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Summary of the Seventh Meeting of the GEF Assembly: 22-25 August 2023

The Seventh Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly was a watershed moment for biodiversity, as members unanimously agreed to ratify the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), approved by the GEF Council in June. The GBFF represents a new source of funding for protecting endangered species and their ecosystems globally. During the Assembly, Canada announced it will invest CAD 200 million in the GBFF and provide CAD 22.8 million for the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF (GEF-8) to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The UK also pledged GBP 10 million in initial contributions to the GBFF.

The GEF Assembly officially opened on the evening of Wednesday, 23 August, with representatives of First Nations welcoming participants to the traditional and unceded territory of the Squamish Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw, Musqueam xʷməθkʷəy̓əm and Tsleil-Waututh səliłwətał Nations.

During the Assembly, in addition to ratifying the decisions underpinning the GBFF, members and other participants gathered in four plenary sessions and 11 roundtables.

The Assembly also:

- adopted amendments to the Instrument for the Establishment of a Restructured GEF;
- took note of the report on the GEF-8 Trust Fund; and
- took note of the report on the GEF Trust Fund.

Preceding the Assembly on 22 August and the morning of 23 August were the:

- Youth Leaders Learning Exchange, which brought together youth activists in a series of panel discussions calling for greater engagement with, and recognition of, youth in the face of the triple planetary crisis the Earth faces;
- Dialogue with Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) Secretariats and the GEF, where panelists from the Secretariats of every MEA the GEF serves spoke to key Convention outcomes and expectations for GEF support;
- Indigenous and Local Knowledge Event, which explored contributions Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) can make and how to increase these contributions; announcement of the 23 winners of the [GEF Assembly Inclusive Challenge Program](#), recognizing and supporting the key role of community-based and civil society actors in delivering inclusive benefits for people and ecosystems; and



Canadian Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** addresses the closing plenary

- launch of the newly established Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Fellowship Program.

The GEF also hosted the first-ever Partnership Forum, which brought together Indigenous Peoples, youth, women,

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and representatives of civil society organizations to discuss ways the GEF can support their empowerment and recognition. Through informal gatherings called “confabs” participants considered intergenerational collaboration, women’s leadership in environmental action, and Indigenous stewardship of the global environment. Key takeaways included calls for:

- attention, support, and funding of women’s participation and recognition that “representation” is not just “participation”;
- inclusion of youth in the design and implementation of projects and development of a GEF strategy for engaging youth;
- changing the principle of “do no harm” to “do good” in engagement with Indigenous Peoples; and
- a study on overlap between Indigenous Peoples’ lands and biodiversity hotspots.

As the Assembly came to a close on Friday, delegates left with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s parting words: “It is time to secure the promise of a better future for everyone; that is what we are doing here together.” Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, expressed hope that the Assembly’s participants would leave with these words in mind: integration, inclusiveness, and impact.

The GEF Assembly and associated events convened from 22-25 August 2023 in Vancouver, Canada, with field trips on Saturday, 26 August, that included:

- a birding excursion, supported by Birds Canada;
- a tour of the Capilano salmon hatchery, supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada;
- a walking tour of the City of Vancouver;
- forest bathing, supported by the University of British Columbia; and
- an event on the future of sustainable food and transportation, supported by Simon Fraser University.

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 for the incremental costs of 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 the 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, the GEF became a separate institution, hosted but not administered by the World Bank, which operates as a key mechanism for global environmental funding, with its Implementing Agencies now numbering 18.

The GEF’s organizational structure includes:

- an Assembly that meets every four years;
- a Council that meets twice a year;
- a Secretariat;
- a Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), which was established in 1995 and provides independent advice to the GEF on its work as well as assistance in the delivery of Members’ responsibilities; and
- an Independent Evaluation Office (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 seven times between 1998 and 2023, is the main guiding structure for the GEF, comprising 186 member governments. It provides a forum for discussion leading up to replenishment negotiations and is responsible for reviewing and ratifying recommendations of the Council.

The GEF is funded by donor countries, which commit money every four years through a process called the GEF replenishment. Since its creation in 1991, the GEF Trust Fund has been replenished with USD 2.75 billion (GEF-1), USD 3 billion (GEF-2), USD 3.13 billion (GEF-3), USD 3.13 billion (GEF-4), USD 4.34 billion (GEF-5), USD 4.43 billion (GEF-6), and USD 4.1 billion (GEF-7). In June 2022, the GEF Council endorsed GEF-8, totaling more than USD 5 billion, for the period 2022- 2026 (with an extra year due to the COVID-19 pandemic). GEF-8 is over 30% greater than GEF-7.

The GEF administers the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund, which was established under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and provides secretariat services to the Adaptation Fund, which was established by Parties to the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC.

The GEF also serves as a financial mechanism for several MEAs, including the: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); UNFCCC; UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; and Minamata Convention on Mercury. The Seventh GEF Assembly adopted amendments to the GEF Instrument in order for it to also serve the new agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) or “High Seas Treaty” under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In addition, the GEF’s work focuses on sustainable forest management, international waters, ozone layer depletion, and other areas.

Daily reports of this meeting and Summaries of ENB coverage of past GEF Council and Assembly meetings can be found at: <https://enb.iisd.org/negotiations/global-environment-facility-gef>.



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

Report of the GEF Assembly and Associated Events

Youth Leaders Learning Exchange

The Youth Leaders Learning Exchange convened on [Tuesday, 22 August](#). In opening the exchange, CEO Rodríguez urged rethinking how the GEF works, recognizing the need for whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. He discussed what each means, and the importance of embedding that understanding in the next replenishment.

Three Things to Save the Ocean: This keynote was delivered by Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia. Introducing his book, [Infinity Fish](#), he explained the concept of fish as a renewable resource that, if treated well, can support humanity forever. During discussion, attendees and Sumaila 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: This panel was moderated by Aileen Lee, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Frankie Marquez, Ocean Wise Conservation Association, noted Ocean Wise funnels youth's passion, frustration, and anger regarding the world's Ocean into addressing overfishing, climate change, and plastic pollution. Skw'akw'as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore, TLKemchEEn, called for resourcing Indigenous Peoples to attend conferences and be heard, urging youth to discomfort people with their reality to influence change.

Marina Melanidis, Youth4Nature, drew attention to the first global youth policy statement calling out greenwashing and urged redistribution of power and resources. Sophia Yang, Threading Change, 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.

Indigenous and Local Knowledge Event

This event, moderated by Rosina Bierbaum, GEF STAP Chair, was held on [Tuesday, 22 August](#). Bierbaum explained the session's purpose was to consider contributions IPLCs can make and how to increase these contributions. Eduardo Brondizio,

Indiana University, 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.

Arctic and the North: This session was moderated by Monica Medina, CEO, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Judith Daxootsú Ramos, University of Alaska Southeast, presented on Indigenous knowledge, including the associated stories that guide the relationship with, and practices 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 the design of buildings in the Arctic. Eli Enns, CEO, IISAAK OLAM Foundation, discussed the connections between Indigenous Peoples.

Amazon: This session was moderated by Avecita Chicchón, 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.

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

Alfredo Vargas, President, Federación Nativa del Río Madre De Dios y Afluentes, highlighted the importance of ancestors' knowledge, as well as the economic necessities of Indigenous communities.

Dialogue with MEA Secretariats and the GEF

CEO Rodríguez opened this dialogue on [Tuesday, 22 August](#), by saying all aspects of GEF operations are open for discussion, welcoming disruptive, out-of-the-box thinking. Moderator Chizuru Aoki, GEF, asked panelists to discuss key convention outcomes and expectations for GEF support.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions Secretariat, highlighted recent



Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair



Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions



Prisca Daka, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, Africa

breakthroughs, such as the Stockholm Convention's compliance mechanism and listing of plastic additives.

David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, 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 GBFF at the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP5) to the Minamata Convention later this year.

Louise Baker, Managing Director, Global Mechanism, UNCCD, described a focus on implementation, with targets from 130 countries. She pointed to the operationalization of these targets as a key GEF support area.

Daniele Violetti, UNFCCC Secretariat, recalled the recently adopted decisions on funding arrangements for loss and damage and the Global Goal on Adaptation, established under the Paris Agreement. He also highlighted work on a "just transition," carbon markets, and doubling adaptation finance.

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

GEF Partnership Forum

The first-ever GEF Partnership Forum, held on [Wednesday, 23 August](#), created a space for Indigenous Peoples, youth, women, and representatives from civil society to discuss ways the GEF can support their recognition and empowerment. Gabriella Richardson Temm, GEF, opened the session. Carleen Thomas, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, greeted participants.

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

Sano Akhteruzzaman, Chair, GEF Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network, called for the GEF Secretariat to provide CSOs

with capacity and the ability to work directly with the GEF and access funds over shorter timeframes.

CEO Rodríguez called for making the GEF the most important strategic financial partner of civil society and facilitator of generational change.

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

Mary Jane Enchill, HATOF Foundation, described how transformative a GEF-supported journalist training on environmental degradation was for her. Skw'akw'as (Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore urged bringing empathy and feelings back into the narratives.

Damaris Fabiola Quijivix Monzón, GEF Small Grants Programme Youth Grantee, Guatemala, credited the talent and drive of young people for creating and growing her local non-profit organization.

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

Forum Confabs: Three "Forum Confabs" or informal gatherings were held during the Partnership Event.



Sano Akhteruzzaman, Chair, GEF CSO Network

Intergenerational Collaboration for Our Future: The first part of this Confab, moderated by Gabriella Richardson, GEF, asked how the GEF Partnership should engage youth. Panelists suggested:

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

In the second part, panelists discussed how to engage youth on a longer-term basis. On the question of possible solutions to impediments, panelists suggested:

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

Women's Leadership in Environmental Action: During this Confab, Verona Collantes-Lebale, GEF, moderated the first part, seeking elaboration on women's leadership and gender-responsive actions in environmental programs and initiatives.

Scovia Ampumuza Faraja, CBD Women's Caucus, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, highlighted a project that is planting trees on riverbanks to help clean the water that women work so hard to fetch. Highlighting that the majority of employment in the agrifood system is held by women, Maria-Helena Semedo, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), called for starting with women in order to transform the system.

Ana Di Pangracio, CBD Women's Caucus, moderated the second part on advocacy for women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment in environmental policies, plans, and financing. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, noting few men in the room, advocated for educating men to change culture and laws harming rural women. Nguavese Tracy Ogbonna, GEF CSO Network, Nigeria, bemoaned science-ignoring cultural and religious practices.



William Ehlers, GEF Council Secretary

Indigenous Stewardship of the Global Environment: Lucy Mulenkei, Indigenous Information Network, moderated this Confab. Giovanni Reyes, Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA) Consortium, the Philippines, discussed the GEF's support in harnessing Indigenous knowledge systems to delineate ICCAs. Yolanda Teran, Indigenous Women Network for Biodiversity, highlighted the importance of working in a holistic manner to elevate the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Aliou Mustafa, Indigenous Peoples and Rural Development Association, Cameroon, underscored the importance of the GEF supporting more inclusive collaboration and working in an intergenerational manner.

Sharing Experiences and Ideas for Change: During the Partnership plenary, Susan Waitthaka, GEF moderated and the rapporteurs from the three Confabs reported back on key takeaways.

The Inclusive GEF Assembly Challenge Program: Chizuru Aoki introduced this new funding initiative, providing up to USD 100,000 to each of 23 winners. Twelve winning organizations' representatives briefly introduced their projects.

Closing of the Partnership Forum: Closing the first-ever GEF-organized Partnership Forum, CEO Rodríguez emphasized the theme of inclusion, noting civil society's rightful place in the "main hall" of the GEF Assembly.

Responding to CEO Rodríguez's call for a more inclusive financial mechanism that takes a whole-of-society approach, GEF Council Chair Tom Bui, Canada, announced his support for the proposal to make civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth an integral part of the GEF family.

Opening Ceremony of the Seventh GEF Assembly and Opening Statements

The Assembly opened on the evening of [Wednesday, 23 August](#). Following a drum and vocal performance and welcome remarks by the host Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil Waututh Nations, Emilie Leclerc introduced the Honor Party from the Canadian Government. Noting the world's systemic crisis requires a systemic approach, CEO Rodríguez called for bringing non-state actors to the table.

Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Canada, expressed Canada's support for the GEF and



Lucy Mulenkei, Indigenous Information Network



hailed the creation of the GBFF. He encouraged all governments, philanthropies, and others to contribute to the GBFF before the next CBD COP in 2024.

Opening Statements were made on [Thursday, 24 August](#). Chair Hussen said the GEF has the opportunity to build stronger partnerships, support locally-driven and inclusive initiatives, and promote ideas that are evidence-based and proven effective. CEO Rodríguez called for a new, systemic approach that brings the voices of civil society to the table.

Assembly Administrative Items

These items were addressed on [Thursday, 24 August](#) and Friday, 25 August.

Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs: On [Thursday](#), the Assembly elected Ahmed Hussen, Canada, as Assembly Chair, and confirmed Prakash Sharan Mahat, Nepal, as Vice-Chair from recipient countries and Yutaka Matsuzawa, Japan, as Vice-Chair from non-recipient countries.

Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work: On [Thursday](#), the Assembly adopted the agenda (GEF/A.7/01/Rev.01; GEF/A.7/02/Rev.02) and organization of work as presented by Chair Hussen.

Amendments to the Instrument for the Establishment of a Restructured GEF: On Friday, Vice-Chair Mahat introduced this item ([GEF/A.7/08](#)), noting that amendments to the Instrument are to be approved by consensus by the Assembly upon the Council's recommendation, after considering the views of the Implementing Agencies and the Trustee.

Many countries welcomed the amendments and GEF-8 pledges, with Argentina, FAO, the US, Germany, and Samoa noting the importance of an amended Instrument for the GEF to serve as part of the financial mechanism of the High Seas Treaty to help countries meet their commitments.

Argentina and Italy commended the evolution toward a more accountable, flexible, and transparent Instrument. Botswana noted it is essential for any progressive entity like the GEF to keep evolving in the face of changing circumstances.

Italy suggested leveraging public resources to scale up private sector involvement. India called for an increased focus on renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, and water security. Thailand encouraged the GEF's continued use of integrated

approaches that generate multiple environmental benefits simultaneously.

Noting significant capacity built recently in his country, Ethiopia asked the GEF to reconsider the country's System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR). With respect to governance, Uganda recommended, rather than using large blocs (e.g., African Group, LDCs), using smaller blocs of countries to more efficiently determine where to focus resources for the biggest impact. The GEF CSO Network recommended increasing visibility through an education component of each integrated program, using defined roles and responsibilities for stakeholders in each integrated program to create accountability, and continuous monitoring to make real-time improvements during program implementation.

Decision: In its decision, the Seventh GEF Assembly, recalling paragraph 34 of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured GEF, and having considered the recommendations of the GEF Council for proposed amendments to the Instrument in its Decisions 37/2022 and 14/2023:

- approves by consensus the amended text of the Instrument contained in Document GEF/A.7/08;
- invites the GEF CEO/Chairperson to submit this amended text to the Implementing Agencies and the Trustee and to request that they adopt it in accordance with their respective rules and procedural requirements; and
- invites the CEO/Chairperson of the Facility to inform all Participants of the effectiveness of the amended Instrument once the Implementing Agencies and the Trustee have approved it.

Report on the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust

Fund: On Friday, 25 August, CEO Rodríguez reported that GEF-8 negotiations ([GEF/A.7/04](#)), held under unprecedented circumstances and entirely virtually due to the pandemic, had resulted in an historic amount, totaling USD 5.33 billion. Japan, the US, and Germany highlighted their contributions, which underscore their pride and confidence in the GEF's successful record, competitive advantages, and upcoming work programs. Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Colombia highlighted the continued importance of integrated approaches.

Tanzania, Togo, and the Philippines urged increased efficiencies, such as timely creation of project proposals and reduced delays in approving projects. Syria hoped that during the upcoming cycle his country would no longer be excluded from GEF activities.

The Assembly took note of the report.

Report on the GEF Trust Fund: On Friday, Vice-Chair Mahat informed the Assembly that the Trustee of the GEF Trust Fund had prepared a report, "GEF-7 Funding Retrospective" ([GEF/A.7/05/Rev.01](#)), on the resources made available to the GEF Trust Fund during GEF-7. The Assembly took note of the document.

Report on GEF Participants: On Friday, 25 August, Vice-Chair Mahat noted that paragraph 14 of the GEF's Instrument calls on the Assembly to keep under review country participants

in the GEF. He presented the list of participants ([GEF/A.7/03/Rev.01](#)), noting the GEF presently has 186 participants. The Assembly took note of the report.

Report on Credentials: On Friday, the Assembly took note of the report ([GEF/A.7/10](#)).

Statement by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office: On Friday, Juha Uitto, Director, GEF IEO, presented the Seventh Overall Performance Study (OPS) or “comprehensive evaluation” ([GEF/A.7/06](#)). Reflecting that the IEO was established 20 years ago, Uitto said the evaluation provides lessons on what works, where, how, and why. He expressed appreciation that the GEF bodies consider the findings of the IEO when deciding next steps, for example, establishing an innovation fund in response to an OPS7 recommendation. Uitto closed by promising the IEO will continue to ensure evaluation approaches will provide timely and relevant inputs as GEF programming evolves.

The Assembly took note of the report.

Statement by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel:

On Friday, Bierbaum reported on emerging signals, trends, and drivers ([GEF/A.7/07](#)). She noted trends, including: 2023 as the warmest year on record; Ocean heatwaves harming marine life and fueling storms; wildlife populations down 70%; and continuing deforestation and pollution. She also noted: public pressure to act; loss of social cohesion; circular economy transformations; citizen science; and new biomaterials for plastics and textiles. She reported STAP recommendations on: tighter regulatory frameworks; inclusivity; policy coherence; innovation; knowledge management and learning; and leveraging “whole-of-society” partnerships.

Statement by the Representative of the CSO Network: On Friday, the GEF CSO Network presented the CSO statement, stressing the need for new ways of addressing the environmental crisis through use of the latest technologies.

Statement by the Youth Representative: On Friday, the Youth representative offered recommendations, specifically: representation and participation of youth in GEF processes; and support of capacity-building efforts.

Statement by the Women and Gender Caucus: On Friday, the Caucus called for: all GEF programming to be gender-responsive; reforms to ensure women’s accessibility to funds; simplification of funding procurement mechanisms;

and amplifying women’s voices to ensure effective policy implementation.

Statement by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: On Friday, IPLCs recommended considering multiple approaches of access to really simplify and provide flexibility for diverse Indigenous Peoples and communities to be able to access funds. They warned that traditional approaches to preservation can lead to dispossession or displacement.

Presentation of the Chair’s Summary: On Friday, the Assembly took note of the Chair’s Summary ([GEF/A.7/Summary](#)).

Summary of High-Level Roundtable Discussions: On Friday, Richard Bontjer, Australia, reported ([GEF/A.7/Inf.02/Rev.01](#)) on key themes on transformative governance from the 11 Roundtables.

Ratification of the Council Decisions on the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

The Assembly took up this item ([GEF/A.7/09](#)) on **Thursday, 24 August**. David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, CBD, urged all participants to mobilize resources to enable GBFF disbursements to developing countries ahead of CBD COP 16.

Canada and the UK announced USD 200 million and GBP 10 million initial contributions, respectively, and urged others to contribute what they can as soon as possible.

Decision: The Assembly endorsed Council decision 09/2023 creating the GBFF. GEF members welcomed GBFF establishment and made statements accordingly.

Plenaries

Three plenaries were held on **Thursday, 24 August** and **Friday, 25 August**.

Solutions for a Healthy Planet: Integrated Responses to Global Environmental Degradation: This Thursday plenary session was moderated by Rosina Bierbaum, STAP Chair. Carlos Nobre, University of São Paulo, as the “disruption speaker,” discussed the pitfalls of the development model that assigns no value to standing forests and contrasted it with agroforestry services, which can provide much higher incomes than pasture or traditional farming.

Panelists commented on management practices toward more sustained outcomes, possible tradeoffs from integration, and



Prakash Mahat, Vice-Chair, Seventh GEF Assembly



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

new tools or technologies that can fulfill the vision of systemic solutions.

Solutions for a Healthy Planet: Partnerships for Financing:

Chizuru Aoki, GEF, moderated this Friday plenary. Citing the disruption caused by COVID-19, Valerie Hickey, World Bank, “disruption speaker,” underscored the importance of money for development gains.

In the following panel discussion, Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, underscored that partnerships for funding should be managed in a way that responds to the needs of the members of the partnership.

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

Speaking on the role of different stakeholders, Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP, called on actors to sound the alarm on the fundamental misallocation of taxpayer dollars to fossil fuel subsidies. Maruma Mrema reflected on how, after learning from past mistakes, the biodiversity regime has the deep involvement of civil society and the private sector.

On how to increase funding and private sector engagement, Gerd Müller, Director General, UN Industrial Development Organization, noted the great disparity between global military spending and development aid. Helen Crowley, Managing Director, Pollination, said companies can rethink risk, return to discover value creation opportunities, and increase resilience and impact.

Solutions for a Healthy Planet: Responsible, Inclusive and Transformative Governance: This Friday plenary session was moderated by Peter Seligmann, CEO, Nia Tero. Introducing the panel, he noted that the environmental crises the planet is facing represents “an urgency that needs to be addressed.”

Sonia Guajajara, Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Brazil, in her “disruption” speech, underscored that “solidarity is a value that needs to grow even more in international relations.” She noted that the greatest expenses come from the impacts of climate change and not from the measures to avoid them. In reference to the GBFF, she called for shared governance mechanisms that are inclusive of recipient countries.



Lori Kerr, CEO, FinDev Canada



Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat

Responding to Seligmann’s question on how to transform governance, panelists provided ideas and examples on engaging communities and elevating their voices where it matters. Ray Kiliho, Jane Goodall’s Roots and Shoots, noted youth wear several hats, including holding governments accountable, grassroots monitoring, and curating technology. He suggested the GEF create systemic youth representation through a specific advisory group. Ruth Spencer, Local Community Representative, Antigua and Barbuda, flagged the importance of building trust, by listening to communities’ ideas and involving them in the inception of projects.

Grethel Aguilar, Acting Director General, IUCN, predicted that progress will accelerate if resources are provided directly to communities. Noting the wealth of the Global North was achieved via extraction from the Global South, Barbara Creecy, Minister of Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs, South Africa, called for righting the balance of power within international bodies. Naoko Ishii, University of Tokyo and former GEF CEO and Chairperson, called for changing the global economic and financial system to “align it with our values” to appreciate natural and human capital and pay “guardians of global commons” for protecting them.

Asked to describe what changes they wished to see in the GEF to effectively respond to planetary crises, Kiliho called for a concrete GEF plan for youth engagement and youth access to GEF financial resources. Ishii said the GEF needs a governing mechanism that includes all voices. Aguilar called for more access to funds for CSOs, and more funding for the GBFF. Guajajara emphasized GEF support for IPLCs.

Roundtables

Eleven roundtables convened on [Thursday, 24 August](#), and Friday, 25 August.

Can Increasing Policy Coherence across Sectors Narrow the Nature and Climate Funding Gap?: This roundtable, held on Thursday, provided insights from the perspective of representative decision makers on: policy coherence; what they see as the main challenges and enabling conditions for increasing policy coherence; how these conditions can be facilitated at both the national and international levels; and their thoughts on any



Grethel Aguilar, Acting Director General, IUCN

existing or potential innovative instruments, mechanisms, or frameworks that can help advance policy coherence.

Bridging the Science and Policy Nexus for Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Thomas Tomich, University of California, Davis, moderated this roundtable on Thursday, calling transformation of complex systems a “wicked problem.”

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

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

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

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

Blake Ratner, GEF STAP, stressed that solving “wicked problems” requires addressing how human systems work, urging real-time evaluation of policies.

Pathways to a Net Zero Nature-positive World: This roundtable, held on Thursday, explored key questions, including:

- What institutional structures are needed for a coordinated and coherent response to the twin crisis?
- How to achieve whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches?
- What is the role of public finance and budgeting processes in supporting climate and nature action? and
- What is the role of international finance institutions in supporting countries raising ambition in climate and nature, and pursuing greater coordination and coherence in responses?

Catalyzing a Zero-Waste, Circular Economic System: This Thursday roundtable, moderated by Apoorva Arya, CEO, Circular Innovation Lab, opened with a presentation

differentiating the current linear, take-make-waste model from a circular economy model. Panelists then presented on:

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

Building Cities for People and Planet – Promoting Decisive Actions on Integrating Nature in Future Urban Growth:

This roundtable, held on Thursday, brought together Mayors, national leaders and urban experts working at the intersection of integrated urban planning with nature, sustainable finance, and climate policies, to share their ambition, innovative ideas, and experiences on how cities can integrate nature and biodiversity and enhance citizen engagement for transformative action.

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

Aziz Abdulkhaimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, Uzbekistan, supported the regional approach in addressing conservation challenges across Central Asia. Citing commitment to addressing barriers to the movement of migratory species, he reported that Uzbekistan will host 14th COP to the Convention on Migratory Species in February 2024.

Lucía Ruiz Bustos, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), stressed the importance of people’s ownership of conservation efforts. Ramson Karmushu, Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation, cited the importance for Indigenous Peoples of conservation of both flourishing and degraded ecosystems.

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

Promoting an Integrated Approach Towards Food Systems Transformation: On Friday, Teresa Welsh, Devex, moderated this roundtable. Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, Canada, in his keynote, said food systems influence the land, and helping make those systems inclusive and sustainable globally is part of Canada's policy.

Zulfiya Suleimenova, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Kazakhstan, highlighted the diametrical challenges of supporting food systems while making sure those systems do not exacerbate threats to ecosystems. She cited the experience from her country, one of the greatest exporters of wheat, where production, impacted by climate change, is expected to decrease by almost half by 2050. She called for finding synergies and balancing competing interest through the formula of bringing nature, people, and development on unexplored paths which include incentivizing soil restoration and management approaches.

Kwaku Afriyie, Minister of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation, Ghana, called for ethical financing to solve food insecurity. Namgay Tshering, Minister of Finance, Bhutan, highlighted how only 7% of the land in his country is arable, and, because of its location, it is vulnerable to erosion and climate change impacts. He stated that drivers of environmental degradation, including crops damaged by wildlife, discourage agricultural production among farmers.

Alue Dohong, Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia, discussed the importance of palm oil in the country's economy as well as reducing forest degradation through a forest clearing moratorium.

Jyotsna Puri, International Fund for Agricultural Development, highlighted the importance of creating incentives in food production systems to reduce food waste and increase resilience. Maria Helena Semedo, FAO, called for science and commitment for informed decisions.

Martien van Nieuwkoop, World Bank, underscored that food systems are both culprit and victim of climate change. Eliane Ubalijoro, CEO, Center for International Forestry Research and Director-General, World Agroforestry, emphasized the importance of focusing on soil health.

In the subsequent panel discussion, when asked about measures of success, Semedo stressed that food systems must consider local circumstances. Van Nieuwkoop cited healthy diets and one health approaches. Adonai Herrera-Martínez, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, urged moving from extractive to regenerative economic frameworks.

Beyond Inclusion: Supporting the Environmental Leadership of Women, Youth, and Indigenous Peoples: This roundtable, held on Friday, focused on identifying ways for the GEF and the wider GEF partnership to support diverse leadership in addition to inclusion. Building on the ideas and recommendations developed during the Partnership Forum, participants discussed solutions and approaches they can implement as well as developing guidance for the GEF and partners.

Managing for Environmental Results and Transformational Change: This roundtable, held on Friday, explored two themes:

- unlocking innovation and managing risk for heightened impact, where participants considered the role of the private sector, and the importance of risk-informed programming for the GEF; and
- harnessing data and results cosystems for the planet, where the focus was on the role of conventions, country action, and support of international financing institutions.

The GEF's Future with New Agreements and Emerging Themes: This Friday roundtable was moderated by Juan Hoffmaister, Environmental Defense Fund. During the discussion on New and Emerging Agreements, Cooper suggested regarding the GBFF as an opportunity to innovate and incubate new ideas and approaches. Mrema suggested the GEF can play a role in financing technical and other support the anticipated plastics treaty may call for. Blake Ratner, STAP, said the GEF needs to consider how the new High Seas Treaty can be effectively implemented and enforced.

Felix Rugwizangoga, Rwanda Green Fund, suggested the GEF help developing countries in: accessing multiple funding sources for the same programs; and simplifying the reporting and monitoring burdens they face. Gabriela Blatter, Switzerland, suggested the GEF be the financial mechanism for any plastics treaty.

In the panel session on Emerging Modalities and Innovative Approaches, Warren Evans, Asian Development Bank (ADB), said closer cooperation between the GEF and the MDBs is important because it can help the GEF leverage funds. Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention on Mercury, welcomed the GEF-8 replenishment's emphasis on integrated approaches, while cautioning that not all issues are suitable for integration.

Jürgen Zattler, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, urged the GEF to consider innovations that enable joining forces with the MDBs, bilateral donors, and others to address issues beyond individual projects. Kevin Lunzalu, Kenyan Youth Biodiversity Network, explained how youth are organizing national, regional, and global issue



Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP

networks. Andrew Deutz, The Nature Conservancy, urged the GEF to work more on bringing together environment and finance ministries, and engage in more blended financing that prompts policy reforms.

Catalyzing Climate Resilience and Adapting to New

Realities: This roundtable, moderated by Jay Koh, Managing Director, The Lightsmith Group, was held on Friday.

Baba Brown, LDC Group, emphasized that the private sector also includes small-scale and informal actors. Valerie Hickey, World Bank, stressed the world owes LDCs a debt for the costs they have incurred from climate change.

Maelis Carraro, Managing Partner, Catalyst Fund, said her fund provides early-stage practical and technical support to entrepreneurs. Aisha Raheem-Bolarinwa, Farmz2U, said her group provides technology for fair, sustainable cocoa value chains. Juliet Monro, Director, FSD Africa, said her organization uses public funds to manage risk and create private sector returns.

Audrey Yamadjako, African Development Bank, emphasized Africa's "tremendous natural capital," urging new regulatory frameworks and reversing investors' risk aversion. Emmanuel Kikli-Leyani, GEF Innovative Challenge Prize winner, emphasized local knowledge, capacity, and networks, noting multiple distribution layers reduce funds reaching local beneficiaries.

Panelists agreed on tackling adaptation, mitigation, and resilience together, and on including African countries in investment decision making. Edward Carr, STAP, said adaptation projects must: reduce risk exposure, reduce sensitivity to risk, or build adaptive capacity; and incorporate rigorous theories of change and evaluation. Toru Kubo, ADB, said the ADB addresses regulatory barriers and investment opportunities, including valuing environmental services to incentivize private sector investment.

Farhina Ahmed, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Bangladesh, said super cyclones cost her country's economy USD 1 billion annually and underscored preferential treatment to business technology and financial institutions. Wilson K. Tarpeh, CEO, Environmental Protection Agency, Liberia, urged accessible systemic innovation focused on learning and knowledge management.

In the ensuing discussion, panelists queried the double standard of easy financing for mainstream start-ups but rigorous requirements for climate adaptation innovators.

Closing of the Assembly

The Assembly closed on Friday. Noting recent wildfires in Canada and other intense, extreme events around the globe, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said these have been driven by climate change and nature loss. He rejected the proposition that we must choose between improving quality of life and protecting nature, saying one helps us achieve the other. Trudeau recalled Canada's announcement at CBD COP 15 of [four major projects](#) led by Indigenous communities that will protect almost one million square kilometers of land and water, in the process creating a conservation economy where caring for the land can be a career. He called for others to do the same around the world. Trudeau hailed the creation of the GBFF and noted Canada's initial contribution of USD 200 million. To leave the Earth better for future generations, he urged working together as the Seventh GEF Assembly has done.

CEO Rodríguez expressed hope that the Assembly's participants would leave with the following words in their mind: integration, inclusiveness, and impact. He emphasized that civil society is key protecting the environment and only by being inclusive is it possible to have higher impact.



L-R: **Rosina Bierbaum**, STAP Chair; **Juha Uitto**, Director, GEF IEO; **Carlos Manuel Rodríguez**, GEF CEO and Chairperson; **Yutaka Matsuzawa**, Vice-Chair, Seventh GEF Assembly; and **William Ehlers**, GEF Council Secretary

Upcoming Meetings

Climate Ambition Summit: This event is being organized by the UN Secretary-General during the High-level week of the UN General Assembly. It is an opportunity for “First Movers and Doers” to report how they are responding to the Secretary-General’s call to accelerate climate action. **date:** 20 September 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-ambition-summit

GCF High-Level Pledging Conference: This event is an opportunity to demonstrate global commitment to achieving collective climate ambition. As part of the financial mechanism of the UNFCCC, the Green Climate Fund supports developing countries to respond to the climate crisis and transition to low-emission, climate-resilient pathways. **date:** 5 October 2023 **location:** Bonn, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany **www:** greenclimate.fund/event/high-level-pledging-conference-second-replenishment-gcf-gcf-2

Final Intergovernmental Consultations on Nature-based Solutions: This event will feature both regional and global consultations on Nature-based Solutions. These final consultations follow five Regional Consultations (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and Other States) and the First Global Consultation. UNEP will host the Consultation. **dates:** 9-13 October 2023 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unep.org/events/working-group/final-intergovernmental-consultations-nature-based-solutions

Eighteenth Meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Committee (POPRC-18) of the Stockholm Convention: POPRC-18 will consider, *inter alia*: draft risk profiles for chlorpyrifos, chlorinated paraffins with carbon chain lengths of C14 and chlorination levels at or exceeding 45% chlorine by weight, and long-chain perfluorocarboxylic acids (LC-PFCAs), their salts and related compounds; and draft risk management evaluations for UV-328 and Dechlorane Plus. **dates:** 9-13 October 2023 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** www.pops.int/

SBSTTA 25: The 25th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the CBD will take place in October 2023. **dates:** 16-19 October 2023 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** cbd.int/meetings/

Minamata Convention COP5: The COP will consider, among other things, amendment proposals to ban cosmetics, fluorescent lighting, and dental amalgam containing mercury. **dates:** 30 October – 3 November 2023 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** mercuryconvention.org/en/meetings/cop5

Fourth Nature for Life Hub 2023: This event will showcase opportunities to accelerate action on the Kunming-Montreal GBF and place nature at the heart of development. The Hub aims to bring together governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector to exchange knowledge and solutions, promote collaboration and partnerships, and raise awareness and countries’ ambitions to deliver National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions

Plans (NBSAPs). The Nature for Life Hub is hosted by UNDP, UNEP, and the CBD Secretariat. **dates:** 7-9 November 2023 **location:** virtual **www:** learningfornature.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Nature-for-Life-Hub-Invitation-2023-final-1.pdf

2023 UN Climate Change Conference: The Conference comprises: COP 28 of the UNFCCC; the fifth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Paris Agreement (CMA 5); the 18th meeting of the COP serving as the MOP to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 18); and the 59th meetings of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI59) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA59). Among other things, COP 28 will conclude the first Global Stocktake of the implementation of the Paris Agreement. **dates:** 30 November – 12 December 2023 **location:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates **www:** www.cop28.com/en/

65th GEF Council: The GEF Council develops, adopts, and evaluates the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. It also reviews and approves the work program (projects submitted for approval), making decisions by consensus. **dates:** 18-22 December 2023 **location:** Washington D.C., US **www:** www.thegef.org/events

For additional meetings, see sdg.iisd.org/

Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil society organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEF-8	Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GBFF	Global Biodiversity Framework Fund
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LDCs	Least developed countries
MDB	Multilateral development bank
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
SGP	Small Grants Programme
SIDS	Small island developing states
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNEP	UN Environment Programme