



GEF Assembly Bulletin

A Daily Report from the Fourth Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly

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FOURTH GEF ASSEMBLY HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 25 MAY 2010

The Fourth Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Assembly opened in the morning of 25 May 2010, at the Conrad Hotel in Punta del Este, Uruguay. High-level officials and representatives from the 32 GEF constituencies addressed the Assembly. In the afternoon, six roundtable discussions were held on the issues of country ownership over GEF projects and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the GEF.

OPENING CEREMONY AND PLENARY

Monique Barbut, GEF CEO and Chairperson, opened the fourth GEF Assembly and introduced Danilo Astori, Vice President of Uruguay, who welcomed participants, and emphasized that the Fifth GEF fund replenishment is the largest in history, but noted still larger amounts will be needed to achieve sustainability goals.

After watching a video on the 19 years of GEF, delegates elected Graciela Muslera, Minister of Environment, Uruguay, as Chair of the fourth GEF Assembly and Bruno Oberle, Switzerland, for donor countries and Abdul Rahman Al Ariani, Yemen, for recipient countries as Vice-Chairs. Delegates adopted the proposed agenda and organization of work (GEF/A.4/1/Rev.1).

Chair Muslera remarked the importance of environmental protection for Uruguay, underscoring the role of multilateralism and the need to address the victims of chemicals mismanagement.

Monique Barbut underscored the unprecedented fifth replenishment of the GEF (GEF-5), and described GEF transformations towards a more effective, transparent, accessible and equitable mechanism. Among goals achieved, she highlighted the creation of system for a transparent allocation of resources (STAR) and the simplification of project approval processes, as a “driving force behind



Danilo Astori, Vice President of Uruguay

country ownership.” On challenges for GEF-5, she mentioned: improving the partnership’s efficiency by strengthening collaboration with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs); simplifying the project cycle; setting up a Results Based Performance System (RBPS); and increasing country ownership of projects.

STATEMENTS BY THE HEADS OF GEF AGENCIES:

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, welcomed the GEF replenishment, and highlighted how far we are from meeting countries’ commitments made at Rio. He stressed the challenge of transforming economies and moving away from subsidizing unsustainable activities, such as the US\$27 billion annually spent on fishing subsidies. He urged GEF to consider well its strategic focus to go beyond financing implementation activities.



Monique Barbut, GEF CEO and Chair, and Graciela Muslera, Minister of Environment, Uruguay, and Chair of the fourth GEF Assembly

Kandeh K. Yumkella, UNIDO Director-General, highlighted UNIDO’s Green Industry Initiative, which links the environment and

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Inger Andersen, World Bank

development agendas, and the UN report “Energy for a Sustainable Future” on universal access to energy and energy efficiency.

Rebeca Grynspan, UNDP, highlighted that national ownership is critical to develop synergies and finance initiatives for poverty reduction. She noted that climate change brings uncertainty and larger costs if policymakers are not prepared to identify effective development strategies.

Inger Andersen, incoming World Bank Vice-President for Sustainable Development Network, underscored that much of GEF’s work has been done in partnership to heal the global commons, and lamented that climate change negative effects affect the poor disproportionately.

Wendy Watson-Wright, UNESCO, highlighted UNESCO’s ability to mobilize local finance, promote technical assistance, provide capacity building, and integrate academic work in GEF’s activities. She said that UNESCO has applied to be a GEF agency.

STATEMENTS BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONVENTIONS

Luc Gnacadja, UNCCD Executive Secretary, welcomed the increase in the envelope for land degradation in GEF-5 in support of UNCCD 10-year strategy, but exhorted countries to give higher priority to the land agenda to secure co-funding.

Donald Cooper, Stockholm Convention Executive Secretary, also welcomed the increased GEF-5 resources, and recalled the need for countries to look for additional funding sources.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, CBD Executive Secretary, said biodiversity is central to GEF, and recalled that the next CBD COP, to be held in Japan, in December 2010 should agree on an access and benefit sharing regime and on a liability and redress protocol.

STATEMENTS BY GEF CONSTITUENCIES

Constituencies from Africa: Algeria, for four North African countries, welcomed the GEF reforms, called for more flexibility in GEF projects and more equity in resource allocation; reiterated the voluntary nature of national plans, which should not be seen conditional for accessing resources; and stressed the need to reinforce the small grants programme (SGP).

Cameroon, for eight Central African nations, saluted donor countries for their contributions and described projects underway with GEF support to conserve forest ecosystems, species, and waterways and to address desertification, climate change, and transboundary transport.

Tanzania, for 13 East African countries, expressed gratitude for the significant increase in the replenishment, and suggested greater representation by African nations in GEF decision-making process, and further project cycle streamlining.

Burkina Faso, on behalf of nine African countries, welcomed the GEF’s role in implementing the UNCCD, and called for financial support for climate change adaptation in small African inland states.

Côte d’Ivoire, for eight African countries, expressed satisfaction for GEF’s allocation of funds for land degradation, which is a priority in his country and the African Group.

Constituencies from the Americas: Barbados, on behalf of 16 Caribbean countries, requested: GEF special consideration when dealing with small island developing states (SIDS) on programmatic approaches and multifocal area projects; developing special rules and procedures on GEF access; capacity building; country-driven facilities for project implementation; and time frames for the project cycle.

Brazil, for the constituency including Colombia and Ecuador, highlighted their countries determination to support GEF activities, underscoring the need to work on enhancing MEA implementation and synergies among implementing agencies.

Canada promoted the inclusion of the programmatic approach, measuring, monitoring and reporting on results; building synergies across focal areas; and enhancing relations with the private sector.

Costa Rica, for four Central American countries, Mexico and Venezuela, highlighted biodiversity and desertification as regional coordination topics, with the Mesoamerican corridor as an example of regional coordination, and said GEF projects and coordination mechanisms should be participatory, transparent and synergetic.



Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP

Paraguay, for six Southern Cone nations, expressed disappointment with the level of the fifth replenishment and the need for increased co-financing by recipient nations, and called for shorter project approval cycles and greater efficiencies in using funds.

Constituencies from Asia and the Pacific: Australia, for the constituency including New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, welcomed the reforms and the increased GEF-5 resources, and reaffirmed their engagement to improve country ownership in GEF projects and GEF efficiency to make most of its increased resources.

Lao PDR, on behalf of eight East Asia countries, mentioned that GEF provided significant support to their countries while further efforts should be made on the protection of livelihoods, ecosystems, poverty reduction, climate change and biodiversity.

China lauded GEF's achievements over the last four years and proposed increasing country ownership, strengthening fundraising to assist international conventions, and further streamlining project cycles and efficiency.

India, for six Asian nations, welcomed GEF's work, especially in Buthan and the Himalayas. He noted the financial burden on developing countries and their needs for support for sustainable development.

Iran noted that activities on technology transfer, which is an obligation of developed countries, are still to be materialized.

Japan recalled GEF's leading role in environmental conservation, called for the implementation of result-based management for improving efficiency, and said GEF should focus on capacity building.

Pakistan, for six West Asia countries, recalled GEF's contribution to poverty reduction, and highlighted the need for project-cycle streamlining, clear guidelines for private sector cooperation, and for GEF projects to be country-driven and linked to local development priorities.

Samoa, on behalf of Pacific island nations, welcomed GEF reforms that made projects more country-driven and GEF support for projects on desertification and land degradation as well as the SGP.

Constituencies from Europe: Austria, on behalf of seven countries in Central Europe and Turkey, underscored their countries' support for GEF policy recommendations, highlighting remaining challenges such as country ownership, improvement of GEF portfolio quality, synergies with implementing agencies and collaboration with multilateral conventions such as UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Norway, for four Scandinavian countries, stated that the GEF replenishment is vital for following up on the Copenhagen accord.

France stressed: the role of the SGP in Africa; the need for GEF to work toward new guidelines and respond to new challenges; and the GEF's role in helping countries to address climate change.

Germany stressed: the importance of maintaining GEF's strong financial standards; the transversal programme on sustainable forest management; the importance of strong civil

society participation; strengthening recipient nation's ability to use funds efficiently; and the need for more GEF biodiversity projects.

Italy highlighted country ownership of GEF projects and programmes and the need to avoid duplication with other international financial institutions, and encouraged streamlining of the project cycle and strengthening partnerships with GEF agencies.

ROUNDTABLES

On Tuesday afternoon six roundtables were held where delegates discussed two main themes, namely: improving efficiency and effectiveness of GEF; and enhancing country ownership over GEF projects.

Roundtable 1: Participants agreed that country ownership of GEF projects and programmes must be based on integrating them into national priorities and budgets. They welcomed the incentives included under GEF-5 to foster national consultations.

Many participants insisted on the importance of strengthening country capacities in GEF-related matters while



Kandeh K. Yumkella, Director-General, UNIDO

others noted that GEF is still largely unknown at the country level. Some suggested the GEF Secretariat should improve communication. Participants emphasized the need to strengthen the focal points and involve them also in project follow-up; and that well-functioning national GEF committees could be instrumental in improving country ownership.

Countries expressed concerns about the role of implementing agencies, which sometimes have been responsible for long delays and have not been able to mobilize necessary expertise. Some participants called for direct access to funds under some circumstances and for better coordination and earlier consultation with countries on regional or global projects.

Several delegates considered the extension of the GEF network to other institutions as a positive development and said that criteria should be based on comparative advantages and competence, while some noted that the private sector, and in particular regional and development banks, could be involved.

To improve the project cycle, participants felt that monitoring and evaluation activities are very important, and called for reducing delays in responses, avoiding frequent changes in procedures, and for larger involvement of CSOs.

Participants agreed on the usefulness of the programmatic approach, which should be strengthened under GEF-5.

Roundtable 2: Indonesia recommended defining clearer rules and responsibilities for applying for GEF grants. Iran suggested the establishment of a GEF national board for project approval, and recommended development of best practices materials. Serbia said that GEF application requirements are too long. Niue described the difficulty of fulfilling GEF requirements. Antigua and Barbuda reported problems experienced working through the implementing agencies, and requested direct access to GEF funds.

The United States said that funds invested in projects with strong country ownership generate a higher return on investment of donor funds. UNIDO said countries must develop the capacity to “own” projects, and that funds may be needed to allow this. Syria added that when countries contribute their own funds to the GEF it builds ownership. Samoa described the many steps it has taken to work effectively with the GEF, including the establishment of a national GEF office.

Kiribati said that indigenous peoples know what projects are needed in their home regions. A CSO representative said NGOs and indigenous peoples should have more access to the GEF decision-making process. Finland mentioned increased



Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director and, Kacou Gervais, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire

Several African nations expressed misgivings about the impact of STAR. Some African and Caribbean nations complained that the replenishment was too small to make resource allocation equitable. Nigeria lamented that a handful of countries receive the lion's share of GEF monies.

Several African and Caribbean nations said meeting the co-financing requirement would be a great challenge and a potential burden for recipient countries, especially for small nations and those hard hit by the global economic crisis.

Bhutan, supported by some African nations, called for considering a result-based approach allowing countries more flexibility in meeting specific targets.

Several nations called for expanding the GEF network, bringing in more development banks, but others cautioned that new entities should only be brought in if they could add value.

Roundtable 4: Lebanon hoped GEF reforms will enable governments to implement projects in line with national priority plans. Lesotho underscored the need for policy change to respond more effectively to environmental challenges. She highlighted the importance of assisting countries in formulating and improving GEF projects on land degradation to reduce negative impacts on food security. She noted the need to include civil society, especially rural women, in project implementation.

Cambodia suggested more flexible rules to allow funding access to Least Developed Countries. The Netherlands called attention to the need to focus on enhancing communication. Egypt said that GEF can be a tool to increase countries' ownership leading to successful project design. Brazil, China, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovenia, the Marshall Islands and Turkey highlighted the need to enhance country capacity to enhance their ownership. Gambia suggested the inclusion of more implementing agencies, while the Philippines suggested promoting regional ownership, especially on transboundary issues. Some developing countries supported South-South cooperation initiatives.

Sweden highlighted the importance of sharing experiences and avoiding more bureaucracy and competition within implementing agencies regarding GEF-5.



Roundtable 3

interest in the GEF among the media and other stakeholders. Yemen expressed satisfaction with small GEF grants that it has received and said that these have fostered local project ownership.

Roundtable 3: Participants generally agreed the project cycle needs to be shortened and to become more transparent, but some also emphasized maintaining accountability. Many participants praised the programmatic approach, but cautioned that work remains to realize its promise.

Participants also discussed whether and how direct access to funds would work. All participants stressed the importance of country ownership. Participants from Africa, the Caribbean, India and South Africa said GEF has not done enough to build country capacity to manage GEF projects.



Roundtable 4

Roundtable 5: Many developing countries emphasized problems with the GEF project cycle, including uncoordinated approaches to project design by different implementing agencies, which in some cases led to countries not using the financial resources allocated to them during GEF-4.

Some proposed strengthening interagency coordination, rather than focusing on increasing the partnership, to ensure that existing partners are able to share a single approach to project development. Several delegates also highlighted the need for GEF partners to speak with one voice regarding project definition and approval processes. Others proposed strengthening local government officials' capacity to better understand the respective competencies of each agency. Angola underscored that there is no clear leadership among the GEF partnership, so agencies conflict when developing projects on which process to follow.

Bahamas proposed issuing standard project best management practices for project design so that developing countries can better understand project procedures. Lao PDR suggested that the GEF Secretariat could help countries define national priorities and get these preapproved to ensure countries can use their allocations within GEF-5.

On programmatic approaches, Angola said they are useful but should not detract from some specific projects that may be necessary in line with country priorities. Afghanistan also cautioned that projects within programs should not take longer to approve.

Roundtable 6: Graciela Muslera, Uruguay's Minister of Housing, Land Planning and Environment, provided a parallel analysis of the GEF reforms and the national prioritization of environmental protection. She noted Uruguay is hosting the One UN pilot project. She said the RAF implementation had reduced small countries access to funding. She underscored GEF-5's challenges as avoiding overlap and reducing administrative costs. Héctor Malarin, Inter-American Development Bank, called for considering the lessons learned by implementing agencies on project programming and the programmatic approach.

El Salvador, Argentina and others said GEF-5 is insufficient to cover developing countries environmental needs. Cuba noted GEF is still based on obligations assumed by donor

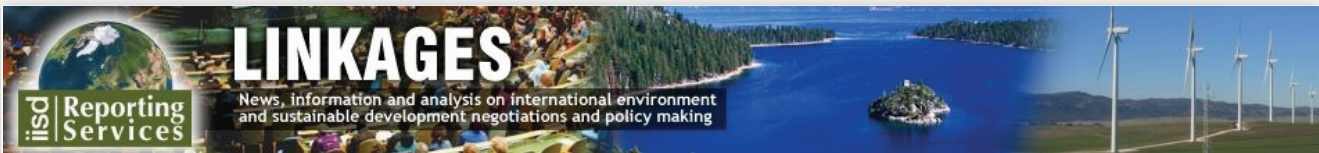
countries in the 1992 negotiations and should take into account developing countries' priorities such as adaptation to climate change. Delegates also underlined the need to strengthen the Assembly competences.

On improving GEF efficiency, many Latin American countries discussed proposals to: set out time frames for project approvals; avoid high agency and consultant costs; increase synergies among national institutions; take advantage of regional institutions and plans; increase the frequency of GEF project assessments; and adjust project requirements according to their size. Argentina underscored that proposals were already in the GEF's Fourth Overall Performance Study.

On country ownership, Latin American countries mentioned national experiences, noting GEF projects should emerge from national priority identification exercises and thus be aligned with national development plans. They also highlighted that implementation should be done through national institutions and local consultants, involving local authorities and communities throughout the whole project cycle, including communicating results. Colombia proposed considering the Paris Declaration and other lessons learned from international cooperation. Spain recalled the policy recommendations in GEF-5 aimed at promoting recipients' ownership and increasing private sector involvement and called for further planning and proposals by recipients. NGO representatives called for further involvement of civil society in environmental priorities and the project cycle.



Roundtable 1



"YOUR MEETING" BULLETIN

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- ▶ **Copenhagen Business Day**, 11 December 2009, Copenhagen, Denmark
- ▶ **East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2009**, 23-27 November 2009, Manila, Philippines
- ▶ **Country-led Initiative by the People's Republic of China in Support of the UN Forum on Forests: Forests for People: The Role of National Forest Programmes and the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests**, 17-20 November 2009, Guilin, China
- ▶ **World Summit on Food Security**, 16-18 November 2009, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Headquarters, Rome, Italy
- ▶ **XIII World Forestry Congress (WFC 2009) and Pre-Congress Workshop on Regional Forest Cooperation**, 17-23 October 2009, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- ▶ **Special Information Seminar - "Policies and Arrangements for Access and Benefit-sharing for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture"**, 17 October 2009, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy
- ▶ **Global Renewable Energy Forum - "Scaling up Renewable Energy"**, 7-9 October 2009, León, Mexico
- ▶ **Second Ad Hoc Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Meeting on an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-II)**, 5-9 October 2009, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Headquarters, Nairobi, Kenya
- ▶ **Seventieth session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Housing and Land Management**, 23-25 September 2009, Geneva, Switzerland
- ▶ **International Conference on Green Industry in Asia: "Managing the transition to resource-efficient and low-carbon industries"**, 9-11 September 2009, Manila, Philippines
- ▶ **Expert Panel on Ocean Acidification**, 3 September 2009, UN Headquarters, New York, US
- ▶ **World Climate Conference-3**, 31 August - 4 September 2009, Geneva, Switzerland
- ▶ **International Hydropower Association (IHA) World Congress 2009**, 23-26 June 2009, Reykjavik, Iceland
- ▶ **International Energy Conference 2009**, 22-24 June 2009, Vienna, Austria
- ▶ **Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**, 15-19 June 2009, Geneva, Switzerland
- ▶ **High-level Conference on Carbon Capture and Storage**, 27-28 May 2009, Bergen, Norway
- ▶ **World Ocean Conference**, 11-15 May 2009, Manado, Indonesia
- ▶ **Dialogue on Climate Change Adaptation for Land and Water Management**, 16-17 April 2009, Nairobi, Kenya
- ▶ **International Policy Dialogue on Financing the Climate Agenda: The Development Perspective**, 19-20 March 2009, Berlin, Germany
- ▶ **5th World Water Forum**, 16-22 March 2009, Istanbul, Turkey
- ▶ **Third International Workshop on Community-Based Adaptation to Climate Change**, 18-24 February 2009, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ▶ **Meeting of the Pew Commission on Whale Conservation in the 21st Century**, 9-10 February 2009, Lisbon, Portugal