

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Friday, 25 August 2023 | Online at: [enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7](http://enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7)

## Seventh GEF Assembly Highlights: Thursday, 24 August 2023

Shortly after the Seventh GEF Assembly welcomed the ratification of the Council Decisions establishing the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, Canada announced that Canada will invest CAD 200 million in the GBFF and provide CAD 22.8 million for the GEF Eighth Replenishment to address climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

### *Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs; Adoption of the Agenda*

**Election of the Chair:** The Assembly elected, Ahmed Hussen, Canada, as Chair of the Assembly.

**Election of the Vice-Chairs:** The Assembly confirmed Prakash Mahat, Nepal, as Vice-Chair from recipient countries and Yutaka Matsuzawa, Japan, as Vice-Chair from non-recipient countries.

**Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work:** The Assembly adopted the agenda (GEF/A.7/01; GEF/A.7/02) and organization of work as presented by Hussen.

### *Opening Statements*

Emphasizing Canada's firm conviction that fighting the climate crisis requires concerted action, reliable funding, and effective global collaboration, Hussen said the GEF has the opportunity to build stronger partnerships, support locally-driven

and inclusive initiatives, and promote ideas that are evidence-based and proven effective. Rodríguez reflected on 30 years of the GEF's existence, saying the field of international cooperation has remained fairly static. He called for a new, systemic approach that brings the voices of civil society to the table.

### *Ratification of the Council Decisions of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund*

Hussen recalled that the GEF Council in June 2023 adopted Decision 09/2023 establishing the GBFF. The Assembly endorsed the Decision. Rodríguez said the first GBFF Council meeting will be held in January 2024, with a view to approving the first work program at the June 2024 Council meeting.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), urged all participants to mobilize resources to enable GBFF disbursements to developing countries ahead of the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the CBD.

CANADA and the UK announced USD 200 million and GBP 10 million initial contributions, respectively, and urged others to contribute what they can as soon as possible. BARBADOS, JAPAN, CHILE, CONGO, URUGUAY and SOUTH AFRICA welcomed GBFF establishment. THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ADVISORY GROUP (IPAG) and INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) welcomed the GBFF provision allocating 20% directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

**Decision:** The Assembly endorsed Council decision 09/2023.



Ahmed Hussen, Co-Chair Seventh GEF Assembly



David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD Secretariat



Halatua Fua, Cook Islands

BRAZIL, with COLOMBIA, recalled their proposal at the GEF Council to allocate 20% of GBFF resources to IPLCs. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO said GBFF funds must be accessible to all. CUBA, with HONDURAS, called for simplified processes for obtaining GBFF funding. COLOMBIA stressed rebuilding resilience and peace in war-torn lands that possess fragile biodiversity. CHINA reported incorporation of the GBF into its national biodiversity work.

COSTA RICA welcomed the opportunities the GBFF opens for innovative financing mechanisms. LESOTHO urged parties to contribute to the GBFF. The GEF-Civil Society Organization (CSO) NETWORK highlighted the need to access funding directly, and for focus on education.

COOK ISLANDS highlighted the daunting task of addressing the threats in the Blue Pacific amidst financial deficits. ZIMBABWE highlighted his country's in-kind contributions through local actions with global impacts on poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

MYANMAR welcomed international cooperation. NEPAL highlighted successes in tiger and rhino conservation. SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS called for a vision of co-building and co-designing resilient states. BANGLADESH said the GBFF is vital for vulnerable countries like hers. NIGERIA requested the GBFF focus on identifying gaps and challenges with current GEF procurement processes. UGANDA proposed that GBFF's



Prakash Mahat, Vice-Chair, Seventh GEF Assembly



Trudy Harrison, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

membership should be split equally between developed and developing countries and inclusive of women.

PERU, VENEZUELA, NICARAGUA, ECUADOR, AZERBAIJAN, and RWANDA highlighted the resources, land, and ecosystems they have already preserved or will put under protection in their countries. TOGO, VENEZUELA, SAMOA, BURUNDI, MEXICO, and THE PHILIPPINES thanked countries for their pledges thus far and invited other countries to follow suit.

BELIZE committed to leveraging domestic resources as well, such as other nature trust funds, payments for ecosystem services, tourism, pollution and logging taxes, and crowdfunding. SYRIA called for establishing an independent mechanism from among GEF members to run the new Fund. NAMIBIA, YEMEN, and GAMBIA urged simplifying processes, minimizing transaction costs, and more direct access to funds.

MOLDOVA underscored GEF's support for small countries. SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE highlighted the impact of climate change.

### Roundtables

**Bridging the Science and Policy Nexus for Heathy Planet, Healthy People:** Thomas Tomich, University of California, Davis, moderated this session, calling transformation of complex systems a "wicked problem."

Sara Scherr, President, EcoAgriculture Partners, noted effective national policy includes: frameworks explicitly recognizing local partners; institutionalized technical services; assistance in accessing financial and business information; and fostering of knowledge exchange.

M. Sanjayan, CEO, Conservation International, said science objectively uses observed data, tests hypotheses, and then course-corrects as data increases, but it must be applied, which relies on policy, communities, understanding of needs, and indigenous wisdom.

Kwaku Afriyie, Minister of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation, Ghana, urged measuring human development, not economic growth, and questioned using market mechanisms.

Ani Dasgupta, President, World Resources Institute, said knowledge must result in change, urging evidence-gathering, on-the-ground application, then scaling up good results.

Blake Ratner, GEF STAP, said solving wicked problems addresses how human systems work, urging real-time evaluation of policies.

#### **Catalyzing a Zero-Waste, Circular Economic System:**

The roundtable moderated by Apoorva Arya, CEO, Circular Innovation Lab, opened with a presentation differentiating the current linear, take-make-waste model from a circular economy model. Panelists then presented on:

- a reusable/refillable packaging model developed in a Latin American country that has engaged participation by major multinational consumer goods brands and is now spreading elsewhere;
- challenges faced by a major multinational packaged food and beverage producer in trying to shift to reusable or recyclable packaging for all their products;
- challenges faced by a developed country that is a federal republic and natural resource-based economy in moving toward recycling and away from reliance on virgin materials;
- the efforts of an African country to ban single-use plastics and adopt and implement a circular economy action plan;
- the challenges faced by a small island country in considering how to shift to a circular economy; and
- global efforts to attract venture capital into investing in circular economy initiatives.

Panelists also discussed:

- common legislative and regulatory hurdles to reusable or refillable packaging;
- how to reduce the price disadvantage recovered materials faced compared to virgin materials; and
- the need to change mindsets and behavior to shift populations from regarding used materials/products as waste to considering them recoverable source materials.



**Aziz Abdulkhakimov**, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, Uzbekistan

**Conserving and Restoring Nature:** Ulrich Apel, GEF, introduced the roundtable and panels, moderated by Asha Bobb-Semple, GEF. In his keynote, Bernardo Strassburg, Executive Director, International Institute for Sustainability, asked how to increase scale of landscapes and remain true to local knowledge and data.

Aziz Abdulkhakimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, Uzbekistan, highlighted that his country has increased protected area coverage from 4% to 14%, and supported the regional approach in addressing conservation challenges across Central Asia, including through establishing transboundary protected areas. Citing commitment to addressing barriers to movement of migratory species, he reported that Uzbekistan will host the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) COP.

Lucía Ruiz Bustos, WWF, stressed the importance of people's ownership of conservation efforts. Ramson Karmushu, Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation, cited the importance for Indigenous Peoples of conservation of both flourishing and degraded ecosystems.

Scott Edwards, Executive Director, Conservation Strategy Fund, highlighted the need to be mindful of where funds for restoration come from. Noralene Uy, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines, discussed: a program to identify critical habitat as well as spatial planning tools for watershed management; and spatial analysis to identify fragile marine ecosystems. Sebastian Troeng, Conservation International, noted how complicated it is to measure how negative impacts on environment are avoided.

#### **Plenary 1 – Solutions for a Healthy Planet: Integrated Responses to Global Environmental Degradation**

Opening the session, Rosina Bierbaum, GEF STAP, said we are now finally realizing what the First Nations have known for thousands of years: we must all row together. Carlos Nobre, University of São Paulo, as the “disruption speaker,” discussed the pitfalls of the model of development that assigns no value to standing forests and contrasted it with agroforestry services





Lucy Mulenkei, Co-Chair, IIFB and Chair, IPAG



Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat

which can actually provide much higher incomes than pasture or traditional farming.

Panelists commented on management practices toward more sustained outcomes, possible tradeoffs from integration, and new tools or technologies that can fulfill the vision of systemic solutions. On best practices, Lucy Mulenkei, Co-Chair, IIFB and Chair, IPAG, said IPAG has been focused on elevating new voices - of youth and women in particular. Éliane Ubalijoro, CEO, Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry Centre (CIFOR-ICRAF), spoke to integrating digital age knowledge with the age-old wisdom of indigenous knowledge. On tradeoffs, Monica Medina, President and CEO, Wildlife Conservation Society, cautioned that in pursuit of solving climate change, we must not destroy the natural environment, while Jean Lemire, Envoy for Climate Change, Northern and Arctic Affairs, Quebec, noted that electric vehicle adoption has spurred more mining. On new tools, Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia, spoke about designing a simple valuation tool for local communities to value their knowledge and natural resources.

### ***Plenary 2 – Solutions for a Healthy Planet: Partnerships for Financing***

Chizuru Aoki, GEF, moderated this session. Valerie Hickey, World Bank, “disruption speaker,” citing the disruption caused by COVID-19, underscored the importance of money for development gains. She described how to accelerate progress towards the green economy through policy reforms, including by repurposing subsidies.

In the following panel discussion, Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), underscored that partnership for funding should be managed in a way to respond to the needs of the constituency.

Lori Kerr, CEO, FinDev Canada, stated that there is a USD 700 billion investment gap in nature and highlighted the role of emerging markets and private capital in addressing the biodiversity crisis.

Speaking on the role of different stakeholders, Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN Development Programme (UNDP), called on actors to sound the alarm on the fundamental misallocation of taxpayer dollars to fossil fuel subsidies. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), reflected on how, after learning from past mistakes, civil society and the private sector are deeply involved in the biodiversity regime. On how to increase funding and private sector engagement, Gerd Müller, Director General, UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), noted the great disparity between global military spending and development aid. Helen Crowley, Managing Director, Pollination, said companies can rethink risk and return to discover value creation opportunities and increase resilience and impact.

Asked for final thoughts, Müller called for reforming the Bretton Woods system and seeking minimum social standards for workers. Mrema said immediate systemic changes in finance and governance are needed. Cristián Samper, Managing Director and Leader for Nature Solutions, Bezos Earth Fund, emphasized scale, speed, and equity in finance mobilization.



Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP