

Sixth GBFF Council and Civil Society Forum

Highlights:

Wednesday, 3 June 2026

The day's deliberations highlighted the pivotal role that civil society organizations (CSOs), Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), women, youth, and other stakeholders play in advancing global environmental goals and ensuring that Global Environment Facility (GEF) investments reach communities most affected by environmental degradation and climate risks. The Civil Society Forum reflected the GEF's efforts toward a whole-of-society approach.

The Council of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) concluded its work in the morning, addressing international financial institutions' (IFIs) involvement and issues around GBFF evaluation. Members also listened to the Co-Chairs' joint summary of the: 71st meeting of the GEF Trust Fund Council; the 40th meeting of the Council of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF); and the sixth meeting of the GBFF Council.

Sixth GBFF Council

Options to Facilitate the Achievement of the Portfolio Target Related to IFIs

Sino Tohirzoda, Co-Chair, GBFF Auxiliary Body, presented [GEF/GBFF.06/06](#). He highlighted the portfolio-level target for programming 25% of resources through IFIs that are GEF Agencies, stressing it has been exceeded to date, as 30.4%, or USD 110.07 million, of programmed GBFF resources have been channeled through six IFIs.

Tohirzoda outlined key findings from a survey of GEF operational focal points (OFPs). He focused on advantages of IFIs, such as: co-financing opportunities; technical expertise and capacity; strong management systems; and experience with innovative financial mechanisms. He also addressed key challenges in working with IFIs as Implementing Agencies, including: complex and lengthy procedures; limited flexibility for national circumstances; and insufficient biodiversity expertise. Tohirzoda also highlighted the Auxiliary Body's recommendations, including strengthening coordination and IFIs' biodiversity-related capacities.

Members welcomed the report and recommendations. Some urged: strengthening dialogue between IFIs and countries, including engaging with OFPs when designing projects; and



Sino Tohirzoda, Co-Chair, GBFF Auxiliary Body

agreeing on concrete steps on IFI staffing, capacity, and regional presence. A member stressed that any transition toward increased IFI participation should take place in a balanced and predictable manner, aligned with national coordination and planning processes.

Members also queried: IFI engagement in the survey; harmonizing and simplifying IFI procedures; and how working with IFIs has influenced their overall portfolio and investments.

Tohirzoda underscored IFIs' advantages in leveraging finance and noted that further engagement with IFIs will assist in deepening mutual understanding and increasing their participation.

The Council welcomed the recommendations of the Auxiliary Body.

Second Formative Evaluation of the GBFF and Management Response

GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) Director Geeta Batra introduced the evaluation ([GEF/GBFF.06/E/01](#)), explaining it assesses the Fund's early design, governance, and initial portfolio of 82 projects selected across five selection rounds.

Anupam Anand, IEO, summarized the evaluation's findings, including:

- strong demand for GBFF funding;
- successful early mobilization of resources and meeting programming directives;
- improved project design;
- project concentration in certain GBF targets;
- whole-of-society participation with varying degrees of engagement; and



Geeta Batra, Director, IEO

- high donor base concentration.

He also noted four IEO recommendations aiming to:

- enhance coordination across the GEF family of funds;
- strengthen feedback and technical review in the competitive programming model;
- strengthen implementation of the enhanced Results Framework; and
- improve reporting on whole-of-society participation and governance outcomes.

Benjamin Singer, GEF Secretariat, delivered the management response ([GEF/GBFF.06/07](#)), noting the Secretariat agrees with all four recommendations and has already made progress on several elements.

Council members welcomed the evaluation and the management response. Several underscored the feedback recommendation, especially regarding why proposals are not selected. Others stressed the finding on donor concentration, with one suggesting developing “an elevator pitch” on the GBFF’s added value to attract new donors. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Women’s Caucus stressed that women need to be seen as partners in decision-making and implementation.

One member asked why there were not more projects in GBFF Action Areas 7 (invasive alien species) and 8 (biosafety, biotechnology, and access and benefit sharing). Another praised the cross-fertilization underway between the GBFF and the GEF family of funds as new ideas are tested and lessons learned exchanged.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity requested including the Guidelines on Actions by IPLCs as part of the periodic review. The CBD Secretariat proposed shifting focus to GBF targets that are underserved, including Targets 14 (integrating biodiversity in policies), 16 (sustainable consumption), 18 (reduce harmful incentives), and 19 (resource mobilization).

Singer noted that more proposals were needed on action areas 7 and 8 and encouraged countries and agencies to submit projects on these topics. When asked how the GBFF sets itself apart in the GEF family of funds, Singer replied that investing in the GBFF is like investing venture capital: the GBFF could pilot and test new approaches, such as a novel approach to IPLCs, a simplified and mainstreamed project cycle, and an innovative resource mobilization strategy, with the possibility of

scaling across the GEF if successful. He also highlighted that the underserved GBF targets correspond to GBFF Action Areas 4 (resource mobilization), 5 (sustainable use of biodiversity), and 6 (biodiversity mainstreaming), where blended finance approaches can be most useful.

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

Work Program and Budget for the IEO for 2027

Batra and Fabrizio Felloni, Deputy Director, IEO, introduced [GEF/GBFF.06/E/02](#). The Work Program includes the preparation of the annual evaluation report of the GBFF, focusing on: implementation of the previous IEO recommendations; strategic coherence; portfolio coherence and value addition; quality of entry and results architecture; implementation performance; and inclusion. Felloni noted the proposed budget for 2027 amounts to USD 561,000, marking a 25% reduction compared to the previous year.

One member queried whether project implementation reports will be ready in time for the evaluation and the difference compared to the IEO budget for the LDCF/SCCF. Another stressed continuing to examine challenges in access to financing, including those related to operational complexities, approval timelines, and institutional capacity.

In response, Batra and Felloni highlighted the importance of early and real-time implementation evaluations, including on the management side. They attributed the increased budget compared to the LDCF/SCCF to the novelty of the Fund, noting that the yearly reduction demonstrates efficiencies taking effect as experience is accumulated.

The Council approved the budget for the IEO to implement the Work Program for 2027.

Co-Chairs Joint Summary and Closing of the Council Meetings

Council Secretary Noemi Hernández Rodríguez Borjas presented the joint summary of the Co-Chairs of the 71st meeting of the GEF Trust Fund Council, the 40th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council, and the sixth meeting of the GBFF Council ([GEF/C.71/Joint Summary](#)), paragraph by paragraph.

On the GEF Council, one member requested reflecting in the report that the US and others had stressed the importance of directing System of Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) country allocations to “the poorest countries.” Another member underscored the need to prioritize hybrid formats for future meetings, and Hernández Rodríguez Borjas noted that the summary will reflect that the relevant decision is adopted pending budget availability. She also pointed to the inclusion of a footnote to Decision 11 (2027 Work Program and Budget of the IEO), reflecting that “the US did not join the consensus.”

The Council approved the joint summary with no further comments.

GEF Interim CEO Claude Gascon underscored members’ instrumental guidance and sense of cooperation in directing the meetings. He extended heartfelt thanks to the four Council members, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel Chair, and



Claude Gascon, Interim CEO and Chairperson, GEF

one Secretariat staff stepping down from their positions, for their support, conviction, and leadership over the years.

In closing remarks, Co-Chair Richard Bontjer (Australia) emphasized the Council's unique role in addressing global environmental challenges, noting it stands out for its constructive engagement on tackling the "hard issues" and achieving positive outcomes.

Hernández Rodríguez Borjas closed the meetings at 11:20 am.

Civil Society Forum

Opening Remarks and Objectives

The Civil Society Forum met in the afternoon, bringing together CSOs, IPLCs, women, youth, GEF member countries, Implementing Agencies, and other stakeholders to: share their priorities, interests, and experiences; elevate community perspectives; and strengthen participation in global environmental governance.

Gabriella Richardson Temm, GEF Secretariat, opened the session noting that civil society and IPLCs continue to demonstrate innovations and leadership.

"Civil society is at the heart of the fight for our planet's future. The leadership and lived experiences of women, youth, and IPLCs are essential to halting environmental degradation and achieving sustainable development," GEF Interim CEO Gascon stressed. He highlighted that the whole-of-society approach was central to the ninth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-9) negotiations and drew attention to the approval of the 20% aspirational target for IPLCs across the GEF's family of funds.

Aziz Abdulkhakimov, Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan on Environment, and Chairman, National Committee on Ecology and Climate Change, stressed that the right to live in a healthy environment is enshrined in his country's constitution. He noted that CSOs are becoming important platforms for public participation and require better access to data and involvement in the decision-making process, calling for establishing a regional network of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Central Asia to facilitate knowledge exchange.

Underscoring our collective responsibility to avert the environmental crisis, Faizal Parish, Chair, GEF CSO Network, called for changing business-as-usual practices in project design and implementation by engaging civil society in all steps. "The

GEF has always had a strong commitment to working with civil society," he noted, highlighting the new aspirational target to channel at least 20% of available resources to support or finance actions by IPLCs.

Giovanni Reyes, Chair, Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG), stressed that Indigenous Peoples can offer solutions and must take the lead in decision making when it comes to biodiversity, but require technical assistance from CSOs. He urged all to join civil society and non-state actors in redoubling efforts toward biodiversity conservation as we near 2030.

CSO Network Vice-Chair Sagar Aryal presented findings from the Network's series of "Whole-of-Society Talks" held over the last year, including: that a whole-of-society approach is imperative, not optional; the need for scaling up the successes of the Small Grants Program (SGP) and the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI); access to financing and knowledge on how to use it remains uneven; and the need to reverse the declining trend of civil society-led GEF projects.

Scaling Community-led Solutions

Stressing that the GEF is supporting Indigenous and community-led work, panel moderator Aryal noted divergent signals from GEF-9 programming directions, with the SGP decreasing by USD 20 million from GEF-8, and ICI increasing four-fold, from USD 25 million to USD 100 million. He invited speakers' insights on strengthening existing pathways for community-led work and paving new ones across the GEF portfolio.

On what GEF-9 needs to get right for translating programming into real authority for Indigenous and community-led work, Alisi Rabukawaqa, IPAG, Fiji, emphasized providing direct access to resources, called for building on traditional conservation systems, and noted this work succeeds where rights to territories, resources, and self-determination are protected. She called for GEF-9 investment in community capability-building to help them beyond a single funding cycle.

Olivia Patterson Maura, Executive Director, Friends of the Environment (FRIENDS), Bahamas, shared lessons from her organization's experience accessing SGP funds. She emphasized the need for simplified access procedures and for real-time evaluation to facilitate capacity-building, cautioning against slow evaluation cycles that delay urgently needed capacity and resources for those on the frontlines of environmental crises. Patterson Maura urged improving communication between CSOs at all levels and stressed the need to support communities to become agents of change.

Addressing the role of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in channeling finance to communities, Jana El Horr, World Bank, highlighted how SGP funds can be catalyzed through blended financing initiatives. Suggesting viewing microfinance as part of a broader ecosystem, she stressed sustainable financing beyond project lifecycles. El Horr highlighted how establishing an apex fund in Tanzania has leveraged blended finance to provide MFIs with the necessary liquidity to sustain women and youth-led initiatives.

Cam Do, GEF Council member, Canada, highlighted how Indigenous organizations' perspectives are integrated into Canada's positions at Council meetings. She underlined that GEF-9 lays the foundation for translating commitments into real decision-making authority for IPLCs, pointing to 80% of ICI funding allocated to Indigenous Peoples' self-determined priorities. Do emphasized three dimensions of GEF-9: expanding participation of IPLCs in the SGP; the ICI; and the Results Management Framework.

Aryal summarized the panel's takeaways, stressing the need to address structural barriers to community-led solutions, and build capacities and systems to enable initiatives to endure past the project lifecycle.

In a "Show and Tell" session:

- Dayana Blanco Quiroga, Uru Uru Team, Bolivia, presented their women-led organization that focuses on restoring Uru Uru Lake using traditional knowledge practices;
- Esther Mwaura Muiru, Stand for Her Land Campaign, Kenya, showcased their advocacy for women's land rights;
- Alejandro Luque, Azul y Verde Foundation, Ecuador, talked about their work in helping cities with capacity building, circular economy initiatives, and green portfolio development; and
- Mandukhai Tsogtbal, Green Mongolia Hub, focused on their actions to promote peaceful regional cooperation in Eurasia through dryland restoration.

Finance, Governance, and Accountability

Moderator Vivian Silole, IMPACT Kenya, invited speakers to discuss how to ensure that commitments translate to meaningful impacts on the ground.

Juliet Grace Luwedde, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Youth Caucus, Uganda, outlined the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy, including its objectives on capacity building, meaningful participation, financial and technical support, and advancing youth-focused policies. She stressed a whole-of-society approach and called for collaboration between stakeholders and meaningful youth recognition and participation.

"We are not here to ask for another piece of the pie, but to change the recipe." Arturo Arreola, Focal Point for Mesoamerica, CSO Network, Mexico, called for shifting perceptions toward viewing civil society as principal actors and rightsholders instead of beneficiaries. He stressed fair and equitable participation in the GEF for civil society as partners sharing a common vision.

Edda Fernández, CBD Women's Caucus, Mexico, called for GEF-9 to demonstrate how communities on the ground are benefited and involved. She drew attention to the CBD Gender Plan of Action, GBF Target 23 (gender equality), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's recently adopted Belém Gender Action Plan. Fernández urged updating the GEF Policy on Gender Equality. She stressed that direct and timely access to funding must become a core principle of transformative environmental funding.

On the role of OFPs in shaping the GEF country engagement portfolio, Hoda Elshawadfy, Head of GEF Unit, Ministry



Vivian Silole, IMPACT Kenya

of Environment, Egypt, shared insights from her country's restructuring of national steering committees toward including civil society, NGOs, and the private and banking sectors. She stressed that OFPs are key to strengthening whole-of-government and -society readiness in GEF processes and projects.

The speakers further called for: a GEF-wide youth engagement strategy; reducing administrative barriers and increasing access to medium- and full-sized GEF projects for civil society; increasing preparedness across GEF processes and timelines; establishing clear, measurable indicators for participation; and operationalizing the GBFF windows approach.

Laura Bermúdez Wilches, GEF Women and Gender Caucus, moderated a second rapid-fire "show and tell" session, in which:

- Richard Gokrun, Tuvalu Climate Action Network, presented their innovative digital tools that bridge islands and knowledge systems, and build community resilience;
- Mukudzei Juliet Muteera, Youth Development Initiative Trust, Zimbabwe, highlighted their successful, co-benefit-generating project of empowering women for sustainable aquaculture;
- Emina Karalić, Sharklab ADRIA, Bosnia and Herzegovina, showcased how building trust and partnerships with communities unlocks results that official systems fail to achieve, reflecting on challenges in their work on shark conservation; and
- Maria Fernanda Barahona Cruz, Amazon Conservation Team, Colombia, shared their challenging role in representing and defending isolated Indigenous communities' rights.

Reflections and Closing

Adriana Gonçalves Moreira, Head of Partnerships, GEF Secretariat, noted the target of at least 20% support for IPLCs in GEF-9 resulted from constant dialogue with the CSO Network and IPAG, saying it is only the start toward building a more inclusive GEF. "You are our partners and allies," she declared, asking CSOs to continue working together with the Secretariat to transform the GEF.

In closing, CSO Network Chair Parish stressed the GEF must progress further toward viewing civil society as not just beneficiaries, but as actors, rightsholders, and partners, underscoring that "the only way forward is collaboration."