

GEF Bulletin

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Wednesday, 3 June 2026 | Online at: enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-8-council-meeting-71

71st GEF Council, 40th LDCF/SCCF Council, and 6th GBFF Council Highlights: Tuesday, 2 June 2026

Least developed countries (LDCs), climate change, and biodiversity considerations came to the fore as the Council of the LDC Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) held their 40th session while the Council of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) met for the sixth time. In the morning, the 71st Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) concluded its deliberations.

71st GEF Council

Draft MoU on Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

Following a report on informal consultations, Council members agreed to proceed with the originally recommended decision, to invite members' comments on the draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a view to reflecting them in a revised MoU.

One member reiterated that many on the Council believe the draft MoU represents a carefully crafted text, agreed by consensus at the BBNJ Preparatory Commission, requesting reflecting this in the meeting report.

The Council adopted the decision.

Other Business

Dates and format for the 72nd, 73rd, and 74th Council meetings and Co-Chair election: The Council decided to hold its 72nd and 73rd meetings in a hybrid format in Washington DC the weeks commencing January 25, 2027 and June 14, 2027, respectively. An email will be circulated for Council approval to schedule the 74th meeting for January 2028.

The Council also decided to extend Richard Bontjer (Australia) as Co-Chair until their 72nd meeting.

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) Chair's appointment: Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), highlighted the role of the STAP in times when science and the multilateral system face growing pressures. Emphasizing that science offers a foundation for cooperation and guides collective action on interconnected environmental challenges, she said that hosting the STAP is not only an institutional responsibility for UNEP, but also a stewardship role, fully respecting the Panel's independence and scientific integrity.

Andersen commended outgoing STAP Chair Rosina Bierbaum for her leadership, noting she will conclude her term in June 2026. She suggested appointing Edward Carr as interim Chair



Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme

for one year. She added that the current panel membership will remain in place during the interim period.

The Council adopted the decision on the appointment of the interim STAP Chair.

40th LDCF/SCCF Council

Opening of the Meeting and Adoption of the Agenda

Claude Gascon, Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chairperson of the GEF, opened the meeting, noting it takes place at a critical moment for the funds and the communities they serve. Gascon noted that with this final Work Program under the eighth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-8), the LDCF reaches 44 LDCs with total programming of over USD 750 million, while the SCCF expands its reach with 40 projects, 25 of which are in non-LDC small island developing states (SIDS).

Council Co-Chair Bontjer noted the adaptation strategy reflects an inclusive process with “an evolutionary and practical result that does not reinvent the wheel—but builds on what it does well,” and welcomed the aspirational target directing 20% of resources for actions that benefit Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

Evans Njewa, on behalf of the LDC Group, said the Work Program demonstrates a collective agreement to support vulnerable communities. He stressed further efforts to close the finance gap, drawing attention to seven technically cleared projects that are unlikely to be approved for implementation under GEF-8 due to insufficient resources. Njewa highlighted the accelerating impacts of climate change that SIDS and LDCs face, calling for urgency and determination.

The LDCF/SCCF Council approved the meeting agenda ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/01](https://enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-8-council-meeting-71)).



Claude Gascon, Interim CEO and Chairperson, GEF

GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the LDCF and SCCF and Operational Improvements July 2026 to June 2030

Jason Spensley and Tshewang Dorji, GEF Secretariat, presented the Programming Strategy ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/02](#)). The Strategy proposes three priority themes: agriculture and food systems; water; and nature-based solutions (NbS) and infrastructure. It outlines four distinct approaches to drive transformational adaptation: policy integration and country leadership; adaptive social protection; partnerships with development banks and financial institutions; and innovative finance and market development.

The Strategy also foresees two financial scenarios, with total resources of USD 1 and 1.3 billion respectively for the LDCF, and USD 200 and 300 million for the SCCF.

Council members welcomed the draft strategy and its:

- priority themes;
- target for supporting locally-led adaptation or adaptation actions that benefit IPLCs;
- target for greater collaboration with multilateral climate funds (MCFs); and
- emphasis on mobilizing private finance.

Members also welcomed details about the financial scenarios underpinning the draft strategy. One member stressed the scenarios' levels should be viewed as minimums. Several members urged those in a position to do so to contribute to the two funds. One member said the GEF Partnership needs to reflect on how to broaden the donor base.

The Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Network and the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group urged changing monitoring indicators to more accurately track progress toward the IPLC target.

Spensley assured members that work on new guidance for the monitoring framework is underway, and tracking regarding IPLCs will be done separately and additionally to the results framework.

The Council endorsed the strategy as a basis for programming resources under the LDCF and SCCF from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2030.

Work Program for the LDCF and the SCCF

Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, presented the Work Program ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/03](#)), noting the GEF Council's approval of USD 67.64 million for both funds. She highlighted: four LDCs

accessing LDCF resources for the first time in GEF-8; focus on fragile and conflict-affected settings; significant international financial institutions (IFI) engagement and co-financing; and alignment with thematic and sectoral priorities.

Olusola Ikuforiji, GEF Secretariat, outlined the Work Program's seven projects for the LDCF, including one multi-trust fund project, and one for the SCCF. Aoki and Ikuforiji presented updates on programming and results so far, and key risk analyses of both funds.

Council members supported the Work Program, commending that 44 of 46 LDCs and 28 of 30 SIDS will have benefitted during the GEF-8 period. They welcomed its focus on gender considerations, its broad geographic coverage, and coherence and complementarity with other MCFs.

Members called for:

- more balanced agency diversification, particularly for the SCCF;
- monitoring financial service usage; and
- integrating NbS where possible.

A few members expressed concerns that some projects were not included due to resource constraints, calling for their future consideration. Others queried the lack of SCCF projects, and an overemphasis on co-financing.

The CSO Network called for measuring and reporting indicators on civil society engagement in GEF-9.

On the diversity of agencies working in SCCF Window A (on SIDS), Aoki noted that the GEF-8 country cap of USD 3 million affected Implementing Agency distribution. Aoki indicated the Secretariat would develop guidelines to enable target monitoring and reporting in GEF-9. She highlighted an increasing number of projects are integrating NbS beyond small-scale implementation, providing alternatives to grey infrastructure.

Ikuforiji emphasized that co-financing is not a determinant to the projects' financing and outlined the process for determining the selection of co-financing agencies.

The Council approved the Work Program.

Administrative Budget and Business Plan for the LDCF and the SCCF for 2027

Juan Pablo Hoffmaister, GEF Secretariat, presented the budget ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/04](#)). He outlined main accomplishments during 2026, including finalization of the GEF-9 LDCF/SCCF Programming Strategy, development of the GEF-9 results framework, and of two Work Programs totaling USD 121.87 million. The budget requested for 2027 totals USD 8.1 million for both funds.

Members commended the Secretariat for their prudent financial management that resulted in underspending for 2026, with some welcoming the aspirational target of 10% for coordinated investments with MCFs and the Program/Project-based Implementation Approach Capacity Building Program. Several members queried the personnel and IT budget increase, and how the administrative budget compares to the funds' overall resources.

The Secretariat clarified that two of the vacancies already approved for 2026 will be filled in 2027, and the one new hire will bring expertise and focus on resource mobilization. They specified that the increase in IT expenditure pertains to a one-time cost of upgrading the submission, review, and tracking portal. Furthermore, they stressed that the administrative costs remain far below industry standards for both funds.

The Council approved the proposed budget for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, and the Trustee.

LDCF/SCCF Annual Evaluation Report 2026 and Management Response

Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) Director Geeta Batra introduced [GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/E/01](#). Anna Birgitta Viggh, IEO, detailed the report's findings, stressing that the LDCF and SCCF are delivering results, with 83% of evaluated projects demonstrating satisfactory outcomes. She added, however, that while delivery is strong, project sustainability is not.

She noted three recommendations, calling for strengthening:

- sustainability and scaling at the project design and review stages;
- quality-at-entry reviews to better align project design with implementation realities in LDCs, and fragile and conflict-affected settings; and
- the implementation and use of monitoring and evaluation systems to improve outcomes and learning.

Presenting the management response ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/05](#)), Dorji said the Secretariat accepted all three recommendations. He noted some are already reflected in the just-approved programming strategy for the LDCF and SCCF.

Council members welcomed the documents' insights.

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

Work Program and Budget for the GEF IEO under the LDCF and the SCCF for 2027

Batra introduced the Work Program and budget ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.40/E/02](#)), noting plans to produce a Program Evaluation of the LDCF/SCCF during 2027 and an annual evaluation report, as well as conduct knowledge management activities.

The CSO Network called for explicit, structured beneficiary engagement strategies and formally incorporating community consultations. They encouraged the IEO to strengthen focus on equity and power dynamics beyond institutional performance and typologies, and to improve local actors' access to knowledge products.

Batra indicated the IEO would address these gaps.

The Council approved the budget for the IEO of the GEF under the LDCF and the SCCF to carry out the Work Program for 2027.

Sixth GBFF Council

Opening of the Meeting and Adoption of the Agenda

Opening the meeting, Co-Chair Gascon addressed progress since the Fund was launched in August 2023. He highlighted an expanded, diverse contributor base, including the GEF's first non-sovereign donor.

Co-Chair Bontjer reflected on the Fund's influence on GEF-9 directions by breaking ground, challenging old ideas, and driving engagement. He emphasized that its track-record of meeting or surpassing all three portfolio-level targets exemplifies how these objectives can drive rather than constrain progress.

"Decisions on biodiversity finance taken today will determine whether future risks to economies are mitigated or amplified." Asad Naqvi, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat, stressed the socioeconomic and sustainable

development co-benefits of implementing the GBF. With over 90% of the USD 387.2 million in contributions already programmed, he urged scaling up investment to enable actions to continue.

The Council approved the meeting agenda ([GEF/GBFF.06/01/Rev.01](#)).

Work Program for the GBFF

Aoki presented the document ([GEF/GBFF.06/02/Rev.01](#)). The Work Program comprises two projects in India and Papua New Guinea, totaling approximately USD 20 million, with an average of 39% supporting actions by IPLCs. Benjamin Singer, GEF Secretariat, highlighted that both projects focus on areas with high levels of biodiversity and poverty, delivering environmental and socioeconomic benefits.

Council members welcomed the Work Program, noting the strong focus on IPLCs and gender responsiveness. Some members welcomed improvement in its Implementing Agency diversity and linkages to innovative finance mechanisms.

Observers stressed that the current financial architecture often creates barriers for IPLCs. They called for respect to their right to self-determination during the selection of financial mechanisms and supported mandating alignment with the CBD Gender Plan of Action as a project requirement.

One member pointed out the lack of GBFF projects in North Africa.

In response, Singer noted that the Secretariat is working to improve regional distribution and that one agency currently has 21% of the projects, an IFI 16%, and five GEF agencies have yet to seek GBFF funding.

Regarding proposals for enhanced observer roles in the project review process, Aoki said these would first require the Council to amend the project cycle policy.

The Council approved the Work Program.

Administrative Budget and Business Plan for the GBFF for 2027

Sumeet Kaur, GEF Secretariat, presented [GEF/GBFF.06/03](#). She noted that in 2026, the GBFF completed its first and opened its second programming tranche, respectively allocating USD 201.6 million and USD 160.5 million. Kaur also highlighted the



Sumeet Kaur, GEF Secretariat

launch of the Guidelines on Actions by IPLCs and establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Predictability of Financing. She outlined planned activities for 2027 and noted the requested GBFF budget represents a 6.6% reduction from 2026.

Council members expressed appreciation for the zero-growth Secretariat budget and efforts toward cost efficiency. Among others, they sought clarification on recruitment, introduced costs on travel and the country engagement strategy, and the utilization of remaining funds from the 2026 budget.

Several members stressed the need to ensure administrative expenditure is proportionate, urging the prioritization of resources flowing to country-level implementation. One member proposed lowering administrative costs by reducing the frequency and duration of meetings.

In response, Aoki reported that a mid-level post is expected to be filled to support the country engagement strategy. She noted that past fiscal year savings are returned to the GEF Trust Fund, and outlined: savings regarding meeting arrangements; necessary travel costs for CBD meetings; and GEF-wide IT infrastructure expenditure.

The Council approved the proposed budget for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, and the Trustee.

Towards a Resource Mobilization Strategy for the GBFF 2026-2030

Aoki and Kaur presented [GEF/GBFF.06/04](#), noting it is a revised version of the initial proposal based on the recommendations from the *Ad Hoc* Working Group.

The document outlines USD 387.2 million in contributions from 11 contributors since August 2023, and two funding scenarios assuming USD 500 and 750 million contributed.

Kelly Sharp, Co-Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group, outlined the Group's activities and discussions. She explained the Group recommends several key actions to support implementation and four pillars of contributions, from sovereign countries, subnational and regional public institutions, philanthropic and private foundations, and the private sector.

Members welcomed the revised Strategy. Some stressed the need to expand the donor base and support innovative measures to attract contributions from the private sector, private foundations, and philanthropies, including new programs, earmarked resources, and bond issuance. Some urged a discussion on costs and benefits before proceeding with any option.

One member supported the elimination of the distinction between sovereign and non-sovereign donors, while others noted that contributions must respect the intergovernmental nature of the process, align with priorities of receiving countries, and complement, not replace, sovereign funding. Some cautioned private sector involvement must be subject to rigorous safeguards.

The Global Youth Biodiversity Network lamented that observers were not allowed more input into the final version of the Strategy.

Kaur assured members that all non-sovereign donors would be rigorously screened and that innovative resource mobilization actions would be subject to Council approval. She added that the



Chizuru Aoko, GEF Secretariat

Secretariat would examine how to further engage observers in resource mobilization efforts.

The Council approved the Strategy.

Progress Report on the GBFF

Jurgis Sapijanskas, GEF Secretariat, introduced [GEF/GBFF.06/05](#). He reported on the process for the fifth round of project selections, the GBFF portfolio to date, and its anticipated global environmental benefits. Sapijanskas drew attention to the Guidelines on the Implementation of the GBFF Results Framework ([GEF/GBFF.06/Inf.02](#)).

Razan Nimir, GEF Secretariat, provided key updates on the GBFF governance arrangements, namely the Auxiliary Body, Advisory Group of Non-Sovereign Participants, and GBFF Observers.

Sandra Naumann, GBFF Advisory Group, reported on the Group's activities since the Council last met. She reported the Group had identified a range of potential contributors and stressed creating momentum and enabling conditions for engagement, citing the need for:

- clear, accessible pathways for contributions;
- defining the value proposition for donors; and
- framing participation as part of broader collective efforts, specifically for local and subnational governments.

Members welcomed the report, noting improvements in regional balance and alignment with portfolio targets.

Some queried the ceiling on the portfolio targets regarding LDCs and SIDS, while others called for additional financial contributions, particularly from non-sovereign actors. One member stressed that deeper engagement with MDBs and emphasis on non-grant instruments can create barriers to countries with limited institutional capacities. An IPLC representative drew attention to the distinction between actions by and for IPLCs.

The Secretariat explained that the 61% ceiling for non-LDCs and SIDS was agreed in the Policy for the Allocation of Resources to ensure representation from vulnerable countries. For IPLC actions, they stressed that since the approval of the new guidelines, the Secretariat tracks actions by IPLCs.

The Council welcomed the report and took note of progress.