BACKGROUND NOTE | GEF FOCAL AREAS

Biodiversity (BD)

OVERVIEW

The goal of the GEF-9 biodiversity strategy is for globally significant biodiversity to be conserved, sustainably used, and restored. The strategy was designed to support the implementation of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). It is complementary to the programming directions of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund by focusing on integrated landscape/seascape approaches and by providing countries with predictable, guaranteed funding through the STAR allocation and through set-aside funding for enabling activities, which are key building blocks for the KMGBF.

CONVENTION GUIDANCE

The KMGBF, adopted at CBD COP15, is the global framework informing the strategy. It sets a vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050, anchored in 23 targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and four goals for 2050.

CBD COP16 guidance maps explicitly to GEF delivery mechanisms across five areas:

- Balanced implementation of the three objectives of the CBD;
- KMGBF goals and targets;
- National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans;
- National Biodiversity Finance Plans;
- KMGBF monitoring framework, including planning, reporting, and review.

The biodiversity strategy includes a mapping of all KMGBF targets to their respective entry points across the GEF family of funds.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, including the implementation plan and capacity-building action plan adopted by COP-MOP10 in 2022, and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, are reflected in the strategy's second objective.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The GEF-9 biodiversity focal area aims to:

1. Improve conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of biodiversity through integrated landscape and seascape approaches.

Biodiversity focal area projects use context-tailored combinations of nature- and people-oriented conservation measures, restoration, sustainable use, and biodiversity mainstreaming approaches to respond to the drivers of biodiversity loss within large landscape and seascape mosaics. Projects blend integrated governance and spatial planning with a range of other interventions aimed at:

- Financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of protected area systems, OECMs, and Indigenous and traditional territories;

- Legal and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- Biodiversity mainstreaming in priority sectors;
- Restoration;
- Prevention, control, and management of invasive alien species;
- Synergies with other conventions and objectives, including health.

2. 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.

3. Realign financial flows and mobilize resources for biodiversity.

A global program on financial flows realignment and resource mobilization will help countries develop enabling conditions, including policies, incentives, and institutional frameworks, for public and private finance realignment and mobilization of new and additional domestic resources, including through blended finance.

Through standalone projects, the biodiversity focal area may also help countries implement their Biodiversity Finance Plans and leverage private sector and multilateral development banks for biodiversity.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMMING

Countries access biodiversity focal area financing through STAR allocations, multi-focal area projects, and Integrated Programs, with all investments expected to align with National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and, for Objective 3, Biodiversity Finance Plans.

Consistent with the GEF mandate to generate global environmental benefits, landscapes and seascapes targeted by projects must contain globally important biodiversity. Projects justify the significance of targeted biodiversity components—genes, species, or ecosystems—in relation to their worldwide extent or population size, as well as the adequacy of the chosen landscape(s)/seascape(s) boundaries and project interventions for the persistence of globally significant biodiversity.

Through the enabling activity modality, eligible countries may access support for national biodiversity monitoring systems bundled with the 8th National Report to the CBD, the 2nd National Report under the Nagoya Protocol, and the 6th National Report under the Cartagena Protocol.

WHAT'S NEW IN GEF-9

The GEF-9 biodiversity strategy will bring enhanced focus on integration and synergies with other conventions served by the GEF through integrated landscape/seascape approaches and support to development of Access and Benefit Sharing frameworks that contribute to the implementation of KMGBF Target 13, the Nagoya Protocol, the CBD digital sequence information multilateral mechanism, and the BBNJ Agreement.

The strategy will focus on blended finance for biodiversity and realignment of financial flows through policy reforms and incentive frameworks, including through a new dedicated global program.

Inclusive Conservation Initiative programming will increase from $25 million to $100 million, reflecting the central role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in KMGBF delivery.

The strategy includes a set-aside for global/ regional project(s) for the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols and will support the development and implementation of national biodiversity monitoring systems through the enabling activity modality.

Chemicals and Waste (CW)

OVERVIEW

The GEF chemicals and waste (CW) focal area finances the sound management of chemicals and waste in recipient countries, tackling pollution that harms human health and the global environment: persistent organic pollutants (POPs), mercury, highly hazardous pesticides, electronic waste, and an escalating plastics crisis.

The GEF-9 CW objective targets more integrated, transformative, and ambitious pollution prevention and management, with zero-waste and pollution-free economies as the rallying goal, pairing elimination of hazardous legacy pollution with upstream transformation of the sectors and supply chains that may generate future pollution. The focal area holds 15.5 percent of resources within the GEF-9 architecture. The focal area sits outside the STAR allocation system and anchors or contributes to three Integrated Programs.

CONVENTION GUIDANCE

The CW focal area strategy responds to the most recent COP guidance. For 2026-2030, the Stockholm Convention urges the GEF to prioritize: elimination of PCBs in equipment and sound management of PCB wastes no later than 2028; disposal of listed industrial POPs, products and articles; elimination of POPs pesticides, including obsolete stockpiles; DDT phase-out with affordable alternatives; and Best Available Techniques/Best Environmental Practices against unintentional POPs, alongside National Implementation Plan updates, national legislation, and the global monitoring plan, informed by the sixth review of the financial mechanism and the 2026-2030 needs assessment.

The Minamata Convention adds Minamata Initial Assessment updates and monitoring of human exposure and environmental mercury to supported activities, emphasizes dental amalgam support needs, and reiterates that programming must reflect obligation deadlines. The CW focal area strategy also embeds the Global Framework on Chemicals 2030/2035 targets, supports Montreal Protocol action in economies in transition, including the Kigali Amendment, and readies the GEF for a role under a future plastics treaty.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The GEF-9 CW focal area strategy targets six objectives: strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks; driving innovation and technology deployment; building capacity and ensuring a just transition; transforming supply chains and markets; strategic financial mechanisms and private sector engagement; and eliminating the hazardous legacy. Its thematic focus spans the conventions' core agendas (PCBs, DDT, unintentional POPs, newly listed POPs including per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and mercury across mining, products, and industry) and extends to plastics, highly hazardous pesticides, e-waste, and chemicals in textiles, electronics, agriculture, construction, and healthcare. Innovations include an incubation and accelerator window, digital traceability tools, pollution prevention bonds and pollution-risk taxonomies, performance-based grants, health co-benefit measurement, and science partnerships with the STAP and the new Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel.

The focal area contributes to three principal Integrated Programs, anchoring Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution and Pollution-free Supply Chains, and providing mercury-related support in in Critical Forest Biomes. GEF-9 targets 5 million metric tons of chemical-containing materials avoided, 900 metric tons of mercury, and 2,200 grams of toxic equivalent.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMMING

Eligible programming includes enabling activities such as National Implementation Plans and updates, Minamata Initial Assessments and updates, Article 7 reviews, Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM) National Action Plans and policy, regulatory and enforcement strengthening, including extended producer responsibility and economic instruments. Also eligible are environmentally sound disposal and remediation of PCBs, DDT, obsolete pesticides, contaminated sites, and mercury hotspots.

The full Minamata agenda is eligible, from ASGM formalization and mercury-free technology to product phase-out, dental amalgam support, industrial emissions, trade control, and exposure monitoring; supply chain projects phasing out newly listed POPs, PFAS, and hazardous additives; circular economy and plastics projects covering eco-design, reuse systems, sound recycling and unintentional POPs reduction; technology transfer, training, and just transition support, including informal waste pickers; and blended finance.

Countries engage outside STAR allocations, through standalone projects or projects under the Integrated Programs, with eligibility following party status to the relevant conventions.

WHAT'S NEW IN GEF-9

The GEF-9 CW strategy expands from three objectives to six, adding innovation, just transition, supply chains and strategic finance, and restores weight to legacy elimination per IEO evaluation findings. Plastics moves from pilot to platform: the plastics program scales from food and beverage packaging to nearly all plastic categories, and a dedicated plastics indicator (EP-CW-07) enters the results framework. Alignment shifts from SAICM to the Global Framework on Chemicals. The supply chains program broadens to critical minerals and shipping, a mercury envelope enters the forests program, and new financing tools include pollution prevention bonds, a larger non-grant window, and a 25 percent private capital mobilization ambition.

Climate Change Mitigation (CCM)

OVERVIEW

Climate change is a critical and growing threat to both human and natural systems. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report is unambiguous: global net anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions must decline 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 to keep a 1.5°C pathway within reach. Despite growing national ambition, current commitments do not meet the urgency and speed of decarbonization that science indicates are necessary. Achieving the 1.5°C pathway demands transformations across energy, industry, transport, and land use, as well as the financial architecture to make those transformations possible.

The GEF-9 climate change mitigation (CCM) strategy supports countries in their efforts to rapidly accelerate decarbonization and undertake transformational shifts towards net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate-resilient development. CCM focal area investments will complement and maximize synergies with the Integrated Programs, other focal areas, and the GEF's family of funds.

CONVENTION GUIDANCE

The GEF serves as an operating entity of the financial mechanism under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. As such, the GEF supports climate action in recipient countries in line with COP guidance including on climate finance, complementarity, and coherence with other multilateral climate funds, improving the delivery of transparency support supporting the Technology Implementation Programme, and incorporating just transition elements into national climate plans. The CCM strategy also incorporates support for nationally led investment planning mechanisms such as country platforms,

The CCM strategy aims to maximize climate adaptation co-benefits, including through multi-trust fund projects with the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). The GEF will further explore risk-taking approaches to foster innovation and make better use of concessional financing to attract more private investment to climate change mitigation efforts.

GEF-9 projects must be in line with national climate strategies, including updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0), Long-Term Strategies, and associated implementation roadmaps and investment plans. Projects must also promote the participation of civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, and youth.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The GEF-9 climate change mitigation strategy is structured around two objectives:

Objective 1: Advancing transformational mitigation pathways targets the economic systems responsible for most global GHG emissions (energy, industry, transport, and land use). It does so through five strategies covering long-term net-zero planning and just transition, resource efficiency and circular economy, power systems and energy access, integrated and zero-emission mobility, and nature-based solutions.

Objective 2: Strengthening enabling conditions ensures that climate action is grounded in national planning systems and that countries can meet their convention and Paris Agreement reporting obligations. Through the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) the GEF provides institutional and technical support so countries can meet the provisions of the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement. The GEF also supports the preparation of Biennial Transparency Reports, National Communications, Technology Needs Assessments, and Nationally Determined Contributions.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMMING

Climate change mitigation focal area investments under the first objective will prioritize technology transfer, financial innovation, policy reforms, and promotion of best practices that enable rapid GHG reductions to achieve net zero by mid-century, while integrating climate resilience. Interventions are expected to incentivize private sector engagement, offer high replication potential, maximize co-benefits, and minimize trade-offs for climate adaptation, improved livelihoods, enhanced biodiversity, and reduced land degradation and pollution.

Eligible programming includes national strategy, plans, and policymaking; CBIT and enabling activities; establishing standards and certification schemes; developing fiscal/financial instruments and business models; cost-effective interventions in natural ecosystems and productive landscapes for GHG mitigation; and the piloting and demonstration of innovative technologies (e.g., cooling, industrial decarbonization, green hydrogen, renewable energy integration, decentralized energy solutions, electric mobility, decarbonization in shipping and aviation, agriculture- and food-technologies, advanced monitoring systems, etc.).

WHAT'S NEW IN GEF-9

Building on the GEF-8 Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator Integrated Program, the GEF will support long-term net-zero planning, country platforms, and policy coherence efforts, as well as the integration of just transition into climate plans, including reskilling programs with explicit attention to workers, women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Blended finance is elevated to deliver climate mitigation benefits at scale. With a higher risk profile, no project caps, and stronger country incentives, GEF-9 will foster innovation and crowd-in private finance for nationally driven climate priorities, including through programmatic approaches (e.g., e-mobility, mini-grids) and country-led investment platforms.

Synergies and complementarities will be maximized to reduce GHG emissions. The GEF has strengthened collaboration and coherence with the multilateral climate funds, and CCM focal area investments will leverage its comparative advantage, including synergies with other GEF focal areas, Integrated Programs, and funds.

International Waters (IW)

OVERVIEW

The GEF-9 international waters (IW) focal area strategy supports multi-country cooperation to manage and conserve shared freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems. The IW focal area responds to the multiple and layered transboundary stresses these complex systems face to generate lasting global environmental benefits. The GEF supports establishing and strengthening existing regional cooperation frameworks and sustainable financing mechanisms to promote durable management, including as part of the financial mechanism of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement.

CONVENTION GUIDANCE

The GEF, through the IW focal area, serves as part of the financial mechanism for the BBNJ Agreement. GEF-9 IW objective 2 mirrors the initial guidance identified in Article 52 of the BBNJ Agreement, with flexibility for future guidance.

While not mandated to support other multilateral environmental agreements, GEF-9 IW objectives are aligned with other international legal instruments, including the UN Water Convention, the Port State Measures Agreement, the Ramsar Convention, and the International Maritime Organization conventions and protocols. The IW focal area also helps countries meet commitments under related multilateral environmental agreements, such as National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (Convention on Biological Diversity) and Nationally Determined Contributions (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change).

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Under GEF-9, the IW focal area strategy targets three objectives:

1. **Strengthening sustainable management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems**: promoting integrated management approaches, sustainable blue economies, and sustainable fisheries, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
2. **Supporting the BBNJ Agreement**: assisting with BBNJ Agreement ratification and implementation.
3. **Strengthening the management of shared freshwater ecosystems**: promoting integrated management approaches in river and lake basins, wetlands, aquifers, and deltas.

Cross-cutting priorities include: promoting Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis–Strategic Action Program (TDA-SAP) development and implementation, with whole-of-government and whole-of-society participation; source-to-sea approaches and policy coherence; private sector engagement; innovative and blended financing; and knowledge management and learning, including through GEF IW:LEARN.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMMING

Objective 1: Advance integrated management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems, including through TDA-SAP and marine spatial planning; promoting sustainable blue-economies; supporting Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (protect 30 percent of global lands and waters by 2030); promoting ecosystem restoration; advancing sustainable fisheries management, including market mechanisms, regional agreements, and innovation; addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and addressing threats in areas beyond national jurisdiction outside of the BBNJ Agreement, including those related to industry activities.

Objective 2: Support ratification assistance and implementation readiness as well as implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, through capacity building, including conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, and training for transfer of marine technology; assist developing states parties in BBNJ Agreement implementation; support conservation and sustainable use programs by Indigenous Peoples and local communities as holders of traditional knowledge; support public consultations; and fund other activities as decided by the parties to the BBNJ Agreement.

Objective 3: Enhance water security across borders and sectors in shared freshwater systems, including: establishing and strengthening multi-country and transboundary cooperation (e.g., supporting the TDA-SAP process and strengthening or establishing multilateral agreements, River Basin Organizations, and other institutional frameworks); strengthening resilience against increasing variability of the global water cycle, including flooding, drought, and glacial melt; supporting freshwater ecosystem protection and freshwater fisheries; leveraging private sector finance to enhance water security; and addressing shared groundwater resource governance and management and promoting conjunctive management approaches.

WHAT'S NEW IN GEF-9

BBNJ Agreement: Supporting the BBNJ Agreement with a dedicated objective and eligible activities for implementation.

Groundwater: Stronger emphasis on addressing transboundary groundwater issues.

Sustainable finance: Priority use of blended finance and non-grant instruments to achieve project long-term financing needs.

BACKGROUND NOTE | GEF FOCAL AREAS

Land Degradation (LD)

OVERVIEW

Pressure on global land resources has led to the degradation of 1.6 billion hectares of land, putting the health, livelihoods, and security of communities at risk. As climate change intensifies drought and degradation, sustainable land management, ecosystem restoration, and drought resilience have emerged as urgent global priorities.

The GEF is committed to supporting countries in achieving their Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets. The land degradation (LD) focal area takes a comprehensive approach to deliver solutions across regional, national, and landscape scales, with a focus on people-centered sustainable land management (SLM) interventions in production landscapes to improve local livelihoods. LD investments complement related Integrated Programs, including Food Systems, Critical Forest Biomes, Blue and Green Islands, and Drylands and Drought Management, to deliver benefits for land and people.

CONVENTION GUIDANCE

The GEF serves as a financial mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The GEF-9 LD strategy responds to decisions of UNCCD COP16, which invite the GEF to strengthen its support for countries in programming LD focal area resources to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought to achieve their voluntary LDN targets. COP16 decisions also encouraged the GEF to prioritize the allocation of resources to proactive drought management, especially through strengthening support for the implementation of national drought plans and related policies, which have emerged as a priority in GEF-9.

While its primary mandate is the UNCCD, the LD focal area also leverages synergies across the Rio Conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements and contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The goal of the LD focal area is to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation, combat desertification, and proactively manage drought through a people-centered approach. This goal will be achieved through three main strategic objectives:

1. Sustain productive landscapes and livelihoods.
2. Support implementation of national drought plans and drought-related policies.
3. Promote fair land and water governance and strengthen enabling conditions.

Across these objectives, the GEF supports countries in implementing voluntary LDN targets and establishing coherent policies to achieve long-term sustainability. Investments focus on productive landscapes where agriculture, forestry, and rangeland management underpin community livelihoods. Projects pursue SLM through a people-centered approach that delivers benefits for smallholder farmers and pastoralists. The focal area continues to promote socio-ecological connectivity, encourage transboundary cooperation, and prioritize private sector mobilization.

The LD focal area recognizes that the knowledge and participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is indispensable to reversing land degradation and mitigating drought. The focal area also addresses gender inequality and promotes women's land tenure security and decision-making power through a whole-of-society approach.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMMING

Objective 1: Support SLM practices to sustain productive landscapes and livelihoods including:

- Agroecological approaches, such as the diversification of farming systems;
- Measures to improve soil health and nutrient management;
- Blended finance structures that generate benefits for land and ecosystem restoration.

Objective 2: Support the implementation of national drought plans and related policies through:

- Applying technical assistance and drought management tools to operationalize planning;
- Building capacity among relevant stakeholders to develop locally owned drought preparedness solutions;
- Fostering partnerships across government agencies, private sector, and civil society to enhance the effectiveness of drought policy implementation.

Objective 3: Promote fair land and water governance and strengthen enabling conditions through:

- Promoting policy coherence and providing advisory support for sectoral integration;
- Strengthening water governance systems to actively engage local governments, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and civil society;
- Resolving land tenure and resource rights issues that are barriers to SLM.

WHAT'S NEW IN GEF-9

In GEF-9, drought resilience becomes more central, targeted, and measurable. A new Drylands and Drought Management Integrated Program complements focal area investments in drought. A drought vulnerability index is incorporated into the STAR formula to calculate resource allocation to countries, and new indicators are established to track improved drought resilience. GEF-9 also places a stronger emphasis on the land-water nexus, land governance including land tenure reform, and the removal of harmful subsidies to improve the sustainability of agricultural systems.

The new cycle builds on past investments and renews commitments to people-centered approaches and the engagement and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Linkages between the LD focal area and the Least Developed Countries Fund are explored to identify synergies, and blended finance approaches in delivering focal area results are especially encouraged.