

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Wednesday, 23 August 2023 | Online at: [enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7](https://enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7)

## Seventh GEF Assembly Highlights: Tuesday, 22 August 2023

The Youth Leaders Learning Exchange and the Indigenous and Local Knowledge events, two of the dialogues leading up to the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Global Environment Facility Assembly, were held today with the haze from the wildfires surrounding Vancouver harbor a steady reminder, in the words of Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, of the triple planetary crisis that humanity has so far failed to address.

### Youth Leaders Learning Exchange

In opening the exchange, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, urged rethinking how the GEF works, recognizing the need for whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, discussing what each means, and embedding that understanding in the next replenishment. He called for:

- involving all ministries and the legislative branch in GEF activities, in part by redefining GEF focal points to become akin to a steering committee;
- devoting 10% of GEF resources to civil society activities by 2030; and
- support by the GEF and the GEF Partnership for training young scientists and practitioners and their research.

René van Hell, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands, expressed full support for Rodríguez's efforts. He said his country embraces the whole-of-society and whole-of-government



René van Hell, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

approaches by focusing on water and how it can prompt the transformative change needed for other issues.

Rosina Bierbaum, Chair, GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), outlined the triple planetary crisis and the need for nature-based solutions. She emphasized the need to restore balance among the three pillars of sustainability. Bierbaum said GEF projects need to explicitly account for behavioral change, seek policy coherence, involve communities in decision making, and incorporate systems thinking.

**Three Things to Save the Ocean:** Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia, introduced his book, 'Infinity Fish,' explaining the concept of fish as a renewable resource that if treated well, can support humanity forever. He framed the



Rosina Bierbaum, GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)



**Aileen Lee**, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

current approach to management as “everything, everywhere, all at once,” noting that “from the ocean good things come, and to the ocean bad things go.” He suggested retooling the approach to “NOT all at once,” noting the intergenerational injustice of conventional discounting and net present value decision making, which will conclude that it is not worth it to rebuild fish stocks or address climate change.

He added that “NOT everything” would be about biodiversity justice, calling for leaving the “orphans of the ocean” (those that live long and grow slowly in the high seas) alone, and avoiding deep sea mining until a better understanding of this resource and its protection is gained. Turning to social and climate justice (“NOT everywhere”), Sumalia urged closing the high seas and having strong marine protected areas all over.

During discussion, attendees and Sumalia stressed the importance of universal access to education for girls and boys, and engaging youth, women, and indigenous leaders in solutions.

**Youth Leaders Learning Exchange panel:** Aileen Lee, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, moderated this session. Frankie Marquez, Ocean Wise Conservation Association, noted Ocean Wise captures youth’s passion, frustration, and anger regarding the world’s oceans, empowering communities to address ocean overfishing, climate change, and plastic pollution.

Skw’akw’as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore, TLKEmchEEn, bemoaned comparatively low attendance at this session, noting that Litton, British Columbia, engulfed by fire in 2019, is currently under evacuation orders. She called for resourcing



**Marina Melanidis**, Founder and Development Director, Youth4Nature

Skw’akw’as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore, TLKEmchEEn Indigenous Peoples to attend conferences and be heard, urging youth to discomfort people with their reality to influence change.

Marina Melanidis, Founder and Development Director, Youth4Nature, spoke emotionally of the hazy skies outside and ongoing evacuation orders. She said Youth4Nature builds youth’s agency and leadership for developing justice-led nature-based solutions (NbS). She drew attention to the first global youth policy statement calling out greenwashing and urged redistribution of power and resources.

Sophia Yang, Founder and Executive Director, Threading Change, noted the fashion industry produces 10% of CO2 emissions and that polyester is a source of microplastic. She said her organization has catalyzed innovations such as global clothing swaps, diversion of clothing from landfills, and promotion of a young people’s movements that recognize that fashion is a finite resource. She called for continuous support mechanisms to promote better clothing decisions.

Ray Kiliho, Jane Goodall’s Roots and Shoots, described the goal of creating more compassionate citizens, underscoring the dangers of apathy. Naina Agrawal-Hardin, Yale University student, highlighted through case studies the role of climate litigation and its reliance on youth, traditional, and local and indigenous knowledge.

In the ensuing discussions, asked what to advise the youth, Dunstan-Moore said her generation is angry but urged youth not to “lose the spark.” Melanidis underscored the need to feel the despair and act on it. Agrawal-Hardin called on youth to organize



**Skw’akw’as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore**, TLKEmchEEn



**Sophia Yang**, Founder and Executive Director, Threading Change

as there is power in the collective. Kiliho said not to be afraid, noting that in “innovation there is no failure.” Yang said that there should be collaboration and not competition.

Asked how to support youth, Dunstan-Moore stressed the need to fund them. Marquez, Agrawal-Hardin, and Kiliho stressed the role of mentorship. Marquez underscored facilitating safe spaces for youth. Melanidis called for funding for wellness.

Agrawal-Hardin stressed the importance of representation in decision-making. Melanidis highlighted the importance of representation in places like the GEF Assembly but also of pushing for changes from the outside. Another member of the audience underscored the role of language and lack of digital access as barriers to participation.

### ***Indigenous and Local Knowledge Event***

Bierbaum explained this session would look at contributions Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) can make and how to increase these contributions. Eduardo Brondizio, Indiana University, noted three forces colliding that affect IPLCs: growing appreciation of the IPLC role in global environmental governance; lack of global progress in changing from the business-as-usual development model; and recognition that the goals of the global biodiversity and climate agreements cannot be realized without recognizing the rights holders represented by IPLCs.

He said that if the GEF wants the help and support of IPLCs in delivering greater global environmental benefits, it must address the aspirations of, and threats faced by, IPLCs that go beyond the environment dimension. Brondizio suggested one way for the GEF to approach these issues is to reframe IPLC contributions by explicitly recognizing and addressing IPLCs as major contributors to global food production.

### ***Dialogue with Multilateral Environmental Agreement Secretariats and the GEF***

CEO Rodríguez opened the dialogue by saying all aspects of GEF operations are open for discussion, welcoming disruptive, out-of-the-box thinking.

Moderator Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, asked panelists to discuss key convention outcomes and expectations for GEF



**David Cooper**, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat

support. Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions Secretariat, highlighted recent breakthroughs, such as the Stockholm Convention’s compliance mechanism and listing of plastic additives.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat, said the GEF is supporting the translation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) into national targets. Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, anticipated that parties will take decisions related to the GBF Fund at COP 5.

Louise Baker, Managing Director, Global Mechanism, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), noted CCD focus on implementation, with targets from 130 countries. She pointed to the operationalization of these targets as a key GEF support area.

Daniele Violetti, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat, noted the new Loss and Damage Fund and the Global Goal on Adaptation, and highlighted work on a “just transition,” carbon markets, and doubling adaptation finance.



**Eduardo Brondizio**, Indiana University



**Daniele Violetti**, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat



**Maria Socorro Manguiat**, Deputy Executive Secretary, Ozone Secretariat

Maria Socorro Manguiat, Deputy Executive Secretary, Ozone Secretariat, noted 145 ratifications of the 2016 Kigali Amendment and progress on transition from hydrofluorocarbons to substitutes with low global warming potential.

On fragmentation versus synergy and integration, Baker called for: making soil a focus; addressing area-based targets; expanding GEF's Integrated Programs (IPs); and exploring land-based carbon markets. Stankiewicz noted Minamata's work on gold mining in international waters and sought GEF assistance on projects in industrial and utilities sectors.

On GEF's emerging role with MEAs, Cooper said the IP model advances synergy; Violetti called for coherence between funding arrangements for Loss and Damage, including between the GEF and the Green Climate Fund (GCF); and Manguiat noted Kigali Amendment linkages to climate change and energy efficiency.

Concluding the session, Rodríguez said increased integration in GEF programming will not "move the needle" toward sustainability without national dialogues that force ministries to break out of their silos and work together toward policy coherence.

### ***Arctic and the North***

This session was moderated by Monica Medina, CEO, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Judith Daxootsú Ramos,



**Louise Baker**, Managing Director, Global Mechanism, UNCCD

University of Alaska Southeast, presented on indigenous knowledge, including the associated stories that guide the relationship and practices as related to wildlife and the natural world. Jackie Qatalina Schaeffer, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, emphasized the importance of oral history as well as integrating indigenous knowledge in design of buildings in the Arctic.

Eli Enns, CEO, IISAAK OLAM Foundation, discussed the connections between Indigenous Peoples.

In response to what the GEF should invest in, Shaeffer highlighted the importance of creating an equitable space and investing in youth. Enns stressed the importance of protecting "the land that can hold us" during times of crisis.

### ***Amazon***

This session was moderated by Avecita Chicchon, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Valerie Hickey, the World Bank, emphasized the human-human conflict, lamenting that people are murdered in the Amazon for protecting it. She stressed that the voices of Indigenous Peoples need to be increased in local decision-making bodies.

Mariana Varese, WCS, and Secretariat of Aguas Amazónicas, stressed the importance of collaborative learning and brought as an example the protection of catfish connecting community-based initiatives for sustainable fisheries across the Amazon.

Corine Vriesendorp, The Field Museum, discussed how they bring threats affecting communities in the Amazon together to create an integrated analysis of opportunities and recommendations, weaving different strands of knowledge.

Alfredo Vargas, President, Federación Nativa del Río Madre De Dios y Afluentes FENAMAD, highlighted the importance of ancestors' knowledge as well as the economic necessities of indigenous communities. He stressed the relevance of their participation in international processes to uphold their rights and traditional knowledge.

In response to a question about the meaning of enabling access by streamlining bureaucracy, Vargas pointed to the case of managing large projects, where streamlining and adapting procedures would be helpful.

Chicchon gave the floor to two representatives of the Indigenous People Advisory Group (IPAG). Maria Yolanda Teran, LAC IPAG, invited working together to combine indigenous knowledge with western knowledge, using culturally appropriate ways to build capacity and transfer technology. Galina Angarova, Executive Director, Cultural Survival, and IPAG member, exemplified the life/death importance of indigenous knowledge in places like the Siberian Arctic. She added that today's pharmaceutical industry leaned on indigenous knowledge and management of compounds in the plants without fair compensation.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In closing, Bierbaum highlighted the day's topics discussed and lessons learned. She noted challenges identified and tools for addressing them, including integration, innovation, and focusing on transformational change.