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Summary of the 64th Meeting of the Global Environment Facility Council: 26-29 June 2023

At a time when the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution increasingly poses an existential threat to humanity and the planet, the role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is more important than ever. In this respect, successfully concluding the 64th meeting of the GEF Council and adopting a series of vital decisions can only be seen as great news for the environmental community, humanity, and life on the planet as a whole.

Following lengthy and often difficult negotiations, Council Members, through their hard work, commitment, and spirit of compromise, managed to make history at this Council meeting. Three key decisions made that possible:

- Adoption of a record Work Program, reaching a total of USD 1.4 billion, which will benefit 136 countries through 45 projects and programs, and includes a strong co-financing element;
- Agreement to establish the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Fund, including its programming priorities, which, in the words of David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), sends “a clear signal that we are all determined to succeed” on the GBF; and
- Agreement on preparing the GEF to serve as part of the financial mechanism of the new international legally binding implementing agreement, 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).

The GBF, established at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the CBD in December 2022, and its four goals and 23 targets, represents humanity’s best remaining chance to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. Robust and effective implementation of the ambitious Framework will determine success and the agreement to establish the GBF Fund is a necessary, albeit insufficient, precondition. The GBF Fund, which will be formally launched during the GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, in August 2023, is expected to strengthen national-level biodiversity management, planning, policy, governance, and finance approaches needed for operative implementation of the GBF. The need for its timely development

was repeatedly underscored by Council Members throughout the week.

The agreement on preparing the GEF to serve as part of the financial mechanism of the BBNJ Agreement, which was concluded in June 2023, is also a game changer. The BBNJ Agreement is much more than the third UNCLOS implementing agreement. It is a milestone for Ocean conservation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the Agreement “pumps new life in the Ocean at a critical time” in which it faces critical threats.

The role of the GEF which, as a large multilateral environmental fund, acts as the financial mechanism of several critical environmental conventions, has become even more prominent following these developments and is expected to attract increasing interest within and beyond the environmental community.

Council Members, beyond the need to negotiate these historic decisions, had a busy agenda in front of them. They were able to, among other things: successfully adopt the GEF Business Plan and Budget for fiscal year 2024; appraise the GEF’s strategy and portfolio in water security and management’s response; address the strategic country cluster evaluation of the Lower Mekong River Basin Report of ecosystem and the relevant management response; discuss the four-year Work Program and Budget of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO); review its Annual

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Performance Report; tackle the updated GEF Communication and Visibility Policy; and receive the report of the Chairperson of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP).

The 34th Council meeting of the Least Developed Countries Fund/Special Climate Change Fund (LDCF/SCCF) also took place, addressing: the LDCF/SCCF Work Program; the progress report on the Funds' work; the administrative budget and business plan for fiscal year 2024; and the four-year Work Program and Budget for the IEO.

The 64th meeting of the GEF Council and 34th meeting of the LDCF/SCCF Council took place from 26-29 June in Brasilia, Brazil, with over 400 participants attending the session.

A Brief History of the GEF

Originating with a 1989 proposal by France to formulate financing responses to mounting concern over global environmental problems, the GEF was established as a pilot program in 1991 through arrangements between three "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, with an initial endowment of around USD 1 billion. By 1994, 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, resulted in the GEF's restructuring in March 1994, where representatives of 73 countries adopted a new GEF Instrument. With this restructuring, 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 STAP, which was established in 1995, provides independent advice to the GEF on its work as well as assistance in the delivery of Members' responsibilities; and
- the IEO, which was created in 2003, and supports the improvement of accountability and learning in 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 six times between 1998 and 2018, is the main guiding structure for the GEF, comprising 185 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 and the SCCF and provides secretariat services to the Adaptation Fund established by the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The GEF also serves as a financial mechanism for several multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the: CBD; UNFCCC; UN Convention to Combat Desertification; 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: <https://enb.iisd.org/negotiations/global-environment-facility-gef>.

Report of the GEF Council Meeting

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, opened the meeting on Monday and welcomed Elected Chairperson Tom Bui, Canada. He highlighted the Facility's close partnership with Brazil since its establishment, noting Brazil's strategic importance, as a mega-biodiverse country and an economic and political powerhouse, in supporting efforts to preserve nature, combat climate change, and promote transformational change. He drew attention to the record USD 1.4 billion Work Program this Council meeting would decide on, with the mandate to tackle the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson



Marina Silva, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Brazil

He underscored that: cooperation is the only path to effectively deal with these collective global challenges; today's multilateralism must extend beyond states to include non-state actors; and the future multilateral architecture must place equity and social principles at its heart. He introduced the Work Program, addressed the proposed GBF Fund, and outlined other notable agenda items the meeting would address. He noted the role of this meeting as a stepping stone to the upcoming GEF Assembly set to take place in Vancouver in August 2023.

Marina Silva, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Brazil, paid tribute to the late conservationist Gustavo Fonseca, who passed away in August 2022, describing his fundamental role in shaping the GEF. She emphasized Brazil's renewed commitment to combatting the triple planetary crisis, noting the national objective to eliminate deforestation by 2030. She called for democratizing decision-making processes on environmental issues, stressing the critical roles of partnerships and under-represented groups such as Indigenous Peoples and youth. She noted her country's intention to host an Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization meeting and UNFCCC COP 30, in Belém, in August 2023 and 2025, respectively.

Sônia Guajajara, Minister of the Indigenous Peoples, Brazil, focused on efforts towards fully realizing the rights of Indigenous



Sônia Guajajara, Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Brazil



Fernanda Machiavelli, Deputy-Minister of Rural Development and Family Farming, Brazil

Peoples, including the protection of Indigenous territories and biodiversity. She emphasized that land demarcation is necessary to provide protection, accompanied by securing possession of territory and removing invading land grabbers. She underscored the need to support implementation of the GBF, highlighting the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as guardians of biodiversity and the need for their effective participation in decision making.

Fernanda Machiavelli, Deputy-Minister of Rural Development and Family Farming, Brazil, stressed that family farming represents 67% of rural establishments and produces 70% of food consumed at the national level. Discussing rural governance, she stressed that encouraging sustainable food production is a central national priority towards achieving the SDGs, the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the GBF.

Ambassador André Corrêa do Lago, Vice-Minister for Climate, Energy and Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil, noted that holding the first ever Council meeting outside Washington, D.C., is a testament to the special relationship between the GEF and Brazil. Stressing that Brazil is a microcosm of global challenges, he highlighted the vision to make Brazil a reference point for environmental sustainability worldwide.

Tatiana Rosito, Vice-Minister for International Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Brazil, underscored the development of an ecological transition plan through the transformation of economic incentives and modes of consumption and production. She highlighted Brazil's leadership of G20 discussions in 2024 to consider mobilizing private and public funding towards an ambitious international financial architecture. She pointed to the importance of civil society members participating in environmental decision making.

Marcia Barbosa, Vice-Minister for Strategic Policies and Programs, Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, Brazil, highlighted Brazil's transformation towards sustainable cities, with GEF support, citing Brasilia and Recife as models. She noted progress in production methods and highlighted the role that biodiversity can play in the production of food and pharmaceutical products as part of the transition from a carbon-based economy towards a bioeconomy.

Participants then watched a video on the establishment of the [Gustavo Fonseca Youth Leadership Program](#), which will support the professional development of young conservationists.

Elected Chairperson **Tom Bui**, Canada

Elected Chairperson Tom Bui, Canada, underscored the importance of approving the decision on establishing the GBF Fund with the objective of ratifying it at the upcoming GEF Assembly and ensuring “adequacy, predictability, and timely flow of funds” in its implementation, stressing intergenerational obligations.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD, highlighted Brazil’s leadership on biodiversity negotiations and national implementation, drawing attention to its role as a champion of gender equality and IPLCs and its commitment to addressing biodiversity loss and climate change in a whole-of-government approach. He looked to this Council Meeting to provide the impetus for implementing the ambitious GBF goals and targets; highlighted that this is the GEF’s largest ever Work Program, and the largest ever for biodiversity; and stressed that the establishment of the GBF Fund would be the first test of the GBF’s robustness.

Adoption of the Agenda

On Monday, Elected Chairperson Bui introduced the provisional agenda ([GEF/C.64/01/Rev.03](#)). In general comments, various Members: stressed that terms such as “non-state actors” should be defined; suggested discussing development of a GEF policy for engagement in disputed areas; and requested clarification of the process for operationalizing the GBF and ensuring full participation at the GEF Assembly. Council Members then adopted the agenda without amendment.

GEF Business Plan and Corporate Budget for the Fiscal Year 2024

On Tuesday, Peter Lallas, GEF Secretariat, presented the document ([GEF/C.64/03.Rev.02](#)), saying it reflects increased Secretariat funding for GEF-8 tasks and complements plans for Secretariat restructuring and broader GEF reform.

Council Members voiced general support for the business plan and budget. Many recognized the need for staff restructuring given GEF’s expanding mandate. They expressed concern that

the increased administrative costs may result in less effective implementation of the Work Program and warned that such costs should not increase at the expense of resources necessary for GEF programs.

Many Members said that a Council decision on this item should explicitly reflect the Council’s demand to cap the administrative support fee increase at 11%, with one Member adding that such a decision should not set a precedent. Some Members queried: standard rates applied for administrative support for organizations similar to the GEF; the existence of a contingency plan if negotiations with IBRD are unproductive; and whether the increased rate for administrative costs could be applied retroactively.

Several Members and other participants questioned the implications of the Council approving an 11% rate if the IBRD does not agree. Many called for the IBRD to attend a Council meeting to provide explanations on their calculations of the administrative charge, with some suggesting that the IBRD regularly provide information to the Council.

With respect to meetings, a few Members supported alternating in-person and virtual meetings. Others agreed but suggested maintaining flexibility to revisit this later, given that: some issues are hard to settle virtually; meetings vary in complexity; and the GBF Fund will add to the Council’s existing work. Some Members underscored equity issues in terms of capacity to participate in virtual meetings and the need to accommodate all time zones. Several Members explicitly supported rotating the location of in-person meetings between Washington, D.C., and recipient countries, underscoring the value of site visits for understanding the GEF’s work and impact.

The GEF Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network stressed the importance of increased budgetary support and resource allocation to non-sovereign stakeholder groups with key roles in ensuring the sustainability of environmental conservation work, drawing particular attention to women and youth.

Juha Uitto, Director, IEO, addressed the potential implications of increasing administrative costs on IEO’s work, adding that IEO staff increases not included in the proposed budget may require future consideration given IEO’s increased workload.

Lallas clarified that the numbers presented on GEF Secretariat administrative costs reflect the GEF’s suggested compromise in the ongoing discussions with the IBRD. He highlighted the

**Juha Uitto**, Director, GEF IEO

need for additional investments in capacities and resources, noting a Council decision may expedite the issue's resolution and emphasizing the potential to reach agreement. Regarding future meetings, he acknowledged the suggestion to rotate virtual and physical meetings, recognized concerns regarding the limitations of virtual meetings, and stressed the need to ensure equitable participation.

On Thursday, Council Members adopted the decision with no additional comments.

Decision: In its Decision 07/2023, the Council takes note of the business plan and approves an FY24 corporate budget from the GEF Trust Fund of USD 37.201 million, comprising:

- USD 30.554 million for the GEF Secretariat, of which USD 2 million will be paid from GEF-7 administrative budget underruns;
- USD 3.135 million for the STAP; and
- USD 3.532 million for the Trustee.

The Council also approves a total FY24 administrative budget for the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (NPIF) of USD 22,400, comprising the following allocations from the NPIF to cover the Secretariat's and the Trustee's expenses for NPIF administration and implementation:

- USD 17,500 for the GEF Secretariat; and
- USD 4,900 for the Trustee.

In addition, the Council approves a total FY24 administrative budget for the Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) from the CBIT Trust Fund of USD 0.436 million, comprising:

- USD 0.412 million for the GEF Secretariat; and
- USD 0.024 million for the Trustee.

The Council further decides that, in the context of the Secretariat's analysis, the 11% indirect charge as set out in this document is the upper limit for the GEF, provided that the IBRD provides a sufficient justification for this level, and otherwise may be adjusted to the level of 7%.

The Council further requests:

- the IBRD to provide a written report setting out the justification and basis for the proposed increase in indirect costs by no later than 30 September 2023, and attend a subsequent Council meeting to enable a discussion with Council Members on the matter; and
- the Secretariat to report to the Council on the status of the above-mentioned elements, and, in consultation with STAP and the Trustee, to present a combined FY25 corporate budget and business plan for discussion at its June 2024 meeting.

Work Program for the GEF Trust Fund

On Monday, Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, introduced the Work Program for the GEF Trust Fund ([GEF/C.64/04/Rev.01](#)). He highlighted work with recipient countries and GEF Agencies to develop this historic Work Program, reaching a total of USD 1.4 billion and doubling the previous GEF-7 record.

He stressed that approval of the Work Program would benefit 136 countries, including 45 projects and programs. He addressed co-financing in the amount of USD 9.1 billion, meaning that each GEF dollar is matched by USD 7.5 in co-financing. He noted that the biodiversity focal area has the highest share, attracting 50% of total Work Program resources, and outlined work in the other GEF focal areas. He stressed that 13 of the 18 GEF Agencies are

represented in the Work Program and highlighted the four Non-Grant Instruments included in the Work Program.

He detailed the rollout of the Integrated Programs (IPs), noting they represent a total of USD 900 million and stressing the GEF's systematic effort to ensure all countries have the necessary information, including through the organization of regional workshops. He emphasized that the IPs represent a timely opportunity to align GEF-8 with global transformation and respond to requests by MEAs, discussed their contributions to the GBF, and summarized the six IPs included in the Work Program:

- Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes;
- Blue and Green Islands;
- Ecosystem Restoration;
- Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator;
- Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution; and
- Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains.

Regarding support to the GBF, Gascon underscored that over 80% of the Work Program is biodiversity relevant, contributing to 15 of the 23 GBF Targets. He suggested taking a decision on the lead Agency for the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP.

Council Members welcomed the record Work Program, congratulating all involved in its development. They emphasized, among others, that all focal areas, particularly biodiversity, are represented. They also expressed satisfaction with the level of co-financing and improvements in gender considerations. Many welcomed the transparency in the selection process for the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP.

They further addressed:

- disparities in the allocation of projects and funding to countries;
- shares of allocations of System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) and IP projects;
- private sector contributions and allocation among Agencies, including further work on diversification;
- strengthening work on chemicals and waste;
- ways to enhance communication and coordination among Agencies and governments;
- mainstreaming of gender issues;
- complementarity between the biodiversity-related GEF-8 resources and the GBF Fund;
- support for the GBF Targets; and



Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat



Alexis Franke, Associate Director, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

- the two tranches of the Small Grants Programme (SGP).

One Member requested a secondary review before CEO endorsement on two projects: querying the sustainability of public funding to support the Land Degradation Neutrality Initiative in the Southern Haiti Strategic Action Programme (SAP); and requesting clarification on the Global Opportunities for the Long-Term Development of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Sector in Paraguay – planetGOLD Paraguay SAP, noting the relatively small number of beneficiaries in comparison to similar projects carried out in the past and in other places.

Another lamented the exclusion of projects from two countries from the GEF pipeline, stressing that this would increase barriers in accessing funding in such instances, and requested clarification on the rationale behind this decision, requesting not to politicize the process. Yet another suggested addressing nuclear leakage into the Ocean, including safety issues and mitigation measures. Two Members queried why nature-based solutions were not explicitly included in the Work Program.

Regional development banks (RDBs) underscored their commitment to working with the GEF and emphasized, *inter alia*, the need: to close the finance gap and mobilize the private sector; for more strategic, inclusive discussion among Agencies and ministries in GEF project development; to establish better incentives for multi-Agency collaboration; and for synchronization of project cycles.

In responding, Gascon appreciated the support and stressed, among other things, that:

- programs on chemicals take more time to develop, and involve several Agencies and countries;
- nature-based solutions are central to the overall approach;
- the formal review period for projects has a mandate to ensure all comments received are collated, distributed, and addressed; and
- the timeline on the Clean and Healthy Oceans IP will be established once the decision is approved.

He added that the full summary from the consultations with multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) is available in the document concerning the GBF Fund on the GEF website. He drew particular attention to one suggestion provided by organizations

and Agencies on the need for greater access to the available and dedicated resources within GEF countries, which would facilitate the different business models of those organizations and Agencies.

GEF CEO and Chairperson Rodríguez clarified the structure and operation of the SGP, describing the formation of the two tranches and stressing that “the take-home message is that there will be no country with a gap in the SGP implementation process.”

Regarding support for the GBF’s implementation, he joked that “the GEF train has already left the station,” pointing to support already included in GEF-7 and extra assistance provided for national biodiversity strategies and action plans. He highlighted important Council decisions that enabled the development of this historic Work Program, including approval of the country engagement budget during the 63rd Council meeting. He recognized the contributions of “an army of operational focal points in 144 countries,” and stressed that the GEF-8 IP approach “is complicated but also a game-changer.” He emphasized that “GEF-8 is not a sprint but a marathon,” and told Members that “if we approve this Work Program today, we will be securing the first 10 kilometers of that marathon.”

Elected Chairperson Bui invited Members to approve the decision, which was formally adopted on Thursday.

Decision: In its Decision 08/2023, the Council approves the Work Program’s 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 July 27, 2023.

Total GEF resources approved in this Work Program amount to USD 1.397 billion, including GEF project financing and Agency fees. The Work Program comprises the following Project Identification Forms (PIFs) and Program Framework Documents (PFD): 12 with a global focus; 13 with a regional focus; and 20 with a national focus.

With respect to the following two national-focused projects, the Council requested the Secretariat to arrange for Council Members to receive draft final project documents and to transmit to the CEO, within four weeks, any concerns they may have prior to the CEO’s endorsing of the project document for final approval by the GEF Agency:

- Land Degradation Neutrality Initiative in Southern Haiti; and
- Global Opportunities for the Long-Term Development of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Sector in Paraguay - planetGOLD Paraguay.

Following previous Council decisions related to UNDP GEF Management, all projects included in the Work Program implemented by UNDP shall be circulated by email for Council review at least four weeks prior to CEO endorsement/approval. Project reviews will consider relevant findings of the external audit and management responses and note them in the endorsement review sheet that will be made available to the Council.

The Council, having considered the report on the Lead Agency Selection Process for the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP, notes the technical and analytical steps taken by the GEF Secretariat and



Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat

endorses the Agency selection to lead the Clean and Healthy Ocean IP.

Establishment of a New Trust Fund: GBF Fund

This agenda item was introduced on Monday and discussed in plenary on Monday and Thursday, and extensively in informal settings throughout the week. Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, introduced the document ([GEF/C.64/05/Rev.01](#)). She provided background on the GBF established at CBD COP 15 in December 2022, noting its four Goals and 23 Targets for transforming humanity's relationship to nature and the need for adequate, predictable, and effective flow of funds in a timely manner as well as ease of access.

She described the document's specific proposals for the organization, governance, resources, and structure of the fund, including on, among others: the World Bank as Trustee; the GEF Council as the GBF Fund council, operating under GEF Council rules of procedure on consensus and voting; and possible advisory groups, subsidiary bodies, and/or an expanded list of observers. On resources, she noted that GBF Target 19 envisages support from all sources, and stressed the need for a flexible, nimble fund structure.

Many Members highlighted the importance of the GBF Fund's timely establishment to assist in the GBF's implementation. They supported greater shares for least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS), with the exact percentage attracting divergent opinions. A few Members emphasized the need for simplified access modalities. Others said that the GBF Fund should focus on assisting all developing countries.

Some Members urged that the GBF Fund be designed to respond to the CBD COP15 mandate to exclusively address implementation of the GBF and stressed the importance of stronger engagement of "mega-biodiverse countries." Several Members highlighted the lack of an agreed-upon definition of "mega-biodiverse countries" and others proposed that countries with unique biodiversity should be considered alongside the "mega-biodiverse countries."

Many opposed references to "voluntary" contributions and requested explicit reference to developed countries with respect to financial obligations. Others emphasized the need to elaborate on what constitutes a voluntary contribution, stressing the need to attract funding from all sources and increase the share of IFIs

in GEF programming. Some underscored that co-financing and effective participation of MDBs is a precondition for added value. In that respect, a number of Members also focused on an increased role for philanthropic institutions. Several called for clarifying policy requirements for non-sovereign contributions. Some Members underlined the need to ensure measures and tools do not cause indirect economic harm to recipient countries, drawing particular attention to loan- and grant-based funding, and requested clarification on how MDBs can render other resources and assistance available.

Some Members suggested deleting references to digital sequence information, stressing that the issue is under consideration by the CBD. This was opposed by others, who urged consistency with CBD decisions. Others proposed a compromise to retain the references to digital sequence information, emphasizing that this does not prejudge outcomes of future negotiations.

Members exchanged opinions on the establishment of a subsidiary body, with some seeking clarification on its mandate and membership. While many supported establishing a subsidiary body with a specific role in its governance mechanism for countries rich in biodiversity, others opposed a subsidiary body comprising only those Council Members self-identifying as "mega-biodiverse" and supported balanced representation. Two Members urged including CBD Focal Points in the governance structure. Some highlighted the need for the GBF Fund to reflect the importance of strengthening synergies between climate change and biodiversity loss.

Many supported establishing an advisory group of non-sovereign actors, which could increase financial resources from all sources without expanding the Council itself. Others underscored that the GBF Fund Council should only include sovereign countries and a selection of observers from Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.

One Member drew attention to the decision-making process, stressing the need to further consider the proposed voting modalities, in cases where all efforts to achieve consensus are exhausted. Some Members emphasized the need for building flexibility into the Fund to enable funding additional activities in the future.

Many Members emphasized that the decision on establishing the GBF Fund and the one on its programming directions should be adopted jointly as a package.

The CSO Network emphasized the need for scientific research to establish baselines and

monitor progress and highlighted the potential utility of artificial intelligence in increasing the timeliness, availability, and accuracy of data to this effect. He urged the Council to engage with civil society groups, suggesting the addition of four new Council Members to represent civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.

The GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) stressed the need to fully recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples and include them as partners in projects; suggested that the Council consider non-stringent and flexible ways to transition from short-term grants to long-term investment and increase IPLCs' awareness of the GBF Fund; and underlined

the importance of free and prior informed consent to ensure the legitimacy and transparency of the GBF Fund.

In responding to the discussion, Aoki noted, among other things, that:

- the proposed establishment of a subsidiary body is in recognition of comments received on the role of countries with significant biodiversity;
- the document acknowledges the uneven global distribution of biodiversity;
- references to digital sequence information reflect agreed-upon, factual information resulting from CBD COP 15 decisions, and the document does not use language that may prejudice future CBD COP decisions;
- observer functions were expanded to enable more robust engagement of stakeholders, including civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth, adding that the observer list is clarified within the document;
- subsidiary bodies can only be composed of sovereign countries, whereas advisory bodies can include non-GEF members;
- active engagement with, and input from, non-sovereign funding sources in the GBF Fund council would be beneficial, adding that the flexible structure of the GBF Fund would facilitate responding to these sources;
- monitoring and evaluation are critical for tracking support;
- existing GEF Agencies should be utilized but national agencies need significant roles in implementing on-the-ground actions; and
- systemic change, LDCs, SIDS, and greater inclusion of IFIs are all important for leveraging support for the GBF Fund.

She noted the proposed Fund will be timebound, last seven years, and must complement the GEF Trust Fund to support ambitious national implementation of the GBF.

On Thursday, GEF CEO and Chairperson Rodríguez encouraged Council Members to expeditiously move towards taking a decision as a package on establishment of the GBF Fund and its programming directions.

Many Members expressed their commitment to a strong outcome, noting difficult but productive informal discussions and compromises made. They further agreed on the need to adopt the decisions as a package.



Laura Bermudez, Council Member, Colombia

Many supported an aspirational target to support actions by IPLCs and provide multiple benefits. Many underscored the special needs of LDCs and SIDS that require a robust allocation of funds, noting that this is needed to achieve the desired transformational change.

Many Members also stressed the need to be innovative, differentiating the GBF Fund from existing mechanisms, and called for strengthening the role of the MDBs, IFIs, and philanthropic institutions.

Two Members urged a timely decision, stressing many governments would like to be able to make financial pledges during the upcoming GEF Assembly. Some stressed the need to ensure the GBF Fund is fit-for-purpose, accessible, and financially operational.

IPAG highlighted the contributions of IPLCs on biodiversity conservation and the gap between their contribution and the financial resources they receive. He outlined the funding landscape for IPLCs and urged disapproval of projects in Indigenous territories that lack participation of Indigenous Peoples.

Rodríguez thanked everyone for their work, expressing confidence that agreement was imminent on the major outstanding topics, including the share of allocation for LDCs and SIDS.

On Thursday evening, following lengthy informal discussions, Council Members agreed on establishment of the GBF Fund. The GEF Assembly will ratify the decision and formally launch the Fund during its meeting in Vancouver in August.

Following the decision, several Council Members expressed their appreciation for the successful efforts to support developing countries, those most in need, and Indigenous Peoples, with the adoption of the new GBF Fund. They stressed that the Fund will help to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and build a better planet for present and future generations.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD, highlighted that the Council's decision sends "a clear signal that we are all determined to succeed" on the GBF. He welcomed the consideration given to the role of IPLCs as irreplaceable biodiversity stewards, and the commitment to support them and their actions according to their own priorities.



David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD

Decision: In its Decision 09/2023, the Council approves the arrangements proposed for the establishment of a new trust fund, with the aim of supporting the GBF, and invites the World Bank to act as Trustee for the new GBF Fund.

Programming Directions for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

This agenda item was introduced on Tuesday and discussed in an informal setting throughout the week. Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, introduced the relevant document ([GEF/C.64/06/Rev.01](#)), identifying three main areas of work: action areas, allocation of resources, and ease of access. He outlined the eight action areas, and the process for the simplification of access, noting it does not require amendments to GEF policies.

On the allocation of resources, he focused on: countries' allocations and GEF-8 biodiversity STAR allocations as a basis for differentiation; developing a competitive model for access to resources; the level of the fixed share for LDCs and SIDS; incentives for philanthropic institutions; and processes to increase the share of MDBs and IFIs.

Opinions converged on ease of access, with many Members supporting simplified access. Some Members commented on the action areas without significant disagreements. However, opinions diverged on various aspects regarding the allocation of resources.

Many Members stressed that the starting point is that “we want to get as much money on the table as possible to implement the GBF.” Many supported increasing the share for LDCs and SIDS, while others stressed that the GBF Fund should serve all developing countries, and not discourage them from implementing the GBF. One Member called for an allocation ceiling for countries that are not LDCs or SIDS and that is equal to their biodiversity STAR allocation. Some supported applying the same rationale used for STAR allocations for the GBF Fund, while others favored distribution based on countries' readiness and opposed the STAR formula. Many underscored the need for easy, uninhibited access for all eligible countries to the GBF Fund.

Many Council Members emphasized that official development assistance (ODA) funds are insufficient and noted that the share for IFIs implementing the GBF needs to be higher than the 10% envisaged in the draft document. Some opposed reference to loans and called for developing a rule to allow

fund reprogramming in case they are not utilized. One Member stressed that recipient countries are not always able to take on debt in order to partner with MDBs. Another emphasized that strengthening involvement of the private sector and philanthropic institutions is feasible, and shared relevant national experiences.

Others drew attention to incentives for increased participation and funding from MDBs and IFIs in the GBF Fund, and suggested developing criteria on involving the private sector, co-funding levels, and scalability and replicability of projects. Some Members supported co-financing as a selection criterion, while others noted that co-financing requires further clarification, and its application must be mindful of recipient countries' capacity and development stage.

One Member called for a policy framework on managing risk around private sector engagement and another cautioned against the GBF Fund prejudging CBD COP decisions, particularly regarding digital sequence information, genetic resources, and biotechnology. Some supported including a placeholder allowing for adjustments as the GBF Fund progresses to future-proof its development.

Several Members called for a country-focused approach, maintaining diverse approaches consistent with national circumstances, and underlined the unique and critical needs of vulnerable states. A Member queried the status of middle-income countries.

The CSO Network called for inclusivity in the decision-making process, calling for exploring mechanisms that enable active participation by CSOs in implementation activities and promoting collaboration in a whole-of-society approach.

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) said Indigenous Peoples have preserved 80% of still-extant biodiversity for millions of years without the support of external funding or Western science. He stressed the importance of consulting with the UNPFII on using GBF Fund resources.

MDBs and RDBs stressed that private sector mobilization is needed to reach the target of mobilizing USD 200 billion annually by 2030; highlighted their aim to increase capacity to design and implement rigorous, targeted action plans; provided explanations on the capacity, tools, and assistance they can provide to countries and urged the Council to consider their comparative advantages; and underlined the importance of IFIs in mobilizing additional funding, and the benefits of multi-sectoral approaches.

Gascon noted that: GEF participation principles will apply; the 36% share for LDCs and SIDS contained in the draft document represents the share allocated under the biodiversity STAR allocation and is a starting point for negotiations; co-financing is encouraged, although not project-by-project; and simply establishing a target on the share of MDBs and IFIs without the tools to achieve these targets is insufficient.

GEF CEO and Chairperson Rodríguez summarized the issues that required agreement to finalize negotiations on the GBF Fund, including: the provision on financial resources; references to benefit-sharing and digital sequence information; the establishment of a subsidiary body; issues of terminology,



Annette Windmeisser, Council Member, Germany

including regarding mega-biodiverse countries; the share allocated for LDCs and SIDS; the target for MDBs and IFIs and ways to achieve it; and the target for philanthropic institutions.

Decision: In its Decision 10/2023, the Council approves the programming directions, with the aim of supporting the GBF, including the principles by which resources will be allocated and the amendments as presented by the Elected Chairperson in his revised proposal. These include:

- a 20% aspirational share to IPLCs;
- a 25% enforced share to IFIs, with a review two years after the GBF Fund is ratified by the GEF Assembly;
- a 36% share, +3%, to LDCs and SIDS, with a review three years from the ratification date to reprogram this 3% to other countries if it is unused; and
- additional language ensuring consistency with that of the established GBF Fund.

Annual Performance Report 2023 - Special Themes: Behavioral Change

On Wednesday, Juha Uitto, IEO, presented the GEF IEO Annual Performance Report 2023 ([GEF/E/C.64/Inf.01/Rev.01](#)), noting improvements in achieving intended outcomes, materialization of co-financing, and findings on project indicators. He reported on behavioral change resulting from: training, changing rules, regulations, or standards; and/or material incentives, linking effectiveness to addressing needs and barriers and highly participatory approaches.

Council Members recommended: greater communication of IEO best practices, lessons learned, and outcomes in terms of behavior change and the use of more detailed indicators; follow-up interventions after IEO reports; evaluating changing consumption patterns; considering broader biodiversity loss-behavioral change links; and encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships for promoting behavioral change.

They further highlighted the MDBs' role in strengthening private sector engagement and called for targeted funding for the transition period after a project's handover to local or national entities.

The CSO Network recommended additional acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge and citizen science. IPAG urged capacity building for staff and personnel on: Indigenous Peoples'



Geeta Batra, GEF IEO

rights, cultural sensitivity, and participatory, rights-based approaches.

Uitto noted ongoing indicator development on behavioral change. Geeta Batra, IEO, confirmed that all future evaluations will measure behavioral change but said sustainability evaluations must be long term. She highlighted GEF studies on sustainability done in 2021 and planned for the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS-8), noting that post-completion evaluations are done seven to nine years after project completion.

Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, said sustainability measures in project design are increasing with the STAP's help and noted a lower risk appetite means lower potential impact. He said good investment and governance can lead to sustainable outcomes that go beyond specific projects.

Council Members took note of the report.

Evaluation of the GEF's Approach and Interventions in Water Security and Management Response

On Wednesday, Geeta Batra, IEO, presented the Evaluation of the GEF's Approach and Interventions in Water Security ([GEF/E/C.64/01/Rev.01](#)), noting it is the IEO's first comprehensive evaluation of water security and is relevant to the GEF's work in all areas. She noted that as the GEF has no existing water security strategy, the IEO developed a theory of change covering the physical capacity of water systems and the enabling environment, cautioning that policy and regulatory reforms typically take longer than a GEF project cycle. She recommended ensuring that water security is measured and prioritizing sustainable financing mechanisms and other activities for scaling up interventions.

Regarding the management response to the evaluation ([GEF/C.64/13](#)), Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, highlighted positive changes already made: on including water security measurements. He said the GEF programming directions include water "management," which will be changed to "security" for GEF-9, with freshwater resources specified. On scaling up, he reported good track records for the LDCF and SCCF on including aspects likely to scale up and sustain benefits. He also confirmed more consistent incorporation of sustainable finance in the International Waters focal area, with progress tracked and findings mainstreamed.

Many Members expressed strong support for the water security agenda and integrated water management. They underlined the critical importance of rapid action in addressing the water crisis threats and the GEF Secretariat's essential role in embedding water security across focal areas.

Some Members called for translating urgencies into actions by following up on the recommendations and pragmatically bringing these considerations on board for GEF-8. Many emphasized the need to strengthen, scale up, and share information on innovative and sustainable approaches and financial mechanisms. One Member highlighted sovereignty issues, stressing the need for consultation processes to incorporate national priorities.

Several Members supported adoption of the [UN Water definition of water security](#). Others queried: the low share in GEF funding for land degradation focal area projects;

uneven geographic concentration of projects; and the level of consideration given to the impact of the water security aspect in climate risk assessment.

Some Members supported efforts to mainstream findings to prepare the water security strategy ahead of GEF-9 negotiations, noting the importance of a holistic approach on water management.

The CSO Network highlighted that good governance and decision making, transboundary cooperation, financing, and peace and political stability should serve as key indicators for evaluation. She called for a global benchmark of indicators for monitoring and evaluation and for fully implementing and periodically monitoring the [GEF Guidance on Gender Equality](#).

IPAG and the UNPFII highlighted the direct on-the-ground work undertaken by Indigenous Peoples to address water security, and underlined the need for the GEF to include Indigenous youth and women, in accordance with international best practice. The UNPFII additionally suggested that the GEF consider treating water as a legal entity and rights-holder rather than as a service.

Gascon reassured the Council that consultations with countries are ongoing, for both national and regional projects. He explained that lower investment and uneven geographic concentration in land degradation projects are due to the distribution of land degradation areas globally, and that lower investment likely reflected those countries having fewer areas with land degradation. He noted that water security is built into the international waters project and shared management of freshwater basin methods, at the national scale, and that project design improvements will continue ahead of GEF-9.

Council Members adopted the draft decision on the management response to the evaluation.

Decision: In its Decision 11/2023, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Lower Mekong River Basin Ecosystem and Management Response

On Wednesday, Geeta Batra, IEO, presented the IEO's Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Lower Mekong River Basin Ecosystem ([GEF/E/C.64/02/Rev.01](#)). She outlined key challenges that the region faces, including biodiversity loss, land degradation, pollution and waste, climate impacts, and hydrological connectivity. She highlighted the GEF's involvement and support, focusing on the evaluation of 28 GEF projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam, spanning from GEF-4 to GEF-7.

She shared the evaluation's main findings, including on alignment with national priorities and reduction of vulnerability for local communities, and stressed that the GEF is well-positioned to continue contributing to regional transformation and scaling up solutions. She called for further efforts to achieve full social, economic, and environmental impact, and policy coherence; pointed out potential improvements using smart indicators, monitoring, and evaluation systems to drive adaptive

learning and corrective action; and encouraged additional information collection to evaluate long-term effectiveness.

She presented stories of impact from the three recipient countries and highlighted the evaluation's recommendations, namely to: enhance coordination between the GEF, partner countries, and other bodies on the strategic regional priorities of the Mekong River Commission's Basin Development Strategy; support longer-term sustainability by designing and implementing mechanisms for testing, replicating, and scaling up successful local outcomes and mainstreaming them at the national level; and request the STAP, in consultation with the GEF, to provide technical advice on internationally agreed-upon definitions and guidelines for implementing ecosystem-based conceptual approaches and management tools.

Claude Gascon, GEF Secretariat, introduced the document on the management response to the evaluation ([GEF/C.64/14](#)). He expressed appreciation for the evaluation and support for its recommendations, noting that implementation of the recommendation on enhancing coordination is dependent on recipient countries as well as on the Secretariat.

Council Members generally welcomed the report as the first country cluster evaluation of its kind.

Some Members queried why few projects seem to have been mainstreamed to improve policy coherence at the national level, or replicated and/or scaled up beyond the target areas. Several Members highlighted lessons learned from the evaluation on the complexities of transboundary area work, and welcomed alignment between GEF project objectives and national priorities. One Member encouraged enhanced engagement with regional governance in developing and implementing tools to support decision making and enhance economic benefits. Others highlighted the need for enhanced cooperation across focal areas, noting the particular importance of water and food security beyond the Mekong River Basin area.

One Member encouraged the GEF Secretariat to use its position as a mediator to increase stakeholder cooperation across political levels, highlighting the potential of the Expanded



Dario Mejia Montalvo, President, UNPFII

Constituency Workshops, which bring together GEF focal points, focal points from the main environmental conventions, representatives from civil society, and GEF Agencies. Wider diversification of the selected GEF Agencies for implementation in the Mekong River Basin area was also urged. Another Member stressed the serious consequences of conflict on the environment and on livelihoods, referring to the recent destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in Ukraine, which was destroyed during the war. She expressed support for more country cluster evaluations in the future, including for the Dnipro River Basin in the Black Sea region.

IPAG stressed the importance of inclusive efforts in achieving transformational behavioral change based on social and environmental justice principles. The CSO Network queried the envisioned role of Indigenous Peoples and other directly impacted stakeholder groups regarding long-term ownership and relevant monitoring modalities.

The UNPFII encouraged increased representation and integration of Indigenous Peoples and their representative organizations in planning, monitoring, and evaluation efforts.

Batra noted that project results have been transformative at the local level, indicating the potential of close collaboration with the Mekong River Commission in facilitating scaling up to the regional level. She invited the CSO Network to engage in more detailed discussions on methodology outside of the Council meeting. She also confirmed Indigenous Peoples' involvement throughout IEO's evaluation processes.

Gascon noted ongoing work and investment in the GEF Strategy for Knowledge Management and Learning, although this agenda item is being deferred to the 65th Council meeting. He reassured Members that these will feed into processes ahead of GEF-9.

Council Members adopted the draft decision on the management response to the strategic country cluster evaluation.

Decision: In its Decision 12/2023, the Council takes note of the related evaluation recommendations and endorses the management response to address them.

Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the IEO

On Wednesday, Juha Uitto, IEO, presented the Four-Year Work Program and Budget of the IEO ([GEF/E/C.64/03/Rev.01](#)), noting OPS-8 will be presented to the Council in 2025 to inform the GEF-9 replenishment process. He proposed increasing the draft budget for the fiscal year 2024 by 11% to match expected cost increases.

Council Members suggested: an overarching "integration" theme; reflecting on Agency concentration and addressing risk management; a mid-term review of evaluation using already collected data; and incorporating more analytics and institutional outreach.

Members commended the inclusion of GEF support for marginalized groups and early warning systems. They urged: integrating follow-up evaluations; continuing important work



Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair

on knowledge and learning; engaging the private sector on commodity value chains; analyzing projects with low ratings; and addressing cities' sustainability.

Uitto expressed appreciation for Members' encouragement and welcomed ideas for improvements, noting collaboration between the IEO and other global evaluation institutions given the scarcity of resources.

On Thursday, Council Members approved the decision with no further comments.

Decision: In its Decision 13/2023, the Council approves the annual IEO budget for FY24 for a total of USD 8.34 million, which includes the indirect overhead charge of 11% applied by the World Bank Group, and the work program for GEF-8, including preparations for the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF.

Report of the Chairperson of the STAP

On Wednesday, Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair, presented the Report of the STAP Chair ([GEF/STAP/C.64/Inf.01](#)). She outlined the STAP's recommendations that the GEF: adopt a clear risk appetite framework; develop strategies on innovation and policy coherence; identify, track, and report co-benefits; establish a knowledge management and learning system; include youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples in project design; and invest in external partnerships.

Regarding new science, she highlighted: findings on the increased severity of major environmental risks (World Economic Forum report); the narrowing window of opportunity to stay on the 1.5°C pathway (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report) and further climate predictions for 2023-2027 (World Meteorological Organization report); trends in ice-retreat, ocean temperatures and sea-level rise (National Aeronautics and Space Administration – NASA – report); two recent reports on plastics and chemicals, stressing that a significant portion of the 13,000+ chemicals associated with plastic production remain unassessed; and new publications indicating the importance of plant species diversity and forest soils on climate change mitigation efforts, and the multiple environmental, social, and economic benefits provided by global marine kelp forests.

Bierbaum outlined the training and workshops that the STAP has provided over the last six months, including on metrics for

transformation, knowledge arrangements and learning, and PIF template training, as well as the nine IP design workshops the STAP participated in, praising the productive interactions that such settings facilitate. She then provided examples of activities that the GEF could pursue to improve policy coherence, such as reducing perverse subsidies, and emphasized the need to address misaligned policies and investment decisions, both public and private. She encouraged the GEF, *inter alia*, to support countries with similar challenges to work together.

Bierbaum outlined the STAP's short-, medium- and long-term work program focal areas, which include risk appetite, blended finance, and healthcare waste, respectively. Regarding risk appetite specifically, she encouraged the Secretariat to continue fostering innovation by adopting a risk appetite framework and management strategy and using targeted funding windows to embed innovation in the design cycle.

She detailed the benefits of integrating a common set of principles that ensure accessibility, searchability, interoperability, and durability across all aspects and levels of the GEF Knowledge Management and Learning System, recalling the recent IEO evaluation's conclusions. She also highlighted potential co-benefits and advised on how to incorporate these into GEF projects. She reminded the Council that durable global environmental benefits require projects to be resilient in the face of plausible alternative futures, and that developing narratives is critical in helping stakeholder engagement and buy-in for more successful project delivery. Finally, she observed that PFDs are generally well-prepared and that improvements are still required on the new PIF template.

Many Council Members expressed their appreciation for the STAP Chair's report, welcoming the lessons learned it provided and the clear reminder it gives to the Council on the real impact and importance of the GEF's work.

During the discussions, Members supported: the focus on policy coherence, noting its importance in delivering GBF Targets; the development of and focus on the risk appetite framework; the work on leveraging innovation to enact transformational change; and the ongoing need to increase and mainstream stakeholder engagement, including from underrepresented groups. Several sought and received clarification on the STAP's horizon scanning processes.

Preparing the GEF to Serve As Part of the Financial Mechanism of the BBNJ Agreement

On Thursday, Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, and Jurgis Sapijanskas, GEF Secretariat, presented the document ([GEF/C.64/12/Rev.01](#)) on this issue. They highlighted the BBNJ Agreement's provisions on its financial mechanism (Article 52), noting that it includes three funding sources: a voluntary Trust Fund; a Special Fund; and the GEF Trust Fund. They outlined the GEF's work under the International Waters focal area on areas beyond national jurisdiction and stressed that BBNJ is not a new topic for the Council.



Sano Akhteruzzaman, CSO Network

They reminded Council Members that, during the last Council meeting, they had welcomed the GEF Trust Fund becoming part of the BBNJ Agreement's financial mechanism. They outlined the timeline of the BBNJ process, summarized past and ongoing support relevant to the BBNJ Agreement, and presented the draft decision.

Many Council Members welcomed the BBNJ Agreement and supported the GEF Trust Fund becoming part of the financial mechanism. Many also highlighted the GEF's relevant experience and expertise, and the need for timely entry into force of the new Agreement. Some stressed promoting complementarity, coherence, and avoiding the duplication of efforts, calling for further work to ensure complementarity with the BBNJ's Special Fund once it is established.

Some Members highlighted the need for support to developing countries for capacity building and the transfer of marine technology. One Member requested that the GEF retain political neutrality and avoid funding projects in disputed areas. A few called for facilitating synergy development and support for integrated, systemic projects that address multiple conventions.

The CSO Network highlighted the need for full and effective participation of civil society representatives, including gender balance. IPAG emphasized the need to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights, noting that intrusion in their territories also takes place in ancestral waters where projects progress without their free, prior, and informed consent.

Aoki and Sapijanskas thanked Members for their views and encouragement and noted that ratification support will follow the same principles as when new conventions have been supported in the past. They added that: further details will be provided during the next Council meeting; direct national support as well as regional or global support will be provided; steps to establish complementarity and coherence will be very important; and capacity building will be essential for implementation of the Agreement.

Elected Chairperson Bui noted strong support and said that a revised decision would be circulated for adoption. On Thursday afternoon, Members approved the revised decision without further comment.

Decision: In its Decision 14/2023, the Council:

- welcomes the invitation from the Intergovernmental Conference on BBNJ to the GEF to be part of the financial mechanism of the BBNJ agreement as reflected in the Agreement, adopted at the further resumed fifth session of the Intergovernmental Conference on June 19, 2023;
- authorizes up to USD 34 million for funding ratification support and early action activities for the BBNJ Agreement;
- requests the GEF Secretariat to develop initial guidelines for enabling activities and ratification support projects, in consultation with the interim Secretariat of the BBNJ Agreement for decision at the 66th Council Meeting; and
- recommends to the Assembly that the Instrument be amended to add a new subparagraph stating that this fund is to operate as one of the entities comprising the financial mechanism of the BBNJ Agreement, to function under the guidance of and to be accountable to its COP, with the GEF receiving guidance from the COP on overall strategies, policies, program priorities, and eligibility for access to and utilization of financial resources.

Improving the Visibility of the GEF: New Communication and Visibility Policy

Robert Bisset, GEF Secretariat, introduced a proposed updated GEF Communication and Visibility Policy, titled “Improving the Visibility of the GEF” ([GEF/C.64/11](#)), to: strengthen the GEF brand and visibility for GEF-9; support clear, consistent communications policies across countries; and improve coordination across the globe.

One Member questioned whether costs would be met under existing project implementation fees and suggested referring to “implementing” rather than “observing” the new policy. Another asked how the Council will learn of any non-adherence to the policy.

The CSO Network suggested further modification, including through rethinking the GEF newsletter and developing an education mechanism under the GEF. He sought clarification on new elements in the proposal.

Bisset responded that the policy represents a practical, implementable update, focusing on potential staff activities and opportunities for building capacity and programs in-country.



Robert Bisset, GEF Secretariat

The Council adopted the recommended decision.

Decision: In its Decision 15/2023, the Council approves the GEF Communication and Visibility Policy, requesting all GEF Agencies and others in the GEF Partnership to implement the Policy, including the GEF Brand Guidelines developed by the Secretariat as necessary, and where applicable to any GEF-funded activity.

Assessing the Strength of the GEF Partnership: Coverage by GEF Agencies

On Wednesday, Paola Ridolfi, GEF Secretariat, introduced the document ([GEF/C.64/10](#)), recalling the request to the Secretariat during GEF-8 to explore possibilities, where necessary, to improve the thematic and geographic coverage of the GEF Partnership. She stressed that both geographic and thematic coverage continue to improve, and highlighted consultations through the Country Engagement Strategy, including national dialogues, to make relevant information available.

She indicated areas requiring further work, noting RDBs’ stagnating shares and the limited engagement of the four Agencies added most recently, namely the West African Development Bank, the Development Bank of Latin America, the Foreign Economic Cooperation Office – Ministry of Environmental Protection of China, and the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund. She drew attention to the draft decision requesting the Secretariat to continue monitoring the strength of the GEF Partnership along the five dimensions of geographic and thematic coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement. The decision further requests the Secretariat to present an analysis to the 67th Council meeting ahead of GEF-9, highlighting the request to remove the geographic restrictions applicable to the DBSA.

Council Members, among other things:

- queried the reasons that some Agencies are able to reach the project implementation stage faster than others and expressed concern over IP expressions of interest being dominated by a few Agencies, noting that measures to ensure better distribution of projects among Agencies will assist in maximizing global benefits;
- highlighted the need to reinforce the efficacy and effectiveness of the Partnership so that countries can diversify their choice of Agencies;
- suggested providing increased coverage, especially for Pacific SIDS, including conducting a workshop to strengthen the partnership with other Agencies, with one Member noting that any discussion on expansion should not start before GEF-9;
- proposed defining the level and strength of engagement, by evaluating key stakeholders and engagement with government, civil society, and communities;
- supported expanding the geographic coverage of the DBSA, with a Member underscoring the importance of retaining country ownership when diversifying implementing Agencies’ extent and coverage; and
- noted the lack of coordination with countries once a project is allocated to GEF Agencies, stressing the need to include national and state Agencies with a presence on the ground, although one Member highlighted successful projects where the Implementing Agency had no physical presence.



Paola Ridolfi, GEF Secretariat

Some Members highlighted that negative competition among Agencies may surface in specific countries, and called for synergies and complementarity, as well as flexibility, to allow for better integration of MDBs to address the triple planetary crisis. They highlighted the analysis on barriers to entrance for Implementing Agencies and queried potential expansion, noting that the last Implementing Agency was added in 2015 and many developments in the environmental policy sphere have taken place since 2018.

Many Council Members stressed the need for capacity building and a couple noted that some Agencies are relatively unfamiliar with the GEF's role, mandate, and directions. Some expressed concerns regarding potential barriers for countries' access, highlighting disparities in experience and proximity to Implementing Agencies. Others stressed the need to categorize the Agencies, expressing concern about a "one-size fits all" approach.

One Member encouraged providing additional information on participation and outreach efforts to operational Focal Points and other stakeholders for better decision making. Another underlined issues arising from delays in project development, and welcomed efforts to simplify procedures.

Ridolfi highlighted, among other things:

- stakeholder engagement policy involving key state and non-state actors;
- further efforts to encourage MDB involvement;
- existing and new types of workshops rolled out at GEF-8, and flexibility to explore further opportunities;
- the need for increased capacity building, better analytics, support for operational Focal Points, and strengthened coordination efforts among Agencies;
- the upcoming launch of a new Community of Practice at the GEF Assembly in August; and
- efforts to engage Agencies in releasing locked funds, highlighting work done with the World Bank to release USD 80 million.

Jonathan Caldicott, GEF Secretariat, added that the GEF functions in a way that generally separates its role of supervision with that of the national-level executing entity, and encouraged capacity building at the local level in that regard. He noted

that the Secretariat has limited tools for encouraging further involvement of the MDBs, noting the process is country-driven.

Council Members adopted the decision.

Decision: In its Decision 16/2023, the Council requests the Secretariat to:

- continue to monitor the strength of the GEF Partnership along the five dimensions of geographic coverage, thematic coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement, and present an analysis to the 67th Council in advance of commencing GEF-9 negotiations; and
- take the necessary actions to remove the geographic restrictions applicable for the DBSA to enable it to implement GEF projects or programs in any country in accordance with its mandate.

Report of the Selection and Review Committee

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

Decision: In its Decision 17/2023, the Council:

- agrees to launch the recruitment process for the Director of the Evaluation Office as soon as possible, with attached terms of reference and in accordance with the recommended "hybrid" process;
- approves a budget of up to USD 50,000 for the Special Initiative to complete the recruitment of a new Director of the Evaluation Office; and
- takes note of the FY23 mid-term assessment for the IEO Director and the GEF CEO and requests the Selection and Review Committee to present the performance evaluations of the GEF CEO and IEO Director for the Council's review at its 65th meeting.

Other Business

On Wednesday, CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez proposed to defer three agenda items to an intersessional Council meeting to allow time for continued substantive negotiations on other agenda items. William Ehlers, Secretary to the Council, GEF Secretariat, explained the relevant rule of procedure. The agenda items that will be addressed in a virtual intersessional meeting are:

- GEF Strategy for Knowledge Management and Learning;
- Enhancing Policy Coherence through GEF Operations; and



William Ehlers, GEF Secretariat

- Relations with the Conventions and Other International Institutions.

One Member proposed developing a GEF policy on work in disputed territories, citing World Bank Operational Manual BP 7.60 – Projects in Disputed Areas, which will be discussed at the next regular Council meeting.

Following a discussion on dates and venues, Ehlers confirmed: the 65th meeting of the Council will discuss the deferred items from this meeting; the 66th meeting will be held virtually in January 2024; and the 67th meeting will convene in Washington, D.C., in June 2024. Specific dates of all three meetings will be determined at a later date.

Participants watched a video publicizing the upcoming seventh GEF Assembly to convene in Vancouver, Canada, in August, with several Members stressing the need for timely procedures to ensure participation of all GEF Members.

Report of the 34th LDCF/SCCF Council Meeting

Opening of the Meeting

On Thursday, Elected Chairperson Tom Bui, Canada, opened the 34th LDCF/SCCF Council meeting, inviting Members to defer consideration of the agenda item on the annual monitoring review of the LDCF/SCCF for fiscal year 2022 due to a heavy workload and time constraints. Members agreed and adopted the provisional agenda ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.34/01](#)).

Work Program for the LDCF/SCCF

On Thursday, Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, presented the Work Program for the LDCF/SCCF ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.34/03](#)), showcasing six project proposals cleared for approval and noting that all six have financing. She highlighted alignment with GEF-8 strategy focus areas, inclusion of gender considerations, a whole-of-society approach, and scaled up finance.

Members expressed general support for the Work Program and the projects, with many welcoming the enhanced focus on gender considerations.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 1/2023, the LDCF/SCCF Council approves the Work Program comprising six projects, subject to comments made during the Council meeting and additional comments that may be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by July 27, 2023. Total resources approved in this Work Program amount to USD 60.13 million from the LDCF and USD 3.36 million from the SCCF, both inclusive of GEF project financing and Agency fees.

Progress Report on the LDCF/SCCF

On Thursday, Jason Spensley, GEF Secretariat, and Alope Barnwal, GEF Secretariat, presented progress reports for LDCF/SCCF ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.34/05](#)), and Madeleine Diouf Sarr, Chair of the GEF LDC Group, reported on the benefits of collaborative and inclusive work in enhancing regional capacity building for LDCs.

Members welcomed these reports and addressed the benefits of multilingualism in overcoming accessibility barriers, with some noting lengthier discussions would be appreciated.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 3/2023, the LDCF/SCCF Council welcomes the progress report on the LDCF and

the SCCF and takes note with appreciation progress made under the LDCF and the SCCF.

Administrative Budget and Business Plan for the LDCF/SCCF for the Fiscal Year 2024

On the administrative budget and business plan for the LDCF/SCCF for FY24 ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.34/06](#)), Council Members adopted the decision on Thursday without comment.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 4/2023, the LDCF/SCCF Council approves the proposed budget for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, and the Trustee as follows:

- USD 3,775,598 (GEF Secretariat), USD 133,000 (STAP), and USD 502,000 (Trustee) from the LDCF; and
- USD 1,229,022 (GEF Secretariat), USD 133,000 (STAP), and USD 110,000 (Trustee) from the SCCF.

Four-year Work Program and Budget for the IEO under the LDCF/SCCF

On the Four-Year Work Program and Budget for the IEO under the LDCF/SCCF ([GEF/LDCF.SCCF.34/E/01](#)), in response to some Member queries regarding budget increases, Juha Uitto, IEO, explained that they reflect increasing numbers of LDCF/SCCF programs and more realistic accounting of staff costs that had been absorbed elsewhere in the past. The draft decision was adopted on Thursday as presented.

Decision: In its Decision LDCF.SCCF 5/2023, the Council approves the work program and budget of USD 339,500 to carry out the work program of the IEO under the LDCF and SCCF for the FY24: USD 204,400 from the LDCF and USD 135,100 from the SCCF.

Co-Chairs Joint Summary and Council Meeting Closing

William Ehlers, GEF Secretariat, and Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, presented the joint summary of the Co-Chairs of the 64th Council meeting and the LDCF/SCCF paragraph by paragraph. Regarding the LDCF/SCCF, Aoki noted agreement to defer a decision on the annual monitoring review to the next Council meeting. The Council approved the joint summary without comments.

GEF CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez underscored the hard work undertaken over the last few days and months, expressed gratitude to the Council for reaching successful outcomes, and closed the Council meeting at 19.45 p.m.

Upcoming Meetings

What to Expect at the HLPF? Building Momentum towards the SDG Summit and Beyond: This meeting will discuss expectations for the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and review findings from the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 and the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism. **date:** 6 July 2023, 09:00-10:30 EST **location:** virtual **www:** [iisd.org/events/what-expect-hlpf-building-momentum-towards-sdg-summit-and-beyond](https://www.iisd.org/events/what-expect-hlpf-building-momentum-towards-sdg-summit-and-beyond)

Second Part of the 28th Session of the ISA Council and Assembly: The ISA Council and the Assembly will convene to continue discussions on the draft exploitation regulations, among

other business. **dates:** 10-28 July 2023 **location:** Kingston, Jamaica **www:** isa.org.jm/sessions/28th-session-2023/

HLPF 2023: Held under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the HLPF is the main UN platform on sustainable development. It has a central role in the follow-up and review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. A three-day ministerial segment will convene during the second week. **dates:** 10-20 July 2023 **location:** New York City, US **www:** hlpf.un.org/

19th Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: The CGRFA is the only permanent intergovernmental body that specifically deals with all components of biodiversity for food and agriculture. CGRFA 19 will discuss three cross-sectoral matters: review of work on biodiversity, nutrition, and human health; access and benefit-sharing for food and agriculture; and digital sequence information for food and agriculture. **dates:** 17-21 July 2023 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** fao.org/3/nl/755en/nl755en.pdf

First Regional Consultations on Nature-based Solutions – Africa: Following the first global consultation on this subject held in May 2023, the first African regional consultation on nature-based solutions will be held in a virtual format. **dates:** 10-11 July 2023 **location:** virtual **www:** unep.org/events/working-group/first-regional-consultations-nature-based-solutions

First Regional Consultations on Nature-based Solutions – Eastern Europe: Following the first global consultation on this subject held in May 2023, the first Eastern European regional consultation on nature-based solutions will be held in a virtual format. **dates:** 18-19 July 2023 **location:** virtual **www:** unep.org/events/working-group/first-regional-consultations-nature-based-solutions

First Regional Consultations on Nature-based Solutions – Asia-Pacific: Following the first global consultation on this subject held in May 2023, the first Asia-Pacific regional consultation on nature-based solutions will be held in a virtual format. **dates:** 25-26 July 2023 **location:** virtual **www:** unep.org/events/working-group/first-regional-consultations-nature-based-solutions

Regional Preparatory Meeting for SIDS4 for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Seas Region: This meeting aims to identify and develop regional input for SIDS4, which will convene in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024. **dates:** 24-26 July **location:** Mauritius **www:** sdgs.un.org/smallislands/regional-preparatory-meeting-ais-region; sdgs.un.org/smallislands/about-sids4

Regional Preparatory Meeting for SIDS4 for the Caribbean Region: This meeting aims to identify and develop regional input for SIDS4, which will convene in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024. **dates:** 8-10 August 2023 **location:** Saint Vincent and the Grenadines **www:** sdgs.un.org/smallislands/regional-preparatory-meeting-caribbean-region; sdgs.un.org/smallislands/about-sids4

Regional Preparatory Meeting for SIDS4 for the Pacific Region: This meeting aims to identify and develop regional input for SIDS4, which will convene in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024.

dates: 16-18 August 2023 **location:** Tonga **www:** sdgs.un.org/smallislands/regional-preparatory-meeting-pacific-region; sdgs.un.org/smallislands/about-sids4

Seventh GEF Assembly: This meeting will provide an opportunity for ministers, environmentalists, government officials, business leaders, and representatives of GEF Agencies, environmental conventions, civil society representatives and Indigenous Peoples, to discuss governance and financing solutions for global environmental challenges and forge new partnerships focused on addressing the drivers of ecological strains. It is expected to, among others, formally launch the GBF Fund. **dates:** 22-26 August 2023 **location:** Vancouver, Canada **www:** www.thegef.org/events/seventh-gef-assembly

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org/

Glossary

BBNJ Agreement	International legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil society organization
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFI	International Financial Institution
IP	Integrated Program
IPAG	Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
LDCs	Least developed countries
MDB	Multilateral development bank
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
PFD	Program Framework Documentu
PIF	Project Identification Form
RDB	Regional development bank
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SGP	Small Grants Programme
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
UNCLOS	UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNPFII	UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues