable Cities

176. The tremendous pace and scale of urbanization have made the transformation of urban systems to greater sustainability central to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cities contribute significantly to environmental degradation, accounting for over 70% of greenhouse gas emissions[130, 131] and causing extensive destruction of biodiversity and nature due to habitat loss and fragmentation (36,6% urban areas are in KBAs),[132] and pollution of land, fresh water and oceans. According to the IUCN Red list of Species,[133] up to 27,767 species are affected by residential and commercial development, 45% of them at extinction risk, ranking third top threat after agriculture and aquaculture use and biological resource use. By 2050, approximately 68% of the global population is projected to live in urban areas, with most of this growth occurring in Africa and Asia.[134] Demographic changes associated with unplanned urban expansion are anticipated to intersect with environmental degradation, influencing health, economic conditions and access to ecosystem services such as clean water, air, energy, and food.

177. By 2050, over a billion people in low-lying cities will face coastal environmental risks.[135] Urban heatwaves caused by increasing global temperatures and infrastructure expansion will affect most urban populations. About 350 million urban dwellers will experience water scarcity

[130] Lwasa, S., *et al*., 2022: Urban systems and other settlements. In IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [P.R. Shukla, *et al*. (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. doi: 10.1017/9781009157926.010.

[131] This includes emissions from urban food systems and therefore overlaps with the GHG emissions from global food system.

[132] Simkins, A.T., et al. 2023. A global assessment of the prevalence of current and potential future infrastructure in Key Biodiversity Areas. Biological Conservation, 281, 109953.

[133] IUCN. 2025. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2025-1. https://www.iucnredlist.org. Accessed on 23/05/2025.

[134] United Nations, 2018: 68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050. UN DESA.

[135] World Bank. 2016. *Unprepared for a Risky Future*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

from severe droughts at 1.5°C increase above the historical mean. Groundwater overuse in cities is leading to depletion of water tables, land subsidence, saltwater intrusion, and pollution.

178. Environmental degradation disproportionately impacts women, the poor, disabled and particularly those in urban informal settlements. According to UN projections about 3 billion people could reside in informal settlements by 2050[136] with limited access to affordable and adequate housing and other services and economic opportunities. Women are overrepresented in informal settlements and in general are less involved in decision making and face challenges in accessing resources and services tailored to their needs making them more vulnerable to environmental impacts.

179. The challenges of nature loss, weather extremes and pollution in cities represent a triple interlinked planetary crisis that needs to be addressed in an integrated manner, considering that the drivers of these issues are interconnected across sectors, linked to socio-economic factors and stretch beyond urban administrative boundaries. Cities are part of broader resource sheds that encompass natural ecosystems and rural areas which provide key urban services. Linear infrastructure such as roads facilitates this connection and promotes urban and economic growth but also contributes to deforestation and habitat degradation.

180. Considering the extensive scale of urbanization, cities exert a planetary influence, with particularly significant effects on regions undergoing rapid urban growth and encroaching into natural ecosystems. Urbanization represents one of the most critical tipping points; therefore, there is a limited window of opportunity to facilitate a viable transition towards urbanization that aligns human development needs with the preservation of natural ecosystems.

181. Urbanization drives environmental degradation but also provides opportunities to foster a healthy planet and healthy people. The connection between people, nature, and infrastructure in cities enables policy makers to create solutions with multiple benefits and transform cities into engines of sustainability. This important role has been highlighted across the major international environmental summits and will continue to be a focus towards the 2030 SDGs. To enhance their efforts, systemic barriers in financing, policies, technology, and knowledge must be addressed at all levels in a holistic, integrated approach.

182. Since its inception in GEF-6, the GEF's Sustainable Cities program has evolved into a major global partnership initiative on urban development. At least 90 cities across 33 countries have participated in the program, promoting integrated solutions related to land use planning, nature-based solutions, waste management, transport and energy, and housing. This has created an "ecosystem" of partners and initiatives that the GEF is well placed to leverage for advancing transformative change in urban systems. This includes the use of integrated land use planning approaches to foster transit-oriented development and low carbon zones in cities, and the use of digital geospatial tools for participatory and evidence-based planning. These approaches are helping to influence and support energy security, contribute to reducing pressure on natural

[136] United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/

systems, improve health systems through circularity principles for waste management, and improve food security. A notable contribution to cities is the mainstreaming of nature and biodiversity, enabling a rethinking of urban infrastructure development through policies for conservation and nature-based solutions.

183. Operating in complex urban governance systems, the program has also promoted innovative multi-level and cross-sector governance models, fostering collaboration between municipalities and national governments. It has created an enabling environment for replicating successes across cities through national city platforms and linking spatial development plans with national investment plans. Globally, the program has elevated the importance of cities in meeting objectives of conventions like the UNFCCC and CBD and built city capacities through exchanges and targeted knowledge and capacity development activities. Through this effort, the program has harnessed a global partnership that involves 11 of the 18 GEF Agencies including strong participation of MDBs and UN agencies, and City networks such as C40 and Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) that have championed and supported integrated approaches in cities worldwide.

184. Building on the progress and achievements to-date, and the potential for scaling to tackle drivers of environmental degradation and vulnerability, GEF-9 will support cities in their sustainability ambitions, commitments, and actions and align with MEAs served by the GEF, emphasizing the importance of cities in transitioning to nature positive urban systems, which integrate nature in all its form into urban development to support a resilient growth.

Framing of the Integrated Program

185. The GEF-9 Sustainable Cities IP will continue to promote integrated approaches to urban planning and development and aim to tackle major drivers of environmental degradation and generate multiple global environmental benefits. The program approach contributes to the transformation of urban systems by focusing on processes that engage a variety of actors and ensure durable outcomes within relevant institutions.

186. The GEF-9 program will emphasize the nexus between climate, nature and pollution; interlinkages that are increasingly recognized in the environmental conventions and which are very clearly experienced in cities. To advance the integrated approach, and deliver results at scale while adding value, the GEF-9 IP will strategically foster collaboration with national and regional governments. It will expand its intervention space to address environmental degradation drivers at urban and associated territorial scales. This includes natural ecosystems that supply clean water, air, food, and energy to cities, as well as linear infrastructure that connects with cities and urban supply chains. This approach will create stronger links between human development and ecosystems with the aim of urban transformation that benefits people and the planet.

187. The IP will advance integration vertically with a focus on policy coherence and effective governance relations between different levels of governments, and horizontally by focusing on interconnection of sectors and their inherent social-economic linkages present at the local level. Integration will also include mainstreaming energy efficiency and nature-positive approaches into urban plans and policies that can enable systemic, scalable and multi-disciplinary solutions

in urban regions and help cities better harness synergies between investments. To promote whole of society benefits, the Sustainable Cities IP will work to support interventions that also bring local benefits of economic growth, poverty reduction, and job creation, considering the needs of women, youth and vulnerable communities. The program will support women's influence in urban planning and decision making and promote job creation for female entrepreneurs.

188. The Sustainable Cities IP aims to create large-scale impact by tackling urgent environmental degradation caused by urbanization, going beyond the city boundaries and including urban-rural linkages and the value chain of resources consumed in cities. The IP will help create systems for measuring impact and promote processes that can be durable and sustained within institutions and with a whole of society approach. To maximize impact and recognizing the urgency, the SC IP will put particular emphasis on rapidly urbanizing regions where early action can have large scale effects and avoid negative lock-ins. This will include working with intermediary cities and their surroundings, where urban development is happening at a high pace. While the program will be open for cities in developing countries from all the regions, it will give particular consideration to those regions where the financial resources and institutional capacity to manage rapid urbanization and tackle environmental challenges are limited.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

189. The objective of the GEF-9 Sustainable Cities IP is to promote nature positive urban development. To achieve this, the program will work with local, regional and national governments, and other urban actors, to adopt integrated approaches to urban planning. This includes upstream systemic interventions like policy development, financing, and capacity building, and downstream support in selected cities through strategic investments and implementation. The program will combine country-level investments with a global knowledge and coordination platform building on previous phases and GEF-IEO recommendations to improve governance and reporting mechanisms. The program will focus on a set of transformation levers.

- Governance and policy coherence: The SC IP will support cities and countries in developing governance models and coherent urban policies that integrate key aspects of urbanization, such as human development, jobs and informality, while ensuring protection of biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Policy coherence will focus on strengthening governance across the spatial scale and integrating sustainability in core urban functions of land use planning, regulations, budgeting and financing. This will be supported through national urban platforms that connect city action with national priorities and urban land use and infrastructure plans anchored in national investment plans. Additionally, it will leverage outcomes-based financing from MDBs and support the development of standards and data for coherent decision-making in mainstreaming nature, climate, and circularity in urban development.

- Leveraging finance: Cities often struggle to access necessary resources due to low revenues, insufficient fiscal transfers, borrowing restrictions, and lack of technical capacity to prepare bankable projects. The SC IP will aim to strengthen the institutional capacity of local governments to access and manage finance and seek to strengthen and rationalize cities' main funding sources (national funds, fiscal transfers, etc.) to create conditions and incentives for nature positive investments. This will enable acceleration and access to structured finance such as PPPs. It will work with MDBs on mechanisms like bonds, performance linked investments and support development of innovative blended finance that can de-risk investments and catalyze large scale sub-national financing.
- Knowledge, learning and innovation: The program will bring together various knowledge partners (academia, traditional knowledge, private sector, etc.) and foster learning and collaboration to spread learnings and application through innovative tools and solutions. The Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC) that was established for the GEF-6 pilot program led by the World Bank will evolve to support the GEF-9 program, and link directly with the GEF-7 UrbanShift platform led by UNEP. This will foster interoperability of the platforms between the GEF phases to strengthen learning and knowledge exchange and foster adaptive management. Additionally, the platform will be linked with the global platforms created under the GEF-8 GRID and NZNPA IP to leverage its partnership and knowledge created for sustainable infrastructure.
- Partnerships: Effective governance, finance, and learning depend on strong, diverse partnerships. The global program will build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones through a multi-stakeholder approach, leveraging the momentum of project partners and previous program phases of Sustainable Cities IP, GRID, and NZNPA and explore collaboration with GEF-9 IPs such as with the Food Systems IP on urban agri-food systems and the Pollution-free Supply Chains IP on sustainable construction practices.

190. The program will focus on thematic entry-points which have the potential to generate important environmental and socio-economic benefits and contribute to scalable, replicable and lasting impact at both the local and global scale. These entry points are:

- Land-use planning and management: Support integrated land use planning in urban regions, considering metropolitan areas, surrounding territories and catchments, supply chains and the linear infrastructure connecting with cities. A broader spatial approach will enable more integrated and synergistic solutions across the climate, nature and pollution nexus. The program will support improved land use planning, including the use of geospatial tools for mapping and land management, and incorporate considerations of land ownership and valuation through mechanisms such as land-value capture. This thematic area will address crucial aspects of densification, mobility, housing and informal settlements, and ecosystem services including groundwater recharge and treatments for reduction in flow of harmful pollutants to land and water bodies. Interventions related to infrastructure and nature-based solutions will integrate environmental and social safeguards, following GEF policies, with clear action plans to engage with stakeholders in order to systematically account for impact on communities, including informal settlements.

- Infrastructure**:** Provide strategic support to sustainable infrastructure development in cities and their surrounding areas, linking with integrated land use plans. A range of integrated solutions that factor in synergies and trade-offs will be supported with potential to deliver multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits in sectors including transportation, housing, energy, waste, and water. These may include sustainable transportation solutions such as mass urban transit, e-mobility, non-motorized transportation, clean energy and energy efficient solutions for buildings, flood, heat and drought management solutions, and application of innovative technologies including artificial intelligence solutions for sustainable infrastructure and urban services. The program can also support sustainable and nature positive infrastructure beyond urban boundaries such as industries in special economic zones, linear and energy infrastructure such as roads, and trade infrastructure like ports. The support in such large-scale infrastructure needs to be linked with the urban system and will focus on upstream technical assistance on planning, policy coherence, standards, efficient procurement, and innovative financing to deliver environmental benefits.
- Nature and biodiversity**:** The support for urban nature and biodiversity will enhance the role of cities in achieving global biodiversity and climate goals. The GEF's support for cities and surrounding regions will promote urban nature-based solutions[6], ecosystem management and conservation solutions, including restoring degraded ecosystems, promoting ecological connectivity across urban and peri-urban landscapes, and reducing threats such as habitat fragmentation and invasive species. Considering the relationship between climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, pollution and health, this integrated approach will allow projects to plan interventions at the catchment area level, delivering more comprehensive solutions that enhance biodiversity, reduce erosion, sequester carbon, and increase the security of vulnerable communities. Solutions will draw on pilots and best practices globally, informed by science. Locally relevant guidance will be developed to scale up urban ecosystem restoration effectively, aligning with CBD Decision 15/12 and contributing to GBF Target 2, Target 12, and other relevant targets, supporting collaboration, financial resource mobilization, capacity development, awareness, improved information, and monitoring.
- Circular economy solutions: The program will take an ambitious approach to advance zero-waste and pollution free cities[137] through partnerships with governments and the private sector by supporting circularity solutions. The program will support pilot interventions at city-level or neighborhood scale, complemented by planning, policy and technical support for replication across cities. Key entry points include circularity in buildings and construction materials, water and waste management, urban industries, plastics value chain and urban and peri-urban agri-food system with focus on sustainable production, food loss and waste reduction. The focus will be on upstream regulations,

[137] Zero-waste cities are understood to be cities in which actions are taken to reduce the generation of waste, improve sorting to enhance recycling, and provide environmentally sound disposal facilities for the waste that could not be avoided nor recycled"

standards, building codes, technologies, behavior change and procurement models promoting circularity, with support to implement local solutions with high potential for scaling and replication.

Selection criteria

191. The SC IP will consider the following selection criteria for countries and cities:

- Enabling environment: National and sub-national policies and governance models that create an enabling environment for achieving global environmental benefits targets in relation to MEAs and avoid negative subsidies which contribute to environmental degradation in cities.
- Leadership**:** Demonstrated political leadership and ambition on sustainability by cities, sub-national and national governments, enabling policy certainty, cross sectoral collaboration and whole of government approach.
- Integrated approach**:** Integrated and systems-based approaches with clear entry points for delivering multiple global environmental benefits across sectors, governance levels and spatial boundaries.
- Alignment with national policies and additionality: Alignment and coherence of project activities with national urban development priorities with a clear added value ensuring additionality to existing urban initiatives or investment.
- City selection: Cities and regions in highly urbanized or rapidly urbanizing countries across different climate zones, including intermediary cities and cities in LDCs, SIDS, and fragile contexts where the integrated approach to urbanization can be adopted to tackle environmental degradation.
- Finance**:** Ability of the project to support cities and partners in leveraging financing from both domestic and international, public and private capital to achieve large scale impact.
- Partnerships: Strategic collaboration with diverse stakeholders—including the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations—as well as coordination with complementary initiatives, to leverage expertise and resources for innovation and scalable, sustainable solutions. Engagement of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth.
- Socioeconomic benefits: Potential to deliver socio-economic benefits for inclusive urbanization, including increasing resilience, reducing inequality and poverty, and improving livelihoods.
- Private sector engagement: Foster collaborative efforts with private sector actors at all scales, to create an enabling environment to mobilize private capital and develop innovative and scalable solutions.
- Innovation: Innovative solutions with sound risk management that can lead to innovation in technology, finance, policies, behavior change and governance, including solutions to advance measurements and monitoring of progress in an innovative manner.
- Scalability: A scalable approach for replicating the project activities in other cities.

- Sustainability: Projects that have the potential to generate long-term sustainable impact towards urban transformation, with clear strategies for sustenance beyond the lifetime of GEF's investments.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

192. The GPSC, created in GEF-6 period and further strengthened in GEF-8 will continue to be reinforced in GEF-9 period. Alongside UrbanShift, which was established in the GEF-7 period, these platforms have become leading global convening and knowledge hubs, bringing together more than 90 cities and 33 countries. The global platform has brought together city networks and organizations such as ICLEI, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and World Resources Institute (WRI) as core partners to facilitate city-city learning, capacity building and political leadership of local governments in contributing to national, regional, and global environmental goals.

193. Building on the core partnerships and diverse collaboration established under the cities program to date, GEF-9 will further strengthen its partnership with complementary programs, city networks and strategic institutions such as Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (CCFLA), Resilient Cities Network, UN-Habitat, the European Space Agency, the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM), UNEP's Generation Restoration Cities, The World Bank's Tokyo Development Learning Center, EBRD's Green Cities Program, The SDSN Global Commission on Urban SDG Finance, and other strategic national and global partners and programs including those engaged under the global platforms of GEF-8 GRID and NZNPA IP. As these partnerships advance, the GEF will adopt an agile and adaptive approach to provide complementary support to local, sub-national and national governments with its unique approach to address challenges related to biodiversity loss, weather extremes and pollution in an integrated manner.

194. With a specific aim to accelerate flow of finance and engage private sector, the GEF-9 SCIP will strengthen engagement of MDBs in the program and develop strategic partnerships with their private sector and sub-national financing arms such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and IDB Invest. The program will leverage complementary project preparation and financing facilities such as the Gap Fund implemented by European Investment Bank (EIB) and World Bank, C40 Cities Finance Facility and ICLEI's Transformative Action Program. The program will engage with the MDBs Cities Group and bilateral programs such as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Green Cities and Sweden's Viable Cities to enhance financing for urban development.

195. In line with GEF's KM&L Strategy, the IP will foster collaboration with global research and academic institutions to capture and share knowledge from GEF's sustainable cities investments. Partnerships will be established with institutions such as University of Pennsylvania, Durham University, OECD, IPCC, IPBES, ISP-CWP and Institute of Housing and Urban Studies, including leading research institutions from the global south. These collaborations will facilitate south-south and north-south collaboration and enable GEF to integrate the latest science and knowledge into the program's planning and implementation. Finally, the program will leverage existing national urban platforms created in countries like China, India, Brazil, Peru, and Paraguay

to inspire new countries to develop similar platforms and connect them with the global platform for knowledge generation and exchange.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

196. The GEF-9 period builds on GEF's efforts to support urban transformation, aligning with global targets on climate, nature, and sustainable development, including the MEAs that the GEF serves. The UNFCCC recognizes the need for local action to combat climate change and build resilience through urban greening, energy-efficient buildings and sustainable transportation.[138] Over two-thirds of country NDCs include references to urban development, showing clear linkages between urbanization and climate action.[139]

197. The SC IP will generate climate benefits through efficient land-use planning, energy efficient infrastructure, and nature-based solutions[6]. The CBD includes Target 12, focused on enhancing green spaces and urban planning for human well-being and biodiversity and other targets such as Target 8 to minimize impacts of environmental change, Target 2 to restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems, and Target 14 to integrate biodiversity values into decision-making and planning. The IP will directly contribute to these targets by integrating nature and biodiversity into urban planning and design.

198. The UNCCD notes that rapid urbanization affects ecosystems beyond city boundaries. The program's regional approach will mitigate ecosystem degradation and promote improved land and water management. Built environment solutions will foster long-term materials and waste management, reducing plastic waste and hazardous chemicals such as persistent organic pollutants and mercury under the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions. Furthermore, the program will contribute to the benefits associated with the international waters focal area, particularly in groundwater and ocean ecosystems issues.

199. Sustainable built environment and circular solutions can strengthen long term materials and waste management and reduce plastic leakage and related pollution. In this regard, the IP will incorporate practical pollution-prevention measures within its system focus, including policy and regulatory reforms, incentives, and green public and private procurement that reduce pollution risks (for example, by avoiding products and materials containing hazardous substances, including mercury and persistent organic pollutants, and problematic additives, improving standards, and strengthening EPR where relevant). These actions are intended to reduce broader pollution pressures and create enabling conditions for longer-term improvements. They will also contribute to convention-specific Chemicals and Waste focal area results (reductions of mercury and persistent organic pollutants regulated under the Minamata and Stockholm Conventions), will be prioritized and reported as additional to those achieved by the CW focal area. IP child projects will include a clearly defined, verifiable convention deliverable with CW results reporting.

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[138] Cities and Local Action to Combat Climate Change

[139] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (2017) Sustainable Urbanization in the Paris Agreement

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

200. The private sector is an integral part of urbanization and transformation, driving economic growth and creating jobs by bringing capital, expertise, and innovation to urban services. The business case for sustainability is robust, and the private sector is increasingly proactive in developing market-based solutions in areas such as housing, transportation, energy, water, and waste management. Environmental standards, certification systems, corporate target setting initiatives for net-zero and nature positive approaches, and more recently disclosure frameworks relevant to cities will be used to engage the private sector at both the global and city level projects. The private sector role and blended finance in urban biodiversity and nature-based solutions is a growth area, and the IP will adopt a systemic approach to engage the private sector as close partners of local and national governments in solutions at the nexus of climate, nature, and pollution. It will follow a three-pronged approach:

- Focus on upstream market creation- through institutional capacity, policies on public private partnerships and sustainable procurements, project preparation and risk mitigation- for private sector participation in implementing sustainable urban infrastructure and nature-based solutions.[140] Support the development and application of standards and taxonomies to create markets for sustainable and nature-based solutions in urban areas.
- Utilize program resources to provide technical assistance and catalytic capital for early-stage engagement, advisory and blended finance structuring to develop financing instruments and products to enable private sector, domestic financial institutions and MDB investments in nature-based, circular and sustainable infrastructure projects. Provide support for municipal reforms to enhance city creditworthiness and create enabling conditions for sub-national financing including by MDBs.
- Leverage private sector innovation in emerging technology and financial solutions through mechanisms like innovation challenges and platforms for business dialogues, with an emphasis on MSMEs and youth and women-led businesses.

Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution

201. Despite growing awareness of plastic pollution and microplastics, global plastic production and mismanagement continue to escalate, posing severe threats to the global environment and to human health. Today, only about 9% of plastics produced are recycled[141], while the majority end up in landfills and incinerators, or leak into the environment. Historically, international attention has centered on single-use plastics, predominantly in food and beverage packaging. However, plastic-intensive products span far beyond this sector, encompassing construction materials, electronics, textiles, agricultural films, automotive parts, and many other applications. Their ubiquitousness requires that plastics solutions address all major value chains.

202. Within the GEF-8 Integrated Program on Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution, systems have been put in place to accelerate systemic changes to reduce plastic leakage and waste.

[140] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

Building on this momentum, there is substantial GEF-9 potential to broaden both upstream and midstream measures, such as eco-design, reusable systems, and sustainable alternative materials, across a broad set of plastic categories and supply chains. Upstream approaches offer the greatest promise for eliminating plastic pollution at its source by redesigning products and business models for circularity. A 2023 UNEP analysis[141] underscores that redesigning products and packaging can dramatically cut waste: for example, implementing design-for-circularity rules would greatly improve recyclability and reduce pollution. These rules include eliminating dyes and additives that hinder recycling, standardizing plastic materials and formats, increasing recycled content, and removing hazardous chemicals. By shifting the emphasis to prevention, the GEF-9 integrated program aims to transform entire value chains toward circular economy practices.

203. The expanded GEF-9 Plastics IP widens the scope of action from a sole focus on the food and beverage sector in GEF-8 to addressing all major plastic categories (except those covered by the Stockholm Convention). The program will continue the focus on upstream interventions while taking a circular economy approach to address all aspects of the plastic supply chain. Blended finance solutions, robust policy frameworks, and whole of society participation are central elements of the approach. The program builds on transformations identified in GEF-8, especially the synergy of finance, governance, innovation, and multi-stakeholder action to deliver impact at scale. It aligns with emerging international momentum, including the negotiation of a new global plastics treaty, to catalyze an ambitious and comprehensive response to the plastic pollution crisis.

204. Existing plastic pollution refer to plastic materials that have already been produced, used, and discarded, and now persisting in the environment, economy, and waste streams, often for decades. The program will maintain its emphasis on upstream interventions, while adopting a circular economy approach that addresses the entire plastic value chain. By focusing on redesign and innovation, it aims to "turn off the tap" on new plastic entering the system, preventing future accumulation of existing plastic pollution. Eliminating problematic, unnecessary, and avoidable (PUA) plastics from supply chains will help break the cycle of continued waste generation. At the same time, strengthening policies on EPR and improving recycling systems will enhance the management of existing plastic waste and significantly reduce leakage into the environment, including into marine ecosystems.

Framing of the Integrated Program

205. The GEF-9 Plastics IP builds on the first phase of the GEF-8 Integrated Program on Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution to trigger a systems change to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy of plastics and prevent plastic pollution with a focus on upstream solutions. The

[141] United Nations Environment Programme (2023). Turning off the Tap. How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy. Nairobi.

STAP recognizes the importance of a circular economy approach to addressing plastic pollution in the paper: Plastics and the Circular Economy.[142]

206. This expanded GEF-9 IP widens the scope of action from a sole focus on the food and beverage sector to addressing all major plastic categories, including electronics, consumer goods, building and construction, healthcare, etc. It simultaneously deepens the emphasis on preventing waste generation and mismanagement by prioritizing blended finance solutions, private sector engagement, policy coherence, and whole of society participation. It builds directly on the levers of transformation identified in GEF-8, especially the interplay of finance, governance, innovation, and multi-stakeholder action.

207. The theory of change for the GEF-9 Plastics IP will recognize that plastic pollution is a complex and systemic issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. It will also acknowledge that addressing plastic pollution requires action across the entire value chain, from production to consumption, to leakage into the environment, and that a combination of regulatory, policy, and market-based approaches are necessary to achieve transformative change.

208. The IP is designed to achieve benefits across multiple focal areas including in the Chemicals and Waste focal area through reductions and elimination of toxic chemicals, the Climate Change focal area through GHG mitigation from reduced production and incineration of plastics, and the International Water focal area by addressing plastic pollution in marine protected areas. It is also designed to address multiple MEAs and coordinate with other projects, programs, and platforms within and outside of the GEF.

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

209. The objective of the GEF-9 Plastics IP is to accelerate the circular economy of plastics and to prevent plastic pollution, with a focus on upstream solutions. The program will strengthen the circular economy through thoughtful eco-design, alternative materials, and reuse and refill systems. Blended finance, private sector partnerships, and whole of society approaches will amplify program impacts and scale, while providing for a just transition. The waste hierarchy framework will guide the program to prioritize actions that have the least environmental impact.

<u>Key Program Components</u>

a) *Upstream interventions*: An overarching objective of this IP is to prevent or drastically reduce plastic waste generation by rethinking product design and material choices at the earliest stages. Upstream interventions will prevent or drastically reduce plastic waste generation by addressing product design and material choice. The program will support eco design, and alternative materials, including biodegradable (if safer and more sustainable) or non-toxic substitutes for conventional plastics, focusing on high-volume sectors like packaging, construction, agriculture, and consumer goods. Reusable and refillable systems are a key to success, and the program will encourage large-scale

[142] Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) to the Global Environment Facility (2018). Plastics and the Circular Economy.

adoption of models (e.g., refillable packaging for household items, returnable containers in retail) and investment in enabling infrastructure. Working with the private sector is key to upstream interventions.

b) *Blended finance mechanisms*: Mobilizing financing for circular economy solutions in plastics requires going beyond traditional public-sector grants. Public funds and development aid, while important, are insufficient to meet this scale of resource needs. Therefore, a core objective of the program is to de-risk and leverage private investment for circular plastic solutions through blended finance.

   Blended finance efforts will aim to mitigate real and perceived risks associated with novel circular economy ventures so that private investors can participate with confidence of reasonable returns. By structuring public-private deals that absorb certain risks, this approach can unleash multiples more capital toward plastic pollution solutions than public finance could alone.

   Blended finance models will be developed by combining GEF grants, or risk guarantees with commercial capital. For instance, the program can support the creation of investment funds targeting circular plastics enterprises, such as eco-design startups, recycling technologies, or reuse/refill systems. Debt instruments like nature bonds and sustainability-linked loans tied to plastic waste reduction metrics may also be utilized to incentivize private capital flows. Blended finance approaches will be coupled with technical assistance to ensure investable project pipelines, thereby helping entrepreneurs, SMEs, and municipalities to develop "bankable" circular solutions and to build capacity to absorb and manage new investments. Over time, as markets mature and regulatory frameworks strengthen, reliance on public de-risking should diminish, with proven business models standing on their own.

c) *Policy and governance*: Technological and financial innovations must be supported by an enabling policy environment. This component of the program focuses on strengthening governance, policies, and enforcement mechanisms to align incentives across the plastics value chain. Governments will be supported in developing coherent strategies and regulations that drive the transition to circular plastics.

   The program will establish a robust, cross-sectoral policy environment that incentivizes upstream solutions and ensures accountability along the plastics value chain. Integrated policy frameworks will align and harmonize waste management, environmental, and trade policies to facilitate circular economy approaches. Regulatory tools and economic instruments will be used to introduce or refine plastic taxes, recycled-content mandates, import-export regulations, and bans on selecting problematic plastics. Institutional capacity building will strengthen national and subnational agencies' ability to enforce policy, track progress, and coordinate across multiple sectors (e.g., environment, commerce, industry). The program will also develop or strengthen extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes that mandate product redesign for recyclability and hold producers responsible for end-of-life management. In addition to national regulations, local governance and enforcement capacity are crucial.

d) *Monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV)*: Accurate progress tracking and transparency are essential for adaptive management. Therefore, standardized metrics,

such as plastic leakage rates, greenhouse gas emissions savings, and the percentage of recycled content will be adopted to ensure consistency across different projects. Innovative technology enabled data systems, such as blockchain, will be considered for real-time tracking of plastic flows from production to disposal, while independent third parties will verify performance outcomes, especially in finance models tied to measurable impacts.

Key Themes

210. A defining element and key theme of this program is ensuring inclusive, whole of society, whole of government and, private sector participation in the effort to reduce plastic pollution. Transforming the plastics economy will require changes in practices and mindsets across all stakeholders, and the program is designed to catalyze broad engagement through partnerships, awareness campaigns, and support for innovative initiatives at all levels of society. As we move toward a circular plastics economy, it is paramount that the transition is equitable, leaving no one behind. Plastics pollution is not only an environmental issue but also a social one: millions of people's livelihoods currently depend on the plastics value chain, including informal waste pickers, who are often among the poorest and most marginalized. New systems of plastic management must integrate such informal workers into the emerging circular economy. This approach was highlighted in the February 2024 GEF Council paper "Tracking and Measuring the Socio-Economic Co-Benefits of GEF Investments"[143] and the GEF STAP paper "Community-Based Approaches."[144]

211. The program will ensure broad-based participation in plastics reduction efforts, from large multinationals to individual households with a focus on ensuring a just transition. Civil society and community initiatives will empower NGOs, community-based organizations, youth groups, women-led businesses, Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' organizations, and educational institutions to champion and scale local solutions. Private sector engagement will foster public–private partnerships, supply-chain collaborations, and corporate commitments to reduce and redesign plastics. Behavioral change and consumer awareness will be targeted through campaigns to encourage plastic avoidance, promote reusable/refillable models, and improve waste sorting at the household level.

Implementation and Scaling Strategy

212. The Plastics IP proposes to launch demonstration projects in strategically selected contexts, showcasing the feasibility, profitability, and environmental benefits of upstream interventions. Lessons learned will be captured for upscaling regionally and globally. Multi-level partnerships will anchor cooperation across local, national, and international scales to align regulations, mobilize resources, and share knowledge. A global knowledge exchange mechanism will synthesize best practices, data, and success stories, creating adaptive management loops so that strategies remain effective in diverse conditions.

[143] GEF/C.66/12 (2024). Tracking and Measuring the Socio-Economic Co-Benefits of GEF Investments.

[144] Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) to the Global Environment Facility (2024). Community-Based Approaches.

Selection Criteria for Projects

213. Projects seeking to participate in this program must demonstrate clear alignment with its core objectives of reducing plastic waste generation, preventing mismanagement, and scaling circular solutions. A strong readiness to implement upstream strategies, such as eco-design, alternative materials, or blended finance for reuse systems is central. Policy commitment is also central, including evidence of stakeholder buy-in, political will to strengthen policy coherence, and the ability to harmonize incentives across multiple sectors. Sound private sector engagement, indicated by both financial leverage and technological innovation, is key. The program will prioritize projects that involve civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth initiatives, ensuring a whole of society approach. Each project should propose robust monitoring frameworks that use standardized indicators and allow for transparent reporting and independent verification. Strong multifocal area, interventions producing multiple benefits is also key for this program. A demonstrated commitment to participate and collaborate in a GEF IP is required.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

214. The GEF-9 Plastics IP is designed to achieve benefits across multiple focal areas and MEAs. The program will contribute to the Chemicals and Waste Focal Area through reductions and elimination of toxic chemicals, the Climate Change Mitigation Focal Area through GHG reduction from reduced production and incineration of plastics, and through the International Water Focal Area by reducing plastic pollution in marine protected areas. This program will also contribute to improving human health.

215. The IP will incorporate practical pollution-prevention measures within its system focus, including policy and regulatory reforms, incentives, and green public and private procurement that reduce pollution risks (e.g., by avoiding products and materials containing hazardous substances and problematic additives, improving standards, and strengthening EPR where relevant). These actions are intended to reduce broader pollution pressures and create enabling conditions for longer-term improvements. They will also contribute to convention-specific Chemicals and Waste results (Stockholm/Minamata tonnage reductions), which will be prioritized and reported as additional to those achieved by the Chemicals and Waste focal area. Accordingly, IP child projects will include a clearly defined, verifiable convention deliverable with CW results reporting.

216. The GEF-9 Plastics IP directly supports global environmental governance by aligning its objectives with key MEAs. Additionally, by reducing plastics-related POPs emissions, the program supports the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on POPs.

217. Through promotion of circular economy principles, waste reduction, and sustainable material management, the program aligns with objectives of the Basel Convention, particularly regarding the transboundary movement of plastic waste while also respecting and aligning existing regional targets and declarations. The IP will contribute to achieving Target 7 of the KMGBF which calls for “preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution.”

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

218. To maximize impact, the IP will leverage existing global and regional platforms and partnerships focused on plastic pollution. Collaboration with initiatives like the UNEP-hosted One Planet Network, the World Bank's PROBLUE program, and the Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) hosted by the World Economic Forum will be prioritized to accelerate knowledge exchange and amplify funding opportunities. The IP will engage with regional bodies such as ASEAN's Regional Action Plan on Marine Debris and the African Circular Economy Alliance to replicate successful interventions regionally. By tapping into networks like the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Global Commitment, PREVENT Waste Alliance, and the Global Action Partnership for EPR the IP will also benefit from robust private sector engagement, thereby significantly expanding the scale and pace of circular plastics solutions globally.

219. Under the first phase of the Plastics IP, the global coordination project has created a robust coordination and knowledge platform to build on that provides technical resources and supports and enables the exchange of lessons learned between country projects to achieve results. This platform will support actors across plastic intensive sectors in GEF-9.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

220. The private sector is crucial for driving systemic change in the plastics economy. This sector's role in the IP includes innovating through eco-design and advancing substitution of plastics through the bioeconomy, adopting sustainable practices across value chains, and mobilizing capital through blended finance mechanisms. Businesses will implement EPR systems to manage the lifecycle impacts of their products. Companies participating in initiatives such as the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, coordinated by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UNEP, through a GEF-6 funded project, are pivotal partners in shifting market dynamics toward sustainability. Collaboration between the IP and these companies will accelerate the scaling of circular economy solutions, particularly in high-volume industries such as packaging, consumer goods, construction, textiles, health care, and electronics.

221. Private financial institutions, leveraging blended finance instruments such as nature bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and venture capital investments in circular start-ups, will play a central role. The IP will facilitate public-private partnerships that demonstrate the profitability and sustainability of circular plastics innovations, thereby attracting further private investment.

Pollution-free Supply Chains

222. Global supply chains, spanning sectors such as agriculture, construction, textiles, electronics, and manufacturing, remain crucial to global commerce yet are major contributors to environmental degradation,[145] GHG emissions, and biodiversity loss.[146] The implications of these supply chains extend beyond localized pollution: hazardous chemicals like POPs, endocrine disruptors, and heavy metals, including mercury, once introduced, can disperse across regions via wind, water, and international trade.

223. The GEF-8 IP on Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains demonstrated that addressing these issues requires strong governance, blended finance, collaborative stakeholder engagement, and technological innovation. Building on those lessons, the new Integrated Program explores a broader range of high-impact supply chains with the goal of establishing supply chains that are simultaneously pollution-free, zero waste and nature positive. By employing systemic, interlinked approaches, this program aims to reshape production and trade to safeguard both ecological integrity and socioeconomic development.

Framing of the Integrated Program

224. Under the GEF-8 program, joint efforts by governments, multinational corporations, and local stakeholders are poised to yield substantial reductions in toxic chemical usage and improvements in resource efficiency by combining public grants, philanthropic capital, and private-sector contributions, pilot projects successfully de-risked emerging technologies, spurring further investment in safer chemical substitutes, energy-saving manufacturing, and advanced waste processing. Policy reforms in participating countries will harmonize enforcement across different ministries, creating predictable business environments that incentivize compliance. Community-driven participation is proving equally important, especially involving women's groups and marginalized communities who often bear the brunt of pollution and other environmental impacts. The early work of this IP prompted an expanded vision: eliminating hazardous substances in more sectors, curbing carbon footprints throughout value chains, and embedding biodiversity conservation in industrial and agricultural operations.

Rationale for the Proposed GEF-9 Program

225. From textiles to electronics, modern supply chains generate substantial pollution, degrade ecosystems, and accelerate global warming. As evidence of climate tipping points and biodiversity loss accumulates,[147] siloed initiatives tackling these threats separately risk inefficiency and partial solutions. Instead, a holistic approach is needed to create cross-cutting

[145] Global Chemicals Outlook II, UNEP 2019

[146] IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

[147] Pollution and health: a progress update; Fuller, R. *et al*. The Lancet Planetary Health, Volume 6, Issue 6, e535 - e547

synergies and avoid negative tradeoffs. For example, phasing out hazardous chemicals typically lowers GHG emissions associated with high-energy waste treatment, while reforestation or regenerative agriculture strategies both restore ecosystems and sequester carbon.[148]

226. Eliminating hazardous chemicals toward a pollution-free, zero waste pathway requires a commitment to proactive chemical management, the adoption of safer alternatives, and robust regulatory frameworks. Similarly, promoting a net-zero pathway demands a comprehensive strategy encompassing secure and reliable energy production, energy efficiency improvements, and the integration of circular economy principles. Creating nature positive supply chains necessitates a shift towards actively contributing to ecosystem health through deforestation-free sourcing, agriculture, and ecosystem conservation initiatives, guided by frameworks like Science Based Targets Network (SBTN) and Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD).

227. The policy and governance landscape are also rapidly evolving, with increasing international and national regulations driving corporate accountability for supply chain sustainability. Organizations like the OECD[149] and the World Bank[150] provide invaluable guidance and recommendations for governments and businesses navigating this complex terrain. Effective governance mechanisms, built on collaboration and transparency, are crucial for translating policies and commitments into tangible environmental outcomes. The Global Framework on Chemicals also provides guidance on addressing chemicals and waste throughout their lifecycle in key economic systems.

228. Financing the transition requires innovative approaches that blend public and private capital, incentivize improved practices through financial instruments, and support investments in improved technologies. Technological advancements in areas such as pollution control, traceability, and logistics offer powerful tools for achieving environmental excellence in supply chains. Collaborative partnerships among diverse stakeholders, including businesses, governments, NGOs, and local communities, are essential for driving systemic change and fostering local empowerment. Finally, establishing robust monitoring, reporting, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms ensures transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the pursuit of sustainable supply chain management.

229. The IP for pollution-free supply chains has the potential to be a transformative force, contributing to a more environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically robust future. The GEF-9 program will orchestrate solutions at scale by aligning governance, finance, technology, and stakeholder involvement. It envisions supply chains that not only mitigate harm but actively regenerate ecological systems, strengthen communities, and set new benchmarks for corporate transparency. Transboundary cooperation among nations, policy coherence, private sector investment scaling and coordination in execution across supply chains will be encouraged.

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[148] Griscom, B.W. *et al*. (2017) – Natural Climate Solutions (PNAS)

[149] OECD Corporate Responsibility

[150] Resilient and Inclusive Supply-Chain Enhancement

Objectives, Key Interventions, and Selection Criteria

230. Creating pollution-free and zero waste supply chains involves systematically phasing out or significantly reducing hazardous chemicals, such as POPs, heavy metals, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and hazardous chemicals in plastics. Achieving this requires a combination of risk-based regulatory frameworks, advanced treatment technologies, systems redesign, widespread adoption of green, sustainable chemistry principles and access to finance and markets.

231. To achieve net-zero emissions, it is essential to expedite the transition to renewable energy sources, implement energy-efficient manufacturing processes, and adopt low-carbon logistics strategies, aligning operations with the Paris Agreement's objective of limiting global temperature rise to below 2°C. Integrating circular economy models further supports this effort by minimizing carbon intensity throughout supply chains.

232. Generating nature positive outcomes involves actively rehabilitating and protecting critical ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, and coral reefs located within or adjacent to supply chains. Adopting regenerative agricultural practices, ensuring deforestation-free sourcing, and initiating ecological restoration projects are crucial strategies for enhancing biodiversity and strengthening ecological robustness.

233. Achieving systemic transformation demands coherent policies that span environmental protection, international trade, labor rights, and industrial practices. Encouraging multi-stakeholder participation, from local communities to global corporations, is vital. Additionally, robust monitoring systems and continuous knowledge exchange are essential to sustain and scale transformative efforts effectively.

234. Ensuring comprehensive and lasting changes to global supply chains hinges on the strategic deployment of four key levers:

235. The first is blended finance, which involves combining public and philanthropic funding with private-sector capital to mitigate the risks associated with emerging sustainability measures. These include safer chemical alternatives, renewable energy adoption, and large-scale ecosystem restoration projects. Financial instruments link returns to tangible milestones in greenhouse gas or pollution reduction.

236. The second lever is private sector engagement. Encouraging companies, from global multinationals to small and medium-sized enterprises at national level, to adopt ambitious sourcing standards, prioritize safer materials, and embrace circular practices is crucial. Tools like supply chain audits and the formation of industry-wide coalitions help set shared norms. These efforts are further bolstered by transparent reporting practices and growing consumer and investor demand for responsible production.

237. Third, policy coherence and governance play a critical role. Harmonizing regulations related to chemicals, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity across various government ministries ensures consistent enforcement, including in public procurements. This creates a level playing field where compliant firms can innovate without being undermined by less scrupulous competitors. Landmark legislation, such as the EUDR and Germany's Supply Chain Act,

exemplifies how due diligence laws can enhance accountability for environmental impacts embedded in traded commodities.

238. Finally, whole of society participation is essential for equitable and effective implementation. Involving local communities, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth initiatives ensures that solutions are socially just and contextually relevant. Multi-stakeholder platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing, uphold social oversight, and catalyze grassroots innovation.

Program Components

239. Supply Chains to be addressed in this program can include but not be limited to the following high impact supply chains. The ultimate selection of supply chains will be done by participating countries. Plastics should not be selected for this IP as Plastics will be managed under a separate integrated program:

- Textiles – Commercial, Industrial and Apparel
- Electronics
- Critical Minerals
- Agriculture & Agro-Processing
- Construction
- Shipping

These supply chains frequently span multiple countries, underscoring the transboundary nature of pollution and the need for globally coordinated financing. Advancing substitutes for common supply chain pollutants through the bioeconomy may also be considered. The Pollution-free Supply Chains Integrated Program will include the following interventions:

1. *Strengthening Policy and Governance Frameworks*:

240. Establishing robust policy and governance structures, the crucial starting point for sustainable supply chains, must be a collaborative endeavor. Policy Alignment and Reform will be most effective through the creation of inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder task forces. These wide stakeholder bodies, comprising representatives from environment, trade, agriculture, industry ministries, Indigenous Peoples, women's associations, youth groups, labor unions, and relevant NGOs, will harmonize sectoral regulations, ensuring that chemical management, circular economy, and energy efficiency are mutually reinforcing and socially equitable. For instance, the design and implementation of EPR frameworks for electronics, or textiles will be enriched through participatory workshops with community advisory councils and civil society organizations, considering the livelihoods of informal waste workers and promoting fair labor practices. Similarly, enforcing Deforestation-Free Supply Chains requires traceability standards developed in consultation with Indigenous Peoples and local stakeholders, respecting their traditional knowledge and land rights, and incorporating mechanisms for grievance redress and benefit-sharing.

241. Effective enforcement and institutional capacity rely on a workforce equipped not only with technical skills but also with an understanding of the rights of diverse communities. Specialized training curricula for border agencies, environmental inspectorates, and labor departments will include modules on these crucial aspects. Upgrading data collection and monitoring systems (digital platforms, remote sensing, blockchain traceability) will be enhanced by incorporating input from citizen science initiatives and community-based monitoring programs, ensuring data accessibility and transparency for public accountability. Furthermore, the implementation of penalties for non-compliance and incentives for early will be carefully considered for potential impacts on SMEs and vulnerable populations, ensuring fair application and access.

2. *Mobilizing Blended Finance*

242. Transitioning to cleaner, more efficient supply chains requires innovative financing models that prioritize both environmental and social outcomes. Outcome-based instruments will be structured to tie financial returns not only to environmental performance but also to verified social metrics, such as job creation for marginalized groups, fair labor practices, and community benefits. "Clean Production Bonds," for example, will prioritize projects demonstrating positive social impacts through community engagement and safe working conditions. Similarly, sustainability-linked loans will incentivize companies based on progress in both environmental and social aspects of their operations and supply chains.

243. Risk mitigation tools must be designed to lower barriers for a diverse range of stakeholders. Establishing guarantees and first-loss capital arrangements will prioritize investments in projects with strong environmental and social safeguards, actively engaging and benefiting local communities. Blended-finance facilities pooling public and private resources for high-risk, high-reward demonstration projects (e.g., large-scale circular solutions). Capacitating local/national commercial banks to lend to businesses in transforming supply chains will involve training on assessing both environmental and social risks and opportunities and establishing guarantee mechanisms supporting SMEs and women-led enterprises.

3. *Fostering Private-Sector Partnerships and Industrial Upgrades*

244. The private sector's indispensable role in supply-chain transformation must be guided by principles of collaboration and social responsibility. Corporate Supply-Chain Engagement will be most effective through sector-specific platforms (for textiles, electronics, agribusiness, etc.) that bring together not only large corporations and local suppliers but also representatives from labor unions, community organizations, and environmental NGOs. These inclusive platforms will co-develop roadmaps that are both environmentally sound and socially just, sponsoring supplier development programs that offer training, technology transfer, and financing tools tailored to smaller firms, ensuring they can meet new sustainability standards while also improving labor conditions and promoting fairness.

245. Encouraging technology and process innovation will involve partnerships with R&D institutions and the active participation of workers and communities to ensure safety and address potential social impacts of technological change. Performance-based grants or low-interest loans for energy efficiency initiatives and green, sustainable chemistry adoption will be

linked to demonstrable environmental savings and improvements in worker health and safety. Building Circular Economy Infrastructure requires collaboration with informal waste worker organizations to revamp local collection and recycling systems, ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and opportunities for formalization. Industry associations and consumer groups will lead to eco-labeling standards that indicate not only environmental performance but also provide information on product durability, repairability, and the conditions of production.

4. *Implementing Cross-Sector Interventions for Integrated Nature Positive Outcomes*

246. Efforts to protect and restore ecosystems must be deeply integrated with social considerations. Landscape and Ecosystem Restoration will involve financial incentives (carbon credits, PES) for regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, and habitat restoration designed in consultation with local communities and Indigenous peoples, respecting their rights and traditional ecological knowledge. Urban and coastal restoration projects will prioritize the active involvement of local communities in design, implementation, and long-term management, ensuring equitable benefit distribution. Biodiversity Safeguards in Industrial Corridors will necessitate enforcing buffer zones and rehabilitating degraded land with the full participation and consent of local communities, addressing potential displacement or livelihood impacts through fair compensation and alternative opportunities. Co-financing pollution control systems in factories near sensitive habitats will be linked to demonstrable positive impacts on local communities' health and livelihoods.

5. *Monitoring, Reporting, and Knowledge Exchange through Transparency and Participation*

247. The success of sustainability initiatives hinges on transparent and inclusive monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Digital Traceability and Data Platforms will be implemented to track commodities, ensuring data accessibility for consumers, CSOs, and affected communities to verify both environmental and social compliance. Publicly accessible dashboards displaying real-time emissions data will enable community monitoring and participation in environmental oversight. Independent Verification and Reporting will involve contracting accredited third-party auditors whose selection is transparent and whose reports are publicly available, validating both environmental and social metrics. Public “Sustainability Scorecards” will incorporate both environmental and social performance indicators, actively soliciting feedback from diverse stakeholders on their design and content to ensure accountability and recognize leaders.

<u>Implementation Approach</u>

248. A multi-stakeholder steering committee, including the GEF Secretariat, GEF agencies, government ministries, industry, and civil society, oversees resource allocation, sets priorities, and approves child projects. Each child project aligns with the integrated theory of change, featuring robust monitoring protocols for chemical compliance, emissions reduction, and nature positive actions. Independent verifiers apply standardized frameworks such as the GHG Protocol (Scopes 1–3) and TNFD[151] guidelines to gauge progress.

[151] TNFD (2025) – Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures

249. Implementation proceeds in stages. Pilots in the first 1–3 years refine the financial and policy architecture while testing leading-edge solutions. Subsequent phases (3–7+ years) expand these proven approaches across broader geographies and additional commodities, securing deeper institutional buy-in. Ultimately, the supply chain actors themselves, driven by market demand, consumer awareness, and consistent regulation, sustain the momentum for pollution-free, nature positive practices.

250. To make these components actionable at scale, projects can begin by conducting a baseline assessment that maps key industries, their pollution hotspots, and greenhouse gas sources, as well as identifying critical ecosystems under threat. From there, they can formulate a national supply-chain action plan, prioritizing interventions according to environmental impact, economic value, and feasibility, and aligning these timelines with major international agreements such as the Stockholm Convention, Minamata Convention, Global Framework on Chemicals, the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

251. Projects should already at the design stage integrate options for mobilizing blended finance by creating bankable proposals that attract interest from development banks, philanthropic foundations, and private investors. In parallel, they should enact and enforce policy reforms to set up favorable legislative conditions and ensure real-world compliance. Pilot projects in selected regions or sectors serve as proving grounds, with rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks guiding subsequent scale-up. Throughout these stages, whole of society engagement, embodied in permanent multi-stakeholder councils and ongoing community consultations—guarantees local buy-in and shared decision-making. Finally, the "Report and Refine" phase uses transparent data reporting to assess impact, make evidence-based adjustments, and sustain momentum.

Selection Criteria for Projects

- Creating meaningful impact through eligible projects requires a multifaceted approach that addresses environmental, social, and governance dimensions.
- Projects should aim to eliminate or significantly reduce pollution from hazardous chemicals by presenting credible strategies for reducing, removing or disposing of POPs (including PFAS), mercury and other heavy metals, or other highly hazardous chemicals. These measures are vital for protecting both human health and environmental integrity.
- In parallel, initiatives should endeavor to contribute to global environmental goals by curbing greenhouse gas emissions. This can be achieved through the integration of renewable energy sources, adoption of low-carbon logistics, improvements in energy efficiency, implementation of circular economy strategies and/or use of greener chemistries.
- Protecting and restoring ecosystems is another critical element. Successful projects will demonstrate how efforts such as reforestation, regenerative agriculture, or habitat conservation contribute directly to advancing biodiversity objectives and strengthening ecological resistance.
- Projects must also embed systemic policy reforms. This involves providing evidence of alignment with supportive policies, such as EPR schemes, reverse supply chains,

procurement regulations, alongside strong enforcement mechanisms and coordination with national or regional frameworks.

- Effective initiatives will actively engage and empower women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed and culturally appropriate.
- Finally, robust monitoring and evaluation systems are essential. Projects should employ independent, verifiable metrics to track progress in reducing pollution from chemicals and waste, lowering carbon emissions, and conserving and restoring ecosystems. Transparent reporting and data sharing are key to fostering global learning and accountability.

Existing Platforms and Potential Partners

252. Achieving the vision of pollution-free, net-zero, and nature positive supply chains demands a unified effort from a wide range of stakeholders. The collective actions of global institutions, civil society, industry leaders, and local communities are essential to driving progress.

253. Multilateral organizations and development banks play a foundational role in this transformation. Institutions like the World Bank, the IFC, and regional development banks provide critical financial instruments such as blended finance, technical assistance, and risk guarantees to support infrastructure projects. Agencies including UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and UNIDO contribute with their deep policy expertise, data resources, and capacity-building initiatives that foster integrated strategies for chemical safety, climate neutrality, and biodiversity protection.

254. International NGOs and philanthropic foundations further bolster these efforts. Organizations such as WWF, TNC, and CI offer specialized knowledge in ecosystem restoration, biodiversity monitoring, and community engagement. Meanwhile, foundations like Rockefeller, Ford, and Bloomberg support pilot programs, research initiatives, and grassroots efforts that explore and scale innovative solutions.

255. Industry alliances and business platforms also serve as catalysts for lasting change. The WBCSD enables collaboration among major companies to chart sustainability roadmaps, while global commerce initiatives such as the Green Chemistry & Commerce Council (GC3) encourage peer learning and best practices in chemical safety. Sector-specific platforms like The Fashion Pact address the environmental footprint of industries like textiles and apparel, committing to biodiversity and environmental goals.

256. Certification and standard-setting bodies ensure accountability and transparency across supply chains. Entities like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Fairtrade uphold rigorous standards for sustainable resource use and ethical labor practices. Frameworks from the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) and the TNFD guide companies in measuring and disclosing their environmental and climate impacts.

257. Technology and data platforms are indispensable in creating traceable and verifiable supply chains. Tools like blockchain solutions offered by Tracextech and EFL Global enhance real-

time visibility, while the GHG Protocol provides standardized methods for tracking emissions across all scopes, promoting transparency and consistency.

258. National and regional government networks foster policy alignment and shared responsibility. Coalitions of environment ministries work to harmonize regulations on hazardous chemicals and climate targets across borders. PPPs mobilize joint investments to mainstream improved technologies in strategic sectors and regions.

259. The Global Framework on Chemicals provides guidance for addressing chemicals and waste throughout their lifecycle in key economic systems where these supply chains operate. Finally, local communities and civil society organizations are at the heart of implementation. Community-based organizations bring essential local knowledge, help with monitoring, and ensure accountability among suppliers. Women's cooperatives and youth councils play a pivotal role in promoting equitable benefit-sharing, elevating emerging voices, and ensuring that program efforts are fair and intergenerational.

Contributions of this Program to Global Environmental Benefits and MEAs

260. By systematically eliminating toxic chemicals, decarbonizing industrial operations, and embedding nature-based solutions[152], the Integrated Program fulfills multiple MEAs, including:

- Stockholm Convention on POPs: Phasing out POPs through regulatory controls and safe alternatives.
- Minamata Convention on Mercury: Halting mercury use in manufacturing processes and controlling emissions.
- Global Framework on Chemicals: Improving the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes: Improving hazardous-waste handling, preventing cross-border dumping.
- Paris Agreement: Reducing GHG emissions in line with net-zero targets and limiting global warming below 2°C.
- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: Halting and reversing nature loss via reforestation, biodiversity corridors, and deforestation-free sourcing. Specifically the interventions proposed in this integrated IP are likely to directly relevant to the following targets: Target 7 (Reduce pollution), Target 8 (Minimize Climate Change Impacts), Target 10 (Sustainability in Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry), Target 14 (Mainstreaming Biodiversity), Target 15 (Business Responsibility), Target 18 (Incentives and Subsidies), Target 19 (Resource Mobilization), Target 20 (Knowledge, Technology and Capacity), Target 21 (Indigenous and Local Knowledge) and Target 22 (Inclusive and Equitable Participation).

[152] GEF, forthcoming, Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions in GEF Projects.

261. In addition to meeting treaty obligations, the program delivers tangible global environmental benefits. Soil health and water quality improve as toxins are phased out; GHG emissions decline through renewable energy and efficiency measures; and biodiversity rebounds from targeted habitat restoration. Jobs in eco-friendly manufacturing, regenerative agriculture, and waste management bolster local livelihoods.

Role of the Private Sector and Blended Finance in Supporting this Program

262. In the collective pursuit of pollution-free, net-zero, and nature positive supply chains, governments and international organizations lay the groundwork by crafting vital policy frameworks and deploying funding mechanisms. Yet, it is the private sector that holds a unique and powerful position to accelerate the pace, expand the scale, and inject the innovation necessary to turn these ambitions into reality.

263. Private enterprises play a multifaceted role in driving this transformation. One of their most immediate contributions lies in financing and investment. Corporations with deep capital reserves can swiftly scale up solutions to shift investment to safer chemicals, renewable energy projects, and efficient logistics infrastructure. Moreover, by co-investing with development banks or philanthropic organizations, they help de-risk emerging technologies like advanced water treatment systems or carbon capture solutions, making these innovations more attractive and accessible to wider markets.

264. The private sector also leads the charge in innovation and technology. Within private R&D labs and entrepreneurial start-ups, breakthrough ideas take shape including biodegradable materials, AI-powered climate risk analytics, and other cutting-edge solutions are developed here. Once proven, these innovations benefit from the commercial power of corporations, gaining rapid traction and transforming from niche prototypes into new industry standards.

265. Beyond product development, private companies wield significant influence over global supply chains. Multinational firms can set and enforce rigorous environmental standards across their networks, requiring deforestation-free sourcing, low-toxicity inputs, and low-carbon operations. They can further enhance accountability and transparency by deploying digital tools such as blockchain and IoT sensors, providing real-time data on carbon emissions, pollution levels, and biodiversity impacts for stakeholders across the board.

266. In the marketplace, businesses also shape consumer behavior. Through strategic marketing and clear product labeling, they can raise awareness and drive demand for net-zero, environmentally responsible goods. This, in turn, nudges the entire system toward more sustainable production and consumption. Companies that embrace these forward-thinking values not only contribute to the planet's health but also gain competitive advantages, strengthening their brand reputation and consumer loyalty.

267. Finally, collaboration and partnerships are essential to sustained progress. Private companies are increasingly forming alliances with NGOs, academia, and local communities, co-developing shared standards and championing best practices, whether it is the phase-out of hazardous chemicals or large-scale ecosystem restoration. Larger firms also play a critical role in

uplifting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), offering training, technology transfers, and financial support to help them transition to greener practices.

268. In embracing these roles, private-sector actors become both catalysts for change and beneficiaries of a more sustainable world. Their leadership not only aligns with environmental stewardship but also secures long-term business resilience in an increasingly conscious global economy.

FOCAL AREAS

269. Focal Areas provide predictable funding for recipient country actions in pursuit of national environmental priorities and global MEA commitments. GEF Focal Areas provide core investments in conservation, mitigation and restoration activities and, as highlighted by the IEO's OPS-8, deliver significant environmental outcomes.[153] Investments follow the guidance of relevant MEAs and align with recipient country national development plans. In addition to technical projects and programs enhancing nature conservation, mitigation of pollutants and planetary change, and providing restoration and regenerative solutions for degraded ecosystems, GEF Focal Areas provide core support for MEA enabling activities and reporting. Focal Areas feature programs, regional and global, on priorities and opportunities at those scales (e.g., GEF-8 FARM+ agricultural chemicals program), and national and transboundary projects that may be single or multiple focal area. Multiple focal area projects are increasingly common as the GEF seeks to maximize efficiency, synergy and lasting impact in its investment approach.

270. GEF-8 focal area investments are yielding important global environment benefits. As of June 2025, GEF-8 focal area programs and projects have supported the conservation of 218 million hectares of protected areas, restored over 9 million hectares of land and ecosystems, reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 1,905 million metric tons, improved management across 40 transboundary water ecosystems, and removed over 261 thousand metric tons of hazardous chemicals and waste.[154]

271. GEF-9 focal areas strategies are designed to amplify GEF-8 achievements, advancing integrated and transformational actions, and responding to emerging global environmental challenges. The GEF Focal Areas, described in detail in the pages that follow, include:

a) Biodiversity (BD)
b) Climate Change (CC)
c) Land Degradation (LD)
d) International Waters (IW)
e) Chemicals & Waste (CW)

Biodiversity

Global Context of Biodiversity

272. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines biodiversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic

[153] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[154] GEF-8 Corporate Scorecard June 2025.

ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems."

273. In addition to its intrinsic and relational values, biodiversity is a societal asset that makes significant contributions to advance human prosperity and quality of life.[155] We depend on biodiversity for food, health, clean air and water, security from natural disasters, and for recreation and cultural inspiration. More than half of global gross domestic product (over $50 trillion of global annual economic output) is dependent on nature.[158] Peace and human conflicts are also commonly influenced by natural resource competition and scarcity.[156]

274. As nature underpins the health of the planet upon which we reside, and itself is sustained by the diversity and distribution of biodiversity, urgent action at global scale to reduce biodiversity loss is a key priority for humanity. Three quarters of terrestrial ecosystems have been significantly altered, a quarter of assessed plant and animal species are threatened with extinction, and genetic diversity is declining in wild and domesticated species.[133, 157] If delayed merely ten years, the costs of addressing biodiversity loss would likely double, and the probability of global species extinctions – for which the rate is already tens to hundreds of times higher than averaged in the past 10 million years – would increase for the 1 million species that currently face extinction.[158]

275. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction ("BBNJ"), which was adopted in June 2023, identifies the GEF as part of its Financial Mechanism. The GEF-9 International Waters Focal Area Strategy is specifically designed to support its implementation through its objective 2 "Supporting the BBNJ Agreement". The GEF-9 Biodiversity Strategy supports activities that are mutually supportive of the implementation of the CBD and the BBNJ Agreement.

[155] IPBES (2022). Summary for Policymakers of the Methodological Assessment Report on the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6522392.

[156] Rist, L., Norström, A., & Queiroz, C. (2024). Biodiversity, peace and conflict: understanding the connections. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *68*, 101431.

[157] IPBES (2019). Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673.

[158] IPBES (2024). Summary for Policymakers of the Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13850289.

Relevant COP Decisions[159]

276. Adopted by the CBD COP 15 in December 2022, the KMGBF[160] sets out an ambitious pathway to achieve our shared global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among the Framework's key elements are 23 targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and put nature on a path to recovery by 2030 and four 2050 goals. CBD COP 15 requested the GEF to establish the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) in 2023. GBFF was fully operational, with programming well under way, in 2024.

277. Among considerations for its implementation[161], the KMGBF recognizes that a whole of government and society approach is required to achieve its goals and targets. Women's empowerment, and youth responsive approaches and the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) are necessary elements for successful implementation of the framework that were further operationalized through the Programme of Work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the CBD related to IPLCs to 2030 adopted by CBD COP 15 and 16, respectively.

Table 3: Elements of the four-year outcome-oriented framework for biodiversity programme priorities of the CBD and its Protocols for the GEF-9 period

Main elements of CBD COP 16 guidance	Delivery mechanism
The four-year outcome-oriented framework of biodiversity programme priorities for the period 2026–2030 includes the following elements under the CBD and its Protocols for which effective implementation support is to be provided: (a) The balanced implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. (b) The KMGBF, including each of its goals and targets, which define the outcomes being sought. (c) National biodiversity strategies and action plans, including national targets on biodiversity. (d) National biodiversity finance plans or similar instruments. (e) The mechanisms and strategies adopted under the Convention to strengthen the means of implementation of the	(a)–(c): Main delivery mechanisms are Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Integrated Programs of the GEF Trust Fund; and GBFF. Projects developed through other programming lines of the GEF Trust Fund, the LDCF and SCCF may contribute. (d): Objective 3 of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Action Area 4 of the GBFF.

[159] As operating entity of the financial mechanisms of multiple MEAs, the GEF functions under the guidance of, and is accountable to, Conference of the Parties (COP) for the purpose of their respective conventions. The GEF regularly reports to COP on how it has responded to the guidance provided. *Instrument for the Establishment of the Global Environment Facility, January 2025*

[160] CBD. (2022). KMGBF, CBD/COP/DEC/15/4.

[161] Section C of the KMGBF.

KMGBF, in particular eligible activities under the following mechanisms: (i) The revised strategy for resource mobilization. (ii) The long-term strategic framework for capacity-building and development. (iii) The knowledge management strategy to support the implementation of the KMGBF. (f) Eligible activities under the plans of action adopted under the Convention to support the effective and inclusive implementation of the KMGBF, including: (i) The plan of action on subnational governments, cities and other local authorities for biodiversity (2023–2030). (ii) The Gender Plan of Action (2023–2030). (iii) The global action plan on biodiversity and health. (g) The monitoring framework for the KMGBF and the enhanced multidimensional approach to planning, monitoring, reporting and review. (h) The implementation plan and the capacity-building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. (i) The capacity-building and development action plan for the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization. (j) The guidance on programme priorities to support the implementation of the Protocols, adopted by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol at its eleventh meeting and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol at its fifth meeting, contained in enclosures I and II, respectively.	(e) (i): Objective 3 of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Action Area 4 of the GBFF. (e) (ii)-(iii): Addressed as cross-cutting elements in all GEF and GBFF projects, including through the requirements on Knowledge Management Approach in all projects set in GEF guidance on the project and program cycle policy (f) (i): Delivery mechanisms: Sustainable Cities IP. Objective 1 of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy may contribute. (f) (ii): Addressed as a cross-cutting element in all GEF and GBFF projects through GEF Policy (f) (iii): Objective 1 of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy; Chemicals and Waste Focal Area and most Integrated Programs (Global Wildlife for Development IP, Food Systems, Pollution-free Supply Chains, Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution, Sustainable Cities, Drylands and Drought Management) (g): Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy through Enabling Activities, including for national reports and support to monitoring systems (h) - (j) Objective 2 of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Action Area 8 of the GBFF

GEF-9 Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming

278. The goal of the GEF-9 BD focal area strategy is for globally significant biodiversity to be conserved, sustainably used, and restored. To achieve this goal, the strategy will support the following three objectives:

a. Improve conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of biodiversity through integrated landscape/seascape approaches
b. Strengthen biosafety and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources, including through the implementation of the Cartagena and Nagoya protocols.
c. Realign financial flows and mobilize resources for biodiversity.

279. Projects using Biodiversity STAR allocations will be requested to demonstrate their alignment with and contribution to implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans and, for Objective 3, to Biodiversity Finance Plans.

Objective 1. To improve conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of biodiversity through integrated landscape/seascape approaches (Goals A and B of the KMGBF)

280. GEF-9 continues the strategic shift initiated in GEF-8 towards an area-based investment strategy focused on integrated landscape/seascape management approaches[162] that use multiple tools and strategies to respond to the drivers of biodiversity loss within large landscape and seascape mosaics.[163] Context-tailored combinations of nature- and people-oriented conservation measures, restoration, sustainable use, and biodiversity mainstreaming approaches in the context of large, landscape/seascape-scale investments are likely to achieve more durable outcomes for biodiversity, including through enhanced connectivity. They are also cost-effective for achieving co-benefits with water, food, health, and climate, and amplifying environmental, economic and social outcomes.[164]

[162] Integrated landscape management and landscape approaches have no universally agreed definition. For GEF, support to integrated landscape/seascape management refers to an investment strategy that provides tools for allocating and managing terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems to most effectively achieve GEF's mandate to deliver global biodiversity benefits while supporting important social, economic, and environmental co-benefits in areas where agriculture, fisheries, mining, forestry, etc. compete with biodiversity goals. This approach is fully consistent with the ecosystem approach long espoused by the CBD and the landscape approach discussed at SBSTTA 15 and within the recommended guiding principles for landscape level approaches (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/13)

[163] In the context of the GEF-9 strategy, mosaics are defined as networks of protected areas and complementary landscapes/seascapes that include combinations of protected areas, OECMs, ICCAs, sustainable use areas, production landscapes and seascapes, and IPLC managed lands and waters. Landscapes include all the freshwater and aquatic biodiversity therein

[164] Carmenta, R., *et al*. (2020). Characterizing and Evaluating Integrated Landscape Initiatives. *One Earth, 2*(2), 174–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2020.01.009

281. Consistent with the GEF mandate to generate global environmental benefits, targeted landscapes and seascapes will contain globally important biodiversity. Project proponents will demonstrate:

- The global importance of the project's anticipated biodiversity benefits. It typically requires justifying the project`s contribution to the persistence of biodiversity components - genes, species, or ecosystems - in relation to their worldwide extent or population size. Proponents will be invited to use the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) standard[165] or other criteria commonly used to identify areas for biodiversity conservation, but other well-justified criteria will be accepted with consideration for the specific project context and data availability.[166]
- Adequacy of the chosen landscape(s)/seascape(s) boundaries and project interventions to contribute to the persistence of targeted globally significant biodiversity given its current and future spatial distribution, including under climate change, and given projected ecological connectivity within the landscape(s)/seascape(s) and with the wider environment.[167]

282. Embedded as a fundamental element in this approach is the central role of IPLC-managed lands and waters and ICCAs, and their contribution to improved biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and critical socio-economic benefits at local and national levels.

283. Transboundary cooperation among nations, policy coherence, and coordination in execution will be encouraged, particularly for species reliant upon migratory corridors and to address the need to manage ecosystems at a scale ensuring the sustained provision of ecosystem services, ecological function and adaptive capacity to a changing Earth system. Strategies that can be supported in an integrated landscape/seascape intervention are described below.

284. Integrated governance and spatial planning (KMGBF Targets 1, 14, 21, 22, 23)

As key ingredient of projects under Objective 1, the GEF will support the development or strengthening of integrated governance arrangements, joint planning processes, including biodiversity-inclusive spatial land/sea-use planning, clarification of land tenure and resource rights, and policy reform and development for greater policy coherence. GEF will also fund decision support tools, such as Natural Capital Assessment and Accounting (NCAA), to help maximize the fulfillment of biodiversity targets, optimize co-benefits and manage trade-offs in spatial planning or other landscape/seascape management decisions. This will also include analytics to identify the distributional impact, i.e. winners and losers, of potential policy and

[165] KBA Standards and Appeals Committee of IUCN SSC/WCPA (2022). Guidelines for using A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas. *Version 1.2*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

[166] Asaad *et al*. (2017) identified 8 commonly used criteria: (1) habitat rarity or uniqueness; (2) habitat fragility/sensitivity; (3) ecological integrity; (4) habitat representativity; (5) presence of species of conservation concern; (6) occurrence of restricted range species; (7) species richness; and (8) importance for life history stage.

[167] GEF STAP, 2025, Considerations for biodiversity conservation in the Anthropocene, A STAP Information Note, Council document GEF/STAP/C.70/Inf.04.

management changes, and define adequate transition plans or compensatory measures. While optimal governance structures will vary among landscapes/seascapes, inclusive[168], accountable and adaptive governance is essential for success of integrated landscape/seascape approaches and to foster the transformative change required to address the drivers of biodiversity loss.[169] Projects will thus support the development and/or use of coordinating structures and processes that enhance the engagement of multiple actors through horizontal (e.g., across various sectors) and vertical (e.g., multilevel governance) channels to address fragmented and sectoral decision-making, diverse values, and inadequate scaling of actions. Such coordinating structures should contribute to participation in decision-making and access to information related to biodiversity by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in line with KMGBF Target 22. By focusing on multi-sectoral approaches and trade-off identification and management, this set of interventions contributes to operationalizing IEO's recommendations 3 and 4 for GEF Support to Mainstreaming Biodiversity[170] and STAP's conclusions on Natural Capital approaches[171] and Nature-Based Solutions.[172]

285. Financial Sustainability, Effective Management, and Ecosystem Coverage of Protected Area Systems, OECMs, and Indigenous and traditional territories (KMGBF Target 3)

GEF will strengthen three elements of a sustainable system of protected areas and OECMs:[173] (i) effective protection of ecologically viable and climate-resilient representative samples of the country's ecosystems and adequate coverage of threatened species to ensure long term persistence; sufficient and maintained (ii) financial resources and (ii) individual and institutional capacity at the site and system-level to manage protected areas and OECMs. Support will also be provided for the sustained stewardship of indigenous and traditional territories, including the recognition and realization of the rights of IPLCs to control and manage their lands, territories, and waters. GEF will continue to promote the empowerment, participation, and capacity building of IPLCs in the design, implementation, and (co-)management of protected areas and OECMs.

286. New protected areas established with GEF support will be globally significant as defined

[168] OECD (2020), "What does "inclusive governance" mean? : Clarifying theory and practice", *OECD Development Policy Papers*, No. 27, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/960f5a97-en.

[169] IPBES (2024). Summary for Policymakers of the Thematic Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11382230

[170] GEF IEO (2019) Evaluation of GEF Support to Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

[171] GEF STAP (2022) Natural Capital Approaches: Lessons Learned. A STAP Information Brief.

[172] GEF STAP (2020) *Nature-based solutions and the GEF*. A STAP Advisory Document.

[173] OECMs are defined as a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio–economic, and other locally relevant values (CBD/COP/DEC/14/8).

by the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) standard.[174] When KBA criteria are not met, proposals will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Notably, the GEF biodiversity focal area will support the protection of areas recognized by the CBD as ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSA)[175] focusing on areas within national jurisdictions.[176]

287. Legal and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (KMGBF Targets 4, 5)

GEF will support efforts to ensure the legal and sustainable use of: (a) wild and native species from terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems; and (b) agrobiodiversity including protection of Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) in-situ through CWR Reserves; plant genetic resources, through farmer management, in Vavilov Centers of Diversity and other globally important diversity centers[177]; and animal genetic resources to conserve the wild relatives of domesticated livestock. GEF will also support customary sustainable use of biodiversity by IPLCs, thereby supporting the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Sustainable Customary Use. GEF biodiversity mainstreaming efforts in the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism sectors will also support sustainable use.

288. Biodiversity Mainstreaming[178] in Priority Sectors (KMGBF Targets 10, 14)

GEF will continue to focus primarily on supporting the following suite of activities to advance biodiversity mainstreaming:

- Changing production practices to be more sustainable for biodiversity, with a focus on sectors that have significant impacts on biodiversity: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism, extractive industries (gas, oil, and mining), and infrastructure development.
- Integrate biodiversity values into policy, upstream planning and decision-making, to avoid biodiversity loss, including in the design and financing of infrastructure, such as transportation and energy infrastructure.
- Developing or amending policy and regulatory frameworks to reform incentives harmful to biodiversity and provide incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
- NCAA exercises designed to respond to specific decisions or policy questions.

[174] CBD (2018). Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. CBD/COP/DEC/14/8

[175] Convention on Biological Diversity. *Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA).* https://www.cbd.int/ebsa

[176] Protected areas in Areas beyond national jurisdiction will be supported through the International Waters Focal Area, as part of its support to the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

[177] Results from these investments may also generate important co-benefits for the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

[178] The GEF defines biodiversity mainstreaming as "the process of embedding biodiversity considerations into policies, strategies, and practices of key public and private actors that impact or rely on biodiversity so that it is conserved and sustainably used both locally and globally."

289. Restoration (KMGBF Target 2)

The Biodiversity Focal Area will support cost-effective restoration activities that improve the status of globally significant biodiversity, including through enhanced connectivity. Proponents are invited to align opportunities provided by other focal areas to fund restoration activities targeting specific ecosystem services with benefits for biodiversity of global significance.

290. Prevention, Control and Management of Invasive Alien Species (KMGBF Target 6)

GEF-9 will continue to focus its support on addressing Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in island ecosystems. Ninety percent of documented global extinctions attributed mainly to IAS have occurred on islands.[179] GEF will support the implementation of comprehensive prevention, early detection, control, and management frameworks that emphasize a risk management approach by focusing on the highest risk invasion pathways. Targeted eradication will be supported in specific circumstances where proven, low-cost approaches exist, reintroduction risks can be minimized, and it would support the persistence of globally significant biodiversity.

291. For support outside of island ecosystems, proponents are invited to use the opportunities provided by Action Area Seven (Invasive alien species management and control) of the GBFF.

292. Synergies with other Conventions and objectives, including health (KMGBF Targets 7,8, 11)

Synergies: Proponents are encouraged to use the coherent and flexible framework offered by integrated landscape/seascape approaches to build Focal Area and Multi-Trust Fund projects combining interventions eligible under the Biodiversity Strategy with activities under other GEF Strategies to deliver on multiple MEAs in a synergistic manner. Such projects will promote cooperation and complementarity in the implementation of CBD and the related objectives of the other conventions served by the GEF, as well as those of other biodiversity-related conventions, recognizing the potential contributions of those instruments to the objectives of the CBD, its Protocols and to the KMGBF. Combined interventions may include, among others, SLM interventions on productive land (Land Degradation Focal Area), demonstration of scalable approaches to pollution prevention (Chemicals & Waste Focal Area), mini-grids systems in rural and peri-urban areas and electric cooking (Climate Change Mitigation Focal Area), which can enhance energy access while reducing pressure on natural ecosystem within targeted landscapes, or coherent and coordinated integrated landscape/seascape approaches across multiple geographies along migratory pathways. In addition, proponents are expected to optimize the climate mitigation and adaptation co-benefits of the intervention funded under objective 1 of the Biodiversity Strategy.

[179] IPBES (2023). Summary for Policymakers of the Thematic Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7430692

293. Health: To support the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health adopted by COP 16,[180] proponents are invited to embed in projects designed under Objective 1, relevant interventions that harness biodiversity and health interlinkages, while delivering benefits for biodiversity of global significance. Proponents will be encouraged to monitor and evaluate the health co-benefits of such projects. Embedded interventions may include those identified by the IPBES Nexus Assessment, notably:

- Strengthening policy integration and collaboration across the Environment and Health sectors through integrated governance models and inter-ministerial coordination, in line with the One Health approach
- Pandemic prevention through protected areas and corridors that reduce zoonotic disease spillover risk
- Wetland and mangrove conservation that contributes to clean water and associated disease prevention
- Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for traditional and modern medicine, including through IPLC-led conservation and benefit-sharing agreements under the Nagoya Protocol.
- Incorporating health impact assessments in land-and sea-use planning.

294. Flyways: If met with sufficient country demand, a programmatic approach dedicated to flyways would support integrated landscape/seascape approaches across multiple geographies in a coherent and coordinated manner. Migratory birds travel thousands of miles along routes called flyways, which include sites where they can rest, feed and breed. A decline in migratory birds thus indicates the deterioration of the ecological systems they encounter during their life cycle[181]. Impacted by habitat loss, climate change, hunting, and collision with energy infrastructure, nearly 10% of all migratory birds are threatened with extinction. Cumulative impacts on flyways also lead to adverse effects on a host of other species, and loss of ecosystem services and livelihoods. The transboundary nature of flyways means that international collaboration and coordinated responses that address threats at the site, national, regional and global scales is essential to conserving migratory birds and the habitats on which they depend. The program would be funded with country STAR resources . The program would work in partnership with international organizations, governments, private sector and IPLCs, taking an integrated approach that combines policy, planning and site-based measures. It will support several KMGBF targets (including 1, 3, 4, 8, 9) with contributions to the CMS and Ramsar Convention.

Bioeconomy: If met with sufficient country demand, a programmatic approach dedicated to advancing the Bioeconomy would support biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation, land

[180] CBD (2024). *Biodiversity and health*. CBD/COP/DEC/16/19

[181] Eren, S., *et al*. (2024). Flyways beyond migratory pathways: The case of waterbird conservation. Conservation and Society, 22(2), 74-85.

restoration and sustainable livelihoods, enhancing coherence across MEAs and across multiple geographies in a coordinated manner. As reflected in the G20 High-Level Principles on Bioeconomy—endorsed at Leader level—bioeconomy provides an integrated pathway to deliver biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation, land restoration, circularity and inclusive development. It would support science-based, nature positive value chains that enhance Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' livelihoods, while being aligned with relevant CBD guidance. The program would be funded with country STAR resources. The program would take an integrated approach that combines policy, innovative financing and private sector mobilization, as well as site-based interventions embedded in integrated landscape/seascape approaches that deliver benefits for globally significant biodiversity, as described under objective 1 of this Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy.

295. Project proponents may also embed Mother Earth-centric actions[182] that deliver global environmental benefits within integrated landscape-seascape approaches.

Objective 2. To strengthen biosafety and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources, including through the implementation of the Cartagena and Nagoya protocols (Goals A, B and C of the KMGBF)

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

296. The GEF will support the ratification of the Protocol by the countries that have not done so and support the implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks (NBFs), in line with the implementation plan[183] and capacity-building action plan[184] adopted by COP-MOP 10 in 2022. The aim of GEF investment is to build capacity to ensure that countries have functional NBFs and are in full compliance with the requirements of the Protocol and have mobilized adequate resources to support its implementation.

297. In the context of country-driven projects, eligible Parties will be supported to implement the provisions of the Protocol, including: development or alignment of biosafety legislation; capacity building and strengthening of infrastructure related to detection and identification of living modified organisms; capacity building related to risk assessment and risk management; and enhancing public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. They will also be supported in developing or acquiring

[182] Mother-Centric Actions are defined in Target 19 of the KMGBF as "Ecocentric and rights-based approach enabling the implementation of actions towards harmonic and complementary relationships between peoples and nature, promoting the continuity of all living beings and their communities and ensuring the non-commodification of environmental functions of Mother Earth"

[183] CBD (2022). *Implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety* CBD/CP/MOP/DEC/10/3, annex.

[184] CBD (2022). Capacity-building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress (CBD/CP/MOP/DEC/10/4), annex.

certified reference materials, in knowledge-sharing and technology transfer, including establishing regional networks of laboratories, and implementation of action plans to achieve compliance with the Cartagena Protocol.

298. Many national biosafety frameworks were originally designed to address living modified organisms (LMOs) and may not fully encompass emerging biotechnologies (e.g., CRISPR) and synthetic biology. The novel traits and applications arising from these technologies necessitate updated methodologies for risk assessment and management. GEF will thus support countries in revising and strengthening their NBF and national biotechnology strategies, and in building their technical capacity to assess, monitor, and manage the risks and benefits associated with these emerging biotechnologies.

299. The GEF will also provide support for the ratification and implementation of the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB). There will also be a specific focus on capacity building and regional cooperation to support the effective implementation of the supplementary Protocol.

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), including the Nagoya Protocol

300. GEF will support national and regional implementation of the Nagoya Protocol, in line with capacity-building and development action plan[185] adopted by COP-MOP 5 in 2024. GEF will support ratification of the Protocol by non-Party countries eligible to the GEF. The GEF will also support the establishment of national policy, legal, institutional framework for the implementation of the multilateral mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources (DSI), which CBD COP 15 decided to establish[186] and CBD COP 16 operationalized. The following core activities will be supported:

a. Stocktaking and assessment (gap analysis of policies, laws, regulations, and institutional capacity, including research organizations; stakeholder identification, user rights and intellectual property rights).
b. Development or revision of national ABS frameworks, including national laws and policies that promote scientific research and development and national investments on the use of genetic resources.
c. Development of long-term institutional capacities for managing, monitoring, enforcing, and evaluating national ABS frameworks, including the capacities of IPLCs and relevant stakeholders to participate in legal, policy and decision-making processes and secure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.
d. Capacity-building to add value to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge for access and benefit-sharing, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable use.

[185] CBD (2024), *Capacity-building and development and awareness-raising* (CBD/NP/MOP/DEC/5/3), annex.

[186] CBD (2022), Digital sequence information on genetic resources (CBD/COP/DEC/15/9)

e. Monitoring of both monetary and non-monetary benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, in alignment with Target 13 and Goal C of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

301. Projects related to ABS will be requested to ensure alignment of national measures on access and benefit-sharing from DSI with the multilateral mechanism, including to ensure no duplication of expectations to share the benefits arising from DSI under the multilateral mechanism. Countries will also be supported in taking administrative, policy or legislative measures to incentivize DSI users in their jurisdiction to contribute to the global fund in line with the modalities of the multilateral mechanism.

302. In recognition of the importance of genetic resources for food and agriculture and in achieving food security worldwide, the GEF will consider projects for the mutually supportive implementation of the Nagoya Protocol, and of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and/or the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge for countries that are Parties to these instruments. These projects may include support for traditional practices and Indigenous Peoples' food systems that contribute to nutrition and food security while safeguarding biodiversity.

303. Eligible countries that are parties to the relevant agreements are invited to combine support from the International Waters focal area and Biodiversity STAR resources programmed under Objective 2 of the Biodiversity Strategy to build synergies in their national frameworks and capacity building efforts for the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol, the CBD and ABS provisions of the BBNJ Agreement.

304. The GEF will also enhance the national implementation of the Nagoya and Cartagena Protocols through regional collaboration, which can be cost-effective through sharing regulatory and scientific resources.

Objective 3. To realign financial flows and mobilize domestic resources for biodiversity (Goal D of the KMGBF)

305. The recent IPBES Nexus assessment[158] estimates the global biodiversity finance gap at $0.3–1 trillion per year. It highlights that current economic and financial systems allocate 35 times more resources towards economic activities that directly damage biodiversity than they provide to support nature. Private investment in activities that damage biodiversity is incentivized both by harmful subsidies and the wider enabling environment, which permits externalities that remain unaccounted for in production and consumption choices.

306. CBD COP 16 adopted the Revised strategy for resource mobilization (2026-2030)[187] to increase substantially and progressively the level of financial resources from all sources, align

[187] CBD (2025), *Resource Mobilization*, CBD/COP/DEC/16/34

fiscal and financial flows with goals and targets of the KMGBF, and encourage the private sector to reduce negative and increase positive impacts on biodiversity progressively. The revised strategy includes the development, update and implementation of national biodiversity finance plans and multiple actions targeted at enhancing the contribution of multilateral development banks.

307. The KMGBF recognizes that an increased ODA is required to achieve its goals and targets, but also that ODA will continue to represent only a fraction of the global biodiversity finance gap. Realignment of financial flows and mobilization of new and additional domestic resources is thus to play a central role and largely rests upon setting the proper policy environment for public and private finance and fostering policy coherence.

308. Since its inception, the GEF has supported about half of the Conservation Trust Funds worldwide,[188] many payments for ecosystem services schemes[189, 190] and Project Finance for Permanence approaches,[191] a debt-for-nature conversion facility, national Access and Benefit Sharing measures,[192] and several innovative bonds, including the first sovereign blue bond[193] and outcome payment bonds.[194] Thanks to its central role in developing blended finance models for biodiversity, the GEF has been the largest contributor to private finance mobilization for biodiversity through ODA, accounting for 75% of the total over 2017-2020.[195] The GEF has also contributed to shaping the nascent biodiversity credit markets[196] and supported catalytic initiatives leveraging philanthropic resources, such as the Blue Nature Alliance,[197] which has mobilized more than $115 million of co-finance for the conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems.

309. To step up and systematize these efforts, GEF-8 introduced domestic resource mobilization as an objective of the Biodiversity Focal Area strategy and provided support to 91 countries to develop their first national biodiversity finance plans (BFP). Building on and

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[188] GEF (2024) *How Conservation Trust Funds Are Driving Progress for Nature*

[189] GEF (2014) *GEF investments on Payment for ecosystem services schemes.*

[190] GEF (2023) *Payments for Ecosystem Services*

[191] Cabrera *et al*. (2021) *Securing sustainable financing for conservation areas: a guide to project finance for permanence*. Washington D.C. Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program and WWF.

[192] UNDP-GEF (2021) *Access to genetic resources and benefit sharing. Theory to Practice under the Nagoya Protocol.*

[193] https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/press-releases/seychelles-launches-worlds-first-sovereign-blue-bond

[194] GEF (2022) A new lifeline for wildlife conservation finance.

[195] OECD (2023) *A decade of development finance for biodiversity*. https://doi.org/10.1787/e6c182aa-en

[196] GEF (2023) *Innovative Finance for Nature and People*

[197] *https://www.bluenaturealliance.org/*

expanding UNDP's Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), the GEF Umbrella Programme to Support Development of BFPs has been helping countries create enabling conditions, including baseline diagnostics, capacity, and institutional arrangements, required to mobilize resources at scale to implement the KMGBF.

310. The GEF-9 Biodiversity Strategy consolidates and builds on this baseline GEF-8 investment to strengthen GEF's central role in developing the pathway to KMGBF Targets 18 and 19. The GEF, including the GBFF designed to receive contributions from all sources, will directly contribute to Target 19(a) as the prime channel for multilateral biodiversity finance and continue to leverage direct co-financing. In addition, Objective 3 will contribute to Targets 18 and 19(b), (c), (d) and (g) by supporting initiatives dedicated to realigning financial flows with the KMGBF and generating additional biodiversity finance beyond the lifetime of projects. It will support the implementation of BFPs, introduce a stronger focus on blended finance and leverage MDB policy-based operations. Focusing on integration, the GEF Trust fund will also contribute to Target 19(e), optimizing co-benefits and synergies of finance targeting biodiversity and climate. Target 19(f) is supported through Objective 1.

Global program on realignment and resource mobilization (Targets 14, 15, 18, 19)

311. GEF-9 will support a global program on financial flows realignment and resource mobilization to sustain the transformative process initiated by the GEF-8 Umbrella Programme to Support Development of Biodiversity Finance Plans (BFPs). Continued support in GEF-9 is in line with GEF IEO's conclusion that, to influence key national decisions, mainstreaming biodiversity into national financial planning requires long-term support to national-level processes.[198] The GEF-9 program will focus on creating the enabling conditions, including policies, incentives, and institutional frameworks, for public and private finance realignment and mobilization of new and additional domestic resources. This includes upstream policy work to support integrated decision-making and planning that values biodiversity, and the enabling policy environment to mobilize private sector funding such as through the TFFF and other blended finance vehicles. The program will support capacity building and institutional set-up for implementation and monitoring of BFPs, including support to national-level platforms to foster a whole of government approach and multi-stakeholder coordination. It will further support piloting and evaluation of priority measures or mechanisms identified in national BFPs. A global knowledge platform will provide methodological support, codify lessons, promote innovations, and foster peer-to-peer learning.

312. Countries will use their STAR allocation to participate in the program. Set-aside funding will resource the global knowledge platform.

[198] GEF IEO (2019) Evaluation of GEF Support to Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

Implementation of Biodiversity Finance Plans (Targets 14, 15, 18, 19)

313. In parallel to the global program, GEF will also support implementation and evaluation of measures and mechanisms identified in BFPs through standalone projects funded through STAR. Support will be provided to the context-specific solutions identified by countries in their BFPs to mobilize resources at scale for biodiversity conservation, use and restoration.

Leveraging private sector and multilateral development banks for biodiversity (Targets 18, 19)

314. Countries are invited to use STAR resources in alignment with the Blended Finance Program as non-grant instruments to leverage private sector finance to deliver global biodiversity benefits. Within a project, countries may combine the use of STAR and GBFF resources as traditional grant and non-grant instruments, but only the latter will trigger additional financing from the Blended Finance funding window. While not limited to these instruments, GEF will notably support Debt-for-Nature Conversions, biodiversity outcome bonds, and other forms of sovereign biodiversity bonds. These tools have the unique ability to mobilize capital markets to benefit public entities and deliver public goods. They have the potential to reach significant scale and biodiversity impact[199] while creating a powerful entry point for lasting collaboration between the Ministries of Finance and Environment. The GEF will also support nascent nature/biodiversity credit market efforts, focusing grant resources on creating the necessary governance and policy frameworks to ensure private sector demand and market integrity, while encouraging the use of non-grant instruments (e.g. outcome bond structures, price guarantees) to facilitate pilot transactions. Countries may also use blended finance to advance bioeconomy projects that generate benefits for biodiversity of global significance while promoting sustainable development.

315. Debt-for-Nature Conversions (DFNCs) are based on derisking tools (credit enhancements) provided by MDBs and an increasing array of actors to help countries deliver on nature and debt objectives concurrently. DFNCs entail debt restructuring where countries exchange existing debt for a new guaranteed bond (or loan) at more favorable terms that generate savings and usually have extended tenors. The proceeds of the new bond are used to "buy back" the comparatively more expensive, outstanding debt. All or a significant portion of the generated savings are used to fund biodiversity action. Recent DFNCs demonstrated how capital markets can be leveraged to raise long-term biodiversity funding through the capitalization of CTFs, while securing required policy changes and conservation commitments in line with the KMGBF. GEF will support countries to meet enabling conditions for DFNCs (including CTF development/strengthening, development of evidence-based conservation commitments, capacity building and coordination between Environment and Finance sectors) and will offer direct support to DFNC through STAR or GBFF resources used as credit enhancement (guarantee, liquidity facility or other de-risking

[199] 67 countries at risk of sovereign debt distress hold over 22% of global biodiversity priority areas, 83% of which are unprotected: (Nedopil, C., Yue, M. & Hughes, A.C. Are debt-for-nature swaps scalable: Which nature, how much debt, and who pays? *Ambio* 53, 63–78 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-023-01914-4)

instrument), in which case additional financing from the Blended Finance funding window would be provided.

316. Building on its pilot investments in the Rhino and Coral bonds, GEF will continue investing in biodiversity outcome bonds with the objectives to (i) facilitate replication to achieve scale with the aim of eventually eliminating GEF support, including by diversifying issuers and attracting other entities, budget lines or market mechanisms as sources of outcome payment; and (ii) enhance the ability of the instrument to deliver ecosystem-wide benefits for biodiversity of global significance.

GEF will also support, through set-aside resources, a Technical Assistance Facility to mainstream biodiversity in multilateral development banks' policy-based loans and credit enhancements (PBLC). PBLCs provide direct budget support or facilitate access to financing on more favorable terms, in exchange for policy actions in developing countries. They represent a significant financial volume and share of commitments made by Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)[200] and are powerful tools to foster policy coherence. However, integration of biodiversity objectives remains limited. As PBLCs are typically negotiated over a few months, the facility would provide MDBs that are GEF agencies with rapid access to funding required to develop analytics to assess alignment with KMGBF, and to include biodiversity objectives in policy matrices underpinning PBLCs. The facility will also contribute to the development of tools and methodologies, in support of MDBs' Joint Statement on Nature, People, and Planet and the Task Force on Sustainability-Linked Sovereign Financing for Nature and Climate.

Enhanced complementarity between the GEF Trust Fund and the GBFF

317. GBFF programming directions, which have been set for the period up until 2030, were designed to complement GEF-8 support while also exploiting opportunities to leverage finance for scaling up support to the KMGBF. They include eight Action Areas[201] contributing to the implementation of 19 KMGBF targets. The GEF-9 BD Strategy reinforces complementarity with the GBFF by ensuring (i) the GEF Trust Fund provides "universal" baseline support and optimizes synergies across MEAs, while the GBFF maximizes biodiversity-focused outcomes through selectivity; and (ii) by focusing on landscape/seascape scales, while the GBFF is to targeting national-scale interventions to match the ambition of the KMGBF targets (Figure 6). With its ability to receive contributions from non-sovereign funders, GBFF also enables the diversification of biodiversity investments and leverage from public, private and philanthropic sources.

[200] Policy-based operations represented $139 billion, or 38% of the total new financial commitments made by the African Development Bank (AfDB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank, between 2015 and 2020: (Neunuebel, C., *et al*. 2022. "Aligning Policy-Based Finance with the Paris Agreement." Working Paper. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. https://doi.org/10.46830/wriwp.21.00066).

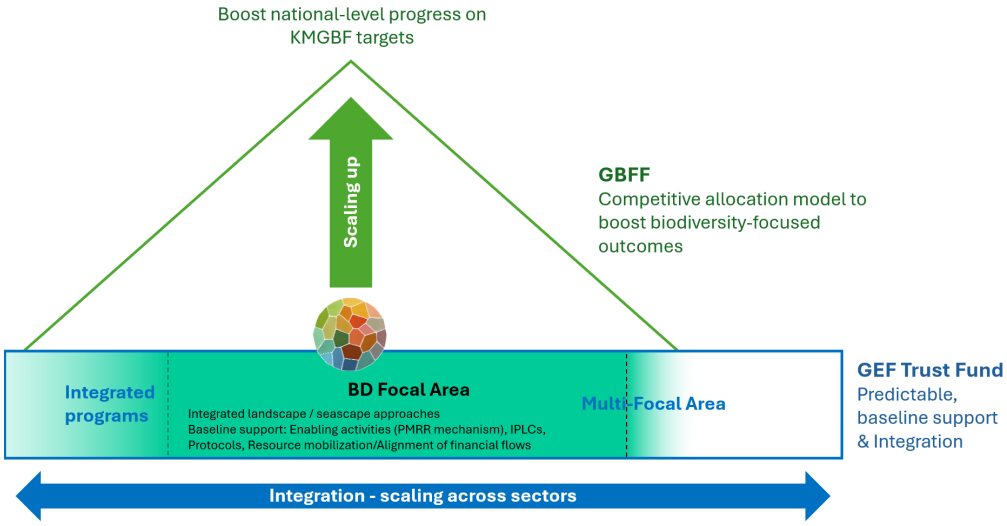
[201] GEF. (2024*).* Programming Directions for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (Council Document GEF/C.64/06/Rev.02)

318. Predictable. “universal” baseline support for KMGBF building blocks: All resources are allocated to countries through a competitive process in the GBFF, so that countries do not have guaranteed funding for their implementation of the KMGBF. The GEF Trust is complementary in its provision of predictable country STAR allocations and guaranteed access to enabling activities through a dedicated set-aside, provided certain conditions are met. The GEF Trust Fund will guarantee support to eligible countries to meet the requirements of the KMGBF Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Review mechanism, including support to national biodiversity monitoring systems. Resources will also be set-aside to ensuring financing for the evolving strategic priorities identified by the CBD COP, including more direct support to IPLCs, ensuring effective support for the Nagoya and Cartagena Protocols, accelerating implementation of the CBD resource mobilization strategy and other priorities that may identified by CBD COP 17, through the first global review of collective progress in the implementation of the KMGBF.

319. Focus on integration: In line with GEF Trust Fund’s comparative advantage as Financial Mechanism of six MEAs, Biodiversity STAR programming in GEF-9 will focus on integration through Multi-Focal Area (MFA) projects, the GEF-9 IPs, and integrated landscape and seascape approaches, and. The GEF-9 BD Strategy promotes integrated landscape/seascape approaches as a strategy supported by best science that also enables countries to blend resources from focal areas and GEF funds to deliver on KMGBF targets and MEAs in a coherent and synergistic manner.

320. A complement to GEF TF programming, the GBFF is a biodiversity fund dedicated to boosting and upscaling progress on KMGBF targets. The GBFF competitive process maximizes biodiversity-focused outcomes per unit investment. In addition, the GBFF programming directions enable national-scale projects focused on a narrow set of KMGBF targets. While the GEF Trust Fund emphasizes integration and the GEF-9 Biodiversity Strategy focuses on core biodiversity needs and integrated landscape/seascape approaches, the GBFF provides complementary support to scale up from landscape-level to national-level to achieve the ambition of the KMGBF targets.

Figure 6: Enhanced complementarity between the GEF Trust Fund and the GBFF



Focal Area Set Aside

Enabling activities

321. Reporting obligations: Support will be provided to eligible countries for their 8th National Report to the CBD, 2nd National Report under the Nagoya Protocol, and 6th National Report under the Cartagena Protocol. Per COP 16 guidance, the GEF will also contribute to the development and implementation of national biodiversity monitoring systems, including through capacity-building and development, to support the reporting efforts of Parties to the CBD. As monitoring is foundational for effective KMGBF implementation and reporting, support will be provided through an enabling activity modality to ensure all countries have access to baseline support, which countries may complement with STAR resources.

322. Biodiversity Finance Plans: Countries that have not yet benefited from BIOFIN or GEF support to develop a BFP may be supported to do so as part of the global program on realignment and resource mobilization for biodiversity described under Objective 3. As necessary, other countries may use their STAR allocation to update their BFP as part of the global program.

323. In addition to enabling activities, the Focal Area set aside envelope will be used for innovative and high impact global, regional or multi-country programs in line with objectives 1-3 of the Biodiversity Strategy and to respond to priorities identified by the global review of collective progress in the implementation of the KMGBF to be conducted at CBD COP 17. It will include the global program on realignment and resource mobilization for biodiversity and a Technical Assistance Facility to mainstream biodiversity in multilateral development banks' policy-based loans and credit enhancements described under Objective 3.

324. It will also include an Indigenous Peoples and local communities Conservation Initiative (ICI), building on previous iterations of the ICI, which provides dedicated and direct funding to Indigenous-led organizations and contributes to their strengthening to enable their participation in GEF projects as executing agencies and funding intermediaries to enhance access. The GEF has increased its engagement of Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPO) as partners in project design and execution and aims to further increase IPO engagement and execution roles in GEF-9. With greater institutional and project execution capacity IPOs may play a more significant role in efforts of the GEF Partnership and receive greater funding. ICI programming will increase from $25 million in each of the past two cycles to $100 million . Beyond direct ICI investment, the GEF will increase funding allocation to IPOs and IPLCs through their inclusion as executing partners in other relevant focal areas and integrated programs, notably in Land Degradation, International Waters, Climate Change, Critical Forest Biomes, Global Wildlife for Development, among others.

325. In response to COP 16 guidance,[202, 203] GEF-9 set aside resources will also be used to support the implementation of the protocols through global or regional projects, prioritizing countries that have not received GEF funding for that purpose in recent GEF cycles. Countries are encouraged to use their STAR and the opportunities in Objective 2 to advance implementation of the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols.

Key Contributions of Integrated Programs to Biodiversity Focal Area Outcomes

326. The GEF-9 biodiversity strategy and associated programming strategies build on the integrated approaches to achieve biodiversity conservation and durable use outcomes implemented since GEF-6. Integrated Programs will help achieve the focal area objectives while specifically supporting Goals A, B and D of the KMGBF and many of its targets (Table 4).

327. Some IPs will provide focused support to important biomes hosting unique biodiversity, where concerted action will deliver stronger benefits. The Critical Forest Biomes, the Blue and Green Islands, and the Drylands and Drought Management IPs will contribute to the conservation and restoration of globally important forest biomes, terrestrial and marine ecosystems in SIDS and dryland ecosystems, respectively. Drylands and Drought Management

[202] Annex II, Paragraph 13 of CBD COP decision 16/33: "Further requests the Global Environment Facility to examine options to support the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization in order for the Global Environment Facility to be able to fulfil its responsibilities in operating the financial mechanism for the Protocol on an interim and ongoing basis in the most effective manner, and to report on this matter to the Conference of the Parties at its seventeenth meeting."

[203] Annex II, Paragraph 10(b) of CBD COP decision 16/33: "To further explore modalities to reform its operations, including by considering how to increase funds dedicated to the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol and the use of global and regional projects, in such a manner as to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities effectively in operating the financial mechanism for the Protocol on an interim and ongoing basis, and report on those matters to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its seventeenth meeting;"

IP will also support the sustainable use of dryland biodiversity. Other IPs will address key global drivers of biodiversity loss. The Food Systems IP will scale up transformational changes in food systems. The Pollution-free Supply Chains and the Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution IPs will address the impact of key supply chains (e.g., textiles, electronics, agriculture, construction) and plastic pollution on biodiversity, including through support to prevent, reduce, and eliminate plastic pollution, with a focus on upstream interventions. Urban and infrastructure development will be targeted by the Sustainable Cities IP, which will promote nature positive, net-zero, pollution-free and resilient urban regions. The Global Wildlife for Development IP will conserve wildlife and wildlife landscapes by tackling habitat fragmentation and loss, and the use and trade of wildlife.

Table 4: Mapping of GEF-9 Programming Directions to the KMGBF Action Targets

KMGBF TARGETS	INTEGRATED PROGRAMS								FOCAL AREAS[‡] AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES		GBFF ACTIONS AREAS (AA) & OTHER FUNDS
	Critical Forest Biomes	Blue and Green Islands	Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution	Drylands and Drought Management	Food Systems	Pollution-free Supply Chains	Sustainable Cities	Global Wildlife for Development			
1	X	X					X	X		IW	AA-1 AA-2
2	X	X		X	X	X		X		LD-1 CC-1.5 IW	AA-1 AA-2
3	X	X						X		CC-1.5 IW	AA-1 AA-2
4								X			GBFF
5	X							X		IW-1&3	AA-5
6										IW-1&3	AA-7
7		X	X		X	X	X		BD-1	IW-1&3 CW	AA 6
8	X	X		X	X	X	X			CC-1 LD-2 IW	LDCF SCCF
9	X							X		IW-1&3	AA-5
10		X		X		X	X			LD-1 CC-1.5 IW-1&33	AA-6
11	X	X		X	X	X	X			LD-1 & 2 CC-1.5 IW	LDCF SCCF
12							X				LDCF SCCF
13									BD-2	IW-2	AA-8
14		X				X	X		BD-1&3	IW	AA-3

15						**X**			**BD-3**	**Blended Finance**	**AA-3**
16			**X**		**X**						**LDCF** **SCCF**
17									**BD-2**		**AA-8**
18					**X**	**X**			**BD-3**	**IW-1**	**AA-3** **AA-4**
19	**X**	**X**				**X**			**BD-3**	**Blended Finance** **SGP**	**AA-4**
20	All GEF projects to embed relevant capacity building, technology transfer, scientific and technical cooperation, as relevant										
										G. Fonseca Leadership Program **IW-2**	
21	All GEF projects to embed knowledge management activities and ensure FPIC										
22*	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**ICI**	**LD-3** **SGP**	**AA-2**
23*	All GEF project to contribute as per the GEF Policy on Gender Equality										
										SGP	

* GEF's policy framework on Stakeholder Engagement, IPLCs and gender ensures that all GEF investments Fund contribute to Targets 22 and 23 and report annually on their results.

‡This column shows the focal area objectives relevant to pursue projects implementing elements of a specific KMGBF targets, e.g. BD-1 refers to objective 1 of the Biodiversity Strategy.

Climate Change

Global Context of Climate Change

328. Climate change continues to be a critical and growing threat to both human and natural systems. The Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), released in March 2023,[204] highlights that human activities have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperatures reaching approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels.

329. The global carbon budget for 1.5°C has shrunk significantly since the last GEF replenishment was completed in 2022. Indeed, estimates suggest that at current emissions rates, the world will likely deplete such a budget before 2035, unless immediate action is taken. The AR6 emphasizes that global net anthropogenic CO_2 emissions need to decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by around 2050. Achieving these targets necessitates rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban, and industrial systems.[205]

330. The urgency for rapid reduction of carbon emissions has led to a growing momentum in establishing net-zero commitments and plans. As of December 2024, 146 countries, representing approximately 93% of global Gross Domestic Product had adopted net-zero emissions targets.[206] During COP 28 in Dubai, nearly 200 countries agreed to accelerate efforts toward net-zero energy systems well before or by around mid-century.

331. The first Global Stocktake[207] however, which was finalized during COP 28, noted insufficient progress across all areas of climate action, from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to strengthening resilience, to providing financial and technological support for vulnerable nations. It emphasized the urgency of accelerating action to keep the 1.5°C threshold within reach.

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[204] IPCC (2023): Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

[205] Systems Change Lab (2024). By the Numbers: The Climate Action We Need in the Next 10 Years

[206] Net Zero Tracker (2024) Net Zero Stocktake 2024: New Climate Institute, Oxford Net Zero, Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit and Data-Driven EnviroLab https://netzeroclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Net_Zero_Stocktake_2024.pdf

[207] UNFCCC (2023), Outcome of the First Global Stocktake

Relevant COP Decisions[208]

332. The GEF serves as an operating entity of the Financial Mechanism under the Convention and the Paris Agreement. The GEF-9 Climate Change strategy supports climate action in developing countries in line with this role and responsive to COP guidance. The GEF-9 period is framed by the Paris Agreement's ambition mechanism, including the submission of Long-Term Strategies (LTSs) and updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) prior to the start of GEF-9, the Second Global Stocktake in 2028, and the next round of NDC submissions toward the end of GEF-9.

333. The latest guidance was provided to the GEF at COP 29 in 2024, including guidance from the COP and from the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA). COP 29 welcomed the collaboration of the GEF with the other multilateral climate funds, aiming to enhance developing countries' access to climate finance, scale successful projects, and strengthen coherence. With respect to GEF-9, COP 29 invited the GEF to support developing countries by incorporating just transition elements into national climate plans, facilitating coordination of climate support, and enhancing adaptation contributions within its project portfolio. On transparency, the CMA 6 requested the GEF to consider ways to improve the delivery of support for the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) and enabling activities.[209]

334. Regarding the private sector, the GEF will further explore risk-taking approaches to foster innovation and make better use of concessional financing to attract more private investment.[210] On transparency, the fifth meeting of the CMA (CMA 5) welcomed the support from the GEF for preparing biennial transparency reports (BTRs), including combined and expedited application processes for multiple BTR projects.[211] As part of the Global Stocktake (GST) decision the CMA also established a Technology Implementation Programme to be supported, inter alia, by the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism.[212]

335. Article 13 of the Paris Agreement establishes an Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) for action and support, and the COP requested the GEF to support the establishment and

[208] As operating entity of the financial mechanisms of multiple MEAs, the GEF functions under the guidance of, and is accountable to, Conference of the Parties (COP) for the purpose of their respective conventions. The GEF regularly reports to COP on how it has responded to the guidance provided. *Instrument for the Establishment of the Global Environment Facility, January 2025*

[209] Decision -/CMA.6, paragraph 3. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2024_L18E.pdf

[210] Decision 7/CP.28, paragraphs 20-21. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2023_11a01_adv.pdf

[211] Decision 11/CMA.5, paragraph 2 (a). https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_16a02_adv.pdf

[212] Decision 1/CMA.5, paragraph 110. https://unfccc.int/documents/637073

operation of a CBIT during GEF-6 and through future replenishment cycles. On transparency, the fourth meeting of the CMA noted the increased support provided in GEF-8 for developing countries to BTRs and for the CBIT.[213]

GEF-9 Climate Change Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming

336. In its last evaluation covering the focal area, the GEF IEO explicitly recognized that the GEF CC portfolio offers clear comparative advantages within the global landscape of climate finance.[214] The IEO identified several distinguishing features, which include the provision of flexible and predictable grant financing; the focus on upstream and regulatory environments to support scaled-up investments; its targeted support for innovation and piloting of new technologies and financial approaches; its ability to fund integrated approached and to program resources across environmental priorities; and its support for countries to meet their obligations under the UNFCCC.[215]

337. The GEF-9 CC Focal Area strategy is designed to further strengthen the GEF's comparative advantages as identified by the IEO conclusions presented above. It aims to support countries to rapidly accelerate their decarbonization efforts and to undertake transformational shifts towards net-zero GHG emissions and climate-resilient development pathways. CC focal area investments will complement and maximize synergies with the other GEF windows and programming modalities, including the IPs, other Focal Areas and the GEF's Family of Funds.

338. The GEF remains firmly committed to deepening complementarity, coherence, and collaboration with the multilateral climate funds (MCFs). The GEF has played a leading role in advancing a structured partnership framework, including a detailed joint action plan presented to the GEF Council in June 2024. This has led to new governance arrangements—through the MCFs' Heads Committee and Secretariat-level Taskforce—that have strengthened institutional coordination. Following guidance received at COP 28 and COP 29, the GEF, the Adaptation Fund, the and the GCF, have intensified joint efforts to promote collaboration and coherence in order to improve developing countries' access to climate financing.

339. CC investments will seek to further strengthen synergies and maximize complementarities with programming by the MCFs, leveraging the comparative advantages of the GEF model, including its predictability, high concessionality, trusted processes, and its unique ability to program resources for multiple environmental benefits. The GEF Trust Fund provides

[213] Decision -/CMA.4, paragraph 7. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2022_L11E.pdf

[214] https://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/climate-change-2017.pdf

[215] https://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/climate-change-2017.pdf

reliable, “universal” baseline support for climate change mitigation and optimizes synergies across MEAs. This is an essential underpinning of country level climate change stocktaking, planning, reporting and action, serving all GEF recipient countries. Upon this baseline, MCFs invest in specific initiatives to enhance and upscale climate change mitigation efforts in a subset of GEF recipient countries. This complementarity rests on the GEF’s ability to provide predictable, grant-based funding for baseline climate change mitigation actions.

340. CC funding is intended to complement resources deployed by other providers of climate-related finance, including the MCFs. Investments structured in the context of shared investment plans and country-led investment platforms will be encouraged. With respect to co-financing, the GEF is working with the other multilateral climate funds to identify opportunities where joint engagement can add value for recipient countries, reduce fragmentation, and scale impact, ensuring that resources are used more effectively and that results are maximized. Synergies with the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage and relevant climate adaptation vehicles will be considered and developed, as strategic. Capturing synergies across the GEF Family of Funds, including LDCF, SCCF, and GBFF are a cross-cutting GEF-9 priority.

341. CC investments will also be designed with respect for the country ownership principle, consistent with support for the MCFs collaboration efforts. Such collaboration efforts cover areas such as adoption of common results and reporting indicators, definition of joint modalities for the delivery of capacity building activities, and the identification of opportunities to co-finance specific initiatives or jointly support developing countries’ climate investment plans.

342. CC investment will also actively look to promote and increase women participation and benefits from GEF projects, particularly in, although not limited to, areas such as energy access and productive uses, nature-based climate solutions and the provision of zero carbon transportation services. GEF CC investments will aim address challenges of inequality and empowerment of women and girls in key areas such as decision-making processes and leadership, financing and credit, and access to information and technology.

The CC strategy is organized around two objectives and related strategies, as follows:

- Advancing Transformational Climate Mitigation Pathways
    - Integrated Long-Term Net-Zero Planning and Just Transition
    - Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy
    - Low-Carbon Power Systems and Energy Access
    - Integrated and Zero-Emission Mobility
    - Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Mitigation
- Strengthening Enabling Conditions

- Capacity-Building Needs for Climate Transparency
- Convention Obligations and Enabling Activities

Objective 1: Advancing Transformational Climate Mitigation Pathways

343. GEF-9 CC investments will aim to drive the transformation of key economic systems — energy, industry, transport, and land use — that are responsible for most global GHG emissions. Through technology transfer, financial innovation, support for policy reforms, and promotion of best practices, CC focal area investments will focus on rapid GHG reductions to achieve carbon neutrality by mid-century, while integrating climate resilience. All CC projects will be required to align with national strategies, including NDCs and LTSs and their implementation roadmaps and investment plans, and to demonstrate sustainability beyond the implementation period.

344. CC projects will prioritize transformative policies and support for innovative technologies and business models that incentivize private sector engagement and attract substantial co-financing, offer high replication potential, and promote the participation of civil society, IPLCs, women and youth. GEF-9 CC efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts will follow safeguards for operating in these high-risk environments. GEF-9 CC interventions will continue to maximize co-benefits and minimize trade-offs, notably in terms of climate adaptation, improved livelihoods, enhanced biodiversity and reduced land degradation and pollution.

345. CC Objective 1 includes five key strategies. Projects may target multiple strategies, including cross-cutting initiatives such as innovative finance, clean technology innovation, and carbon pricing. For the latter, GEF investment will support national level institutional enabling conditions, not pilot transactions. Fossil fuel-related projects are ineligible for GEF funding.

Strategy 1.1: Integrated Long-Term Net-Zero Planning and Just Transition

346. CC focal area investments under this strategy will support a whole of government and programmatic approach to ensure consistency between climate and development planning,[216] short-term and long-term planning,[217] and across MEAs commitments. This strategy will support cross-sectoral modeling, analytics, and planning activities that are transparent, iterative and led by country capacities, enabling decision-makers to make informed choices on country alignment with long-term, low-emission and climate resilient pathways. Countries will be supported to develop domestic capacity to prepare and update their climate change long-term vision and strategy and to translate those into concrete pipelines of policy reforms and bankable investments.

[216] IDB, IDDRI (2022) , Achieving Net Zero Prosperity: how governments can unlock 15 essential transformations

[217] DDPP (2024), 2050 Pathways, NDC – LT-LEDS Alignment guide

347. Leveraging the growing momentum around supporting country-led frameworks and national investment platforms,[218] and building on lessons from the GEF-8 Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator Integrated Program, this strategy will support the establishment of nationally determined mechanisms to facilitate coordination and mobilization of financial support. In addition, this strategy will also look to maximize contributions towards policy coherence efforts, financing activities such as green budgeting,[219] repurposing of subsidies in climate-related sectors, and efficient spatial planning to inform net zero infrastructure development while minimizing trade-offs with other environmental priorities.[220] This strategy will also support the integration of fair and inclusive just transition elements into national climate plans and programs, to mitigate socio-economic impacts on vulnerable populations. Funded activities may include the design of inclusive energy transition or fossil fuel phase-out roadmaps that include job retraining programs; support for multi-stakeholder platforms - government, labor unions, civil society and private sector - to co-create just transition plans; financing pilot projects with replication potential; support local manufacturing and market development for energy transition related supply chains and related south-south cooperation; and investing in reskilling and social protection programs for workers, especially women, youth, and IPLCs. This strategy will also support IPLCs as ecosystem stewards who may be impacted by net-zero transition plans through, where applicable, co-design and co-ownership of sustainable infrastructure.

348. Programming of funds under this window will be coupled, when applicable with funding from other CC focal area strategies (1.2 to 1.5), from the Blended Finance/NGI window, and from other relevant windows within the GEF Family of Funds. In addition to the use of STAR resources as grant for upstream capacity building in financial structuring, countries are invited to engage in blended finance using STAR resources available under this strategy as non-grant instruments, to leverage private sector finance to deliver climate mitigation benefits at scale. Capital markets instruments such as outcome-based bonds, sustainability-linked bonds and other forms of sovereign debt issuance linked to climate-related KPIs may effectively mobilize private investment for climate change mitigation.

Strategy 1.2: Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy

349. GEF has a strong record of accomplishment in energy efficiency and will seek to increase GEF-9 CC focal area support of cost-effective energy efficiency solutions with large mitigation

[218] NDC Partnership (2024), https://ndcpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/building-blocks-country-owned-climate-action.pdf

[219] OECD (2021), Green budget tagging: Introductory guidance and principles

[220] Hernandez, R. R., *et al*. "Techno–ecological synergies of solar energy for global sustainability." Nature Sustainability 2, no. 7 (2019): 560-568

potential. On buildings,[221] CC investments will look to tackle both embodied and operational carbon emissions, prioritizing integrated approaches to increase the efficiency of the entire building envelope and lifecycle. The GEF will support a refresh of energy efficiency policies, building codes, and certification schemes, while continuing to support financial and fiscal instruments. Integration of secure energy sources and efficient building standards and demonstrations will also be supported, with a primary focus on public buildings, social housing, buildings of vulnerable groups, and critical infrastructure (e.g. schools, hospitals). Reducing energy needs for cooling and refrigeration will remain a priority area for GEF investments, including through energy efficiency measures, passive designs (e.g. cool roofs , thermal mass, shading etc.), nature-based solutions[6] (e.g. green facades, green roofs, etc.), district cooling, digitalization and energy management systems, financial instruments and business models, and innovation in cold chains with linkages to food security, water, health and also greater resilience and adaptation to extreme heat. Opportunities will be sought to maximize the climate benefits of actions to implement the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Protocol.

350. On circular economy, strategies such as avoid, recover, reduce, reuse, redesign, regenerate and remanufacturing will be promoted. Circular economy approaches informed by life cycle analysis will target a reduction in energy and material use per unit of output, with benefits both for climate, through reduced emissions, and for nature, through reduced environmental pressures. Support in this area will be focused on the development of low-carbon material pathways, including support for certifications and standards (e.g. green cement, steel, etc.), demonstrations through public procurement, and the development of new business models. Furthermore, circular economy approaches will also support the transition away from industrial processes or product uses that involve substances with very high global warming potential, by promoting the adoption of alternative technologies and materials underpinned by updated standards and best practices.

351. In the manufacturing sector, industrial energy supply has traditionally depended on subsidized heavy fuels, and on small and medium sized industrial & manufacturing enterprises that are inefficient in the use of heat and energy. The CC focal area will support mitigation measures in this sector including medium and long-term roadmaps, electrification of heat uses and wider adoption of digital technologies, harmonized benchmarks for low- and zero-carbon products and associated certification schemes, aggregating demand for low- and zero-carbon products, and technology transfer. The GEF will also consider support for green hydrogen as an efficiency modality for very hard to abate sectors, where cost- and resource-efficient. Interventions that address linkages between energy security and critical minerals,[222] for instance, through the promotion of alternative chemistries that are less dependent on materials with negative social and environmental impacts, will also be considered.

[221] GABC (2024), Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction

[222] STAP (2020), Technologically Critical Elements and their relevance to the Global Environment Facility

Strategy 1.3: Power Systems and Energy Access

352. In this sector, CC investments will prioritize upstream interventions to unlock large-scale transformations, focusing on technical assistance, piloting, and capacity building for policymakers and the specialized workforce, as well as derisking approaches for private investments and innovative financial mechanisms. Grid modernization to accelerate the penetration of renewables on the grids, as well as storage technologies and demand side management will be a priority. Support for large-scale efficient and secure energy facilities will be considered on a case-by-case basis to avoid over-subsidizing and crowding out private sector investments, and in line with the principle of minimum concessionality.

353. Opportunities to enhance the climate and economic resilience of communities through improved access to clean, reliable, affordable and climate resilient energy systems, especially in SIDS and LDCs, will also be pursued, including through Multi-Trust Funds programming with the LDCF and the SCCF. Energy access will remain a priority for the GEF. This window will support decentralized clean and affordable energy solutions, focusing on micro- and mini- grid systems in rural and peri urban areas and Indigenous and traditional territories, including electric cooking. Projects should be designed with an understanding and depiction of how efforts will be complementary with ongoing energy access initiatives.

Strategy 1.4: Integrated and Zero-Emission Mobility

354. In transport, the GEF will continue to prioritize investments in interventions, fostering modal shifts, promoting avoid/reduce, shift and improve approaches (A-S-I) to expanding and improve public transit and active mobility, and to reduce reliance on private vehicles. The GEF will support electric mobility piloting, and scaling investments in countries where elective vehicles (EV) penetration rates remain low and the price gap with internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles remains substantial. Participation of and co-financing by the private sector will be important selection criteria for CC investments.

355. CC investments will promote the integration of efficient and secure energy sources with charging networks and advanced technologies such as Vehicle-to-Grid mechanisms, direct coupling of EVs energy demand with efficient and secure energy deployment, and fiscal considerations related to revenues from fuel taxes. The GEF will support policies and local capacity building to advance the recycling of lithium-ion batteries and other critical materials, and to bolster the import of secondhand vehicles, including ICE and EVs. To ensure a seamless and efficient charging ecosystem, the GEF will promote EV charging interoperability, fostering standardized protocols and infrastructure that enable cross-network compatibility. Scalable solutions to plan for and accelerate the decarbonization of the shipping and aviation sectors will also be considered.

Strategy 1.5: Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Mitigation

356. In this sector, GEF focal area investments will support cost-effective interventions to generate GHG mitigation benefits in natural ecosystems and productive landscapes. CC investments will prioritize mitigation options in high-carbon ecosystems and in agriculture, ensuring alignment and complementarity with other GEF focal areas and programming windows. Supported activities must demonstrate a high potential for reducing carbon loss and providing continued or enhanced natural CO_2 removal.

357. Nature-based Solutions[6] (NbS) interventions will aim to generate significant co-benefits, including biodiversity conservation, land revitalization, and strengthening against climate impacts. Aligned with national climate strategies regarding natural ecosystems in countries' NDCs and LTSs, the GEF will support interventions designed to address the drivers of environmental degradation and to protect and restore key sinks for above- and below-ground carbon, including in wetlands, peatlands, and coastal habitats such as mangroves, seagrass, and marshes.

358. In the agriculture sector, strong and cost-effective mitigation potential may be achieved in improved soil carbon management, enhanced nutrient use efficiency, sustainable manure management, and resistant livestock systems. Programming in inland aquaculture, which is projected to grow substantially to keep up with protein demand, has potential to contribute to climate mitigation via inputs and supply chain management. Innovations in agri-tech, food-tech, food waste management, and logistics will also be considered. Methane management represents a time-critical and cost-effective mitigation option. Opportunities to support interventions addressing methane emissions through national or regional methane reductions programs, such as through cross-sectoral interventions, will be actively pursued and prioritized where possible, including through a new regional/global CC FA program. The role of emerging technologies—such as AI and satellite observations—in reducing implementation and MRV costs, making climate action more effective and scalable, will also be explored.

<u>Objective 2: Strengthening Enabling Conditions</u>

359. The GEF will enhance funding enabling activities that enhance the integration of climate change concerns into national planning in view of supporting policy transition to scale up clean technology solutions and reduce GHG emissions. In GEF-9, countries will access dedicated resources for Convention obligations and CBIT support from set-asides and may use their country allocations for other enabling activities.

Strategy 2.1: Capacity-Building Needs for Climate Transparency

360. The CC focal area will provide support for projects that build institutional and technical capacity at national level to meet the provisions of the enhanced transparency framework, as outlined in Article 13 of the Paris Agreement. The CBIT aims to (i) strengthen national institutions for transparency-related activities in line with national priorities; (ii) provide relevant tools, training and assistance for meeting the provisions of Article 13; and (iii) assist in the improvement

of transparency over time. All developing country Parties that have ratified the Paris Agreement can access CBIT support. In addition, once countries have completed the first stage of CBIT projects, they may request further CBIT support.

Strategy 2.2: Convention Obligations and Enabling Activities

361. The GEF will continue to provide support to developing country Parties to the Paris Agreement for the preparation of BTRs and National Communications (NCs). Countries can access resources for the preparation of these reports from the CC focal area set aside. GEF modalities of support and indicative costing for preparing BTRs and NCs are presented in Information note GEF/C.62/Inf.15. Countries requiring additional resources beyond amounts available through the set aside may opt to utilize their STAR allocations

362. Support for Technology Needs Assessments (TNAs) will be made available for SIDS and LDCs that have not yet undertaken one and wish to do so. Other countries may use their country allocations for the preparation and implementation of TNAs. The GEF will also continue to make financial support available for the preparation of NDCs Countries may use CC STAR allocations for these activities.

363. Upstream policy work to support integrated decision-making and planning on climate change mitigation to strengthen the enabling policy environment to mobilize private sector funding such as through the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) and other blended finance vehicles may also be supported.

Key Contributions of Integrated Programs to Climate Change Focal Area Outcomes

364. The CC focal area is cross-cutting as emission reductions are needed and will be sought across all sectors. As such, joint programming with other GEF focal areas will be actively pursued, including in the context of integrated programs. Three integrated programs are particularly important in terms of their potential contribution to the GEF's CC mitigation ambition.

365. Critical Forest Biomes; GEF-9 will build on past successes in sustainable forest management to support low-carbon strategies in intact forest landscapes. These vital carbon sinks are under threat and are key to avoiding GHG emissions through improved forest management and avoided deforestation.

366. The Sustainable Cities IP will support integrated urban solutions that promote low-emission, resilient development. Empowering cities to implement NDCs and pursue low-carbon growth can yield significant CC mitigation benefits.

367. The Food Systems IP will advance resistant agriculture and durable land management, improving food security for smallholders while reducing emissions. It will also support deforestation-free supply chains across agricultural production, processing, and consumption.

Land Degradation

Global Context of Desertification and Land Degradation

368. Land is key to the resilience of the Earth system through processes that regulate climate, biodiversity, water, and nutrient cycling. Land provides food production, clean water, and shelter and, as such, is central to human well-being.[223] The Earth's land area is finite. Using land resources sustainably is fundamental for human well-being. Human use, at varying intensities, affects about 60–85% of forests and 70–90% of other natural ecosystems.[224] Globally, 1.6 billion hectares or 15.4% of land area is degraded. Between 2015 and 2019, at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land were degraded every year, affecting food and water security globally.[225] Warming over land has occurred at a faster rate than the global mean and this has had observable impacts on the land system.[226] Among the multiple challenges, drought is emerging as a critical global challenge. Drought profoundly affects multiple environmental dimensions, including soil health, biodiversity, earth system stability, and water availability.[227] The connection between land degradation and drought is particularly concerning, as healthy soils play a crucial role in buffering against drought conditions. Drought also causes substantial economic losses, impacting agriculture, industry and all of society, with costs exceeding $307 billion per year.[228]

Relevant COP Decisions[229]

366. The UNCCD COP16 Decision on the Collaboration with the GEF includes, among others, seven points that are highly relevant for the GEF-9 focal area strategy and have been taken into account in the development of the LD strategy. The decision:

a) "Invites the GEF to strengthen its support for countries in programming Land Degradation Focal Area resources to combat desertification, land degradation and drought and achieve their voluntary land degradation neutrality targets, including in the context of land degradation neutrality".

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[223] Tomalka, J., *et al*. (2024). Stepping back from the precipice: Transforming land management to stay within planetary boundaries. Potsdam, Germany: Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

[224] IPCC (2023), Special Report on Climate Change and Land

[225] UNCCD Data Dashboard: https://data.unccd.int/

[226] Ibid

[227] STAP (2024), Information Note. Why drought matters for the global environment.

[228] Thomas, R., *et al*. (2024). Economics of Drought: Investing in Nature-Based Solutions for Drought Resilience – Proaction Pays. A joint report by UNCCD, ELD Initiative and UNU-INWEH, Bonn, Germany; Toronto, Canada

[229] As a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, the GEF takes into account relevant decisions of the COP in formulating strategies, programs and projects. The GEF regularly reports to UNCCD COP on how it has responded to COP decisions. *Instrument for the Establishment of the Global Environment Facility, January 2025*

b) “Takes note of the GEF’s enhanced attention to drought mitigation and adaptation and invites the GEF to strengthen its efforts in this regard to enable countries to address their desertification, land degradation and drought priorities”.
c) “Requests the GEF, within its mandate, to support the implementation of the national drought plans and other drought-related policies, especially strengthening early warning, preparedness, mitigation and recovery, rehabilitation and monitoring systems, and capacity-building”.
d) “Encourages the GEF to continue its efforts to harness opportunities for leveraging synergies (i) among the Rio conventions and other relevant environmental agreements; as well as (ii) with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
e) “Commends the continued attention paid by the GEF to policy coherence in the field of desertification, land degradation, and drought, and invites the GEF to continue to track progress on policy coherence”.
f) “Encourages the GEF to consider, upon request, projects that support Parties in reviewing public expenditures, incentives and investments, and to support public policies and investments that decrease land degradation, combat desertification, and build resilience to drought, in a nationally determined manner”.
g) “Noting the need and potential for scaling up requests to the GEF to support the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality flagship initiative in their efforts; and encourages the GEF to look into further support”.

GEF-9 Land Degradation Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming

369. The LD strategy aligns with the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018 – 2030, supporting all five Strategic Objectives. The GEF will support countries with a broad range of SLM interventions to support the implementation of voluntary LDN targets, addressing Desertification, Land Degradation, and Drought, institutions, regulatory frameworks, and policy coherence for LDN.

370. As an overarching concept of the UNCCD, LDN encourages the adoption of a broad range of measures to avoid or reduce land degradation through appropriate planning, regulation and sustainable land management practices, combined with actions to reverse past degradation, through land restoration and rehabilitation, to achieve a state of no net loss of healthy and productive land. As of November 2025, 109 countries have set and validated measurable LDN targets on a voluntary basis.

371. A specific emphasis in GEF-9 is placed on supporting proactive drought management, addressing drought-prone ecosystems and vulnerable populations. This reflects GEF’s increasing

attention to drylands, as confirmed by a recent IEO evaluation[230] as well as OPS-8 findings,[231] and represents a further evolution of the LD strategy towards providing countries with direct entry points to implement their national drought plans and related policies.

372. LD investments focus on production landscapes where agricultural, forestry and rangeland management practices underpin the livelihoods of rural communities, smallholder farmers and pastoralists, Land encompasses soil, water, and life, economic production, cultural heritage, and social well-being. SLM can only be achieved through a 'people-centered' approach. This principle recognizes the connection between people and land and promotes a whole of society approach. National institutions implicitly bear the responsibility of providing competence-based recruitments and continuity in view of sustaining long term results on SLM.

373. The GEF will continue to apply an integrated landscape approach, centering on the interplay and interdependency among water, biodiversity, climate change, and socio-economic factors. Integrated land and water use planning facilitates context-specific solutions, harnesses the potential of different land types in intervention areas, and promotes socio-ecological connectivity in land use systems that maximizes the benefits for local livelihoods. Transboundary cooperation among nations, private sector investment scaling and coordination in execution will be encouraged

374. Women's active participation, input, knowledge and guidance are indispensable to any productive, sustainable efforts to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought. When women are empowered, entire families benefit, and these benefits often have a positive effect on future generations. Therefore, GEF will address challenges of inequality and empowerment of women and girls in access to land and tenure security, decision making processes and leadership, credit, information, technology, and extension. GEF recipient countries should promote women's active participation through a whole of society approach. The UNCCD Gender Action Plan and associated guidelines are recommended frameworks for such efforts.

375. The goal of the LD focal area in GEF-9 is to avoid, reduce, and revert land degradation, combat desertification, and proactively manage drought through a people-centered approach. The goal remains fully in line with the LDN targets of the UNCCD, striving for a land degradation-neutral world by 2030. The goal will be achieved through three main objectives:

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[230] GEF IEO (2024): Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: GEF Support to Drylands Countries. Volume 1: Main Report. GEF Council document: https://www.thegef.org/council-meeting-documents/gef-e-c-66-01

[231] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

i) Sustain productive landscapes and livelihoods
ii) Support implementation of National Drought Plans and other drought related policies
iii) Promote fair land and water governance & strengthen enabling conditions

Objective 1: Sustain productive landscapes and livelihoods

376. This objective promotes the wider application and scaling of SLM[232] interventions that help to achieve voluntary LDN targets by improving land health and maintaining the flow of agro-ecosystem services that underpin food production and livelihoods. It places emphasis on community-based resource management initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship benefiting the environment, Indigenous and local community organizations, and local economies.

377. LD investments will support a broad range of SLM practices, such as:

- Agroecological approaches, including the diversification of farming systems, agro-forestry and other regenerative agriculture practices that rely on natural ecological processes to enhance yields and reduced agrochemical inputs, avoiding GHG emissions, and sequestering carbon in agricultural systems.
- Agro-biodiversity conservation, reducing the conversion of natural habitats, including wetlands conservation and restoration to improve water filtration, biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- Measures to improve soil health and nutrient management, reduce soil erosion, pollution risks and degradation of water resources.
- Sustainable rangeland management including practices that maintain or improve the health and productivity of rangelands through rotational grazing, forage species, and soil preservation through disturbance and erosion control.
- Community-based forest management and restoration to maintain agro-ecosystem services and to curb forest loss and the reduction of trees and vegetative cover in production landscapes.
- Water management measures for efficient irrigation, water harvesting and measures to increase soil moisture.
- Blended finance structures that generate benefits for land and ecosystem restoration of global significance, including investments to advance the bioeconomy.

[232] SLM is broadly defined by the UN 1992 Rio Earth Summit as "the use of land resources, including soils, water, animals and plants, for the production of goods to meet changing human needs, while simultaneously ensuring the long-term productive potential of these resources and the maintenance of their environmental functions."

Objective 2: Support implementation of National Drought Plans and other drought related policies

378. This objective supports the further development and operationalization of national drought plans and policies and their implementation. The objective provides all GEF eligible countries with the opportunity to address DLDD issues at national level and with the option to collaborate with and address specific elements of the Drylands and Drought Management IP. Investments will primarily support nature-based solutions[6] to drought that generate GEBs while also strengthening local livelihoods and drought resilience, within the mandate of the LD focal area.

379. LD investments will seek complementarity with other investments across the GEF Family of Funds where mutual synergies in results can be achieved to support countries in proactive land degradation management. Joint investments will be promoted through Multi-Focal Area and muti-trust fund projects and programmatic approaches. Co-financing will be mobilized to address elements of proactive land degradation management that go beyond the GEF's mandate, for example for physical investments building drought resilience infrastructure in water, agriculture, and transport. LD investments will provide a range of support options, such as:

- Operationalization of land degradation plans, also positively responding to the effects of drought, through technical assistance applying methodologies and tools such as the World Bank's DRRA and the UNCCD Drought Toolbox,
- Fostering partnerships between and across government agencies, private sector and civil society to enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of drought plans and policies by pooling resources and expertise,
- Capacity development, education, and awareness-raising to stakeholders providing LD related solutions with a strong local ownership enhance drought preparedness, promote improved land and water management practices, and foster effective strategies for drought resilience,
- Drought-smart land management (D-SLM) practices in croplands, grazing lands, forests and woodlands, and mixed landscapes including interventions to and reducing wildfire risks by improving forest and woodland landscape management,
- Drought-resilient agriculture, e.g., planting drought-resistant crop varieties and adopting agroecological practices such as agroforestry, silvo-pasture, permaculture, mulching, no-till farming, mixed cropping, and cover cropping that can help improve soil moisture, organic matter and carbon content,
- Sustainable water management and conservation practices, including increasing the capacity of soil to accept, retain, and release water, aquifer recharge, efficient irrigation techniques like drip irrigation and small-scale water storage infrastructure, e.g., check dams, and rainwater harvesting systems.

Objective 3: Promote fair land and water governance & strengthen enabling conditions

380. This objective promotes fair governance and the strengthening of enabling frameworks and conditions for scaling SLM and achieving voluntary LDN targets at national level. It emphasizes the critical role of improving governance by promoting the participation of all stakeholders, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities[233]. The objective also recognizes that capacity building efforts are needed to strengthen governance frameworks, with a responsibility of preserving competence in view of sustaining results, and that private sector engagement including the support of enabling conditions for private sector investments are crucial for bringing innovation and technology required to upscale SLM.

381. LD investments will provide a range of support options, such as:

- Promoting policy coherence in context of LDN and providing advisory support for sectoral integration at national and sub-national level, including the elimination of harmful subsidies in the agricultural sector,
- Revising policies and governance frameworks with responsive domestic ownership in view of continuity of results, reviewing public investments and incentives, exploring diverse financing options, including blended finance supporting investments that decrease land degradation, combat desertification, and address drought challenges, in a nationally determined manner,
- Strengthening multi-level land and water governance systems to meaningfully and actively involve local governments, civil society, engage IPLCs, women, and youth, and integrating local knowledge with national and sub-national policies, as applicable,
- Promoting multi-stakeholder engagement to encourage and enforce land and water conservation practices, regulate access and benefits sharing to natural resources, and enable improved land and water use,
- Resolving land tenure and resource use rights issues that are barriers to SLM and promoting good governance, equality and benefit sharing, and securing livelihoods,
- Building capacity of land users and strengthen governance capabilities for SLM and LDN,
- Seek partnerships with private sector entities that have long-term interests in landscape sustainability and water management and enable private sector engagement, including through blended finance opportunities,[234] expanding technology and innovation, and utilization of data and AI for improved monitoring.

[233] Noting that UNCCD COP16 agreed to establish new caucuses for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities respectively.

[234] The GEF will support countries using their STAR allocation to participate in blended-finance structures to mobilize private finance.

Focal Area Set Aside

382. LD Focal area resources set-aside from STAR will be used for positively incentivizing:

a) UNCCD enabling activities to support countries to fulfil obligations to the convention, focusing on reporting and formulation of national strategies and plans in line with current and upcoming COP decisions and the UNCCD strategy, as well as the UNCCD LDN target setting program (LDN-TSP 2.0).
b) Supporting platforms and incentives for the GEF-9 integrated programs, and coordinating national projects through programmatic approaches, such as regional programs supporting the implementation of LD focal area objectives and its elements, e.g., the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in the Sahel and Sahara as well as the GGWI of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

383. Global and regional projects on GEF-9 priority cross-cutting issues such as innovation, and policy coherence, as well as mainstreamed work on ecosystem restoration will be encouraged.

Key Contributions of Integrated Programs to Land Degradation Focal Area Outcomes

384. By adopting an integrated landscape approach, the LD focal area drives an agenda for multiple GEBs, including those related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the protection of international waters, and pollution and use of pesticides in the agricultural sector. In this regard, joint programming with other GEF focal areas will be actively pursued, especially in the context of integrated programs in view of achieving enhanced synergistic results across several focal areas.

385. The Drylands and Drought Management IP represents a major effort to address DLDD issues alongside multifaceted environmental challenges in drylands. It will help participating countries to implement their national drought plans and other drought related policies in an integrated manner while recalling domestic responsibilities in view of maintaining capacity in national institutions. The Food Systems IP, the Blue Green Islands IP, and the Forest Biomes IP are highly relevant for the LD focal area. These programs address major drivers of environmental degradation, promote LDN, catalyze the transformation towards sustainable food systems, generate multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits through SLM and restoration of degraded land, apply nature-based solutions at scale that support socio-economic development, and invest in the conservation and effective governance of critical forest biomes that maintain the health of the planet.

International Waters

Global Context of International Waters

386. Globally, there are over 300 transboundary river and lake basins, at least 468 known transboundary aquifers, 66 Large Marine Ecosystems, and 64 percent of ocean area beyond national jurisdiction. The health of these international waters underpins environmental well-being and social and economic development for most of the planet. Achieving good governance and sound management of shared freshwater and marine ecosystems, including the BBNJ Agreement, are essential to protecting biodiversity, maintaining productive land systems, and mitigating and adapting to climate change; and foundational for building a healthy planet for healthy people. It can also have significant co-benefits for regional integration and political stability.

387. However, the highly complex nature of shared freshwater and marine ecosystems, and the increasing country reliance on the resources and ecosystem services they provide, results in multiple and layered stresses. Where freshwater and marine ecosystems connect in a source-to-sea continuum, challenges can be even more complex, involving additional countries and key stakeholders in shared-management of these resources.

388. Many freshwater systems are facing unprecedented threats from climate change, urbanization, population growth, and increasing demand from industry and agriculture. Freshwater species populations have experienced the steepest decline of any biome, averaging an 85% decline since 1970.[235] Below the surface, groundwater resources are under threat of rapid depletion and pollution across the world, including in major agricultural regions.

389. Coastal and marine ecosystems are under immense pressure from development, habitat loss, pollution, unsustainable fishing practices and other industry activities, and the impacts of climate change. Ocean warming has accelerated at alarming rates, nearly doubling compared with recent decades,[236] with far ranging impacts to marine habitats, species, and humans. Aquaculture harvest has overtaken capture fisheries harvests for the first time in history, highlighting the increasing demands placed on the coastal and marine environment.[237]

[235] WWF (2024) Living Planet Report 2024 – A System in Peril. WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

[236] Li, Z., England, M.H. & Groeskamp, S. (2023) Recent acceleration in global ocean heat accumulation by mode and intermediate waters. Nat Commun 14, 6888 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-42468-z

[237] FAO (2024) The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA). Rome, Italy.

390. The GEF's International Waters (IW) Focal Area has the unique mandate to support multi-country cooperation in shared freshwater and marine ecosystems to achieve GEBs. IW Focal Area support has helped to establish many regional cooperation frameworks, treaties, and protocols on shared and transboundary surface and groundwater resources and cooperative agreements promoting sustainable shipping, fishing and marine resources."

391. GEF IW investments facilitate integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that engage the public and private sector, civil society, nongovernmental organizations, and bilateral and multilateral institutions, including Indigenous Peoples and local community organizations, women's groups, and youth representatives, as key partners in transboundary water governance and project design. They are designed to work at multiple scales—from community to ministerial levels—and across entire watersheds, from source-to-sea.

GEF-9 International Waters Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming

392. The GEF-9 International Waters (IW) strategy builds on the success of GEF-8 to support multi-country cooperation in managing and conserving shared freshwater and coastal and marine ecosystems for lasting GEBs. This includes the GEF's role as part of the financial mechanism for the BBNJ Agreement. The IW strategy focuses on three objectives:

a) Strengthening sustainable management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems
b) Supporting the BBNJ Agreement
c) Strengthening sustainable management of shared freshwater systems.

393. Where appropriate, the objectives will be combined, including with other GEF Focal Areas and Trust Funds to address multiple and integrated issues, such as land-based activities affecting the freshwater, coastal, and marine environments and measures to build resilience of these vital ecosystems from source to sea.

394. The IW strategy responds to relevant IEO recommendations and STAP guidance. This includes the IEO evaluation of the International Waters Focal Area[238] the evaluation of The GEF's approach and interventions in water security[239], and OPS-8 findings.[240] Specifically, the GEF-9 IW strategy responds to IEO guidance by emphasizing support to promoting transboundary

[238] GEF/E/C.69/02

[239] GEF/E/C.64/01/Rev.02

[240] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

cooperation, innovating financing, and long-term sustainability. The strategy also responds to STAP guidance with strengthened focuses on supporting advancement on blue economies as well as mechanisms for freshwater cooperation and managing conflict.

Objective 1: Strengthening sustainable management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems

395. This objective will target activities and investments in transboundary coastal and marine ecosystems, including Large Marine Ecosystems and ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction. Activities that could be supported under this objective include:

396. Accelerating action on protection and improved management of transboundary coastal and marine ecosystems

a. Establishing and strengthening multi-country and transboundary cooperation for marine management (e.g. Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis-Strategic Action Programme (TDA-SAP) and Strategic Action Programme (SAP) implementation) in Large Marine Ecosystems and other country-led regional management approaches
b. Supporting countries with sustainable and regenerative initiatives promoting coastal and marine blue economic sectors, including, inter alia, tourism, marine recreation, energy, shipping, and fishing and aquaculture
c. Mitigating impacts of ocean extractive industries
d. Promoting intra- and inter-national policy coherence toward addressing land-based pollution threats through source-to-sea approaches
e. Establishing and strengthening long-term sustainable financing mechanisms, including blended finance and utilization of NGI and related incentives
f. Promoting transparency, cooperation and joint management through marine spatial planning efforts and sustainable ocean planning
g. Supporting 30x30 efforts in transboundary coastal and marine ecosystems, which follow participatory approaches including local communities
h. Filling ocean data gaps and piloting new technologies and citizen science approaches for improved management
i. Aligning and mainstreaming marine transboundary priorities into national MEA commitments (NBSAP, NDC, National Action Programs, etc.)
j. Supporting countries to protect, restore and regenerate key coastal and marine ecosystems
k. Supporting establishment of blue carbon inventories and blue carbon market enabling environments, especially for inclusion in NDCs
l. Promoting adoption of NbS and green/blue infrastructure solutions to address coastal and marine priorities and future climate change scenarios

397. Advancing sustainable fisheries management

a. Piloting and scaling sustainable fisheries management initiatives in transboundary systems, including traditional management and zoning practices
b. Reducing harmful subsidies and other perverse incentives, including through policy coherence at national and regional scales
c. Promoting market mechanisms to scale ecosystem-based and sustainable fisheries management approaches, including traceability initiatives
d. Filling data gaps and piloting technologies for improved fisheries management
e. Supporting proactive fisheries management planning with migrating fish stocks under future climate change scenarios
f. Promoting sustainable aquaculture and traditional management practices, including agroecological principles as a guiding framework to foster sustainability
g. Strengthening country efforts to address Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, including support for ratification and implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement

398. Addressing global ocean threats in areas beyond national jurisdiction (non-BBNJ Agreement activities)

a. Protecting commercially important fish stocks and building awareness of the impacts of industrial fishing on ecosystems and biodiversity, including bycatch
b. Improving the use of data and information to combat IUU fishing
c. Mitigating impacts of ocean extractive industries
d. Advancing country-led efforts to promote a sustainable global shipping industry

399. The GEF-9 International Waters strategy builds on more than two decades of GEF investment to address impacts and issues with maritime shipping, including a close partnership with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to address shipping emissions, invasive species via ballast water and hull biofouling, underwater noise, and sea-based plastic pollution. Investments in maritime shipping will continue, particularly within IW Objective 1: Strengthening sustainable management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems, GEF-9 investments may include supporting countries accelerate action on protection and improved management of transboundary coastal and marine ecosystems, such as sustainable and regenerative initiatives promoting coastal and marine blue economic sectors. GEF-9 investments into country-led efforts for sustainable shipping and green ports may also address global ocean threats in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

<u>Objective 2: Supporting the BBNJ Agreement</u>

400. The BBNJ Agreement entered into force on 17 January 2026 and a first Conference of the Parties is to be held within one year from this date. GEF-9 support will be guided by the purposes of the BBNJ financial mechanism established under article 52 of the BBNJ Agreement, including to assist developing States Parties in implementing the Agreement. In this regard, GEF-9 support will be guided by the general principles and approaches set out in article 7 of the Agreement.

GEF-9 support to the BBNJ Agreement aims to ensure that duplication is avoided, and that complementarity and coherence is promoted among the utilization of the funds within the financial mechanism. Supported activities will include continued national-level support for ratification and implementation readiness aligned with GEF Council guidance[241]. Supported activities will also include those aligned with any future GEF Council guidance and future guidance provided to the GEF by the BBNJ Conference of the Parties. GEF-9 support will be utilized to support activities described in Article 52, paragraph 6, of the BBNJ Agreement, as follows:

a. Fund capacity-building projects under this Agreement, including effective projects on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity and activities and programmes, including training related to the transfer of marine technology
b. Assist developing States Parties in implementing this Agreement
c. Support conservation and sustainable use programmes by IPLCs as holders of traditional knowledge
d. Support public consultations at the national, subregional and regional levels;
e. Fund the undertaking of any other activities as decided by the COP

<u>Objective 3: Strengthening the management of shared freshwater ecosystems</u>

401. Objective 3 targets transboundary river and lake basins, wetlands, aquifers and deltas. Example activities that could be supported under this objective include:

402. Enhancing water security across borders and sectors in shared freshwater systems

a. Establishing and strengthening multi-country and transboundary cooperation (e.g. TDA-SAP and SAP implementation, strengthening or establishing River Basin Organizations, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and other country-led regional management approaches) in freshwater systems
   i. Supporting the formation and/or strengthening of regional legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation, including involving Indigenous Peoples and local communities
b. Filling data gaps and piloting new technologies and citizen science approaches for improved freshwater ecosystem monitoring and management
   i. Supporting data and information sharing among countries and accelerating access to information
   ii. Collaboration with technology companies and research institutes (e.g. in form of public-private partnerships) to improve data accessibility
c. Promoting and strengthening intersectoral policy coherence and policy reforms across sectors and borders, including through source-to-sea approaches and integrated water resource management at the basin level.

[241] GEF/C.66/07: Initial Guidelines for Enabling Activities and Ratification Support Projects for the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

d. Supporting cooperation in shared freshwater ecosystems to address preparedness and resilience against increasingly severe and extended Earth system change, in particular increasing variability of the global water cycle, including flooding, drought, and glacial melt
e. Aligning with and mainstreaming freshwater transboundary priorities into national MEA commitments (NBSAPs, NDCs, National Action Programs, National Implementation Plans, etc.)
f. Supporting countries to protect, restore and regenerate globally important transboundary basins, wetlands, and deltas
g. Promoting adoption of NbS and green/blue infrastructure solutions to address pollution where feasible, groundwater recharge, and flood and drought management, and to enhance resilience
h. Supporting sustainable freshwater fisheries and aquaculture management
i. Establishing and strengthening long-term sustainable financing mechanisms, including blended finance and utilization of NGI and related incentive
j. Leveraging private sector finance to enhance water security

403. Addressing gaps in governance and sustainable management of shared groundwater resources and conjunctive management of surface and groundwater, including considerations for the rights and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities

a. Strengthening the enabling environment for groundwater management and the conjunctive management of surface and groundwater at the national level
b. Establishing and strengthening multi-country cooperation to assess and cooperatively manage transboundary aquifer systems and groundwater dependent ecosystems including through support to basin organizations, to transboundary agreements, and aligned support for countries to achieve relevant international targets and frameworks.
c. Promoting the improved groundwater management in the basin management practices of transboundary river basin organizations
d. Piloting and scaling investments to avoid over-pumping, salinization and contamination of groundwater
e. Equipping government entities at all levels with the knowledge and tools to avoid over-pumping, salinization and contamination of groundwater
f. Supporting policy and NbS investments to enhance groundwater recharge
g. Supporting mainstreaming of groundwater quality protection into national and regional planning

Cross-Cutting Themes

404. There are several *cross-cutting topics* that the IW focal area will strengthen further moving forward. These include (i) *engagement with the private sector* to encourage sustainable production and resource use across supply chains, including by engaging with sector or industry-wide roundtables and encouraging transparent the adoption of performance standards ; (ii) whole of government and whole of society approaches in the management of shared water

resources and providing dedicated support in projects, especially including small-scale fisheries, CSOs, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth; (iii) *policy coherence* to promote mutually reinforcing policy actions across governance of shared resources; (iv) *blended finance* and NGI to encourage and derisk the uptake of financing mechanisms such as bonds, guarantees, and insurance; (v) *knowledge management and learning,* including through the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the cross-agency and multi-actor platform of knowledge exchange and capacity building, and (vi) *Supporting communication and engagement with public media* and support cooperation and exchanges among environmental journalists across countries in shared water systems to increase trust, transparency and reaching wider civil society.

Partnerships

405. In addition to the GEF's role as part of the financial mechanism of the BBNJ Agreement and coordination with relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies (IFBs), the GEF International Waters focal area may support actions to mutually achieve goals for other international agreements where the GEF does not operate as the financial mechanism nor have any obligations or mandates, as aligned with GEF-9 priorities and objectives. This includes the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the International Whaling Commission, and many others. The increasing number of Parties worldwide to and activities and tools of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes provide an opportunity for synergies and for increased sustainability of initiatives supported by the GEF, within its mandate. Healthy transboundary marine and freshwater ecosystems are also prioritized in many Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) and NBSAPs and will be essential in supporting delivering the CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD and UN Decade of Ocean targets.

406. Partnerships with private sector entities across the focal area will be encouraged to support resource mobilization and co-finance, the deployment of new technologies and knowledge exchange that can close data gaps, build capacity within country and regional initiatives, and promote long-term sustainability of GEF IW investments. Partnerships with private sector platforms, industry think tanks, and research organizations and multistakeholder platforms will also be targeted, such as in the shipping sector together with IMO.

407. The GEF IW Focal Area will also facilitate partnerships through IW: LEARN among a range of actors to stimulate conversation and capacity between, and beyond, GEF funded activities. The focal area will also continue to engage with related initiatives led by countries and partners, including the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition, the Freshwater Challenge, the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) consultative community, and similar efforts from other partners.

Key Contributions of Integrated Programs to International Waters Focal Area Outcomes

408. Shared freshwater and marine ecosystems underpin many of the GEF Focal Areas and Integrated Programs proposed for GEF-9. The IW Focal Area will continue to identify opportunities to work alongside national investments utilizing STAR focal areas to foster multi-country and transboundary cooperation, including opportunities for blended finance and/or Multi-Trust Fund projects. Multiple entry points also exist for leveraging ongoing GEF IW and Integrated Programs investments, including the GEF-8 Clean and Health Oceans Integrated Program, to achieve the objectives of the IW Focal Area and the same is also true for IW projects to contribute to GEF-9 Integrated Programs. All GEF-9 IPs provide opportunities for national-level child projects to support the implementation of regional and global IW priorities in LMEs and transboundary freshwater basins. For example, the Blue and Green Islands IP and the Circular Solutions to Plastics IP may support the national implementation of regional SAPs, such as in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) SAP that prioritized land-based sources of pollution as a transboundary threat to the Caribbean Sea. Likewise, the key geographies of the Critical Forest Biomes IP also help advance national level strengthening of past IW efforts for multi-country cooperation, such as in the Amazon, Meso-America, and Congo. Further, the Sustainable Cities and Drylands and Drought Management IPs may provide national and municipal-level implementation to address critical groundwater and conjunctive water management issues that are priorities of the GEF-9 IW strategy. The Food Systems IP could support the scaling of many regional fisheries management strategies linked to GEF IW efforts promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. All the GEF-9 IPs may also benefit from and support the strengthening of knowledge and experience from IW:LEARN.

Chemicals and Waste

Global Context of Chemicals and Waste

409. Year after year, global chemical production and use continue to expand, fueling economic progress while simultaneously contributing to pollution that jeopardizes both human well-being and the health of the planet. Hazardous chemicals and persistent pollutants, including plastics, highly hazardous pesticides, environmentally persistent pharmaceuticals, electronic waste, and substances regulated by international conventions such as those under the Stockholm Convention and the Minamata Convention, have been detected in the air, in water sources, throughout food webs, across farmland and urban landscapes, and even within human bodies. In many developing nations and economies in transition, limited resources and institutional capacity hinder environmentally sound waste management, the creation and enforcement of coherent policies, the development of skills and knowledge, and effective data collection. As a result, these areas are especially susceptible to accumulating harmful toxins in both the environment and human populations.

410. Against this backdrop, the GEF has emerged as a key financial mechanism for several international accords, including primarily the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Minamata Convention on Mercury, while also supporting the Global Framework on Chemicals and the Montreal Protocol. Over the years, the GEF has supported impactful chemicals and waste initiatives that cut across numerous high-stakes industries, such as agriculture, mining, infrastructure, healthcare, information and communication technology, transportation, tourism, waste and plastics management, and the manufacture of consumer products and commodities.

411. Under its ninth replenishment cycle (GEF-9), the GEF is proposing an enhanced strategy designed to encourage more integrated, transformative, and ambitious approaches to pollution prevention and management. This includes addressing the problem of legacy chemicals and tackling new challenges posed by the escalating global plastics crisis. Although reaching "zero waste and pollution-free economies" remains an aspirational goal, it serves as a rallying call for the scale of change necessary and emphasizes the critical need to safeguard both the planet's ecosystems and human health. The GEF will aim for invested resources to yield lasting results in improving the sound management of chemicals and waste and definitively reducing their pollution.

412. In conjunction to the Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution, the focal area will continue to address POPs contained in difficult to recycle materials, and products, including plastics. These difficult-to-manage products, including plastics, often containing hazardous additives, will remain a priority under GEF-9. The Chemicals and Waste Focal Area will continue to promote policies and regulations that target the full life cycle of such materials, from production to disposal. This includes materials and products and plastics with harmful chemical additives in their supply chains. In parallel, the Focal Area will invest in improved waste management, including, recycling, helping to reduce the release of dioxins and furans, toxic byproducts often emitted from the open burning or uncontrolled landfilling of plastic waste. Together, these interventions will reduce both chemical and plastic pollution, aligning with global commitments under multilateral environmental agreements.

413. A central pillar of this new strategy involves mobilizing additional resources from private, commercial, and household sectors, all while strengthening the GEF's established collaboration with industry stakeholders in the chemicals and waste focal area. By fostering deeper partnerships and bolder action, the GEF aims to catalyze meaningful progress toward a cleaner, healthier, and better future for all.

414. Through a cohesive, integrated strategy, the GEF-9 Chemicals and Waste focal area:

- Implements key IEO[242] evaluation insights: reinforcing robust policy frameworks, training, private-sector and SME engagement, measuring health and environmental co-benefits, and balancing legacy-chemical commitments with progressive supply-chain transformations.
- Fulfills Minamata Convention obligations and enabling activities: continuing to support Minamata Initial assessments (MIAs), artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) National Action Programs, Review of the Implementation of Article 7 (RIA), Update of Minamata Inventories (UMI), phaseout of mercury containing products, control and management of trade of mercury and its compounds, reduction of industrial emissions and strong awareness/behavior-change interventions to reduce mercury's health and environmental impacts. The focal area will also support stronger linkages between mercury pollution and human health.
- Fulfills Stockholm Convention obligations: continuing to support National Implementation Plan (NIP) updates, manage and dispose of legacy POPs including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) reduce emissions of unintentional POPs (UPOPs) and act on new POPs[243] including Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts and PFOA-related compounds, Perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS), its salts and PFHxS-related compounds, Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances and others . The focal area will also respond to any newly listed chemicals by the Convention during the GEF-9 period, including through support for updating of NIPs and early actions on these chemicals.
- Aligns with the Global Framework on Chemicals: championing integrated, sectoral, cross-sector, and knowledge-driven approaches to embed safer chemicals management, resource mobilization, and stakeholder partnerships toward global 2030/2035 targets. The focal area will support the targets of the Global Framework through incorporating the objectives of the targets into the design of projects funded under the focal area. The focal area will also support specific actions under the global framework that require globally coordinated action, including, but not limited to action on environmentally persistent pharmaceuticals, antimicrobial resistance, highly hazardous pesticides, textiles, agriculture, mining and critical minerals and electronics.
- Supports the implementation of the Montreal Protocol: by supporting the ratification of the eligible countries with economies in transition as well as implementing the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Protocol.
- Aligns with the STAP 2020 advisory document on Delivering Multiple Benefits through the Sound management of Chemicals and Waste by the strategy's multi-objective framework, mix of policy reforms, technology deployment, and attention to social and economic outcomes that reflects the core messages in the STAP advisory document.[244] As implementation proceeds, continuing to deepen co-benefits measurements for biodiversity,

[242] Evaluation of GEF Interventions in the Chemicals and Waste Focal Area GEF-5 to GEF-9: GEF/E/C.68/01

[243] Persistent Organic Pollutants Listed by the Stockholm Convention

[244] STAP advisory document" Delivering Multiple Benefits through the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste"

earth system change, water, and especially local community well-being will help demonstrate the full range of positive impacts envisioned by both the strategy and the STAP guidance.
- Deepens ongoing work to address plastic pollution throughout its lifecycle and readies the GEF to function in the financial of a future treaty on Plastics, if decided by the Intergovernmental Negotiations Committee on Plastic Pollution.

GEF-9 Chemicals and Waste Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming

415. The GEF-9 CW strategy supports a transition toward circularity, safe and green, sustainable chemistry, improved chemicals management, and pollution prevention across value chains. It emphasizes development of new materials and products utilizing green, sustainable chemistry and nature-based solutions[6], prevention at the source, addresses legacy chemicals and waste that contains hazardous materials or that can generate hazardous chemicals from improper handling, mainstreaming of environmental and social safeguards, robust data collection and monitoring, and innovative financial mechanisms.

416. The Focal Area will focus on the following principles:

- Supporting Conventions obligations[245] (Minamata, Stockholm, and the potential plastics agreements), including enabling activities and capacity building for newly listed and legacy chemicals.
- Supporting the Global Framework on Chemicals and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.
- Strengthening policy frameworks that align national and regional regulations with international commitments, accompanied by robust enforcement.
- Use of science-backed approaches including but not limited to the STAP and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP).
- Driving and encouraging innovation and technology adoption, including data transparency and traceability systems for supply chains, trade flows, and frontier digital tools (AI, Internet of Things, blockchain).
- Building capacity and ensuring a whole of society approach, emphasizing vulnerable communities, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth.
- Transforming markets and supply chains to phase out hazardous substances, including plastic additives of concern, driving product redesign, and reducing reliance on harmful chemicals and materials.

[245] The conduct of waste management and trade in hazardous substances are governed by the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions and both the Stockholm Convention and the Minamata Conventions requires the use of guidelines and procedures from these conventions therefore programming to address Stockholm and Minamata Obligations will have co-benefits to these conventions.

- Mobilizing and establishing long-term financial mechanisms, including blended finance and utilization of NGIs and related incentives, are crucial for scaling up pollution prevention, with a specific focus on the promotion of circular solutions.
- Supporting Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities through strategic programs and projects tailored to their needs
- Where appropriate, support implementation of the KMGBF, including Target 7 and supporting actions to protect biodiversity from pollution.
  Working with private sector and sub-national governments to advance circular solutions to pollution.
- Use of established and validated technologies when addressing disposal of hazardous chemicals and plastic waste, including recycling of plastic waste, while also encouraging innovation.

Objective 1: Strengthening Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

417. In an era of growing environmental awareness, governments and international bodies recognize that the safety of our ecosystems and communities' hinges on robust policy and regulatory frameworks. The need to control hazardous chemicals and plastics has never been more urgent, and addressing these issues requires a multi-layered approach that encompasses legal reforms, cross-sectoral coordination, and effective enforcement. By strengthening these frameworks, stakeholders can ensure the replacement of hazardous chemicals with safe alternatives, including those developed using green, sustainable chemistry principles or nature-based solutions and responsible use and disposal of chemicals and plastics, safeguarding both public health and the environment. Under this objective the following actions are eligible for support:

418. Enabling Environments and Alignment: The following actions seek to build effective policies by creating strong legal and regulatory frameworks that reflect international agreements. This foundation not only facilitates the adoption of best practices but also empowers countries to respond swiftly to evolving environmental challenges.

a. Support EAs and related processes under the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions, and a possible future treaty on plastics[246]— including under the Stockholm Convention, National Implementation Plans (NIPs) and NIP Updates; for the Minamata Convention, MIAs, Update of Minamata Inventories (UMI), Review of the Implementation of Article 7 (RIAs), National Action Plans for ASGM.
b. Provide technical and legal assistance to incorporate international treaties and processes (e.g., BRS, Minamata, plastics and the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC)) into

[246] If a Plastics Treaty is concluded during GEF-9, and the GEF is selected to function in the financial mechanism a ratification and early implementation program will be brought to Council for approval.

national or regional frameworks, including the integration of newly listed chemicals and emerging plastics-related amendments or conventions.

c. Integrate Global Monitoring Programme (GMP) requirements into domestic regulatory systems, ensuring alignment with established global standards.

419. Harmonization, Enforcement, and Compliance: The following actions seek to ensure uniform guidelines and robust enforcement measures and regulations remain consistent across sectors and national borders. Such harmonization deters illegal trafficking and fosters greater accountability among stakeholders.

a. Develop or strengthen sector-specific guidelines for industries such as electronics, plastics, textiles, agriculture, healthcare, and tourism, promoting environmentally sound management practices.
b. Promote effective enforcement by providing targeted training (e.g., customs and port of entry) with the aim of intercepting illegally trafficked hazardous chemicals, waste containing or contaminated with hazardous chemicals, plastic waste, and other pollutants.

420. Strengthen incentives and penalties, including EPR, tax incentives, pollution charges, and subsidies, to encourage safer chemical use, waste reduction and prevention and the adoption of plastic alternatives Policy Coherence and Data Integration: Seamless collaboration between ministries, combined with comprehensive data collection, ensures that all facets of pollution prevention are addressed. This coordinated approach aligns budgetary decisions with environmental objectives while maintaining transparency and accountability. Actions as follows will be considered:

a. Promote cross-sectoral coordination among environment, finance, health, and other ministries to align domestic financial flows with pollution prevention goals, enabling budgetary coherence.
b. Emphasize data collection on traded chemicals and plastics, focusing on cross-border impacts and the entire supply chain.
c. Embed monitoring and reporting frameworks (including social and environmental safeguards and health co-benefits) to track policy and regulatory effectiveness in preventing pollution from hazardous chemicals and plastics.

<u>Objective 2: Driving Innovation and Technology Deployment</u>

421. Innovation for Pollution Prevention: Fostering new ideas, technologies, and processes is essential to curb hazardous chemicals and plastics. By establishing platforms for research, development, and scaling up best practices, industries and communities can harness innovative solutions that reduce pollution at its source. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Establish an incubation and accelerator innovative window to seed and scale local and international best practices, including chemistry practices, cleaner production, plastics alternatives, and nature positive solutions.

b. Embed digital-era tools (AI, IoT, blockchain) in risk assessment, compliance monitoring, and supply chain transparency, ensuring that plastic waste flows and chemical usage are tracked accurately.

422. Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building: Effective technology deployment depends on the exchange of skills and insights. Facilitating knowledge transfer ensures that proven techniques are tailored to local contexts, while ongoing training and monitoring help sustain long-term benefits. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Facilitate technology transfer and replication of Best Available Techniques/Best Environmental Practices (BAT/BEP), focusing on solutions suited to specific local needs.
b. Promote research and development (R&D) and pilot projects that showcase cost-effective, scalable methods for pollution prevention, including data collection and robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E).
c. Encourage plastics recycling and redesign innovations to reduce reliance on virgin plastics, fostering a market for reincorporating sustainably produced and recycled materials.

423. Lifecycle and Circular Design: Early-stage design decisions significantly influence the environmental impact of products and processes. By prioritizing eco-design and circularity, industries can minimize waste and pollution throughout a product's lifecycle. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Support design-stage interventions (safe chemistry, eco-design, lifecycle assessments) that minimize the use of hazardous chemicals, plastics, and other toxic inputs.
b. Promote resource efficiency in line with the circular economy action hierarchy through rethink, reuse, repair, recycling, upcycling, and safer substitutes, prioritizing actions that prevent pollution leakage into the environment.

<u>Objective 3: Building Capacity and Ensuring a Just Transition</u>

424. Workforce Development and Safeguards: A shift toward safer chemicals and sustainable plastics management requires a well-trained workforce. Ensuring occupational safety and health standards protects workers and promotes best practices across value chains. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Train workers in manufacturing, agriculture, recycling, waste handling, tourism, electronics, and related sectors on safe and green chemical use aligned with international best practice on health and safety measures, including effective plastics management. Training may also include measures to ensure continuity when new workers arrive following the end of the project.

425. Social Protection: Engaging diverse stakeholders in decision-making ensures fair distribution of benefits and responsibilities. Social safety nets and community-led initiatives help vulnerable groups transition away from harmful practices without compromising livelihoods. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Engage CSOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth, local communities, women, and vulnerable groups in project design, implementation, and M&E, as relevant, to foster equitable benefit-sharing and capacity building.
b. Where relevant, provide livelihood support and social safety nets to communities moving away from hazardous activities or polluting industries, including plastic manufacturing.

426. Local Innovation and Ownership: Local communities often hold valuable knowledge and innovative ideas for addressing pollution challenges. In some cases, by empowering them through training and financial support, projects can become self-sustaining and responsive to real-world conditions. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Encourage, where relevant, community-driven pilot projects that build on and incorporate local and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge.
b. Strengthen enabling environments by offering training and microfinancing for informal waste pickers, smallholder farmers, and other groups as relevant positioned to adopt safer practices, particularly in the collection and management of plastic waste.

Objective 4: Transforming Supply Chains and Markets

427. Detoxification and Durable Supply Chains Transparency: Reducing the presence of hazardous chemicals and plastics in supply chains calls for better tracking, inventories, and enforcement. Collaboration among industries, governments, and consumers is critical for phasing out harmful substances and ensuring transparency. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Work with industry to phase out newly listed POPs, mercury, and other hazardous chemicals, including plastic additives of concern in supply chains, using green, sustainable chemistry and nature-based solutions[6].
b. Support the collection of inventories and data on traded chemicals, plastics, and finished articles, strengthening supply chain tracking.
c. Incentivize improved product design (e.g., using the principles of green, sustainable chemistry, safer materials and ensuring a longer lifespan, repairability and recyclability) to minimize cross-border pollution and plastic leakage.

428. Circular and Pollution Free Supply Chains: Embedding circular economy and green, sustainable chemistry principles into supply chain management helps industries adopt cleaner technologies, reduce emissions, and prevent pollution. This synergy between nature positive procurement and low impact strategies benefits both environmental conservation and corporate aims. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Collaborate with corporations and trade associations to incorporate circular economy approaches thereby extending product life, adopting hazardous chemical-free or plastic-free materials, and prioritizing pollution prevention at the source.

b. Encourage sustainable and green public procurement (e.g., hazardous chemicals- or plastic-free, low-impact materials) and low impact strategies in tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, and other sectors.
c. Promote water stewardship, watershed management, and marine litter reduction using a source-to-sea approach, reinforcing the goal of nature positive supply chains.

Objective 5: Strategic Financial Mechanisms and Private Sector Engagement

429. Innovative Financial Instruments: New financing models can unlock resources for pollution control and plastics reduction. By embedding clear environmental criteria into bonds and other financial products, investors and institutions can channel capital toward sustainable projects. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Pilot bonds such as pollution prevention bonds, blended finance, insurance, guarantees, equity and other vehicles aimed at curbing waste containing or contaminated with hazardous chemicals, plastic waste and reducing chemical usage as well as supporting pollution free businesses and green chemistry.
b. Where applicable work with development banks and other UN funds/finance initiatives such as UNEP FI and UNCDF in view of scaling up results.
c. Explore embedding pollution and plastics criteria (e.g., plastic neutrality) and transparency requirements in mainstream financial products.
d. Encourage the development of financial taxonomies that recognize chemicals, plastics, and waste risk as material factors, driving deeper private sector commitment.
e. Leverage focal area resources (e.g., GEF's non-grant instrument window) to complement and incentivize private investment in pollution prevention initiatives.
f. Blended finance structures that generate benefits for chemicals and waste management of global significance while promoting sustainable development, including investments to advance the bioeconomy.

430. Optimizing GEF's Role: Through strategic use of grants and co-financing, the GEF can catalyze large-scale pollution control efforts. Identifying critical intervention points ensures resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Identify key intervention points by conducting value chain and cost-benefit analyses, including the disposal costs for newly listed POPs, mercury, hazardous chemicals, waste containing or contaminated with hazardous chemicals, and plastic waste streams.
b. Use performance-based grants and co-financing models to attract private capital for pollution control solutions, including cutting-edge plastics circularity initiatives.
c. Engage the private sector early in project design to establish a clear business case for pollution prevention as a strategic investment area.

431. Policy and Regulatory Linkages: Aligning financial incentives with robust policies strengthens overall pollution control strategies. By partnering with finance ministries and leveraging industry advocacy, governments can establish a supportive framework for safer

chemicals and plastic waste management. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Partner with Ministries of Finance and other key institutions to integrate pollution risks into financial regulations (e.g., mandatory disclosures of plastic and chemical footprints).
b. Foster a policy advocacy role for industry to reduce regulatory uncertainty and champion reforms that expedite safer chemicals and plastic waste management.

Objective 6: Eliminating a Hazardous Legacy

432. Addressing Legacy Chemicals and Plastics Hotspots: Decades of unsustainable practices have left stockpiles of obsolete pesticides, POPs, and other hazardous materials. Targeted remediation and safe disposal are crucial for preventing further environmental and health risks. Below are the key actions proposed under this focus area:

a. Address legacy chemicals (e.g., PCBs, obsolete pesticides, POPs in stockpiles, contaminated sites, and mercury hotspots) in accordance with established Convention guidance.
b. Invest in cost-effective, safe final disposal and remediation aligned with Basel Convention guidelines for environmentally sound management.
c. Scale up local solutions for the environmentally sound disposal of legacy POPs and other hazardous stockpiles, preventing further releases into the environment.
d. Tackle plastic pollution hotspots (e.g., uncontrolled dumpsites, coastal areas) through integrated cleanup and remediation efforts, along with structural measures that avert future leakage.

Partnerships

433. IPs: Encourage cross focal area synergy (BD, CC, IW) to amplify impact and mainstream pollution prevention, particularly plastics, into broader development plans.

434. Stakeholders: Coordinate with the BRS, Minamata, GFC and Montreal Protocol Secretariats, and with private sector, civil society, local authorities, research institutions, and local communities.

435. Capacity Building for MEA Obligations: Support enabling activities, global monitoring, and reporting under relevant conventions (e.g., Stockholm, Minamata), while also anticipating forthcoming global frameworks on plastics

Key Contributions of the Integrated Programs to the Chemicals and Waste Focal Area

436. Across tropical forest regions such as the Amazon and Congo basins, integrated programs can support curbing mercury use in ASGM and reducing POPs and highly hazardous pesticides from agricultural runoff and logging. These approaches help countries meet their Minamata Convention obligations and encourage best practices like IPM, thereby aligning with the CW focal area's efforts to eliminate hazardous substances. In island contexts, particularly SIDS, programs can support "source-to-sea" strategies that enhance solid waste and e-waste management and limit hazardous imports, ultimately reducing the volume of marine contaminants. Additionally, food systems initiatives can emphasize safer pesticides, regenerative agriculture, and improved aquaculture and livestock practices, thus addressing both POPs and the emerging issue of antimicrobial resistance in the environment.

437. In dryland regions, integrated programs can address heavy pesticide use during drought responses, preventing dangerous chemicals from accumulating in fragile ecosystems. By promoting sustainable pest control and better water management, these initiatives reduce soil contamination and salinization while bolstering policy frameworks and enforcement capacity. Urban-focused efforts can tackle municipal and industrial waste challenges by improving collection, recycling, and disposal systems; cities also benefit from nature-based solutions like natural infrastructure to filter pollutants, and from cleaner production methods in local industries to cut mercury and POP releases. Complementing these, circular approaches to plastics encourage safer material design, reduce hazardous additives, and prevent unintentional POPs from open burning or improper disposal.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Country Engagement Strategy

438. Country engagement is the means through which the potential of the GEF Partnership is translated into environmental impact and lasting GEBs. The CES articulates how this potential - in financial and technical resources, in translation of science to robust strategy and best practice, and in partnership, political alliance and leverage-building – is translated into impact -through effective empowerment of recipient countries and their key institutions, public, private, and civil society. Country empowerment, through the provision of information, capacity-building, technical support, financial resources, networks, and opportunities, aims to strengthen country ownership and integration of environmental goals and GEF-driven actions into national development strategies for lasting GEBs.

439. The effectiveness of the CES in translating GEF's potential into impact has gained consistent recognition in recent IEO evaluations including OPS-8[247] as well as in the MOPAN Evaluation of the GEF.[248] At the country level, the CES activities strengthen countries' ownership of environmental portfolios by intensifying support for impactful country outcomes through GEF financing and resources. Countries in turn have a responsibility to ensure an active ownership through competence-based recruitments and in ensuring continuity in key positions in relevant public institutions. This empowerment aligns with findings of the G20 report,[249] which highlights the CES's role in improving coordination and transparency, enabling more impactful environmental investments. The GEF IEO's 2023 evaluation of the country support program[250] and OPS-8 findings[251] emphasizes that the CES fosters stronger partnerships, driving measurable improvements in project design and implementation through meaningful engagement with governments, civil society, and the private sector, all of which demonstrate that the CES is a critical mechanism for the GEF in translating global environmental ambitions into country-driven actions and impacts. Emphasis will be made on positively incentivizing, for instance through set asides, countries demonstrating active commitment to GEF whole of government and whole of society approaches, with strong domestic ownership for sustainable results.

440. The CES thus is a central means to deliver the full GEF-9 strategy. The CES also serves the entire family of GEF funds and as such will improve the synergies and efficiencies in all GEF resource programming with countries resulting in a more seamless and impactful set of investments. The CES also guides how the GEF Secretariat convenes, communicates, and collaborates across the GEF Partnership to achieve our shared aims of achieving lasting GEBs. Thus, consistent with the IEO's OPS-8 recommendations,[252] the CES articulates how the GEF will bring together our broad partnership around its many interventions and relationships to provide efficient and effective technical support for portfolio development, to enhance policy coherence, and to leverage financial, institutional, and political resources to achieve our ambitious aims. To this end, the CES articulates how the GEF will support recipient country governments to become more integrated and aligned to deliver environmental outcomes.

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[247] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[248] MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

[249] Accelerating Sustainable Finance for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies: Independent High-Level Expert Group Review of the Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds October 2024 https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/G20-IHLEG-VCEF-Review.pdf

[250] GEF IEO GEF Country Support Program (CSP) https://www.gefieo.org/evaluations/csp

[251] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[252] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

Progress on Country Engagement in GEF-8

441. In November 2022, GEF Council approved the GEF-8 CES, noting "*The Country Engagement Strategy … builds on the past three decades of GEF's work focused on empowering and supporting countries to achieve higher impact with GEF resources*." GEF-8 CES piloted important new initiatives such as training and financial resources for Operational Focal Points (OFPs) to enhance their GEF portfolio management[253] and the Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program, supporting young conservation leaders who will be at the helm of stewarding the global environment.

442. GEF-8 also marked an important pivot towards a greater Country-focused approach, including increased engagement of GEF technical staff in upstream dialogues with OFPs and national partners for portfolio planning, focusing on enhancing policy coherence supporting alignment of actions and investments across government ministries. In GEF-8, efforts were made to learn from existing experiences in countries that had adopted National Steering Committees (NSC) for GEF national governance. Country Platforms were also piloted in select countries.

CES Strategic Directions in GEF-9

443. The CES builds upon past investments to empower countries for maximum impact in the use of GEF resources,[254] to advance GEF's policy coherence and whole of government integration, to build capacity and strategic opportunity for key GEF liaisons (Operational Focal Points, Political Focal Points, Ministries) to lead impactful country portfolios, to mobilize critical stakeholders for nature positive governance, and increase communications, knowledge, and learning. The CES brings together the entire GEF Family of Funds for efficient, effective, and responsive support of GEF recipient countries, with a particular emphasis of those with a strong commitment to the whole of government and whole of society approaches and active domestic ownership for sustainable results.

444. Building on GEF-8 successes and key lessons, and consistent with the IEO's OPS-8 findings and recommendations,[255] the forthcoming CES Evaluation and the MOPAN Report,[256] the GEF's CES efforts in GEF-9 will center on the following 4 strategic lines: enhancing active country ownership and OFP capacity with continuity, advancing the whole of government approach for

[253] As highlighted in the impending MOPAN Assessment, increasing support was provided to OFPs during GEF-8 to help identify the correct agencies for programming. MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

[254] MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

[255] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[256] MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

policy coherence, supporting and empowering all stakeholders for maximum impact and shared benefits, and providing effective communications, knowledge, and learning opportunities, tools and products.

Enhancing Country Ownership and OFP Capacity

445. Country ownership of GEF investments requires that the GEF is understood and integrated in national development agendas, and that the GEF's key country liaisons (OFPs, PFPs, Ministries) are engaged in efforts to build knowledge, advance integrated planning, align policies and mobilize complementary resources to achieve and sustain GEBs.

OFP Empowerment

446. Given the central importance of OFPs to effective GEF delivery, and consistent with the IEO's OPS-8 recommendations,[257] strengthening the capabilities and influence of OFPs for national environmental leadership is a centerpiece of the CES. In GEF-9, OFP Empowerment will be anchored on three key pillars – building capacity through the provision of knowledge and training, increasing financial and technical resource access for portfolio management, and enhancing OFP recognition as environmental leaders in their countries and their regions.

447. Building on GEF-8 progress, the GEF would enhance the capacity of OFPs by providing dedicated capacity-building and technical assistance. Enhancing the capacity of OFPs will enable OFPs to efficiently and effectively manage their GEF portfolios and enhance policy coherence of GEF investments at country level. GEF-9 OFP capacity building efforts may include core GEF knowledge provision and skills training in investment portfolio development and management, blended finance,[258] knowledge exchanges to enhance replication of successful innovation, thematic meetings and webinars on emerging scientific and technical issues, among other topics.

448. CES efforts to strengthen OFP capacity will be coordinated with GBFF, LDCF, SCCF efforts, consistent with the GEF-9 Family of Funds approach. In particular, more robust engagement of these other GEF trust funds in CES efforts will be adopted for GEF-9, with a special focus on LDCs and SIDS. Such engagement will be planned and implemented in coordination with the GEF-wide CES efforts. Relevant activities may entail in-depth discussions with countries on GBFF, LDCF and SCCF programming opportunities and synergies with GEF TF programming, engagement with OFPs and UNFCCC focal points on how programming may be aligned to address national needs and priorities, dialogue on GEF-relevant matters in relation to upcoming major multilateral meetings and responses to key decisions, Concerted efforts will be made to expand outreach to UNFCCC national focal points, national entities, and focal points of key MCF, national and sub-national government institutions, IPLCs, and innovation and private sector platforms

[257] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[258] As identified by the MOPAN Report, further steps are needed to build country demand for loan finance and non-grant instruments. MOPAN Assessment Report of the GEF, 2025.

449. GEF-9 will continue the successful GEF-8 pilot of financial support to OFPs, providing essential resources to manage their GEF portfolios. The modest funding provided for effective operational oversight is essential to supervising Implementing Agency delivery, to project-based learning, management, and to building OFP leadership. This support may enable OFPs to join supervision missions, organize field visits, and contribute to project performance reports. GEF Agencies will collaborate with OFPs to coordinate oversight efforts.

450. OFP retention is an important priority for the GEF Partnership, as frequent turnover undermines coherence and continuity in environmental stewardship and effective programming of GEF resources to achieve GEBs. The MOPAN Report[259] also points out that, in some cases, the effectiveness of the OFP structure is often challenged by operational vulnerabilities beyond GEF's sphere of influence, including capacity gaps, high turnover rates amongst OFPs/frequent administrative re-organization. Hosting Ministries will be engaged to agree on OFP terms and retention priorities prior to GEF resourcing of OFP empowerment efforts, as recipient countries bear the responsibility of ensuring continuity of this critical role in the GEF Partnership

451. OFP retention and redundancy will be core principles for GEF training, financial resource provision, and OFP empowerment through recognition and leadership opportunities. Institutional capacity will be strengthened to ensure that knowledge and systems are preserved and transitioned within OFP host ministries, even if personnel may change. Alternate OFP appointments will be encouraged to build redundancy and resilience of this critical GEF recipient country role.

Upstream Technical Dialogues

452. In addition to general training efforts, the GEF will continue direct, context-specific engagement with OFPs in Upstream Technical Dialogues, supported by GEF technical staff and Agency partners. Upstream efforts aim to support OFPs in the prioritization of GEB targets, optimization of portfolio design and leverage of complementary actions and investments – public, private, philanthropic. These Dialogues are demand-driven and will be prioritized at the beginning of GEF-9. They will be held both in-person and virtually and will be followed through the GEF-9 cycle with periodic portfolio reviews by OFPs and their GEF technical support partners.

453. Blended finance programming will be supported by technical assistance delivered through Focal Areas and IPs, particularly in upstream technical dialogues and portfolio planning at the inception of GEF-9. GEF-9 will offer targeted technical assistance through CES to help countries develop strategic blended finance projects and create enabling conditions for their success.

[259] MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

454. Moreover, to incentivize countries to maximize the leverage of GEF-9 financing, a portion of the Blended Finance window will be allocated to support the use of grant instruments as further described in the Blended Finance section below. Under this initiative, countries that utilize their STAR and non-STAR focal area allocations as non-grant instruments to attract private sector investment will be eligible for additional resources from the Non-Grant Initiative. This incentive will be included in strategic dialogues on country portfolio planning, to encourage strategic use of blended finance from country STAR and non-STAR allocations.

Advancing the Whole of Government Approach

455. Successful GEF investments require that all relevant government entities actively participate and are aligned with environmental goals and priorities. GEF-8 pilots of the policy coherence approach and Country Platforms are forging a new path to integrating GEF investments into national development efforts, ensuring greater synergies and holistic planning in achieving lasting environmental outcomes central to nature positive growth, and providing opportunities to leverage and amplify financial resources and actions delivering GEBs. The MOPAN Report notes that the GEF's commitment to a whole of government (and whole of society) approach makes its country outreach more nuanced and at the same time potentially more productive.[260] GEF-9 CES efforts will strengthen proven approaches, such as National Dialogues and Constituency meetings, and will expand and mainstream National Steering Committees[261] and Country Platforms.

456. These efforts will aim to position GEF investments as a strategic opportunity within each recipient country, working across agencies of the Executive Branch to integrate environmental values in national development strategies and investments. Advances in cross-ministry planning and policy coherence will enable greater domestic resource mobilization to further narrow the nature financing gap. Additionally, the GEF will increase efforts to engage and support PFP and OFP participation in national ministerial coalitions on environment and development priorities to build further synergies, lasting results and leverage resources for nature positive development.

457. The Country Engagement Strategy (CES) serves also as a vehicle for aligning domestic resource mobilization with environmental goals as it is the instrument through which the full GEF-9 Strategy is delivered. By empowering recipient countries and their key institutions through effective National Steering Committees and Country Platforms, the CES enables more effective alignment of external and domestic resources for lasting environmental outcomes (GEBs).

[260] MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

[261] Ibid.

458. Country engagement will not be limited to the national level in GEF-9, where we will seek strategic opportunities to partner with sub-national governments, where development efforts are commonly anchored. State-level land use planning, protected area and IPLC territorial management, and groundwater management efforts may benefit from sub-national government engagement.

National Steering Committees (NSC)

459. The CES will promote National Steering Committees (NSC) in willing countries to maximize coherence in programming GEF resources, aligned with national development priorities. National Steering Committees bring together key Ministries across recipient country governments to integrate environmental priorities and investments towards shared development aims. As several GEF recipient countries already have active NSC, the GEF-9 CES will learn from these experiences to scale up and mainstream to selected pilot countries in alignment with a whole of government approach. Priority will be given to implementing countries with a demonstrated commitment to the whole of government and whole of society approaches and strong domestic ownership for lasting results.

460. The establishment of NSC provides an opportunity to elevate the roles of GEF Political Focal Points (PFPs) and OFPs. While countries will determine what management and governance arrangements are most suitable to local context, the GEF will generally recommend that PFPs serve the role of NSC Chairperson and the OFP serve as NSC Secretary. This will enhance recognition and empowerment of both key GEF liaisons in country and create further incentive for their continuity. Political and Operational Focal Points would strengthen investment coordination and policy coherence through NSC, facilitating consultation, information sharing, and coherent decision-making.

461. By bringing all relevant ministries - including those working with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, and Local Communities - around the same table, National Steering Committees will also foster the whole of society approach. Opportunities to enhance access to inclusive decision-making that involves the participation of Indigenous Peoples, CSOs, women, and youth groups will be encouraged in the development of NSCs, in consultative platforms and ancillary bodies coordinated by relevant ministries.

462. Further engagement with countries will be undertaken to determine financial support needs and to develop guidance for NSC coordination related to GEF portfolio planning. Guidelines for NSCs will be developed in preparation for GEF-9 and the project cycle policy updated, as needed. In all cases, the structure of the National Steering Committees (NSCs) will be fit to country-context, respecting country sovereignty and leadership. Furthermore, NSCs will draw upon existing country structures, when suitable, rather than developing GEF-specific committees.

Country Platforms

463. The G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group highlighted the importance of supporting country-driven strategies over individual projects to overcome the fragmentation and

inefficiencies in current climate funding mechanisms.[262] Discussions at COP29 around the Global Financial Architecture Reform emphasized the urgent need to develop pipelines of green investments grounded on country leadership. The GEF will build on successful examples that integrate climate funds into cohesive Country Platforms to ensure that financing mechanisms are efficient, scalable, and aligned with national priorities, offering a roadmap for other countries.

464. To date, the GEF Family of Funds has contributed to Country Platforms initiated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Seychelles, aligning GEF TF, LDCF, and SCCF investments for lasting impact across the spectrum of environmental challenges in these countries. These Country Platforms build on IMF Resilience and Sustainability Facilities (RSF) that are financing packages associated with a set of in-depth policy reforms and the requirement to catalyze private sector investment. In each country, the Country Platforms are jointly Chaired by Ministers of Finance and Environment and are directly linked to IMF climate policy reforms with substantial long-term concessional finance. The Country Platform in Madagascar, held in October 2024, was linked to an RSF totaling $321 million, which is conditioned on country-owned policy reform measures. The Madagascar Country Platform enhanced linkages between GEF programming and government priorities and catalyzed the development of a market-based outcome bond for nature conservation, which the GEF is actively pursuing through a Multi-Trust Fund project with a combination of GEF Trust Fund and LDCF support, with the World Bank, as lead agency.

465. The GEF will expand its engagement in and support for Country Platforms, as a Family of Funds. This would help engage with the MDBs and increasingly the private sector, as well as other Multilateral Climate and Environmental Funds for enhanced coherence. Importantly, it would also enable whole of government-owned policy reforms and large-scale financing. In turn, the GEF Family of Funds investments would also be strategically aligned with national priorities, increasing the likelihood of performance and sustainability. This approach requires careful design to ensure equity, transparency, and minimal administrative burden on countries, particularly those in LDCs, SIDS, and fragile contexts.

466. Country Platforms will leverage the important work of National Steering Committees (NSC) that guide GEF portfolio planning in-country. Representation in Country Platform dialogues will include the NSC Chair (often the PFP) and Country Platform planning will draw upon agreed GEF investment portfolios as a baseline. Country Platforms will include other multilateral funders, as well as climate vertical funds and, ideally, will also include bilateral development agencies for coordinated investment planning for national development.

[262] Accelerating Sustainable Finance for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies: Independent High-Level Expert Group Review of the Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds October 2024 https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/G20-IHLEG-VCEF-Review.pdf

467. The CES will encourage Countries to participate in Country Platforms to plan GEF STAR programming in collaboration with multilateral and bilateral donors to promote coordinated and synergistic investments in nature positive development. Country Platforms will be implemented in close coordination and collaboration with relevant national institutions, external development funders, and private actors to avoid the risk of creating multiple parallel structures and processes. The GEF will evaluate and, where possible, use existing national structures within countries as well as efforts of MDBs and other funds before spending funding on new country platforms. Country Platforms will not exclusively serve the GEF; indeed, the principle of Country Platforms is that they offer a means of aligning all development funders to coordinate investments in supporting recipient country development agendas, thereby maximizing synergies, efficiencies and impact. Accordingly, Country Platforms will aim to serve all development funders, creating a common framework for planning, policy coherence and complementary, leveraged investment.

468. Establishing and supporting Country Platforms will strengthen the enabling environment for blended finance by fostering coordination among stakeholders, aligning public and private resources, and streamlining project preparation. These platforms provide a structured mechanism for identifying, prioritizing, and de-risking investments, thereby enhancing the scale and impact of GEF-financed blended finance. Country platforms strengthen national ownership and facilitate investment endorsement, thereby serving as a powerful market signal and crowding-in additional finance.

469. The CES will include specific provisions to support Country Platforms through the GEF Trust Fund and broader Family of Funds, as relevant. Support will be considered to incentivize Country Platform implementation. If a significant number of recipient countries express interest in portfolio planning and investment alignment through Country Platforms, the GEF may draw resources from focal area set asides to provide expert technical assistance, capacity building, and shared learning.

470. While the base level of CES support will be provided to all countries, consistent with the GEF-8 approach, countries that commit to developing National Steering Committees and Country Platforms may receive additional support to establish and orient these new Committees and Platforms to GEF portfolio development and oversight and leveraged financing. This additional support will further positively incentivize adoption of NSC and Country Platforms as key elements of an enhanced whole of government engagement. Base-level CES support will be provided to countries who are not adopting or not yet ready for Country Platforms, so they can be strengthened towards adopting NSC and Country Platforms.

471. In all cases, Country Platforms will be voluntary, responding to country demand, and will be fit to country-context, respecting country sovereignty and leadership. Each country will choose to engage in Country Platforms and will serve as the convener of these planning bodies. Country Platforms will not serve the role of governance or decision-making bodies overseeing and directing GEF investment portfolios, but as ancillary bodies enhancing policy and investment coherence among development finance institutions, duly respecting national sovereignty.

472. GEF initiatives and investments to advance this suite of whole of government elements, will follow a progression from baseline investments in building increased OFP and PFP capacity and engagement, to integrated upstream portfolio planning, to establishing NSC and then Country Platforms. GEF efforts will therefore be staged, ensuring that capacities and commitments align with expansion to more advanced planning and engagements. And resourcing will be similarly aligned with opportunity and attentive to need, to not exclude lower capacity countries but instead ensure their progression of learning and capacity development. Priority will be given to countries with demonstrated commitment and strong domestic ownership for lasting results.

Supporting and Empowering all Stakeholders

473. The GEF-9 CES will also serve as a means of fostering approaches, to build understanding and partnership with all elements of society for nature positive solutions. The CES will provide opportunities for enhanced stakeholder participation in GEF events, support for broad participation in regional and global policy dialogues, and enhanced communications efforts to increase knowledge and appreciation of the GEF Partnership.

National Dialogues

474. The CES will support National Dialogues, in coordination with (OFPs) to engage relevant national stakeholders, including civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth organizations to discuss and guide the programming of GEF resources in strategic portfolios and partnerships enabling maximum impact and leverage, particularly of domestic resources. National Dialogues are tailored to the needs of recipient countries. In GEF-9 National Dialogues will optimize investments across the GEF Family of Funds.

Expanded Constituency Workshops

475. Expanded Constituency Workshop (ECWs) bring the GEF partnership together in every region annually, focused on priority themes, aligned to the stage of the replenishment cycle. ECWs engage OFPs, PFPs, Convention Focal points, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth organizations to build relationships, knowledge, and opportunities to enhance understanding and cooperation across the whole of society ECWs provide an opportunity for the GEF to share information, to guide and support programming objectives, and to listen and learn from country partners and stakeholders.

GEF Constituency Meetings

476. Convened and chaired by Council Members, GEF Constituency Meetings bring together all countries in the Constituency to discuss and formulate official positions on the GEF Council agenda items. Constituencies may also convene these meetings to discuss Constituency governance matters. The Secretariat may organize the Constituency Meetings, either virtually or in-person, and may introduce certain Council items at the request of Council Members. Pre-Council meetings may also be organized on demand to support recipient country Council Members and Alternates to exchange views on the Council agenda and to develop common positions for more effective Constituency representation.

GEF Seminars

477. GEF Seminars provide the core "GEF 101" content, offer guidance on project design with GEF technical staff and with STAP, and feature current GEF strategies and priorities. GEF *Introduction Seminars,* held twice annually in a virtual format, provide an enhanced understanding of the GEF, its policies, and operations to recipient country partners in government agencies, implementing agencies, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth organizations. GEF-9 Introduction Seminars will be supplemented with online resources, including webinars, briefing documents, and training toolkits. Additionally, GEF-9 inception workshops may be conducted across GEF regions to promote lasting results and knowledge diffusion of GEF-9 strategies for IPs, focal areas, global initiatives, and cross-cutting themes to foster the effective implementation of GEF-9 activities.

Support to Key Stakeholders

478. Mobilizing the whole of society in support of nature positive solutions will also require that the GEF support the participation of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth organizations in GEF-relevant national, regional and global meetings. These include National Dialogues, ECWs, thematic conferences, as well as MEA COPs in which the voices of those most directly affected by global environmental challenges must be elevated and amplified to inform and influence decisions taken by the global community.

The Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program

479. GEF-8 saw the launch of the "Fonseca Leadership Program" (FLP) and to date we have supported over 250 young conservation leaders with graduate fellowships and field grants in all GEF regions. This support will ensure that we are preparing the next generation of conservation leaders to act and occupy strategic leadership positions in GEF recipient countries. As seen in GEF-8, the FLP fellows directly contribute to strengthen country capacity, strengthening the potential for securing and sustaining MEA's commitments, enhance relationships with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women and, of course, youth, and influential roles in national and international fora. In GEF 9, the program will align with focal area, integrated programs, and broader GEF-9 objectives and will establish criteria to identify candidates associated with existing GEF projects and/or with field work planned in GEF project sites.

<u>Communications, Knowledge, and Learning</u>

480. GEF Communications will be central to effective implementation of the CES, including by supporting engagement with political decision-makers and influential communicators, who can reinforce the GEF's goals in targeted countries, as well as with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth organizations and with the private sector. The GEF Policy on Communication and Visibility will guide GEF-9 CES communications efforts.

481. Knowledge sharing is an essential element of country empowerment. To further advance knowledge-sharing and help strengthen partnerships on the ground among stakeholders, and

consistent with the IEO's OPS-8 recommendations,[263] the GEF will continue its activities for sharing best practices and lessons learned with key stakeholders. OFPs lie at the center of these exchanges, through a Community of Practice that will enable South-South, regional exchanges, and trans-continental dialogues, for intensive and strategic knowledge sharing on best practices and challenges, including open exchanges on design, implementation, successes/failures, sustainability, co-financing, specific unplanned issues and their resolutions, any challenges with GEF Agencies, and feedback to the Secretariat. Knowledge and learning exchange will also be promoted through the global and regional platforms of the IPs.

482. Efforts to build awareness of the results achieved and value of the GEF's support for recipient country environmental efforts in GEF-9 will also include ongoing work that has started in GEF-8 to amplify the voices of a global network of GEF Project Communicators. Every GEF-accredited Implementing Agency and the majority of Executing Agencies have communications specialists that document and publicize successes and challenges on the front lines of conservation.

Blended Finance (Non-Grant Instrument)

483. The imperative to increase financing for global environmental objectives and targets, and to broaden the array of mechanisms available for this purpose, is a central theme in global environmental negotiations. While ODA remains essential, it is insufficient to bridge the nature funding gap. The need to mobilize resources from both traditional and non-traditional sources, especially from the private sector, is reflected in COP decisions, highlighting this imperative. The Sevilla Commitment, adopted as the outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, reinforces the global consensus regarding the urgent need to scale up and diversify financing for sustainable development, drawing upon a broad spectrum of financial sources, encompassing both public and private sectors. The report also highlights "the importance of grant-based or highly concessional finance and non-debt creating instruments for developing countries."[264]

484. Blended finance can be a highly effective tool to mobilize capital flows from the private sector. A recent OECD report cites blended finance effectiveness in mobilizing private sector investment, with total leverage reaching $70 billion in 2024, and yet notes that this remains a small portion of total global investment.[265] Relatively limited use of blended finance may be attributed to the complexity of its structuring and the inherently longer deal execution periods, which may conflict with the private sector's need to quickly adapt to changing market conditions.

[263] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[264] https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.227/2025/L.1

[265] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/leveraging-private-finance-for-development.html

Convergence's "Blended finance deal flow was higher in 2024 than the market average for the previous four years, with 123 deals reaching close totaling $18 billion in financing with climate-driven blended finance transactions as the primary driver. The report also noted a reduction in overall ODA for climate but an increased participation of MDBs and DFIs in climate financing, which reached a six-year high and was central to the blended finance market rebound.

Box 1: Blended Finance scope in the context of the GEF

Convergence Blended Finance defines Blended Finance as "the use of catalytic capital from public or philanthropic sources to increase private sector investment in sustainable development." Blended finance is a structuring approach that allows organizations with different objectives to invest alongside each other while achieving their own objectives (whether financial return, social impact, or a blend of both)[266] *In the GEF Family of Funds, the blended finance practice builds on the GEF's ability to provide concessional finance in a form other than grants, as established in the GEF Instrument.*[267]

GEF blended finance investments therefore focus on a subset of catalytic investments in the form of non-grant instruments or "NGI" at concessional terms. NGIs are defined as financial instruments that have the potential to generate financial returns from the original investment or for principal repayment. [268]

Starting in GEF-4, the GEF work on blended finance has evolved from the early GEF cycles, resulting in a dedicated financing window that focuses on private sector mobilization. The GEF-8 NGI Window is $196 million. Reflows generated under the NGI window are to be paid back to the GEF Trust Fund.

A country may use its GEF Trust Fund (STAR and non-STAR) allocations for a project/program deploying a non-grant instrument. In that case, reflows will remain available to the GEF recipient country that has thusly programmed its STAR. In this manner, Countries can benefit from non-debt creating instruments at country level using NGI.

485. GEF and its Partner Agencies were among the first international organizations to pioneer the use of blended finance structures for renewable energy and energy efficiency, validating numerous business models still in use today. GEF work in blended finance has evolved from early GEF cycles to support innovation and the creation of new asset classes, such as outcome bonds for conservation. The use of non-grant instruments such as debt, equity, results-based financing or guarantees at concessional terms offer unique advantages for private sector participation since it enables the GEF to support innovation through patient capital, de-risking financial structures, or longer maturities of financing. GEF blended finance projects achieve high co-financing ratios—averaging 1:17 overall since GEF-5 and 1:12 from the private sector.

[266] OECD DAC Blended Finance Principles https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-dac-blended-finance-principles_dc66bd9c-en.html

[267] Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured GEF "9. GEF funding shall be made available for activities within the focal areas […]in accordance with the following eligibility criteria: (a) GEF grants that are made available within the framework of the financial mechanisms […]; (c) GEF concessional financing in a form other than grants that is made available within the framework of the financial mechanism of the conventions"

[268] GEF Blended Finance Global Program and NGI Policy Update GEF/C. 63/12.

486. The GEF-9 approach to blended finance is informed by the G20 Report on Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds (VCEF).[269] This report assessed the comparative advantages of various environmental funds in mobilizing private investment and specifically recommends that the GEF expands its use of non-grant instruments to achieve greater leverage and increase the involvement of MDBs. These recommendations are further supported by findings from the IEO's OPS-8[270] and the MOPAN Report.

487. The VCEF report also underscores GEF's distinctive role in fostering innovation and taking on higher-risk projects, in contrast to other climate funds that typically focus on larger-scale investments and recipients with higher creditworthiness. In GEF-9, blended finance activities will continue to build on these comparative strengths by supporting highly innovative and higher-risk initiatives, utilizing a broad spectrum of financial instruments, and offering flexible financing terms to maximize GEBs.

488. Recent G20 discussions on the reform of the global sustainable finance architecture underscore that multilateral environmental funds are not interchangeable with development banks or capital markets. In this context, the GEF fills critical gaps that other vertical funds and financial institutions do not address, notably by supporting early action and upstream interventions, including enabling activities, policy reform, technical assistance, capacity-building and national reporting. These functions are essential to the delivery of GEBs and remain largely non-bankable, particularly in areas such as biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management, soil restoration and support to small-scale producers, marine pollution control, and phase-out of hazardous substances.

489. GEF-9 will leverage the recent trend on increased appetite from Countries to use blended finance structures. In GEF-8, recipient Countries recognized the benefits of using blended finance structures for national projects that seek to mobilize financing at scale. Single country projects represented 35% of GEF financing from the GEF-8 NGI window, up from 11% in previous cycles. Most of these projects were presented by the sovereign operations divisions of MDBs and requested de-risking instruments.

490. Countries broadly have expressed interest in keeping reflows in country for further environmental investments. Retaining reflows applies when countries use their STAR and non-

[269] Accelerating Sustainable Finance for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies: Independent High-Level Expert Group Review of the Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds October 2024 https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/G20-IHLEG-VCEF-Review.pdf

[270] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

STAR allocation in the form of non-grant instruments. Since no repayment of reflows is expected, GEF financing is mostly used in non-debt creating instruments at country level and in GEF-9, we will increase efforts to include an expansion of funding, modalities and partnerships to optimally deploy the blended finance approach across the GEF Family of Funds.

491. Private sector engagement and co-financing have grown significantly from GEF-6 to GEF-8, thanks in part to the strategic use of blended finance structures. Additionally, GEF focal area and integrated programs have grown more active and more sophisticated in private sector engagement. Private sector cofinancing has grown from $2.44 billion in GEF-6, to $2.52 billion in GEF-7, and is forecast at $3.78 billion for GEF-8 cycle (currently $3.2b). Private sector engagement has also increased through each phase of GEF IPs. The proportion of financing directed towards projects with a private sector component within IPs has grown from 32 percent in GEF-6 to 50 percent in GEF-8. GEF recipient countries have gained benefits beyond cofinancing from private sector engagement in GEF portfolios, such as training and capacity development, policy development, knowledge management and information sharing.

492. Private sector platforms for sustainability provide the GEF with the opportunity to scale partnerships vertically, comprehensively through value chains and horizontally, through landscapes, cities, countries and regions. This horizontal and vertical interconnectivity offered through platforms can extend the reach and influence of GEF funding beyond specific geographies and bring a wider range of resources and solutions from all levels of the private sector. The power of engaging private sector platforms is demonstrated through the GEF's Integrated Program *"Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution"* (GEF Project ID: 11197), which works strategically through platforms to attain global coverage of all the projects within the portfolio through a cascading approach from a global coordination project to regional and country networks with the private sector engaged through each stage.

Box 2: GEF-8 NGI Program Highlights

Projects in GEF-8 aimed to create new asset classes and financial structures that have the potential to transform industries and reach scale through capital markets. The GEF's flexible terms of financing remains a strong competitive advantage in negotiating strategic leverage opportunities.

A. GEF investment in outcome-based bonds, securitizations and debt for nature conversions:

- *Debt for Nature conversions (11324) Regional LAC.* The GEF financing provides a convertible guarantee as credit enhancements for sovereign Debt for Nature Conversions in at least three LAC countries. These instruments enable long-term financing for conservation and introduce incentives for achieving conservation commitments. The GEF guarantee can convert to a grant supporting conservation efforts if certain GEB milestones are met.
- *Living Amazon Mechanism* (*11327) Brazil.* This project tests a securitization mechanism that leverages on a capital markets product (Agribusiness Receivable Certificate) to finance conservation activities of Amazon stewards (IPLCs) and SMEs in the value chain of Natura, a major player in Bioeconomy and a cosmetic company.

- *Coral Reef Bond* (*11323) Indonesia*. The world's first outcome-based bond for Marine Protected Areas, the bond will finance improved management effectiveness and biodiversity outcomes in some 2 million hectares of coral reefs. This iteration has attracted a private financial institution as an outcome-payor and additional co-financing from the Agency. It also involves knowledge transfer to local Indonesian authorities through the Indonesia Environment Fund as the executing agency.

B. GEF investment in de-risking mechanisms to scale up solutions.

- *PSEEP (11064) South Africa.* The project will establish a risk-sharing facility to encourage commercial lending for energy efficiency improvements by SMEs, leveraging private sector capital with a mobilization ratio of 1:16. Commercial lenders will accept 30% of the risk, while the GEF provides a first loss guarantee.
- *E-mobility Program (11671) Regional Africa.* The project aims to promote mobility solutions by attracting private sector investment to support the deployment of electric buses, electric 2-3 wheelers, and associated charging infrastructure in six African countries.
- *Scope 3 Mechanism (11326) Global.* The project aims to reduce Scope 3 emissions in the textile and apparel sector through the Global Supply Chain Decarbonization Platform. Several textile and apparel brands will provide loans to manufacturers and suppliers across emerging markets.

Upscaling Blended Finance

493. Based on GEF experience, consistent with the IEO's OPS-8 findings and recommendations,[271] and considering the changing environmental finance landscape, the work on blended finance will focus on three strategic actions to enhance environmental impact and mobilize greater private sector resources: (i) Expand blended finance within the GEF Family of Funds by enlarging the Blended Finance funding window, mainstreaming blended finance approaches into the GEF Trust Fund both with non-grant instruments and with grants; (ii) Maintain a high degree of flexibility in GEF financing terms to continue supporting projects delivering multiple GEBs that are high-risk and highly innovative; (iii) Actively engage the financial industry to catalyze systems transformation.

494. *Enlarge the Blended Finance Program funding window*. Expert stakeholders suggested during the TAG meetings that GEF's resource allocation should increase, both to raise ambition and to fully benefit from the leverage effect of non-grant instruments. From GEF-6 to GEF-8, cumulative GEF investment in NGI reached $369.5 million with $6.4 billion in total co-financing (a ratio of 1:17), with over half ($3.5 billion) from the private sector. Experts also suggested the possibility of increasing the size per operation when GEBs and regional or global projects with high environmental impact require higher de-risking to attract private sector financing. In GEF-9, the $15 million investment cap per project will be removed, allowing for greater flexibility and leverage potential. The existing call for proposals competitive selection process will be replaced by the standard selection of projects in the project and program cycle with an aim to achieve a

[271] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

more systematic workflow with GEF agencies. Programmatic approaches such as Program Framework modalities (PFD) and the Concurrence Mechanism[272] will be further encouraged to reach a bigger scale in a timelier manner, aligned with private sector needs and fast-changing market conditions.

495. To ensure that the expansion of blended finance does not divert grant resources away from biodiversity and other non-market priorities, criteria for project eligibility will explicitly note the imperative of addressing the achievement of GEBs. Additionally, allocations within the Blended Finance Program may be structured to fulfill proportional targets related to focal area representation and GEB provision to ensure that non-market priorities are not disadvantaged.

496. *Mainstreaming blended finance in the GEF Trust Fund with a Blended Finance Country Incentive*. To incentivize countries to maximize the leverage of GEF-9 financing, a portion of the Blended Finance Program resources will be allocated to incentivize the use of non-grant instruments at a 1:3 ratio. Under this initiative, countries that utilize their STAR and non-STAR focal area allocations as non-grant instruments to attract private sector investment will be eligible for additional incentive resources from the Blended Finance Program. As countries increase their involvement in blended finance mechanisms, it is anticipated that MDBs will increase their participation in GEF projects and programs. Programs should consider options for MDB collaboration already at the project design stage. Expanded participation may foster the development of innovative and scalable project models, accelerating private sector investment in environmental initiatives. A mid-term assessment of the Blended Finance Program and utilization of its incentive mechanism will be conducted and presented to Council[273.]

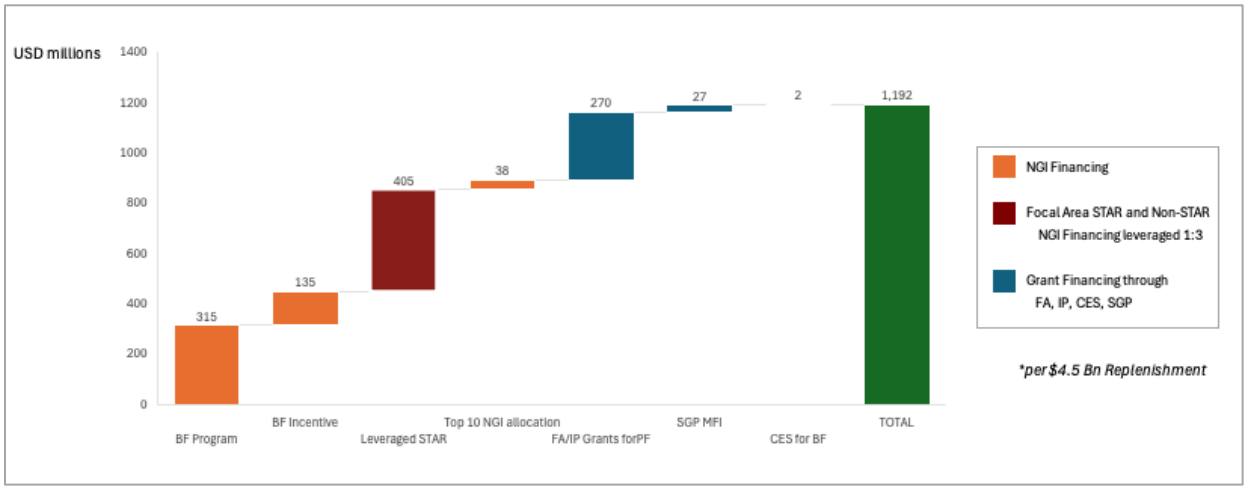
497. *Mainstreaming blended finance in the GEF TF with grant financing.* Grant financing is essential for enabling blended finance and private investment mobilization. Funding for project design, preparation, and capacity building in financial structuring helps support transactions that might otherwise be considered too risky or complex. GEF-9 priorities within Focal Areas and Integrated Programs include four strategies relevant to advancing the GEF-9 goal of mobilizing private capital: (i) project development support for private investment (e.g., project preparation and technical assistance facilities); (ii) capacity building for GEF recipient countries to engage in blended finance solutions; (iii) initiatives to increase private finance in domestic and international resource mobilization, aligned with COP guidance; (iv) development of innovative financial structures and new asset classes to attract private finance for GEBs. Although not embedded within the Blended Finance Program, these activities are essential to deliver GEF-9 ambitions on private capital mobilization and for countries and Agencies to pursue more complex financial

[272] The Concurrence Mechanism was approved in GEF-5 for Blended Finance projects where the pipeline of projects is still to be defined at the time of CEO endorsement, and where Agencies agreeing to eligibility criteria can have a certain delegation of authority to select and fund projects provided there is GEF concurrence. In GEF-8, three projects will be approved with Delegation of Authority (GEFID 11324; GEFID 11671 and GEF ID 11866)

[273] Additional details on the mid-term assessment are included in the Policy Directions for GEF-9 Document Section I Compact of Priority Policy Actions, subsection on Affordability and Scaled Finance

structures. Collectively blended finance mainstreaming aims to reach an aspirational target of 25% GEF Trust Fund programming in GEF-9 (Figure 7).

Figure 7. GEF Trust Fund Programming for Private Investment Mobilization*



498. Recognizing challenges in operational complexity of blended finance transactions, and limited government capacity, GEF-9 will offer targeted technical assistance through CES to help countries develop strategic blended finance projects and create enabling conditions for their success. Twelve percent (12%) of the STAR allocation for the top ten recipient countries, excluding any SIDS or LDCs, will be set aside to be used for Blended Finance partnering with Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), together with the development of Country Platforms which will help to mainstream national environmental objectives and foster whole of government and whole of society approaches. Country Platforms, supported by the CES, provide a structured mechanism for identifying, prioritizing, and de-risking investments, thereby enhancing the scale and impact of GEF financing. Country Platforms strengthen national ownership and facilitate investment endorsement, thereby serving as a powerful market signal and crowding-in additional finance.

499. GEF-9 also anticipates an increase in Multi-Trust Fund (MTF) projects utilizing blended finance. Projects may combine investments from the NGI, STAR and non-STAR allocations with resources from the GBFF, LDCF, and from SCCF Window B. For the GBFF, opportunities to submit MTF projects will be identified as the GEF aligns project and program cycles to enable more effective complementary financing.

500. *Maintain flexibility in the terms and conditions of GEF financial products*

GEF blended finance windows since GEF-5 have successfully invested in highly innovative projects, generated GEBs in multiple focal areas, and achieved high co-financing ratios with strong participation of the private sector. Opportunities for innovation in GEF-9 will continue to require flexible financial conditions, long tenors and a high-risk appetite, including local currency financing. While other environmental funds focus on providing reimbursable financing in hard currencies to recipients that are creditworthy entities/projects with a high expectation to pay back, the GEF's nature and grant making mandate allows for higher risk taking and innovation

with the option of taking local currency risks. As a result, GEF investments in blended finance structures have actively provided patient capital such as equity-which is scarce amongst environmental funds- debt with longer tenors and highly subordinated positions both to MDBs and private investors, and local currency financing. GEF investments have also been used in the creation of new asset classes such as Outcome Bonds. In GEF-9, as the blended finance portfolio increases, the GEF will seek to refine its GEF approach and Risk Appetite Statement to ensure appropriate management of resources while continuing delivering on innovation.

501. *Collaborate with the Financial Industry as a key lever for aligning financial flows* Disclosure, metrics, and measurement remain key challenges for investment in nature at scale, mostly in developing countries. The GEF participation and investment in the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) supported the efforts to mainstream disclosures of nature-related financial risks and impacts by corporates and financial institutions as a necessary first step towards providing investors consistent, comparable and decision-useful information to incorporate nature-related considerations into investment decisions. Increased support for and coherence in approaches to develop and standardize metrics and financial disclosure requirements will be key to the future growth of financial flows to nature positive activities. The GEF will work with Agencies that engage with the financial sector, including regulators and central banks, to increase efforts towards the alignment of financial flows with Conventions' priorities, such as Targets 14 and 15 of the KMGBF.

Small Grants Program

502. Civil society organizations (CSOs), women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities play important roles in influencing and setting national, regional, and global agendas, supporting domestic policy coherence and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements.[274] They bring citizens' voices to national and international debates, initiate and implement local and lasting solutions, and elevate local needs in national, regional, and global strategies. Local actions conceived and executed by CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) provide bottom-up approaches critical to conserving the environment.

503. Recent GEF IEO Evaluations and OPS-8 findings[275] corroborate that community-based approaches, guided by community priorities and ownership, are linked to greater project sustainability and that good project design, focused on participatory planning and meaningful integration of communities in resource management, was a key factor in sustainability. [276] At the same time, barriers to civil society engagement are varied and numerous, including legal structures, financing to institutional and cultural dynamics, and social norms.

504. Each of the MEAs continues to stress the critical need for translating global agreements into effective action at local, national and sectoral levels and engage with civil society and non-state actors in different ways. Interest of civil society in the work and implementation of these MEAs has grown exponentially over the years. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework highlights the need to enable participation at all levels of government, with a view to fostering the full and effective contributions of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local

[274] Assorted references on the important roles of civil society, women, youth, and IPLCs in delivering global environmental benefits:

- Alejo C, *et al*. (2021) Are indigenous territories effective natural climate solutions? A neotropical analysis using matching methods and geographic discontinuity designs. PLoS ONE 16(7): e0245110. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245110
- Brondízio, E.S, *et al*. (2021): Locally Based, Regionally Manifested, and Globally Relevant: Indigenous and Local Knowledge, Values, and Practices for Nature. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour*. 2021. 46:16.1–16.29
- Forest Peoples Programme, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network, Centres of Distinction on Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2: The contributions of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to renewing nature and cultures. A complement to the fifth edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook. Moreton-in-Marsh, England: Forest Peoples Programme.
- Child B, Cooney R. (2019) *Local Commons for Global Benefits: Indigenous and community-based management of wild species, forests, and drylands*. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility, Washington, DC.

[275] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

[276] GEF IEO (2024), Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF, https://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/community-based-approaches-vol1.pdf

communities, civil society organizations, the private and financial sectors, and stakeholders from all other sectors.

505. During the GEF-8 Replenishment negotiations the GEF reiterated the importance of enhancing engagement of non-state actors and focused on "whole of society" approaches emphasizing stakeholder engagement across different segments of society. The GEF-8 Strategy integrated new targeted efforts to expand support and engagement with civil society,[277] including increasing the ambition, scale and scope of the GEF SGP, elevating women empowerment responsive measures, facilitating renewed efforts to support young professionals and youth groups working with the MEAs,[278] as well as the launch of the FLP[279] and the second phase of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI).

506. Over the course of GEF-8, the GEF Secretariat has organized and facilitated dialogues and consultations with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth groups, including CSO Consultations,[280] the GEF-7 Assembly Partnership Forum,[281] GEF Expanded Constituency Workshops, and more recently a dedicated stocktaking and visioning exercise on expanding GEF's engagement and financing to civil society and SGP as part of the GEF-9 Technical Advisory Meeting. The below proposed strategic directions build on these consultations and early lessons learned advancing SGP in GEF-8.

[277] For additional background see: GEF/C.63/Inf.15, p. 20.

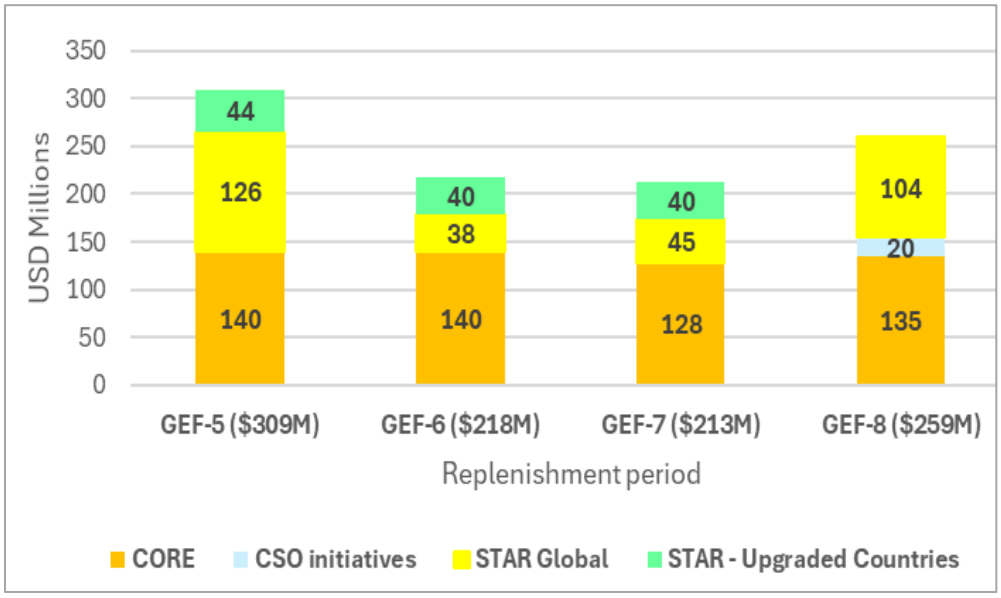
[278] https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/gef-small-grants-program

[279] https://www.thegef.org/fonseca-leadership-program

[280] Including: "Enhancing Climate Resilience: The Role of Civil Society, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities." – June 2021 (https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-enhancing-climate-resilience/"Youth-led Solutions to the Planet's Environmental Crisis" - Dec 2021 (https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-youth-led-advocacy-and-solutions)/ Expanding Microfinancing to Support Local Actors and Actions for the Environment in GEF-8 and Beyond - June 2022 (https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-inclusive-microfinancing)/ Civil society engagement with the Global Environmental Conventions that the GEF Serves - Nov 2022 (https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-global-environmental-conventions)/ Consultations with Civil Society on Building Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Cities - Feb 2024 (https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-building-sustainable-resilient-and-inclusive-cities)/ Conversation on GEF initiatives and approaches to Civil Society -June 2024.

[281] See also https://enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7-daily-report-23aug2023

Figure 8: Resource allocations to GEF SPG across replenishment periods



Progress on SGP 2.0 in GEF-8

507. The GEF SGP has served as an essential element of the GEF's larger efforts to support strong engagement of civil society stakeholders and partners, providing financing as well as technical and capacity building support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth to achieve the GEF mandate and mission. Since its inception in 1992, the program has supported close to 30,000 grants,[282] of over $1.5 billion of GEF funds to CSOs, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples organizations across 136 countries and mobilized over $990 million in co-financing (Figure 8).

508. The approval of the SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8[283] responded to findings and recommendations of the joint IEO Evaluation of SGP,[284] affirmed GEF's ambitious SGP reform agenda and set forth a bold plan of action to expand, diversify, innovate and optimize the SGP model and approach. In line with these arrangements, the GEF Secretariat has led efforts towards implementing the new features and priorities of SGP 2.0. including:

- *Diversified SGP implementing roles* beyond UNDP. In 2023, FAO and CI were selected as the two additional SGP implementing agencies for the SGP Core global program. Together, these three agencies, with the support of the GEF Secretariat, are now collaborating closely, pooling together diverse experience and technical expertise for the benefit of SGP and supporting the continued expansion and evolution of SGP. In addition, SGP implementing roles were further

[282] UNDP. GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report. Key results, reporting year 2023-2024

[283] GEF/C.63/06/Rev.01, GEF Small Grants Programme 2.0 Implementation Arrangements

[284] GEF/E/C.60/01, Joint Evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Programme (2021)

expanded with the two new SGP CSO Initiatives, the "GEF SGP CSO Challenge Program", implemented by IUCN, and the "Microfinance Initiative", implemented by World Bank.

- *Expanded the SGP financing envelope*. A 22% increase of financing to SGP since GEF-7 and increased country allocation of STAR to SGP by 30% since GEF-7.[285]
- *Expanded country coverage*. Eliminated the upgrading policy and facilitated equal access of SGP resources to all GEF eligible countries, increasing coverage to 136 compared to 124 countries in GEF-7.
- *Innovated with two pilot and complementary approaches to enhance direct financing* and support to youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including the roll-out of the two SGP 2.0 CSO Initiatives, including (i) the CSO Challenge Program (led by IUCN), and (ii) the Microfinance Initiative (led by the WB), with $10 million allocated to each.
- *Improved measures to increase efficiency of SGP resources* and better capture and monitor important socio-economic benefits. In GEF-8, there has been an increased grant ratio of GEF SGP financing directly flowing to CSOs, CBOs, local communities and Indigenous Peoples organizations to 72 % (compared to 62% in GEF-7) and introduction of a new results framework to better account for the full scope of SGP's results and impacts.

Proposed Strategic Directions for the GEF SGP in GEF-9

SGP Objective and Principles

509. The GEF SGP in GEF-9 will serve as one dedicated pillar of the whole of society approach to enhance access to resources for civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women empowerment, and youth. SGP will continue to build on the GEF SGP 30 years' strong foundation and successes, as well as early achievements and lessons learned implementing SGP 2.0 in GEF-8, and in alignment with the IEO's OPS-8 findings.[286]

510. The proposed strategic directions include renewed principles to further diversify the scope of SGP to provide increased financing and meaningful support to civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and youth and women groups. Underpinning GEF's ambition around a Whole of Society Approach, the proposed overall objective of the SGP for GEF-9 is to "catalyze and mobilize civil society actors and local actions, through increased financing, engagement and support to civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth that address global environmental issues, while helping to deliver on national MEA commitments and sustainable development."

[285] STAR resources increased from $85M in GEF-7 to $104M in GEF-8 (15 countries more countries than in GEF-7 decided to allocate STAR resources in GEF-8 - now 88 countries compared to 73 in GEF-7)

[286] Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office (GEF IEO), *Integration for Greater Impact: Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF*, Washington, DC: GEF IEO, 2025.

511. For over 30 years, the SGP has served as a primary mechanism for the GEF to facilitate local initiatives that contribute to global environmental benefits and implement MEAs from a bottom-up perspective. Core funding for the SGP has remained consistent over the last four replenishment periods. To align SGP financing with the GEF-9 vision and its whole of society ambition, a robust Small Grants Program is recommended to enable engagement, bottom-up leadership, and actions by civil society, communities, and NGOs.

512. In GEF-9, it is proposed that the GEF SGP continues the path set out in GEF-8 by adopting and strengthening the following principles and elements:

- *Strengthen civil society participation and capacity*, by (i) incorporating targeted measures and (based on lessons-learned, good practices and innovations) to support civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth organizations to partner in GEF projects and programs; and (ii) expanding criteria for SGP grantees to include civil society networks and platforms, including Indigenous Peoples, youth, women groups affiliated to the MEAs that the GEF serve.
- *Diversify GEF SGP implementing agencies and strengthen the role of executing partners*. While it is envisaged that the number of SGP Core Implementing Agencies (UNDP, FAO, and CI) selected in GEF-8 will remain, new measures in GEF-9, include (i) diversifying GEF Agency participation through other GEF financed windows, and ii) strengthening the execution roles of regional and national NGOs and CSOs in SGP programming.
- *Facilitate more equitable distribution of core resources among SGP core implementing agencies* by making SGP resources available concurrently to all three agencies. This approach will help promote greater engagement opportunities for all agencies with participating countries and enable greater flexibility for countries. Countries may allocate complementary STAR resources to the SGP at the start of the GEF-9 cycle.
- *Enhance SGP Community of Practices and Learning Platform*s to ensure program coherence and strengthen knowledge sharing, as well as reporting and communication among SGP grantees, country officials, implementing agencies, and other partners, sharing best practices and innovative solutions across SGP projects.
- *Strengthen monitoring, reporting and efficiency measures,* including (i) maintaining the increased grant ratio of SGP financing directly flowing to CSOs and CBOs as set at 72% in GEF-8; and (ii) building on SGP 2.0 SGP Results framework introduced in GEF-8 and strengthen measures to better monitor, capture and report on SGP results and operational aspects, including relevant socio-economic benefits[287] and co-benefits.[288]

[287] The need to track socio-economic co-benefits across the GEF Portfolio is also identified by the MOPAN Assessment Report: Global Environment Facility (GEF) 2025: https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/gef.html

[288] GEF/C.66/12 Tracking and Measuring the Socio-Economic Co-benefits of GEF investments.

SGP Thematic Approaches and Priorities in GEF-9

513. As an overarching strategy, SGP will continue to promote its landscape and seascape approach and enhance capacities of bottom-up, country-driven and decentralized country programs. Consistent with the GEF-8 SGP Strategy, SGP will continue to prioritize grantmaking at the national level to support (i) community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species, (ii) durable agriculture and fisheries, and food security, (iii) low-impact energy access and co-benefits, (iv) local to global coalitions for chemicals and waste management, and (v) catalyzing sustainable urban solutions. This strategy will be implemented through a four-pronged approach:

514. *Enhance the SGP Core Program*: The SGP global core program will have an enhanced focus on IPLCs, women and youth. Consistent with GEF-8 SGP Strategy, the SGP will continue to adapt, and augment the landscape and seascape approach and thematic priorities, with additional focus on scaling up and out, innovation and expanding criteria to include national civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth networks linked to the MEAs. To achieve this, the SGP proposes the following: increasing the overall GEF financing envelope allocated to the SGP; maintaining the three SGP Implementing Agencies introduced in GEF-8, whilst extending and further codifying the role and requirements of CSO executing entities; updating and streamlining the disbursement mechanism through unified tranches to ensure equal opportunities for the newer SGP Agencies to establish SGP country programs in GEF-9.

515. *Consolidate and enhance two SGP CSO Strategic Initiatives*:

- *CSO Challenge Program*: Building on the early lessons learned from the GEF-8 SGP CSO Challenge Program, this complementary window will provide the SGP with opportunities outside the traditional landscape and seascape approach, to better align SGP grantmaking to the needs of civil society actors to engage, influence, support and deliver on national MEA commitments, plans and targets. The program will prioritize youth and youth-led civil society organizations, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and identify and implement scalable CSO and CBO-led local actions to directly contribute to national MEA priorities, plans, targets and metrics. This window will also allow for the enhanced engagement of civil society in MEA-related national, regional/international events, platforms and networks and expand the scope of SGP beneficiaries to include youth, women networks & platforms affiliated to MEAs. It will include opportunities for scaling up successful, innovative civil society environmental initiatives and approaches in GEF projects and programs. A digital tech accelerator may also be supported by the Challenge Program, to advance community innovation and build links with rapidly evolving global technological systems.

- *SGP Microfinance private sector engagement window:* Building on the GEF-8 SGP 2.0 Microfinance Initiative and other experiences across the GEF project portfolio, we propose a renewed complementary financing window to further explore, expand and incentivize scalable Microfinance Institution (MFI) and private sector engagement and linkages with the SGP. This window will look to strengthen MFIs' capacities, products and services to provide

technical and financial support to SGP nature-based MSEs and producers, with a focus on Indigenous Peoples, women and youth enterprises and entrepreneurship. The overall aim is to help strengthen and scale up selected SGP initiatives by providing training and mentoring, capacity development, and mobilize complementary financing through private sector funding and blended finance.

516. *Establish a GEF SGP Global Learning platform*: In GEF-9, SGP will introduce a dedicated GEF SGP Global Learning Platform, aiming to leverage and capture diverse SGP Implementing Agencies', community-based and Whole of Society approaches, best practices and lessons learned. The global learning platform will build on experiences from similar platforms, including GEF Integrated Programs and GEF-8 SGP. The SGP platform will underpin, integrate and support vertical and horizontal linkages between the SGP global Core program, the targeted CSO initiatives and civil society and community-based approaches within the wider GEF project and program portfolio, as well as with other GEF learning platforms and knowledge exchange efforts. It is envisaged that it will be implemented as an inter-agency platform for collaboration and collective learning.

517. *Incorporate Targeted SGP-type components in selected GEF-9 Integrated Programs*: Considering the SGP as a proven and successful delivery mechanism for civil society engagement and local action, promoting the incorporation of SGP-type components and other community-based approaches into relevant GEF-9 Integrated Programs, FSPs and MSPs, with the aim to boost finance and the engagement of civil society actors across GEF programming. The planned SGP learning platform is expected to help identify opportunities for replicating and scaling-up tested and successful approaches and SGP projects within the GEF portfolio.

518. *Strengthen monitoring, reporting and efficiency measures:* Building on the renewed effort in GEF-8 to increase efficiency and improving the monitoring and results framework as described in the GEF SGP 2.0 Operational Guidelines for GEF-8,[289] SGP in GEF-9 will (i) improve the monitoring of the efficacy of the increased 72% grant ratio introduced in GEF-8, while recognizing the need for capacity development and learning; and (ii) build on the SGP 2.0 Results framework introduced in GEF-8 and strengthen measures to better monitor, capture, report and communicate on SGP contribution to global environmental benefits and positive socio-economic outcomes for civil society, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women and youth.

[289] GEF SGP 2.0 Operational Guidelines for GEF-8: https://www.thegef.org/documents/gef-small-grants-programme-2-0-operational-guidelines-gef-8

ANNEX 1: RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR THE NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF THE GEF TRUST FUND[290]

Table 1: GEF-9 Resource Allocation Table

	Agreed Reference Allocation Table		*Initial Pro-rated Allocation Table [1,2]*	
	GEF-9 $4.5 Billion		**GEF-9 $3.9 Billion**	
FOCAL AREA	**$**	***% of total***	**$**	***% of total***
Total BD	***1,575***	***35.0%***	***1,362***	***35.0%***
BD STAR Country Allocations	***1,062***	***23.7%***	***922***	***23.7%***
Integrated Landscape/Seascape Management	392	*8.8%*	342	*8.8%*
Biosafety & Access and Benefit Sharing	36	*0.8%*	31	*0.8%*
Realign Financial Flows & Mobilize Domestic Resources	112	*2.5%*	97	*2.5%*
Integrated Programs	522	*11.6%*	451	*11.6%*
BD STAR Set Aside	***513***	***11.3%***	***440***	***11.3%***
EAs	145	*3.2%*	125	*3.2%*
Global and Regional Programs*	137	*3.0%*	117	*3.0%*
IP Global Platforms	57	*1.3%*	49	*1.3%*
IP Country Project Incentive	174	*3.9%*	150	*3.9%*
Total CCM	***405***	***9.0%***	***350***	***9.0%***
CCM STAR Country Allocations	***140***	***3.1%***	***121***	***3.1%***
Integrated long-term net-zero planning	10	*0.2%*	9	*0.2%*
Resource efficiency and circular economy	0	*0.0%*	0	*0.0%*
Power systems and energy access	20	*0.4%*	17	*0.4%*
Integrated and zero-emission mobility	20	*0.4%*	17	*0.4%*
Nature-based solutions	0	*0.0%*	0	*0.0%*
Integrated Programs	90	*2.0%*	78	*2.0%*
CCM STAR Set Aside	***265***	***5.9%***	***229***	***5.9%***
CBIT	*75*	*1.7%*	*65*	*1.7%*
EAs	*145*	*3.2%*	*125*	*3.2%*
Global and Regional Programs	0	***0.0%***	0	*0.0%*
IP Global Platforms	15	***0.3%***	13	*0.3%*
IP Country Project Incentive	30	***0.7%***	26	*0.7%*

[290] On an exceptional basis for GEF-9, the allocation table will be adjusted annually, as needed, to proportionally reflect any additional resources received during the replenishment cycle, in line with the allocation of resources agreed for the USD 4.5 billion envelope.

Total LD	***509***	***11.3%***	***440***	***11.3%***
LD STAR Country Allocations	***359***	***8.0%***	***310***	***8.0%***
Sustainable Land Management & Livelihoods	70	*1.6%*	61	*1.6%*
Restoration of Production Landscapes	0	*0.0%*	0	*0.0%*
Support Implementation of National Drought Plans	54	*1.2%*	47	*1.2%*
Inclusive Governance & Enabling frameworks	25	*0.6%*	22	*0.6%*
Integrated Programs	210	*4.7%*	182	*4.7%*
LD STAR Set Aside	***150***	***3.3%***	***130***	***3.3%***
EAs	30	*0.7%*	26	*0.7%*
Global/Regional Programs	10	0.2%	9	0.2%
IP Global Platforms	40	0.9%	35	0.9%
IP Country Project Incentive	70	1.6%	61	1.6%
Total CW	***698***	***15.5%***	***603***	***15.5%***
Stockholm Convention	***319***	***7.1%***	***276***	***7.1%***
EAs	25	*0.6%*	22	*0.6%*
Other Programming	294	*6.5%*	254	*6.5%*
Minimata Convention	***213***	***4.7%***	***184***	***4.7%***
EAs	*20*	*0.4%*	*17*	*0.4%*
Other Programming	193	*4.3%*	167	*4.3%*
Montreal	***12***	***0.3%***	***10***	***0.3%***
SAICM	***32***	***0.7%***	***28***	***0.7%***
IP Global Platforms	*32*	*0.7%*	*28*	*0.7%*
IP Country Project Incentive	*90*	*2.0%*	*78*	*2.0%*
Total IW	***509***	***11.3%***	***440***	***11.3%***
Marine	***201***	***4.5%***	***173***	***4.5%***
BBNJ	***50***	***1.1%***	***43***	***1.1%***
Freshwater	***169***	***3.8%***	***146***	***3.8%***
IP Global Platforms	*14*	*0.3%*	*12*	*0.3%*
IP Country Project Incentive	*50*	*1.1%*	*43*	*1.1%*
BBNJ EA support	*25*	*0.6%*	*22*	*0.6%*
TOTAL FOCAL AREA RESOURCES	***3,695***	***82.1%***	***3,193***	***82.1%***
Non-Grant Instruments Window	***450***	***10.0%***	***389***	***10.0%***
Innovations Window	***0***	***0.0%***	***0***	***0.0%***
Small Grants Program	***135***	***3.0%***	***117***	***3.0%***
Country Engagement Strategy	***23***	***0.5%***	***20***	***0.5%***
TOTAL PROGRAMMING	***4,302***	***95.6%***	***3,717***	***95.6%***
Corporate Budgets	***203***	***4.5%***	***175***	***4.5%***
GEFSEC	***140***	*3.1%*	***121***	*3.1%*
IEO	***36***	*0.8%*	***32***	*0.8%*
Trustee	***15***	*0.3%*	***13***	*0.3%*
STAP	***13***	*0.3%*	***11***	*0.3%*
GRAND TOTAL	***4,500***	***100.0%***	***3,900***	***100.0%***

[1] ***This pro-rated allocation table will be recalculated as new donor contributions are made to GEF-9***

[2] ***In cases of discrepancies due to rounding, the agreed % allocations will be used for the final allocations***

Table 2. Notional Integrated Programs Envelopes for Country Programming

GEF-9 Integrated Programs	% of total IP country funding	Notional amount for countries
Food Systems	17%	230
Drylands and Drought Management	10%	126
Sustainable Cities	16%	182
Critical Forest Biomes	25%	307
Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution	6%	82
Blue and Green Islands	10%	132
Global Wildlife for Development	11%	134
Pollution-free Supply Chains	5%	68
Indicative Totals	**100%**	**1236**

Table 3. Notional Breakdown of Country Amounts for Integrated Programs

GEF-9 Integrated Programs	BD	CCM	LD	IW	CW	TOTALS
Food Systems	121	9	75	0	0	205
Drylands and Drought Management	34	7	85	0	0	126
Sustainable Cities	104	55	23	0	0	182
Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes	227	24	32	6	18	307
Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution	26	9	0	15	33	82
Blue and Green Islands	66	10	27	29	0	132
Global Wildlife for Development	107	0	27	0	0	134
Pollution-free Supply Chains	12	6	11	0	39	68
Focal Area Totals to Countries	***696***	***120***	***280***	***50***	***90***	***1236***
IP envelop per focal area >>	*696*	*120*	*280*	*50*	*90*	***1236***

ANNEX 2: GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS TARGETS

Table 1. The Expected Global Environment Benefits of GEF-9[291]

INDICATORS GEF-9 Results Management Framework	**GEF-9 TARGETS**
CONSERVING & SUSTAINABLY USING BIODIVERSITY	
Conservation areas created or under improved management	
Terrestrial conservation areas created or enhanced (Mha)	160
Marine conservation areas created or enhanced (Mha)	120
Strengthened management of areas beyond conservation areas	
Area of landscapes under improved practices (Mha)	80
Area of marine habitat under improved practices (Mha)	95
SUSTAINABLY MANAGING AND RESTORING LAND	
Area of land under restoration (Mha)	8
Production landscapes under sustainable management (Mha)	45
REDUCING GHG EMISSIONS	
Greenhouse gas emissions mitigated (Mt CO_2e)	1,200
- of which directly	950
- of which indirectly	250
STRENGHTHENING TRANSBOUNDARY WATER MANAGEMENT	
Shared water ecosystems under cooperative management (nb)	45
Over-exploited fisheries moved to more sustainable levels (Mt)	2.2
REDUCING POLLUTION FROM CHEMICALS AND WASTE	
Chemical-containing materials and products directly avoided (Tt)	5,000
Mercury reduced (Tt)	0.9
Persistent organic pollutants to air reduced (g TEQ)	2,200

[291] GEF-9 results targets are established based on a reference US$4.5 billion Replenishment scenario and may be adjusted based on the final GEF-9 financial envelope.

Annex II: Policy Recommendations for the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GEF-9

GEF-9 Policy Recommendations: Summary and implementation timeline

1. GEF-9 policy actions, presented here as policy recommendations for adoption, set out a comprehensive, innovative and ambitious path to modernizing the GEF. They build on incremental policy achievements of earlier periods and take a more step-wise and holistic approach. There are three elements to the presented actions: first, a set of policy enhancements structured around 'The Five As', five priority policy areas to enable the implementation of GEF-9 Programming Directions; second, improvements to the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources; and, finally, a set of improvements to measure and manage for results.

2. The list of policy actions to undertake is listed in Table A. They include not only clearly defined actions, but also specific time-bound deliverables. The impact of these actions will be assessed against expected outcomes identified and quantified for each action where appropriate. This list should be read together with the accompanying main Policy Directions document which spells out the actual policies requiring adjustments under the Council's authority. While the GEF Secretariat will be at the initiation of most actions, achieving this ambitious policy agenda will require the joint effort of the Trustee, countries and Agencies, under the guidance and authority of the GEF Council.

3. The GEF Secretariat will implement robust mechanisms for reporting on implementation of the policy actions. First, the GEF-9 Corporate Scorecard will allow monitoring programming trends and progress. Second, the GEF Secretariat will track and report to the Council on the implementation of the policy recommendations referenced in the table below at mid-term and during the last year of GEF-9. This will provide more granularity and transparency, allowing a clearer picture of where progress along the policy recommendations is taking place, including through a risk-based approach that highlights areas requiring enhanced attention or mitigation.

4. The policy recommendations reflect the outcomes of negotiations among GEF-9 Replenishment Participants on all elements of GEF programming and strategic direction, as well as the specific policy measures deliberated throughout the replenishment process. They are are also informed by the findings of OPS8 and contributions from Observers and other stakeholders.

2. Table A. GEF-9 Policy Recommendations [292]

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
ACCELERATED AND STREAMLINED DELIVERY (OBJECTIVE 1)	
a. Facilitate access to finance across funds with fewer modalities	
▌By **mid-2026**, the GEF draws on GBFF lessons to inform the accelerated project approval modality development. ▌By **mid-2027**, the Council considers for approval a proposal for policy updates enabling an accelerated project approval modality. ▌By **mid-2027**, the PIF template is retired and replaced by a simplified request for Project Preparation. ▌By **mid-2027**, streamlined Project Preparation Requests are approved on a rolling basis by the GEF Secretariat. ▌By **mid-2027**, the Council considers for approval a simplified approach to preparing Enabling Activities. ▌By **2028**, full projects under the accelerated project approval modality are presented for Council approval on a rolling basis. ▌By **2028**, the GEF mainstreams a single, accelerated project modality across funds	▌By **2030**, all standalone projects approved are using the accelerated project approval modality.
b. Streamlining Agencies' internal processes	
▌By **2028**, a progress update on internal Agency measures is shared with Council. ▌By **2028**, GEF Agencies implement internal streamlining measures for processing GEF funding.	▌By **2029**, delays in reaching CEO Endorsement are reduced, accelerating project preparation and disbursement.
c. Better tracking early project ideas	
▌By **2027**, criteria to enter into the pipeline are clarified and reflected in GEF Portal. ▌By **2027**, the GEF enables OFPs or Agencies to record early-stage project discussions in the GEF Portal.	▌By **2027**, a dynamic pipeline of investments will improve visibility into upcoming programming and funding flows.
d. Introducing time standards for Agencies	
▌By **2027**, the GEF Secretariat introduces a maximum time standard for both GEFSEC and Agencies to resubmit projects.	▌By **2028**, the GEF Partnership observes improved review processes and accelerated approvals.
e. Harmonize Agency fees and commitment schedule	
▌By **2027**, the GEF harmonizes Agency fees by setting a 9% maximum uniform fee rate and applies flexibility in Project Management Costs. ▌By **2028**, the GEF Council decides on options to differentiate levels of PMC and Agency fee by investment size and type, as well as to encourage prompt implementation through enhanced tranching of fees.	▌By **2028**, this effort will streamline processes, reduce complexity, heighten cost efficiency and ensure a level playing field among Agencies.

[292] Dates throughout refer to the beginning of the calendar year, unless otherwise indicated.

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
f. Upgrade and align the GEF IT systems for higher efficiency	
▌By **mid-2028**, processes and workflows in the GEF Portal reflect GEF-9 policy decisions, with user-centred design principles guiding all enhancements.	▌By **2029**, an enhanced Portal levels the playing field among Agencies and supports collaboration.
AFFORDABLE AND SCALED FINANCE (OBJECTIVE 2)	
g. Mainstreaming blended finance to increase private sector mobilization, efficiency and reach	
▌By **2027**, the Council considers for approval updates to the NGI policy, which would include relevant policies to enable an element to pilot the mainstreaming of blended finance, and other relevant policies to enable the mainstreaming of blended finance. ▌By **2027**, the GEF Secretariat mainstreams blended finance through private sector engagement and by integrating NGIs into a more flexible, streamlined project cycle and enabling access to funding sources across the GEF Trust Fund to be supported by the removal of project size cap and calls for proposals, and reliance on a unified accelerated project approval modality, along with flexible project-level financing arrangements and approach to uphold country ownership. ▌By **mid-2028**, the Council will consider a mid-term assessment of the Blended Finance Global Program, including its incentive mechanism. ▌By **2028**, the Trustee updates Financial Procedure Agreements with Agencies to give greater flexibility to NGI implementation and liquidity management, pending need assessment and contingent on Agencies' concurrence.	▌By **2028**, this will enhance private capital mobilization, increase operational efficiency, and expand the scalability of investments.
h. Enhancing co-financing transparency and effectiveness	
▌By **2027** a new Co-Financing Policy clarifies co-financing types (joint, parallel, coordinated) and sources (public and private), improve reporting consistency, and strengthen guidance, tracking and reporting for private capital mobilization, clarifying also that joint co-financing will mainly count toward the co-financing ratio and estimated expected results.	▌By **2027**, this will amplify leverage, the quality of financing and achievement of environmental outcomes.
AGILE AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION (OBJECTIVE 3)	
i. Increase project readiness	
▌By **2027**, the GEF updates project templates reflecting requirements and assessments of project implementation arrangements during preparation, ensuring clear governance and disbursement plans before full project approval, clarifying the flow of funds and steps required to reach project start promptly.	▌By **2028**, this will reduce start-up delays and improve project readiness, while upholding quality.
j. Accelerating the implementation start of pending projects	
▌By **2027**, the Council considers for approval an update to the Cancellation policy requiring project cancellation for projects breaching a 30-month threshold. ▌By **2027**, the GEF enhances the monitoring of timelines for projects to reach first disbursement, enforcing cancellation for breaching the 30-month threshold.	▌By **2028**, this will accelerate project start-up, improve fund utilization, and maintain alignment with country priorities.

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
k. Strengthening executing entity capacity for faster implementation	
▌By **2027**, the GEF ensures that projects templates capture capacity building support in executing entities when relevant and in application of Agencies' purview in this area.	▌By **2028**, this will enhance executing agencies' skills and systems, accelerating implementation and improving project effectiveness.
l. Formalizing portfolio review for stronger oversight	
▌By **2027**, the Council considers for approval an update to the Monitoring policy, formalizing portfolio engagement with Agencies, supported by an alert system for performance deviations. ▌By **2027**, the GEF formalizes portfolio engagement through clear frequency, digital tools and ad hoc mission participation, ensuring that bilateral exchanges not only address issues ex-post but act as an early warning system for proactive resolution.	▌By **2028**, this will strengthen portfolio oversight, enable timely identification of challenges, and improve performance tracking.
m. Enhance flexibility for projects in FCS	
▌By **mid-2028**, the GEF enhances flexibility, where relevant, in FCS by adapting timelines, budgets, and engagement, notably with the implementation of the accelerated project modality and during implementation, and as reflected in project templates.	▌By **2028**, this will improve project relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability while supporting adaptive and risk management.
n. Risk-based approach to fast-tracking project management	
▌By **2028**, the GEF implements a risk-based approach to fast-track low-risk projects through simplified and expedited processes as approved by Council.	▌By **2027**, options to be identified and presented for Council discussion. ▌By **2029**, this will increase efficiency by reducing delays for simpler projects while maintaining oversight of high-risk initiatives.
AUGMENTED ACCESS AND EMPOWERED COUNTRIES (OBJECTIVE 4)	
o. Expanding Agency cohort through open, cross-fund and targeted accreditation	
▌By **2027**, the partnership expansion process is submitted for Council approval, building on GEF/C.69/05-Rev1, with implementation start at the start of GEF-9, considering opportunities to accredit a select number of Agencies with private sector and/or IPLC experience. ▌By **mid-2027**, the assessment process for a select few new Agencies will be completed, followed by Council approval and legal and operational arrangements to be carried out by the Trustee and the Agencies, and building on the experience of other MCFs. ▌By **2028**, the GEF expands its Agency cohort through open, cross-fund, and targeted accreditation processes to include new entities, including to ensure identified new Agencies have experience with SIDS, LDCs, the private sector and IPLCs.	▌By **2029**, this will enhance the Partnership's reach, improve complementarity with other environmental funds, and increase access for specialized organizations and underrepresented regions.
p. Enhancing financing to IPLCs, women and youth	
▌By **mid-2027**, the GEF updates the *2012 Principles and Guidelines for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples*. ▌By **mid-2027**, the Council considers for approval a pilot approach for no-objection for IPLC-led projects. ▌By **2027**, the GEF shares portfolio data on support to IPLCs in the Corporate Scorecard.	▌By **2028**, this will empower specific groups, support their rights and knowledge systems, and ensure their voices are integral to decision-making processes.

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
▌An aspirational target of 20 percent of GEF-9 programming is to be directed toward actions by IPLCs. ▌By **2028**, the GEF refines financing mechanisms, policies and guidelines to ensure their responsiveness to IPLCs, women, and youth. ▌By **2028**, a GEF policy on Indigenous Peoples is presented for Council approval, building on dedicated consultations.	
q. Promoting Country Platforms to boost private and public investments	
▌By **2027**, the GEF promotes and supports Country Platforms as coordinated national frameworks to enhance collaboration among MDBs, the private sector, other financiers and the society at large. ▌By **2028**, financial arrangements allow Country Platforms to operate with GEF support, including by participating in and contributing to already existing Country Platforms. ▌**During GEF-9**, the GEF continues to advance joint actions supporting MCF collaboration and complementarity, including as part of and beyond the Country Platform context.	▌By **2027**, This will strengthen strategic engagement, enable whole-of-government reforms, and mobilize large-scale investments aligned with national priorities.
r. Ensuring an active and diverse GEF Partnership	
▌By **2027**, a formula to operationalize the portfolio cap will be established and communicated to Agencies; It will apply a cumulative 25 percent ceiling per Agency. ▌By **2027**, the GEF Portal will include automated tracking and alerts to signal when an Agency is nearing the cap. A monitoring dashboard will be made available to Agencies with regular information updates on portfolio status and implications for future programming. ▌By **2027**, the GEF requires Agencies to limit their portfolio share to a maximum of 25 percent and will apply a notional minimum target of 25 percent for MDBs and IFIs across the portfolio.	▌By **2027**, this will promote a more active and balanced Partnership, encouraging greater engagement from MDBs and other Agencies.
s. Promoting National Steering Committees	
▌By **2028**, sensitization mechanisms clarifying how to set up National Steering Committees and good practice examples will be provided to support their establishment. ▌By **2028**, the GEF will support the implementation of National Steering Committees that include multiple ministries and stakeholders to coordinate GEF activities.	▌By **2028**, this will foster a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
t. Enhancing OFP capacity and supporting engagement in projects	
▌By **2027**, the GEF will enhance OFP capacity by providing dedicated training, technical assistance, and resources to support their active engagement in project oversight and coordination.	▌By **2027**, this will strengthen OFP participation, improve project supervision and reporting.
APPROPRIATE ARCHITECTURE AND REPRESENTATION (OBJECTIVE 5)	
u. Advancing governance through the establishment of a dedicated working group	
▌By **2027**, the GEF Council sets up an ad hoc Working Group on the evolution of the GEF architecture, oversight and donor base, with	▌By **2028**, the updated GEF architecture is refined and in place.

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
Terms of Reference that include clear deliverables, milestones and timelines.	
ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES	
▌Refinements to the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) formula, and data updates to all existing indices and sub-indices: • For the Global Benefits Index (GBI) for Biodiversity, the weight of the Marine sub-index is increased to 0.3, with a corresponding reduction of the Terrestrial and Freshwater sub-index weight to 0.7; • For the GBI for Climate Change, the weight of the Forest Cover sub-index is increased to 0.3, with a corresponding reduction of the GHG sub-index weight to 0.7; • For the GBI for Land Degradation, a Drought Vulnerability sub-index is introduced, with a weight of 0.2, and concomitant adjustments made to the other sub- indices as needed; • The STAR focal area ceilings are lowered to 5% of the respective focal area STAR envelope; • The absolute aggregate STAR allocation floors are maintained at GEF-8 levels, set at USD 8 million for SIDS and LDCs and USD 5 million for non-SIDS and non-LDCs; • The weight of the GDP Index is increased to -0.21; • A Disbursement sub-index is introduced under the Country Performance Index, with a weight of 0.2, and concomitant adjustments made to the other sub- indices as needed. ▌An expansion of a special STAR window to the top 10 recipient countries (excluding any SIDS or LDCs) with a thematic focus on blended finance, relying on 12% of the allocations of the eligible countries. ▌A mid-term review of GEF-9 STAR, with an aim of assessing utilization of STAR resources to date, including a dedicated and disaggregated assessment of SIDS and LDCs as distinct country groups. ▌Full flexibility for country programming across the three STAR focal areas, with continued tracking of OECD-DAC Rio Markers. ▌Enhanced support to SIDS/LDCs: • [43%] of STAR resources to SIDS/LDCs to better support countries with special needs (with the final percentage to be determined by the outcomes of the final GEF-9 STAR model, and the final replenishment size); • An aspirational benchmark set for SIDS/LDCs of 35% of total GEF-9 programming, inclusive of capacity-building activities;	▌On **July 1st, 2026**, STAR country allocations are made publicly available[293]. ▌From **July 2026**, countries start programming activities based on predictable and known allocation levels. ▌By the **mid-term of GEF-9 (July 2028),** Council discussions on the STAR utilizations to date. ▌By the **end of GEF-9**, all STAR resources are fully programmed.

[293] On an exceptional basis for GEF-9, STAR allocations will be reposted annually, as needed, to reflect any additional resources received during the replenishment cycle.

POLICY ACTION	EXPECTED OUTCOME
• Strengthened monitoring of SIDS/LDCs, including capacity-building efforts: a dedicated section on SIDS and LDCs in the GEF-9 Corporate Scorecard; a dedicated and disaggregated assessment of SIDS and LDCs as distinct groups in the GEF-9 STAR mid-term review.	
▌A full review of the allocation model during GEF-9 towards comprehensive allocation model changes for the GEF-10 replenishment and also assessing the potential inclusion of additional focal areas in line with GEF mandate.	▌From **July 2026**, GEF starts the scoping exercise on allocation model reform and periodically reports back to Council as needed. ▌By **the start of the GEF-10 Replenishment negotiation**, a new allocation model is ready for discussion.
RESULTS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK	
▌By **mid-2026**, countries and Agencies start programming along the GEF-9 RMF.	▌By **2027**, the GEF reports results along the enhanced and expanded GEF-9 Results Management Framework through the Monitoring Report and GEF-9 Corporate Scorecard.
MANAGING RISK TO OUTCOMES	
▌By **2027**, the Council will consider a revised GEF Risk Appetite, including the implementation and monitoring of a risk tolerance band under the Context and Execution risk dimensions in FCS, with additional focus on situations of fragility and conflict.	▌By **2027**, improved risk management and oversight in FCS settings, enabling more informed and tailored support.
▌By **mid-2026**, the GEF Secretariat monitors through the Rio Marker methodology that, over the GEF-9 period, funding commitments meet the following minimum thresholds: 70% for biodiversity, 60% for desertification, 80% for climate change-related investments, including at least 45% for adaptation and 65% for mitigation. The 80% climate-related financing target will also apply specifically to NGIs.	▌By **2027**, balanced and strategic allocation of GEF resources aligned with global environmental priorities and GEF-9 programming is ongoing.

Annex III: GEF-9 Replenishment Resolution for Approval by the World Bank Executive Directors

GEF-9 REPLENISHMENT RESOLUTION

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY TRUST FUND
NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF RESOURCES

(RESOLUTION NO. IBRD 2026-0010)

INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S RESOLUTION NO. IBRD [2026-0010]

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY TRUST FUND

NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF RESOURCES

WHEREAS:

A. The participants contributing to the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund ("the GEF Trust Fund"), (jointly, "the Contributing Participants", each "a Contributing Participant") having considered the prospective financial requirements of the GEF Trust Fund, have concluded that additional resources should be made available to the GEF Trust Fund for new financing commitments for the period from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2030 (the "Ninth Replenishment") and have agreed to ask their legislatures, where necessary, to authorize and approve the allocation of additional resources to the GEF Trust Fund in the amounts set out in Attachment 1, and according to the provisions set forth herein;

B. The Council of the Global Environment Facility (the "GEF" or "Facility") (the "Council"), having considered the Summary of the Negotiations on the Ninth Replenishment, including the policy recommendations made on the basis of the Eighth Overall Performance Study of the GEF, other reports emanating from the GEF monitoring and evaluation program during the prior replenishment period, and the views and proposals of the Participants, has requested the Executive Directors of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the "World Bank") to authorize the World Bank as Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund to hold in trust and manage the resources made available for the Ninth Replenishment;

C. It is desirable to administer any remaining funds from the Eighth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund, authorized by the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility, as amended (the "Instrument"), and approved by Resolution No. 2022-0003 of the World Bank, adopted on July 25, 2022 (the "Eighth Replenishment"), as part of the Ninth Replenishment;

D. The World Bank, as provided for in Paragraph 8 and Annex B of the Instrument (adopted on May 24, 1994, pursuant to Resolution No. 94-2 of the Executive Directors of the World Bank), is Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund and, in that capacity, will hold in trust and manage the resources made available for the Ninth Replenishment.

NOW THEREFORE the Executive Directors of the World Bank hereby note with approval the replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund in the amounts and on the basis set forth herein and

authorize the World Bank as Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund (the "Trustee") to manage the resources made available for the Ninth Replenishment as follows:

Contributions

1. The Trustee is authorized to accept contributions to the GEF Trust Fund; (a) by way of a grant from each Contributing Participant in the GEF Trust Fund in the amount specified for each Contributing Participant in Attachment 1, and (b) otherwise as provided herein.

Instruments of Commitment

2. (a) Contributing Participants to the Ninth Replenishment shall deposit with the Trustee an instrument of commitment substantially in the form set out in Attachment 2 ("Instrument of Commitment"), subject to sub-paragraph 2(b).

(b) When a Contributing Participant agrees to pay a part of its contribution without qualification and the remainder is subject to enactment by its legislature of the necessary appropriation legislation, it shall deposit a qualified instrument of commitment in a form acceptable to the Trustee ("Qualified Instrument of Commitment"); such Contributing Participant undertakes to exercise its best efforts to obtain legislative approval for the installment amounts of its contribution by the payment dates set out in sub-paragraph 3(a) below.

(c) At every Council meeting, the Trustee will inform the Council of the status of Instruments of Commitment and Qualified Instruments of Commitment deposited with the Trustee.

Payments

3. (a) Contributions to the GEF Trust Fund under sub-paragraph 1(a) that a Contributing Participant agrees to pay without qualification shall be paid to the Trustee in four equal installments by November 30, 2026, November 30, 2027, November 30, 2028, and November 30, 2029, provided that:

(i) The Trustee and a Contributing Participant may agree to earlier payment;

(ii) If the Ninth Replenishment shall not have become effective (as described in sub-paragraph 6(a) below) by October 31, 2026, payment of any installment which would otherwise have been due prior to the Effective Date (as defined in subparagraph 6(a) below) shall become due 30 days after the Effective Date;

(iii) Upon the written request of a Contributing Participant, the Trustee may agree to allow such Contributing Participant to postpone the payment of any

installment, or part thereof, up to, but not beyond, June 30 of the calendar year following the year in which such installment is due. Payments made pursuant to any such agreement with the Trustee shall constitute timely payments; and

(iv) If any Contributing Participant shall deposit an Instrument of Commitment with the Trustee after the date on which any installment of the contribution is due, payment of any such installment(s) shall be made to the Trustee within 30 days after the date of deposit of such Instrument.

(b) Contributions to the GEF Trust Fund under sub-paragraph 1(a) that a Contributing Participant agrees to make pursuant to a Qualified Instrument of Commitment shall be paid to the Trustee as follows:

(i) If any Contributing Participant deposits a Qualified Instrument of Commitment with the Trustee after the date on which any installment of the contribution would have been due under sub-paragraph 3(a) if the Contributing Participant had deposited an unqualified Instrument of Commitment, payment of any such installment(s), or part thereof, shall be made to the Trustee within 30 days after the date of deposit of such Instrument to the extent that such Instrument has been unqualified.

(ii) If any Contributing Participant that has deposited a Qualified Instrument of Commitment thereafter notifies the Trustee that an installment, or part thereof, is unqualified after the date when such installment would have been due under subparagraph 3(a) if the Contributing Participant had deposited an unqualified Instrument of Commitment, payment of such installment, or part thereof, shall be made within 30 days of such notification.

(c) Payments under sub-paragraph 1(a) shall be made, at the option of each Contributing Participant, (i) in cash or (ii) through the deposit of notes or similar obligations (such as letters of credit) issued by the government of the Contributing Participant or the depository designated by the Contributing Participant, which shall be non-negotiable, non-interest bearing, and payable at their par value on demand to the account of the Trustee on the following terms:

(i) Subject to sub-paragraph 3(a)(iii), payment in cash may be made on terms agreed between the Contributing Participant and the Trustee that shall be no less favorable to the GEF Trust Fund than payment made through the deposit of notes or similar obligations pursuant to sub-paragraph 3(c)(ii).

(ii) The Trustee shall encash notes or similar obligations on an approximately pro rata basis among Contributing Participants, at reasonable intervals as needed for disbursements and transfers referred to in paragraph 8, as determined by the Trustee. An indicative encashment schedule is set out in Attachment 3. At the written request of a Contributing Participant experiencing exceptionally difficult budgetary circumstances, the Trustee may permit postponement of encashment for (i) up to two years in respect of a Contributing Participant that is also an eligible recipient under the GEF Trust Fund, and (ii) up to 45 days in respect of all other Contributing Participants.

(iii) At the request of a Contributing Participant, the Trustee may agree to encash notes or similar obligations on a basis other than a pro rata basis; provided that, subject to sub-paragraph 3(c)(iv), the schedule of encashment agreed for such notes or obligations shall be no less favorable to the GEF Trust Fund than the schedule that would apply according to the pro rata basis provided for under subparagraph 3(c)(ii).

(iv) If the sum total of a Contributing Participant's notes or similar obligations deposited with the Trustee is insufficient to meet the indicative encashment schedule referred to in sub-paragraph 3(c)(ii) (as such schedule may be amended from time to time), such Contributing Participant shall exercise its best efforts, subject to its domestic budgetary and legislative practices and requirements, to meet a schedule of encashment for the notes or similar obligations it thereafter deposits with the Trustee that would be no less favorable to the GEF Trust Fund than the schedule that would otherwise have applied according to the pro rata basis provided for under subparagraph 3(c)(ii).

(d) Sub-paragraph 3(c) does not apply to, or affect, the schedule for the payment of installments set out in sub-paragraph 3(a) or, in the case of a Contributing Participant that has deposited a Qualified Instrument of Commitment, the obligations undertaken pursuant to subparagraph 2(b). Further, nothing in sub-paragraph 3(c) authorizes the Trustee to increase a Contributing Participant's contribution or to impose financial penalties for any reason.

(e) Contributions to the GEF Trust Fund under sub-paragraph 1(b) shall be paid in accordance with the terms on which such contributions are accepted by the Trustee.

(f) The Trustee shall make regular reports to the Council on the status of Contributing Participants' contributions.

Timely Availability of Resources

4. (a) If (i) a Contributing Participant does not make payment in accordance with subparagraph 3(a) or 3(b); or (ii) a Contributing Participant that has deposited a Qualified Instrument of Commitment, is unable, despite its best efforts undertaken in accordance with sub- paragraph 2(b), to obtain legislative approval to unqualify a sufficient amount of its contribution to meet the payment dates set out in subparagraph 3(a), and such delay continues for 30 days, the Trustee shall notify the Contributing Participant of the delay. In doing so, the Trustee shall request the Contributing Participant to make payment promptly, or, as appropriate, to exercise its best efforts to obtain legislative approval to unqualify sufficient funds to make payment promptly. The Trustee shall also remind the Contributing Participant of the obligation it will incur under the further requirements of this sub-paragraph if the delay persists. If payment has not been made 30 days before the date of the Council meeting following the date on which the delay was incurred, the responsible Minister of the Contributing Participant concerned shall provide the Chief Executive Officer/ Chairperson of the Facility (the "CEO") with a written communication stating the reasons for the delay and the measures being taken to address it. The CEO shall forward any such communication to the Council, with a copy to the Trustee.

(b) As provided in sub-paragraph 25(c) of the Instrument, for the purpose of determining voting power in the event of a formal vote by the Council, a Contributing Participant's total contributions shall consist of the actual cumulative contributions made by a Contributing Participant to the GEF Trust Fund, including actual contributions made to the Ninth Replenishment, contributions made to the Global Environment Trust Fund (the "GET"), and the grant equivalent of co-financing and parallel financing made under the GEF pilot program, or agreed with the Trustee before the effective date of the GEF Trust Fund.

Currency of Denomination and Payment

5. (a) Contributing Participants shall denominate their contributions in Special Drawing Rights ("SDR"), or in a currency that is freely convertible, as determined by the Trustee, except that if a Contributing Participant's economy experienced a rate of inflation in excess of ten percent per annum on average in the period 2022 to 2024 as determined by the Trustee as of the date this Resolution is adopted, its contribution shall be denominated in SDR or United States Dollars.

(b) Contributing Participants shall make payments in SDR, a currency used for the valuation of the SDR, or with the agreement of the Trustee, in another freely convertible

currency. The Trustee may, in its discretion, freely exchange contributions received for any such currencies.

(c) Each Contributing Participant shall maintain, with respect to its currency paid to the Trustee and the currency of such Contributing Participant derived therefrom, the same convertibility as existed on the date on which this Resolution is adopted.

Effective Date

6. (a) The Ninth Replenishment shall become effective on the date when Contributing Participants whose contributions aggregate not less than sixty percent (60%) of the total contributions of all Contributing Participants, as set out in Attachment 1 shall have deposited with the Trustee Instruments of Commitment or Qualified Instruments of Commitment (the "Effective Date").

(b) The Trustee shall promptly notify all Contributing Participants when the Ninth Replenishment becomes effective.

(c) If the Ninth Replenishment does not become effective by March 31, 2027, the Trustee shall so inform the Contributing Participants and consult with them on possible steps to be taken to prevent any interruption of GEF financing. The Trustee, in collaboration with the CEO, will inform the Council of the results of such consultations, and seek the Council's guidance on the steps to be taken, including, as may be necessary, the convening of a meeting of the Contributing Participants.

Advance Contributions

7. (a) In order to avoid an interruption in the Trustee's ability to make financing commitments pending the effectiveness of the Ninth Replenishment, and if the Trustee shall have received Instruments of Commitment or Qualified Instruments of Commitment from Contributing Participants whose contributions aggregate not less than twenty percent (20%) of the total contributions of all Contributing Participants, as set out in Attachment 1, the Trustee may deem, prior to the Effective Date, one quarter of the total amount of each contribution for which an Instrument of Commitment or Qualified Instrument of Commitment has been deposited with the Trustee as an advance contribution, unless the Contributing Participant specifies otherwise in its Instrument of Commitment or Qualified Instrument of Commitment.

(b) The Trustee shall specify when advance contributions pursuant to sub-paragraph 7(a) above are to be paid to the Trustee.

(c) The terms and conditions applicable to contributions to the Ninth Replenishment shall apply also to advance contributions until the Effective Date, when such contributions shall be deemed to constitute payment towards the amount due from each Contributing Participant for its contribution.

Commitment or Transfer Authority

8. (a) Contributions shall become available for commitment by the Trustee, for disbursement or transfer as needed to cover the work program, the administrative budget of the GEF, and any other expenses approved by the Council under the Instrument, upon receipt of payment by the Trustee of the contributions set out in sub-paragraphs 1(a) and (b). Paid in but unallocated resources included in the carryover reflected in Attachment 1 hereto and investment income shall become available for commitment by the Trustee, for disbursement or transfer as needed to cover the work program, the administrative budget of the GEF, and any other expenses approved by the Council under the Instrument, upon adoption of the resolution by the Executive Directors of the World Bank.

(b) Commitment and transfer authority shall be increased by:

(i) The income earned on the investment of resources held in the GEF Trust Fund pending disbursement or transfer by the Trustee; and

(ii) Payments received by the Trustee as repayment, interest or charges on loans made by the GEF Trust Fund.

(c) The Trustee may enter into agreements to provide financing from the GEF Trust Fund, conditional on the commitment of such financing becoming effective and binding on the GEF Trust Fund when resources become available for commitment by the Trustee.

Administration of the Eighth Replenishment

9. Funds, receipts, assets and liabilities held by the Trustee under the Eighth Replenishment, including the full carryover reflected in Attachment 1 hereto, will be administered under the Ninth Replenishment.

ATTACHMENT 1: GLOBAL ENVIROMENT FACILITY TRUST FUND

NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF RESOURCES

TABLE OF CONTRIBUTIONS

	CONTRIBUTIONS (in millions)								
	GEF-9 Shares and Basic Contributions			Supplemental Contributions	GEF-9 Actual Shares	Total Contributions			
Contributing Participants	(%)	SDR		SDR	(%)	SDR	Currency a/		Currency
Australia	1.16%	38.38		-	2.17%	38.38	80.00		AUD
Austria	1.16%	38.42		-	2.18%	38.42	45.00		EUR
Belgium	2.20%	72.84	b/	-	4.13%	72.84	80.00		EUR
Brazil	-	4.50	c/	7.22	0.66%	11.72	86.78	b/	BRL
Canada	3.79%	125.12	b/	-	7.09%	125.12	219.00		CAD
China	-	4.50	c/	12.59	0.97%	17.09	166.26		CNY
Côte d'Ivoire	-	4.50	c/	-	0.25%	4.50	6.15		USD
France	4.65%	153.66		-	8.70%	153.66	180.00	b/	EUR
Germany	16.28%	537.83		-	30.46%	537.83	630.00		EUR
India	-	4.50	c/	10.14	0.83%	14.64	20.00		USD
Ireland	0.36%	11.77	b/	-	0.67%	11.77	12.50		EUR
Italy	2.20%	72.56		-	4.11%	72.56	85.00		EUR
Japan	10.49%	346.51		-	19.62%	346.51	71,377.34		JPY
Luxembourg	0.14%	4.50		-	0.25%	4.50	5.27	b/	EUR
Mexico	-	4.50	c/	1.36	0.33%	5.86	147.78	b/	MXN
Netherlands	3.20%	105.86		-	6.00%	105.86	124.00		EUR
New Zealand	0.12%	3.96	b/	6.97	0.62%	10.94	23.50		NZD
Norway	1.83%	60.31	b/	-	3.42%	60.31	780.00		NOK
Slovenia	0.14%	4.50		-	0.25%	4.50	5.27		EUR
South Africa	-	4.50	c/	-	0.25%	4.50	106.84		ZAR
Switzerland	3.66%	120.91		-	6.85%	120.91	132.10		CHF
Uzbekistan	-	3.29		-	0.19%	3.29	4.50		USD
1 New Funding from Contributing Participants	51.37%	1,727.43		38.28	100.00%	1,765.71			
2 Projected Investment Income						386.10	d/		
3 Projected Carryover of GEF Resources						633.34			
Paid-in Unallocated Resources						434.61	e/		
Unpaid Resources						198.73	f/		
4 Reflows from Non-Grant Instruments						70.07	g/		
5 **Total Projected Resources to Cover GEF-9 Work Program**						**2,855.22**	h/		

** **All pledges are subject to Parliamentary/Congressional approval.**

a/ As agreed by the Contributing Participants at the first GEF-9 replenishment meeting in May 2025, the reference exchange rates to convert between the SDR amounts and the national currency amounts will be the average daily exchange rates over the period from July 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025 (reference exchange rates)

b/ Contributing Participants have the option of taking a discount or credit for acceleration of encashment and; (i) including such credit as part of their basic share; (ii) counting such credit as a supplemental contribution; or (iii) taking such discount against the national currency contribution. Belgium, Canada, Ireland, and Norway have opted to include such credit as part of their basic share. New Zealand has opted to take the credit for accelerated encashment as a supplemental contribution. Brazil, France, and Luxemburg have opted to take a discount against the contribution currency.

c/ For those Contributing Participants that do not have a basic share, this represents the agreed minimum contribution of SDR 4.5 million.

d/ Investment income is projected using a USD 4.17 billion average cash balance and estimated investment return of 3.02% per annum.

e/ This amount represents paid-in but unallocated resources in the GEF Trust Fund (excluding amounts for which commitment by the Trustee is deferred under any prior replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund) and investment income.

f/ This amount comprises Instruments of Commitments not yet deposited plus arrears (late payments under deposited Instruments of Commitments or Qualified Instruments of Commitments).

g/ This amount represents reflows under the Non Grant Instruments which are expected to be received during the GEF-9 Replenishment period up to June 30, 2030.

h/ This SDR amount is equivalent to USD 3,899.43 million using the agreed GEF-9 reference exchange rates.

i/ This represents pledges from Contributing Participants whose internal governance and budget processes are not sufficiently advanced to allow pledging at the final replenishment meeting, but where pledges are expected to be confirmed as soon as possible. This represents an indicative amount calculated by the Trustee, and does not represent pledges by the Contributing Participants. Pledge amounts are to be determined by the Contributing Participants and confirmed to the Trustee soon.

ATTACHMENT 2: GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY TRUST FUND

NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF RESOURCES

INSTRUMENT OF COMMITMENT

Reference is made to Resolution No. IBRD 2026-0010 of the Executive Directors of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the “World Bank") entitled "Global Environment Facility Trust Fund: Ninth Replenishment of Resources" which was adopted on August 7, 2026 (the "Resolution").

The Government of _____ hereby notifies the World Bank as Trustee of The Global Environment Facility Trust Fund, pursuant to paragraph 2 of the Resolution, that it will make the contribution authorized for it in Attachment 1 of the Resolution, in accordance with the terms of the Resolution, in the amount of _____.

_____ _____

(Date) (Name, Title and Office)

ATTACHMENT 3: GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY TRUST FUND

NINTH REPLENISHMENT OF RESOURCES

INDICATIVE ENCASHMENT SCHEDULE

Fiscal Year	GEF-9 Indicative Encashment Schedule (%)
2027	2.0%
2028	8.0%
2029	11.0%
2030	16.0%
2031	16.0%
2032	14.0%
2033	14.0%
2034	10.0%
2035	6.0%
2036	3.0%
Total	**100.0%**