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Summary of the 66th Meeting of the Global Environment Facility Council: 5-9 February 2024

The 66th meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council notched several important achievements. It adopted the second largest GEF Trust Work Program ever. The Council also adopted initial guidelines for enabling activities and support for ratification of the International Legally Binding Instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

Meeting as the Council for GEF’s special climate adaptation funds, the [Least Developed Country Fund](#) (LDCF) and [Special Climate Change Fund](#) (SCCF), it approved one of the largest LDCF/SCCF Work Programs to date. Meeting as the first Council for the newly-created [Global Biodiversity Framework Fund](#) (GBFF), it took the steps needed to make the Fund operational in coming weeks, thus fulfilling an ambitious request from the 15th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in just over one year.

After years of discussion, the Council finally adopted a Risk Appetite Statement to encourage the GEF Partnership to take more risk and innovate more in GEF investments. The Council also took initial steps in another longstanding item on its to-do list, streamlining the GEF project cycle, and setting up an *ad hoc* working group to propose further measures.

The Council also discussed:

- tracking and measuring socioeconomic co-benefits from GEF investments;
- how to improve GEF support for drylands countries;
- GEF-funded activity and engagement in fragility, conflict, and violence-affected states (FCS); and
- guiding principles for learning from challenges in GEF projects.

The 66th meeting of the GEF Council, 35th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council, and 1st meeting of the GBFF took place from 5-9 February 2024 in Washington, DC.

A Brief History of the GEF

Originating with a 1989 proposal by France to formulate financing responses to mounting concerns over global environmental problems, the GEF was established as a pilot program in 1991 through arrangements between three



The dais and Council Members applaud Council Secretary **William Ehlers** for his years of service to the GEF Secretariat

“implementing agencies,” the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), to be housed in and administered by the World Bank. Its purpose was to provide concessionary and additional funding of the incremental costs for achieving global environmental benefits (GEB), with an initial endowment of around USD 1 billion. GEF was restructured through the adoption of a new GEF Instrument in March 1994 in response to developing countries’ calls for democratic decision-making, to replace the World Bank’s weighted voting system based on share of the Bank’s capital stock held by each member country. With this

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restructuring, the GEF became a separate institution, housed in, but not administered by the World Bank, which operates, with its implementing agencies now numbering 18, as a key mechanism for global environmental funding.

The GEF's organizational structure includes:

- an Assembly that meets every four years;
- a Council that meets twice a year;
- a Secretariat;
- the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), which was established in 1995, and provides independent advice to the GEF on its work as well as assistance in the delivery of Members' responsibilities; and
- the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), which was created in 2003, and supports the improvement of accountability and learning in the GEF strategies and operations through its evaluations.

The organization's main decision-making body is the GEF Council, which includes both donor and recipient countries and is responsible for developing, adopting, and evaluating the GEF's operational policies and programs. Meeting twice a year, it is composed of 32 appointed Council Members, each representing a constituency, that is, a group of either donor or recipient countries.

The GEF Assembly, which has convened seven times between 1998 and 2024, is the main guiding structure for the GEF, comprising 186 member governments. It provides a forum for discussion leading up to replenishment negotiations and is responsible for reviewing and ratifying recommendations of the Council.

The GEF is funded by donor countries, 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 with 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). In June 2022, the GEF Council endorsed GEF-8, totaling more than USD 5 billion, for the period 2022-2026 (with an extra year due to the pandemic). GEF-8 is over 30% higher than GEF-7.

The GEF administers the LDCF, SCCF, and GBFF.

The GEF also serves as a financial mechanism for several multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the: CBD; UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; and Minamata Convention on Mercury. The GEF's work also focuses on sustainable forest management, international waters, and ozone layer depletion, among others. Funding from the Facility has been channeled to recipient countries through [18 GEF Agencies](#).

Summaries of ENB coverage of past GEF Council and Assembly meetings can be found at: enb.iisd.org/negotiations/global-environment-facility-gef



William Ehlers, GEF Council Secretary, and **Carlos Manuel Rodríguez**, GEF CEO and Council Co-Chairperson

Report of the 66th GEF Council Meeting

On Monday morning, 5 February 2024, GEF CEO and Council Co-Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez opened the meeting. He said the triple planetary crises require a better GEF, bringing more resources, enhancing access, streamlining its policies and procedures, managing higher risks, generating more investment around policy coherence, and catalyzing the mobilization of financial resources from all sources. This means, he stressed, that the GEF and its Partnership must evolve.

Rodríguez emphasized GEF efforts to increase integration across sectors, conventions, and stakeholders, and pursue whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. He noted GEF efforts to find ways to cooperate with existing environmental and climate funds and other relevant biodiversity-related conventions like the Convention on Migratory Species, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, so that the GEF can catalyze a greater and collective impact. He also noted that the GEF has agreed to house, in partnership with the World Resources Institute, the Secretariat of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and Peoples (HAC for N&P).

Lastly, Rodríguez announced the first grant agreement for the first batch of conservation graduate fellowships under the Gustavo Fonseca Fellowship Program.

Co-Chair Rodríguez introduced the provisional agenda ([GEF/C.66/01](#)). Council Members approved the agenda without amendment.

The GEF Monitoring Report 2023

On Monday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat, introduced the GEF Monitoring Report 2023 ([GEF/C.66/03](#)), explaining it is aligned with the two tiers of the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework (RMF), by focusing on outcomes and portfolio efficiency. He said the report shows:

- significant results across five environmental areas;
- Agencies reached first disbursements in countries with speed and reached an overall higher disbursement ratio, while rating implementation progress in the satisfactory range for over four out of five projects;



Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat

- financial closure was reached on time for a higher share of the portfolio than a year ago; but
- delays in submitting Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) remain and that there has been modest progress in materializing co-financing.

While Council Members welcomed the report, many highlighted the need for further operational efficiency of the fund, thereby increasing the speed across the whole GEF project cycle. Several Members congratulated the GEF Secretariat on the improvement of disaggregated data in the report and the Geospatial Platform.

Several Members raised questions and indicated concerns about the indicators on co-financing, with some suggesting it might be time to revise the policy on co-financing. Caldicott highlighted that establishing credible co-financing and knowing where co-financing is coming from, for instance other public sources or the private sector, is challenging. He expressed hope that an upcoming IEO evaluation on the topic will assist with this. One Member highlighted that co-financing needs to account for the special circumstances of small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), with another Member pointing to the difficulties in mobilizing co-financing in these countries. Caldicott responded that he was pleased to see that the aggregate co-financing in LDCs is higher than in other GEF regions.



María Antonella Parodi, Council Member, Argentina

Several Members expressed concern about delays in MTRs and terminal evaluations. Many Members also noted the value of the MTRs. Caldicott clarified that this report covers the results reported in MTRs and terminal evaluations already submitted, so consequently, GEF-8 projects are not yet reflected. He said once GEF-8 data becomes available, it will be analyzed in a future monitoring report comparing it to GEF-8 targets.

Several Members asked for greater clarity about whether first disbursements are significant. Caldicott responded that the Secretariat is looking into improving reporting on this subject, noting that generally the Secretariat considers 10% of project funds a significant initial disbursement.

Several Members highlighted the need to have a more explicit discussion on gender equality, with one requesting it be included as a specific agenda item at future GEF Council meetings.

The GEF Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Network noted the lack of analysis of CSO engagement in GEF work in the report. Noting that the GEF Engagement Policy called for annual reporting on the issue, he asked why no such report is being offered to the Council. Caldicott replied that engagement is reported via the GEF Corporate Scorecard.

One Member requested to include further elaboration of the reasons behind the negative trends presented in the report and recommendations to reverse them.

On capacity building, one Member highlighted the huge deficit in national capacity to prepare projects, characterizing it as problematic and resulting in resources being returned to the GEF.

In response to questions on the Small Grant Programme, Caldicott highlighted that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Conservation International have been selected as additional implementing agencies, along with UNDP.

Decision: In its Decision 1/2024, the Council welcomes the report and continued implementation of the GEF-8 RMF.

Work Program for GEF Trust Fund

On Monday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, presented on the “Work Program for GEF Trust Fund” ([GEF/C.66/04](#)), noting that the proposed third GEF-8 Work Program comprises 45 projects and programs for an amount of USD 840 million, representing nearly 18% of the total GEF-8 funds. He highlighted that USD 420.7 million will be allocated to biodiversity, USD 113.4 million to climate change, USD 139 million to land degradation, USD 100.1 million to international waters, and USD 62.4 million to chemicals and waste, as well as USD 80.6 million for non-grant instruments. Gascon said the program covers 77 recipient countries, including 22 LDCs and 14 SIDS. He stressed that each dollar the GEF provides is expected to be matched by USD 8.9 in co-financing from other sources, amounting to a total of USD 7.53 billion.

Noting that the FAO and UNDP have the highest amounts programmed, with 28% and 23% of the resources respectively, Gascon stressed that the efforts to reduce concentration among implementing Agencies is moving in the right direction.



Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat

He detailed the four Integrated Programs (IPs), noting their alignment with global aspirations for transformative change in key systems: Clean and Healthy Ocean, Food Systems, Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development, and Wildlife Conservation for Development.

Most Council Members supported the Work Program, as well as the different proposed activities. Several Members stressed the importance of continuing to work on reducing the concentration of implementing Agencies, with Gascon reminding Members that, in the end, it remains a country-driven decision. Many Members supported a proposal by one Member to look at Agency concentration in the GEF-8 MTR.

Many Members underlined the Work Program's geographic balance, the importance of the gender inclusion approach, and policy coherence.

While welcoming the level of co-financing expected in this Work Program, several Members expressed hope to increase private sector involvement in future co-financing and lessen reliance on co-financing from governments and Agencies.

Several Members expressed concern about the low levels allocated to the chemicals and waste focal area. Gascon said, considering project proposals in the pipeline, he expects the focal area to "catch up" by the end of 2024.

Responding to the section in the Work Program discussing policy coherence, one Member suggested including in future



Gabriela Blatter, Council Member, Switzerland

monitoring reports a section on the issue. The Secretariat responded that it is considered doing a "deep dive" on the issue in the next monitoring report. He noted that the IEO is currently analyzing policy coherence in the existing GEF portfolio, and this analysis will help inform any future report.

Responding to Member concerns about not having more SIDS in the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP, Gascon explained that only six SIDS had submitted initial expressions of interest, and two of these proposals did not meet quality review requirements. He suggested it was likely more SIDS will apply to join the IP as they see results in the initial four SIDS participants.

Responding to one Member's question about oversubscription to the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP (14 countries) and under-subscription of the Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development IP (5 countries), Gascon explained that the Work Program reflects actual initial demand from countries instead of early estimates of interest. He expressed the opinion that more countries will join the transport IP in coming Work Programs.

Regarding questions about support in the Work Program for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) targets, Gascon said the GEF-8 Work Programs have now addressed all targets, and the Secretariat is already contemplating how to continue supporting the targets in the GEF-9 replenishment.

A Member requested that the written records of the Council meeting reflect that considering its policies related to development projects, his country opposes a Council decision that supports Work Program projects proposed in China, Turkmenistan, Uganda, and Venezuela.

Decision: In its Decision 2/2024, the Council approves the Work Program comprising 45 projects and programs, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and additional comments that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 6 March 2024.

Total resources approved in this Work Program amounts to USD 916.1 million, including GEF project financing and Agency fees. The Work Program comprises the following Project Identification Forms (PIFs) and Program Framework Documents (PFDs): six with a global focus; eight with a regional focus; and 32 with a national focus.

With respect to the PIFs and PFDs approved as part of the Work Program, the Council finds that each of these PIFs and PFDs (i) is, or would be, consistent with the Instrument and GEF policies and procedures, and (ii) 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 since PIF approval, the final project document shall be posted on the web for Council review for four weeks prior to CEO endorsement.

Streamlining the GEF Project Cycle

On Monday, Co-Chair Rodríguez introduced this agenda item. Caldicott presented on “Streamlining the GEF Project Cycle” ([GEF/C.66/08/Rev.01](#)), noting a revised version was shared on February 1. He said this resulted in deferring the decision to increase the geographic scope of the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund and China’s Foreign Economic Cooperation Office subject to more analysis. Several Members supported the increase in scope in principle.

Caldicott referenced the GEF-8 decision to explore areas for streamlining, with the objective of reducing transaction costs and faster access to funds, and noted that work has started on this, but more work is required. He outlined the proposal to increase the cap on mid-sized projects (MSPs) from USD 2 to 5 million, to which many Members expressed support.

The GEF CSO Network supported the increase in the cap, highlighting that unless overall funds are increased, it will mean fewer projects per country and as such, could mean greater dominance of a few implementing Agencies.

Several Members asked about the rationale for the decision to set the new cap at USD 5 million, to which Caldicott answered that they looked at, *inter alia*: the impact of inflation, harmonization with the GBFF, average project sizes in GEF-7, and previous consultations with multilateral development banks (MDBs).

Some Members queried if these USD 5 million projects will include a MTR, suggesting it should be mandatory. One Member requested the Secretariat to analyze the issue and develop proposals. Caldicott clarified that MSPs currently conduct MTRs on a voluntary basis.

One Member, supported by many others, suggested establishing an *ad hoc* working group of Council Members to work closely with the Secretariat to analyze and suggest further streamlining measures before the next Council. UNEP and FAO proposed that GEF Agencies also be a part of this working group. Rodríguez noted that it was not necessary to alter the proposed decision text to establish this working group, as there is precedence to do so by including the suggestion in the meeting highlights.



Ben Green, Council Member, UK



Laura Camila Bermúdez, Council Member, Colombia

Rodríguez proposed, and Council Members agreed, to withhold this agenda item decision to give the Secretariat time to amend the proposed policy and improve the draft decision addressing the MTR issue and other Member suggestions.

On Wednesday, Council Secretary William Ehlers introduced the updated decision, and Council Members adopted it.

Decision: In its Decision 3/2024, the Council, having considered document GEF/C.66/08/Rev.03, approves:

- an increase in the cap for MSPs from USD 2 million to USD 5 million;
- amendments to the Project Cycle Policy outlined in Section II of GEF/C.66/08/Rev.03; and
- requiring MTRs for projects above USD 2 million.

The Council requests the Secretariat, in consultation with Agencies, to elaborate additional measures for streamlining as outlined in Annex 1 of GEF/C.66/08/Rev.03, for consideration by Council at its 67th meeting, as appropriate.

UNDP - 2023 Third Party Review of Minimum Fiduciary Standards

On Monday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Caldicott introduced “UNDP: 2023 Third Party Review of Minimum Fiduciary Standards” ([GEF/C.66/11](#)), explaining it presents the final report of the independent Third-Party Review of compliance by UNDP with the GEF Policy on Minimum Fiduciary Standards for 2023. John Fitzsimon, the third-party reviewer, explained that the Review finds that UNDP has addressed the gaps identified in the previous self-assessments and independent reviews, concurs with UNDP’s June 2023 self-assessment, and reconfirms areas where the 2021 and 2022 third-party reviews had previously confirmed compliance. Caldicott said the Secretariat supports the conclusion that additional measures in place for UNDP are no longer required.

Members expressed support for the recommendation to lift the additional measures, but several called for continued monitoring of UNDP’s separation of implementing and executing agency roles.

Decision: In its Decision 4/2024, the Council:

- notes with appreciation the collaboration of UNDP in the self-assessment and review process;
- notes the findings of the report confirming the UNDP self-assessment and full compliance with GEF Minimum Fiduciary Standards; and
- notes that the additional requirements related to UNDP described in Decision 26/2021, to be discontinued in December 2023, are no longer needed at this time.

Tracking and Measuring Socioeconomic Co-benefits from GEF Investments

On Monday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Caldicott introduced the document “Tracking and Measuring the Socio-economic Co-benefits of GEF Investments” ([GEF/C.66/12](#)), which he said responds to a Council request. He explained the document suggests:

- identifying a small number of standard indicators that would provide an aggregate view of the GEF’s contribution to socioeconomic co-benefits;
- assessing the feasibility of relying on alternative measurement practices in the context of the GEF portfolio or specific projects or programs, such as geospatial analyses linked to population data;
- better capturing and monitoring the results of GEF financing for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), civil society, and youth, through the development of standard indicators or custom ones specific to projects and programs;
- leveraging the value of qualitative and narrative reporting to better demonstrate the value of context-specific socioeconomic results; and
- taking steps to ensure an appropriate consideration of socioeconomic co-benefits during the design stage.

Council Members welcomed the document and emphasized the importance of measuring socioeconomic co-benefits. Several Members pointed to the need for the new indicators not to be too onerous and for them to be harmonized with other fund indicators to reduce additional reporting burdens. Several Members noted the need for the indicators to be designed so they can be adjusted to national circumstances. One Member highlighted the need for both quantitative and qualitative methods emphasizing the value of narrative reporting.



Annette Windmeisser, Council Member, Germany



Faizal Parish, Global Environment Centre, Malaysia, and Chair, GEF CSO Network

A few Members highlighted that only a third of assessed projects had socioeconomic indicators and that they wanted to see this number increase. They also asked for these indicators to be included in the RMF for GEF-9.

The GEF CSO Network emphasized that socioeconomic results should be the main project objectives and not just co-benefits and urged adoption of similar targets for the GBFF to directly support actions by IPLCs in the focal areas of the GEF on a country basis.

Decision: In its Decision 5/2024, the Council endorses the outlined approach in GEF/C.66/12 and requests the GEF Secretariat to proceed with the proposed next steps.

Identifying a Risk Appetite for GEF Investments

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Caldicott introduced the document “GEF Risk Appetite” ([GEF/C.66/13](#)), explaining that it was developed in collaboration with STAP and a working group of interested Council Members, and offers a draft Statement articulating the risk appetite for the whole GEF portfolio along three risk dimensions: context, innovation and execution. He noted that the Statement sets a high-risk appetite in the context dimension, substantial risk in the innovation dimension, and moderate risk for execution, with the latter largely reflecting GEF’s zero tolerance for fraud.

Blake Ratner, STAP, added that the paper also presents a framework of measures to assess and manage risk and monitor and review the Risk Appetite Statement. He suggested that this framework allows for a shared understanding of risks and a more nuanced discussion of the learning process from challenges encountered in projects.

Council Members generally welcomed the proposed Risk Appetite Statement, with many stressing the importance of high-risk appetite for the innovation dimension. Some Members asked to include a definition of what is considered “innovation.”

Some Members asked how the Statement would translate operationally, with a few suggesting regular reports to Council on its implementation.

Several Members also raised the upcoming IEO evaluation on risk appetite, wondering whether adoption of the Statement



André Wehrli, Alternate Council Member, Switzerland

should await the IEO report or be revised in light of IEO findings. One Member suggested that the Statement should be a “living document” subject to ongoing review and revision.

One Member asked the IEO to include a chapter on risk appetite in its next comprehensive evaluation. Another inquired whether a risk appetite statement is being considered for the LDCF and SCCF.

Caldicott responded that there had been some discussion in the working group about defining “innovation,” although the paper does not treat it fully. He explained the Secretariat views it as comprising not just technological change, but also such innovations as new business and financial models. He added that the Secretariat plans to provide guidance on what is innovation in project design and implementation, with the understanding that this will be refined over time in light of implementation experience.

As for operational implementation, Caldicott explained that PIF templates will be updated to include more discussion of risk, and the Secretariat plans some knowledge management and learning activities, and regular monitoring.

On the status of the Statement as a “living document,” he said the Secretariat views it as such and believes it should be adopted now, providing it will be revised in light of IEO findings, as appropriate.

Finally, Caldicott explained that the Risk Appetite Statement and Framework included the LDCF and SCCF, as the proposed statement applies to the GEF generally.

Decision: In its Decision 6/2024, the Council approves the Risk Appetite Statement and Framework, including follow-up actions for implementation.

Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: GEF Support to Drylands Countries and Management Response

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. IEO Director Juha Uitto introduced the “Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: GEF Support to Drylands Countries” prepared by the IEO ([GEF/E/C.66/01](#)). He said the report offered four recommendations:

- as the GEF prepares to design and implement an official policy coherence framework for GEF-8, the Secretariat should

ensure that guidance to enhance policy coherence through GEF operations includes a focus on subnational and local levels;

- the GEF Secretariat and Agencies should ensure that increased attention is devoted to the inclusion of land tenure security and conflict resolution for resource management within program and project designs and the underlying theories of change;
- the GEF Secretariat and Agencies should ensure that equal consideration is given in project and program design to both fostering synergies and mitigating trade-offs between environment and socioeconomic development, with due attention to distributional impacts; and
- the GEF Secretariat should encourage Agencies to provide project-level monitoring data showing associated biophysical changes for relevant area-based core indicators.

Delivering management’s response to the report ([GEF/C.66/14](#)), Ulrich Apel, GEF Secretariat, said the Secretariat agrees with the evaluation analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Specifically addressing the IEO recommendation, he noted that the Secretariat:

- agrees with the first recommendation, with the understanding that its formal agenda on policy coherence has only recently begun in October 2023. The initial focus is therefore intended to be at the national level, and based on those learnings the GEF Secretariat will work on how best to address governance at different levels of spatial scale;
- agrees with the second and fourth recommendations;
- agrees with the third recommendation, with the understanding that the mandate of the GEF is to generate GEB; therefore, the consideration of trade-offs will need to balance trade-offs in a way that maximizes environmental outcomes.

Council Members expressed appreciation of the IEO evaluation and support for management’s response. Some Members suggested that the GEF develop a drylands strategy, while others suggested addressing how to strike the right balance between GEB and socioeconomic benefits. Several Members urged the IEO to offer an additional recommendation addressing water security. One Member suggested more attention in GEF work on drylands on regional approaches and transboundary impacts.



Juha Uitto, Director, GEF IEO



Ulrich Apel, GEF Secretariat

Uitto responded that the IEO will discuss with the Secretariat the development of language on addressing the balance between GEB and socioeconomic benefits, as well as how to address the issue of water security.

Apel said the Secretariat will consider a drylands strategy as part of the GEF-9 programming. He also indicated that the Secretariat plans to give greater attention to regional approaches and transboundary impacts in GEF-9.

Decision: In its Decision 7/2024, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF and Management Response

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Uitto introduced the “Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF” ([GEF/E/C.66/02](#)). He highlighted *inter alia* that:

- projects that apply a community-based approach (CBA) have a higher performance rating than other GEF projects;
- funding for CBA has increased over time, but still a limited number of projects fully demonstrate good practice;
- the GEF project cycle presents challenges for implementing CBA projects; and
- lack of indicators limits the ability for the GEF to adaptively manage CBA projects.

Uitto outlined the three recommendations in the evaluation:

- ensuring that co-design of projects with communities is possible under the suite of GEF policies and guidelines;
- providing more clarity and guidance on when and how CBAs can be used in GEF projects; and
- developing an approach for tracking devolved responsibility and/or financial resources to the local level.

Rodríguez shared his own experiences with CBA, saying they are the most cost-effective investment to protect nature, noting is not just through hiring scientists and experts that objectives can be achieved, and that CBA ensures long-term project sustainability.

Gabriella Richardson Temm, GEF Secretariat, presented the GEF management response ([GEF/C.66/15](#)). She noted this evaluation is timely given the current early programming



Gabriella Richardson Temm, GEF Secretariat

focus of GEF-9 and that the Secretariat broadly agrees with the recommendations on project co-design with communities and on tracking, and partially agrees with the recommendation on providing further clarity and guidance. On the latter, Richardson Temm said the Secretariat will seek further advice from STAP on opportunities to further promote the use of CBA in GEF projects and programs, as appropriate, and may prepare a best practice document for the GEF-9 thematic discussions.

Members welcomed and supported the evaluation and the management response, with many underscoring the importance of CBA.

The GEF CSO Network, with interest from one Member and Uitto, encouraged CBA’s expansion beyond natural resource management to any project that directly affects communities or could benefit from their inclusion.

Several Members highlighted the tension between priorities to reduce the time to start the project implementation, and that CBA requires more time and resources in the initial project stages. Uitto responded that there might be trade-offs in time, but time lost in the beginning may be gained back in the end as it improves the sustainability of projects.

Decision: In its Decision 8/2024, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Learning from Challenges in GEF Projects and Management Response

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Geeta Batra, IEO, introduced the document “Learning from Challenges in GEF Projects” ([GEF/E/C.66/03/Rev.1](#)). Stressing the goal was extracting insights from projects that failed to achieve their objectives, she noted among the lessons: something can be learned from even the most disappointing project; effective management can generate big wins; and modest but thoughtful adaptive management can consistently deliver small wins.

Batra presented eight proposed principles on:

- active engagement with high priority but deeply complex environmental projects over time and through experimentation;
- establishment of scope conditions;



Geeta Batra, IEO

- benchmarking realistic expectations and time frames;
- comprehensive contextual analysis to inform design, scaling, and replication decisions for complex interventions;
- monitoring more as a learning tool than compliance instrument;
- recognition that ambition and innovation are associated with a heightened likelihood of major breakthroughs - and serious disappointments;
- ensure the robustness of the authorizing environment and the sustained support of key local leaders; and
- development of credible measures.

She concluded with the report's recommendation of reflecting and applying the principles relevant to the GEF in the detailed action plans for knowledge and learning.

Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, introduced the management response ([GEF/C.66/16](#)). He noted the Secretariat agrees with the recommendation and will track progress on its implementation.

Most Members thanked the IEO for the proposed principles, and many emphasized links with the MTRs and the GEF Knowledge Management and Learning Strategy.

Decision: In its Decision 9/2024, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Evaluation of GEF Support to Climate Information and Early Warning Systems and Management Response

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Uitto introduced the IEO document "Evaluation of GEF Support to Climate Information and Early Warning Systems (CIEWS)" ([GEF/E/C.66/04](#)). Noting CIEWS as crucial in reducing climate change vulnerability and enhancing resilience, he emphasized it as one of the priority themes in the LDCF and SCCF strategy for 2022–2026.

Uitto presented the three report recommendations to the GEF:

- shift projects' focus from solely providing early warning information to fostering early actions during disaster events;
- continue aligning GEF Secretariat, STAP, and GEF Agencies indicators with established good practices; and
- continue to explore strategies to enhance the financial sustainability of CIEWS components.

Aloke Barnwal, GEF Secretariat, introduced the management response ([GEF/C.66/17](#)), noting the Secretariat's partial agreement on all three.

Many Council Members welcomed the evaluation and supported the key findings. A Member queried the rationale for partial support by the Secretariat, with other Members inviting the Secretariat to revise the management response. The GEF CSO Network noted the recommendations were too broad or general to address specific needs.

Barnwal responded that not all elements on the recommendations are directly related to the Trust Fund focal areas. GEF Secretariat, noting this is the first time that the management response is partial agreement, he reassured Council Members that even with a partial agreement, the recommendations will be considered, valued, and incorporated comprehensively.

Decision: In its Decision 10/2024, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Report of the Chairperson of the STAP

On Wednesday, Badgie Dawda, The Gambia, the elected Council Co-Chair for 2024, opened this agenda item. Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair, presented the "Report of the Chairperson of the STAP" ([GEF/STAP/C.66/Inf.01](#)). Regarding recent science, she highlighted findings on tipping points, climate impacts and justice, climate change-fueled droughts and flooding, rising hurricane wind scales, loss of sea ice, and the use of bioacoustics and artificial intelligence for forest monitoring.

Bierbaum described recent STAP activities and reports, including a STAP Science Day held at the 7th GEF Assembly in August 2023. She outlined STAP recommendations to the GEF Secretariat and areas identified for future work resulting from reports on:

- agrivoltaics;
- blended finance;
- alternative livelihoods;
- environmental security;
- citizen science, and
- ecosystem-based approaches.



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Council Co-Chairperson, and elected Co-Chair Badgie Dawda, The Gambia



Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair

Bierbaum summarized a STAP analysis of climate adaptation in GEF projects, saying nearly 40% of the 24 projects examined delivered adaptation benefits, with more than half having the potential to deliver new or additional adaptation benefits.

She highlighted STAP future work reviewing “emerging signals and trends” and their relevance for the GEF in terms of societal changes, economic and financial shifts, and science and technological advances. Bierbaum also mentioned STAP’s intention to convene scientists to discuss possible inputs to the GEF-9 replenishment strategy, including which indicators to use for GEF-9.

Lastly, Bierbaum offered STAP observations on the newly-adopted GEF Work Program, noting:

- noticeably shorter PIFs;
- clearer and more concise project rationales and descriptions;
- all proposals included a theory of change, although some needed better and more explicit assumptions; and
- signs of policy coherence, but with only limited assessment of where gaps and contradictory policies exist.

Council Members welcomed the report, and STAP’s Chair stated the intention to follow up with further work on blended finance and environmental security. Some Members indicated strong interest in the reports and recommendations on agrivoltaics and citizen science. A Member expressed interest in following up on the analysis on adaptation. Noting the strong presence of youth and Indigenous Peoples at the STAP Science Day, one Member stressed the importance of continued STAP engagement with both groups.

Bierbaum responded that:

- STAP, the Secretariat, and the IEO are all working hard to engage with youth and will continue to do so;
- STAP is already thinking about how to enhance coherence regarding indicators of co-benefits;
- STAP recognizes the importance of further work on blended finance, especially as the GEF works more on nature-based solutions; and
- STAP believes it is important taking a circular economy approach to agrivoltaics to avoid a waste problem from solar panels.

Gap Analysis of GEF Funded Activity and Engagement in Fragility, Conflict, and Violence-affected States (FCS)

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat, introduced “Gap Analysis of GEF Funded Activity and Engagement in Fragility, Conflict, and Violence-affected States (FCS)” ([GEF/C.66/09](#)). He noted that this topic has been in the domain of the Council for some time. He highlighted that 18 of the 25 top countries vulnerable to climate change are also affected by fragility and that 7.4% of the GEF portfolio is allocated to countries in situations of conflict and nearly 6% in areas of fragility. On next steps, Caldicott said the Secretariat will continue to do two things: develop voluntary guidance for GEF projects in FCS, and share lessons learned and explore opportunities to enable such exchanges.

The GEF CSO Network urged the GEF to channel resources through CSOs in FCS. One Member underscored the need to simplify fiduciary manuals and documentation for agencies and stakeholders working in FCS. Another Member shared that they see this issue as falling within the remit of the GEF Agencies; as such she noted that it is important to think carefully about the role the GEF should take.

Regarding a Council Member question on whether there were requests from Agencies on further guidance, Caldicott answered that there had been requests from some Agencies, but others already have detailed and comprehensive guidance. He observed there is scope to help level the playing field across Agencies.

A few Members requested the Council include a decision to move the guidance development work forward. Co-Chair Rodríguez supported this proposal and said that the Secretariat would work on text to be considered by the Council on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, Council Secretary Ehlers presented the draft decision. A couple of Members proposed including a reference to the harmonization across funds. The Council accepted the decision, as amended.

Decision: In its Decision 11/2024, the Council, having considered the gap analysis, and taking into account ongoing efforts to enhance coordination and harmonization across the climate and environmental funds, requests the GEF Secretariat to proceed with the proposed actions.



Barbara Curran, Council Member, Canada

Gap Analysis of GEF Policies and Key Social Inclusion Issues

On Tuesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Gabriella Richardson Temm, GEF Secretariat, introduced the “Gap Analysis of GEF Policies and Key Social Inclusion Issues” ([GEF/C.66/10](#)). She noted the paper identified as potential areas for further work:

- using the term ‘non-discrimination’ consistently across the three GEF Policies, to better capture sexual orientation and gender identity;
- exploring options to better communicate, visualize, and reflect GEF policy requirements on issues related to persons with disabilities and child protection; and
- continuing work and activities to expand engagement with youth groups and constituencies of the MEAs, among others.

Richardson Temm highlighted that the analysis reconfirmed that GEF Policies already include provisions that promote social inclusion and that the GEF policies are contemporary in formulation and align with relevant inclusion-oriented global strategies.

A Council Member proposed, and many supported, to have a decision under this agenda item addressing which policies will be revised and when.

The GEF CSO Network welcomed the reference to the need for a renewed effort to enhance the engagement of non-state actors, including increasing financing to CSOs, and along with many Council Members, applauded the reference to youth as effective change makers. The Climate Investment Fund expressed willingness to share its experience engaging with youth.

Richardson Temm highlighted as a priority to accelerate engagement with youth and the connection with the different conventions the GEF serves. On next steps, she mentioned the creation of a partnership division within the Secretariat focused on gender, youth, Indigenous Peoples and civil society, and the consideration of a youth engagement strategy.

Co-Chair Rodríguez proposed, and Members agreed, to consider a draft decision on this agenda item on Wednesday. On Wednesday, Council Secretary Ehlers presented the draft decision. A Council Member proposed a minor amendment. A few other Members proposed including a reference to the harmonization across funds. The Council accepted the decision, as amended.

Decision: In its Decision 12/2024, the Council requests the Secretariat to present to the 67th Council for decision a timetable outlining when the policies concerning highlighted areas will be modified. The proposed modifications will take into account ongoing efforts to enhance coordination and harmonization across the climate and environmental funds.

Relations with Conventions and Other International Institutions

On Wednesday, Co-Chair Dawda opened this agenda item by noting the Secretariat report “Relations with the Conventions and Other International Institutions” ([GEF/C.66/05](#)) and inviting executives from MEAs to address the Council.



Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC

Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC, said that COP 28 achieved a historic agreement on the operationalization of funding of loss and damage. He announced that COP 29 will be a “finance COP” focusing on increasing mobilization and reforming the multilateral finance architecture.

Miguel de Serpa Soares, UN Legal Counsel, outlined the historic nature of the BBJN Agreement and urged its prompt entry into force. He announced that 85 states and the European Union (EU) have already signed, with Palau being the first to ratify the instrument. He stressed the importance of GEF support for enabling activities and swift ratifications.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, emphasized outcomes and decisions from the 11th Stockholm Convention COP of 2023, especially highlighting future work on sustainable financing and the phaseout of polychlorinated biphenyls. He stressed the linkages and co-benefits between tackling climate change and pollution.

Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, underscored the remarkable outcomes of COP 5 of 2023. She highlighted that the second review of the financial mechanism of the Convention viewed the GEF in a very positive light, although stating that the GEF IPs have not been serving the Convention so far, noting there is potential to do so.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD, said the focus of COP 16 will be on finance and to demonstrate momentum towards the goals and targets of the GBF. He outlined



Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury



Andrea Meza Murillo, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD

the work of the advisory committee on resource mobilization, which includes efforts to assess if there is a need for an additional financial instrument for the GBF or if the GBFF is sufficient.

Andrea Meza Murillo, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD, shared outcomes of the recent Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention session, stressing country reports on the land degradation neutrality goal. She noted with worry an increase in degraded land. Meza Murillo emphasized work on empowering women in land restoration and that the host of COP 16, Saudi Arabia, wants to make the conference a turning point for the land and drought agenda.

Council Members welcomed the reports, highlighting the relevance of synergies, collaboration, intersectoral, and multi-actor work for efficiently achieving the different conventions' targets and goals. Several Members encouraged the Secretariat to keep following the conventions and the work on drought, plastic treaty negotiations, and digital sequence information. The GEF CSO Network proposed to the GEF Secretariat to prepare joint side events for the upcoming COPs of CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD.

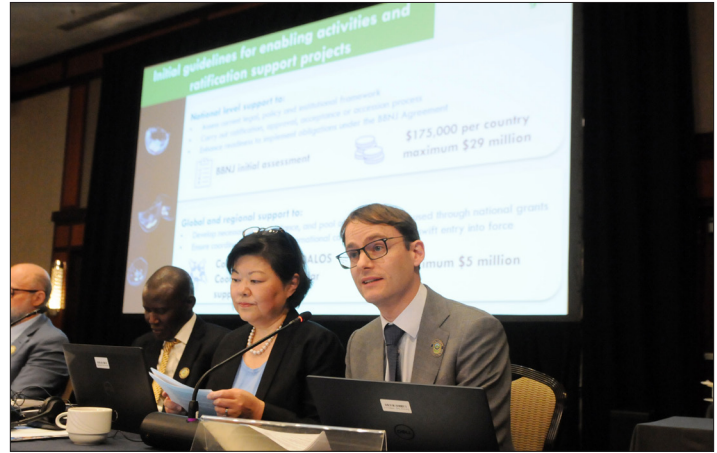
Some Members asked for more details on the policy and procedures for harmonization, the contribution of IPs to achieve targets on different MEAs, and the country requests for funds for chemical and waste projects.

Cooper noted synergies in using limited resources as key to simultaneously achieve targets of different conventions. Payet noted that more countries will soon request access to the GEF chemical and waste focal area. Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, noted the ongoing Secretariat analysis of policies and procedures for harmonization, which should have a concrete working plan by midyear.

Decision: In its Decision 13/2024, the Council welcomed the report (GEF/C.66/05) and requested the GEF network to continue to work with recipient countries to reflect the guidance and national priorities in their GEF programming and activities.

Initial Guidelines for Enabling Activities and BBNJ Ratification Support Project

Aoki briefed Council Members on the status of the BBNJ Agreement and its provisions relevant to the GEF. Jurgis



Chizuru Aoki and Jurgis Sapijanskas, GEF Secretariat

Sapijanskas, GEF Secretariat, introduced “Initial Guidelines for Enabling Activities and Ratification Support Projects for the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)” (GEF/C.66/07). He explained that under the proposed guidelines, the GEF will:

- provide up to USD 175,000 per country for national support, where countries can choose from a menu of options for the type of support they need; and
- allocate up to USD 5 million for global and regional support efforts.

Council Members emphasized the importance of the BBNJ Agreement and the need for its swift ratification and implementation. They welcomed the proposed guidelines. Several Members also said that they looked forward to BBNJ-related discussions during the GEF-9 replenishment. The GEF CSO Network applauded the guidelines, and urged awareness, outreach, and capacity development elements to be included in all grants. One Member called for projects to support conservation and sustainable use programs by IPLCs. Another Member asked if extra technical support will be given to LDCs and SIDS. A third Member cautioned against setting too much emphasis in support projects on marine protected areas (MPAs).

Aoki agreed on the need for prompt implementation of the Agreement and reported that the Secretariat is already in discussions with GEF Agencies that can assist in enabling projects. She emphasized the GEF will offer a menu of support options for governments to choose from based on their own assessment of gaps and needs, stressing that the Secretariat will not be pushing for one option, such as MPAs, over others. Sapijanskas said outreach will be built into all projects. He also noted that GEF-9 negotiations will be where donors will consider how to support BBNJ beyond enabling activities.

Decision: In its Decision 14/2024, the Council approves the initial guidelines and requests the GEF Secretariat to implement them for the funding of ratification support and implementation readiness activities for the BBNJ Agreement.

Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the GEF Council

On Wednesday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. William Ehlers, Council Secretary, introduced “Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the GEF Council” ([GEF/C.66/06](#)). He said the Rules of Procedure have long needed updating, with the last update in 2006. Ehlers outlined the decisions and work that had been done both to amend the GEF instrument and its Rules of Procedure. He noted that the changes were an adjustment, with one of the biggest changes being that Co-Chairs are elected for a full year instead of for only one Council meeting.

The decision was adopted after minor edits to take into account a Member’s suggestions on the length of time Agencies are given to comment on information documents with policy implications. Ehlers provided clarifications surrounding the difference between implementing and accredited agencies, and protections against potential conflict of interest.

Decision: In its Decision 15/2024, the Council updated Rules of Procedure in line with changes outlined in Annex II of document GEF/C.66/06/Rev.01, thereby superseding all previous versions of the Rules of Procedure for the GEF Council.

Report of the Selection and Review Committee (SRC)

This agenda item was discussed on Wednesday by Council Members and Alternates behind closed doors.

Decisions: In its Decision 16/2024, the Council takes note of the SRC’s recommendation to the Council to reappoint Carlos Manuel Rodríguez for a second terms as CEO, agrees to consult their constituencies and provide their views of the recommendation to the SRC by 31 March 2024.

In its Decision 17/2024, the Council agrees with the SRC’s recommendation to offer Geeta Batra the position of IEO Director.

Other Business

On Wednesday, Rita El Zaghoul, Director, [HAC for N&P](#), presented the Coalition’s objective and pillars to contribute to achieving GBF’s 30x30 target. Co-Chair Rodríguez encouraged countries to look at the HAC for N&P and the GEF as strong partners. He emphasized that the GEF has the resources to implement the GBF, particularly the 30x30 target.



Rita El Zaghoul, Director, HAC for N&P

Council Secretary Ehlers presented to the Council the proposed dates for the 69th and 70th Council meetings.

Decision: In its Decision 18/2024, the Council agreed to hold the 69th Council Meeting in hybrid format on 2-6 June 2025, in Washington DC, and the 70th meeting during the week of 15 December 2025, virtually.

Report of the 35th LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting

On Thursday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened the LDCF/SCCF Council meeting. He emphasized the importance of these two GEF adaptation funds to build resilience and adaptation in the world’s most vulnerable countries. Rodríguez expressed satisfaction with recent donor pledges at the UNFCCC COP 28 and the size of the new LDCF/SCCF Work Program, urging for more support for the SCCF innovation and technology transfer window.

In video remarks to the Council, UNFCCC LDC Group Chair Evans Davie Njewa expressed his appreciation for the recent increased donor support for LDCF, stressing the need for even more resources, since the needs of LDCs are much greater. “The international community needs to ensure both LDCF and SCCF are fully supported,” he said.

Co-Chair Dawda introduced the draft provisional agenda ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.35/01](#)), which Council Members adopted without amendment.

Work Program for the LDCF/SCCF

Co-Chair Dawda opened this agenda item. Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, introduced the “Work Program for the LDCF and SCCF” ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.35/03](#)). She explained it is among the largest Work Programs for the LDCF and SCCF to date, requesting a total of USD 203.40 million, including Agency fees, for 21 projects totaling 17 projects for the LDCF, two projects for the SCCF, and two multi-fund projects, covering 16 LDCs and eight non-LDC SIDS. Aoki highlighted that the Work Program includes one multi-country project and 20 national projects and highlighted that it is the first Work Program to include projects from the SCCF-A window devoted to SIDS, a new feature for GEF-8. She noted the high proportion of participation by MDBs and international financial institutions (IFIs) in the programming.



Chizuru Aoki and Fareeha Iqbal, GEF Secretariat



Ramson Karmushu, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), and **Viviana Figueroa**, Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG)

Fareeha Iqbal, GEF Secretariat, explained the subject focus of the projects, how they address the GEF-8 strategy, and how gender is integrated into the Work Program. She also noted that the expected results from this Work Program include over four million beneficiaries, 51% of them female, delivering adaptation benefits to 1.575 million hectares of land.

Council Members welcomed the proposed Work Program, with many expressing satisfaction about the interest in the SCCF-A window and the high participation of MDBs and IFIs. Noting that the distribution of Agencies for the LDCF projects is greater than the GEF Trust Fund portfolio, several Members asked if there were lessons learned that can be applied to the Trust Fund and to GBFF.

One Member asked about risk finance in the LDCF/SCCF Work Program and lamented that the LDCF project for Zambia did not have a theory of change and had not adequately consulted CSOs. A Member called for more private sector engagement in future LDCF/SCCF Work Programs, while another asked how best to increase private sector co-financing in LDCF projects.

One Member asked for a second risk assessment of a project involving Liberia and requested this meeting record to reflect that in accordance with his country's policies, it cannot join in the decision to approve projects in South Sudan.

The Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group called for all LDCF/SCCF projects to consider traditional knowledge and respect the rights of IPLCs while ensuring their full and effective participation.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 1/2024, the Council the LDCF/SCCF Council approves the Work Program comprising 21 projects totaling USD 203.4 million, involving 16 LDCs and eight non-LDC SIDS, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and additional comments that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 6 March 2024.

Total resources approved in this Work Program amount to USD 180.40 million from the LDCF and USD 23.00 million from the SCCF-A, both inclusive of GEF project financing and Agency fees. The Work Program comprises PIFs for 20 national projects and one SCCF-A project serving five SIDS.

With respect to the PIFs approved as part of the Work Program, the Council finds that each of these PIFs (i) is, or

would be, consistent with the Instrument and GEF policies and procedures, and (ii) 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 since PIF approval, the final project document shall be posted on the web for Council review for four weeks prior to CEO endorsement.

FY22 Annual Monitoring Review of the LDCF and SCCF

Co-Chair Dawda opened this agenda item. Aoki and Yuki Shiga, GEF Secretariat, introduced the document "FY22 Annual Monitoring Review of the LDCF and SCCF" ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.35/04](#)). Aoki explained the reason for considering the FY22 Annual Monitoring Review (AMR) is that the June 2023 Council meeting ran out of time, noting that the FY23 AMR will follow soon. She highlighted four key messages from the report:

- active SCCF and LDCF portfolios are progressing well;
- the SCCF portfolio demonstrated a high level of achievement;
- overall risk faced by the projects has improved; and
- the aftermath of COVID-19 is still being felt across the portfolio.

Shiga outlined that the LDCF supported 74 projects with a total of USD 447 million with USD 2.06 billion in co-financing, whereas the SCCF supported 20 projects with USD 99 million, with USD 590 million in co-financing.

The GEF CSO Network asked for more statistical information on gender and CSO engagement rather than just good practices, for example on the level of resources given directly to community groups.

A few Members asked for more information regarding the weakest performing projects, with one Member noting that one Agency had ratings well below others. Shiga responded that common factors include political instability, prolonged COVID-19 impacts, lack of government capacity and difficulty in recruiting capable staff. One Member asked for more information



Alf Friisø, Council Member, Norway



Emilie Wieben, Alternate Council Member, Denmark

regarding the reason for the decrease in beneficiaries in LDCF projects. Shiga responded that the number of beneficiaries fluctuates depending on the aims of the project but that the achievement ratio remains stable at around 80%.

Some Members provided requests for several aspects to be included in future reports. Aoki asked Members to inform the Secretariat which specifics will increase support for the funds and the Secretariat will aim to include them.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 2/2024, the Council welcomes the overall finding that the LDCF and SCCF portfolio under implementation in FY22 performed satisfactorily.

Progress Report on the LDCF and SCCF

On Thursday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Jason Spensley, GEF Secretariat, introduced the “Progress Report on the LDCF and SCCF” ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.35/05](#)). He highlighted the LDCF portfolio aims to reduce the vulnerability of an estimated 60.79 million people and the SCCF of an estimated 8.92 million people; and the sectors with the greatest focus among LDCF projects are agriculture followed by water, and within SCCF projects, water followed by agriculture.

Spensley noted progress on two complementary dedicated programs: the Communications and Visibility Enhancements Program, highlighting its communication strategy, introductory videos, and the leadership series; and the Outreach and Capacity Support Program, emphasizing four workshops held supporting 26 countries, and noting an upcoming workshop within this program to be held in March 2024, to be hosted by the Dominican Republic.

Aloke Barnwal, GEF Secretariat, pointed out the UNFCCC COP 28 outcomes related to LDCF and SCCF, highlighting the USD 179,6 million resulting from the Ministerial Dialogue and pledging session and the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program funding and implementation progress.

One Member underscored the role of these funds and workshops in promoting local livelihood development and resilient infrastructure. Co-Chair Dawda underlined the relevance of having capacity-building initiatives conducted in French.

Council Members welcomed the progress reported, applauded the Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program,

with one Member asking for details on youth engagement, and recognized the value of the introductory videos. A Member stressed the importance of overcoming language barriers. Another encouraged to undertake capacity-building workshops on a more regular basis. Barnwal responded that around 31% of the Challenge Initiative is directly or indirectly related to youth. Spensley noted that the videos are available in multiple languages.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 3/2024, the Council welcomes the report and takes note with appreciation of the progress made under the LDCF and the SCCF.

Report of the 1st GBFF Council

On Thursday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened the GBFF Council meeting. In opening remarks, he called the convening of the GBFF Council one of the proudest and most significant moments in his years as GEF CEO. He thanked the CBD COP for entrusting the GEF with the creation of the GBFF and expressed the Secretariat’s commitment to honoring that trust and delivering everything COP 15 requested of the GEF. He reviewed GEF efforts to create and ratify the GBFF and set its programming directions. While recognizing the pledges of Canada, Germany, Japan, and the UK that allowed the GBFF to begin operations, Rodríguez urged more pledges. He emphasized that contributions to this fund are not pledges to the GEF or GBFF – “they are pledges to the future of the planet, to the future of our children and grandchildren.”

Acting CBD Executive Secretary Cooper emphasized the GBFF sets ambitious targets that require immediate action if the targets are to be realized by 2030. He thanked the GEF for working hard to get the GBFF operational and the first GBFF Council meeting organized. Cooper welcomed existing pledges and urged for more. He underscored that the immediate task is to move from agreements to actions.

Via video, Hugo Morán Fernández, Secretary of State for the Environment, Spain, announced a contribution of EUR 10 million.

Co-Chair Dawda introduced the provisional agenda ([GEF/GBFF.01/01](#)), which was adopted without amendment.



David Cooper, Acting CBD Executive Secretary



Hugo Morán Fernández, Secretary of State for the Environment, Spain

Policy on Allocation of Resources for the GBFF

Co-Chair Dawda opened this agenda item. Jurgis Sapijanskas, GEF Secretariat, introduced the document “Policy on Allocation of Resources for the GBFF” ([GEF/GBFF.01/03/Rev.02](#)), explaining that the proposed policy codifies and operationalizes the resource allocation system agreed as part of the programming directions of the GBFF. He stated that the three main elements to operationalize the allocation system are:

- programming tranches triggered by capitalization thresholds on a rolling basis of USD 250 million;
- within programming tranches, all GBFF resources are allocated in a country-driven manner to projects through consecutive selection rounds open to all eligible countries; and
- three portfolio-level targets, namely: 36% + 3% ring-fenced for SIDS and LDCs for the first three years; a full 25% of resources programmed through IFIs that are GEF agencies; and an aspirational programming share of 20% by 2030 to support actions by IPLCs.

In response to a request from a Council Member, Praveen Prasad Desabatla, World Bank, as the GEF Trustee, presented the status of the contributions to the GBFF: Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain, and the UK have pledged USD 219.2 million, of which USD 54.6 million has been paid by Germany and Spain.



Abigail Demopulos, Council Member, US

Members noted the landmark nature of the first Council meeting of the GBFF and thanked the donors that have contributed, urging more to do so. One Member suggested CEO Rodríguez send out a formal request to all countries to contribute to the GBFF.

One Member said that the 36%+3% ring-fenced share for LDCs and SIDS is not intended to be a ceiling and exceeding it is desirable.

A few Members expressed concern about the low amounts of funding allocated to many countries, noting this would make it difficult to find an Agency willing to submit a proposal. One Member proposed that countries submitting applications through IFIs have no ceiling, making it less challenging to reach the 25% IFI target. As a response, several Members highlighted the need for regional clustering to achieve meaningful programming on a larger scale such as in the Amazon or SIDS.

On a question on private sector engagement, Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, shared that the Secretariat is reaching out to the private sector and philanthropists to contribute to the GBFF and that there is interest, although eventual pledges or co-financing will take time to materialize. The Nature Positive Initiative encouraged the private sector to engage.

Some Council Members, referring to the aspirational programming share of 20% allocated to support actions by IPLCs, stressed the importance of their participation and requested a written policy in this regard. Gascon responded they will develop and present a methodology on the IPLCs target to accompany the Work Program to be presented to the Council in June 2024. International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) stressed all projects should engage with IPLCs as partners and co-designers rather than just beneficiaries.

Several Members highlighted the Resource Allocation Policy alignment with the guidelines approved in the last GEF Council Meeting in June 2023. One Member asked whether, with the current level of disbursement, the first round of projects can be launched. Gascon responded that once the Council adopts the Policy, the resources will be made available as soon as possible.

Global Youth Biodiversity Network recommended an additional direct allocation of resources for women and youth. The CBD Women’s Caucus emphasized that the GBFF needs to be gender-responsive, community-led, context-bound and support the CBD Gender Action Plan.

Many Members suggested that the amount of the tranche be reduced from USD 250 to 200 million, with some suggesting an additional time trigger be added to the financial threshold to avoid money sitting in an account unused for long. Gascon responded that decreasing the tranche level will decrease the amount each country will have access to. He suggested instead to include a time trigger with the following amended text to the policy: “subsequent to the first tranche, a new programming tranche is opened every time an additional USD 250 million has been contributed to the GBFF, or 18 months since the tranche is open.”

Decision: In its Decision GBFF 1/2024, the Council approves the GBFF Resource Allocation Policy contained in an annex to document GEF/GBFF.01/03/Rev.02.



Henry Salazar, GEF Secretariat, presents on the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund Project Cycle Policy

GBFF Project Cycle Policy

On Friday, Co-Chair Dawda opened this agenda item. Henry Salazar, GEF Secretariat, introduced the “Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) Project Cycle Policy” (GEF/GBFF.01/04/Rev.02). He reviewed the guidance provided by CBD COP 15 and the programming directions adopted by the GEF Council in June 2023, noting in particular the Council instructions to require an advanced analysis of implementation arrangements prior to approval, and to modify the cancellation policy for a new milestone attached to the first disbursement.

Salazar reviewed how the proposed GBFF project cycle differs from the GEF Trust Fund project cycle, which the Secretariat believes will cut the time from PPG submission to first disbursement to 18 months.

He also outlined the proposed cancellation policy, which would allow for an extension to the nine-month period for submitting a full proposal for CEO endorsement by up to three months in cases of *force majeure*. He emphasized that if a project is unable to start implementation six months after CEO endorsement, an Agency may resubmit it for consideration within one year from the effective date of cancellation.

Council Members generally supported the proposed Policy and the steps and timelines contained therein. Some Members



Qongqong Hoohlo, Council Member, Lesotho

requested information from the Secretariat on possible weaknesses in the new project cycle, as such impacts on safeguards or increased workload. Several Members suggested allowing for virtual approval of projects and creating an online dashboard on the status of project proposals. Gascon responded that work was already being done on adding a GBFF component to the GEF portal.

One Member asked if the extension policy could be amended to allow for more reasons than *force majeure*. Gascon responded that the Secretariat felt that opening extensions to other reasons would result in many project delays.

One Member suggested that a fiduciary manual be developed for the GBFF.

Gascon said that the new set of processes being created for GBFF will need to be “road tested,” with any issues and challenges to be brought back to Council. He stressed that the proposed timelines are based on the GEF’s experience with, and analysis of, other funds, and the Secretariat feels the timelines are realistic.

Turning to the months ahead, Gascon explained that because of the decisions the first GBFF is taking, the first tranche of funding will open for proposals within the following weeks. He expressed the hope that countries and Agencies are already thinking about proposals to fast track, and explained the Secretariat will hold workshops and consultations in coming weeks to explain to countries and Agencies the policies and procedures agreed by the first Council.

Co-Chair Rodríguez said the work undertaken by the Secretariat to make the GBFF operational so quickly was really “rocket science” that had taken him a while to understand, but stressed it was based on deep experience and analysis and the Secretariat was learning how to communicate the GBFF project cycle to interested parties. He suggested that only GEF, with its deep expertise and institutional memory, could have created this Fund in the time allotted with streamlined features while ensuring quality and proper safeguards.

Rodríguez added that the GBFF’s streamlined project cycle should offer a learning opportunity for the GEF Partnership – the Secretariat, Agencies, and countries -- with lessons to be learned that might be applied to the project cycle in other funds.

Decision: In its Decision GBFF 2/2024, the Council approves the Policy, which will apply to all GBFF projects as of the effective date of its approval.

The Council delegates the authority to the GEF CEO to approve projects up to USD 5 million.

The Council agrees to require a MTR for all projects above USD 2 million.

FY24 and FY25 Administrative Budget and Business Plan for the GBFF

Co-Chair Dawda opened the item. Aoki introduced the document “FY24 and FY25 Administrative Budget and Business Plan for the GBFF” ([GEF/GBFF.01/05](#)). She presented the 14-point business plan with work elements that address intensified needs for the fund and staff engagements. Aoki



Laura Rajaniemi, Council Member, Finland

outlined the requested budget for FY24 and FY25 totaling USD 7,220,179 for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, Trustee, and the IEO.

Juha Uitto, IEO Director, outlined three key areas for IEO evaluation of the GBFF:

- strategy and design;
- thematic evaluations focused on the GBFF; and
- relevance, design, implementation, and early effectiveness of the Fund.

Several Members inquired into the timeline for recruitment to which Aoki responded that they aim to finalize the terms of reference for the positions as quickly as possible and shared that the World Bank standard for recruitment is 90 days, although subject to relocation needs.

Responding to how the level of staffing was assessed, Aoki shared that the Secretariat had done an internal review of expected work and compared them with the LDCF and SCCF.

IIFB urged the GBFF Secretariat to recruit dedicated staff with knowledge and experience related to IPLCs. One Member asked the Secretariat to have one SIDS point of contact with knowledge and understanding of their circumstances.

Several Members asked about the 11% administrative cost to the World Bank, to which Co-Chair Rodríguez responded that negotiations with the World Bank are ongoing, and that the actual administrative costs of 4-5% apply until further notice.



Sione 'Akau'ola, Alternate Council Member, Tonga

Many Members said they were pleased with the plan of the IEO. Uitto said the IEO plans to be fully responsive to the new Fund from 1 July 2024. With respect to a question on what the IEO can contribute by CBD COP 16, he shared that there is little to evaluate on the GBFF yet, but given the extensive evidence from past biodiversity evaluations there might be insights to share.

Responding to a Council Member inquiry about why meeting costs had been multiplied by four, Aoki said that this line item combines several items, including observers' attendance at the new proposed advisory bodies, and noted that these funds will be used only if necessary. After adoption one Member said for the record that they agreed to the initiation of the advisory bodies but not to have an explosion of costs.

Decision: In its Decision GBFF 3/2024, the Council approves the proposed FY24 and FY25 budget for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, the Trustee, and the IEO as follows:

- FY24: USD 1,665,857 (GEF Secretariat), USD 18,167 (STAP), and USD 462,000 (Trustee), and USD 0 (IEO), and
- FY25: USD 3,592,540 (GEF Secretariat), USD 384,614 (STAP), USD 404,000 (Trustee), and USD 693,000 (IEO).

Terms of Reference for Advisory Group(s) and Auxiliary Body

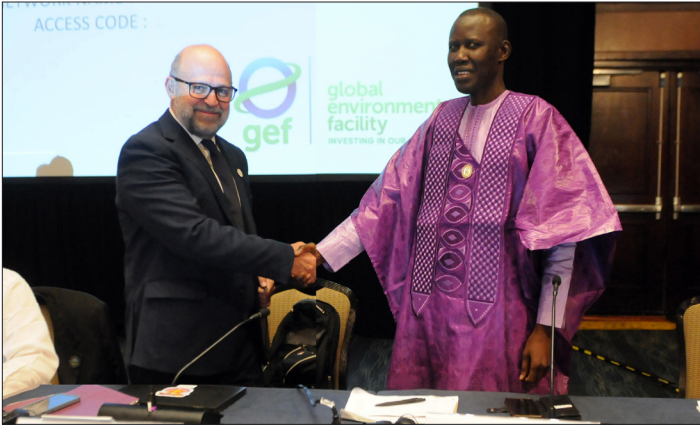
On Friday, Co-Chair Rodríguez opened this agenda item. Aoki presented the “Terms of Reference (ToR) for Advisory Group(s) and Auxiliary Body for the GBFF” ([GEF/GBFF.01/06](#)). Noting that the proposed ToR follows the elements agreed upon during the GEF 65th Council meeting regarding the establishment of the GBFF, she outlined the purpose, composition, establishment, organization, modalities, and schedule for the proposed Advisory Group and the Auxiliary Body for the GBFF.

During the ensuing exchange of views regarding the proposed ToR, Council Members discussed:

- whether the composition of the Advisory Group should be open to non-sovereign participants or only non-sovereign contributors to the Fund;
- whether to define a contribution threshold to enter the Advisory Group and the need to effectively establish the Advisory Group upon confirmation of the effectiveness of



William Ehlers, GEF Council Secretary



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Council Co-Chair, and Co-Chair **Badgie Dawda**, The Gambia

contribution agreements with three non-sovereign entities by the Trustee;

- whether to reduce or expand the number of experts per GEF constituency that include developing countries nominated to the Auxiliary Body, with some Members stressing that fewer members will allow better performance, while others advocated for better representation of constituencies with several countries or relevant biodiversity regions;
- whether to submit written advice and recommendation as a working document or an information document for the consideration of the Council;
- whether to hold the meetings of the group(s) and Body virtually;
- if only the Chair of the advisory group(s) and Co-Chair of the Auxiliary Body should be funded to attend the Council meetings in person to present the advice and recommendations;
- the need to establish a rotation mechanism among the experts' periods to enable work continuity and institutional knowledge transfer; and
- the need to ensure expert independence from government influence after nomination.

Noting a lack of consensus, Co-Chair Rodríguez said under the Council Rules of Procedure, the matter would be forwarded to the next Council meeting for further consideration.

Joint Summary of the Co-Chairs and Council Meeting Closing

Council Secretary Ehlers presented the joint summary of the Co-Chairs of the 66th Council meeting, 35th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council, and 1st meeting of the GBFF Council paragraph by paragraph. The summary was approved after Council agreed to include a Member's suggestion about a fiduciary manual for the GBFF in the meeting report. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at 3:00 pm EST.

Upcoming Meetings

2nd Multi-Stakeholder Webinar on the SIDS4: The objective of the webinar is to share updated information about the preparations for the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) as well as to create an opportunity for stakeholders to share their views and proposals on the zero draft outcome document in an informal dialogue with the co-chairs of the SIDS4 Preparatory Committee and other interested Member States. **date:** 15 February 2024 **location:** virtual **www:** sdgs.un.org/events/2ndstakeholderwebinarSIDS4

UNEA-6: The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the highest decision-making body on environmental matters in the UN system. The 6th UNEA will focus on the theme, 'Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.' **dates:** 26 February - 1 March 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** www.unep.org/environmentassembly/

Integrating Environmental and Socioeconomic Domains for Sustainability: The GEF IEO will host its fourth conference, aimed to promote intensive discussions focused on how evaluation practice has increasingly integrated the cross-pollination of environmental, socioeconomic, and policy domains. **dates:** 5-7 March 2024 **location:** Washington, DC, US **www:** www.gefio.org/events/conference-2024

Second Session of the SIDS4 Preparatory Committee: The second session of the Preparatory Committee for SIDS4 will discuss substantive preparations for the Conference, including



Group photo at the end of the 66th GEF Council Meeting

consideration of the draft outcome of the Conference. **dates:** 1-5 April 2024 **location:** New York City, US **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/sids2024/preparations#preparatory_committee_meetings

Plastic Pollution INC-4: The fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, to continue negotiations on the instrument. **dates:** 23-29 April 2024 **location:** Ottawa, Canada **www:** www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution/session-4

UNFF 19: The 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF 19) will be the policy portion of the biennial cycle focused on the themes: enhancing forest-based economic, social, and environmental benefits; increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and mobilizing financial resources and strengthening scientific and technical cooperation, promoting governance frameworks to advance implementation, and enhancing cooperation, coordination, and coherence for sustainable forest management. **dates:** 6-10 May 2024 **location:** New York City, US **www:** www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html

SBSTTA 26: The 26th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) will make preparations for CBD COP 16. **dates:** 13-18 May 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** www.cbd.int/meetings/

Fourth Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation of the CBD: The fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) of the CBD will review in advance of COP 16. **dates:** 21-29 May 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** www.cbd.int/sbstta

SIDS4: SIDS4 will bring together leaders to assess the ability of SIDS to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs and discuss a new program of action for SIDS. The Conference will convene under the theme ‘Charting the Course Toward Resilient Prosperity.’ **dates:** 27-30 May 2024 **location:** St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/sids2024

60th Sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies: The 60th sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) will prepare for the next Climate COP. **dates:** 3-13 June 2024 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** unfccc.int/sb60

67th Meeting of the GEF Council: The GEF will consider its work program and other matters related to its functioning as the financial mechanism for various MEAs. The Council will also meet as the 36th LCDF/SCCF Council and the 2nd GBFF Council. **dates:** 17-21 June 2024 **location:** Washington, DC **www:** www.thegef.org/events

Glossary

AMR	Annual Monitoring Review
BBNJ Agreement	International Legally Binding Instrument under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
CBA	Community-based approach
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CIEWS	Climate Information and Early Warning Systems
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	civil society organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCS	fragility, conflict, and violence-affected states
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GBFF	GBF Fund
GEB	Global environmental benefits
GEF-8	eighth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund
HAC for N&P	High Ambition Coalition for Nature and Peoples
IEO	GEF Independent Evaluation Office
IFI	international financial institution
IIFB	International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity
IP	Integrated Program
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
LDCs	least developed countries
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
MDB	multilateral development bank
MEA	multilateral environment agreement
MPA	marine protected area
MSP	mid-sized project
MTR	Mid-term review
PIF	Project Identification Form
PFD	Program Framework Document
RMF	Results Measurement Framework
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SIDS	small island developing States
STAP	GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCLOS	UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change