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Eighth GEF Assembly Highlights: Thursday, 4 June 2026

Let us “seize this moment together with solidarity, courage, and respect for those who came before us, and determination to leave a better world for those who are yet to come.” Global Environment Facility (GEF) Interim CEO Claude Gascon set the stage for the eighth GEF Assembly, noting the symbolism of convening in Samarkand, the “jewel of the silk road,” where peoples, ideas, and commerce have converged over the centuries to solve the challenges of their times.

Opening of the Assembly

Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs: Gascon welcomed delegates to the Assembly. The Assembly elected by acclamation Aziz Abdulkhakov, Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan on Environment, and Chairman, National Committee on Ecology and Climate Change, as Chair. Members also elected Maina Vakafua Talia, Minister of Environment, Tuvalu, and Shuichi Hosoda, Deputy Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, Japan, as Vice-Chairs for recipient and donor countries, respectively.

Chair Abdulkhakov stressed that environmental sustainability and transitioning to a green economy have become key priorities for Uzbekistan and drew attention to several national environmental targets, including on emissions reduction and reforestation. He highlighted GEF support to developing countries as the world faces interconnected environmental challenges “that transcend national borders and require collective action at an unprecedented scale.”

Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work: Chair Abdulkhakov presented the Assembly’s agenda ([GEF/A.08/01](#)).

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION queried the lack of interpretation in all official UN languages. The Secretariat explained that the meeting modalities were agreed at the 70th GEF Council.

The Assembly adopted the agenda and approved the organization of work.

Statement by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO): IEO Director Geeta Batra stressed the GEF’s commitment to accountability and learning underpins its relevance and effectiveness. She highlighted the GEF’s capacity to “reflect, adapt, and improve,” ensuring that past experiences translate to future results. Presenting the Eighth Overall Performance Study (OPS8) of the GEF ([GEF/A.8/05](#)), she noted that over 80% of projects have achieved their objectives.

GERMANY noted the report demonstrates a “strong scientific and results-oriented backbone in a world increasingly threatened by misinformation.” They stressed that OPS8 recommendations for simpler access, stronger innovation and risk taking, and more consistent social inclusion have already been translated into concrete reforms for the ninth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-9).



Chair Aziz Abdulkhakov, Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan on Environment

Statement by the Scientific Technical Advisory Panel (STAP): STAP Chair Rosina Bierbaum said that GEF-9 comes at a pivotal moment for global environmental progress, highlighting the GEF’s role in promoting the shift to durable, equitable, and transformational outcomes.

Delegates viewed a video summarizing the findings and recommendations of “Accelerating transformation in turbulent times: STAP’s report to the 8th GEF Assembly” ([GEF/A.08/06](#)).

GERMANY thanked the STAP for its science-based contributions to the GEF-9 negotiations, noting they are reflected in the final GEF-9 package. They said the STAP report shows the GEF’s strong track record in implementing scientific advice.

Statements by Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs): Faizal Parish, Chair, Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network, called for:

- new pledges for GEF-9 to match or exceed GEF-8;
- direct funding access for CSOs across the GEF family of funds;
- incorporating CSOs into project development;
- deepened CSO engagement in regional and transboundary projects supported by the GEF;
- a strengthened role for youth; and
- expansion of education and capacity-building programs, drawing on civil society’s expertise.

Vivian Silole, Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG), said a healthy planet is only possible when the rights of Indigenous Peoples are fully respected and they are treated as partners. She celebrated GEF-supported Indigenous conservation initiatives and Indigenous-led projects, and highlighted the GEF-9 target of directing at least 20% of financing toward IPLCs, noting it is the fruit of years of work, dialogue, and perseverance by Indigenous Peoples.



Amelia Arreguín Prado, GEF Women and Gender Caucus

“Women and girls, in all our diversity, are more than beneficiaries. We are knowledge and rights holders, environmental defenders, and leaders.” Amelia Arreguín Prado, GEF Women and Gender Caucus, called on countries to fulfill their obligations on delivering adequate public finance “with the urgency that our planetary crises demand.” Urging the Caucus’ formal recognition, Arreguín Prado noted its role as an effective partner in ensuring direct access to, and impactful utilization of, funds.

“The whole of society is at the heart of GEF-9,” said Heitor Dellastas, upcoming GEF Youth Network, emphasizing that youth stand ready, as proven effective partners, to design and implement global environmental solutions. He urged integrating their meaningful participation and contributions across GEF processes, highlighting the creation of a GEF-wide youth engagement strategy as a first step.

Funding Retrospective: Vice-Chair Talia introduced the GEF-8 funding retrospective ([GEF/A.08/04](#)). The Assembly took note of the report.

Report on the Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-9): Gascon presented the report on GEF-9 (GEF/A.08/03), which was endorsed by the GEF Council on Sunday. He stressed the successful conclusion of GEF-9 negotiations represents a renewed vote of confidence in multilateralism and the GEF Partnership, and signals the importance of delivering global environmental benefits, “for everyone, everywhere.” Among the upcoming replenishment’s priorities, Gascon highlighted:

- advancing whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches;
 - deepening support to IPLCs;
 - scaling up blended finance to unlock greater investment;
 - sustaining robust support for least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS); and
 - streamlining and facilitating countries’ access to GEF resources.
- Stressing that GEF-9 will be implemented in a time characterized by declining development assistance, rising debt burdens, and growing geopolitical uncertainties, EGYPT called for: coherence; scaled up, predictable public financing; and clear focus on results. CÔTE D’IVOIRE stressed the need for more contributors to unlock finance under GEF-9, noting an expanded contributor base would strengthen inclusive governance.

The Assembly took note of the report.

High-level Opening Ceremony

Delegates watched a video highlighting global environmental challenges and Uzbekistan’s role in international cooperation with GEF support.

Welcoming participants to the ancient city of Samarkand, Saida Mirziyoyeva, Head of the Presidential Administration, Uzbekistan, on behalf of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, stressed the GEF’s vital role in addressing the triple planetary crisis. She described Uzbekistan’s ecological transformation as a new development model and presented initiatives on: air quality protection; biodiversity conservation and protected areas; waste management; and environmental education, research, and innovation.

Mirziyoyeva suggested declaring Samarkand the “Green Investment and Innovation Capital” of Central Asia. She announced that Uzbekistan will become a GEF donor and drew attention to, among other things, the establishment of the National Framework for Hydrometeorology and Climate Services, and the “Clean Air of Central Asia” interstate consortium combating transboundary air pollution in collaboration with Kazakhstan.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme, also speaking on behalf of the GEF agencies, highlighted that the GEF was created from the recognition that environmental challenges transcend national borders. She said the GEF’s science-based solutions have reached communities, protected nature, underwritten resilience, and helped governments deliver their commitments, through local, national, and regional actions. Andersen endorsed the criticality of blended finance, called for sectoral integration and agency collaboration, and congratulated the GEF Secretariat, Trustee, and members for GEF-9.

Speaking for the GEF Conventions, Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, underlined that the GEF ensures convention commitments become reality. Noting that overlapping environmental pressures affect all economies and communities, he welcomed the new GEF guidance on integrated programming and a whole-of-society approach as major steps forward. He added that relying on traditional grant financing alone is no longer sufficient, nor sustainable, stressing that “non-grant instruments are no longer optional if we are to move into scale.”

Gascon noted the symbolism of convening in Samarkand, the “jewel of the silk road,” where peoples, ideas, and commerce have converged over the centuries to solve the challenges of their times. Welcoming Uzbekistan’s leadership and action on advancing environmental solutions, Gascon urged the Assembly to choose partnership, progress, and possibility. “Let us seize this moment together with solidarity, courage, and respect for those who came before us, and determination to leave a better world for those who are yet to come.”

To the sounds of Mother Earth’s pleas for justice, a performance by an Uzbek ballet company stressed the urgency of stepping forward and taking responsibility for humanity’s environmental destruction.

High-level Round Tables

How Can Blended Finance and the Private Sector Bridge the Funding Gap: The panel, moderated by Avril Benchimol, Blended Finance Coordinator, GEF Secretariat, heard from recipient and donor countries, private and development banks, and investors on ways to mobilize private capital.

Rachel Kyte, UK Special Representative for Climate, noted in her keynote speech the high expectations for GEF-9 to deliver on blended finance. She highlighted investment derisking as a prerequisite to unlock private capital and close the growing funding gap, especially for nature-based solutions (NbS).

Patricia Idrobo, Vice Minister of Economy and Finance, Ecuador, stressed that nature protection and fiscal responsibility can advance together, drawing attention to two national projects that unlocked capital through debt-for-nature swaps and the crucial role that multilateral development banks (MDBs) played in building institutional capacity and technical expertise.

Ramzi Issa, Managing Partner, Enosis Capital, suggested increasing the supply of investable opportunities in nature by: getting finance ministries' buy-in; assisting in de-risking through the GEF or MDBs; and having a conservation entity dedicated to developing the pipeline.

Gregory Watson, Inter-American Development Bank, said MDBs can help blended finance by: advising governments on creating enabling conditions; helping to structure transactions; de-risking; and bringing all parties to the table.

Cam Do, Global Affairs Canada, said blended finance is a necessity, not an option, to meet the scale of environmental and developmental challenges. She advocated GEF testing of blended finance models in areas commercial lending has not entered yet.

Victoria Sabula, CEO, African Enterprise Challenge Fund, explained her non-profit organization helps financing high-risk small businesses in Africa struggling to access commercial lending, tests new models of financial support, and helps de-risk the entry of commercial lenders.

Among key messages, panelists called for: context-relevant actions; simplifying access to complex blended finance processes; stronger partnerships to invest in institutional capacity; and the need to accelerate and scale blended finance by reducing transaction costs, create investable pipelines, and standardize blended finance models.

Addressing audience questions, panelists: highlighted the GEF's comparative advantage for absorbing risk related to local currency markets; the importance of bringing credit rating agencies on board; and measures to ensure support flow down to microentrepreneurs.

Accelerating Delivery for Environmental Outcomes: This panel explored how to improve the speed at which financial resources are translated into outcomes on the ground.

Opening the discussion, Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat, drew attention to the GEF-9 management framework and policy recommendations.

Sandy Andelman, STAP, moderated the panel and invited participants to identify obstacles in delivering environmental outcomes at speed.

Fatou Haidara, Deputy to the Director General, UN Industrial Development Organization, stressed approaching industrial transformation in a holistic way by building clear standards, strong institutions, and a healthy financial ecosystem.

Yevgeniy Zhukov, Director General, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank, called for increasing collaboration between agencies and strengthening government capacities.

Noting how country platforms have evolved, Maria Eugenia Netto, Executive Director, Institute for Climate and Society, highlighted the importance of creating spaces for collaboration to identify solutions matching existing problems.

Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, stressed that pollution lacks integration compared to climate and biodiversity, and drew attention to a recent recommendation by the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) on how to bridge the science and policy gap between pollution and biodiversity.

Aliou Mustafa, Africa Representative, IPAG, stressed meaningful engagement and direct funding for IPLCs to achieve sustainability. Kamal Rohitha Uduwawala, Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka, outlined challenges

in achieving the national goal to increase forest coverage to 32%. He noted that forest conservation is an issue of economic resilience, food security, and climate adaptation.

In the ensuing discussion, participants queried, among others: how to receive and consolidate project feedback directly from executing communities; ways to enable direct access to finance for IPLCs; and sustainable agriculture.

How Can the GEF Leverage the Conventions and its Family of Funds to Deliver on the 2030 Goals? Moderated by Grethel Aguilar, Director General, International Union for Conservation of Nature, this session opened with Interim CEO Gascon underscoring the conventions served by the GEF are at the intersection of global environmental crises. He stressed the GEF is uniquely placed to respond to these challenges synergistically.

The first panel convened representatives of the conventions' Conference of the Parties (COP) Presidencies.

Janine Coye-Felson, Permanent Representative to the UN, Belize, and Co-Chair, BBNJ Agreement Preparatory Commission, stressed the GEF's key role in building responsible governance systems, calling for GEF-9 to be implementation-focused.

Mukhtar Babayev, Representative of the President of Azerbaijan for Climate Issues and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP29 President, stressed trust-building ahead of negotiations and the potential of regional GEF projects and programs.

Highlighting the importance of country ownership, Julio Cordano, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chile, and Chair, INC on Plastic Pollution, Richard Bontjer, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, and incoming UNFCCC COP31 Presidency of Negotiations, and Davit Manukyan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia, and CBD COP17 Presidency, converged on the GEF's role as a connector between conventions, countries, and communities.

Tsend Sandag-Ochir, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Mongolia, and incoming UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP17 Presidency, noted the GEF should prioritize inclusive participatory approaches along the full project cycle, including the necessary capacity-building and innovative financing.

A second panel featured the perspectives of the conventions on resource mobilization.

Payet underlined that "GEF-9 is not enough," stressing it must be used to leverage innovative finance, and called for strengthening the GEF/convention interface.

Stankiewicz called for scaled up integration across the GEF and conventions, exemplifying the case of all sources of pollution reaching the Ocean that requires all on board.

Asad Naqvi, CBD Secretariat, highlighted the CBD's work on tackling nature-negative financial flows, including engaging with Ministers of Finance on nature-related risk.

Cathrine Mutambirwa, UNCCD Secretariat, emphasized the importance of joint planning across conventions to ensure efficient and adaptive resource mobilization and allocation.

Hyunwoo Noah Kim, UNFCCC Secretariat, noted that countries' calls for new funds reflects their aspirations for a global financial architecture that is responsive to their needs and easier to access.

On priorities for GEF-9, panelists noted strengthening responsiveness to national priorities, coherence, and improved access.

Leaving No Country Behind: SIDS, LDCs, and Fragile and Vulnerable Countries: Moderated by Cassie Flynn, UN Development Programme, this roundtable sought to explore how to strengthen engagement with, and provide impactful support

to, SIDS, LDCs, and countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations towards nature-positive futures.

The roundtable opened with a video address by Rabab Fatima, UN High Representative for the LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries and SIDS, who urged scaling up funding to SIDS and LDCs with urgency and ambition, and to strengthen the LDC Fund (LDCF).

The first panel consisted of: Olha Yushkevych, GEF Operational Focal Point, Ukraine; Evans Njewa, Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change, Malawi; Annette Windmeisser, GEF Council Member, Germany; Maina Vakafua Talia, Minister of Home Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Tuvalu; and Daniel Mabengo Ngimbi, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Panelists discussed ways GEF-catalyzed collaboration can result in tangible action on the ground, such as helping conflict-torn countries continue working on environmental management, generating livelihoods while protecting nature, and resolving boundary conflicts. One panelist stressed not creating new specialized funds, but more flexibly utilizing existing funds in the GEF family. Panelists also highlighted ways to help SIDS and LDCs by:

- dedicating seats for them in the GEF Council;
- increasing LDCF contributions;
- promoting more integrated projects/programs;
- simplifying access to GEF funds for the most vulnerable countries;
- harmonizing compliance rules among funds; and
- reducing project reporting burden.

The second panel consisted of: Valerie Hickey, World Bank; Marie May Jeremie, Minister of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources, Seychelles; Mikko Ollikainen, Head, Adaptation Fund; Juan Carlos Mendoza, International Fund for Agricultural Development; and Joshua Prentice, Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform Focal Point.

Panelists discussed how to accelerate progress in the sprint to 2030, including:

- solving locally-identified problems;
 - getting funds and development partners to collaborate and complement efforts, not compete;
 - ensuring solutions are sustainable in the local context, as well as affordable and cost-effective;
 - preferring NbS to importing complex and/or costly technologies;
 - considering SIDS and LDCs as partners and co-designers, not just beneficiaries; and
 - tying projects to creating green jobs and livelihoods.
- Roundtable participants suggested:
- simplifying and speeding up access to finance, including by reducing bureaucratic burdens;
 - designing financing around practical country and community needs; and
 - promoting integrated sustainable financing approaches.

Forging Partnerships for Land and Water in Central Asia and Beyond: This event focused on the GEF-8 Central Asia Water Land Nexus (CAWLN) Program, celebrating the official launch of its implementation phase.

Ulrich Apel, Senior Environmental Specialist, GEF Secretariat, introduced the event, welcoming participants.

Katrin Schneeberger, State Secretary and Director, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland, stressed that the



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CAWLN program focuses on key countries in need of support, integrates programming across various environmental topics, and supports cross-border cooperation.

Godfrey Magwenzi, Deputy Director-General and Director of Cabinet, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), focused on opportunities and entry points for regional cooperation to address interconnected challenges and transboundary risks, providing an overview of FAO's support in Central Asia.

Kaveh Zahedi, Assistant Director-General and Director, Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment, FAO, presented the CAWLN program, noting it leads to system-wide and cross-sectoral action by strengthening transboundary governance and policies, promoting integrated action on the ground, and ensuring improved data and monitoring.

A high-level panel discussion ensued, moderated by Francesca Bernardini, Chief, Transboundary Cooperation Section, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), who provided an overview of UNECE's and the Water Convention's initiatives in Central Asia.

Highlighting the links between sustainable resource management and food security, Yerlan Nysanbaev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Kazakhstan, outlined national and regional efforts on: land degradation; drought resilient seeds; improved land monitoring and management, including for saline lands; and technological innovation.

Bakhodur Sheralizoda, Chairman, Committee on Environmental Protection, Tajikistan, underscored his country is the "water tower of Central Asia," being the source of 60% of regional waters. He called for increasing the number of hydrological, meteorological, and glaciological stations in the country as well as for producing real-time automated data beyond specific project cycles.

Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan Abdulkhakimov highlighted the value of NbS and stressed the GEF can play a key role in supporting transboundary solutions and financing joint monitoring and scientific cooperation.

GEF Interim CEO Gascon highlighted the shift from narrow single-sector solutions to holistic and whole-of-society approaches. Celebrating the launch of the CAWLN program's implementation phase, he stressed that it promises a pathway toward healthier ecosystems and livelihoods.

The IISD's summary of the Eighth GEF Assembly and 71st Meeting of the GEF Council will be available on Monday, 8 June 2026 at enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-8-council-meeting-71