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Virtual Meeting

**PROGRESS REPORT:  
THE GEF SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM 2.0**

## INTRODUCTION

1. Civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and youth and women groups, leaders and advocates around the world play critical roles in shaping global development agendas. They deliver transformational solutions to global environmental problems, bring rights holders and marginalized voices into national policy dialogues, and elevate local priorities in international environmental negotiations and financing.
2. The GEF Small Grants Program (GEF SGP) has served as a cornerstone of civil society engagement within the GEF partnership since its inception in 1992. Over three decades, the program has demonstrated remarkable reach and impact, administering over \$1.5 billion through nearly 30,000 grants to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth across 136 countries. This extensive network has successfully secured \$990 million in co-financing, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in mobilizing additional resources for environmental action at the grassroots level.
3. The GEF-8 Replenishment process reiterated the importance of enhancing engagement of non-state actors and focusing on "whole of society" approaches emphasizing stakeholder engagement across different segments of society. The GEF-8 Strategy integrated new targeted efforts to expand support and engagement with civil society, including increasing the ambition, scale and scope of the GEF SGP.
4. The replenishment resulted in a \$155 million allocation to SGP with a renewed focus on maximizing non-state actor engagement through a Whole of Society approach. This strategic direction established the overarching objective for SGP 2.0 to *"catalyze and mobilize civil society actors and local actions to address major drivers of environmental degradation and deliver multiple benefits across GEF's thematic dimensions while promoting sustainable development and improved livelihoods."*
5. The Council's approval of SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements at its 63rd Meeting in December 2022<sup>1</sup>, responding to findings and recommendations of the joint GEF and UNDP OP8 IEO Evaluation of SGP<sup>2</sup>, affirmed an ambitious reform agenda centered on expansion, diversification, innovation, and optimization of program delivery mechanisms. This evolution of the Program reflected the GEF's growing recognition of the critical role that local communities and civil society organizations play in addressing global environmental challenges, and the important role of SGP in supporting innovative solutions that might otherwise remain undiscovered or unscaled while contributing to the achievement of GEBs and promoting sustainable development and improved livelihoods.

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<sup>1</sup> GEF/C.63/06/Rev.01

<sup>2</sup> [Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme \(SGP\) 2021 | GEF Independent Evaluation Office](#)

6. This report provides a comprehensive update on the progress in operationalizing the GEF-8 SGP 2.0 programming strategy that traces the reform journey from initial Council approval through full implementation, highlighting how strategic decisions at each phase enabled subsequent achievements, including:

- Successfully securing \$155 million for SGP - a 22% increase compared to GEF-7.
- Expediently diversifying SGP Core implementing agencies with the addition of FAO and Conservation International (CI) alongside UNDP.
- Timely development of operational guidance to facilitate cohesive programming of SGP 2.0 and reporting frameworks, and codifying key principles to increase the SGP grant ratio to ensure that more SGP resources reach civil society organizations directly.
- Effectually expanding country coverage from 124 in GEF-7 to 135 in GEF-8.
- Timely introduction of two innovative SGP CSO Initiatives with the CSO Challenge Program, led by IUCN, and the Microfinance Initiative, led by the WB, to offer complementary opportunities for financing to civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth and women.

## **BACKGROUND**

7. The expanded scale and scope of the GEF SGP 2.0 highlights the importance that the GEF places on multi-stakeholder partnerships and social inclusion to deliver on its mission. It represents an important step towards realizing GEF-8 ambitions around a "whole of society" approach.

8. Consequent to the SGP 2.0 objective SGP 2.0 was rolled out following four core pillars:

- 1) Expand the SGP financing envelope
- 2) Diversify SGP Implementing Agencies
- 3) Innovate through complementary delivery models
- 4) Optimize use and impact of SGP resources

9. This report traces the implementation of these pillars, showing how the Secretariat strategically sequenced actions from July 2022 through October 2025.

## SGP 2.0 PLANNING AND DESIGN PHASE

10. The GEF-8 replenishment concluded with an allocation of \$155 million to the GEF SGP Corporate Program, representing a notable 22% increase in SGP financing compared to GEF-7. The Secretariat strategically allocated these resources as follows:

- \$135 million to the SGP global Core program, distributed in two tranches of \$67.5 million each.
- \$10 million to a new SGP CSO Challenge Program.
- \$10 million to a new SGP Microfinance Initiative.

11. Following the onset of GEF-8 in July 2022, the GEF Secretariat initiated a thorough planning and design phase to establish the foundations for the entire SGP 2.0 reform. The initial significant milestone was the Council's approval of the SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8, which were developed by the Secretariat and endorsed at its 63rd Meeting in December 2022. These implementation arrangements responded to findings and recommendations of the joint GEF and UNDP OP8 IEO Evaluation of SGP<sup>3</sup>, and detailed the principles and processes to operationalize the 2.0 reform agenda centered on expansion, diversification, innovation, and optimization of program delivery mechanisms.

12. In line with the provisions set out in the Implementation Arrangements, the Secretariat promptly and judiciously initiated measures to operationalize the total Core funding of \$135 million through two tranches of \$67.5 million each, introducing new SGP agencies while ensuring program continuity, facilitating a transparent process to ensure equal access of SGP resources to all GEF eligible countries<sup>4</sup>, and proactive measures for countries to allocate STAR resources to their national SGP programs early in the programming process.

13. These early decisions and actions proved to be strategic, as they were later shown to play a critical role in significantly increasing SGP country participation –with 11 more

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<sup>3</sup> [Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme \(SGP\) 2021 | GEF Independent Evaluation Office](#)

<sup>4</sup> Previously, some countries had "upgraded" from SGP to larger programs, creating inequities in access. The new approach ensured that core SGP resources would be allocated equally across all eligible countries, guaranteeing approximately \$1 million per participating country.

countries joining since GEF-7<sup>5</sup>—and in increasing STAR allocation to SGP, resulting in more than a 20 % increase in STAR resources compared to GEF-7<sup>6</sup>.

## **SGP 2.0 Operational Framework**

14. Recognizing that successful multi-agency implementation of SGP would require common standards and expectations, the GEF Secretariat took the lead in developing a comprehensive operational framework during the first half of 2023. By taking this proactive approach, the GEF Secretariat ensured that all implementing agencies—both existing and new—would operate under unified guidelines.

15. The Secretariat initiated technical working group discussions with UNDP (and later FAO and CI) to draft the SGP 2.0 Operational Guidelines<sup>7</sup>, setting out the guiding principles and framework for the implementation of projects funded through GEF SGP Core resources in GEF-8.

16. A critical element of the Operational Guidelines was the establishment of a 72% grant ratio requirement, meaning that 72% of all SGP resources must flow directly to civil society organizations and community-based organizations, representing a significant increase from the 62% ratio in GEF-7.

17. Simultaneously, the Secretariat led development of the SGP 2.0 Results Framework for GEF-8 which builds on previous versions and aligns with the GEF-8 Results Management Framework. This updated framework introduced, for the first time, SGP-specific indicators designed to track and monitor social inclusion and livelihood outcomes, including:

- Number of grants directly targeting women’s or women-led groups and/or organizations; youth or youth-led groups and/or organizations; and indigenous peoples’ and/or organizations)
- Amount of grant funding of total grant portfolio accessed by women’s or women-led groups and/or organizations; youth or youth-led groups and/or organizations; indigenous peoples’ groups

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<sup>5</sup> 135 out of 144 eligible countries, representing a 93% participation rate—11 more than in GEF-7—including new participants such as Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Montenegro, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, and Turkmenistan.

<sup>6</sup> Rising from \$85 million in GEF-7 to \$104 million in GEF-8. This figure is expected to grow by approximately \$5 million pending the complete review and approval of all three Core agencies’ CEO endorsements for Tranche 2. Noting also that in GEF-8, 88 countries have chosen to allocate STAR resources to the SGP, compared to 73 countries in GEF-7—a net increase of 15 countries.

<sup>7</sup> [GEF 8\\_SGP\\_Operational\\_Guidelines\\_Feb2024.pdf](#)

- Direct beneficiaries with diversified, strengthened livelihoods and/or sources of income disaggregated by females and males.

18. The SGP 2.0 Results Framework established a standardized methodology for monitoring and reporting on GEF SGP's environmental and socio-economic outcomes. This approach enables the GEF to aggregate SGP's contribution to both GEF Core Indicators and socio-economic results, while also providing guidance for the development of SGP projects in GEF-8 across all GEF implementing agencies.

### **SGP 2.0 Core Agency Selection Process**

19. A cornerstone of the SGP 2.0 diversification strategy was the transparent selection process for new implementing agencies under the Core program. Acknowledging UNDP's proven track record over the past three decades, the reform sought to strengthen existing efforts by bringing in two additional agencies with complementary areas of expertise.

20. In the first semester of 2023, the Secretariat promptly initiated an inclusive selection process for two additional SGP Implementing agencies. This opportunity was extended to all 17 eligible GEF implementing agencies, with the exception of UNDP. The Secretariat designed a rigorous procedure comprising several distinct steps:

- Virtual briefing sessions prior to release of the Expression of Interest (EOI)
- Publication of EOI and Terms of Reference
- Bilateral meetings with interested agencies upon request
- Proposal development period.
- Formal submission and review process.

21. The Secretariat set up an *ad hoc* review committee composed of four members from the GEF Secretariat and representatives from STAP, the CSO Network, and IPAG to facilitate a transparent and consistent evaluation, including the use of a standardized "Agency Selection Review Criteria Scorecard." In October 2023, the committee convened virtually to collectively review scores and justifications and finalized its recommendation to the GEF CEO. This process culminated in the selection of FAO and CI, marking a historic expansion of the SGP implementing partnership. The selection brought complementary strengths:

- FAO: Agricultural and food systems expertise, strong field presence.
- CI: Conservation innovation, biodiversity, and marine/coastal expertise.

- UNDP: Three decades of SGP operational experience, extensive country office network, and community development expertise.

## **SGP 2.0 TRANCHE 1: ROLLOUT**

22. With foundations established—resource allocation decided, and operational frameworks developed—the Secretariat moved into the full-scale launch of SGP 2.0.

23. The decision to implement SGP GEF-8 Core resources in two separate tranches enabled UNDP to promptly ensure the continued operation of SGP activities across more than 120 countries. The first tranche of \$67.5 million was made available to UNDP in 2022, and the PIF (GEF ID 11285) was approved by the GEF Council in June 2023<sup>8</sup>. In this first tranche, 99 countries were selected after a thorough evaluation of their potential financing and operational gaps.

24. The CEO endorsement for tranche one (GEF ID 11285) was approved August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, for a total allocation of \$137.5 million in GEF resources, including over \$70 million in STAR resources.

## **SGP 2.0 TRANCHE 2: PREPARATION AND ROLLOUT**

25. The selection of FAO and CI as additional Core implementing agencies in late 2023 set the stage for the roll out of Tranche 2 and the programming of the remaining \$67.5 million. The introduction of two new agencies to a program that had been implemented by UNDP for over 30 years, has been the most complex phase of the SGP 2.0 reform agenda; supporting the continuity of UNDP’s SGP GEF-7 operations in over 120 countries, whilst facilitating country choice has required a practical and flexible approach.

### **Country Engagement on Agency Selection**

26. A core principle of SGP 2.0 tranche two was country choice, meaning countries could select the implementing agency that best suited their country's needs and priorities. In January 2024, the GEF Secretariat provided comprehensive written guidelines to OFPs regarding the agency selection process for Tranche 2, which included:

- Profiles and comparative advantages of each implementing agency
- Process for requesting Core and STAR resources
- Timelines and procedures for submitting Letters of Interest and Endorsement
- Options for collaborative management between agencies.

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<sup>8</sup> GEF/C.64/04/Rev.01

27 In February 2024, the Secretariat convened two virtual meetings for GEF OFPs, scheduling them to accommodate different time zones. These meetings included an overview of the SGP 2.0 reform process and detailed guidance on the selection procedure for the SGP implementing agency of their choice. Participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on relevant matters. Additionally, throughout this period, the Secretariat addressed individual inquiries from OFPs through both written and virtual correspondence.

28. Over a four-month period from February to June 2024, the Secretariat encouraged countries and GEF OFPs to review and consider technical proposals from all three SGP implementing agencies. This structured engagement period was designed to facilitate informed country choice rather than default selections, providing FAO and CI with the opportunity to present their approaches, expertise, and value proposition. The Secretariat further supported this process by facilitating bilateral discussions as needed.

29. To confirm country selection, following the conclusion of the engagement period, the Secretariat promptly initiated the rollout of tranche two by requesting that agencies secure OFP-signed Letters of Interest (LOIs) for Core resources clearly specifying their chosen implementing agency - and Letters of Endorsement (LOEs) for STAR resources.

### **Tranche two programming**

30. Following the allocation of the remaining \$67.5 million of Tranche two funding to UNDP, FAO, and CI in 2024, the Secretariat undertook measures to ensure alignment across all three submissions. These efforts focused on country selection, coverage, and consideration of co-management arrangements, resulting in a coordinated deployment of the SGP 2.0 tranche two funds. This resulted in the approval:

- I. CI MSP, covering 5 countries (GEF ID 11719) for a total of GEF resources of \$4,687,500 (all Core, no STAR) in November 2024.
- II. UNDP covering 118 countries (GEF ID 11726), for a total of GEF resources of \$70,370,637 (\$44,659,014 Core resources and \$ 25,711,623 STAR) at the GEF 68<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, December 2024.
- III. FAO covering 13 countries (GEF ID 11698) for a total of GEF resources of \$18,141,964 (\$9,460,224 Core resources and \$8,681,740 STAR) at the GEF 68<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, December 2024.

31. As of October 2025, an analysis of the portfolio indicates several notable achievements:

- i. \$964,858 in SGP Core resources secured for each of the 135 participating countries.
- ii. Compared to GEF-7, 11 new countries have joined the SGP, resulting in a 93% participation rate (135 out of 144 eligible countries)<sup>9</sup>.
- iii. STAR resources to SGP increased by over 20%, from \$85 million in GEF-7 to \$104 million in GEF-8, with a possible further \$5 million pending agency endorsements for Tranche
- iv. An additional 15 countries have decided to allocate STAR resources to SGP in GEF-8, increasing the number from 73 countries in GEF-7<sup>10</sup> to 88 in GEF-8.

32. Following the PIF approvals, the Secretariat continued upstream discussions with UNDP, FAO and CI regarding the operationalization of collaborative management arrangements, involving country OFPs, national steering committees, agency country offices, and SGP management teams, with the Secretariat maintaining close oversight of these processes. Furthermore, an innovative aspect emerged from countries' SGP agency selection process: five countries elected to adopt collaborative management models, working with two agencies across both tranches. These arrangements highlighted the adaptability of the new approach and reflected the countries' desire to capitalize on complementary expertise.

## **SGP CSO INITIATIVES**

33. Responding to the implementation arrangements, the GEF Secretariat initiated a process to pilot new and complementary approaches to enhance direct financing and support to youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The two SGP 2.0 CSO Initiatives, including the CSO Challenge Program and the Microfinance Initiative, provide complementary financing windows for the GEF to support and catalyze additional engagement, actions, and sustainable innovations of civil society actors and capitalize on the expertise of new GEF Agencies, including their diverse institutional set-up, partnerships and innovative practices. They also offer new opportunities to support the implementation of MEA commitments and the delivery of Global Environmental Benefits.

34. Following the finalization of the Core SGP Implementing Agency selection process, closely adhering to the timeline and framework set out in the SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements, in the first semester of 2024 the GEF Secretariat initiated the selection

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<sup>9</sup> These new country participants include Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Montenegro, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, and Turkmenistan. This expansion may be attributed to the greater choice of agencies and the secretariat's efforts to engage Operational Focal Points (OFPs) to help countries select an implementing agency that aligns with their specific context, priorities, and needs.

<sup>10</sup> -88 countries in GEF-8 compared to 73 in GEF-7.

process for interested GEF implementing agencies for the two CSO initiatives. This staged approach was purposely adopted to address the complexities associated with managing concurrent selection processes, as well as the varied operational approaches and considerations concerning operability and scheduling. All 18 GEF implementing agencies were invited to participate in both selection processes, which followed closely the transparent protocols established for the global core program. These included virtual briefings for all agencies, bilateral meetings upon request, publication of EOI and Terms of Reference, project proposal preparation, submission, review and final recommendations emitted by an ad hoc selection committee to the GEF CEO.

### **The SGP 2.0 CSO Challenge Program**

35. Following the previously outlined selection and review process, IUCN was appointed in August 2024 as the implementing agency for the SGP 2.0 CSO Challenge Program. This decision was based on IUCN's comprehensive methodology for managing competitive challenge mechanisms and its proven ability to engage a wide range of civil society networks globally.

36. The GEF Secretariat held multiple upstream meetings with IUCN from August through November 2024 to guide project development and ensure alignment with GEF-8 and SGP 2.0 priorities. These consultations refined the competitive mechanism design, grant sizing, selection criteria, and knowledge management approach. The PIF for the "SGP CSO Challenge Program" (GEF ID 11757) was subsequently approved at the 68<sup>th</sup> GEF Council in December 2024 and the CEO endorsement is currently under review with approval expected before the end of 2025.

37. This \$10 million stand-alone project will establish a competitive mechanism to identify, reward and support innovative high-impact environmental approaches and solutions spearheaded by civil society organizations and actors. The first call for proposals is expected to be launched in the first semester of 2026 and will be open to CSOs in all GEF-eligible countries. Key features include:

- Grant size of up to \$300,000 (significantly larger than standard SGP grants)
- A minimum of 30 initiatives across approximately 25 countries
- Priority for youth-led organizations, women's groups, and Indigenous Peoples
- Technical support, capacity building, and peer-to-peer learning as essential components.
- Knowledge creation and dissemination of successful approaches
- Expected co-financing of \$4.5 million.

38. In October 2025, the program was pre-launched at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi<sup>11</sup>. This high-profile event, which featured participation from the GEF CEO, attracted significant attention from civil society organizations globally and generated substantial interest in the program that will be open to CSOs, with a focus on youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples, in all GEF-eligible countries. The first call for proposals is expected to be launched in the first semester of 2026.

### **SGP 2.0 Microfinance Initiative**

39. The selection and review process for the Microfinance Initiative followed a similar approach to the CSO Challenge Program, culminating in the World Bank being chosen as the implementing agency in October 2024. This decision was based on the World Bank's extensive experience with microfinance institutions and proven ability to scale innovative financial solutions for local communities.

40. As with the CSO Challenge Program, the GEF Secretariat held multiple upstream meetings with the World Bank to guide project development and ensure alignment with SGP 2.0 objectives. As a result, a PFD for the project "Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally Led Action" (GEF ID 11901) for \$10 million was approved at the 69<sup>th</sup> GEF Council in June 2025. The corresponding CEO endorsement is currently under review and expected to be approved before the end of 2025.

41. The Microfinance Initiative aims to improve microfinance institutions' capacities to design innovative financial products that support low-income households, small producers, and micro-enterprises in accessing finance for environmental solutions. It will be working across seven countries—Brazil, Colombia, Madagascar, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Türkiye, and stands out for several innovative features:

- Integration into existing World Bank national programs in seven countries
- \$1.487 billion co-financing leveraged by a \$10 million GEF investment (nearly 150:1 ratio)
- Strong focus on women (65% of direct beneficiaries) and youth
- Projected over 4.3 million indirect beneficiaries.

42. Integrating GEF resources into larger World Bank initiatives will help advance environmental objectives, leveraging development finance that already benefits millions of low-income households.

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<sup>11</sup> [New GEF programme set to deliver grants up to USD 300,000 for civil society-led environmental action - Press release | IUCN](#)

## **ENGAGEMENT, COORDINATION, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

43. Throughout the SGP 2.0 reform process, the GEF Secretariat established and maintained effective coordination mechanisms and stakeholder engagement platforms. These measures were vital for managing the greater complexity inherent in a multi-agency program, while upholding the objectives and characteristics of the SGP 2.0, ensuring consistency, and promoting collective ownership and a unified vision.

### **SGP 2.0 Governance and Agency Coordination**

44. The operationalization of SGP 2.0 has required extensive coordination, outreach and knowledge management efforts. The Secretariat has established and maintained multiple platforms and mechanisms to ensure effective collaboration, learning, and communication across the expanded SGP partnership.

45. The SGP Global Steering Committee (GSC) has evolved to serve as the premier platform for strategic coordination. Chaired by the GEF Secretariat and composed of implementing agencies and stakeholder representatives, the Committee provided oversight and guidance throughout the SGP 2.0 reform. These meetings have been instrumental in discussing critical issues pertaining to the roll-out of SGP 2.0 and its key milestones, including agency selection and onboarding, Tranche 1 and 2 PIF development, Operational Guidelines and SGP Results Framework, roles of implementing and executing agencies, and grant and non-grant ratios.

46. The first meeting of the inaugural expanded Global Steering Committee was held in January 2024. This brought together the GEF Secretariat (as Chair), UNDP, FAO, and CI, along with representatives from civil society, Indigenous Peoples, and other stakeholder groups. This meeting fulfilled several essential objectives: it established expectations for SGP inter-agency collaboration, reached consensus on the approach for Tranche 2 roll-out and country engagement.

47. To date, four formal GSC meetings have been held, and another one is planned before the end of December 2025 to review progress on CEO endorsements and prepare for the implementation phase.

48. In addition to the formal, SGP GSC meetings, the Secretariat established a system of regular technical working group meetings. These brought together operational staff from the Secretariat and all three implementing agencies to address day-to-day management issues. These highly proactive, interactive and constructive meetings have been greatly beneficial for all parties. Since February 2024, thirteen such meetings have taken place, covering topics including: country-level governance arrangements; grant-

making procedures; monitoring and reporting protocols; knowledge management, communications; and CEO endorsement development and review.

49. These frequent touchpoints have proven to be invaluable for ensuring alignment, resolving issues quickly, and building collaborative working relationships among agencies with different institutional cultures and procedures.

### **Stakeholder Outreach, Communications and Consultations**

50. The GEF Secretariat has maintained active engagement with civil society partners and the GEF CSO Network throughout the SGP 2.0 development and implementation process. While not exclusively focused on the SGP, several GEF CSO consultations and dialogues have featured the SGP prominently, particularly in the context of the GEF's whole-of-society approach. Six pre-GEF Council consultations with civil society have taken place since the start of GEF-8. Furthermore, in the lead-up to the GEF-9 replenishment process, the GEF CSO Network has initiated a series of consultations called "The Whole of Society Talks." These open virtual moderated conversations focus on GEF's Whole of Society approach and GEF-9 planning. To date, three sessions have been held, including one participated by the Secretariat on how communities can access funding through the GEF SGP and ICI.

51. The GEF Secretariat has utilized the Extended Constituency Workshops (ECWs) and regional dialogues throughout GEF-8 to engage with countries and stakeholders on SGP 2.0. These events have provided valuable opportunities to:

- Communicate the SGP 2.0 reform agenda and new features.
- Gather feedback on country priorities and needs.
- Facilitate dialogue between countries and implementing agencies.
- Share lessons learned and best practices among SGP grantees and other GEF civil society partners.

#### **Box 1: Topics of GEF CSO Consultations**

- Expanding Microfinancing to Support Local Actors and Actions for the Environment in GEF-8 and Beyond (June 2022)
- Civil Society Engagement with the Global Environmental Conventions that the GEF Serves (Nov 2022)
- Consultations with Civil Society on Building Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Cities (Feb. 2024)
- GEF Initiatives and Approaches to Civil Society Engagement (June 2024)
- Operationalizing the GEF Whole of Society Approach - Enhancing Engagement and Support to Civil Society in GEF-9 (May 2025)

## **Learning Platform Development**

52. As implementation of SGP 2.0 progressed, it became clear that an improved approach to knowledge management and learning was necessary. The increased scope and institutional complexity of SGP 2.0 - encompassing three implementing agencies, diverse programming approaches, and operations across 135 countries - demanded coordination mechanisms that were significantly more advanced than those previously in place.

53. Acknowledging these challenges and opportunities created by SGP 2.0's growth and the GEF's renewed Whole-of-Society Approach, the Secretariat began developing an SGP Global Learning Platform in early 2025. Following extensive internal discussions and consultations with SGP lead agencies, the Secretariat developed a framework for the platform, approved by the GEF CEO and strongly supported by SGP agencies. The SGP Global Learning Platform is designed to serve as the central repository for SGP knowledge, facilitating cross-learning among stakeholders, and supporting capacity building efforts across the GEF SGP network. Intended to serve as the primary knowledge-sharing repository and capacity building hub for GEF SGP operations, the system will be flexible, allowing for incremental expansion beyond GEF-8 and establishing itself as the program's permanent knowledge management infrastructure.

54. The SGP Learning Platform is being processed as a \$5 million Medium-Sized Project (MSP) to be jointly implemented by UNDP, FAO, and CI, with UNDP as the lead agency. The Secretariat is currently working with UNDP, FAO and CI on developing a PIF for this Platform. The submission of this document is anticipated before the end of 2025, and it will outline several key features.

- Comprehensive digital knowledge hub
- Virtual and in-person learning events and communities of practice
- Technical assistance and capacity building programs
- Monitoring and evaluation tools and resources
- Communication materials and visibility products
- Mechanisms for South-South and triangular cooperation.

## **Utilization of Remaining SGP Core Funds**

55. With 135 out of 144 eligible countries participating in SGP, and Core resources allocated equally among participants, approximately \$8.7 million in Core funds remained unallocated after all Tranche 2 PIFs were approved. Consistent with the Implementation

Arrangements provision for reallocating unused funds, the Secretariat engaged in discussions with the three Core implementing agencies to determine the most effective use of these. The following decision was reached:

- Allocate \$5 million to the SGP Global Learning Platform
- Distribute \$3.7 million equally among the 135 participating countries (\$27,357 per country)

56. This approach carefully considered various options to optimize the use of SGP Core resources, while strategically addressing emerging needs to strengthen knowledge management infrastructure, learning and coherency moving forward.

## **SGP 2.0 RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

57. The period spanning July 2022 to October 2025 has produced substantial progress in every aspect of the SGP 2.0 reform agenda. This section provides a consolidated overview of the results achieved thus far.

### **Portfolio Overview and Participation**

58. The SGP 2.0 reform succeeded in dramatically expanding access and participation:

- \$155 million total SGP 2.0 allocation (\$135M Core, \$20M CSO Initiatives).
- Nearly \$1 million in Core SGP financing guaranteed per country.
- 135 countries participating (93% of eligible countries), 11 more than GEF-7.
- \$104 million in STAR resources allocated to SGP (more than a 20 % increase from GEF-7).
- 88 countries allocating STAR funds to SGP (up from 73 in GEF-7).

### **Expected Global Environmental Benefits**

59. The SGP 2.0 Results Framework has successfully guided the three Core implementing agencies in the formulation of their global PIFs and CEO endorsements. The data suggests substantial contributions to GEF-8 targets and demonstrates the effectiveness of community-led approaches in achieving global environmental benefits at scale. The balanced gender distribution reflects SGP's strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

*Box 2: Expected SGP 2.0 GEBs and Socio-Economic outcomes*

**55,000** hectares of terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management

**151,800** hectares of marine protected areas created or under improved management

**395,300** hectares of area of land and ecosystems under restoration

**6,690,000** hectares of area of landscapes under improved practices

**296,300** hectares of marine habitat under improved practices

**851,200** beneficiaries, of whom half are women

60. Beyond these quantifiable outcomes, SGP 2.0 core is expected to generate transformational impacts through:

- Enhanced capacity of civil society organizations to engage in environmental governance.
- Improved livelihoods and income generation for participating communities.
- Development and scaling of innovative environmental solutions.
- Strengthened networks and partnerships among civil society actors.
- Increased influence of local and Indigenous communities in national environmental policy.
- Greater integration of gender considerations and youth engagement in environmental action.

61. The SGP CSO Challenge Program, envisaged to support at least thirty high-impact initiatives led by CSOs from approximately twenty-five different countries. The program aims to generate GEBs, while generating significant qualitative outcomes through the identification and scaling of innovative local environmental solutions, strengthening the capacity of participating civil society organizations, and fostering new partnerships and networks that extend both the reach and impact of successful approaches.

**Box 3: CSO Challenge Program Expected Results**

**12,000** hectares of area of land and ecosystems under restoration

**159,000** hectares of area of landscapes under improved practices

**3,800** hectares of marine habitat under improved practices

**25,000** beneficiaries, of whom half are women

62. The SGP Microfinance Initiative was established to strengthen the capacities of microfinance institutions (MFIs), enabling them to expand financial products and solutions for low-income households, small producers, and micro-enterprises. The initiative is designed to achieve positive livelihood outcomes and generate GEBs across the seven participating countries.

*Box 4: SGP Microfinance Initiative Expected Results*

**5,000** hectares of area of landscapes under improved practices

**4,347,604** indirect beneficiaries (4,177,604 (96%) women and 170,000 (4%) men)

## Conclusions

63. The results and achievements of the SGP 2.0 in GEF-8, to date, demonstrate how strategic sequencing enabled success. The Secretariat began by establishing foundations: securing resources, developing unified principles and frameworks and processes for collaboration, outreach and communication. These early investments in planning and coordination created the conditions for delivering on the SGP 2.0 principles and core pillars to (i) Expand the SGP financing envelope; (ii) Diversify SGP Implementing Agencies; (iii) Innovate through complementary delivery models; and (iv) Optimize use and impact of SGP resources.

64. Beyond expected quantitative results and numbers, SGP 2.0 embodies GEF's commitment to a whole-of-society approach. By diversifying implementing agencies, piloting new delivery mechanisms and maintaining core principles of local empowerment, the SGP 2.0 reform demonstrates that expanding scale need not compromise quality or purpose. These reforms point to clear operational results and accomplishments: Establishment of a GEF SGP Multi-Agency Model: Introducing two new core implementing agencies, and two additional agencies for the CSO Initiatives, all with complementary expertise while maintaining program coherence through unified guidelines, frameworks and coordination.

- i. Expanded SGP Country Choice: Improving country-driven programming by providing choice for countries to select their implementing agency based on national needs and priorities.
- ii. Improved equitable access to SGP core resources: Securing nearly \$1 million in Core financing per participating country, ensuring program viability and continuity across all countries regardless of size or previous participation levels.

- iii. Expanded Country coverage: Increasing SGP country participation from 124 countries in GEF-7 to 135 in GEF-8, representing an increase of 11 countries, including Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Montenegro, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, and Turkmenistan
- iv. Increased country resources: Securing increased STAR allocation to SGP by more than 20% since GEF-7, rising from \$85 million in GEF-7 to \$104 million in GEF-8<sup>12</sup> with 15 countries allocating STAR resources to the SGP compared to GEF-7.
- v. Innovated with two pilot and complementary approaches: Enhancing direct financing and support to youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities through the introduction two SGP 2.0 CSO Initiatives, including (i) the CSO Challenge Program and the Microfinance Initiative
- vi. Improved efficiency and reporting: Codifying target to increased grant ratio of GEF SGP financing directly flowing to CSOs and CBOs to 72 % (compared to 62% in GEF-7) and introduction of a new results framework to better account for the full scope of SGP's results and impacts.

## **LOOKING FORWARD: GEF SGP STRATEGY FOR GEF-9**

65. The initial successes and outcomes of the SGP reform implemented during GEF-8 indicate that a thorough transformation of a program with thirty years of history is attainable when it is guided by shared objectives, effective consultations, well-defined principles, transparent procedures, and adaptive management practices.

66. The GEF Secretariat will continue to provide strong leadership, coordination support to ensure successful implementation of SGP 2.0, including renewed focus on monitoring and reporting of progress and results, and investments in learning, knowledge sharing and communication.

67. As the GEF partnership looks toward GEF-9, the solid foundation established through SGP 2.0 provides a strong platform for further expanding and deepening GEF's engagement with civil society and support for community-led environmental action. Consultation with implementing agencies and civil society stakeholders, lessons learned, relationships built, and innovations tested through SGP 2.0 are already informing the development of an even more ambitious agenda for SGP in the next replenishment cycle.

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<sup>12</sup> Expected to grow by approximately \$5 million pending forthcoming approval CEO endorsements for Tranche 2.