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71st GEF Council Highlights: Monday, 1 June 2026

Council members continued their work addressing: relations with international environmental conventions; the Work Program and budget of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) for 2027; the GEF Evaluation Policy 2026; the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement); and the IEO evaluations of the GEF Sustainable Cities Program, GEF support to marginalized groups, and GEF support for policy coherence.

Relations with Conventions and Other International Institutions

Chair Claude Gascon, Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chairperson of the GEF, introduced a panel of multilateral environmental agreements' (MEAs) Executive Secretaries and high-level representatives, inviting them to discuss: expectations for the ninth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-9); programming and policy updates; and links between the GEF and work under their respective conventions.

Rolph Poyet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, stressed that chemicals and waste have been treated as an adjacent, secondary consideration and GEF-9 must “mark the moment when we stop treating pollution as a footnote to planetary health.” He urged mobilizing capital beyond grants to close the finance gap, and stressed derisking, catalyzing, and unlocking relevant investments.

Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, highlighted new guidance for integrating chemicals and waste, and welcomed the expanded blended finance toolkit, adding that a strong GEF investment for 2027 will send a powerful signal. She called for further efforts toward integration, including bringing mercury into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). She stressed that “cutting mercury and other pollution is not a standalone cost. It is a driver of co-benefits for biodiversity and for the climate.”

Daniele Violetti, Senior Director, Programmes Coordination, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, stressed the need to: maximize the catalytic impact of resources; leverage the Integrated Programs to deliver climate outcomes; and strengthen support to developing countries to move from commitments



Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention

to implementation. He called for strategically using GEF-9 resources, mobilizing and complementing other sources of finance, and highlighted systems transformation and integrating climate objectives among broader priorities.

Asad Naqvi, Director, Implementation Support Division, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), welcomed GEF support for NBSAPs and national reports, emphasizing these are the foundation for implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). He called for: focusing on sustainable use and benefit sharing in addition to conservation; a systemic shift in economic and finance systems; and simplified processes and accessible funds to drive implementation.

Cathrine Mutambirwa, Programme Coordinator, Land Degradation Neutrality and Land Restoration at the Global Mechanism, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, highlighted synergistic efforts among the Rio Conventions with GEF support and the need to scale up partnerships with the private sector, expanding to non-grant instruments (NGI). She welcomed the GEF’s focus on droughts, calling for a cross-sectoral response and continued support for smart investments and flagship initiatives. “The work ahead is urgent, but our partnership is strong,” she noted, looking forward to delivering in partnership with the GEF, a GEF-9 “that the world’s land users can feel in healthier soils, more resilient harvests, and restored hope.”

Engaging in a dialogue, Council members welcomed insight on how GEF-9 will enhance workstreams, including on country engagement strategies, and closer cooperation among multilateral climate funds (MCFs). Several members urged strengthening



Cathrine Mutambirwa, Programme Coordinator, Land Degradation Neutrality and Land Restoration at Global Mechanism, UNCCD Secretariat

existing funds and using them more efficiently and effectively, opposing the proliferation of new funds.

Members queried:

- ways to simplify and coordinate burdensome national reporting;
- expectations on tripling annual outflows from MCFs by 2030 when there is a reduction for the climate change focal area under GEF-9; and
- opportunities presented by the [UN80 Initiative](#) on streamlining and efficiency.

They called for greater focus on scaling for GEF-9 programming beyond project cycles, and linkages between the pollution crisis, climate, and energy. On the global plastics treaty negotiations, one member underscored the GEF as the only viable option for a funding mechanism. The Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) called for developing guidelines on actions by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) analogous to those of the GBF Fund (GBFF) across other funds.

Mutambirwa noted progress on the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, highlighting GEF-9 as an opportunity for enhancing collaboration.

On reporting, Naqvi highlighted work underway using leftover GEF-8 funds to pilot a unified and simplified reporting template across MEAs. Violetti stressed the goal of tripling MCF annual outflows requires increasing coherence across MCFs and catalyzing innovative sources of funding.

Stankiewicz shared lessons learned from simplifying reporting and enacting joint work programmes with the BRS Conventions. Poyet urged breaking silos and opening communication channels at the government level for efficient and effective resource use and reduced administrative burdens.

Following the panel discussion, Rawlestone Moore, GEF Secretariat, introduced [GEF/C.71/07](#), highlighting its elements: updates on engagement with MEAs and collaboration with MCFs; MEA engagement during GEF-9 negotiations; and an update of relations with other international institutions.

Many members highlighted the GEF's role in promoting synergies among MEAs and supporting coordination at the national level. Several also welcomed GEF cooperation with the BBNJ Agreement.

One member suggested considering how to increase the relevance of guidance from Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the GEF. Another urged promoting stronger scientific and technical support for decision-making in the MEAs. Noting the guidelines for tracking the 20% target of GBFF resources to support IPLC actions, the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Network stressed counting only those actions under IPLC control.

Council members adopted a decision welcoming the report and requesting the GEF to continue working with recipient countries to reflect the guidance and national priorities in their GEF programming and activities.

Work Program and Budget of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office for 2027

Geeta Batra, Director, IEO, presented [GEF/E/C.71/01](#), providing an update on the Work Program since the last Council meeting and outlining: the proposed Work Program and budget for 2027; the completion of the eighth comprehensive evaluation of the GEF; evaluation work underway; and the IEO's knowledge management and outreach activities. She noted the proposed Work Program covers three areas of evaluations, on institutional, thematic, and regional and country clusters, alongside knowledge products. She detailed the proposed budget of USD 8.233 million for 2027.

Drawing attention to the launch of the IEO country evidence series, Kseniya Temnenko, IEO, highlighted the first "[StoryMap](#)" focusing on Uzbekistan.

Council members emphasized the value of the IEO's work and role in strengthening GEF's credibility, and generally supported the proposed Work Program and budget for 2027. One member requested further justification for any real budgetary growth, emphasizing the need for fiscal restraint. Several stressed that any use of machine learning, or artificial intelligence (AI), is done responsibly. Some members stressed that the reduction in size of the envelope for evaluations will require careful and impactful resource allocation. Another called on the IEO to evaluate the agency expansion procedure and the rate of turnover for operational focal points.



Rawlestone Moore, GEF Secretariat



Geeta Batra, Director, IEO

The CSO Network called for the upcoming four-year Strategy to deepen engagement with CSOs and consider strengthening the evidence base by drawing on other knowledge systems.

Batra provided explanations on one-time budgetary costs and subsequent efficiencies, including for building AI infrastructure and model testing. She noted that the IEO will publish “deep-dives” on GEF-8 NGI interventions before producing a comprehensive evaluation.

The Council acknowledged the progress made by the IEO and approved the 2027 Work Program and budget.

GEF Evaluation Policy 2026

Fabrizio Felloni, Deputy Director, IEO, introduced document [GEF/E/C.71/02](#), noting that modifications in the Evaluation Policy reflect the evolution of the GEF Partnership and broader changes in international evaluation practices. He highlighted reinforcing accountability, mutual learning, and evidence-based decision making in an increasingly complex institutional environment. Felloni also underscored how the refined policy strengthens evaluation, including through innovative methods, data use, and responsible AI use, as well as the links between policy and practice.

Council members welcomed the timely updating of the Evaluation Policy, noting it balances continuity and evolution, and offers a more effective governance framework. Many welcomed the distinction between policy and operational guidance and welcomed the addition of coherence as an evaluation criterion. On AI, some called for safeguards related to confidentiality, data protection, and human supervision alongside frequent reviews, and noted that AI use should be explicitly stated.

Some members underscored further strengthening exchanges with evaluation offices to promote harmonization of evaluation approaches, shared learning, and potential joint work. Others emphasized the role of operational focal points and national stakeholders and the need to accompany the policy with capacity-building efforts.

The CSO Network called for enhancing the policy to strengthen tracking of CSO and IPLC project engagement. The Council approved the new GEF Evaluation Policy.

Evaluation of GEF Sustainable Cities Program and Management Response

IEO Director Batra introduced [GEF/E/C.71/03](#). Neeraj Kumar Negi, IEO, summarized the report’s findings, and noted its three recommendations, to:

- strengthen the focus on investments and support the replication of investment pilots;
- address gaps in the global platform’s coordination with, and support to, child projects while sustaining its knowledge and convening functions; and
- measure and track system-level transformation over time, consistent with the program’s strategic directions.

Aloke Barnwal, GEF Secretariat, introduced the management response to the evaluation ([GEF/C.71/08](#)), noting the Secretariat’s full agreement with all three IEO recommendations. Many members welcomed the documents, further appreciating the program’s track record of providing co-benefits.

Members highlighted the need to:

- strengthen efforts on investments and providing predictable resources;
- strengthen links between planning, execution, and investment;
- achieve system-level transformations;
- ensure social and economic co-benefit generation;
- replicate successful experiences to strengthen impact; and
- improve follow-up and adaptive management.

The CSO Network stressed examining the risk of green gentrification, calling for safeguards to prevent investments from displacing lower income and informal residents.

In response, Barnwal noted, among others:

- strong collaboration with multilateral development banks for mobilizing investment;
- selection criteria to strengthen partnerships with financial institutions in GEF-9; and
- the GEF’s core priority of reducing vulnerability.

Batra noted previous studies on co-benefits, highlighted an indicator capturing social and economic benefits, and outlined the relevant knowledge products produced.

The Council took note of the evaluation’s recommendations and endorsed the management response.

Evaluation of GEF Support to Marginalized Groups and Management Response

Batra introduced [GEF/E/C.71/04](#). Kate Steingraber, IEO, summarized the report’s findings, and noted its three recommendations to:

- develop and update guidance to support the engagement of marginalized groups;
- strengthen review processes to support whole-of-society engagement beyond the design stage; and
- invest in knowledge management and learning to strengthen understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions.

Adriana Gonçalves Moreira, GEF Secretariat, introduced the management response ([GEF/C.71/09](#)) to the evaluation, noting the Secretariat agrees with all three recommendations.

Members welcomed the response's commitment to updating the 2012 Principles and Guidelines for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. They emphasized the importance of:

- improving engagement and meaningful participation for women and persons with disabilities;
- effectively involving actors and stakeholders across project lifecycles;
- ensuring engagement strategies are tailored to national circumstances; and
- improving follow-through on engagement.

A member queried the level and quality of engagement with marginalized groups in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

The CSO Network called for strengthened engagement requirements under GEF-9. IPAG suggested incorporating lessons learned from IPLC involvement in the Small Grants Program to GEF-9.

Gonçalves Moreira clarified potential accountability mechanisms and modalities for engagement tracking.

Batra noted that the first evaluation on fragile and conflict-affected situations demonstrated women and marginalized groups were more adversely impacted.

The Council took note of the evaluation recommendations and endorsed the management response.

Lessons from Evaluating GEF Support for Policy Coherence and Management Response

Batra introduced [GEF/E/C.71/05](#). Steingraber summarized the report's findings and noted its three recommendations, to:

- clarify and articulate the GEF's strategic niche in supporting policy coherence, drawing on its comparative advantage and track record, while preserving the flexibility to respond to country-driven priorities;
- ensure policy coherence interventions are grounded in country contexts by systematically assessing governance conditions and institutional capacities prior to designing them; and
- leverage existing learning and monitoring mechanisms to strategically support and track outcomes of long-term policy processes.

Sonja Sabita Teelucksingh, GEF Secretariat, introduced the management response ([GEF/C.71/10](#)) to the evaluation, noting the Secretariat agrees with all three recommendations. Council members supported efforts for: improved coordination; experience exchange; transformative investments; country-driven, flexible approaches aligned with national realities; and identifying harmful policies.

Several members supported the use of GEF national steering committees. One stressed that their establishment is voluntary. The CSO Network called for formalizing civil society participation across project lifecycle phases in GEF-9.

Teelucksingh outlined the established Management Action Record undertaken by both the IEO and the GEF. She noted that only a few recipient countries will pilot national steering committees in accordance with the GEF-9 country engagement strategy, with lessons learned incorporated from existing committees.



Neeraj Kumar Negi, IEO

The Council took note of the evaluation recommendations and endorsed the management response.

Draft MoU on BBNJ

Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, introduced [GEF/C.71/12](#). She outlined the MoU's development, noting the GEF Trust Fund is part of the financial mechanism of the BBNJ Agreement.

Many Council members welcomed the draft MoU and highlighted its results from intense negotiations at the last session of the BBNJ Preparatory Commission. They suggested approving the MoU without further comments and amendments, noting the process may derail the delicate balance achieved.

Other members supported the two-step approach for the MoU to enter into force, inviting comments by Council members and submitting a revised MoU for consideration at BBNJ COP1. Some emphasized the multi-fund structure of the BBNJ Agreement may require tailored arrangements. One member called for equitable access to the financial mechanism, including for landlocked countries.

Others welcomed further information on the practical mechanism to coordinate resource utilization across the different funds of the BBNJ Agreement's financial mechanism.

The item was suspended pending the outcome of informal negotiations.

Strengthening the GEF Partnership: Agency Expansion Procedure

Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat, presented [GEF/C.71/05/Rev.2](#), circulated by email for members' consideration, and noted the revised document incorporates changes in four main areas, reflecting:

- the need to unambiguously align the agency expansion procedure with GEF-9 objectives and recommendations;
- members' calls to consider complementarity among agencies;
- that not every agency will have capabilities or capacity in all thematic areas identified for GEF-9; and
- concerns that the objective of harmonizing the MCFs does not detract from the importance of the GEF's five focal areas.

Caldicott outlined the changes, including amendments to the minimum eligibility criteria. The Council adopted the revised decision and associated annexes.