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## **PROGRESS REPORT ON ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The GEF Policy on Gender Equality<sup>1</sup> approved by the 53<sup>rd</sup> GEF Council in November 2017 and the Gender Implementation Strategy<sup>2</sup> approved by the 54<sup>th</sup> GEF Council are the foundational documents that guide the GEF Partnerships' efforts and ambition to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. The GEF Policy on Gender Equality (hereafter Policy) introduced a set of principles and requirements to mainstream gender in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GEF programs and projects. It marked a distinct shift in GEF's ambition around gender mainstreaming - moving from a gender-aware "do no harm" approach to a gender-responsive "do good" approach. The Policy further requested the Secretariat to track and report annually to the Council on portfolio-level progress and results.

3. Following the previous reports' structure, this report updates on the progress in integrating gender perspectives at the project design stage. It presents some key lessons learned in the implementation of selected projects as reported by Agencies in their mid-term reviews and terminal evaluations and features good practice examples. The report presents the work undertaken by the Secretariat to support the implementation of the Policy and advance gender equality. The last section charts a way forward for the GEF Secretariat to continue its leadership in advancing gender equality in the realization of global environmental benefits.

4. The findings of this report corroborate those of the earlier reports.<sup>3</sup> All projects reviewed for this reporting period complied with the Policy, and in addition, incorporated gender equality and women's empowerment substantively in the design of projects and programs. This was realized in part with the GEF Secretariat's rigorous review of projects and programs to ensure compliance.

5. The good practice examples and reports submitted showed evidence of how mainstreaming gender ensures better outcomes for women and in realizing gender-responsive environmental policies and actions on the ground. The key messages that stood out from the examples and reports include:

- ✓ **Comprehensive gender analysis informs project design and implementation.** Projects that considered existing gender inequalities, socio-cultural and religious norms and power dynamics were able to develop targeted interventions with

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<sup>1</sup> The GEF Policy on Gender Equality is available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> The GEF Gender Implementation Strategy is available [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> 1st Progress Report: GEF/C.56/Inf.03 is available [here](#); 2nd Progress Report: GEF/C.58/Inf.05 is available [here](#); 3<sup>rd</sup> Progress Report: GEF/C.60/Inf.09 is available [here](#); 4<sup>th</sup> Progress Report: GEF/C.63/Inf.07 is available [here](#).

community support, facilitating the implementation of planned activities to address gender issues.

- ✓ **Active participation of women in all phases of the project ensures that women's specific needs and perspectives are considered.** Engagements with women allowed project teams to understand and factor in issues such as land tenure or women's caregiving responsibilities in projects. It also informed the development of specific activities with women as key beneficiaries. **Even projects that did not include gender considerations from the beginning benefitted from women's engagement** during the projects' implementation phase, enhancing the projects' outcomes and impact.
- ✓ **Involving the entire community through awareness-raising and sensitization** helps broaden understanding of the importance of including women in the socio-economic life of the community and **tackle traditional gender roles and norms.** Communities where men and traditional authorities were engaged showed more openness to women's participation and achieved better gender results and more effective conservation outcomes. **Trainings for public officials** on gender issues facilitated the introduction of gender-specific actions through legislation, policies or programs.
- ✓ **Sex-disaggregated indicators play an important role in measuring results and outcomes,** but it is equally **important to go beyond the numbers** and elaborate on actions that contribute to women's empowerment in the longer term, for example, by focusing on the impacts to women of activities such as establishing micro-lending corporations for women or water wells that save women water collection time.

6. **In the coming year,** the GEF Secretariat will continue to advance gender equality considerations in project design through rigorous project reviews to ensure compliance with the Policy and guidance. The GEF Secretariat's efforts to promote gender equality in its projects and operations will be supported by the following actions:

- ✓ ***Strengthening and building capacity of GEF technical staff and agencies*** on gender analysis and approaches to mainstream gender considerations in projects and programs. **Tools, methodologies and training materials will be developed** with gender experts with information and lessons learned from the GEF Partnership, GEF projects, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.
- ✓ ***Awareness-raising and broadening understanding of and appreciation for gender equality*** through organizing gender-specific meetings and webinars, communicating good practices and gender-related results widely, including in Introduction to the GEF Seminars, Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs), National Dialogues, Council meetings, as well as in related global and regional meetings.
- ✓ ***Advancing GEF's inclusion and gender equality ambition through partnerships.*** The GEF Secretariat, as the convener of the GEF Gender Partnership (GGP), will lead and support GGP members' proposed work around gender mainstreaming and gender-

responsive programming by: i) *Building knowledge and evidence*; ii) *Capacity-building* for enhanced understanding; iii) *Compiling and disseminating of best practice examples*; and iv) *Enhancing communication efforts*.

- ✓ ***Connecting with women participants/beneficiaries, executing entities.*** On-site visits and discussions with stakeholders in particular, women beneficiaries, are avenues to better understand how women and girls are benefitting from GEF-funded projects and what lessons can be learned from the projects' implementation. These visits are critical in guiding GEF's future direction and approach in engaging with and supporting women's groups and in integrating gender considerations in GEF projects.
- ✓ ***Continuing engagements with the Conventions and their gender focal points.*** Building on productive engagements at sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) of the Conventions in the past years, the Secretariat will continue to work with the gender focal points of the Conventions to support efforts to enhance synergies on gender mainstreaming across the Conventions and complement GEF's work to advance gender equality in projects and programs.

## PROGRESS AND RESULTS

### ***Quality at Entry***

7. The analysis of progress on gender equality in projects and programs at the Project Information Form (PIF) stage considered under the work program June 2023 and February 2024 as well as those that have been submitted for CEO Endorsement/Approval for the period November 16, 2022 to November 15, 2023<sup>4</sup> continues to demonstrate good compliance with the principles and requirements set out in the Policy. It shows that gender dimensions are considered from the outset and indicative plans to carry out gender analyses and develop gender action plans are explicitly mentioned. The review also shows that projects that have reached CEO Endorsement/Approval have used gender analyses to inform the integration of gender perspectives in the project components and outputs. Gender Action Plans accompanied the submission, together with results framework that included gender-sensitive indicators as appropriate.

8. **All the PIFs considered under the work program June 2023 and February 2024 embedded gender perspectives** throughout the project, including in the project description and in project components and outputs, in compliance with the GEF guidance. Additionally, projects indicated budget allocations for gender-related actions or gender-specific activities.

9. The substantive integration of gender issues in the PIFs is a first step to ensure the meaningful reflection of gender equality and women's empowerment in CEO

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<sup>4</sup>The review does not include Enabling Activities.

Endorsement/Approval documents. As such, the Secretariat reviews the integration of gender dimensions in project design with the view to ensuring compliance with the Policy and guidance. A PIF that is compliant: i) ensures that gender perspectives are woven into the project itself, including in the description and in the project components; ii) has undertaken a gender analysis that informs the integration of gender perspectives in the project; iii) ensures that women's and gender experts' perspectives are taken into account in the development of plans, policies and related actions to achieve the environmental objectives of the project; iv) ensures that women and gender experts are represented in boards, steering committees and related decision-making bodies; v) ensures that all knowledge products and platforms incorporate lessons learned or best practices on gender mainstreaming and advancing gender equality, and are gender-responsive; and vi) commits to develop a gender action plan that is budgeted.

10. At the CEO Endorsement/Approval stage, projects should have a detailed gender analysis, a gender action plan and a gender-responsive results framework that includes gender-sensitive indicators. Projects are also asked to specify whether or not the project addresses inequalities observed in any of the three domains: participation in natural resources governance; socio-economic benefits; access to natural resources.

11. A review of **184 FSPs and MSPs submitted for CEO Endorsement or Approval** during the period November 16, 2022 to November 15, 2023 showed that **all of the projects presented a gender analysis or assessment** which informed the specific gender inequalities to be addressed, for example, constraints to women's participation and access to resources due to cultural practices and gender stereotypes prevalent in the project's specific context. All projects indicated plans to develop a **gender-responsive results framework**. Ninety eight percent plan **to include gender-sensitive indicators**, an increase of 3 percent from last year's report.

12. The gender analyses across projects considered women's multiple and intersecting burdens, for example, their roles as primary caregivers or household managers, which pose limitations on their time to engage in community activities, attend meetings or take up leadership roles. Projects' activities were thus tailored to take account of the result of the gender analyses. Those activities were intended to address women's limited access to information, resources and finances through targeted capacity-building, awareness-raising and training, including on gaining access to financial resources, and specific support to women-led environmental initiatives or livelihood and other income-generating endeavors.

13. Many projects have included gender action plans with detailed information on how the identified gender inequalities would be addressed through specific activities falling under the relevant components or outputs of the project. In many instances, beneficiaries were disaggregated by sex to identify the number of women that would benefit from awareness-raising, training, livelihood or financing opportunities. Gender action plans also included information on the development and dissemination of gender-sensitive knowledge products or publications that integrate gender mainstreaming best practices. Increasingly, gender action

plans include gender-sensitive indicators and are budgeted. Reporting on gender action plans were also integrated in the M&E component of the projects.

14. **All of the projects reviewed confirmed plans to address at least one of the following gender issues:** (i) *improve the participation and decision-making of women in natural resources governance* (100 percent), (ii) *target socio-economic benefits and services for women* (97 percent), (iii) *contribute to more equal access to and control of natural resources* (85 percent). The figures on participation and access to natural resources saw improvements from last year's figures of 96 percent and 77 per cent, respectively. Projects ensured that women were given seats to engage in discussions relating to policy assessments or policy formulation, as well as decision-making regarding natural resource management. Projects considered factors such as women's household responsibilities, their limitations in access to technology and digital platforms, language barriers and other cultural factors that may impede women's participation. In some instances, quotas were reserved for women to ensure their representation in critical decision-making processes. Socio-economic benefits for women were ensured through awareness-raising, training and capacity-building on access to financial services, business and livelihood opportunities, technology, for example. Issues of gender-based violence were also considered as this may hamper women's access to and enjoyment of socio-economic benefits from the project. Access to natural resources was supported through actions such as strengthening land tenure systems, facilitating access to seeds and other materials essential for agriculture or to carry out other productive activities.

15. In summary, the analysis of **CEO Endorsement/Approvals show marked improvements in the reflection of gender equality considerations.** This could be attributed to the implementation of GEF's Policy on Gender Equality, as well as continued interaction with GEF Agencies on GEF's policy requirements. Similarly, greater awareness and sensitivity to gender issues in countries, more ambitious gender equality strategy and markers in many GEF Agencies, and gender-related mandates stemming from the Conventions that the GEF serves, are contributing factors.

### ***Quality at Implementation***

16. To get a better understanding of gender-related results of projects during implementation or at a project's completion, a review of 243 projects for the period November 16, 2022 – November 15, 2023 was done. Of the 243 Midterm Reviews (MTRs) and Terminal Evaluations (TEs) from GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects, 96 percent of the projects included some reporting on gender results, albeit very unevenly. Reports are narrative and can be a few lines to hundreds of words. Some reports contain a listing of women beneficiaries reached while some provide detailed description of the gender-responsive actions taken and present key successes as well as challenges in implementing gender-specific actions.

17. **Key points from the MTR and TE reports** include the following:

- ✓ **Developing a gender strategy, action plan, and targets** from the initial project design stage was a crucial step to provide guidance in gender mainstreaming efforts throughout the project cycle. Some projects reported creating an implementation matrix that facilitated monitoring of progress on gender equality. Having a matrix enabled the project team to identify missing activities, areas where the project was not meeting expectations, and where additional efforts needed to be introduced. It helped in recalibrating actions to align with the on-going plan.
- ✓ **Collecting sex-disaggregated data and tracking gender indicators enabled monitoring progress on gender equality.** In the project "Supporting Climate Resilient Livelihoods in Agricultural Communities in Drought-prone Areas", developed in Turkmenistan, efforts were made to incorporate gender-disaggregated data into adaptation planning processes. The project facilitated the creation of an instruction manual for collecting and storing gender-disaggregated data, as well as a guideline for ministries on utilizing this data. This data played a crucial role in revising sectoral planning and budgeting guidelines, particularly in the water and agriculture sectors. Additionally, in some other projects, the data served as the foundation for a gender action plan, which identified areas requiring additional efforts, highlighted disparities of gender equality, and determined where more time and budget allocation was necessary.
- ✓ **Putting in place targeted actions to ensure women's participation, in addition to mainstreaming gender across activities was key.** Examples of actions include accommodating women's schedules, providing childcare services, setting quotas, engaging men, village chiefs and other family members, among others, to overcome barriers to women's participation. Projects that have pushed for women's participation and leadership in community bodies, trainings, and decision-making meetings have seen women's positive contributions in incorporating women's and other genders' specific needs, knowledge and roles in delivering on the projects' environmental and social objectives.
- ✓ **Taking account of the burden of domestic and household work** impeding women's ability to engage in productive activities was important. Projects such as the Ecuador Mainland Marine and Coastal Protected Areas Network and the Uganda Karamoja sub-region agricultural and land management introduced interventions such as holding training sessions online and providing caregiving services to not disadvantage women from accessing information on economic opportunities offered by the projects.
- ✓ **Holding regular community engagement and awareness-raising activities were crucial for the success of a project.** As gender inequalities persist, and projects are implemented in communities where social and cultural norms have implications on

implementing gender-specific interventions, regular community engagement and awareness-raising were identified as critical ingredient for success. By involving the entire community, men, women, village chiefs and religious leaders, in separate or combined information and/or training sessions, the project builds trust and able to convey the crucial role of women as key actors, not only within the projects themselves but also within the broader community. For example, in an environmental sustainability project in Liberia, community members were engaged in capacity-building training, meetings with stakeholders, and knowledge management activities. Women were given the opportunity not only to participate but also to showcase their own projects and initiatives. This allowed them to demonstrate the benefits and added value of their contributions and empowering them at the same time.

Community meetings also provide safe spaces to share information and views on sensitive topics such as gender-based violence which received scant attention in projects. One project reported on its efforts to enhance women's economic empowerment with a built-in component to combat gender-based violence. The project identified GBV as posing a significant challenge in women's participation if women did not feel safe or respected. The project's interventions included awareness-raising and capacity-building programs on GBV, making available safe spaces for women to engage (in some instances, with their husbands or other male members in the community) and empowering women financially through loans.

18. As the GEF continues to support the effective implementation of the Policy, more attention is being placed on monitoring and reporting. Going forward, a more harmonized system of capturing and reporting gender-related results may be developed, in collaboration with the of GEF Gender Partnership, Secretariat staff and agencies.

19. To get a deeper insight of good practices and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in projects, the Secretariat prepared some good examples presented in the boxes below. The examples highlight crucial interventions and actions taken to address gender dimensions and inequalities in projects. A summary of the key lessons learned in advancing gender equality in projects are the following:

- ✓ **Comprehensive gender analysis or assessment informs project design and implementation.** Projects that considered existing gender inequalities, socio-cultural and religious norms, power dynamics, among other, were able to develop targeted interventions with community support, facilitating the implementation of planned activities to address gender issues. It is worth noting that **there were projects that did not incorporate gender equality considerations from the beginning. In the course of the projects' implementation, activities aimed at engaging and empowering women were carried out** because of the realization of the implications of the project on women, as well as women's positive contributions to the projects' objectives and their sustainability (see UNDP and WB examples).

- ✓ **Active participation of women in the design and implementation phases ensures that women’s specific needs and perspectives are considered.** In the Burundi example, the project’s gender impact was initially overlooked. Through engagements with local stakeholders and women's groups, such as women farmers, the project realized the importance of including women's land tenure in the project and was then incorporated. The Senegal project successfully incorporated the voices and needs of women during the implementation phase, engaging them in the management and maintenance of the solar-powered equipment installed, the manufacture and use of cookstoves, and processing of agricultural products. These activities improved women's access to water, food, and energy security and created economic opportunities. In the Brazil example, women's role as stewards of the environment and their knowledge of traditional recipes were tapped. They were involved in developing recipes for the community kitchens, which were key to realizing the project’s objective of addressing food security in the community.
- ✓ **Involving the entire community through awareness-raising and sensitization help in getting support** and in broadening understanding of the importance of including women in the socio-economic life of the community. In the Timor-Leste example, the capacity-building and awareness-raising activities embedded in the project allowed for sharing of experiences among community members and a greater appreciation of women’s caregiving role and resulted in men sharing the burden of care and domestic work. This freed up women’s time and enabled them to participate in and contribute to the projects. Through awareness-raising, projects tackle and address **traditional gender roles and norms**. Communities where men and traditional authorities showed more openness to women's participation achieved better gender results and more effective conservation outcomes. **Trainings for public officials** on gender issues facilitated the introduction of gender-specific actions in future legislation, policies or programs.
- ✓ **Sex-disaggregated indicators play an important role in measuring results and outcomes**, such as the number of women benefitting from workshops, training and livelihood projects. However, it is equally **important to go beyond the numbers** and make a qualitative assessment of how a project’s gender-specific intervention are contributing to women’s empowerment in the longer term. In the Burundi example, the project did not stop in just sharing the number of land tenure licenses granted to women through the project. It elaborated on how its interventions supported creation of micro-lending corporations for women (made possible by these women having land tenure licenses), the amount of time saved by women when infrastructure for water collection was built and how they invested their time saved from water collection in other socio-economic or leisure activities.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

**Box 1: GEF ID 9434 (Conservation International), Women and natural resource management in catchment corridors in Timor-Leste**

The project "Securing the long-term conservation of Timor-Leste's biodiversity and ecosystem services through the establishment of a functioning National Protected Area System and the improvement of natural resource management in priority catchment corridors" supported the Government of Timor-Leste in establishing a functional protected area system and improving the management of forest ecosystems focused on empowering local communities through collaborative management arrangements, introducing gender action throughout the project. In these areas, social norms have a significant influence, resulting in women having less access to resources, a 30% productivity gap in their farming activities, the need to collect water, daily security risks, and fewer opportunities to earn income.

Based on the gender analysis, the project engaged with both men and women separately to encourage greater participation from women. Through the training they received, women gained access to income and were able to improve the water system, bringing it closer to home and reducing the time and risks associated with everyday travel to collect water. This also led to a shift in household duties and increased awareness in the community about women's roles, allowing women to participate in the projects. As women had more opportunities to earn income, financial conflicts that sometimes led to domestic violence were minimized. Men also were beneficiaries from these activities, and the communities where men and traditional authorities showed more openness to women's participation in project activities had better gender results and more effective conservation outcomes.

Learning from this experience, it must be highlighted the gender analysis that was conducted during the PPG phase, helped to gain insights into the socio-economic dynamics of the region and helped with tailoring the actions. The project team, in hindsight, wished they had the resources and time to adapt their activities to reach more community members, especially women, by conducting a more thorough analysis of each region's challenges, key activities, and doing more stakeholder engagement beforehand. Also, they highlight that even though gender trainings are done for the staff members, these have to be more frequent and along all the project implementation time, to learn from the information that they are receiving as they are working on the project. This approach could have helped design a more ambitious gender approach that went beyond sex-disaggregated targets and achieved more robust gender outcomes.

**Box 2: GEF ID 10594 (World Bank), Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project**

The project "Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project" aims to restore land productivity in targeted degraded landscapes and provide immediate and effective responses in times of emergency or crisis. This project has a strong linkage to women's rights in land tenure, as Burundian women were deprived from land tenure and ownership. Through this project, Burundian society is beginning to recognize women's rights to access and own land.

Initially, the project did not specifically consider the impact it would have on women's rights. However, it became evident that land management is intrinsically connected to women's rights, as women often work on the land but do not have legal ownership. In a patriarchal culture like Burundi, women do not inherit land and are only allowed to use it at the discretion of their parents, brothers, and sometimes their in-laws.

One of the components of the project was a certification process to link land ownership to community members. This involved developing a framework with the Burundian government, a pilot legal framework. In this way, both spouses' names can be proposed to be registered on the land registration, recognizing women's rights over the plot of land. Through open conversations and engagement with both men and women in the community, by having open conversation and the engagement activities done by the staff at the ground, the project achieved remarkable results. Out of the 100,000 land certificates delivered to date, 75% bear a woman's name.

Other component was providing land management training to the community. This training helped them develop hillside terracing and create tree nurseries using specific species of trees to prevent landslides and flooding. This not only stops land erosion but also provides food security and access to finance, such as microloans, to start income generating activities. As a result, women, who were previously excluded from society activities in this region, are nowadays recognized landowners, able to generate income, and gaining access to finance, altogether contributing to their economic empowerment.

***Box 3: GEF ID 4080 (UNDP): Participatory Conservation of Biodiversity and Low Carbon Development of Pilot Ecovillages at the Vicinity of Protected Areas in Senegal***

The project "Participatory Conservation of Biodiversity and Low Carbon Development of Pilot Ecovillages at the Vicinity of Protected Areas" introduced solutions to communities to develop and invest in new and sustainable forms of energy supply, more efficient energy use and improved livelihoods and income generation based on integrated and sustainable management of the land and natural resources available to them.

The project did not carry out a gender analysis and had limited consideration of gender equality in the project design, as the project was CEO endorsed in 2011, before the GEF put in place requirements to integrate gender in projects. In the course of the project's implementation, and with the realization that the Eco-villages will benefit from women's engagements, the project introduced interventions aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

The project actively involved the entire community, including women, to ensure that their needs were understood, acknowledged and tackled. The installation of solar-powered water pumps and new and improved cookstoves, and the provision of financial assistance for micro-projects and small enterprises and capacity-building and training courses, all contributed to women's economic empowerment and building of their leadership skills. In addition, they helped improve the respiratory health and nutritional status of women and children in the community.

Having solar-powered water pumps made water more accessible, freeing women's time to engage in training on management and maintenance of the solar-powered equipment, manufacture and use of cookstoves, processing of agricultural products, and gardening. These activities not only improved women's access to water, food, and energy security but also created new economic opportunities. Of the 28,498 direct jobs the project has generated, women accounted for 66 percent. Women have also taken up leadership roles in the Eco-villages committees, with almost equal men-women representation.

These gender-related achievements would not have been realized were it not for the adjustments made in the project during implementation. A key learning from this project is that gender aspects, though not all accounted for during the design of the project or built into the project results framework, could materialize during implementation and contribute to realizing the project objectives and the sustainability of environmental impacts even after the project's closure.

**Box 4: GEF ID 9271 (FunBio), National Strategy for Conservation of Threatened Species (ProSpecies) Project**

The Pro-Species Project supports the development and implementation of the Territorial Action Plan Chapada Diamantina-Serra da Jiboia, which aims to improve food security in the municipality of Itaeté-Bahia. As part of this project, cooking workshops were organized for women in the community. These workshops not only provided the women with new skills to combat food insecurity but also allowed them to earn income and take on leadership positions in 11 out of the 17 participating institutions. This enabled them to actively participate in the decision-making process for the project.

Although gender equality and women's empowerment were not initially included in the project design, the inclusion of women's vision and voices led to the introduction of new actions, such as recipe workshops and the construction of a community kitchen. During the workshops, different recipes using locally available foods, mostly from their gardens, were taught. These foods are often underutilized and wasted due to a lack of knowledge on how to use them. Through these actions, women not only became champions of biodiversity conservation but also played a key role in their communities.

A total of 30 women from 3 communities participated in the workshops, which were conducted online due to the pandemic. To ensure the participation of mothers and alleviate their double burden, the project offered the possibility of hiring childcare workers. This allowed the women to fully engage in the workshops without worrying about childcare responsibilities.

Even though the community kitchen is not yet ready, women continue to actively participate in the work team to ensure gender balance and their involvement in consultancies and services. They are currently exchanging information about testing new recipes and organizing themselves for when the kitchen is completed. Through this project, women are able to generate food security, strengthen community-based tourism as an income source, and gain leadership and empowerment in their communities.

**Box 5: GEF 9125 (UNDP), The Coastal Fisheries Initiative in Latin America**

The Coastal Fisheries Initiative in Latin America supports the sustainable use and management of coastal fisheries, where women have played an invisible role during the last decades. With the use of UNICAS and UNDP's "Growing your Business" methodologies, women have not only gained valuable knowledge in administration, finance, accountability, and accessing new markets, but they have also diversified their income. Additionally, they have enhanced their social networks, fostering economic independence and empowerment.

The initiative introduced the following interventions: i) training in basic gender concepts to empower women but also create an inclusive community, as well as training on sustainable fisheries management for both women and men. As a result of the training, 11 gender focal points were designated to ensure the implementation of the gender action plan; ii) empowering women economically. The project supported women's access to finance and strengthened their entrepreneurial capacities (4 women-led enterprises were supported). In 18 months, 33 Credit and Savings Unions were formed with 551 people benefitting, 66 percent of whom are women.

The successful interventions which resulted in the empowerment of women in the fisheries community was due in large part to the design and implementation of a detailed gender strategy and a gender team that introduced key activities and actions to operationalize it. The gender strategy was informed by a detailed gender analysis

which found that public officials needed gender training to allow them to introduce gender-specific actions in future legislation, policies or programs. With the trainings received and the resulting economic empowerment from the project's interventions, women were more eager to participate, and men were more supportive of women's interest to engage.

## **SECRETARIAT'S ACTIONS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY**

20. The GEF Secretariat has led or coordinated activities and related actions to advance gender equality in GEF projects and operations. The actions will be presented under the following headings:

- (i) Broadening understanding of gender equality
- (ii) Enhancing collaboration and partnerships to advance gender equality
- (iii) Building knowledge, enhancing communications and better capturing of gender equality results

### ***Broadening Understanding of GEF's Work on Gender Equality***

21. The Secretariat reviews projects and programs at PIF and CEO Endorsement/Approval stages both at the level of the Program Managers and the Senior Gender Specialist, enhancing the review process and resulting in a mutually reinforcing learning process among Secretariat staff. Brown bag lunches were organized including on International Women's Day as platforms for the GEF Secretariat staff to engage with gender experts and advocates and learn about best practices and inspiring examples in advancing gender equality in GEF projects, as well as in other initiatives such as the RISE program to tackle gender-based violence in environmental projects<sup>5</sup> and the W+ standard<sup>6</sup> – an innovative measure of a project's contribution to women's empowerment. For the GEF Introduction Seminars and in some Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs) organized during the reporting period, good practice examples from GEF projects were shared to better illustrate a project's success story in integrating gender equality and women's empowerment actions in projects.

22. At the 7<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly held in August 2023, the theme of inclusion was seized as an opportunity for learning from gender experts, project beneficiaries, representatives of women's organizations, gender advocates, representatives from the GEF Gender Partnership, GEF staff, among others (see the box on the GEF Assembly below for details). For the first time, a GEF Assembly provided dedicated spaces for women and gender advocates to present their demands and key messages in High-level plenaries, roundtables, side events and bilateral meetings,

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<sup>5</sup> The Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Environments (RISE) grants challenge information can be found [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> The W+ Standard information can be found [here](#).

including with the GEF CEO, Heads of the Conventions Secretariats, agency representatives and representatives of the government of Canada.

23. GEF Secretariat also met women project beneficiaries and members of the projects' gender teams and other officials, during field visits, national dialogues and similar opportunities. These face-to-face dialogues proved extremely useful in gaining an in-depth and first-hand account of the successes, challenges and lessons in terms of realizing gender equality objectives and interventions in GEF projects.

24. GEF Secretariat staff are actively participating as panelists or co-organizers of gender-specific events at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) and related meetings of the Conventions that the GEF serves, including at the COPs of the BRS Convention, the Minamata Convention and the UNFCCC. The Senior Gender Specialist has also served as speaker including at the XXV RedLAC Congress 2023, UNFCCC COP 28 training for National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points, the Global Conference on Gender and Environment Data, organized ahead of UNFCCC COP 28, among others, where she shared GEF's policy and work in advancing gender equality in GEF projects and GEF's contributions to building knowledge and information on gender and the environment.

#### ***Enhancing Collaboration and Partnerships to Advance Gender Equality***

25. The GEF Secretariat continues to actively support the GEF Gender Partnership as one platform to carry out joint awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, and sharing of best practices on gender mainstreaming.

26. GGP members advance gender equality within their respective agency teams through: i) compiling best practices, tools and methodologies from their respective experiences and related resources; ii) building capacity of their respective program teams for a better understanding of gender mainstreaming in project design and implementation; iii) raising awareness and expanding networks through engagements in regional, sub-regional and international meetings, conferences and events; and v) sharing and publishing best practice examples on gender mainstreaming and promoting gender-transformative interventions in GEF projects.

27. GGP has served important roles, for example, at the GEF Assembly and the Partnership Forum, as well as at the COPs.

**Box 6: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at the heart of the 7<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly**

The Inclusive GEF Assembly provided ample opportunities for the GEF Gender Partnership (GGP) and women's organizations (named themselves Women and Gender Caucus (WGC) at the GEF Assembly) to bring attention to and discuss the critical gender equality and women's rights issues in environmental actions and GEF projects and programs. The GEF Secretariat facilitated, in collaborations with GGP and the WGC pre- assembly meetings to prepare for their engagements at the Assembly.

Supporting the objective of inclusion and elevating the voices of all key stakeholders at the Assembly, the GGP and the WGC were invited as high-level speakers, panelists in Roundtables and side-events, as well as at the Closing Plenary. They were also the main organizers of the Partnership Forum's session on Women's Leadership in Environmental Action, which focused on women's leadership in environmental actions and the challenges and opportunities in the advocacy for women's rights and gender equality in environmental plans, policies and financing. Young women leaders, women project beneficiaries, Afro-descendant women and indigenous women were among those invited to share experiences. The session concluded with some key messages and recommendations for the GEF, including the importance of gender-responsive GEF programming, community-led and context-bound approaches, ensuring women's accessibility to funds, among others.

The GGP organized four main sessions related to gender data and better monitoring of progress, best practices in gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive MEAs, and the role of GGP in the GEF-8 cycle. GGP members engaged in dedicated discussions on future work and areas for collaboration, including around information sharing among members, facilitating communication of results, joint support for capacity-building and awareness-raising, and resource mobilization for joint gender-related initiatives.

The WGC had a valuable opportunity to engage with the Global Affairs Canada Gender Team during the conference. The representatives from Canada actively listened to the views, key messages and needs of the WGC.

The GGP and the WGC also had the opportunity to meet with the GEF CEO who challenged them to make ambitious proposals for the GEF to further its social inclusion agenda and advance gender equality in GEF's programming and operations.

28. GEF Secretariat leveraged opportunities to enhance collaboration with the other climate funds – Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds, Green Climate Fund in this reporting period. this year. At the UNFCCC COP 28, the climate funds engaged with the UNFCCC National Gender and Climate Change Focal (NGCCFPs) points to elaborate on entry points for integrating gender perspectives in the projects benefiting from the Funds. The NGCCFPs and the UNFCCC gender team appreciated the information shared by the Funds and conveyed their interest in having similar joint conversations with the financial mechanisms in the future. At COP 28, the climate funds' joint pavilion provided space to organize joint funds' events. One event was *Meeting the gender experts*, a well-attended event where the gender experts across the four funds committed to continue their collaboration around joint knowledge products and capacity-building, awareness-raising events on the four funds' promising practices on gender mainstreaming and

opportunities for the NGCCFPs to collaborate with their counterparts at the national level to strengthen the reflection of gender perspectives in projects.

### ***Building Knowledge, Enhancing Communications and Better Capturing of Gender Equality Results***

29. The GEF Secretariat, through the GGP and other partners, accelerated efforts to build knowledge and find avenues to better communicate and disseminate best and promising practices on gender mainstreaming and inspiring gender-specific project outcomes or results.

30. At the 7<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly and at the COPs of the Conventions that the GEF serves, GGP members, including the Secretariats of the Conventions, have presented promising practices and successful outcomes on realizing gender equality and women's empowerment in GEF projects or in the implementation of the Conventions. Some of these important lessons have been published and shared widely within the GEF Partnership through the GEF Communications networks as well as in dedicated events, for example, at the sidelines of key meetings such as the COPs or other global and regional conferences.

31. The Open Online Course on Gender and Environment, continues to be promoted. The Course which contains close to 10 hours of instructive material covering thematic areas such as biodiversity, land degradation, climate change, international waters, and chemical and waste has attracted a total of 38,802 people enrolled as of November 2023. 37,761 certificates of participation were issued by this date.

32. The Secretariat will continue to review ways to more systematically analyze and capture gender equality results of GEF projects. This effort may benefit from and would be aligned by the Secretariat's pathway identified in the Council paper on Tracking and Measuring the Socio-economic Co-benefits of GEF Investments.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD**

33. GEF's Policy on Gender Equality, the Implementation Strategy and the guidelines have informed project preparations and GEF Secretariat's efforts to advance gender equality in its work and operations. During the reporting period, projects at the design phase have demonstrated substantive integration of gender perspectives supported by gender analyses. Projects incorporated gender dimensions in the project description and project components, with gender-specific indicators.

34. The review of the MTR and TEs submitted during this reporting period, reaffirmed the importance of undertaking in-depth gender analyses to inform project development and implementation. Information provided in the MTRs and TEs reviewed, underscored the importance of regular engagement with community members – men and women alike, to ensure their support throughout the projects' life cycle, as well as the need for awareness-raising and

training, and targeted interventions for women aimed at empowering them and giving them voice and leadership in natural resources decision-making and governance.

35. The GEF Secretariat has stepped up its work and efforts at broadening understanding of gender equality among GEF staff and the GEF Partnership overall, with support and active engagement of the GEF Gender Partnership members. In collaboration with GGP members, gender equality considerations in environmental projects and in the implementation of the Conventions were given visibility through engagements of the GEF Secretariat and Convention gender focal points at their respective COPs and related events. The GGP and other partners have appreciated the GEF Secretariat's proactivity and efforts in bringing greater attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in the work of the GEF and in its projects and programs.

36. In the coming year, the GEF Secretariat, will continue to work with GEF Program Managers, the GGP and relevant partners to contribute to GEF's broader social inclusion agenda, promote gender-transformative programming and better capture gender equality results.

37. The priority areas of work ahead are outlined below:

#### ***Strengthening and Building Capacity, Developing Tools, Methodologies and Training Materials***

38. Building or strengthening the capacity of GEF technical staff and agencies is a good investment to ensuring the substantive reflection of gender equality consideration in GEF projects and programs, in a harmonized and systematic way. Towards this end, the GEF Secretariat will work with gender experts, including from the broader GEF Partnership, and other stakeholders in developing training materials, tools and methodologies on gender analysis and in mainstreaming gender considerations in GEF projects. The good practice and lessons learned, and related tools and methodologies will help ensure a more uniform and systematic integration of gender perspectives by project teams, which in turn will simplify and facilitate project reviews within the GEF.

39. Information and lessons learned from GEF projects will be among the primary resources to be reviewed. Consultations with experts and stakeholders will complement the desk review and initial research. The expertise within the GEF Gender Partnership, as well as other related gender and women's networks such as the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) will also be tapped.

#### ***Awareness-Raising and Broadening Understanding of Gender Equality***

40. The Gender team within the Secretariat will continue its efforts to broaden understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as appreciation of the need to substantively integrate gender issues in projects to realize greater environmental outcomes. Bilateral meeting with staff on specific gender-related discussions, or as part of their on-boarding,

will continue. Gender-specific BBLs will also be held regularly, including on International Women's Day. Meetings or BBLs with gender experts will be organized on special topics, for example, gender-based violence in environmental projects, gender and environment data and indicators. Communications from implementing agencies on best practices or specific gender results of GEF projects will be widely shared, including in Introduction to the GEF Seminars, events or speeches by the CEO.

41. Dedicated gender equality sessions will be organized around Expanded Constituency Workshops, National Dialogues, Council meetings, as well as in related global and regional meetings to which GEF's expertise is sought. The GEF Secretariat will support the update or development of training modules or e-courses, including the e-course on gender and the environment, subject to resource availability.

### ***Advancing GEF's Inclusion and Gender Equality Ambition Through Partnerships***

42. The GEF Secretariat, as the convenor of the GGP, will lead and support GGP members' proposed work around: i) *Building knowledge and evidence* through compilation and review of existing tools, methodologies and approaches on, as well as evidence of successful gender mainstreaming in GEF projects and making these available publicly to support replication, knowledge exchange and learning; ii) *Capacity-building for program managers* and project team members for a common and enhanced understanding of gender mainstreaming in project development and implementation; iii) *Regular sharing of and disseminating best practice examples* on gender mainstreaming and promoting gender-transformative interventions in GEF projects to broader audiences; iv) *Supporting efforts to better articulate, integrate and communicate issues* such as gender-based violence, upholding the rights of environmental defenders, in particular, women, and disability inclusion, in GEF projects.

### ***Connecting with Women Participants/Beneficiaries, Executing Entities***

43. On-site visits by GEF Secretariat and discussions with stakeholders, in particular, women beneficiaries, are avenues to better understand how women and girls, and communities are benefitting from GEF-funded projects and what lessons can be learned from the projects' implementation. These visits are critical in informing and guiding GEF's future direction and approach in engaging with and supporting women's groups and in integrating gender considerations in GEF projects and programs more broadly.

44. These engagements will be undertaken back-to-back with missions that allow for field visits, or during Expanded Constituency Workshops, learning missions or related regional meetings, and in collaboration with implementing agencies.

### ***Continuing Engagements with the Conventions and Their Gender Focal Points***

45. All the Conventions that the GEF serves (except BBNJ) have gender action plans. The Convention Secretariats' gender focal points are actively working to further gender equality objectives in the implementation of their Conventions and related mandates.

46. Parties to the Minamata Convention adopted its first Gender Action Plan at its COP in October 2023 and encouraged partnerships, including with the GEF. Similarly, the UNCCD CRIC 21 encouraged collaboration among key agencies, including the GEF to harmonize efforts in advancing gender equality across the Rio Conventions. With the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework which included two targets – Targets 22 and 23 that are relevant from a gender perspective and the gender-responsive implementation of the GBF, GEF Secretariat's engagements at the CBD COPs and related meetings are key for a better understanding of how these targets could be better reflected in related programs and projects submitted to the GEF. With the UNFCCC's continued advances in the consideration of gender issues in the Convention's processes and in the implementation of the Paris agreement, GEF Secretariat's engagements in the UNFCCC's gender-related work will be strategic.

47. Building on the GEF Secretariat's Partnership team's productive engagements at COPs in the past years, the Secretariat will continue to work with the gender focal points of the Conventions to support efforts to enhance coherence and promote synergies in the implementation of gender-specific actions of the Secretariats of the Conventions that the GEF serves.