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Virtual Meeting

REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF GEF-8 COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Overview

1. The GEF Council approved the Country Engagement Strategy (CES) Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8 at its 63rd Session in November 2022. The CES provides the strategic framework to deliver an expanded and coordinated approach to the GEF's effort to empower countries in the ownership of their portfolios, and in turn, maximize the impact of GEF resources through a coordinated approach. The CES builds on nearly three decades of dedicated country engagements and includes several dedicated funding initiatives to deliver this objective.

2. This is the third report on the implementation of the CES covering the period since the last report, including the second half FY25 and the first third of FY26 (July 1 to Nov 1, 2025). The report describes how CES financial resources have been utilized. The first report was presented in the 66th Council Meeting and the second was presented during the 68th Council meeting.

Implementation of the CES –Fiscal Year FY26

3. The table below summarizes the budget categories and funding for implementation of the GEF-8 CES to November 1, 2025. The subsequent text describes the activities supported during the current reporting period by each of these budget line items. The list of events organized during this reporting period can be reviewed in Annex 1.

Implementation of new GEF Country Engagement Strategy as of 1 November 2025 (in US\$ millions)						
Fund	GEF-8 Amount approved by Council	Amount Disbursed in FY23	Amount Disbursed in FY 24	Amount Disbursed in FY25	FY26 disbursements as of Nov 1, 2025	Available Balance
Country Engagement Strategy - Part I (totals)	27.000	3.636	4.821	4.822	2.751	10.968
Upstream Technical and National Dialogues	2.100	0.961	0.409	0.372	0.061	0.297
Constituency Workshops	11.740	2.500	1.446	1.367	0.825	5.602
Intro Seminars	0.260	0.030	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.230
Constituency Meetings	4.000	0.143	2.836	0.653	0.010	0.358
Building Execution Capacity of Stakeholders	1.100	0.000	0.065	0.386	0.000	0.649
Financial Support to GEF Operational Focal Points	5.800	0.000	0.000	1.981	1.857	1.962
Knowledge Exchange/Learning	2.000	0.002	0.065	0.063	0.000	1.870
Country Engagement Strategy - Part II (totals)	13.200	0.305	2.791	1.585	1.036	7.480

Fonseca Leadership Program (FLP)	10.000	0.000	2.680	1.450	0.957	4.913
Site Visits for Council Members	1.200	0.252	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.948
Support to Attend COPs & Related Meetings	2.000	0.053	0.111	0.136	0.081	1.619

Upstream Technical and National Dialogues

4. These initiatives aim to provide technical and strategic support to GEF stakeholders in recipient countries with the objective of enhancing their understanding of GEF-8 Strategies, aligning efforts deliver Global Environmental Benefits and enabling OFPs to manage GEF investment portfolios to greatest impact. In the reporting period, activities included two national dialogues in Africa and the Caribbean and several technical consultations in Latin America.

Expanded Constituency Workshops

5. Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs) aim to provide training, capacity building and knowledge exchange on the GEF to the major stakeholders of the GEF partnership. They furthermore include dedicated efforts to review and adaptively manage GEF investment portfolios within countries and regions with OFPs and Agencies.

6. ECWs took place in Africa (4 constituencies) and one in Latin America. They brought together all key stakeholders, including Convention Focal points, CSO representatives, and GEF political and operational focal points. There were sessions focusing on policy coherence, national steering committees, blended finance, and dedicated bilateral dialogues on portfolio management with country teams.

Introduction Seminars

7. These virtual seminars provide training and relevant information for an enhanced understanding of the GEF, its policies and operations to new Agency staff, Operational Focal Points, selected stakeholders, as well as new Convention Secretariat staff. These diverse stakeholders are furthermore encouraged to invite their staff to learn more about the GEF.

8. During the reporting period, there were no Introduction Seminars organized as the Secretariat prioritized briefings for Operational Focal points on the GEF-9 Replenishment. Replenishment briefings took place before each replenishment meeting in April and September.

Constituency Meetings

9. These meetings continue to be the main tool for Council Members and Alternates within a constituency to prepare for their engagements at the GEF Council. The Secretariat organizes

up to two annual in-person Constituency Meetings, at the request of Council Members. Virtual Constituency Meetings can also be organized, in case a constituency requests additional meetings to discuss specific issues of interest.

10. All GEF recipient regions were invited and participated in virtual Constituency Meetings during the reporting period and prior to the June Council meeting. Two Constituencies held in person Constituency Meetings in Washington DC, while others held them in their regions.

Building the Execution Capacity of Stakeholders

11. This includes support to National Executing Agencies to improve GEF portfolio results, enhance portfolio management and promote South-South twinning exchanges and peer-to-peer learning; this also includes support to Civil Society Organizations to build their capacity to partner in GEF projects through the transfer of knowledge, experiences and lessons from CSOs which have gained experience in the execution of GEF projects.

12. In the reporting period, a policy exchange visit for GEF OFPs, executing entities from 5 African countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Senegal and Kenya) with various government and GEF executing agencies in Costa Rica. The exchange visit was led by the CEO and included highlighted GEF projects in Costa Rica's journey of ecological restoration, sustainable tourism, forest conservation, and climate policy leadership and looked to capture actionable lessons for replication, especially in: mobilizing financial resources through public-private partnerships and innovative financing models, strengthening institutional and community capacities and enabling policy reform that incentivises sustainability.

Financial Support to GEF Operational Focal Points

13. This initiative aims to strengthen OFP capacity and provide resources to enable their effective oversight of their GEF portfolios. Access to these dedicated funds is optional and flexible.

14. GEF resources cover the costs of project oversight activities, including field visits, project meetings, monitoring and evaluation efforts – all aiming to strengthen OFPs ability to perform their project oversight. Utilization of these resources is optional and flexible, and OFPs are entitled to receive these funds if and when they request access to this additional support¹. This financial support complements the ongoing efforts provided by the GEF Secretariat to build the capacity of OFPs to manage their GEF portfolio of projects.

15. The Secretariat has signed agreements globally with seven institutions to support the implementation of this initiative. These partner institutions include Tropical Biology Association

¹ [Summary of Negotiations of the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund](#), GEF/C.62/03 (June 2022)]

(TBA), African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Organization of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth Secretariat, Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). In partnering with the Secretariat in each GEF recipient region, these institutions are responsible for transferring GEF funds directly to OFPs in recipient countries and ensuring that these funds are used appropriately, in accordance with criteria developed by the Secretariat.

16. In this context, a regional training component on project oversight, including an illustrative project field visit, complements the financial support provided to OFPs. Thus far, such training workshops have been organized, jointly with partner institutions, in West Africa (Accra, Ghana), East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya), Southern Africa (Windhoek, Namibia), Northern Africa (Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt), Latin America and the Caribbean (Bogota, Colombia), East Asia (Manila, Philippines) and the Pacific (Rarotonga, Cook Islands) regions. Disbursements of funds to OFPs are currently underway in these regions in support of eligible oversight activities.

Knowledge Exchange and Learning

17. This funding line is dedicated to supporting the implementation of the GEF Knowledge and Learning Strategy approved by the GEF Council at its 65th Session in October 2023. The Knowledge and Learning Strategy aims to enhance knowledge capture, exchange and learning amongst all GEF partners and stakeholders, including recipient countries.

18. Since the last update, the Secretariat continues to make progress in strengthening knowledge exchange and learning internally across the GEF partnership and with external entities. The focus has been on developing and promoting tools for improved access to GEF resources and systems. This includes micro-learning videos to enable efficient use of the GEF portal by GEF focal points, and e-Learning courses to increase knowledge on GEF operations and procedures. The Secretariat is also engaging with agencies to explore options for aligning and integrating systems for knowledge sharing and learning. The Multilateral Development Banks are already engaged similarly through the Knowledge Management for Impact (KM4Impact) initiative, in which the Secretariat is now fully participating.

19. As part of the ECWs organized over the last year, the Secretariat has been testing a “practical module” to socialize with countries the GEF approach to integration and integrated programming. The module is designed to offer countries hands-on experience with the integrated approach, from project conception to design based on criteria for participation in targeted programs. The exercises conducted during the ECWs have helped to validate the module, which will now be used to develop a resource guide on integrated programming in the GEF.

20. On engagement with external entities, the Secretariat convened an expert workshop to leverage knowledge from GEF investments in sustainable cities. Building on nearly a decade of investments in the Sustainable Cities Program, the GEF Secretariat in collaboration with the program lead agencies—UNEP and the World Bank—convened a technical learning workshop in April 2025 to synthesize initial lessons from the SCP. The workshop brought together over 40 participants, including representatives from GEF Agencies, implementation partners, STAP, IEO, and external experts from academia and research organizations. The workshop focused on global urbanization trends and their links to climate, nature loss, and pollution; summarized insights from the GEF's Sustainable Cities Program; and identified key lessons, challenges, and opportunities for integrated sustainable urban development. A synthesis report is available on the GEF website.

The Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program

21. The Fonseca Leadership Program was designed to provide opportunities for young conservation leaders from GEF recipient countries to engage in graduate studies and field research in areas related to biodiversity conservation, and also receive training on leadership skills. Over the past year, we have worked diligently to establish a series of regional and global partnerships to achieve this goal. We are pleased to report that Program is progressing with 11 partnerships in full operation. Potential new partnerships are being discussed to complement the work of the current partners.

22. Two partner institutions, Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) and the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund (FUNBIO) focus on conservation training in Brazil in general and in the Amazon region, recognizing Gustavo Fonseca's personal history and dedication. The partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Education for Nature Program, complements the efforts to provide fellowship support to young conservationists in the othe of Latin American countries.

23. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) fellowship program focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, and has special expertise and knowledge in tropical Africa. The Living-through-wildlife Community-Based Natural Resource Management program focuses especially on southern and East Africa. In Asia, the India-based National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) focused broadly on developing countries in South Southeast Asia, while the Lincoln University in New Zealand has an overall focus on Asia and the Pacific Island States. The University of Cambridge Master's in Conservation Leadership has joined the GEF's Fonseca Leadership Program to support conservationists from GEF recipient countries through fellowships and post-graduate leadership internships. Finally, two global field research support programs at the Mohamed bin Zayed Foundation and Re:wild provide grant for field research on species-based conservation for

graduate students of GEF recipient countries. All partners select fellows and grantees on a competitive basis.

24. The Fonseca Leadership Program (FLP) is currently supporting 240 young conservation leaders, combining Graduate Fellowships (90 recipients) and Field Research Grants (150 recipients). Fellows represent all GEF regions, with South America accounting for 42%, Africa for 35%, Asia for 16%, Central America and the Caribbean for 6%, and Europe for 1%. The gender distribution reflects continued progress towards gender balance, with 53% male, 42% female, and 5% preferring not to answer. Overall, participants come from 52 countries, with the highest representation from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Indonesia, Peru, Tanzania, and Cameroon. Participation has also extended to smaller or less represented countries, including Eswatini, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Suriname, highlighting the program’s inclusiveness and global reach.

Young Conservation Leaders supported in each GEF region

Region	Number of Young Leaders Supported	Comments
Asia	37	Supported by the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program, and the National Center for Biological Science Partnership in Bangalore.
Latin America	97	Supported by the the Funbio Fonseca Program, the Amazonia Rising Conservation Leaders Program, the Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Latin America, the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program and the Cambridge Master's in Conservation Leadership.
Africa	78	Supported by the the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program, the Gustavo Fonseca Species Conservation Fund, the Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Africa, and the LifethroughWildlife Fonseca’s Fellowships.
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	1	A potential partnership is being assessed with the Central Asia Green University in Uzbekistan. A feasibility study will be completed soon and a decision will be taken based on any recommendations included therein.
SIDS	20	We have a developing partnership with Lincoln University in New Zealand through the Gustavo Fonseca Applied Conservation Scholarship Program, which is in the process of establishing a competitive fellowship window focused on

		Asia-Pacific countries, including SIDS. We also have ongoing partnerships with the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Re:wild, and WWF under the Fonseca Leadership Program, expanding opportunities for young conservation professionals across SIDS.
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25. Over the past year, several partner institutions, including FunBio, the Mohamed bin Zayed Fund, Re:Wild, WCS, WWF, and the University of Cambridge, have launched new calls for proposals to expand their fellowship opportunities. These efforts are expected to increase the number of fellows to over 300 by next year, further supporting the development of young professionals in biodiversity conservation globally.

26. As part of this Program, we have supported the participation of Fonseca Fellows in key international conservation events, including the Fonseca Fellows Conservation Leadership Training and Mentoring Event held alongside the International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2025) in Brisbane, Australia and the IUCN World Conservation Congress (IUCN WCC 2025), in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

27. ICCB 2025 was organized in collaboration with the Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP). This initiative combined leadership training, mentorship, and participation in ICCB sessions for two fellows from the NCBS University. It provided young conservationists from across the Asia-Pacific with practical skills in communication, collaborative leadership, and behavioral science for conservation. The fellows shared that their participation at ICCB 2025 was a transformative step in their professional and personal journeys. Beyond the technical learning, it provided a rare space to connect with peers, mentors, and global experts, exchange ideas, and see themselves as part of a broader conservation community.

28. Another highlight of the year was the participation of the Fonseca Fellows in the IUCN World Conservation Congress, held in Abu Dhabi, one of the most important global gatherings for conservation, held every four years. This event brought together 17 young conservationists from GEF Implementing Partner organizations, representing diverse regional perspectives and institutional affiliations. Each partner institution nominated two fellows, with the GEF providing support for visas, travel, accommodation, and registration to ensure inclusive participation.

29. Fellows represented countries including India, Peru, Honduras, Brazil, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, Mexico, and Albania, showcasing the global reach of the program. The Congress served as a unique space for learning, exchange, and visibility, integrating the fellows into technical and high-level sessions, networking events, and youth-led dialogues that demonstrated GEF's commitment to inclusive and intergenerational environmental governance. The Congress participation was followed by a

two full days leadership training course led by WCN and WCS focusing on leadership skills, communication, and project development.

30. The Fonseca Fellows' participation in the IUCN World Conservation Congress demonstrated the program's impact in fostering leadership, collaboration, and global conservation action. Through their active engagement, Fellows built meaningful connections with donors, universities, and conservation organizations, opening pathways for research funding, PhD opportunities, and future employment. For instance, Tonga Torcida from Mozambique met with conservation trust funds and bioeconomy specialists working in the Niassa Reserve, identifying new partnerships to strengthen marine and terrestrial conservation. Serah Pyawa from Papua New Guinea, the first Indigenous woman from her community to earn a master's degree, connected with experts from her region's GEF-funded 30x30 marine protected area project and was later invited to contribute to IUCN guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' inclusion in OECMs. Emina Karalić from Bosnia and Herzegovina secured a second grant from the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund to advance her shark conservation work in the Adriatic, while Natali Vilas Boas Silveira from Brazil was invited to join the Brazilian IUCN National Committee. Abhilasha Shrivastava from the Re:wild program worked on developing new transboundary cooperation project with China, Thailand, and other countries around the region, focused on coordinated conservation of endangered species and shared ecosystems, and Joel Guity from the WWF program strengthened partnerships for marine and coastal ecosystem management in the Honduran Caribbean and community-based natural resource management initiatives.

Site Visits for Council Members

31. This initiative is designed to enable GEF Council Members and Alternates to benefit from a personal in-depth knowledge and understanding of activities, results, and stakeholders of GEF projects, including through field visits with participation of Developed and Developing countries' Council Members and Alternates.

32. No site visits were organized during the current reporting period.

Support for Country Delegations and Stakeholders to Attend COPs and Related Meetings

33. This funding line provides support for country delegations to participate in the Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the Conventions which the GEF serves as financial mechanism. This support compensates for the limited funding countries receive from the Convention Secretariats. Without the GEF's support, a number of countries would not be able to participate in the negotiations and present their positions, and national interests.

34. In the period covered by this report, an amount of \$136,000 was allocated to support participation by government officials and stakeholders in GEF-recipient countries to attend different meetings. The GEF has supported the participation of government representatives, GEF Operational Focal Points, local authorities, Indigenous Peoples, youth negotiators, and technical experts from the field. This inclusive approach aligns with the GEF's commitment to strengthen whole-of-government and whole-of-society engagement, an approach that has been central to GEF-8 and will continue to guide GEF-9. By facilitating the presence and capacity building of diverse delegates at COPs, this budget line contributes directly to more informed, equitable, and coherent policy discussions within the Conventions, ensuring that decisions reflect the voices and experiences of those most affected by global environmental challenges.

35. Also, the GEF continued to strengthen the capacities and representation of partner countries and stakeholders in key environmental decision-making spaces by supporting participation in the 2025 Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS COPs). For this COP, the GEF supported the Government of Uruguay as host of the OEWG 3.2 and the Intergovernmental Meeting to consider the establishment of a new Science-Policy Panel. Similarly, the GEF supported Suriname's Operational Focal Point and technical officer, whose institution had recently transitioned from the National Institute for Environment and Development (NIMOS) to the National Environmental Authority (NMA). This participation helped enhance institutional capacity, facilitate policy development on emerging issues such as e-waste and POPs, and foster knowledge and resource mobilization, including engagement with GEF-supported financial mechanisms.

36. In addition, this COP held the first Youth Forum on Chemicals and Waste, where the GEF sponsored three youth delegates from Samoa, Antigua and Barbuda, and Brazil to participate as observers and contributors. The youth delegates called for science and training workshops, co-development of a dedicated BRS action plan on children and youth, and greater awareness of chemical- and waste-related risks in National Implementation Plans.

37. The Minamata Convention on Mercury's Secretariat requested GEF's support to establish the first ever Indigenous Peoples Caucus to the Convention. The GEF provided technical support to the Secretariat contributing to the selection of IP led organizations and representatives to compose the Caucus. The GEF also provided financial support for the participation of 7 Indigenous leaders to attend COP-6 as part of the new Caucus. By ensuring their direct participation, the GEF strengthened national and regional capacity to address mercury risks, brought community perspectives into policy discussions, and contributed to more inclusive, equitable, and actionable outcomes.

38. For the UNFCCC COP30 in Belém, the GEF is supporting the participation of 11 government delegates, including GEF's OFPs for Haiti and Dominican Republic, and an additional

technical staff for Dominican Republic, since they are serving as one of the COP's vice-presidencies. The GEF also provided support for eight young government delegates from Mongolia, Palau, Nigeria, Morocco, South Sudan, Lesotho, Indonesia, and Mauritania that received training from the Young Negotiators Academy, a partner in the GEF's Youth engagement program. This international program builds institutional capacity by providing hands-on training and mentorship for early-career professionals working within government or national climate teams. Each participant is nominated and endorsed by their country's COP delegation committee and GEF Operational Focal Point. Through this practical learning experience, participants strengthen their understanding of international climate processes, enhance analytical and communication skills, and help reinforce national institutional memory. The initiative fosters intergenerational learning and sustainable capacity development across Global South countries, preparing the next generation of professionals for future climate governance efforts.

39. Other activities supported under this budget line included assistance for the participation of the Regional Head of the Latin American and Caribbean Conservation Trust Fund Network (RedLAC) in the IUCN Congress to co-organize the GEF Pavilion, as well as support for the Caribbean Youth Council's participation in the Caribbean Youth Environment and Climate Change Conference. The latter, co-hosted by UNEP and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, helped shape a regional youth strategy for UNFCCC COP30, UNEA, and the Caribbean Climate Change Strategy.

Annex 1: List of Events

Country Engagement Strategy – January 2025 – December 2025

Regions	Upstream Technical Workshops/ National Dialogues	Constituency Meetings	ECW	Other – OFP Training/CEO missions
LAC	- 24 th Meeting of the Forum of Ministries of LAC (October 2025, Peru)	1 – Southern Cone (Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia and Chile) Constituency Meeting (June 2025, Washington DC) 2 – Brazil-Colombia-Ecuador Constituency Meeting (June 2025, Washington DC)	1 – ECW Latin America – Panama (October 2025)	1-OFP Project Oversight Training for Latin America & Caribbean by OAS - Colombia (May 2025)
ECA		ECA and MENA Constituency Meeting May 2025 (Virtual) with breakout rooms)		
SIDS	Grenada National Dialogue, (July 2025, Grenada) 32nd SPREP Meeting of Officials, (September 2025, Samoa)	1-Pacific Constituency Meeting (May 2025, Cook Islands)		1-OFP Project Oversight Training for Pacific by SPREP (May 2025, Cook Islands) 2-SIDS Replenishment Consultations by SIDS Replenishment Rep (May, Sept 2025, virtual)

	<p>6th Forum of Ministers of Asia Pacific (August 2025, Fiji)</p> <p>108th Special Meeting of the CARICOM) COTED for Environment and Sustainable Development Ministers (April 2025, Virtual)</p>			<p>3-OFP Project Oversight Training for the Caribbean by OAS - Colombia (May 2025)</p>
Africa	<p>Malawi National Dialogue July 2025</p>	<p>Africa Constituency Meeting – Eastern, Southern, Central and West Africa constituency – Virtual (December 2024)</p> <p>Africa Constituency Meeting (5 constituencies) May 2025 (Virtual) with breakout rooms)</p>	<p>1 - ECW Southern Africa - Johannesburg (January 2025) 2- ECW Central Africa – Guinea Equatorial (April 2025) 3 – ECW West Africa (Sahel and Coastal) September 2025</p>	<p>1-OFP Project Oversight Training for Eastern and Central Africa by AWF - Nairobi, Kenya (April 2025) 2-OFP Project Oversight Training for West Africa by TBA –Accra Ghana (April 2025) 3-OFP Project Oversight Training for Southern Africa by TBA – Windhoek, Namibia</p>

Asia		<p>1-E Asia Constituency Meeting (May 2025, Cambodia)</p> <p>2-S Asia Constituency Meeting (May 2025, virtual)</p>		<p>1-OFP Project Oversight Training for East Asia by PEMSEA (May, Sept 2025, Philippines)</p> <p>2-Asia Replenishment Consultations by Asia Replenishment Rep (May, Sept-Oct 2025, virtual)</p>
Other		<p>-1st Replenishment Webinar - All regions (Virtual) – April 2025</p> <p>2nd Replenishment Webinar – All regions (Virtual) September 2025</p>		