

Summary of the 59th Meeting of the Global Environment Facility Council

The 59th meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council, and the 29th meeting of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) Council convened virtually, from 7-11 December 2020. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, chaired the meetings, which brought together 184 representatives of governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations (CSOs). A GEF Council consultation meeting with CSOs took place on 4 December.

Council Members approved a Work Program, comprising 62 projects and programs, with total resources amounting to USD 409.2 million. The Work Program is designed to take into account COVID-19, and offers urgent assistance to 87 of the world's most vulnerable countries. The Work Program also mobilizes USD 2.1 billion in co-financing, of which USD 1.4 billion is from investments.

The Council meetings included extensive discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused difficulty for many governments in the prioritization of environmental action, including the protection and restoration of nature and climate change adaptation, amid rising health impacts and economic costs. Council Members deliberated on the pandemic's impact on project management, and considered a white paper by the GEF COVID-19 Task Force, outlining how environmental action can reduce future threats of disease outbreak.

The GEF Council endorsed a new private sector engagement strategy, outlining how the GEF will work in a systematic manner with industry groups, companies, and investors to reverse unsustainable global trends and deliver global environmental benefits. It also heard reports by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) about their recent work and considerations related to COVID-19, and endorsed the GEF Monitoring Report 2020, which tracks progress towards generating global environmental benefits amid pandemic-related implementation challenges.

Council Members approved a USD 64 million LDCF Work Program, comprising nine projects, including three multi-trust fund projects that combine resources with the GEF.

During a pledging session for the LDCF, Finland pledged EUR 5 million to the LDCF. Switzerland pledged an additional CHF 700,000. Qatar pledged USD 500,000 – its first contribution to the Fund.

At the conclusion of the meetings, Council Members reviewed and approved the Joint Summary of the Chair for the GEF and LDCF/SCCF Council meetings. This summary highlights the discussions and decisions reached at the 59th meeting of the GEF Council, and the 29th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council.

A Brief History of the GEF

The GEF was set up in the 1990s in response to rising concerns about the state of the global environment. Following a pilot phase started in 1991, the GEF's role in providing financing

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and support for environmental projects was affirmed in 1994, when representatives of 73 countries agreed on the GEF's structure and functions. To date, the GEF has provided over USD 20 billion in grants, and helped mobilize and leverage more than USD 100 billion from other sources. This funding has assisted more than 4,700 projects in 170 countries.

Organizational Structure: The GEF's structure is organized around an Assembly, the Council, the Secretariat, 18 Agencies, a Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, and the Independent Evaluation Office. The GEF Assembly is composed of 184 member states. It convenes every three to four years. The Assembly reviews the GEF's policies and operations, and has met six times.

The GEF Council gathers twice each year, and is the main decision-making body. It develops, adopts, and evaluates the GEF's operations, policies, and programs. The Council is composed of 32 appointed Members representing developing countries, developed countries, and economies in transition.

The GEF Secretariat is based in Washington, D.C., and supports the work of the Council and the Assembly. The Secretariat also coordinates and oversees the GEF's work programs, monitors project implementation, and carries out Council and Assembly decisions.

The STAP provides expert scientific and technical advice on policies, operational strategies, programs, and projects. The IEO was created in 2003. It reviews and reports on the GEF's impact and effectiveness.

Funding: The GEF is funded by donor nations, which commit money every four years through a process called the GEF replenishment. Since its creation in 1991, the GEF Trust Fund has been replenished by USD 2.75 billion (GEF-1), USD 3 billion (GEF-2), USD 3.13 billion (GEF-3), USD 3.13 billion (GEF-4), USD 4.34 billion (GEF-5), USD 4.43 billion (GEF-6), and USD 4.1 billion (GEF-7).

Focus of Work: The GEF supports projects in the areas of biodiversity, chemicals and waste, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and sustainable forest management. It has also supported work on the circular economy, and ozone layer depletion.

The GEF works with numerous partners, and channels funds through 18 "GEF Agencies," including several UN agencies and programmes, regional development banks, and funds. Other GEF agencies include World Wildlife Fund US, Conservation International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund, and the Foreign Economic Cooperation Office of China.

The GEF also administers the LDCF and the SCCF, which focus on helping the world's poorest countries to increase their resilience and adapt to climate change, and provides secretariat services to the Adaptation Fund, established by the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which also serves the Paris Agreement.

Additionally, the GEF serves as a financial mechanism for a number of multilateral environmental agreements. These include the:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
- UNFCCC;
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; and
- Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Summaries of IISD Reporting Services coverage of past GEF Council and Assembly meetings can be found at: http://www.iisd.ca/process/trade_invest_in_sd.htm

GEF Council Consultation with CSOs: The GEF Council consultation meeting with CSOs took place virtually, on 4 December 2020, on the theme, "The Application of Traditional Knowledge by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: Stewards of the Global Environment." The meeting included a dialogue with GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, and two roundtables addressing the role of traditional knowledge in: management of Indigenous Peoples and Local Community (IPLC) land and water resources; and responding to the COVID-19 crisis and global environmental challenges.

The meeting was organized in collaboration with the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group, the GEF Small Grants Programme, and the GEF CSO Network. Participants discussed the value of traditional knowledge in supporting the conservation of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as combating other global and local threats, including responses to COVID-19. For IISD RS' summary of the proceedings, see: <https://enb.iisd.org/gef/council59/4dec.html>

Report of the GEF Council Meeting

The 59th meeting of the GEF Council opened on Monday, 7 December 2020, with welcoming remarks by GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.

CEO Rodríguez noted that the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic is part of a series of overlapping crises triggered by human-caused biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Observing that the pandemic has put urgent, short-term economic recovery at the top of government agendas, he emphasized the importance of seizing this "once-in-a-lifetime chance" to address these challenges in an integrated way. Rodríguez highlighted



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

how the GEF contributes to this by, among other support, helping countries to break down institutional and national silos, and developing integrated and innovative policy tools to leverage resources for environmental protection, including from the private sector.

Looking ahead to the week's agenda, he called for the Council to, *inter alia*: place green recovery strategies to respond to COVID-19 at the heart of the GEF's new Work Program; set robust targets for the GEF-8 replenishment; and support the effectiveness of national-level programmes, including through the sharing of best practices.

Following the Secretariat's explanation on the need to postpone discussion of updates to the GEF Evaluation Policy (GEF/E/C.59/05) to a later meeting, the Council adopted the agenda for the meeting (GEF/C.59/01/Rev.01) as amended.

Annual Portfolio Monitoring Report 2020

On Monday, 7 December, Françoise Clottes, GEF Secretariat, provided an overview of the report (GEF/C.59/03/Rev.01), which summarizes progress on and performance of an active portfolio of close to 900 projects, funded by the GEF Trust Fund between July 2019 and June 2020. Noting the Secretariat has prepared a separate analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on GEF project preparation and implementation, she outlined key "innovations" from the reporting periods, notably: the adoption of a portfolio-wide scorecard with a related "traffic light system" to make it easier to visualize overall performance; a greater focus on results- and risk-based management; and a "deep dive" into the new Integrated Approach Pilot projects.

Clottes noted a generally higher performance rate, with more than 80% of GEF projects rated satisfactory. She discussed improvements in funds' disbursement and financial closure rates, but pointed to a delay in new project inception in the first half of 2020 due to pandemic-related operational challenges. Clottes further reported that terminal evaluations showed many projects had "surpassed expectations" in areas such as co-financing.

In ensuing discussion, Council Members welcomed the GEF's progress towards improving operational efficiencies, as well as the introduction of new elements, such as the integrated approach, and increased focus on gender mainstreaming. On areas for improvement, Members called for, among other things:

- replicating the integrated approach at country level;
- providing more support for countries that are lagging behind, especially small island developing States (SIDS);
- focusing on how the GEF works with national focal points;
- extending the report's focus to cover sub-indicators and compliance; and
- harmonizing approaches across GEF implementing Agencies and focal areas.

Expressing concern that the full impact of COVID-19 is yet to be determined, several Members called for additional analyses to assess projects' resilience, and a more robust risk-management approach.

In his response, CEO Rodríguez noted the monitoring report reflects encouraging portfolio performance. He cautioned, however, the impact of COVID-19 will be more noticeable in 2021, especially for LDCs and SIDS, due to expected large budget cuts, as well as increased challenges for project implementation.

Clottes noted that while there is emerging evidence that COVID-19 could be partly responsible for the 21% of projects flagged by implementing Agencies as high risk, it is difficult to attribute this entirely to the pandemic. She acknowledged the need for harmonization of monitoring and evaluation approaches, and attributed the slow implementation by SIDS to the high percentage of regional projects, noting such projects are more difficult to roll out. She further highlighted efforts to introduce new instruments, such as country fact sheets, that are expected to improve trouble shooting and implementation.

Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, expressed satisfaction with the deep-dive analysis of the Integrated Approach Pilot Program. Acknowledging issues related to the impact of the pandemic on overall project delivery, he explained resilience is a key feature of the pilot projects, which offer insights for providing post-pandemic support. He further highlighted ongoing work to synthesize emerging lessons from GEF-7.

The Council adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/03/Rev.01, "The GEF Monitoring Report 2020," welcomes the report, its framework tracking effectiveness and efficiency, as well as progress in reporting on results. The Council requests the Secretariat, in collaboration with Agencies, to continue to assess implementation progress made by projects and programs to ensure the timely delivery of expected global environmental benefits and to engage with Agencies on ways to improve and adapt to the current operating context affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund

On Thursday, 10 December, the Council opened discussions on the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-8) (GEF/C.59/04), exchanging initial views on the process. Introducing the session, CEO Rodríguez urged the Council to lay the foundation for an ambitious GEF-8 strategy to "build back better and greener." Describing the GEF as "a partner of choice in linking human and natural capital," he said enhanced collaboration with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in this



Françoise Clottes, GEF Secretariat

replenishment cycle would help deliver the required institutional and policy conditions for achieving a major transformation through GEF-9.

Dirk Reinermann, World Bank, outlined the replenishment process, noting the importance of a timely start to the negotiations so as to conclude them by April 2022 and ensure a smooth transition from GEF-7. He said with the Council's approval to initiate the process, the Trustee would share in January 2021 a detailed planning note containing, among others, the proposed agenda and format of the negotiations, and indicative meeting dates and timelines.

In ensuing discussion, many speakers called for a robust replenishment to match the unprecedented challenges faced by a green post-COVID-19 recovery. Several Members called for an expansion of the integrated approach initiated with the GEF-7 Impact Programs, with some noting the importance of considering the GEF's added value to avoid duplication of available efforts. Other priorities highlighted in the discussions include: maintaining the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) allocation framework; maintaining an effective operational framework on the ground; ensuring that no one is left behind; expanding the network of GEF implementing Agencies, especially at the regional and national levels; and continuing the focus on compliance with fiduciary standards.

The Council then adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/04, "Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund," requests the Trustee, in cooperation with the Secretariat, to initiate the discussions on the eighth replenishment of resources of the GEF Trust Fund.

GEF's Private Sector Engagement Strategy

The Council discussed the GEF's Private Sector Engagement Strategy (PSES) on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Introducing this item, Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, commended the GEF Council Private Sector Working Group on revisions to the PSES (GEF/C.59/07) and the Implementation Plan (GEF/C.59/Inf.18), as requested by the GEF Council at its 58th meeting.

Matthew Brian Reddy, GEF Secretariat, presented the proposed Strategy, highlighting its vision for a GEF that acts as a catalyst, and enables the private sector to tackle key drivers of environmental degradation, reverse unsustainable global trends, and extend the delivery of global environmental benefits. He reported the PSES Implementation Plan takes into account the wide range of private sector involvement, and provides avenues to deliver on the GEF Portfolio. He highlighted revisions made to the PSES, including: revised preface and vision; roles and responsibilities; strengthened risk management; a section on COVID-19; and the broadening of engagement modalities. The Implementation Plan, he said, includes a reporting framework, work plan deliverables, a partnership management plan, and a 104-week Gantt chart for project schedules, and the first report of the PSES will be presented at the 61st GEF Council meeting.



Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat

In ensuing discussion, Council Members welcomed the strategy. They sought clarifications and greater detail on, *inter alia*:

- quantitative approaches to measure implementation;
- a green COVID-19 recovery plan;
- capacity-building plan for effective engagement of the private sector;
- alignment of the PSES and its Implementation Plan to GEF focal areas;
- involvement of civil society in the revisions;
- the relationship between Operational Focal Points (OFPs) and implementing Agencies; and
- innovative approaches to enhance information technology and research and development.

Responding to comments from the floor, CEO Rodríguez expressed support for a proposal to strengthen OFPs. He described the PSES as an opportunity to be more strategic and comprehensive, while also noting the need for: improvement of national policies for private sector engagement; facilitation of a level economic playing field; and prioritizing the circular economy.

Fonseca expressed thanks to the Private Sector Advisory Group for its support and input. He recognized the need to assess additionality of private sector engagement, and acknowledged support for private sector involvement in post-COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Reddy recognized the need for targeted resources to enable implementing Agencies to work more collaboratively, and for the private sector to respond to national priorities.

On Tuesday, 8 December, Council Members called for text on enhancing the role and capacities of OFPs in the Strategy, and their inclusion in the review and endorsement of projects from the private sector. Some pointed out this topic is under consideration by the *ad hoc* Working Group on Governance, cautioning against fragmented discussions.

On Wednesday, 9 December, Fonseca clarified the role of OFPs is enshrined in GEF policies and documents. Some Council Members observed that while OFPs' roles and capacities remain unclear, the issue is broader and beyond the remit of the PSES.

Revised decision text was tabled on Thursday, and Council Members adopted it with minor amendments.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/07/Rev.01, “GEF’s Private Sector Engagement Strategy,” endorses the PSES, and notes the Implementation Plan contained in the Information Document GEF/C.59/Inf.18.

The Council requests the GEF Secretariat to report annually on its implementation. Recognizing that international conditions will evolve over time, the Council agrees to review the GEF PSES as appropriate and needed.

Work Program for GEF Trust Fund

On Wednesday, Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, introduced the proposed fifth Work Program for the GEF Trust Fund under GEF-7 (GEF/C.59/06). He explained the total request of USD 409.2 million covers 60 projects and two programmes – Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) Impact Program and the Yangtze River Basin Biodiversity Conservation Program. Fonseca noted that if approved, the Work Program would benefit 87 recipient countries, including 32 LDCs and 19 SIDS. He highlighted green recovery from COVID-19 is a key feature of most projects proposed under the Work Program, drawing attention to the annex on COVID-19 screens, which aims to guide projects to take into account the pandemic in their design. Council Members raised questions regarding:

- the size of protected areas in GEF projects;
- how to further enhance effective collaboration between the GEF and the GCF;
- policies for reallocation of GEF funding where travel is hindered by COVID-19;
- core indicators addressed in GEF-7;
- how to tackle land-based conflicts and local user rights in projects; and
- the amount of funding allocated to countries that are not eligible for official development assistance (ODA).

Council Members also sought clarification on mechanisms for ensuring that projects operating in IPLC-managed areas adhere to the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

On the second review of UN Development Programme (UNDP) projects, Fonseca emphasized the need to manage timelines for assessments and independent reviews, adding that the provision for review was also applied at the previous Council meeting where several projects were submitted for a second review four weeks prior to endorsement.

Several Members called for more balanced distribution of funds among Agencies; and asked for information on how results of audits will impact ongoing UNDP projects.

In response to these queries, Fonseca said an allocation of 5% is allowed for amending budgets to repurpose funds. He said the GEF has safeguard policies, which ensure projects meet approval standards. On core indicators, he said all GEF-7 indicators are on track, and many have exceeded the 100% target, adding that the current Work Program includes indicators on landscapes, greenhouse gas mitigation, protected areas, fisheries, and chemicals. Fonseca also noted the GEF’s commitment to introducing conflict-related requirements in project design, and guidelines to address local user rights.

On ODA eligibility, Fonseca reminded the Council that during the GEF-7 replenishment negotiations it was agreed that a minimum of 90% of Trust Fund financing would be provided to ODA-eligible countries.

Responding to concerns regarding impacts on recipient countries with projects implemented by UNDP, Fonseca reported no projects have been cancelled so far, even though the GEF has received 15 requests for deadline extensions for project development and implementation. He added that in light of UNDP’s prominence in some countries – managing not just the Small Grants Programme, but also LDC/SIDS portfolios – the GEF strives to maintain its support as long as projects adhere to the guidelines.

With regard to the remnant GEF-6 projects, he clarified that the cancellation policy does not apply.

On Thursday, Members continued discussing options for a draft decision on the Work Program. The main issues of divergence centered around the approach to be taken once projects come back for a second review by the GEF Secretariat and the Council. One proposal preferred to put project endorsement on hold until the completion of management actions, presented by UNDP following an audit by the Office of Audit and Investigations, and the results of a third-party review by the Secretariat are available. Another view maintained that the audit processes should run in parallel so as not to delay implementation or risk cancellation.

On Friday, Fonseca presented revised text based on submissions received. Council Members welcomed the amendments, noting the revised text addresses concerns about potential implementation delays by recipient countries. Members proposed that discussions on UNDP projects be tabled at the 60th Council meeting to re-evaluate recommendations from the second review.

Council Members adopted the revised decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/06/Rev.02, “Work Program for GEF Trust Fund,” approves the Work Program comprising 60 projects and two programs, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and additional comments that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 11 January 2021.

Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel

On Tuesday, 8 December, Rosina Bierbaum, Chair, STAP, presented the Report of the Chairperson of the STAP (GEF/STAP/C.59/Inf.01), providing an overview of recent scientific findings, including that:

- neglecting climate and biodiversity would create future pandemics, by the World Economic Forum’s “COVID-19 Risk Outlook”;
- biodiversity conservation alone is not sufficient, and addressing drivers through sustainable production and consumption is paramount, by WWF’s “Living Planet Report 2020”; and



Rosina Bierbaum, Chair, STAP

- summer wildfires are destroying millions of hectares of peatlands in the Arctic system, by the “United in Science 2020” report.

Bierbaum highlighted the STAP’s initial perspectives on a GEF-8 strategy to ensure that individual investments are efficient, transformative, and durable. She said the GEF’s convening power can act as a catalyst for transforming economic systems and promoting partnerships for sustainable development.

She reported on the STAP’s ongoing work on Technology Critical Elements (TCEs), citing a workshop on TCEs and two reports that examine the benefits and costs of TCEs, and offer mitigation measures such as adoption of responsible mining methods.

Bierbaum further reported on improvements to climate risk screening in GEF projects, calling for more attention to the longer-term sustainability of projects.

During ensuing discussions, Council Members sought clarification on, among others, the methods proposed for climate risk screening and for incorporation of nature-based solutions in GEF-8.

In response, Bierbaum recognized the need for guidance on GEF projects’ vulnerability to climate change. She also noted the need to quantify co-benefits from multifocal areas.

Bierbaum further highlighted the potential of South-South cooperation to enhance collaborations between indigenous communities and the scientific community.

Council Members welcomed the report, with many noting the improved gender mainstreaming in projects, and recommended collaboration with indigenous peoples to upscale nature-based solutions.

Report of the Working Group on Governance

On Wednesday, 9 December, Stefan Schwager, Switzerland, introduced the Report of the Working Group on Governance (GEF/C.59/08). He highlighted positive results relating to the efficiency and transparency of GEF decision-making processes, noting in particular the role of the IEO and the STAP, as well as the new project portal. Among challenges, he cited limited disclosure and “unclear mandates” of different GEF organs,

especially with regard to programmatic approaches. He outlined the Working Group’s recommendation that the Council not only consider the evaluation report and recommendations, but also the management response.

With regard to the double role of the GEF CEO and Chairperson, Schwager discussed the report’s recommendation for a one-year co-chairing arrangement to facilitate the greater involvement of the Council in providing input to the GEF’s agenda and meeting outcomes.

In ensuing discussion, many Members welcomed the proposed co-chairing arrangement, with some calling for a co-chair to be appointed before the end of this Council session.

Several speakers supported a greater role for the Council in reviewing management responses to the evaluation reports, based on sound analysis and a clear action plan. Others highlighted the need for a stronger IEO, a role for OFPs in improved project implementation, as well as involvement of CSOs in Council working groups.

Council Members also called for an extension of the Working Group’s mandate to the 61st GEF Council meeting to facilitate the review of the co-chairing pilot.

On the co-chairing proposal, CEO Rodríguez suggested the Council take up the election of a co-chair under other business.

The Council then adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed Document GEF/C.59/08/Rev.01, “Report of the Working Group on Governance,” endorses the suggested recommendations of the Working Group on Governance. The Council requests the GEF Secretariat and the IEO to report to the Council on the implementation of the recommendations no later than the 60th Council meeting. In line with the recommendations, the Council decides to, *inter alia*:

- receive and consider, rather than endorse, future evaluation reports and related recommendations, and discuss the Management Responses and Management Action Records to evaluations in the Council before deciding to endorse them – or not;
- pilot for one year an adjusted co-chairing arrangement and to appoint the Chairperson from among its Members for the duration of one year instead of just one meeting, to facilitate a stronger involvement of the elected Chairperson in providing input to the agenda, the chairing of the meeting, and the meeting report; and
- consider at its 61st meeting an assessment of the pilot and proposed options for the future, including, but not limited to, recommending to amend paragraph 18 of the Governing Instrument.

The Council further decides to extend the mandate of the *ad hoc* Working Group on Governance until 30 June 2022.

IEO Evaluation Reports

On Tuesday, 9 December, Juha Uitto, Director, IEO, presented evaluation reports on: GEF support in fragile and conflict-affected situations (GEF/E/C.59/01); GEF interventions in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector (ASGM) (GEF/E/C.59/02); the role of medium-sized projects (MSPs) in the GEF

Partnership (GEF/E/C.59/03); and knowledge management in the GEF (GEF/E/C.59/04). He reported that the global pandemic has not had a major detrimental effect on the evaluations, even though field work was suspended in March. He said evaluations have improved over time, attributing this to the adoption of requirements and standards that are aligned to good evaluation practice.

Reporting on fragile and conflict-affected situations, Geeta Batra, IEO, noted 33% of projects are being implemented in countries experiencing major armed conflicts. She highlighted challenges such as physical insecurity, social conflict, and mistrust, which affect project implementation, and discussed conflict management strategies to address this risk.

On the ASGM sector, she reported on impacts such as mercury contamination, land degradation and child labor, explaining that the Global Opportunities for Long-term Development of ASGM Sector Plus (GEF GOLD +) project is working to facilitate mercury emissions reduction from mines.

Uitto explained that MSPs had been introduced to increase the GEF's flexibility in allocating resources, and to address funding gaps. On knowledge management, he described knowledge capture in the GEF portal as positive, citing usable products such as high quality practice briefs and e-learning courses. He also noted the need for the GEF Partnership to work on a knowledge management strategy, and build on the GEF knowledge exchange hub.

Delivering responses from the management, Françoise Clottes, GEF Secretariat, said GEF-8 envisages a knowledge management strategy, and a knowledge management advisory group will be mobilized to advise on this.

Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, welcomed the finding that a growing number of projects are addressing risks relating to conflicts and fragility and have introduced innovative strategies to manage these risks.

On ASGM, Fonseca noted a recommendation encouraging high-mercury-emitting countries to become more involved in the Minamata Convention, and called for a focus on enhancing policy agreements, especially for miners.

During ensuing discussion, Council Members encouraged the GEF to develop a robust framework to mitigate risk in fragile and conflict areas, and expand environmental and social safeguards, especially for indigenous communities.



Juha Uitto, IEO

Several speakers called for continuation of the knowledge-sharing global platform linked to the GOLD+ project, in particular the inter-institutional collaboration to eliminate mercury. In this regard, several Members raised concern over the increased use of cyanide in the ASGM sector, and requested the GEF to ensure that one toxic substance is not replaced by another. Other views on this issue included the need to: enhance knowledge dissemination in non-GOLD+ project countries; gather data on project contributions to reduced mercury use; highlight the co-benefits delivered through GEF projects; and strengthen the recognition of local communities' role in environmental conservation in conflict-affected areas.

Underscoring the close links between conflict, climate change, and sustainable development, Council Members called for the scaling up of support for risk management at the regional level, such as in the Central African region. In particular, they highlighted the need to support OFPs to access knowledge from technical and research institutions with expertise on these issues.

Many interventions touched on the role of MSPs in introducing innovative and transformative elements to GEF projects, and called for their continuation. Members credited MSPs with providing opportunities to “test and learn” without the risks associated with larger projects. They also noted that MSPs are a useful entry point for new implementing Agencies, and can help bring in marginalized sectors and stakeholders, such as CSOs. One speaker noted the importance of maintaining the current USD 2 million limit for such projects, as it would encourage a broader spectrum of partners to apply.

Uitto welcomed the positive feedback, noting most interventions touched on follow-up matters, and not the content of the evaluation reports. He expressed readiness to work closely with the GEF Secretariat and the STAP to find the best way forward.

Discussing next steps at the management level, Fonseca highlighted efforts underway to, *inter alia*: strengthen the GEF GOLD+ knowledge-sharing platform; and develop guidance on conflict-sensitive programming that is in synergy with other risk-oriented procedures. He assured Members that the Secretariat will continue to report to the Council through the annual performance reports of the IEO.

The Council then adopted the decisions.

Decisions:

Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/E/C.59/01, “Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations, and the Management Response,” endorses the following recommendations:

- the GEF Secretariat should use the project review process to provide feedback to Agencies to identify conflict and fragility-related risks to a proposed project, and develop measures to mitigate those risks;
- to improve conflict-sensitive programming, while also providing flexibility to Agencies and projects, the GEF Secretariat could develop guidance for conflict-sensitive programming;

- to improve conflict-sensitive design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEF projects, the GEF Secretariat, together with the Agencies, should leverage existing platforms for learning, exchange, and technical assistance;
- the current GEF Environmental and Social Safeguards could be expanded to provide more details so that GEF projects address key conflict-sensitive considerations; and
- the GEF Secretariat could consider revising its policies and procedures so that GEF-supported projects can better adapt to rapid and substantial changes common in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

ASGM: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/E/C.59/02, “Evaluation of GEF Interventions in the Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining Sector and the Management Response,” endorses the following recommendations:

- the GEF Partnership and the Minamata Convention should continue to encourage high-mercury-use countries to become more involved in the Convention;
- the GEF Partnership should increase project focus on policy interventions that help governments put into place the necessary framework to formalize artisanal and small-scale gold miners and monitor the sector;
- the GEF Partnership should seek opportunities for multi-focal area ASGM interventions and measure co-benefits beyond the Chemicals and Waste focal area; and
- the planet GOLD global platform should make available results and lessons learned from completed ASGM projects, and provide more detailed information on National Adaptation Plan and GOLD Program child projects.

MSPs: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/E/C.59/03, “Evaluation of the Role of Medium-sized Projects in the GEF Partnership, and the Management Response,” endorses the following recommendations:

- the MSP should continue to be primarily used for developing innovative projects; and
- mid-term and final evaluations should be conducted on MSPs designed as innovative or transformative, to provide lessons for scaling up or replication.

Knowledge Management: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/E/C.59/04, “Evaluation of Knowledge Management in the GEF (2020) and the Management Response,” endorses the following recommendations:

- The GEF Partnership should develop a clear knowledge management strategy.
- The GEF Partnership should invest in a technical solution that strengthens the knowledge management system.

Proposal for Responsible Investment Options for the GEF Trust Fund

On Thursday, 10 December, Praveen Prasad Desabatla, World Bank, introduced this item (GEF/C.59/12).

Tapiwa Sikiwa, World Bank, provided an overview of the process used by the GEF Trustee to identify social and responsible investment (SRI) options for the GEF’s liquid



Marta Mulas, Spain

asset portfolio, as requested during the GEF-7 replenishment negotiations. Noting that since July 2019, the World Bank Trust Fund has adopted environmental, social and governance (ESG) integration as the default approach across all funds it manages, he said the new proposal aims to explore options beyond ESG integration and considers factors, such as:

- the GEF’s SRI aspirations;
- impacts on the risk/return profile;
- operational factors, including scalability and cost efficiency; and
- reporting considerations and industry best practice.

Sikiwa informed the Council that the proposed strategy focuses on sustainability-themed bonds, initially consisting of Sovereign Supranational and Agency (SSA) securities, which conform to the Bank’s risk limits. He said the new approach will not fundamentally change the Trustee’s investments, but will provide access to a wider pool of information that may help improve the risk-adjusted returns of the portfolio in the long term. He also noted any extension beyond SSAs would require increased resources to deal with, among other requirements, credit analysis, investment management, and impact reporting.

During discussions, several Council Members welcomed the proposed investment options, but emphasized the need to ensure that GEF Trust Fund investments are aligned to globally agreed sustainability objectives, such as the Paris Agreement. Several interventions questioned the ambition of the proposed strategy, calling for exploring both green and blue bonds and for developing long-term targets for impact investments.

Desabatla said the primary goal of the Trustee is to preserve capital and manage the risk return profile. He acknowledged “we are not meeting expectations” in the impact reporting space.

Sikiwa credited the GEF for guiding the Trustee to adopt the ESG framework. Underlining the need to balance ambition and responsibility, he highlighted the lack of a standard reporting framework for green bonds as a key challenge, noting that further expansion will need to be based on an iterative learning process.

The Council then adopted the decision.



Mette Moglestue, Norway

Decision: The Council, having reviewed the document GEF/C.59/12, “Proposal of Responsible Investment Options for the GEF Trust Fund prepared by the Trustee,” provides its consent to the Trustee to implement the proposed Sustainable Bond Strategy for the GEF Trust Fund. The Council also notes that the proposed Sustainable Bond Strategy and the default ESG Integration approach, already in implementation since July 2019, collectively address the GEF-7 policy recommendation for the Trustee to develop options for a responsible investment strategy for the financial management of the GEF funds held in trust.

The Impact of COVID-19 on GEF Project Preparation and Implementation: Overview of Responses from across the GEF Partnership

On Thursday, 10 December, Françoise Clottes, GEF Secretariat, presented the report (GEF/C.59/11), which summarizes the outcome of a survey administered in September 2020 to better understand implications of the pandemic on the preparation and implementation of GEF projects and programs. She reported on 76 respondents out of the 144 OFPs involved, and noted the request to the Council to approve an exceptional, time-bound authorization for the GEF CEO to grant additional exceptions to the GEF Policy on Project Cancellation, by extending project timelines by 24 months, based on impacts of the pandemic on implementation.

Council Members noted the 53% respondent rate to the survey is low, calling for efforts to increase OFP participation in future surveys. They further noted the need to, *inter alia*: use innovative means to maintain consultations with indigenous peoples and local communities; address impacts on project co-financing; estimate the number of projects and activities that will require extension of timelines; and build OFPs’ green recovery capacities. They also recommended establishing a task force to follow up on issues raised in the white paper on a GEF COVID-19 Response Strategy (GEF/C/59/15) before GEF-8, and supported the GEF’s efforts to maximize contributions to green recovery.

In response, Clottes clarified that only projects at risk of cancellation due to constraints related to the pandemic are under consideration. She highlighted measures for close monitoring of projects in collaboration with implementing Agencies, and said it is still too early to estimate the number of projects requiring extension. She further reported on best practice sharing on stakeholder engagement, and resources and instruments to support the uptake of information technology.

Council Members adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/11, “The Impact of COVID-19 on GEF Project Preparation and Implementation: Overview of Responses from Across the GEF Partnership,” takes note of the report, and approves an exceptional authorization for the CEO to grant exceptions to the Project Cancellation Policy, as follows:

- the CEO may grant extensions to cancellation deadlines for all project types for a total of up to 24 months;
- this authorization is effective through the final day of the 60th Council meeting; and
- the Council further requests that the GEF Secretariat continue to monitor the impacts of the pandemic on GEF operations, report to the Council, and take necessary actions within its authority.

Report on the Assessment of GEF Agencies’ Compliance with the GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards

On Monday, 7 December, Françoise Clottes, GEF Secretariat, introduced the findings of a limited compliance reassessment, including Agency self-assessments, certificates of compliance, and action plans to address areas of non-compliance (GEF/C.59/05). She reported that out of 19 self-assessments, five Agencies were found to be fully compliant, while those found to be partially compliant were in the process of submitting time-bound action plans to be fully compliant in 2021. She informed Members about an addition to the draft decision text calling on the Council to approve an independent third-party review of the UNDP’s performance by late 2021.

In the ensuing discussion, Council Members expressed concern regarding potential repercussions of non-compliance on the GEF’s reputation and operational effectiveness, especially in light of the imminent GEF-8 replenishment negotiations. Many called for additional clarity on the scope of the proposed independent audit, noting this should ultimately cover the operations of all GEF implementing Agencies. Several speakers also called for further reflection on actions the GEF should take in response to the results and recommendations of the independent audit.

Responding to the issues raised, Clottes explained that the proposed third-party review mechanism expands on an earlier Council decision that mandated limited assessment of Agencies’ compliance by 2020. She noted that the main difference with the proposed audit relates to the depth of analysis, and emphasized that all Agencies have an obligation to undergo a full assessment by 2022.

While acknowledging the complexity of the situation, CEO Rodríguez assured Members of his commitment to engaging with the Agencies concerned, and expressed confidence that the draft decision provides sufficient guidance on the way forward.

On Tuesday, GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, informed Council Members that the 60th GEF Council meeting will contain an agenda item to discuss the shortening of the timeline for third-party review. In addition, Council Members called for regular information sharing and ways to mitigate or prevent future problems in this regard.

The Council then adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document, GEF/C.59/05/Rev.02, “Report on the Assessment of GEF Agencies’ Compliance with GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards,” welcomes the assessment and takes note of the findings, including the agency certificates of compliance as well as agency action plans to address areas of non-compliance (in Annex 1).

The Council approves, among others, the action plans submitted by Agencies to achieve full compliance, as summarized in the document and further detailed in the letters provided by Agencies in Annex 1, and decides that these Agencies may continue to act in their full capacity as GEF Agencies and seek GEF financing while they implement their time-bound action plans.

The Council also requests that, *inter alia*:

- those Agencies which have self-assessed as not in full compliance with the minimum standards start implementing their agreed action plans according to the timelines set out in the plans, and provide biannual updates to the Secretariat, ahead of every Council meeting, on implementation progress, until they have completed implementation of the action plans and come into full compliance with each minimum standard;
- the Secretariat report to the Council on progress made by GEF Agencies in implementing their action plans, based on the updates provided by the Agencies and, as needed, further expert assessment and consultation with the Agencies; and provide a summary of overall progress to the Council at its subsequent meetings on the implementation of the GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards;
- the Secretariat notify the Council when GEF Agencies have met the commitments set out in their respective action plans to achieve full compliance; and
- in the light of recently available audit information relating to GEF-funded projects implemented by UNDP, the Council requests further actions prior to its consideration of a compliance assessment relating to UNDP. In accordance with the GEF Policy on Monitoring Agency Compliance with GEF Policy, but on an accelerated time frame, the Secretariat will initiate the steps for an independent, risk-based, third-party review of compliance by UNDP with the GEF Policy on Minimum Fiduciary Standards. The Review will be carried out by an independent expert or experts, and will be completed by 1 October 2021. As one input to this Review, UNDP will submit to the Secretariat an updated self-assessment of its compliance by 1 May 2021.

Relations with the Conventions and Other International Institutions

On Wednesday, CEO Rodríguez opened the item on relations with the Conventions and other international institutions (GEF/C.59/10).

Executive Secretaries of four multilateral environmental agreements provided updates of the status of negotiations ahead of the meetings of their respective Conferences of the Parties (COPs) in 2021, and their Conventions’ financial needs under GEF-8.

Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, CBD, expressed concern that while the GEF is using resources more effectively, totals remain inadequate. Noting the GEF-8 replenishment will coincide with the expected adoption of the CBD’s post-2020 global biodiversity framework, she said “our performance will be largely influenced by your funding performance,” and outlined four key messages for the Council:



Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, CBD

- invest in conservation to acquire adequate safety nets for a green recovery;
- invest in sustainable use – with a focus on biosafety and biosecurity – as the “best vaccine” to end biodiversity loss;
- invest in equitable development through the fair and inclusive sharing of biological resources; and
- invest in systemic strengthening to achieve scale.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, drew attention to the recently launched G20 initiative to reduce land degradation by 50% by 2040. Noting that an estimated two billion hectares of land globally is degraded, he stressed that land is the “glue at the heart of the 2030 Agenda,” and a “land restoration economy” will create millions of green jobs as an integral part of post-COVID-19 recovery. He highlighted opportunities for GEF-8 to support, among others, countries’ drought preparedness efforts and innovative nature-based solutions to climate challenges.

Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, characterized the Convention as offering a specific and actionable implementation framework, with sufficient flexibility for countries to address their respective needs. Singling out the GEF’s support for the ASGM sector as an example of ground-breaking programming, she highlighted expectations for GEF-8 to deliver, *inter alia*, transformational changes in trade and supply chains, and ambitious emissions reduction targets in light of the Convention’s aspiration to make mercury history.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, outlined the Conventions’ ongoing efforts to support countries in carrying out needs assessments to fully understand and prioritize their chemicals and waste targets. He provided an overview of joint knowledge-sharing activities with the GEF, including: communicating on links between chemicals and waste, and COVID-19; mutual acknowledgement of support and respective leadership through flagship GEF and BRS publications; and planned joint celebrations to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Convention in 2021.

He said a chemicals and waste agenda for GEF-8 should include a balanced approach to: addressing, among others, the legacy of persistent organic pollutants (POPs); the 2025 deadline for the phase-out of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); and providing guidance and targets for tackling new POPs, especially in the agriculture and electronics sectors.

Responding to questions on mechanisms for harmonized country reports, Stankiewicz explained efforts to regulate mining, track excess mercury stocks, and reduce emissions through the

application of Best Available Technology or Best Environmental Practices, coupled with emissions inventories. She expressed the Convention's readiness to contribute to the formulation of GEF-funded projects in this area.

Payet assured members that the BRS Conventions are fully engaged with the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management process to promote the sound management of chemicals and wastes beyond 2020. Noting the complex landscape covered by the Conventions, with thousands of potential chemicals requiring monitoring, he explained that joint work with the GEF enables the Conventions to take into consideration countries' needs.

Council Members adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/10, "Relations with the Conventions and Other International Institutions," welcomes the report and requests the GEF network to continue to work with recipient countries to reflect the guidance and national priorities in their GEF programming and activities.

Update on the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund

On Thursday, 10 December, Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, introduced the update on the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (GEF/C.59/10). He said the GEF has received a total contribution of USD 16 million from Japan, France, Norway, Switzerland, and the UK, and provided funding for 13 projects benefiting 52 countries. He explained that to facilitate completion, an extension of the Fund's operations is required until 21 December 2023.

Council Members adopted the decision as presented.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/C.59/09, "Update on the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund," takes note of the good progress made by the GEF Secretariat in managing the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund, and decides to extend the operation of the Fund until 31 December 2023 to allow the completion (terminal evaluation) and closure of all the 13 projects funded by the Fund.

Other Business

CEO Rodríguez introduced the item.

Council Members agreed that election of a co-chair from a non-recipient country of the *ad hoc* Working Group on Governance for 2021 will be carried out electronically and communicated via email. The Council also agreed to extend the Working Group until 30 January 2022.

Council Members requested that matters related to UNDP be put on the agenda of the 60th meeting of the Council in June 2021. They also requested to receive updates by UNDP and the GEF Secretariat on further developments.

Dates of Future Meetings: The Council agreed that the 62nd meeting would convene back-to-back with the seventh GEF Assembly, to be held during the week of 22 May 2022 and that the 64th meeting of the Council would take place during the week of 6 December 2022.

Report of the LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting

GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, acting as Chairperson of the LDCF/SCCF Council, opened the 29th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council on Friday, 11 December. Rodríguez emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequalities "more than ever before," and stressed the need to build resilience of the most vulnerable ecosystems. He highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation, and the need for LDCs to strengthen resource

management in their project design. Noting that green jobs will be key to the post-pandemic recovery, Rodríguez highlighted opportunities presented by small and medium-sized enterprises to provide adaptation solutions.

The agenda (GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/01) was adopted without amendments.

Work Program for the Least Developed Countries Fund

Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, presented the LDCF Work Program (GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/03). He noted that LDCs are highly dependent on natural resources to sustain their economies and ensure food security, and are increasingly vulnerable due to COVID-19. The Work Program, he noted, – the fifth for LDCF projects in the GEF-7 cycle – requests a total of USD 63.87 million for nine projects to address urgent and immediate climate change adaptation priorities. He reported six of these are national LDCF projects, while three are multi-trust fund projects that combine resources from the LDCF and the GEF Trust Fund.

He further reported on collaboration between the GEF and GCF through the coordinated engagement pilot, noting ongoing discussions to identify a number of priority countries and/or adaptation themes to proactively develop joint initiatives by the end of the GEF-7 period.

Council Members recognized the LDCF's key role in green recovery strategies, and called for more proactive showcasing of these projects to increase visibility and facilitate predictable funding. They also called for emphasis on livelihoods, and requested more information regarding the GEF-GCF collaboration on adaptation.

In response, Fonseca said the GEF-GCF engagement has grown and demonstrates commitment by both Secretariats, through structured dialogues, for mutually reinforcing projects. On livelihoods, he recommended tools to access socioeconomic benefits against baselines.

Rodríguez highlighted long-term options for enhancing complementarity between the GEF and GCF for more strategic engagement in the Adaptation Fund.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/03, "Work Program for the LDCF," approves the Work Program comprising nine projects, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and additional comments that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 11 January 2021. The total resources approved in this Work Program amount to USD 63.87 million for the LDCF, inclusive of GEF project financing and Agency fees.

With respect to the Project Identification Forms (PIFs) approved as part of the Work Program, the Council finds that each of these PIFs is, or would be, consistent with the Instrument and GEF policies and procedures, and may be endorsed by the CEO for final approval by the GEF Agency, provided that the final project documents fully incorporate and address the Council's and the STAP reviewer's comments on the Work Program, and that the CEO confirms that the project continues to be consistent with the Instrument and GEF policies and procedures.

With respect to any PIF approved in this Work Program, the final project document will be posted on the GEF website for information after CEO endorsement. If there are major changes to the project objectives or scope after PIF approval, the final project document shall be posted on the web for Council review four weeks prior to CEO endorsement.

In light of the recent audit report by the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI) of UNDP GEF Management, all projects included in the Work Program implemented by UNDP shall be circulated by email for Council review at least

four weeks prior to CEO endorsement/approval. This shall take place as actions of the Management Action Plan that address the OAI recommendations are being implemented, and as the independent, risk-based third-party review of compliance by UNDP with the GEF Policy on Minimum Fiduciary Standards is being completed. Project reviews will take into consideration the relevant findings of the external audit and the UNDP management responses, and note them in the endorsement review sheet that will be made available to the Council during the four-week review period.

Annual Monitoring Review of the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund

Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, presented the Annual Monitoring Review of the LDCF and SCCF (GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/04), noting it incorporates the 2019 fiscal year, which was not included on the shortened agenda of the 58th GEF Council meeting. On the LDCF, she reported an active portfolio comprising USD 581 million for 101 projects, primarily in Africa and Asia, with USD 3 billion in co-financing. For SCCF, she said the portfolio amounts to around USD 179 million for 41 projects, with USD 1.7 billion in co-financing, and is fairly equally distributed across four world regions, with 7% going to SIDS.

In ensuing discussion, Council Members welcomed the increased geographical and gender diversity of the portfolios.

Responding to a question on why the bulk of LDCF projects were rated as moderately successful, Aoki noted many projects were implemented in highly fragile economies, and emphasized the need for further analysis. She further highlighted efforts to expand the range of implementing Agencies, including through mobilizing more specialized support for key sectors such as agriculture.

Council Members adopted the decision.

Decision: The LDCF/SCCF Council, having reviewed document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/04, “FY19 Annual Monitoring Review of the LDCF and the SCCF,” welcomes the review and appreciates the progress made in reporting portfolio-level performance, results, and lessons learned under the LDCF and the SCCF. The Council welcomes the overall finding that the LDCF and SCCF portfolio under implementation in the 2019 fiscal year performed satisfactorily.

Progress Report for the LDCF and SCCF

Presenting the progress report (GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/05), Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, summarized the status of total cumulative pledges and funding approvals, as well as paid contributions during the reporting period.

For the LDCF, he reported 17 stand-alone Full-sized Projects and 8 MSPs have been approved since the December 2019 Work Program, noting the increased gender inclusion and community ownership, as well as the diversity of implementing Agencies in the portfolio.

Among expected results of new LDCF projects, he highlighted: approximately 3.5 million hectares of sustainably managed land to enhance resilience to climate change for close to 23 million people; 701 strengthened regional institutions; and 1,757 developed and strengthened sub-national climate adaptation processes. Fonseca noted growing efforts by the GEF Partnership to link these projects with COVID-19 recovery.

Outlining SCCF projects, Fonseca reported that 7 MSPs were approved during the reporting period, highlighting a project in Colombia that will employ drones to generate localized climate impact and early warning data. He highlighted the Challenge



Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat

Program for Adaptation Innovation as an example of new generation GEF-funded projects that aim to leverage ideas and financing from the private sector to scale up impact.

Council Members adopted the decision.

Decision: The LDCF/SCCF Council, having reviewed document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/05, “Progress Report on the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund,” welcomes the report and takes note with appreciation of the progress made under the LDCF and SCCF.

2020 Program Evaluation of the Least Developed Countries Fund

Juha Uitto, Director, IEO, introduced this item (GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/E/01).

Anna Wigg, GEF Secretariat, highlighted the methodology for evaluating 25 approved and 35 completed projects, outlining conclusions, including: the relevance of the LDCF to development policies and programs; alignment of its work with the Paris Agreement to support nationally determined contributions; and effective alignment of project design with the GEF’s strategic objectives. She noted improvements in the gender performance of the LDCF’s portfolio, although 56% of terminal evaluations did not discuss gender action plans or considerations. Wigg cited limited engagement with the private sector, mainly due to the Fund’s focus on LDCs and adaptation, and highlighted factors affecting sustainability, noting the importance of continued financing.

During discussion, several Members expressed concern over findings of gender integration falling behind in terminal evaluations, and called for clarification on gender ratings. Others noted the lack of financial certainty in the context of the LDCF’s performance, as identified in 2016.

In response, Wigg explained gender ratings currently in use will be revised. She said the IEO is working on revised evaluation policies, including a gender mainstreaming policy.

Discussing the management response, Gustavo Fonseca, GEF Secretariat, welcomed the findings of the LDCF’s relevance in supporting COP guidance, and the strong foundations the LDCF has provided for large-scale projects to emerge. He said most projects had been completed before a gender policy was approved.

Council Members then adopted the decision.

Decision: The Council, having reviewed document GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/E/01, “2020 Program Evaluation of the LDCF and the Management Response,” endorses the following recommendations:

- build on progress made on mainstreaming gender in the LDCF portfolio and aim to decrease the knowledge gap about gender-related results; and
- continue to enhance the likelihood of the sustainability of outcomes.

Pledging Session for the LDCF

Dirk Wouters, Belgian Ambassador to the US, announced his country's pledge of EUR 20 million to be disbursed over four years. Switzerland announced a pledge of CHF 700,000. Finland pledged EUR 5 million. Qatar pledged USD 500,000.

Other Business

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

Closing of the LDCF/SCCF Council

GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez closed the online meeting at 10:30 am, EST.

Joint Summary of the Chair

At the conclusion of the Council meetings on Friday, Council Members adopted the Joint Summary of the Chair both for the 59th meeting of the GEF Council and for the 29th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council, with minor editorial amendments.

Following approval of the Joint Summary, GEF CEO and Chairperson, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, led the Council in bidding farewell to longstanding Council Member Stefan Schwager, Switzerland.

Rodríguez closed the online meeting at 10:30 am, EST.

Upcoming Meetings

23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance:

This meeting will address the fourth Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows, and the first report on the determination of the needs of developing country parties related to implementing the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. It will also address the preparation of the Forum on Finance for Nature-based Solutions, as well as draft guidance to the GCF and the GEF. **dates:** 16-17 December 2020 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://unfccc.int>

24th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA): The SBSTTA is expected to address the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, synthetic biology, marine and coastal biodiversity, biodiversity and agriculture, biodiversity and health, invasive alien species, and other issues in advance of CBD COP 15.

dates: first quarter of 2021 (TBC) **location:** Canada (TBC) **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/SBSTTA-24>

Third meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on

Implementation (SBI): SBI-3 will address issues surrounding the effective implementation of the CBD in advance of COP 15. **dates:** first quarter of 2021 (TBC) **location:** Canada (TBC) **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/SBI-03>

16th meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC-16): This meeting will review the possible listing of hazardous chemicals under the various annexes of the Stockholm Convention on POPs. **dates:** 11-15 January 2021 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** <http://www.pops.int/TheConvention/POPsReviewCommittee/Meetings/POPRC16/Overview/tabid/8472/Default.aspx>

Investing in African Mining Indaba: The 2021 Mining Indaba will convene under the theme, "Resilience to Rebuild: The New Mindset for Mining Operators and Investors." It will

bring together stakeholders to advance mining on the continent, and support education and sustainable development. **dates:** 1-4 February 2021 **location:** Cape Town, South Africa **www:** <https://www.miningindaba.com/Home>

19th meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 19): The CRIC assists the UNCCD COP in reviewing the implementation of the Convention, under the authority and guidance of the COP, and as an integral part of the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System. **dates:** 10-12 February 2021 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** <https://www.unccd.int/convention/committee-review-implementation-convention-cric>

Fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) Part I: UNEA-5 is expected to adopt a "two-step" approach, whereby it will first convene virtually in February 2021 with a revised and streamlined agenda. It will then convene for a resumed UNEA-5 to be held in person in Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2022 in a format to be defined and agreed upon. **dates:** 22-26 February 2021 (TBC) **location:** virtual **www:** <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/>

18th Session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF-18): UNFF-18 will discuss, *inter alia*, implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030, the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector, and the proposed programme of work for 2022-2024. **dates:** 28-30 April 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York, US (TBC) **www:** <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/>

60th Meeting of the GEF Council: The Council meets twice annually to develop, adopt, and evaluate the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 15-17 June 2021 **location:** Washington, DC, US (TBC) **www:** <https://www.thegef.org/council-meetings>

Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	civil society organization
FOLUR	food systems, land use, and restoration
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEF-7	seventh replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IPLC	indigenous peoples and local communities
LDCs	least developed countries
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
MSP	Medium-sized Project
ODA	official development assistance
OPF	Operational Focal Point
PIF	Project Identification Form
POPs	persistent organic pollutants
PSES	Private Sector Engagement Strategy
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SIDS	small island developing States
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change