



## **69<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting: GEF Consultations with Civil Society**

**Thursday, May 29th 2025**

**07:00 – 9:00 am. EST**

### ***Operationalizing the GEF Whole of Society Approach: Enhancing engagement and support to Civil Society in GEF-9***

#### **Introduction**

Adjacent to the GEF 69<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, a virtual GEF Consultations with Civil Society is scheduled on Thursday May 29th from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. EST.

This CSO consultation will be forward looking, building on the many consultations with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth group that the GEF Secretariat has organized and facilitated in GEF-8, including CSO Consultations<sup>1,2</sup>, the GEF-7 Assembly Partnership Forum<sup>3</sup>, GEF Extended Constituency Workshops (ECWs); and more recently the dedicated stocktaking and visioning exercise on expanding GEF's engagement and financing to civil society and the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) as part of the GEF-9 Technical Advisory Meetings (TAGs) in February, 2025.

In this CSO consultation session, the GEF Secretariat will convene a conversation with civil society organizations, the GEF CSO Network, GEF Council members and GEF partners to review early lessons learned implementing GEF SGP 2.0 and other targeted efforts to expand support and engagement with civil society, Indigenous Peoples and youth in GEF-8. It will seek to sharpen suggestions and ideas generated in earlier CSO consultations and TAG discussions to generate more detailed recommendations to be considered by the GEF partnership to enhance engagement and financing to civil society in GEF-9.

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<sup>1</sup> Including: "Enhancing Climate Resilience: The Role of Civil Society, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities." – June 2021 (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-enhancing-climate-resilience/>) "Youth-led Solutions to the Planet's Environmental Crisis" – Dec 2021 (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-youth-led-advocacy-and-solutions/>) Expanding Microfinancing to Support Local Actors and Actions for the Environment in GEF-8 and Beyond - June 2022 (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-inclusive-microfinancing/>) Civil society engagement with the Global Environmental Conventions that the GEF Serves - Nov 2022 (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-global-environmental-conventions/>) Consultations with Civil Society on Building Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Cities - Feb 2024 (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gef-consultations-civil-society-building-sustainable-resilient-and-inclusive-cities/>) Conversation on GEF initiatives and approaches to Civil Society - June 2024.

<sup>2</sup> For additional background see: GEF/C.63/Inf.15, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> See also <https://enb.iisd.org/global-environment-facility-gef-assembly-7-daily-report-23aug2023>

## Background

Evidence shows that engaging civil society, women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, and local communities as environmental leaders is effective and efficient in delivering global environmental benefits. Empowered civil society plays important roles influencing and setting national and global agendas, supporting domestic policy coherence and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. They generate a sound complement to government and private sector actions while enhancing well-being, livelihoods, and resilience at the community level and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

Recent GEF IEO Evaluations<sup>5</sup> corroborate that bottom-up approaches guided by community priorities are linked to sustainability and that good project design focused on participatory planning and meaningful integration of communities in resource management was a key factor in sustainability. At the same time, barriers to civil society engagement and inclusion are varied and numerous, ranging from legal structures, financing to institutional and cultural dynamics.

The GEF Partnership has long recognized the importance of the role of civil society, stakeholder engagement and advancing gender equality in its operations and programs. In this regard, GEF has in place policies on Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Equality, and Environmental and Social Safeguards<sup>6</sup> mandating important principles related to stakeholder engagement, incorporation of gender equality dimensions, respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as avoiding and mitigating any potential negative impacts of GEF financed activities on vulnerable groups and individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> Assorted references on the important roles of civil society, women, youth, and IPLCs in delivering global environmental benefits:

- [Alejo C, Meyer C, Walker WS, Gorelik SR, Josse C, Aragon-Osejo JL, Rios S, Augusto C, Llanos A, Coomes OT and others. \(2021\)](#) Are indigenous territories effective natural climate solutions? A neotropical analysis using matching methods and geographic discontinuity designs
- [Brondizio, E.S, Yildiz Aumeeruddy-Thomas, Peter Bates, Joji Carino, Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, Kathleen Galvin, Victoria Reyes-García, Pam McElwee, Zsolt Molnar, Aibek Samakov, and Uttam Babu Shrestha \(2021\)](#): Locally Based, Regionally Manifested, and Globally Relevant: Indigenous and Local Knowledge, Values, and Practices for Nature. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 2021. 46:16.1–16.29
- [Forest Peoples Programme, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network, Centres of Distinction on Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity \(2020\)](#) Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2: The contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to renewing nature and cultures. A complement to the fifth edition of Global Biodiversity Outlook. Moreton-in-Marsh, England: Forest Peoples Programme.
- [Brondizio E.S., Krister Andersson, Fabio de Castro, Celia Fudemma, Carl Salk, Maria Tengo, Marina Londres, Daiana CM Tourne, Tai’s S Gonzalez, Adriana Molina-Garzo, Gabriela Russo Lopes and Sacha MO Siani \(2021a\)](#) Making place-based sustainability initiatives visible in the Brazilian Amazon. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 2021, 49:66–78
- [Child B, Cooney R. \(2019\)](#) Local Commons for Global Benefits: Indigenous and community-based management of wild species, forests, and drylands. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility, Washington, DC.
- [Ens E, Scott ML, Rangers YM, Moritz C, Pirzl R. \(2016\)](#) Putting indigenous conservation policy into practice delivers biodiversity and cultural benefits.

<sup>5</sup> GEF IEO (2024), Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF, <https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/community-based-approaches-vol1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [GEF Policy on Stakeholder Engagement Policy](#) (SD/PL/01, 2017); [GEF Policy on Gender Equality](#) (SD/PL/02, 2017); and [GEF Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards](#) (SD/PL/03, 2019)

Moreover, GEF has established dedicated programs, including the longstanding GEF Small Grants Program (SGP)<sup>7</sup> that have served for 30 years as GEF’s key financing window for civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth groups to access GEF financing, as well as capacity strengthening and technical support to address global environmental issues through decentralized delivery mechanisms. More recently, GEF has launched targeted programs like the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI)<sup>8</sup> and Fonseca Leadership Program (FLP)<sup>9</sup> to increase support and financing to Indigenous Peoples and youth.

### **Objectives of the session**

The session will bring together members of the GEF partnership, civil society representatives and GEF project and program beneficiaries to further discuss, advance, explore and refine ideas and options available to the GEF to operationalize GEF’s Whole-of-Society approach and expand its partnership, engagement, support, and financing to civil society, Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and youth, in GEF-9.

The main objective for this session is to draw out strategic elements of advice on opportunities to enhance GEF’s targeted programs, engagement and financing to civil society and IPLCs to support greater environmental impact and results. The session will be forward looking, reflecting on challenges and opportunities, featuring facilitated discussion and brainstorming among GEF civil society partners, agencies and global and local practitioners and partners. It is expected that the session will generate finetuned and concrete ideas and proposals for consideration for the GEF-9 replenishment cycle.

The discussions will build on the findings of the IEO on the evolving context of civil society engagement such as through its Evaluation of Community-based Approaches at the GEF<sup>10</sup> and the valuable experiences gained from the GEF Small Grants Program as well as recent GEF investments including the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI), and the Fonseca Leadership Program (FLP). It will also be informed by discussions and developments within the GEF CSO Network, the GEF Gender Partnership and the Indigenous People’s Advisory Group and other members of the GEF Partnership. In addition, it will build on previous dialogues held with civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women and youth, including during the Seventh GEF Assembly held in Vancouver in August 2023, and the result of surveys on the topic of social inclusion in GEF programming.

The CSO consultation is expected to focus on

1. Opportunities to operationalize GEF’s WoS approaches and increase the scale and scope of financing mechanisms for CSOs, IPLCs, women, and youth in dedicated Programs including the GEF SGP as well as other GEF programs and projects;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/gef-small-grants-program>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/publications/inclusive-conservation-initiative-phase-2-report-focus-inclusive-finance>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thegef.org/fonseca-leadership-program>

<sup>10</sup> GEF/C.66/15: Management Response to: Evaluation of Community-based Approaches at the GEF

2. Entry points to strengthen representation of CSOs, IPLCs, women, and youth in decision-making and implementation.
3. Opportunities and ways to GEF improve direct access to funding for CSOs, IPLCs, women, and youth-led initiatives

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>
<b>7:00 – 7:05</b>	<b>Welcome and overview of agenda</b> GEF Secretariat
<b>7:05 – 7:30</b>	<b>Overview of Technical Advisory Group findings and GEF-9 Programming Directions (WoS approach and targeted GEF civil society programs)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview: GEF Secretariat</li> <li>• Reflections on TAG: GEF CSO Network (TBC)</li> </ul>
<b>7:30 – 8:45</b>	<b>Facilitated conversation on GEF’s WoS approach and targeted civil society engagement in GEF-9.</b>  <i>Co-Moderators: GEF Secretariat and the CSO Network</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction of topic and panelists (10 min.).</li> <li>2. Mainstreaming GEF’s WoS and CBA approaches through GEF programming and enhancing dedicated GEF programs and financing windows for civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth groups, including the GEF SGP – good practices, lessons learned and opportunities (50 min). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Five panelists, representatives from: (1) civil society organizations; (2) youth-led organizations/networks; (3) women groups; (4) IPLC, and (5) GEF implementing agency (<i>5 min interventions for each topic</i>).</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Interactive engagement (Q&amp;A) with panelists and participants to discuss key opportunities and recommendations - using Mentimeter (or similar (15 min).</li> <li>4. Session summary: GEF CSO Network (10 min).</li> </ol>
<b>8:45 - 8:55</b>	<b>Reflections</b> GEF Council Member (TBC)
<b>8:55 – 9:00</b>	<b>Closing remarks</b> GEF Secretariat