

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Thursday, 24 August 2023 | Online at: enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7

Seventh GEF Assembly Highlights: Wednesday, 23 August 2023

The GEF Partnership Forum created the space for Indigenous Peoples, youth, women, and representatives from civil society to discuss ways the GEF can support their recognition and empowerment as well as land tenure. In the evening, the 7th GEF Assembly opened with Squamish *Skw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw*, Musqueam *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* and Tsleil-Waututh *səlilwətał* Nations welcome songs.

Partnership Forum

Gabriella Richardson, GEF, opened the session. Carleen Thomas, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, greeted participants.

Prisca Daka, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, Africa, asked GEF to support and engage youth more, and allow youth to participate in the GEF Council as observers. Devi Anggrani, Women in Global South Alliance, asked GEF to take Indigenous women's views into account and proactively prioritize projects led by women's groups. Alisi Rabukawaqa, GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group, asked GEF to challenge its perceptions and ways of doing things.

Sano Akhteruzzaman, Chair, GEF Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network, called for the GEF Secretariat to provide CSOs with capacity and ability to work directly with GEF and access funds over shorter timeframes. He called for consideration of whether GEF agencies are still necessary to manage/implement projects.



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

GEF CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez said opposing deforestation and dams in his youth in Costa Rica helped him understand the role of civil society in prompting change. He said perceptions and behaviors must change to make real progress, and this is not possible by just focusing efforts on governments. Rodríguez called for making the GEF the most important strategic financial partner of civil society and the facilitator of generational change.

Intergenerational Fireside Chat: Emilie Leclerc invited participants to reflect on both the devastation of recent and ongoing wildfires, as well as the role of fire as a place for gathering, connecting, and storytelling.

Mary Jane Enchill, HATOF Foundation, described how transformative a GEF-supported journalist training on



Gabriella Richardson, GEF



Emilie Leclerc



Damaris Fabiola Quijivix Monzón, GEF Small Grants Programme Youth Grantee, Guatemala

environmental degradation was for her. Skw'akw'as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore, VIDEA, urged bringing empathy and feeling back into the narratives, noting that young people are angry - not at individuals but with the system that was put in place - and are asking to be part of the solution.

Damaris Fabiola Quijivix Monzón, GEF Small Grants Programme Youth Grantee, Guatemala, credited the talent and drive of young people for creating and growing a non-profit organization that is exploring their local valley for ways it can support the local community while also protecting its native species and the ancestral knowledge and customs that came from it.

Grethel Aguilar, Acting Director General, IUCN, said she learned humans are part of nature from Indigenous Costa Ricans. Yemi Michael Katerere, African Civil Society Biodiversity Alliance, said expropriation of land denied local people access to wild foods, making them “illegal harvesters.”

On the future, Enchill urged: understanding environmental devastation, personalizing sustainable development, and voting for governments with clear sustainability agendas. Dunstan-Moore called for fewer challenges and less trauma for future youth. Quijivix-Monzón hoped to become a wise elder listening to youth and other communities. On lessons learned, Peter MacDougall, Canada, wished he had challenged clearcutting and monoculture planting earlier. Aguilar said she would



Grethel Aguilar, Acting Director General, IUCN



Pooja Pokharel, UNCCD

work intergenerationally, trusting in future equity and change. Enchill advised focusing on “intergenerational collaboration,” not “charity.” MacDougall said solutions entailing broader participation are more effective than those of “elite decision-makers.” Aguilar committed IUCN to implement the Youth Strategy launched in 2022.

Forum Confab I: Intergenerational Collaboration for Our Future: The first session panel featured Pooja Pokharel, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Youth Caucus, Nepal; Cavin Rowayi, Founder, Green Habitat; Marina Melanidis, Youth4Nature; and Kwame Ofori, Ako Foundation. Asked how the GEF Partnership should engage youth, panelists suggested:

- inclusivity in project design and implementation;
- reporting back about youth engagement at the next Assembly;
- forming youth forums in every region;
- providing capacity building programs;
- providing funding and other resources to youth organizations; and
- amplifying, not duplicating, existing youth networks.

In the second session, panelists discussed how to engage youth on a longer-term basis. Juan Carlos Mendoza, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), said IFAD is increasingly trying to engage youth in project design and oversight through what it calls youth grassroots teams. Kinley Tenzin, Bhutan Youth Development Fund, noted Bhutan’s new program to have



Marina Melanidis, Youth4Nature

18-year-olds spend one year in national service. Aguilar urged having youth work alongside older team and project members, making youth participation the norm. Jürgen Zattler, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, noted his ministry has a youth advisory council and is developing a youth engagement policy. Asked about possible solutions to impediments, panelists suggested:

- ensuring non-English speaking youth voices are heard;
- discussing with donors the possibility of a special funding window for youth-led projects;
- requiring GEF-funded projects to include youth in design and implementation; and
- providing opportunities for funded youth involvement that can lead to careers.

Confab II: Women's Leadership in Environmental Action:

Moderator Verona Collantes-Lebale, GEF, asked participants to elaborate on women's leadership and gender-responsive actions in environmental programs and initiatives, noting that the GEF is ensuring funded projects are doing more than "just ticking the gender box."

Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary, lamented that women are laboring to collect water and firewood, only to have polluted water and indoor air pollution make their families sick. Scovia Ampumuza Faraja, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Women's Caucus, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, highlighted a project that is planting trees on riverbanks to make water that women work so hard to fetch cleaner. Fatou Haidara, UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), reported on a project that trained women in the Philippines on formalizing their businesses and increasing income.

Highlighting that the majority of employment in the agrifood system is held by women, Maria-Helena Semedo, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), called for starting with women in order to transform the system, noting that gender balance is not just about numbers, but having a voice. Milagros Dulnuan, Fruitful Farmers, discussed an FAO/GEF project in conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity, including entrepreneurial training in processing agrobiodiversity products.



Maria-Helena Semedo, FAO



Melissa Lem, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

Noting that 80% of health determinants are ecological, social, and structural in North America, Melissa Lem, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, highlighted a partnership with Parks Canada allowing providers to prescribe national park passes to patients. She credited women with the success and reach of the initiative.

Ana di Pangracio, CBD Women's Caucus, moderated the session on advocacy for women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment in environmental policies, plans and financing. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), noting few men in the room, advocated educating men to change culture and laws harming rural women. Jürgen Zattler, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, lamented traditional values hindering women and society, recommending adaptive social safety nets. Laura Hardman, Ocean Wise, called for bolstering data on marine plastic pollution's disproportionate impacts on women. Ruth Spencer, Marine Ecosystems Protected Areas, noted Antiguan women's voluntary sustained environmental activities but urged financing for scaling up. Maria Carcamo, Red de Acción en Plaguicida para América Latina, sought GEF funding on gender-differentiated chemical exposure potentials. Tracy Nguavese, GEF CSO Network, Nigeria, bemoaned science-ignoring cultural and religious practices.

Confab III: Indigenous Stewardship of the Global Environment: Lucy Mullenkei, Indigenous Information Center, moderated this event. Sarah Wyatt, GEF, provided an overview of GEF's engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

Thomas shared how in Canada her people are still under colonial rule and they sustain themselves from marine resources. For Tsleil Waututh the "laws come from the land." Dunstan-Moore, noting the challenges of working within colonial structures, expressed her hope to promote change.

Giovanni Reyes, Philippines, Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA) Consortium, discussed GEF's support in harnessing Indigenous knowledge systems to delineate ICCAs.

Yolanda Teran, Indigenous Women's Network for Biodiversity, highlighted the importance of working in a holistic way to elevate the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Aliou Mustafa, Indigenous



Chizuru Aoki, GEF

Peoples and Rural Development Association, Cameroon, underscored the importance of GEF supporting greater inclusiveness, collaboration and working in an intergenerational way.

Sharing Experiences and Ideas for Change: Susan Waitaha, GEF, and moderator of the session, invited the rapporteurs from the three Confabs to report back on key takeaways.

Ana di Pangracio, CBD Women's Caucus, rapporteur from the Women's Leadership in Environmental Action Confab highlighted: missed opportunities and the need for more attention, support and funding, including through the ratification of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund; and recognition that "representation does not equal participation."

Derrick Mugisha, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, rapporteur from the Intergenerational Collaboration for Our Future Confab, highlighted the need for: inclusion of youth in design and implementation of projects; funding; a focus on education; establishment of a youth advisory council; and the development of a GEF youth engagement strategy.

Galina Angarova, Cultural Survival, reporting on the Indigenous Stewardship of the Global Environment Confab, highlighted the need to reformulate the principle of "do no harm" to "do good" and to go from "reactive" to "proactive." She also called for a study on overlap between Indigenous People's lands and biodiversity hotspots. Maria Leichner, Co-chair, GEF CSO Network, highlighted the need to work on trust and accountability.

The Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program: Chizuru Aoki introduced this new funding initiative focused on directly supporting innovative actions of civil society groups. Peter MacDougall said the funding will advance adaptation, providing up to USD 100,000 to each of 23 winners. Twelve winning organizations' representatives briefly introduced their projects.

Richardson introduced a conversation on how to build inclusive approaches. Two of the winners, Kevin Lunzalu, Kenyan Youth Biodiversity Network, and Katy de la Garza, Forever Costa Rica Association, highlighted the importance of supporting CSOs.



Closing of the Partnership Forum: In closing the first ever GEF-organized Partnership Forum, Rodríguez emphasized the theme of inclusion, noting civil society's rightful place in the GEF Assembly. Responding to Rodríguez's call for a more inclusive financial mechanism that takes a whole-of-society approach, GEF Council Chair Tom Bui announced his support for the proposal to make civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth an integral part of the GEF family.

Official Opening Ceremony of the Assembly

After a drum and vocal performance and welcome remarks by the host Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil Waututh Nations, Emilie Leclerc introduced the Honor Party from the Canadian Government. Noting that the world's systemic crisis requires a systemic approach, CEO Rodriguez called for bringing nonstate actors to the table. "Together we will leap into a new era, an era of solutions." Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Canada, expressed Canada's support for GEF and hailed the creation of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF). He encouraged all governments, philanthropies and others to contribute to the GBFF before the next CBD COP. Harjit Sajjan, Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Canada, called for the Assembly to work toward building a better, resilient future for everyone.



Singer-songwriter Joe McLeod