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EVALUATING THE TRANSITION TO SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME 2.0

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPS	country program strategy
CSO	civil society organizations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LDN	land degradation neutrality
MEA	multilateral environmental agreement
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NDCs	nationally determined contributions
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSC	national steering committee
OP	operational phase
PIF	project identification form
RBM	results based management
SGP	Small Grants Programme
STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
UCP	upgraded country program
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP CPMT	United Nations Development Programme Central Programme Management Team
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services

QUICK SCAN

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP) seventh operational phase (OP7), implemented from 2020 to 2024, continued its mission of delivering global environmental benefits through community-based, civil society-led initiatives across GEF focal areas. The SGP occupies a distinctive niche in the GEF architecture: it is the only GEF-financed modality that channels modest, rapidly disbursed resources straight to civil society and community organizations (CSOs and CBOs), thereby turning global environmental objectives into local action.
2. This evaluation assesses the relevance and effectiveness of the SGP during its seventh operational phase 7 (OP7) while informing the strategic evolution towards the design of the eighth operational phase 8 (OP8), which introduces the structural reforms of SGP 2.0. It informs the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8).
3. The evaluation covers the UNDP-implemented global program and the upgraded country programs (UCPs) that function as stand-alone full-size projects. It considers the very early days of planning towards the delivery of OP8, including the onboarding of new GEF Agencies (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO] and Conservation International). It also takes account of the new facilities being launched under SGP 2.0: the CSO Challenge Program, led by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the World Bank-led Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally Led Action.
4. The findings reflect not only the achievements and ongoing relevance of the SGP but also the challenges encountered during a period of institutional change and expansion. Findings are intended to inform policymakers in the GEF Council, GEF Agencies, and participating governments ahead of the implementation of OP8 and future operational phases.

Main findings

5. The success of SGP is primarily attributed to strong local engagement, access to funding, and the availability of technical support, with 84 percent of survey respondents rating the grants as effective. The role of national coordinators is crucial, as their sustained efforts and strategic guidance significantly contribute to project success.
6. The SGP has significantly enhanced the capacities of hundreds of CSOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs), affecting thousands of individuals each year. This initiative is further strengthened by the Grantmaker Plus program, which offers additional support through training, institutional development, peer networking, and policy engagement, extending beyond the primary role of providing small grants. The steady number of projects and the growing number of individuals receiving training indicate a sustained and potentially expanding impact on local

communities. This reflects a strong commitment to enhancing organizational and technical skills, which are essential for grassroots development.

7. Core indicators reveal that all intended environmental targets were significantly exceeded in OP7. However, the shift from reporting results annually to a cumulative format introduces the potential for double counting. Additionally, survey data indicates that 37 percent of respondents view the administrative and reporting requirements as challenging. These bureaucratic complexities could potentially limit the involvement of smaller groups, including women and indigenous communities.

8. OP7 has demonstrated significant progress in achieving sustainability, as available reports indicated that 566 completed projects were replicated or scaled up by partners. Critical factors contributing to this success include promoting community ownership, securing cofinancing, involving government stakeholders early, and demonstrating tangible livelihood benefits, which incentivize the maintenance of environmental results.

9. SGP has made concerted efforts to enhance inclusiveness and representation of marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women, and persons with disabilities (PwD). For Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in SGP projects has shown modest progress, with participation increasing from 20 percent in the sixth operational phase (OP6) to 22 percent in OP7. This engagement has been facilitated by establishing Indigenous Peoples' focal points in 32 country programs and enhanced outreach efforts in 36 programs. In terms of gender inclusion, SGP has prioritized the involvement of women in project leadership and decision-making roles, aiming to achieve empowerment outcomes. Regarding PwD, the SGP has set a target of engaging youth and PwD in at least 35 percent of country programs. Tracking of PwD inclusion began in 2019–2020; by 2023–2024, 50 organizations of PwD were participating in SGP projects.

10. OP8 has strengthened administrative processes and guidance, improving overall operational efficiency, yet there is no clear evidence that transaction costs have decreased. The mandated 72 percent ratio of grant to non-grant expenditures remains difficult for GEF Agencies to meet, often requiring internal subsidies and adding financial and administrative strain, even though the requirement is intended to enhance community-level impact.

11. The transition from the United Nations Development Programme to other agencies has introduced considerable uncertainty. Countries that previously secured predictable funding through the SGP upgraded countries program (UPC) must now compete for System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) resources to top up their global allocations. This competition poses allocation challenges, particularly for biodiversity-rich countries. Moreover, the process of selecting agencies to participate in the SGP was problematic, as the criteria for agency selection were not widely available. This opacity, combined with the high cost of doing business as an agency under the SGP, may deter other GEF agencies from participating.

12. Despite these operational hurdles, the SGP has evolved from sporadic creativity to a more structured, program-wide approach to innovation. Key findings from a document review highlight that innovation under OP7 is multifaceted, encompassing technological advancements, novel community engagement strategies, and financial and policy initiatives. OP8 is advancing innovation by introducing structured mechanisms such as the CSO challenge program and a global microfinance initiative. FAO also contributes to innovation by providing incubation and acceleration services, leveraging internal expertise and online platforms to improve proposal quality and local capacity. Collectively, these efforts mark a shift from ad hoc projects to a deliberate ecosystem designed to nurture and scale CSO-led innovation at both grassroots and policy levels.

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose, scope, and methodology

1. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) created the Small Grants Programme (SGP) in 1992 with the purpose of channeling support to local community-based organizations for addressing global environmental problems. This follow-up evaluation to the Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the SGP (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021) was commissioned to assess the performance and strategic evolution of the SGP under the seventh operational phase (OP7), with particular emphasis on the program's transition toward the new model for SGP approved under GEF-8 (referred to as SGP 2.0) (GEF 2022a).
2. The primary objective is to inform the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8), which is being conducted by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office. This evaluation aims to provide an evidence-based analysis of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. This evaluation is designed to examine the extent to which the SGP has addressed the recommendations of the Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation (annex A), aligned with GEF-7 strategic priorities, and adapted to the transformational goals set for SGP 2.0 under GEF-8. The evaluation also serves to inform discussions on future reforms and institutional arrangements for GEF-9, ensuring greater inclusivity, country ownership, and readiness for transformative change.
3. The evaluation serves a dual accountability and learning function, aimed at informing the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, GEF Agencies involved with SGP—the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Conservation International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the World Bank—the UNDP Central Programme Management Team (CPMT), country stakeholders, and donors.
4. Key evaluation questions include:
 - (a) KEQ1. How have the operational modalities of the SGP evolved, and to what extent are these addressing the recommendations and findings of the 2021 joint evaluation?
 - (b) KEQ2. Are the updated design and implementation plans of SGP 2.0 consistent with the revised strategy?
 - (c) KEQ3. To what extent is the operationalization of the execution modalities coherent with the overarching SGP policy goals, principles, and objectives?
 - (d) KEQ4. What are the identifiable results of the SGP in 2021–2024?
 - (e) KEQ5. Based on current knowledge, is SGP 2.0 better equipped to deliver environmental and socioeconomic results?

5. For OP7, the evaluation covers the period from its launch in April 2020 through June 2024. For the eighth operational phase (OP8), the evaluation covers the period from July 2024 through June 2025. The dates were selected to provide continuity with the Third GEF-UNDP Joint Evaluation of the SGP which covered implementation up to March 2020, and to include as much updated data as possible to account for the inception period OP8 under SGP 2.0.

Scope

6. The evaluation covers the UNDP-implemented global program, and the upgraded country programs (UCPs) that function as stand-alone full-size projects. It considers the very early days of planning towards the delivery of OP8, which covers 135 countries, separated into two groups: tranche 1 funding (\$137.5 million committed in GEF grants at CEO endorsement in August 2024) implemented through UNDP, and tranche 2 (\$95.1 million in GEF grants at project identification form [PIF] approval in November 2024) implemented through Conservation International, FAO, and UNDP.

7. It also takes account of the new facilities being launched in OP8 under SGP 2.0: the IUCN-led CSO¹ Challenge Program (\$10 million), and the World Bank-led Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally Led Action (\$10 million).²

8. The evaluation encompasses the results of the SGP global program implemented by UNDP, those of the UCPs, and the preparatory and early operational phases of SGP 2.0, including the onboarding of new GEF Agencies (FAO, Conservation International, IUCN, and the World Bank) and the design of new strategic instruments. The evaluation also considers strategic initiatives and special initiatives under OP7 and OP8, and activities that fall within the scope of Grantmakers Plus, such as knowledge platforms and information dissemination.

Methodology

9. Guided by the concept note, this evaluation draws on a mixed-methods approach, using qualitative and quantitative tools for data collection and triangulation. The analysis combines primary qualitative evidence with quantitative analysis of grant performance data, financial reports, and portfolio-level results.

10. In line with international evaluation standards and the evaluation terms of reference, this report assesses the SGP across five key evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, with attention also given to scalability and replicability, innovation and inclusion as cross-cutting themes. Each criterion is explored with reference to the global program and UCPs and distinguishes between achievements under OP7 and the early implementation of SGP 2.0 under GEF-8 as follows:

¹ CSO = civil society organization.

² The SGP Global Learning Platform is under development and not included in the scope of this evaluation.

- (a) Relevance. Evaluate the alignment of SGP 2020–24 programming with the evolving global and national priorities. This will also help determine how well the evolution of SGP’s operational modalities aligns with previous recommendations and global environmental objectives.
- (b) Coherence. Assess the consistency of programming with the SGP policy goals and with SGP 2.0’s updated design and implementation arrangements. Determine the extent to which the SGP articulates, coordinates with, and scales through other GEF programming.
- (c) Effectiveness. Analyze measures of effectiveness (results and impact achieved) during SGP 2020–24, using the portfolio review, and determine whether the execution modalities and programmatic changes can lead to better effectiveness in reaching intended outcomes.
- (d) Efficiency. Analyze the operational improvements in the latest cycle of SGP and in SGP 2.0 and assess whether they enhance the program’s capacity to deliver results with the available resources.
- (e) Sustainability. Evaluate sustainability of SGP 2020–24 projects and determine whether SGP 2.0 is more effectively positioned to ensure long-term benefits for communities and ecosystems.
- (f) Impact. Identify measurable environmental and socioeconomic outcomes from OP7 2020 to 2024.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria and questions

Criteria	Evaluation questions		Data sources
	SGP	SGP 2.0	
Relevance	How relevant are the projects and programs delivered under SGP 2020–24 to the SGP Programming orientations?	How have the operational modalities of SGP evolved, and are they addressing prior recommendations?	Document review, portfolio review, interviews, survey
Coherence	Are the programs and projects delivered under SGP coherent with the SGP priorities and operational modalities?	Are the updated design and implementation plans of SGP 2.0 consistent with the revised strategy? To what extent have forthcoming changes impacted the delivery of programs and projects so far?	Document review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, survey
Effectiveness	Have results been achieved as planned? To what extent were the programs and projects inclusive of vulnerable or excluded groups?	What is the likelihood of results being achieved? To what extent have the recommendations of the third joint evaluation been applied? Is the new SGP modality more helpful for fostering inclusiveness?	Portfolio review, document review, interviews, survey
Efficiency	Have there been improvements in efficiency since the third joint evaluation? What are the key elements of efficiency under current SGP modalities?	Is SGP 2.0 better equipped (technically, technologically, financially, institutionally) to deliver environmental and socioeconomic results? Is the SGP better equipped to use its resources efficiently?	Portfolio review, document review, interviews, survey
Sustainability	Are the programs and projects delivered in 2020–24 sustainable, and are they likely to continue to deliver results even after the change in operational modalities?	What are the long-term implications of the new modalities for community-led environmental initiatives?	Case studies, interviews, document review
Impact	What identifiable results can be observed from 2020–24? Have there been any innovations or changes?	What is the likelihood of impact from SGP 2.0 programs and projects? Is the SGP 2.0 more conducive to innovativeness?	Portfolio review, country evaluation reports

11. The evaluation team used the following methods:

- (a) **Portfolio review.** A rapid review of operational and financial data from UNDP CPMT systems and GEF reports was performed, including project implementation reports (PIRs), SGP annual monitoring reports (AMRs), and grant databases. The review covered 2,393 grants active or completed under OP7. This review also includes an analysis of results achieved under the SGP for the 14 countries who were operating as UCPs.
- (b) **Document review.** To understand results of OP7 and the process of moving towards OP8, the evaluation team undertook an analysis of key documents, including project identification forms (PIFs), CEO endorsement documents, UNDP project documents, SGP annual monitoring reports, case studies and examples provided by the UNDP or the GEF IEO, GEF-7 and GEF-8 programming directions, GEF Council decisions, SGP operational guidelines, SGP country program strategies, and GEF management action records.
- (c) **Key informant interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders across the GEF partnership, including GEF Secretariat staff, UNDP, Conservation International, IUCN, and FAO teams, and CPMT members. Interview questions were tailored to explore institutional arrangements, delivery efficiency, and readiness for SGP 2.0. A full list of interviewees is presented in annex B.
- (d) **Focus group discussions.** Two focus group discussions were held with national program coordinators and representatives of UCPs with the support of UNDP, gathering insights on implementation experience, strategic coherence, and operational risks.
- (e) **Online survey:** A structured survey was administered to SGP stakeholders across regions, programs, and special initiatives. A total of 558 responses were received from CSO grantees, country teams, and national steering committee (NSC) members, as well as others representing GEF implementing Agencies and the UNDP CPMT. A presentation of the survey and results is under annex C.

Limitations

12. This evaluation faced a few key limitations. The first was the impossibility of conducting in-person country visits, which prevented a more in-depth verification of on the ground results and direct, in-person discussions with grantees and beneficiaries. The evaluation team held targeted discussions with key personnel in most Agencies, however due to lack of time or lack of responses, the number of meetings were limited and one Agency was not able to participate in interviews. This was partly mitigated by the survey—which attracted 558 responses from 102 countries, with over 67 percent of respondents from civil society (NGOs and private sector)—and

the focus group discussions, along with additional case study information provided by upgraded country program managers and UNDP.

13. Another key limitation lies in the fact that other than the tranche 1 for the global program, which is to be implemented by UNDP, all other elements of the new SGP 2.0 were under development at the time of writing. While PIF documents were available, final CEO endorsed documents for the FAO, Conservation International, World Bank, and IUCN-implemented programs were not available for analysis.

14. Furthermore, the complexity of overlapping programming modalities (e.g., global program, CSO challenge program, global microfinance initiative for locally led action) constrained comparability across experiences. Finally, findings related to SGP 2.0 reflect only its very early-stage implementation, meaning that outcomes associated with new modalities remain unknown, since implementation had not yet begun on the ground at the time of writing.

II. PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

15. The SGP, in its seventh OP, was designed along an axis of eight “strategic initiatives”: community-based conservation of threatened ecosystems and species; sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security; low-carbon energy access co-benefits; local to global coalitions for chemicals and waste management; catalyzing sustainable urban solutions; CSO-government-private sector policy and planning dialogue platforms; enhancing social inclusion; and monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management.

Summary of OP7 portfolio

16. During OP7, the SGP approved \$139.9 million in grants for the period from 2020 to 2024, benefiting both the global and upgraded country programs. Table 2 summarizes the annual breakdown of funds. The majority of the grant funding (about 80–90 percent annually) came from GEF core and STAR allocations, totaling \$122.7 million, while the remaining 10–20 percent (totaling \$17.2 million) came from non-GEF sources. This demonstrates the program's continued reliance on GEF resources, supplemented by modest non-GEF funding. Overall, trends indicate that although annual grant approvals varied—likely due to programming cycles or availability of funds—cofinancing exhibited a consistent upward trend, reflecting strong engagement from partners in both cash and in-kind contributions. Cofinancing from governments and partners was substantial, amounting to \$34.41 million, \$24.67 million, \$35.43 million, and \$37.71 million over the respective years (SGP 2024a).

Table 2. SGP's grant funding (by source) and project co-financing by year (million \$)

Year	GEF grants (Core+STAR)	Other grants (non-GEF)	Total grants	Cofinancing
2020–21	31.75	7.64	39.39	34.41
2021–22	22.57	3.76	26.33	24.67
2022–23	38.22	1.77	39.99	35.43
2023–24	30.17	4.03	34.20	37.71
Total	122.71	17.20	139.91	132.22

Note: For both GEF funds and non-GEF funds, including global and upgraded countries, in million \$.

Source: UNDP, GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report: Reporting Years 2020–24 for period July to June, UNDP.

17. Under the global program, a total of 3,450 grants were disbursed between 2020 and 2024 in 118 countries and under the upgraded country program, 520 grants in 14 countries.

Regional distribution

18. Africa consistently received the largest share of funding each year. Figure 1 shows the annual funding distribution by region, and each region's percentage of the total OP7 funding, including the global and upgraded country programs. Cumulatively, African countries secured approximately \$109.3 million, which accounts for roughly one-third of the total funding and is the highest among all regions. The Latin America and Caribbean and Asia and Pacific regions followed, receiving \$97.6 million and \$90.2 million, respectively, with the former representing 29 percent of OP7 funding and the latter 27 percent.

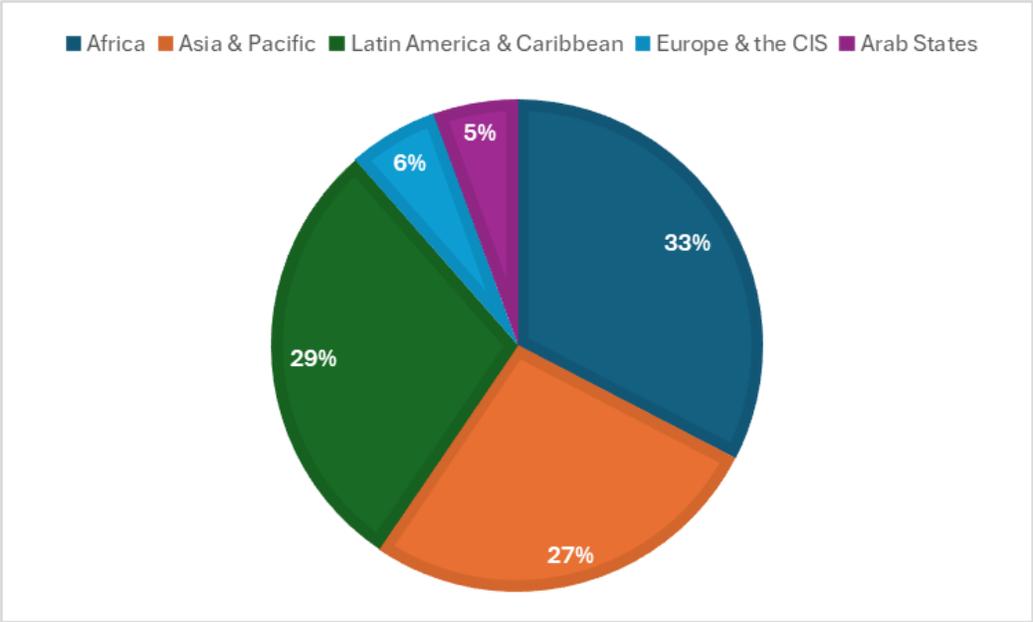
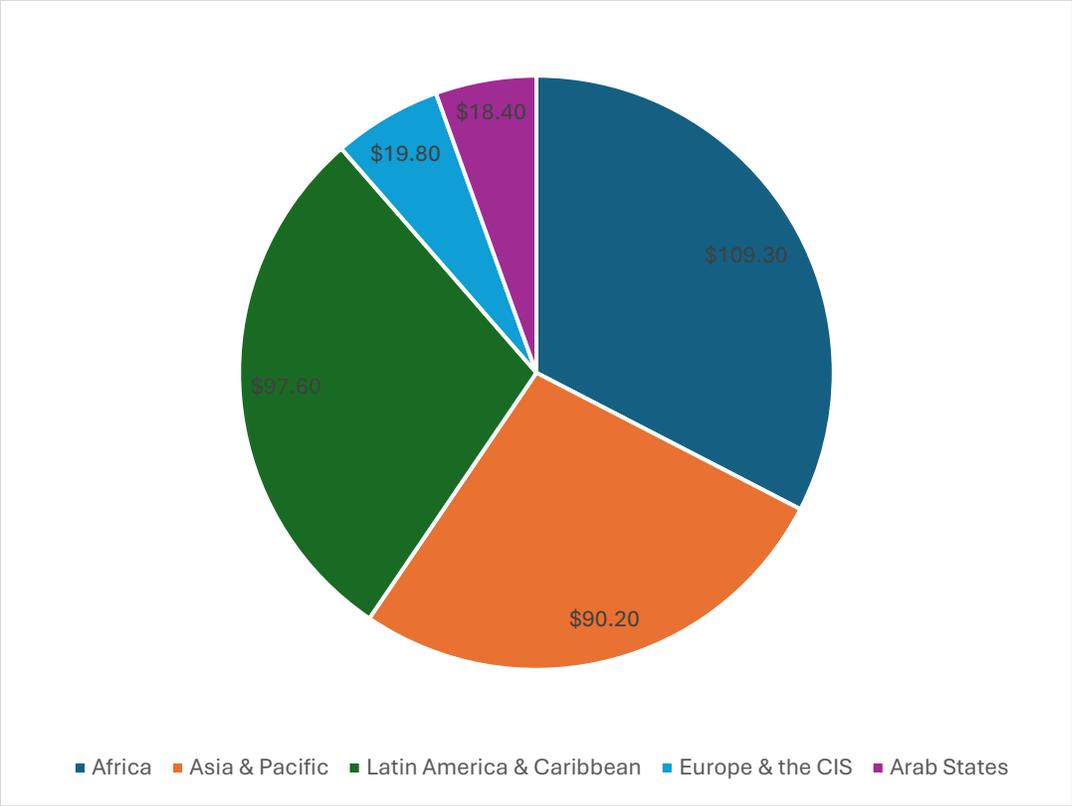


Figure 1. Percentage and total allocation of SGP funds by region for both GEF funds and non-GEF funds, including global and upgraded countries, in million \$

Source: GEF Small Grants Annual Monitoring Report Reporting Years 2020–24 for period July to June, UNDP.

Thematic area distribution

19. The SGP grants in OP7 focused on seven key areas, but funding was predominantly concentrated in a few areas. Biodiversity projects received the largest share of funding, while climate change mitigation and land degradation followed as the next two largest categories.

20. Figure 2 illustrates funding by focal area. Cumulatively, biodiversity initiatives were funded at \$149.6 million over the period of 2020 to 2024, accounting for approximately 45 percent of all SGP funds in OP7. This reflects the SGP's strong emphasis on biodiversity conservation, which remained the top priority each year, with funding increasing from \$38.55 million in 2020–21 to \$44.42 million in 2023–24. Climate change mitigation emerged as the second-largest focal area (19 percent of the total funding) and land degradation projects followed as the third-largest focal area (16 percent). Together, these three areas—biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and land degradation—made up around 80 percent of the overall OP7 funding.

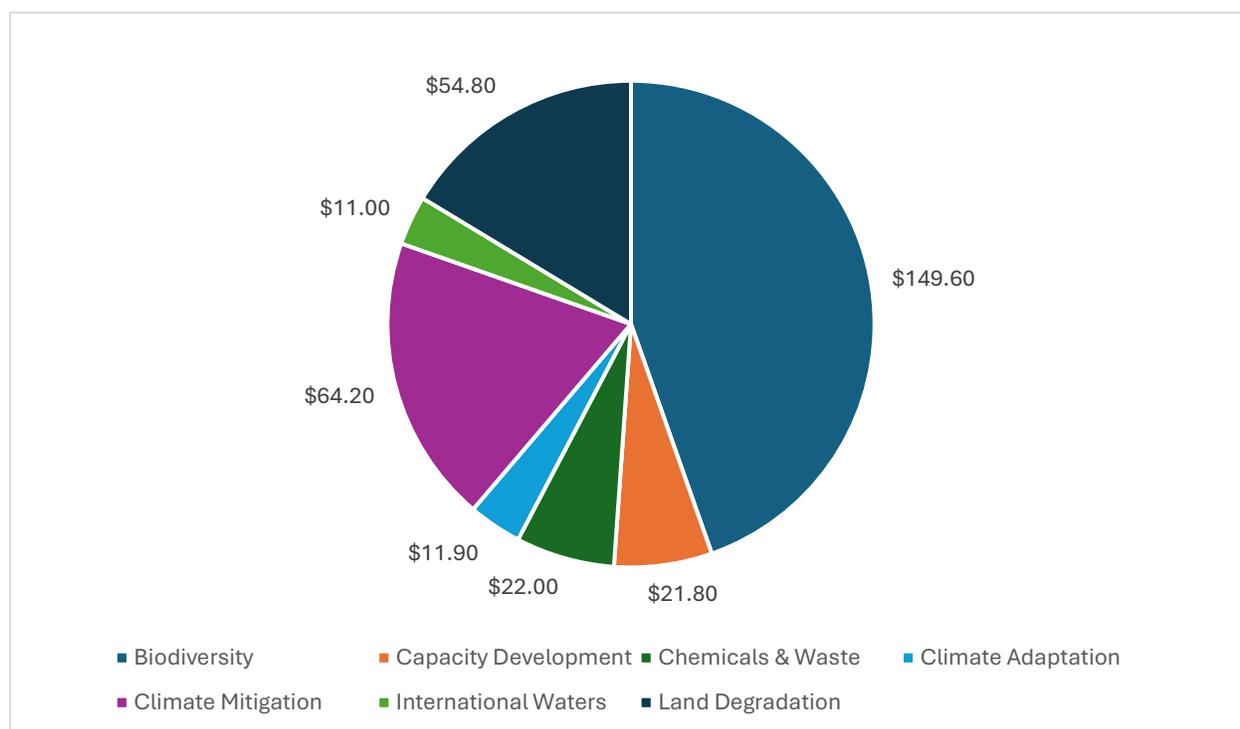


Figure 2. Amount and proportion of funding for active SGP OP7 projects: 2020–24 by focal area for both GEF funds and non-GEF funds, including global and upgraded countries, in million \$

Source: UNDP and UNOPS: GEF Small Grants Annual Monitoring Report Reporting Years 2020–24 for period July to June.

21. In addition to the portfolio reported above, programming under the Grantmaker Plus strategies are SGP's dedicated capacity-building efforts that extend the program beyond its core small-grants function. Launched during OP6, Grantmaker Plus delivers targeted support—training, institutional strengthening, peer networks, and policy-engagement facilitation—to help

civil society and community-based organizations (CSOs/CBOs) grow, share knowledge, and influence environmental governance. By integrating these cross-cutting activities under one umbrella, SGP ensures that local CSOs/CBOs not only receive funding but also build the skills, partnerships, and institutional resilience needed for sustained impact (GEF 2020).

22. Grantmaker Plus activities were financed through two channels:

- (a) Regular small grants (grant component). All country-level Grantmaker Plus support—including peer exchanges, CSO-government dialogues, training workshops, South–South knowledge exchanges—is delivered as grants to national CSO/CBO grantees, drawn from the \$39 million core small grants envelope allocated under tranche 1 (part 1A) of the OP7 project budget.
- (b) Country operational budgets and technical assistance (non-grant component). Additional capacity-building inputs (e.g., international and local consultants, workshops facilitation, database support) flow from the \$22.54 million non-grant budget lines that underpin Grantmaker Plus implementation at country and global levels.

Upgraded country portfolio

Portfolio from GEF-5 to GEF-7

23. The upgraded country program (UCP), introduced in GEF-5, converted the most mature SGP country programs into stand-alone, full-size GEF projects funded directly from their national STAR allocations rather than the central core fund. UCPs gave host governments multiyear funding tranches and programmatic flexibility to scale proven interventions and mentor newer SGP teams. Each UCP followed standard GEF rules on budgeting, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and reporting—unlike the global program—and was intended to expand SGP’s reach without enlarging the core fund, through STAR investment. As of OP8, per the new SGP 2.0, the upgrading policy has been discontinued.

24. Table 3 breaks down the distribution of UCP financing by GEF replenishment period since its inception in GEF-5. In total, there have been 35 projects amounting to \$128.19 million in grants and \$200.51 million in cofinancing in the UCP portfolio. In the reporting period, 14 countries were implementing upgraded country programs. Since the third joint evaluation, Kazakhstan was the only additional and the last country to be upgraded. Although the number of upgraded countries and promised cofinancing has increased from GEF-5 to GEF-7, the GEF grant amount in each replenishment period has remained at the same level.

Table 3. Distribution of UCP financing by GEF replenishment period (million \$)

GEF replenishment period	Number of upgraded country programs	Sum of GEF grant amount	Sum of promised cofinancing
GEF-5	9	43.19	46.54
GEF-6	12	40.00	71.46
GEF-7	14	45.00	82.51
Total	35	128.19	200.51

Note: GEF grant amount includes GEF grant, project preparation grant, and Agency fee.

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

25. Although countries are no longer upgrading in GEF-8, the requested portion of each country's STAR allocation can still be assigned to the SGP global program. Additionally, each previously upgraded country will receive a core fund allocation equal to that of other SGP countries participating in OP8. Table 4 compares the STAR allocations for each country under the upgraded programs in GEF-7 with the combined STAR and SGP core allocations in GEF-8. While most countries will receive amounts comparable to those in GEF-7, Indonesia will see the largest increase—48 percent—whereas Kenya will experience the largest reduction, at 69 percent.

Table 4: STAR allocation to SGP in GEF-8 relative to UCP (million \$)

Country	GEF-7 STAR amount in UCP	GEF-8 STAR and SGP core amount
Bolivia	2.20	1.93
Brazil	5.00	4.94
Costa Rica	2.35	2.16
Ecuador	2.00	1.94
Egypt	2.35	2.36
India	5.00	5.94
Indonesia	4.00	5.94
Kazakhstan	2.00	1.34
Kenya	3.00	0.94
Malaysia	2.85	3.14
Mexico	5.00	5.94
Peru	2.20	2.94
Philippines	5.00	5.94
Sri Lanka	2.05	2.84

Note: STAR amount includes GEF grant, project preparation grant, and Agency fee. GEF-8 SGP core amount across the four global programs in tranche 1 and tranche 2 sum up to \$937,500 for each country.

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

Distribution of UCPs by region and focal area

26. Figure 3 illustrates the four regions where countries have been upgraded. The distribution of GEF grant amounts is proportional to the number of UCPs in each region, with Latin America and the Caribbean being the largest, followed by Asia and Africa. The only country to be upgraded in Europe and Central Asia is Kazakhstan (GEF IDs 9205, 10895).

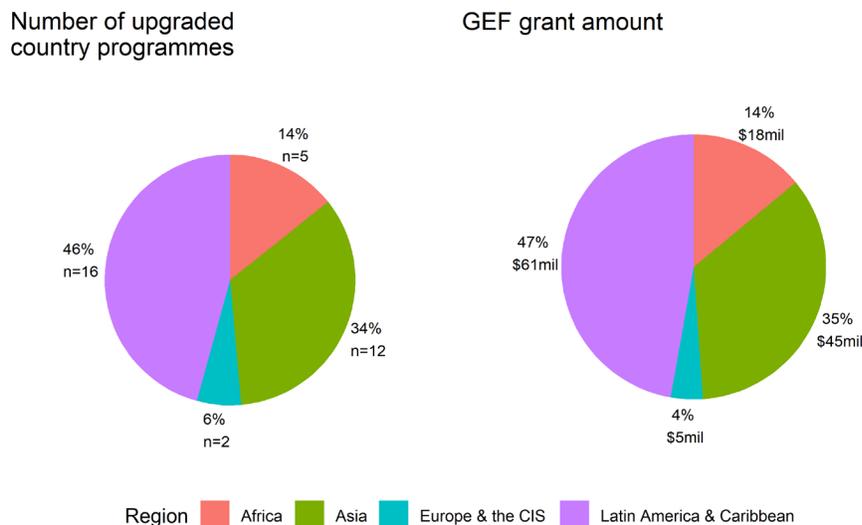


Figure 3. Distribution of upgraded country programs by region

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

27. Figure 4 indicates that a large majority of the UCPs are multifocal. The distribution of GEF grant amounts is proportional to the number of projects within the same focal area.

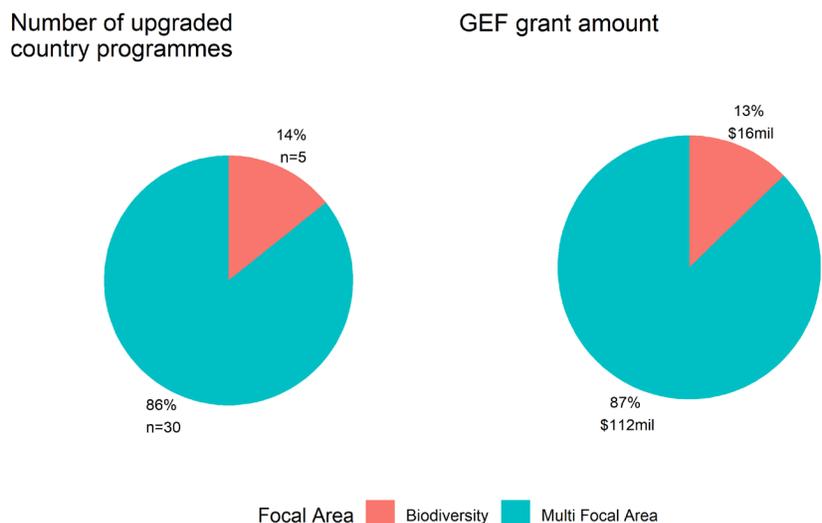


Figure 4. Distribution of upgraded country programs by focal area

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

Towards OP8: a portfolio in transition

28. The GEF Council endorsed the SGP 2.0 implementation arrangements for GEF-8 in December 2022 and the GEF Secretariat issued the SGP 2.0 operational guidelines for GEF-8 in February 2024 with the intention to: (1) align the SGP more closely to the GEF-8 strategy and its integrated programs, (2) extend implementation roles to other GEF Agencies, and (3) mainstream private sector and multistakeholder engagement (GEF 2022a, 2024a).

29. SGP 2.0 replaces the upgrading policy with an equal-share core allocation for all 135 OP8 participating countries, complemented by voluntary STAR top-ups (up to 10 percent of country STAR allocations). Two special initiatives—the SGP CSO Challenge Program (GEF ID 11757) led by IUCN and the Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally Led Action led by the World Bank (GEF ID 11901)—aim to further strengthen the global program.

30. Global governance is anchored in an expanded SGP Global Steering Committee, chaired by the GEF Secretariat, which provides strategic oversight and updates operational guidelines in consultation with UNDP, FAO, Conservation International, and other Agencies who also collaborate through an interagency task force. Each country develops a country program strategy that is intended to align with national priorities and sets out objectives and resources for SGP initiatives.

31. At the country level, multistakeholder national steering committees (with a formalized requirement that the majority be reserved for CSOs) oversee participatory grant decision-making, ensuring that core and STAR resources are deployed against national priorities. Monitoring, reporting, and results—including compliance with GEF core indicators and SGP-specific metrics on social inclusion and livelihoods—are formalized in the operational guidelines, with periodic evaluations and an emphasis on cost efficiency and harmonized indicator guidance.

32. For OP8, funding was approved by tranches in order to speed up processing and avoid interruptions in programming for countries who elected to remain with UNDP. UNDP manages tranche 1, while tranche 2 and the Special Initiatives are delivered by UNDP, FAO, Conservation International, IUCN, and the World Bank—each following standard GEF requirements on budgeting, M&E, and reporting. Grantmaking under OP8 is focused on five thematic priorities directly mapped to GEF-8 Integrated Programs: community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species, sustainable agriculture, fisheries and food security, low-carbon energy access and co-benefits, chemicals and waste management, and catalyzing sustainable urban solutions.

33. At the time of writing, funding had been approved for tranche 1 of the global program, to be implemented by UNDP. CEO endorsement documents were being prepared for tranche 2 and the other four Agency-Specific programs (IUCN, Conservation International, FAO, and the World Bank), as well as preliminary discussions for the creation of a knowledge platform.

34. Funding for OP8 will be allocated as shown in **Error! Reference source not found**.table 5.

Table 5: Indicative financing under OP8

OP8 work-stream	Lead Agency	GEF project financing (million \$)	Indicative cofinancing (million \$)
Global program - tranche 1 (GEF ID 11285)	UNDP	137.54	35.00
Global program - tranche 2 (GEF ID 11719)	Conservation International	4.69	6.30
Global program - tranche 2 (GEF ID 11698)	FAO	19.08	17.50
Global program - tranche 2 (GEF ID 11726)	UNDP	71.31	65.42
SGP CSO challenge program (GEF ID 11757)	IUCN	10.00	4.50
Global microfinance initiative for locally led action (GEF ID 11901)	World Bank	10.00	990.00

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

Note: GEF grant amount includes GEF grant, project preparation grant, and Agency fee.

III. FINDINGS

Relevance

Relevance under OP7

35. **In terms of relevance, the evaluation finds that the SGP under OP7 continued to be highly relevant to evolving global and local environmental priorities, the GEF’s declared aim of empowering local CSOs to deliver global environmental benefits, national priorities, and the stated objectives of the Rio conventions.** The evaluation team analyzed the project documents for OP7 and found that there was significant continuity with the previous operational phases of the SGP.

36. The SGP continues to occupy a distinctive niche in the GEF architecture and partnership: it is still the only GEF-financed modality that channels small grants straight to civil society and community organizations, thereby turning global environmental objectives into local action. Its

relevance is praised and recognized by civil society stakeholders within the broader GEF partnership.³

37. Under OP7, the SGP’s theory of change—in continuity with previous programmatic frameworks for the SGP—rests on the premise that modest, targeted grants to civil-society and community organizations can catalyze locally owned interventions whose demonstrated success can generate broader uptake and, ultimately, measurable global environmental benefits. In practice, small grants (typically up to \$50,000, with some up to \$150,000 for strategic projects) fund community-driven activities—such as biodiversity-friendly natural resource management, climate-smart agriculture, and renewable energy pilots—that yield concrete outputs (e.g., demonstration plots, policy briefs, capacity-building workshops) (SGP 2020, UNDP 2020). These outputs are designed to trigger immediate outcomes: adoption of sustainable practices by local authorities and CSOs, establishment of multistakeholder dialogue platforms and replication funds, and incorporation of proven approaches into municipal or national policies. The causal chain from community action to global environment benefits was explicitly and convincingly argued and well linked to evolving current environmental priorities, as well as to the priorities of the main multilateral environmental agreements (GEF 2020, 2024b).

38. The documents also clearly related the interventions to the ultimate beneficiaries (grassroots CSOs, Indigenous People, women, youth) and their needs in the context of environmental conservation and global environmental benefits. Consistent with the findings of previous evaluations and aligned to the renewed calls for integrated approaches to environmental conservation, OP7 adopts landscape and seascape approaches and approves increased levels of grant funding for “scaling up and to support initiatives that cover many communities, either within in a critical landscape or seascape, or towards a thematic priority.” A renewed priority was also placed on innovation and the private sector’s engagement.

39. At design stage, the scope of planned interventions for OP7 were realistic and did not depart significantly, in financial terms or in terms of targets, from the scope of OP6 programming (GEF 2020). The OP7 design remained focused on proven delivery methods and on grants of less than \$50,000, while allowing for a special window for larger grants that have proven scalability and innovativeness potential (GEF 2020).

40. In terms of context, the OP7 programming was also aligned to the realities of post-COVID delivery, where uncertainties remained and risks were still high. Risks were identified with

³ Interviews and survey.

adequate mitigation plans. By June 2024, the program reports that it has surpassed midterm hectare targets and reached 706,915 direct beneficiaries (SGP 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a).⁴

41. OP7 also built explicit mechanisms to take successful grants to scale and to keep them running after GEF funds end. For example, 10 percent of the grant envelope was set aside for Grantmaker Plus replication funds, enabling country teams to re-grant additional resources to successful pilots that could be expanded across a whole landscape or seascape. The CSO–government–private-sector policy dialogue window also intended at least 25 national platforms and four global events to embed community lessons in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (SAPs), nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and other national instruments—so that practices continue under public budgets after the grant cycle (GEF 2020, GEF 2022b, GEF 2025).

42. Respondents to the survey also confirmed a high level of relevance and alignment to national priorities, with 98 percent of non-governmental respondents rating the SGP as moderately to highly aligned to national priorities and to the needs of local communities and CSOs.

43. Sustainability and relevance were integrated institutionally through the CSO-majority national steering committees, and OP7 piloted the transfer of execution to national NGOs in countries such as Indonesia and the Cook Islands, anchoring know-how and fiduciary systems locally. The OP7 programming also sought to enhance M&E systems to ensure knowledge transfer, and perhaps to prepare for the transition to the new SGP 2.0 model. Together, these features demonstrate that OP7’s interventions were relevant, realistic and deliberately structured for scalability and long-term sustainability.

44. The evaluation also undertook a rapid analysis of programming documents for the upgraded country programs. All programs were aligned to nationally approved strategies and priorities as expressed in policy documents such as the NBSAPs, land degradation neutrality (LDN) plans, NDCs, and sector plans, and filled national “grassroots” delivery gaps. All targets appeared well checked against local conditions and risks, and “strategic grants” of \$150,000 were paired with known in-country partners. Provisions for sustainability and scaling up were present in most upgraded country programs—chiefly replication funds (e.g., Costa Rica’s Payments for Environmental Services Program, Bolivia’s Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas, and Peru mercury), linkages to national trust funds or ministries, and use of CSO executing entities that were intended to continue beyond SGP financing.

⁴ The figures reported in this report are based on self-reported GEF SGP annual monitoring reports covering 2020–24 and were not independently verified.

Towards OP8: relevance of SGP 2.0

45. **The Small Grants Programme under the SGP 2.0 model also appears highly relevant to both GEF-8 and likely GEF-9 priorities, although this will remain to be tested once implementation truly begins.** At design stage, the updated SGP 2.0 modalities for the global program and special initiatives are all explicitly aligned with GEF-8 strategic priorities and are intended to remain relevant through GEF-9, since OP8 will straddle both GEF cycles.⁵ The SGP 2.0 implementation arrangements, approved in December 2022, specify five strategic programming areas and multiple cross-cutting priorities that mirror the GEF's current integrated programs and focal area strategies. SGP 2.0 continues the push towards integrated approaches, territorial approaches, and multifocal grantmaking (GEF 2022a). SGP 2.0 grantmaking is structured around the following five thematic priorities, which are directly mapped onto GEF-8 strategic objectives:

- (a) Community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species, consistent with the GEF-8 focus on biodiversity mainstreaming, area-based conservation, and nature-positive strategies
- (b) Sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security, aligned with the Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Integrated Program and national LDN targets
- (c) Low-carbon energy access and co-benefits, supporting GEF efforts toward just energy transitions, distributed clean energy for health and education, and rural electrification through innovation
- (d) Chemicals and waste management, relevant to the GEF-8 programs on plastics, e-waste, and supply chain reform of hazardous substances
- (e) Catalyzing sustainable urban solutions, supporting low-emission, resilient infrastructure, and linking urban and peri-urban development to landscape-level ecosystem services

46. These areas are complemented by cross-cutting features that reinforce their alignment with the GEF's strategic commitments:

- (a) Social inclusion (with measurable targets for gender, youth, and Indigenous Peoples)
- (b) Innovation and scaling (linked to the CSO challenge program and the global microfinance initiative for locally led action)
- (c) Private sector engagement and blended finance

⁵ Here we refer to the tranche 1 programming document (delivered by UNDP), the tranche 2 programming document (delivered by UNDP, FAO, and Conservation International), the IUCN-led CSO challenge program, and the World Bank-led global microfinance initiative for locally led action. Only tranche 1 programming documents are CEO endorsed, and all other programming documents were under development at time of writing.

(d) Results frameworks tied to GEF core indicators and new SGP-specific social metrics

47. Although GEF-9 programming priorities have not yet been formally endorsed, the anticipated continuation of integrated, multifocal area investment approaches (such as the Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator, Circular Economy, and Inclusive Conservation Platforms) suggest strong continuity with GEF-8 (GEF 2025). SGP 2.0's flexibility and its anchoring in landscape/seascape-based planning, along with its embedded partnerships with civil society, position it to continue delivering against GEF-9 goals, including: post-2020 global biodiversity framework implementation, ecosystem restoration under the UN Decade, climate-smart livelihoods and resilience, and local implementation of emerging chemical conventions.

48. Moreover, the diversified Agency structure of SGP 2.0, with FAO, Conservation International, and UNDP sharing implementation, directly supports the GEF's institutional strategy to broaden delivery frameworks and optimize synergy between the global program and national STAR allocations.

49. Under SGP 2.0, the upgraded country programs policy has been discontinued. It is expected that the relevance of in-country grantmaking to national priorities will be ensured mainly through the country programming strategy and the alignment of national steering committees to national priorities.

Coherence

50. This assessment of coherence considered the consistency of programming with the SGP policy goals and with the SGP 2.0 design and implementation arrangements. It sought to determine the extent to which the SGP articulated, coordinated with, and scaled through other GEF programming.

Coherence with SGP OP7 to GEF programming orientations

51. **The analysis of available documentary evidence, the survey, and interviews show a high level of coherence between SGP OP7 and GEF programming areas, policies, and objectives.** From 2020 to 2024, the strategic goals of the OP7 continued to be structured towards community-based, country-driven actions that address GEF focal areas through locally led initiatives and through integrated landscape and seascape approaches. The SGP OP7 aligned to the GEF-7 programming directions.

52. The OP7 guidance highlighted five strategic initiatives: (1) community-based conservation, (2) sustainable agriculture and fisheries, (3) low-carbon energy access, (4) chemicals and waste management, and (5) local climate-smart urban solutions (SGP 2020). Overall, based on annual monitoring reports, grants delivered under OP7 bore a strong alignment with these priorities as well as continuity with the priorities under the SGP since OP5, including activities focused on biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and sustainable land management with a clear emphasis on biodiversity conservation.

53. The SGP country program strategy (CPS) was used in each participating country to translate GEF-7 Programming Directions—including focal area and GEF impact program goals—into grantmaking frameworks. These strategies ensured consistency with national priorities and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

54. Country-level selection mechanisms helped ensure that funded grants matched these strategic initiatives and addressed prevailing environmental priorities, resulting in a high coherence with SGP’s intended objectives and global programming directions (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021). Country programs used participatory approaches to ensure bottom-up project formulation, making interventions responsive to local realities while being tailored to SGP-relatable areas. Most respondents to the survey also estimated that the SGP responded to the needs of local civil society to a high degree.

Towards OP8: coherence of SGP 2.0 initiatives

55. **There is solid consistency between the design of SGP OP8 and the SGP 2.0 framework and the programming directions endorsed for GEF-8 and planned for GEF-9.** SGP 2.0 retains all five OP7 priority areas and aligns them more tightly with GEF-8 integrated programs. The closer focus on GEF-8 focal area targets, MEA commitments, and integrated programs responds to the OPS7 call for “stronger vertical logic” between community grants and higher-level GEF objectives.

56. According to available documentation and preliminary design documents, the 2022 SGP 2.0 implementation arrangements translate the revised GEF-8 strategy into an operational blueprint that remains faithful to the SGP’s mission while partially addressing previous evaluation findings. They tighten the SGP’s guiding principles by hard-wiring alignment with GEF focal-area targets and related MEA commitments, and by adopting the GEF’s private-sector engagement standards for SGP 2.0 implementation (table 6).

Table 6: Alignment and coherence of SGP 2.0 priorities with GEF-8

OP7 priority area	How it is reflected in SGP 2.0
1. Ecosystem and species conservation	Continued focus via support to community-based conservation (e.g., Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs), key biodiversity areas (KBAs), seascapes), now integrated into GEF-8 integrated programs such as Wildlife Conservation for Development and Ecosystem Restoration. SGP 2.0 enables CSOs and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) to implement projects aligned with these IPs through direct funding windows like the CSO Challenge Program (GEF 2022a).
2. Sustainable agriculture and food security	Embedded in the Food Systems Integrated Program (GEF-8), with opportunities for SGP CSOs to implement agroecological and climate-resilient practices. Grantmaking will continue supporting sustainable production systems in line with NDC and LDN targets (GEF 2022b).

3. Low-carbon energy access	SGP 2.0 prioritizes decentralized renewable energy as part of nature-positive development pathways. Projects promoting low-carbon technologies at the community level are eligible under core grants and innovation platforms (GEF 2022b).
4. Chemicals and waste management	Carried forward through work on plastic pollution, hazardous chemicals, and circular economy practices. CSOs can now apply under GEF-8’s Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program and other thematic funding calls (GEF 2022a).
5. Sustainable urban solutions	Strengthened under GEF-8’s Sustainable Cities Integrated Program (GEF ID 11287), with SGP 2.0 positioning CSOs as agents of green infrastructure, inclusive waste systems, and urban biodiversity management. Local urban solutions can be scaled through new financing mechanisms (GEF 2022b).

57. To replace the former “upgrading” policy, the updated arrangements institute an equal-share core allocation for every eligible country with optional STAR top-ups, thereby improving equity and predictability of SGP 2.0 implementation. The end of the upgrading policy responds to the concerns raised in the third joint evaluation, which concluded that the upgrading policy’s objectives had “not been fully met” and that the shift to full-size-project modality imposed higher transaction costs and operational risks on CSOs and governments” (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021). The previous evaluation recommended that the SGP “reconsider whether it needs a continued upgrading policy.” Under the new arrangements, all eligible countries receive an equal core allocation, supplemented—if they wish—by up to 10 percent of their STAR allocation. This answers long-standing concerns that the upgrading regime created winners and losers, leaving some lower-capacity or small-STAR countries with constrained grant space while others accessed large bespoke envelopes (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021).

58. However, the process for deciding on the closure of the policy was not made clear to the evaluation team: for example, it is unknown whether countries who were implementing UCP under OP7 were informed before or during this process. Furthermore, some risks remain: for example, countries that previously secured predictable, dedicated, multiyear tranches through upgrading must now compete for STAR resources if they want to top up their global allocations, which could lead to competition over resources. Although countries are encouraged to allocate STAR resources for the SGP, in practice the SGP will have to compete with potentially larger or higher-priority projects and programs. In very large, biodiversity-rich countries, smaller programs could see diluted impact unless STAR or other cofinancing is mobilized—a risk that is partially mitigated by the landscape and seascape approach. There is also a small risk that lessons generated by upgraded country pilots could be lost unless explicitly captured in the new knowledge management systems.

Effectiveness

59. The evaluation sought to analyze measures of effectiveness (results and impact achieved) during SGP 2020–24, using the portfolio review, and to determine whether the SGP 2.0 model and programmatic changes can lead to better effectiveness in reaching intended outcomes. This section mostly focuses on OP7, since no grants have yet been disbursed under OP8 and SGP 2.0, and leverages self-reported data included in the SGP annual monitoring reports, PIRs, and evaluation reports for both the global program and the upgraded country programs. However, the evaluation considers institutional arrangements set up during the preparation phase for OP8 as evidence to support early indications of effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the SGP 2020–24

60. **Overall, SGP projects across all focal areas under OP7 have generated measurable outcomes that contribute to global environmental benefits. However, there appears to be double counting and over-reporting across GEF core indicators, leading to exaggerated readings of performance in some cases.** Over the period 2020–24, SGP supported an average of 800 grants annually, fostering significant improvements in natural resource management worldwide. The reported results under each thematic area for the global program are listed in table 7. The application, since OP7, of simplified GEF-7 core indicators and the use of iterative, cumulative reporting, seem to have led to some confusion and inflation in reported figures.

Table 7: Global environmental results for the SGP OP7 global program

SGP results on GEF-7 core indicators	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	Total cumulative
Marine protected areas under improved management effectiveness (hectares)	490,350	62,574	176,955	538,217	1,268,096
Area of degraded agricultural lands restored (hectares)	42,768	67,845	31,575	55,180	197,368
Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (hectares)	1,870,200	5,690,364	2,121,391	2,083,991	11,765,946
Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems (hectares)	135,600	155,947	617,865	150,042	1,059,454
Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares, excluding protected areas)	1,500,000	267,010	77,118	1,599,679	3,443,807
Number of direct beneficiaries as co-benefit of SGP intervention	680,500	544,042	812,854	706,915	2,744,311
Number of females	360,275	282,616	449,588	375,125	1,467,604
Number of males	320,225	261,426	363,266	331,790	1,276,707

Source: GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report: Reporting Years 2020–24 for period July to June, UNDP.

Note: Annual figures are additional to the previous year’s figures, the evaluation was not able to independently verify the figures.

61. Environmental results reported under the upgraded country programs since the previous joint SGP evaluation included the improved management of 4.4 million hectares of landscapes and seascapes for biodiversity conservation, alongside nearly 235,000 hectares of production landscapes. Additionally, upgraded country programs report having mitigated 34.6 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, although there is no information on emissions reduction verification processes. Furthermore, these projects have reached nearly 189,000 people, with women constituting 48.4 percent of the beneficiaries.

62. Table 8 provides a detailed breakdown of these results by year, highlighting the period from July 2021 to June 2022 as particularly effective for UCPs, with seven projects being closed during that time. This period stands out for its substantial contributions to environmental management and social impact, reflecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the UCP initiatives.

Table 8: Core indicators of completed upgraded country programs

UCP results on GEF-7 core indicators	2020-21 (n = # of projects)	2021-22 (n = # of projects)	2022-23 (n = # of projects)	2023-24 (n = # of projects)	Total cumulative (n = # of projects)
Area of degraded agricultural lands restored (hectares)	106 n = 1	37,063 n = 5	0 n = 0	5,371 n = 1	42,540 n = 7
Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (hectares)	45,474 n = 1	3,277,832 n = 7	31,000 n = 1	701,289 n = 2	4,055,595 n = 11
Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems (hectares)	0 n = 0	183,384 n = 6	1,500 n = 1	5,829 n = 2	190,713 n = 9
Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares, excluding protected areas)	0 n = 0	0 n = 0	0 n = 0	56 n = 1	56 n = 1
Number of direct beneficiaries as co-benefit of SGP intervention	4,573 n = 1	150,304 n = 7	9,600 n = 1	24,396 n = 2	188,873 n = 11
Number of females	1,997 n = 1	73,274 n = 7	4,320 n = 1	13,231 n = 2	92,822 n = 11
Number of males	2,576 n = 1	77,030 n = 7	5,280 n = 1	11,165 n = 2	96,051 n = 11

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025. Reporting years 2020–24 for period July to June.

63. The data presented in table 9 compare the intended targets, outputs, and outcomes from the SGP (global program only) at CEO endorsement with the reported figures extracted from annual monitoring reports. It should be noted that the annual monitoring reports only indicated figures for the core GEF indicators. In some cases, the units of measurements used in the AMR differed from those indicated in the project logframe, making tracking a little more complicated.

64. According to the data available, all intended environmental targets were significantly exceeded. Even the most conservative target (marine protected areas) has been exceeded twenty-five-fold. Beneficiary reach likewise outstripped projections, with nearly 1.5 million women and 1.3 million men benefitting from SGP-supported activities over the reporting period. Unlike OP7, earlier phases did not report achievements that dwarfed their original targets. The third joint SGP evaluation presents OP6 results in line with expectations—showing modest over-performance but not orders-of-magnitude gains. Likewise, targets in OP7 were also consistent with OP6 targets. For example, OP6 set a 1 million hectare target for landscapes under improved management and OP7 nudged this up only slightly to 1.1 million hectares; OP6 targets for marine protected areas under improved management and number of beneficiaries were similar.

65. This indicates that the method for reporting results was modified under OP7. SGP OP7's decision to report exclusively on the six GEF core indicators stems from a deliberate shift toward harmonization with the GEF's results guidelines and UNDP's strategic plan. In 2019, the SGP CPMT developed a new M&E strategy that explicitly aligned the global country program's indicator set to the GEF core indicators, "allowing for a better tracking of results across the focal areas and of global environmental benefits" (SGP 2020). In addition, the annual monitoring reports explicitly integrate reporting for the 14 UPCs alongside the global program, whereas in OP6 the AMRs cover only the global country program. The number of grants included in the reporting has also not dramatically increased: 3,450 grants from the global program and 520 grants under UCP in OP7 compiled in the AMR, compared to 3,130 projects in OP6 (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021).

66. The methodology does not appear to have changed either; however, the format of reporting may have created a bias. Up to OP6, AMRs disaggregated results by year. During OP7, however, the monitoring report was adjusted to reflect cumulative results. This may have led to errors in counting, where previous year's results were added to the new year's results. AMR methodology aggregates outputs each year from all grants that report results, regardless of whether a project closed in that year or earlier. Each year, every grant that reports against a core indicator contributes its full tally to the global total—regardless of whether similar outputs were reported in prior years or by parallel grants. For example, if grant A reports 10,000 hectares restored in year 1 and again in year 2 (either under a renewal or follow-on grant), both entries are included—so the same hectares can effectively be "counted" twice. This rolling aggregation

approach is built into the OP7 M&E framework, which stipulates that “project, country level (with portfolio-wide data aggregation at global level)” for all core indicators should be reported.

67. Additionally, some indicators are tracked in anecdotal terms rather than systematically. Urban solutions, policy outcomes, and knowledge management-related metrics were not aggregated in annual reports. Where only qualitative evidence exists, it is often strong (case studies, narrative examples) but cannot be converted into a portfolio-level metric.

Table 9: Target achievement under SGP OP7 (global program) 2020–24

#	Outcome (statement from log-frame)	Key outputs listed under the outcome	Quantified target(s) at CEO endorsement	Target achievement at June 2024
1	Community-based models and biodiversity-friendly practices and approaches promoted for conservation and sustainable use of threatened ecosystems and species in important terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1 Community-based natural resource management measures integrating biodiversity • 1.2 Sustainable biodiversity-friendly enterprises & livelihoods • 1.3 Community measures supporting protected area (PA)/community conserved areas (ICCA) management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of landscapes under improved management: 1,100,000 ha • Marine PAs under improved management: 50,000 ha • Marine habitat under improved practices: 50,000 ha 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of landscapes under improved management for biodiversity: 9,895,746 ha • Marine PAs under improved management: 777,746 ha • Marine Habitat under improved practices: 1,943,807 ha
2	Climate-smart integrated practices improve productivity, food security, and livelihoods of smallholder farmers and support achievement of national LDN targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1 Community-level SLM actions • 2.2 Climate-resilient SLM technologies adapted • 2.3 Guidelines/best practices on sustainable land (SLM) management • 2.4 Value-chain & market linkages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area under SLM in production systems: 140,000 ha • Degraded agricultural land restored: 100,000 ha • SGP countries with food-/fishery-chain linkages: 50 countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes under sustainable land management in production: 923,854 ha • Degraded agricultural land restored: 923,854 ha
3	Low-carbon, viable, and appropriate technologies and approaches demonstrated and scaled up, improving community energy access and building low-carbon infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1 Low-cost energy solutions promoted • 3.2 Community innovations documented • 3.3 Capacity building & knowledge transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installed renewable energy capacity from local technologies: 150 kW • Typologies of locally-adapted energy solutions demonstrated/replicated: 25 • Forest & non-forest land with enhanced carbon stocks: 7,500 ha 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMR provides figures for typologies (331) and households reached (174,469), but do not quantify kW installed or hectares of carbon-stock enhancement.

4	Innovative community-based tools and approaches demonstrated, deployed and transferred for sound chemicals and waste management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1 Community innovative solutions to chemicals & waste • 4.2 Consolidated pesticide/waste/mercury initiatives & coalitions • 4.3 Artisanal and small-scale gold mining mercury-reduction pilots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent organic pollutants /mercury avoided or disposed: 150 t • Local-to-global coalitions strengthened: 2 • Countries running awareness/outreach programs: 25 countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMR reports 230,448 kg of pesticides and 142,167 kg of other chemicals removed or avoided. However, AMRs do not distinguish between the types.
5	Appropriate integrated community-oriented sustainable urban solutions piloted in partnership with government & private sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.1 Integrated urban solutions identified & implemented • 5.2 Capacity-building for service providers & communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries with improved capacity for community-driven low-emission urban development: 12 countries • Community-based urban solutions deployed: 12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No aggregate figure in AMRs; urban portfolio only referenced via Sustainable Development Goal 11 contributions (23% of reporting CPs in 2023–24) • Not reported as a count
6	CSO-Government-Private-Sector policy-and-planning dialogue platforms promote community voices in environmental policy/strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1 National-level CSO-Government dialogues • 6.2 Global CSO-Government & stakeholder dialogues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant policy outcomes reported in ≥ 50% of countries • Social-inclusion reps per dialogue platform: 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMRs give rich examples (e.g., Cambodia forestry & COP26 dialogue) but do not tally national totals
7	South-South exchange brokered to spread knowledge, build capacities and partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7.1 South-South exchanges identified, supported & documented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries adopting improved practices via exchange: 10 countries • South-South exchanges conducted: 15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91 • 190
8	Social inclusion—especially empowerment of women, Indigenous Peoples, youth and persons with disabilities—is mainstreamed and enhanced in SGP programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8.1 Greater participation & empowerment of vulnerable groups • 8.2 Expanded Indigenous Peoples’ Fellowship • 8.3 Youth & disability engagement guidelines/best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects led by women: 30% of portfolio • Projects closing gender gaps in resource access: 20% • Projects improving women’s decision-making: 30% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% • 78% of completed projects classed “gender-responsive,” however it is not clear

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects targeting socioeconomic benefits for women: 70% • Programs with targeted Indigenous Peoples support: 20% • Programs with youth/PwD engagement models: 15% each 	<p>how many are “closing the gender gap”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N-A • N-A • 206 projects with indigenous people support (data is inconsistent) • N-A
9	A common, robust M&E strategy is implemented across all levels, ensuring evidence-based decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9.1 SGP M&E system deployed • 9.2 Country impact reviews conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country teams practicing results-based management (RBM): All SGP countries • Country/cross-country impact reviews: 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMR 2023–24 notes RBM “integrated across all levels.” • N-A
10	Networking & knowledge-sharing leverage local actions for global environmental impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10.1 Citizen-based knowledge platform supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries using the digital innovation library: All SGP countries • Knowledge fairs — numerical target not specified in the log-frame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library relaunched; usage not yet tracked in AMRs • N-A

Source: GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report: Reporting Years 2020-2024 for period July to June, UNDP.

68. In addition to the global environmental benefits reported, as seen in Figure 5, survey respondents noted many associated social and economic benefits such as improved livelihoods, capacity building, and access to new technologies. Among other benefits reported, improved partnerships, relationships, and inclusion featured prominently.

What are the main benefits communities have gained from SGP projects?
(Select all that apply)

Answered: 488 Skipped: 43

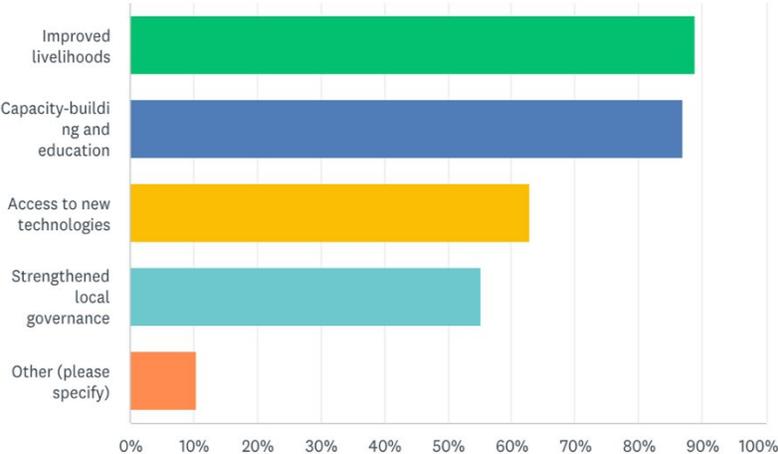


Figure 5. Key benefits reported by SGP participants

Source: Evaluation survey.

69. Survey data also point to a general degree of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the SGP grants (84 percent effective), with key factors of success most often identified as strong local engagement, access to funding, and availability of technical support. This indicates that continued investment in capacity building for civil society may be required to ensure continued results achievement. Among other factors, all answers were related to the strength and continuous efforts of the national coordinator, an aspect which was also reinforced as important during focus group discussions.

What are the main factors contributing to the success of SGP projects in your country? (Select up to three)

Answered: 495 Skipped: 36

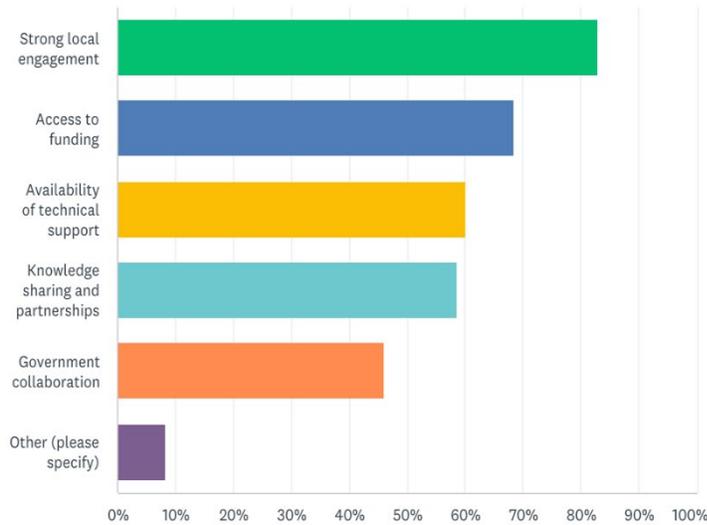


Figure 6. Key factors of success/effectiveness as rated by SGP participants

Source: Evaluation survey.

70. Conversely, the main factors creating obstacles to effectiveness were listed by survey participants and focus group discussions as lack of funding (or limited funding), bureaucratic or administrative burdens, and limited technical expertise (figure 6). One respondent indicated, “I think SGP wants to impact women and indigenous groups, but the overly complicated applications, time consuming (...) reporting procedures and restrictive approved budget lines make it almost impossible for small groups to successfully navigate the system.”

Results under Grantmaker Plus—capacity development

71. Enhancing the capabilities of civil society and community-based organizations serves as both a method and a goal for the SGP. In addition to providing grant funding for specific initiatives, SGP focuses on institutional growth, networking, and knowledge sharing to ensure local CSOs/CBOs become more efficient, sustainable, and influential in environmental governance. From 2020 to 2024, these initiatives were organized under Grantmaker Plus—that is, comprehensive efforts that broaden the program's scope beyond merely granting funds to include capacity building, policy engagement, and partnership facilitation.

72. On a global scale, SGP dedicates a maximum of 10 percent of its country program resources to activities aimed at capacity development (in accordance with GEF guidelines). At the national

level, national coordinators and their teams assess needs and carry out capacity-building projects similar to standard grants, which typically fall into two main categories.

73. Initiatives like establishing and strengthening CSO networks, facilitating policy dialogue platforms between CSOs and the government, encouraging peer learning among grantees, and mobilizing cofinancing or partnerships are common practices. For example, in one year, 44 country programs held 175 CSO–government dialogue events, involving over 4,100 representatives from CSOs/CBOs. These dialogues ensure that community perspectives are included in policy-making processes and help align grassroots initiatives with national strategies. They often lead to changes in local policies or the scaling up of community innovations through government backing. SGP also promoted South-South knowledge exchanges and created platforms for grantees to present their results to potential donors and partners, thereby enhancing their chances of securing resources and continuing their projects beyond SGP funding.

74. SGP provided direct support to organizations aimed at improving their internal capacities including training in project management, technical skills, safeguards, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as offering technical assistance during project execution. During the examined period, 78 country programs conducted training workshops for grantees on various subjects, ranging from biodiversity conservation methods to financial management. Additionally, approximately 71 country programs integrated on-site training within their projects, deploying experts to mentor CBOs in specialized areas (e.g., solar panel maintenance or agroforestry). SGP country teams also played an active role in facilitating connections: around 82 programs helped form or strengthen networks and associations among grantees, promoting collective action and mutual support among community organizations. Numerous countries reported linking their grantees with academic institutions for scientific assistance (63 programs), with government services (73 programs), with international NGOs (73 programs), and even with private sector companies (47 programs) to cultivate new partnerships. These connections significantly enhance the institutional capacity of local CSOs, positioning them to sustain and expand their initiatives.

75. The results of SGP’s efforts to strengthen civil society are significant. In one reporting year, the capacities of 529 CSOs and 870 CBOs were enhanced through 65 specific capacity-development grants, impacting over 10,967 individuals (community members, staff, and volunteers). The subsequent year saw a comparable number of projects (64) training an even larger group—close to 30,000 individuals—in both organizational and technical skills across 492 CSOs and 530 CBOs. These statistics illustrate the extensive reach of SGP in developing local organizational capacity.

76. On the qualitative front, UNDP SGP reports indicate that many CSOs supported by SGP have evolved into impactful entities. Various national or thematic networks that began with SGP support are now advocating for policy reform or consolidating resources for larger initiatives. For

instance, projects in SGP’s chemicals and waste focus area led to the formation or enhancement of 29 national coalitions addressing chemicals and waste management in different countries.

77. A frequent observation in the survey and in interviews, is that SGP often constitutes an organization’s first experience in managing donor funds, thus serving as a practical training environment for project administration. Grantees often recognize SGP for enhancing their abilities in proposal development, financial accounting, and results tracking—skills that later empower them to obtain larger grants from the GEF or other sources. Many organizations that have graduated from SGP have expanded their influence, becoming important players in their respective sectors. Additionally, SGP’s multistakeholder national steering committees (which generally include NGO members alongside government and academic representatives) bolster civil society engagement in national environmental governance. Through the NSCs, local civil society gains valuable experience in transparent project evaluation and consensus-based decision-making, which are essential governance competencies.

Towards OP8: early signs of effectiveness under SGP 2.0

78. **Under OP8, various process-level “green lights” give early effectiveness signals before environmental impact can be measured. They point to improved administrative rollout, clearer guidance for results reporting, and continued confidence by both the Council and country partners in the SGP. However, risks remain for countries who are transitioning from UNDP to other Agencies as implementing partners.** It is naturally too early to say whether similar levels of results can be expected from OP8, given that no grants have been disbursed and that the FAO and Conservation International tranche 2 documents, as well as the IUCN and the World Bank initiatives, are still under preparation. However, based on what is currently known from tranche 1 CEO endorsement documents, and other PIF and concept notes, the targets shown in table 10 are anticipated.

Table 10: Targets at PIF or CEO endorsement for OP8

OP8 work-stream	Lead GEF Agency	Core indicator 3 Land & ecosystems restored (ha)	Core indicator 4 Landscapes under improved practices (ha)	Core indicator 5 Marine habitat under improved practices (ha)	Core indicator 11 Direct beneficiaries (people)
Global program tranche 1 (GEF ID 11285)	UNDP	225,000	3,800,000	270,000	500,000 (50% women)

Global program tranche 2 (GEF ID 11698)	FAO	20,000	350,000	25,000	45,000 (50% women)
Global program tranche 2 (GEF ID 11719)	Conservation International	300	40,000	1,300	6,200 (50% women)
Global program tranche 2 (GEF ID 11726)	UNDP	150,000	2,500,000	NA	300,000 (50% women)
SGP CSO challenge program (GEF ID 11757)	IUCN	12,000	159,000	NA	25,000 (50% women)
Global microfinance initiative for locally led action (GEF ID 11901)	World Bank	NA	5,000	NA	4,347,604 (96% women)

Source: GEF Portal as of June 2025.

79. In addition, process improvements and institutional mechanisms signal improvements in effectiveness. The timely mobilization of the tranche 1 funding envelope was endorsed on August 12, 2024, with \$137.5 million committed, allowing for uninterrupted program delivery. Even while OP8 waited for endorsement, 1,000 new SGP grants were approved between July 2023 and June 2024, demonstrating no loss of delivery capacity during the transition. A number of readiness and capacity building innovations have already been deployed to further facilitate delivery and achievement of results, in line with the 72 percent grant ratio guidelines (GEF 2022a). FAO reports that its new online grant platform is ready and countries will start their first calls for proposals before the end of this year. M&E systems have been streamlined and harmonized with clearer alignment to the overall GEF indicators, and with more systematic efforts coming under the knowledge management platform currently under development.

Efficiency

80. Efficiency refers to the extent to which financial, human, and technical resources have been used in a cost-effective manner to achieve results. This includes administrative cost control, timeliness of implementation, grant-to-total-cost ratios, transaction costs, and overall resource optimization. The assessment below draws on available data from 2020 to 2024.

Efficiency under SGP OP7

81. **Overall, while OP7 made clear advances in improving the financial efficiency of the program—especially in grant ratio and cofinancing—there is less evidence of systemic administrative efficiency gains.** As illustrated in table 11, the ratio for SGP OP7 was on average 65 percent (not inclusive of fees and including only GEF funds).

Table 11: Grant to non-grant funding ratio for SGP global program for 2020–24

Funding ratio for SGP global program 2020–24				
	2020–21 ratio	2021–22 ratio	2022–23 ratio	2023–24 ratio
Grantmaking to CSOs and CBOs	64	66	65	66
Program costs/services (capacity development, knowledge management, M&E, etc.)	22	24	25	24
Project management cost	10	10	10	10
GEF Agency fee (4%)	4			

Source: GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report: Reporting Years 2020–2024 for period July to June, UNDP.

82. Despite improvements in financial ratios, many structural efficiency issues observed in the third joint evaluation remain present. Country teams, especially under the global program, continued to be understaffed. Interviews indicate that many country teams rely on a single national coordinator, with limited support for proposal screening, grantee support, and monitoring. Manual processing in project approvals and reporting has also been cited as a factor leading to inefficiency, particularly in cases where there are changes in national focal point or NSC. This leads to bottlenecks and delays.

83. Survey data also indicate mixed perceptions of efficiency. The survey respondents continue to perceive administrative burdens as a key obstacle (37.45 percent of respondents). While a number of respondents acknowledged improvements in grant processing timelines and access to support tools, others noted that disbursement delays remained a frequent issue, particularly in countries experiencing transitions in host institutions or implementing partners.

Towards OP8: efficiency in transitioning to SGP 2.0

84. **Although the operational guidelines under SGP 2.0 aim to streamline execution, increase availability of resources, and promote national capacity, there is no conclusive evidence that this shift has yet reduced transaction costs across the portfolio.** A key development during OP8 was the formalized requirement to increase the grant ratio to 72 percent,⁶ meaning 72 percent of the total GEF envelope of grants was to be disbursed to SGP grantees for projects on the ground, with implementation beginning under GEF-7 and monitored closely in the transition to GEF-8 (GEF 2022a). This change was aimed at directing a greater proportion of funds to community-level action, though implementing partners flagged the shift as administratively challenging during interviews. Nearly all GEF Agencies participating in OP8 have indicated that sustaining the grant ratio is feasible only by “subsidizing” the SGP with additional internal or external resources.

85. Under OP7, the use of STAR resources within the SGP varied significantly by country type. In non-upgraded countries, SGP funding was predominantly channeled through the global core budget, with limited or no use of STAR allocations. However, in upgraded country programs, STAR resources were an essential part of the SGP financing model. For example, Costa Rica actively pursued SGP upgrading and secured STAR resources for its national program by lobbying its ministry of environment. This reflects a more strategic use of STAR where government stakeholders were engaged and supportive.

86. As SGP transitions into OP8 under the SGP 2.0 framework, and with the end of the upgrading policy, the GEF Secretariat has sought to incentivize the use of STAR funding. This was seen as a measure to promote national ownership and reduce dependency on the global program core budget. Despite this encouragement, evidence suggests that uptake was uneven. In interviews, GEF Secretariat staff acknowledged that while some countries welcomed the opportunity to direct STAR funds to SGP, others were reluctant. In some cases, SGP programs were able to secure increases in STAR funding; however, in other cases, governments were concerned that STAR allocations dedicated to SGP might limit their ability to fund larger-scale projects with other GEF Agencies.

87. Additionally, there is no harmonized or transparent framework guiding how STAR allocations are negotiated or accessed under the new SGP modalities. STAR allocations remain within the purview of each country’s own decision-making, within the parameters set in the OP8 implementation arrangements (up to 10 percent of STAR allocations with a maximum of \$5 million, and decisions resting with the GEF operational focal point). The dual structure of tranche 2 added further complexity, as Agency selection criteria, processes, and opportunities for change were often unclear, and fund distribution was sometimes contested among stakeholders.

⁶ Starting in OP8, the 72 percent grant ratio is intended to be inclusive of fees.

88. The transition to OP8 and SGP 2.0 has caused some significant uncertainties and potential losses in efficiency, although the analysis shows these losses may be temporary due to the newness of procedures and the need for one-time changes, such as re-establishing contracts for national program managers or NSCs. There is some evidence of gaps or delays in programming continuity during the transition from OP7 to OP8. Some country programs exhausted their OP7 resources well before the launch of OP8 modalities. For instance, in Guyana, the SGP coordinator reported that grants had ceased even though OP7 was technically ongoing, leaving grantees uncertain and reducing momentum. Similarly, stakeholder interviews suggest that several countries entered a holding pattern as they awaited decisions on Agency selection, executing agency changes, or NSC reconstitution under SGP 2.0. This pause in programming activity was especially pronounced in countries shifting from UNDP to FAO or Conservation International as implementing partners, contributing to inefficiencies in maintaining community engagement and project continuity.

89. Countries also specifically mentioned delays related to national coordinator transitions and NSC reconfiguration as contributing to administrative slowdowns. Many countries indicated, during the survey and focus group discussions, that communications about the transition process from OP7 to OP8, and changes to multiagency implementation modalities, were insufficiently clear and infrequent. Most respondents indicated a desire for more transparent decision-making processes from global level to local level.

90. Some improvements have been made in supporting national teams and steering committees, which are expected to come to fruition under OP8: the incubator services and technical support provided by the new Agencies as well as the proposed digitization of project approval processes are likely to offset any losses in efficiency and contribute to streamlined processes. However, the nature of these services is different across Agencies, meaning that countries will be less inclined to change Agency between phases due to the transaction cost of learning new systems. A uniformized process, system, and approach to NSC and CPMT support across all three Agencies was not under discussion at the time of writing.

91. Furthermore, the initial debate about grant vs non-grant ratio was focused around the amount spent on capacity building, knowledge management, and policy dialogue activities, many of which were accounted for under the label of Grantmaker Plus. The resources allocated to this type of activity will be reduced under the forthcoming SGP global program, but these activities (knowledge management and policy dialogue) are now proposed for funding from a \$5 million grant secured through unallocated funds under the global program. It is not certain whether this will be accounted for as “grant” under the total SGP portfolio. This also raises the question of whether this amount will be sufficient to generate the learning required across the portfolio, and whether it will be replicated across future phases and if so, from what resources.

92. A number of outstanding issues also remain regarding the transition to SGP 2.0, for which this evaluation has not been able to ascertain evidence. The diversification of implementation arrangements under SGP 2.0 has increased the complexity of the program’s institutional architecture and opened up a set of unresolved questions. These questions relate to the overall effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, and sustainability of the transition process. They would warrant further exploration during the implementation of the SGP OP8 and beyond.

- (a) A potential efficiency risk emerging in OP8 relates to the duplication or concentration of resources across overlapping SGP-linked programming streams. Countries that simultaneously participate in the global program and receive targeted funding under initiatives like the CSO challenge program, or engage in thematic pilots involving the World Bank or private sector actors, may benefit from a disproportionately high level of financial and technical support. While this would reflect country engagement and absorptive capacity, it also could raise concerns about equitable distribution of SGP resources and the potential for over-concentration in countries with greater institutional readiness or stronger historical ties to the program. This warrants close monitoring in OP8 to ensure that diversification of modalities does not inadvertently reproduce inequities in access to community-level environmental financing.
- (b) It also remains unclear whether the current tranche-based approach (tranche 1 and tranche 2) will continue in future operational phases, or whether all countries under the global program will eventually be invited to select among the three (or more) implementing Agencies. Evidence from stakeholder consultations suggests that the initial allocation of countries to agencies did not fully meet the expectations of all parties involved. Moreover, the criteria used to guide agency selection were neither standardized nor clearly communicated to participating countries. This raises a further question related to the ability of a country to change its implementing agency at the end of an operational phase, for example.
- (c) There is no clarity regarding the expansion of GEF Agencies beyond UNDP, FAO, and Conservation International in the long term. The GEF Secretariat has not indicated whether possibilities to participate in the SGP program would be reopened and if so, on what basis. For the moment, the GEF-9 programming directions indicate there is no intention of further diversification. However, this raises the question of the fate of the two “pilots” (IUCN and World Bank initiatives), should these not prove conclusive, not be replicated, or require modified arrangements. A further question may arise if an Agency decides to opt out of the SGP. Many survey and focus group participants noted a general lack of transparency regarding the process for selecting agencies, although a limited number of GEF Agencies came forward. Only one

candidate Agency was not selected under the global program, but the reasons for this appeared rather opaque (the criteria for selection were not widely available); and the special World Bank and IUCN initiatives appear to have taken a parallel route for selection and development. The implications of this lack of clarity, combined with the high cost of doing business as an Agency under the SGP, may prevent further broadening to other GEF Agencies that may have had an interest or a comparative advantage in participating.

93. Beyond financial efficiency, the transition to OP8 also sees a push toward digitization as an efficiency enabler. Several country teams and agency focal points highlighted the promise of the new online grant-management and knowledge-sharing platforms, currently being piloted by FAO and UNDP, to streamline application workflows, automate core-indicator dashboarding, and reduce reliance on manual data-chasing. The UNDP launched its Innovation Library in 2023, which acts as a searchable online repository of innovative practices across all SGP countries.⁷ The FAO and IUCN will be experimenting with code-free applications such as Kobo ToolBox to facilitate application processes and reporting, including by piloting non-verbal reporting tools where users can upload photos and images. As one manager explained, “with a click of a button ... I can generate a dashboard and see where we are regarding core indicator #13,” eliminating repeated email follow-ups and accelerating decision-making.

94. Some stakeholders have cautioned that Indigenous Peoples and other remote or vulnerable groups may lack reliable internet access and digital literacy, creating a risk that the new platform could exclude exactly those communities most in need. FAO and other agencies are therefore integrating offline-capable tools, but uneven connectivity and technology skills will remain a barrier without dedicated support and training (FAO interview, May 2025).

95. Interviews and the 2023–24 AMR also reveal a fragmented digital landscape under early OP8 rollout. UNDP, FAO, and Conservation International have each launched stand-alone grant-management and knowledge-management portals—with overlapping functionalities for application tracking, core-indicator reporting, and knowledge sharing—but no common data schema to ensure interoperability (interviews, May 2025). As one stakeholder noted, “we’re building our own knowledge management site because the existing platform doesn’t capture finance modifiers we need” (interviews, April 2025).

96. The 2023–24 AMR itself calls for “streamlined and harmonized” guidance on indicator reporting yet acknowledges that “there is still no single dashboard for target tracking” and warns that “multiple knowledge platforms risk duplication unless knitted together under a unified framework” (SGP 2024a). Without clear protocols for data exchange or a master dashboard to

⁷ It is available here: <https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library.html>

reconcile outputs, each agency’s incremental improvements—while well-intentioned—may simply multiply administrative burdens and obscure the program’s cumulative progress.

Sustainability, scaling up, and replication

97. For the SGP, sustainability and scaling are integral to the program's theory of change: small grant projects are anticipated to act as pilots or demonstrations that can be replicated, scaled, or incorporated into broader frameworks if they prove successful.

Pathways to sustainability under OP7

98. **There is evidence that SGP grants are reasonably sustainable, while maintaining the ability to pilot and spearhead innovation. Most projects achieve at least partial sustainability, and there is documented evidence of scaling and replication.** Between 2020 and 2024, evidence of wider adoption, scaling up, and replication of SGP projects was documented in annual monitoring reports, PIR, evaluations and case studies. Programs and projects implemented from 2020 to 2024 have shown signs of sustainability through community empowerment and scaling efforts. Promoting community ownership, securing cofinancing, involving government early in the process, and demonstrating livelihood benefits further incentivize the maintenance of environmental results. As noted in the 2021 Joint Evaluation, there are multiple pathways to sustainability, scaling up, and replication in the SGP. These include:

- (a) **Community ownership.** Initiatives that focused on fostering local ownership—through participatory planning, community labor contributions or cofinancing—and ensuring tangible benefits (such as livelihood and health improvements) tended to achieve sustained outcomes more consistently.
- (b) **Capacity building and leadership development.** SGP’s support for capacity development ensures that by the end of a project, local organizations are strengthened, and leaders (including women, youth, and Indigenous leaders) exhibit greater confidence and skills. This significantly boosts sustainability, as these empowered local figures can either carry on the work or attract supplemental funding.
- (c) **Embedding in policy and institutions.** SGP promotes projects that connect with formal organizations (such as local governments, national parks, schools, etc.) to ensure that effective strategies are incorporated into institutional practices. When local authorities endorse or adopt a community project, it secures ongoing technical support and resources.
- (d) **Scaling through partnerships and follow-up financing.** The SGP proactively aims to position successful initiatives for growth by linking grantees with further funding opportunities.

99. In the reporting period, under the global program, available reports indicated that 566 completed projects were replicated or scaled up by partners (SGP 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a). Pathways to replication include instances where local governments allocate funds to implement a SGP pilot in additional villages, or when an NGO extended a successful model to a different area (table 12).

100. In a similar vein, around 12 percent of projects (470 projects) were said to have influenced policy—for instance, their practices were adopted into municipal regulations or national legislation. These numbers reflect a minimum effort at scaling, recognizing that scaling often takes place after project completion and may be underreported.

Table 12: Examples of pathways to replication and scaling under SGP OP7

Pathway	Illustrative evidence
Scaling through national programs	<p>The Plant-a-Forest watershed model in Seychelles fed directly into the GEF-6 project A Ridge-to-Reef Approach for the Integrated Management of Marine, Coastal and Terrestrial Ecosystem in the Seychelles (GEF ID 9431, UNDP), broadening coverage from one watershed to a national island portfolio.⁸</p> <p>The SGP OP6 program in Sri Lanka (2017–2022) employed a landscape approach across three environmentally sensitive areas: the Knuckles, the Mannar–Jaffna coast, and the Colombo wetlands. By implementing ecosystem restoration pilots, governance platforms were established with multiple stakeholders to integrate community-led restoration efforts into national initiatives. These governance mechanisms, such as landscape committees, aligned restoration projects with national conservation policies. According to a UNDP evaluation, this approach was recognized as a model for mainstreaming community-based interventions into national planning and has been recommended for continuation in OP7.⁹</p>
Market-based rollout	<p>Women-led eco-briquette enterprise in South Africa attracted new capital from South African National Parks, a government agency, to replicate near Kruger National Park, using SGP funds as seed finance.¹⁰</p>
Policy dialogue platforms	<p>Shade-house farming pilots in Seychelles were showcased through a CSO-government dialogue platform, helping secure county-level budget lines for climate-smart agriculture.¹¹</p> <p>An Armenian SGP project¹² (2019–2020) piloted incentives for consumers to switch from plastic to reusable bags, collected behavior change data, and collaborated closely with the Ministry of Environment; the findings were translated into formal policy recommendations which helped fine-tune Armenia’s 2019 environmental levy and the 2022 nationwide plastic bag ban.</p>

⁸ Small Grants Programme. 2024b. “Seychelles Results Report (FY 2017–2023).” United Nations Development Programme, New York. <https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2496-seychelles-results-report-%28fy-2017-2023%29.html>

⁹ UNDP Independent Evaluation Office. 2023. “Terminal Evaluation of the Sixth Operational Phase of the GEF Small Grants Programme in Sri Lanka (GEF ID 9432)”. Retrieved from <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/21514>

¹⁰ SGP (Small Grants Programme). 2024a. “GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report 2023–2024.” United Nations Development Programme, New York. [https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2628-gef-small-grants-programme-annual-monitoring-report-2023---2024-\(full-version\).html](https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2628-gef-small-grants-programme-annual-monitoring-report-2023---2024-(full-version).html)

¹¹ SGP (Small Grants Programme). 2023. “GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report 2022–2023.” United Nations Development Programme, New York. [file:///C:/Users/wb19471/Downloads/AMR_Brief_report_2022-2023%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/wb19471/Downloads/AMR_Brief_report_2022-2023%20(3).pdf)

¹² Reducing Plastic Bag Use through Community Action (ARM/SGP/OP6/CH/19/17)

	The project illustrates the use of CSO-government policy dialogue to directly shape national legislation. ¹³
Social-enterprise sustainability model	In Guatemala, the youth organization <i>Asociación de Servicios para el Desarrollo</i> (ASPROC), trained through the SGP, has implemented regenerative agriculture practices based on Maya ancestral knowledge. Through the use of biodiverse plots, the production of organic fertilizers, and on-site agroecological schools, the financial model includes small-scale reinvestment from sales, a micro-fund for members, and establishing partnerships with schools and cooperatives. This grassroots economic framework ensures sustainability without reliance on donor funding and promotes community ownership of climate adaptation practices. ¹⁴

101. Survey responses on the sustainability of SGP projects reveal a mixed but cautiously positive outlook. Out of the 486 respondents who answered question 12:

- (a) 224 (46 percent) reported that project benefits have been sustained after completion;
- (b) 223 (46 percent) indicated benefits were only “somewhat” sustained, often requiring additional support; and
- (c) A small proportion (4 percent) stated that benefits declined or disappeared after funding ended.

102. There appears to be consensus that the long-term success of SGP projects hinges on sustained community ownership, follow-up support, and structural integration into broader development frameworks (figure 7). However, most respondents noted that follow-up support, technical assistance, and partnerships were the most difficult aspects of the SGP to maintain within available resources, and also emphasized the need for continued technical assistance, mentoring, and periodic engagement even after grant closure, arguing that without these, initial gains could taper off.

103. A recurring recommendation from respondents and stakeholders was to lengthen project time frames or introduce phased support mechanisms to allow innovations and practices to take root. Others called for better alignment with local government institutions and policies, suggesting that embedding project outcomes in municipal or national frameworks could help secure resources and legitimacy. Several respondents also highlighted the value of capacity

¹³ Plastic Free Armenia Behavioral Change and Awareness Raising Campaign. Retrieved from <https://sgp.undp.org/spacial-itemid-projects-landing-page/spacial-itemid-project-search-results/spacial-itemid-project-detailpage.html?view=projectdetail&id=27683> (or SGP Plastic Free Armenia Behavioral Change and Awareness Raising Campaign web page.)

¹⁴ UNDP Nature Exposure. 2024. “Juventud guatemalteca lidera la acción climática.” Retrieved from

building—not just during project implementation but as a long-term accompaniment to enable communities and CSOs to independently sustain outcomes.

What factors most influence the sustainability of SGP projects?

Answered: 494 Skipped: 48

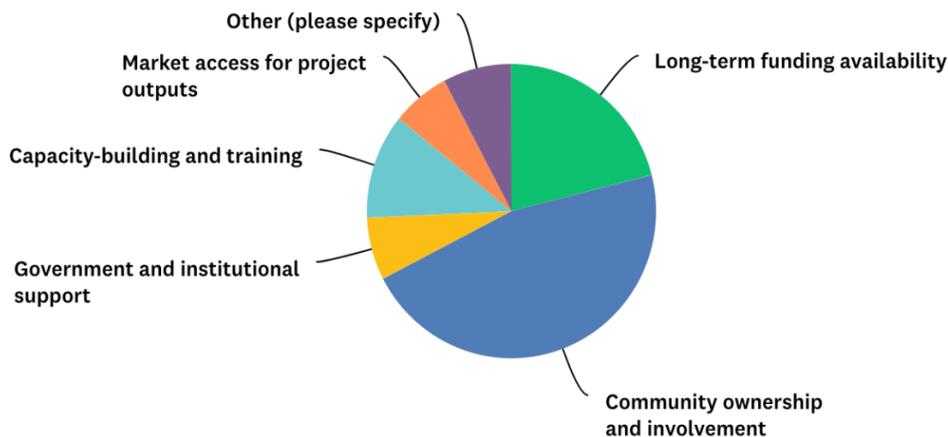


Figure 7. Factors influencing sustainability of SGP project

Source: Evaluation survey.

Towards OP8: sustainability in SGP 2.0

104. **Measures are in place to continue to improve on sustainability metrics under OP8, but there is a recurring concern about the fragility of benefits without follow-up investment or institutional backing.** Building on lessons from earlier phases, SGP 2.0 introduces several measures to bolster the sustainability of grants. This new operational arrangement fundamentally shifts how SGP is implemented, with the clear goal of making results more durable. Key SGP 2.0 measures supporting sustainability include:

- (a) **Enhanced results framework.** Under SGP 2.0, a new results framework has been established that aligns with the GEF-8 core indicators. For the first time, it also includes dedicated SGP-specific indicators focused on socioeconomic benefits. This means that the SGP will systematically monitor outcomes such as improvements in livelihoods, social inclusion, and capacity development across all projects. By tracking these aspects, the SGP can ensure that projects not only produce environmental results but also report on the social and financial conditions necessary for long-term sustainability.
- (b) **Private sector engagement.** Involving the private sector is a central element of SGP 2.0's sustainability strategy. Updated guidelines promote the inclusion of private

sector partners in the governance and implementation of SGP projects. For example, national steering committees and landscape-level platforms in SGP countries are inviting private businesses or entrepreneurs to take part as stakeholders.

- (c) **World Bank microfinance initiative.** The World Bank-led global microfinance initiative for locally led action also brings added benefits for long-term sustainability and scaling, since it will enable follow-on funding, such as micro-loans or seed capital, for community groups, low-income households, and micro-enterprises that have begun with SGP grants. This support allows them to expand income-generating activities linked to environmental efforts. By facilitating access to finance, SGP 2.0 helps successful projects evolve into self-sustaining social enterprises or cooperatives.
- (d) **Business-oriented approaches.** SGP is also promoting business-oriented approaches within its country programs to enhance long-term viability. Grantees are encouraged and mentored to develop sustainable livelihood ventures, such as eco-tourism, agroecology products, or renewable energy services. These ventures can continue beyond the grant period through market revenues.
- (e) **Strategic country planning.** To implement SGP 2.0 at the national level, each participating country will now be required to develop a SGP country program strategy or a landscape/seascape plan in collaboration with national stakeholders. These strategic plans delineate how groups of small grants will support broader ecosystem or developmental objectives and highlight opportunities for policy implementation and partnerships. By integrating SGP projects within a cohesive long-term national strategy, this approach ensures that individual grants are not stand-alone initiatives but part of a continuing effort.

Gender and social inclusiveness

105. **The SGP’s approach to social inclusion from 2020 to 2024 continues to be multifaceted and effective and is expected to continue throughout OP8. Despite progress, there continues to be limited involvement of persons with disabilities in the SGP under OP7, leaving many missed opportunities for the realization of joint socioeconomic inclusion and environmental benefits at local levels. However, awareness of opportunities was increasing, with special emphasis on social inclusion in OP8.**

106. Ensuring inclusive participation of traditionally marginalized groups—particularly women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples—has long been a core strategy of the SGP. Project data from OP7 (2020–24) indicate that SGP country programs have made significant efforts to involve these groups in project leadership and decision-making, and to achieve empowerment outcomes for

them. Table 13 summarizes key participation metrics for women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples in SGP-funded projects during this period.

Table 13: Gender and social inclusion in SGP OP7 (2020–24)

Group	Participation in SGP projects	Notable indicators of inclusion and empowerment
Women	34% of projects led by women (2020) 43% (2023)	Approximately 78–81% of projects were gender-responsive Gender focal points established in 86–90% of country programs, ensuring women’s needs are addressed in project design and approval
Youth	38% of projects with youth participation or leadership (2020) 41% (2023)	209–253 youth organizations engaged in SGP About 73% of country programs have a youth focal point on their national steering committees, facilitating youth engagement in decision-making
Indigenous Peoples	22% of projects involved Indigenous Peoples (2020)	889 Indigenous leaders directly participated in project activities About 40% of country programs have Indigenous focal points on steering committees Culturally appropriate grant procedures adopted (e.g., proposals accepted in local languages in 18 countries) to improve Indigenous access and participation

Source: SGP 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a.

107. Under OP7, the SGP established “*Promoting social inclusion*” as a strategic initiative. This included a commitment that “at least 35 percent of SGP country programs demonstrate appropriate models of engaging youth and persons with disabilities” (GEF 2020). Tracking of the inclusion of PwD began in 2019-2020. In 2020-21, the SGP reported that 47 organizations of PwD participated in SGP projects and strategies; in the 2023-2024 Annual Monitoring Report, the figure was 50 organizations. Examples of projects completed during OP7 included the “Climate Ambassadors” in Georgia, which included organizations of persons with disabilities to strengthen their participation in climate change adaptation and environmental protection activities, and the inclusion of four women with disabilities in an aquaculture project in Zimbabwe (SGP 2024a).

108. Whereas the annual monitoring reports mention a “SGP Innovation program with a focus on PwD engagement” (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021) that was implemented in eight countries, the information provided remains anecdotal in AMRs, with no specific mention in country programming strategies. The reports available also did not provide any more granular data or information on the nature and type of inclusion and participation. It is not clear whether the 35 percent target for social inclusion was met for the category of PwD. Numerical indicators related to the number of organizations may not be sufficient to capture the nature and meaningfulness of participation by PwD in SGP programming.

Women’s participation and leadership

109. Efforts to promote gender inclusion within the SGP have shown measurable progress in project leadership and design. By the end of OP7, 43 percent of SGP projects were led by women—either as project coordinators or as heads of women’s cooperatives—an increase from roughly one-third at the start of the period. Over 78 percent of projects were classified as gender-responsive, incorporating gender-specific activities, outcomes, and indicators. Country programs supported this progress through practical measures such as requiring gender checklists during project appraisal by national steering committees and including sex-disaggregated indicators and women-focused components in project design (box 1). By 2023, 90 percent of SGP country programs had designated a gender focal point on their steering committees, reflecting strong institutional commitment. Despite these positive developments, it remains unclear at this time to what extent SGP interventions produced socially transformational outcomes for women or led to broader shifts in gender equality.

110. In general, SGP participants felt that the SGP did well to strengthen the role of women, with 89 percent of survey respondents indicating gender inclusion was conducted “rather well,” or “excellent.” When considering women respondents only, the ratio decreases slightly to 82 percent. Among the benefits, some cited “female empowerment through experience in managing economic resources and executing projects,” while others, conversely, noted that complicated procedures hindered the participation of women and other vulnerable groups.

Box 1: Example of women-led projects in SGP

SGP supports women-led projects nature-based enterprises in Lesotho

In Lesotho, an SGP grant to the nongovernmental organization Technologies for Economic Development supported women-led nature-based enterprises in honey production. The project—operational from September 2020 to June 2023—trained 44 people, including 37 women, in beekeeping skills through a national workshop (Let there be honey in Lesotho). It facilitated the production of 200 modern beehives and 50 trap boxes, which were distributed to trainees to jump-start their businesses. The introduction of affordable top-bar beehive technology helped overcome challenges with traditional hives and yielded insights for future beekeeping policy development. Importantly, the project catalyzed broader organizational empowerment: it convened district-level beekeeping networks and committees, laying the groundwork for establishing a national beekeepers association. This multisectoral process has ignited strong interest in beekeeping especially among women, but also among youth and even members of the national security services—positioning them to lead a growing sustainable honey-enterprise sector in Lesotho.

Source: SGP 2023.

111. Youth Engagement and Leadership: Youth have also become an increasingly important stakeholder group in SGP projects, recognized as both future leaders and active change agents in addressing environmental challenges. From 2020 to 2024, approximately 40 percent of SGP projects included youth in key roles or as primary beneficiaries, with hundreds of youth-led or youth-serving organizations participating. Many country programs (approximately 71 percent) appointed youth focal points on their national steering committees to ensure that youth perspectives are integrated into grant-making.

112. SGP projects targeting youth have yielded significant empowerment outcomes, often combining environmental action with education, entrepreneurship, and leadership development, as illustrated in boxes 2 and 3.

Box 2: Youth engagement and leadership - an example

Youth engagement and leadership - Peru

In Peru, an SGP project implemented by the *Comunidad Campesina Capacmarca* mobilized 40 local youth to lead sustainable land and water management initiatives. These young community members successfully protected 1,548 hectares of critical headwater ecosystems through communal agreements as part of a public investment project for sustainable forest management.

The youth received extensive training in integrated water resource management and agroecological farming, including practical workshops on organic fertilization. Utilizing their new skills, the participants established 20 hectares of agroecological quinoa and tarwi crops and fenced off 31 hectares to regenerate native queñua forests. They also restored native plant species, including queñua trees and tarwi, and developed a water management plan for the local micro-basin. By dedicating communal land to sustainable use and conservation, the youth improved their community's food security and ecosystem resilience.

This project showcased youth leadership in enhancing community resilience and self-sufficiency, as the young participants spearheaded environmental restoration while actively engaging in local decision-making.

Source: SGP 2024a.

Box 3: Matching traditional knowledge and information technology for natural resource conservation in Mexico

In Capulalpán de Méndez (Sierra Norte of the state of Oaxaca) the SGP worked with a federation of Indigenous organizations, the *Unión de Comunidades Productoras Forestales Zapotecas y Chinantecas de La Sierra Juárez*. The union covers a very large area—23,890 hectares, of which 5,097 hectares are dedicated to forest management.

The SGP supported a collaboration between the union and the Department of Computer Science of the Universidad de la Sierra Juárez on the use of information technology and camera traps to monitor soil health, water conditions, vegetation cover, and wildlife. This collaboration provided students—including young women—from the Indigenous communities with updated technological skills, while allowing traditional community maps to be matched with scientific data and indicators, tracking the results of natural resource management and the effects of climate change.

In an area characterized by substantial outmigration and where the youth are said to have little interest in traditional community activities, access to technical know-how provided the younger generations with distinct opportunities:

- A fresh lens through which to view the local natural resources base and new ideas about initiatives that would suit their interests (e.g., sustainable logging, spring water bottling, eco-tourism, payment for environmental services schemes)
- A chance to address the local assemblies (traditionally dominated by elder males), be recognized for their new skills, and receive their support to experiment with new activities.

Source: GEF IEO 2025.

113. In addition to on-the-ground initiatives, SGP facilitated youth engagement at global forums, organizing a Youth Climate Action video competition in partnership with multilateral environmental agreements—including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification—to amplify youth voices internationally. Overall, the SGP experience demonstrates that when provided with adequate resources and training, youth can drive innovative solutions and influence communal practices for environmental sustainability.

Indigenous Peoples' involvement and empowerment

114. Indigenous Peoples have remained a priority constituency for the SGP over the course of OP7, and their participation has led to tangible empowerment outcomes. In OP6 (2014–18), the third joint SGP evaluation found that projects involving Indigenous Peoples rose steadily—from 192 projects in 2014 to 289 in 2019—and by the end of that phase approximately 20 percent of the portfolio included Indigenous Peoples' participation. From 2020 to 2024 in OP7, 22 percent of SGP projects were reported as involving Indigenous Peoples as implementers, partners, or target communities. This percentage for inclusion in OP7 represents modest progress over OP6's roughly 20 percent share (GEF IEO and UNDP IEO 2021, GEF IEO 2025, SGP 2020). Given the persistent language, capacity, and remoteness barriers facing many Indigenous communities, maintaining and slightly increasing that level of engagement signals real effort. For instance, in OP7, 32 country programs established Indigenous Peoples' focal points on their steering committees and 36 undertook enhanced outreach to Indigenous Peoples' groups (SGP 2024a).

115. To enhance Indigenous Peoples' inclusion, the SGP adapted its processes. For example, 18 country programs accepted grant proposals in local Indigenous languages, and 14 countries piloted the use of participatory video for proposal submissions. In 28 countries, Indigenous representatives were included in national steering committees or technical advisory groups, ensuring they had a voice in project selection and guidance. By 2020, 39 percent of country programs had appointed an Indigenous Peoples' focal person within their SGP governance structure to champion Indigenous issues. The effectiveness with which the SGP has reached or included Indigenous Peoples is evaluated at a moderately high level (84 out of 100) by survey respondents.

116. The participation of Indigenous Peoples in SGP projects has led to tangible empowerment outcomes, as illustrated in box 4. During one reporting period, 889 Indigenous leaders, both women and men, participated in SGP-supported activities. This participation resulted in improved capacities of Indigenous organizations to design and manage projects and strengthened representation of Indigenous interests in environmental policy advocacy.

SGP encourages leadership by Indigenous Peoples in Vanuatu

An indigenous-led community association on Tanna Island addressed forest degradation and water scarcity with SGP support. The community established a forest nursery that improved water access and planted native trees to restore deforested areas while preventing soil erosion on garden slopes. The association cultivated culturally important plants, including medicinal herbs, and conducted training sessions in land and forest management in the local language with Indigenous participants.

In a significant move toward environmental stewardship, the community designated a 5-hectare tract of traditionally owned forest as a no-take, no-entry conservation zone to rehabilitate the watershed. The project's outreach extended to neighboring villages. During World Environment Day, the group distributed 4,000 tree seedlings from the nursery to 10 Indigenous tribes for reforestation on their lands.

Through this project, Indigenous leaders not only restored critical ecosystems but also exercised leadership in natural resource governance, strengthening customary land management practices. This example illustrates how SGP projects can respect and leverage Indigenous knowledge while empowering communities to secure rights to land and resources and participate in local and national environmental governance.

Source: SGP 2022.

117. Finally, there are limited data on the participation of persons living with disabilities or their leadership in projects funded by the SGP. Data are beginning to emerge on SGP projects involving the participation of persons with disabilities. Although targets were set, reports do not mention this group in particular, nor has there been an explicit effort to remove barriers to their participation in national steering committees, or as grantees.

Towards OP8: measures to improve inclusiveness and representation in OP8

118. The SGP under OP8 continues to advance the inclusion agenda by embedding gender equality throughout its programming—from governance to grantmaking. Each participating country must conduct a gender analysis to inform a dedicated gender action plan aligned with its national strategy. National steering committees are required to appoint gender focal points and ensure that women's perspectives are integrated into project appraisal and oversight. Applicants must include gender-responsive activities in their proposals, with technical mentors helping to address any identified gaps. The SGP also sets a quantitative target of 425,600 direct female beneficiaries for OP8, and mandates grievance mechanisms through female representatives.

119. Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples is similarly reinforced, with cultural sensitivity guiding the localization of country program strategies through village-level consultations. Indigenous and local community representatives are required on steering committees to ensure participation in funding and policy decisions. The design of the global program under tranche 1 and tranche 2 recognizes cultural distinctiveness as an operational principle: the program “strives to be ... sensitive to indigenous customs, local languages and cultural values” and will localize every country program strategy (CPS) through village-level consultations in Indigenous territories. In particular, output 1.1 requires participatory CPSs and national steering committees that include IPLC representatives, ensuring that Indigenous leaders sit where funding and policy decisions are made. The programming by FAO and Conservation International continues to prioritize Indigenous leadership.

120. However, a critical gap remains in that granular data on the nature of, and impact from, inclusion of persons with disabilities in SGP programming are lacking. OP8 does not yet provide clarity on how their participation will be supported or barriers removed, highlighting an area requiring greater attention in future phases.

Innovation

Innovation under SGP OP7

121. **The SGP has moved from sporadic creativity to a program-wide, structured approach to innovation, producing tangible technological, social, financial, and policy breakthroughs that are already being adopted and scaled.** The SGP portfolio demonstrates increasingly systematized innovation across four key domains: technological, social, financial, and policy/institutional. Projects illustrate how grassroots initiatives can drive impactful solutions, especially in underserved contexts. In the technological space, renewable energy systems and water access technologies have improved livelihoods and enhanced climate resilience. Social innovations prioritize inclusion—engaging persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities, and youth through accessible infrastructure, education, and cultural expression. Financial innovations transform environmental challenges into income opportunities by developing markets for invasive species or enabling eco-loans and community enterprises. Finally, policy and institutional innovations stem from project-level successes that inform community by-laws and influence national policy, demonstrating the SGP’s capacity to seed systemic change from the bottom up.

122. During GEF-7, the SGP formalized its focus on innovation through dedicated programs initiated in OP6 and expanded in OP7. These innovation funding opportunities enabled groups of countries to explore advanced solutions aligned with key strategic priorities. By 2022–2023, the SGP was supporting innovation pilots in 38 countries (approximately 31 percent of the participating nations) addressing topics like artisanal gold mining (mercury reduction), enterprises led by women, inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD), access to clean energy for

Indigenous Peoples, youth engagement in climate change, conservation of Big Cats, sustainability in small island developing states, and management of plastic waste. Examples of such innovations are illustrated in table 14.

Table 14: Examples of innovations supported under SGP OP7

Innovation type	Project	Innovation examples
Community-driven knowledge solutions	Medicinal oils in the Cerrado (Brazil) ¹⁵	In Brazil, an SGP-supported initiative led by Quilombola women from the Pacari Association focused on developing value chains for native medicinal oils, such as Macaúba and Pequi, to generate income for local communities. This project resulted in sustainable vegetable oils and related products, along with the creation of a comprehensive 300-page illustrated pharmacopoeia titled " <i>Farmacopéia Popular do Cerrado</i> ." This book documents traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, helping to safeguard indigenous practices and prevent biopiracy. Additionally, SGP provided equipment and training to enhance the quality of local oil-processing techniques.
	Traditional Knowledge and Information Technology for natural resource conservation (Mexico) ¹⁶	In Mexico, SGP supported the collaboration between the Unión de Comunidades Productoras Forestales Zapotecas y Chinantecas de La Sierra Juárez and the department of computer science of the Universidad de la Sierra Juarez on the use of information technology to monitor soil health, water conditions, vegetation cover, and wildlife (camera traps). This collaboration provided students from the Indigenous communities with updated technological skills, while allowing traditional community maps to be matched with scientific data and indicators, tracking the results of natural resource management and the effects of climate change.
Technological innovation	Land reclamation via agroforestry in Kemena (Sierra Leone) ¹⁷	This community-driven initiative successfully restored 50 hectares of land degraded by artisanal mining through participatory agroforestry. Local residents were trained in planting nitrogen-fixing species and fruit-bearing trees, which enhanced green cover and improved soil health. Approximately 500 individuals directly benefited from enhanced land access, increased food security, and training in sustainable practices.

¹⁵ GEF IEO and UNDP IEO. 2021. Third Joint GEF–UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme. Includes Brazil case study on Quilombola women’s herbal knowledge documentation.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme Central Programme Management Team. (unpublished). Note on SGP Mexico, country visit in 2025.

¹⁷ SGP. 2022. Land Reclamation of Abandoned Artisanal Mined out Sites in Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District, Sierra Leone. Retrieved from:

	Safe use of agro-chemicals for rice farmers (Sierra Leone) ¹⁸	<p>This model is now recognized as a replicable strategy for post-mining rehabilitation in West Africa, contributing to both land regeneration and inclusive development.</p> <p>In 2024, this innovation addressed the need for safer agricultural practices among rice farmers in northwest Sierra Leone. Two demonstration plots were established to provide hands-on training in the safe handling and application of agrochemicals. A total of 345 farmers, including women and youth, participated in field sessions that focused on the importance of using protective equipment, maintaining proper dosage, and implementing environmental safeguards. This initiative strengthened agricultural extension systems and improved health and safety in a high-risk rural economy.</p>
Social and Inclusion Innovation	Indigenous peoples' access to renewable energy (multicountry) ¹⁹	<p>SGP's OP7 initiative improved Indigenous Peoples' access to renewable energy through various projects, including a micro-hydroelectric plant in Honduras and solar systems for communities in Nepal. It also set up solar charging stations in Cambodia and provided maintenance training to the Baka and Bagyeli peoples in Cameroon.</p> <p>Additionally, the program supported important policy changes, such as the legalization of conservation areas in Cambodia and the strengthening of customary laws in Timor-Leste. Overall, it offered renewable energy technologies and advanced sustainable energy access for marginalized communities, with a special effort toward training of Indigenous communities to lead solar, hydro, and biogas installations.</p>
Financial and market-based innovation	GreenCrowds (Ecuador) & zero plastic waste (Sierra Leone) ²⁰	<p>SGP Ecuador has established market-based strategies that transform community environmental projects into sustainable businesses. GreenCrowds was established as the first environmental crowdfunding platform in Ecuador, funneling private cofinance and visibility to community projects. The program has facilitated the development and promotion of "green products," including natural foods and handicrafts,</p>

<https://www.sgp.undp.org/all-documents/country-documents/2288-land-reclamation-of-abandoned-artisanal-mined-out-sites-in-nongowa-chiefdom-kenema-district%2C-sierra-leone/file.html>

¹⁸ SGP & Sierra Enviro Hope 2024; SGP 2023. Retrieved from <https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2638-promoting-the-safe-use-of-agro-chemicals-among-rice-farmers.html>

¹⁹ SGP 2023; GEF 2024. Retrieved from https://sgp.org.np/assets/docs/OP7_Innovation_Programme_IPs_access_to_energy_Phase%20_2.pdf

²⁰ SGP 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.ppd-ecuador.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ECUADOR-SGP-UNDP-GEF-Prod-oc-for-signature-02-oct-2019.pdf>

Small Grants Programme. 2025. Building Affordable School Structures Using Plastic Bricks Made from Plastic Waste in Sierra Leone. Retrieved from

<https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2640-building-affordable-school-structures-using-plastic-bricks-made-from-plastic-waste-to-promote-zero-plastic-waste-in-sierra-leone.html>

		<p>alongside eco-certification, and has enhanced community ecotourism as a source of income.</p> <p>These initiatives have led to the creation of new community-run enterprises, value-added products connected to biodiversity, and payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes that reward conservation efforts. As a result, rural producers have gained improved market access through fair-trade supply chains and certification systems, which have boosted household incomes and encouraged sustainable practices.</p> <p>In Sierra Leone the youth-led social enterprise eWomen has converted plastic waste into low-cost bricks, which are then used to construct affordable school buildings. They have also created new employment opportunities by empowering young women to work as “keke” taxi drivers and waste managers, significantly reducing plastic pollution in the process. By 2021, eWomen attracted approximately \$20,000 in additional investment and received recognition for its innovative business model. This case illustrates how SGP-supported initiatives can effectively transform waste into valuable resources, resulting in both economic growth and environmental improvements.</p>
<p>Policy and institutional innovation</p>	<p>Legal empowerment & policy dialogue platforms (Argentina, Mexico)²¹</p>	<p>In Argentina, the SGP has effectively connected community innovation with policy and planning efforts. CSO–Government dialogue platforms have been established (e.g., regular multistakeholder forums, inputs into biodiversity and agroecology strategies). A notable initiative is the biennial Good Practices and Knowledge Management Fair, which brings together civil society, SGP beneficiaries, and government representatives. This event allows local innovators to showcase successful practices and technologies, thereby exerting a direct influence on policymakers.</p> <p>These knowledge-sharing initiatives have fostered meaningful policy dialogue, encouraging a shift in policy engagement, with local and national authorities increasingly supporting community-driven solutions.</p> <p>In Mexico, the SGP has made a notable impact on the apiculture (i.e., beekeeping) sector by supporting indigenous and community enterprises. Initially, SGP provided micro-grants to Maya honey</p>

²¹ GEF IEO and UNDP IEO. 2021. Third Joint GEF–UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme. Argentina case, box 6.
Small Grants Programme and UNDP Mexico. 2021. Queens of Their Hives: A Network of Maya Women Produce Melipona Honey and Protect Biodiversity in Mexico [SGP case story]. Retrieved from <https://sgp.undp.org/resources-155/our-stories/654-queens-of-their-hives-a-network-of-mayan-women-produce-melipona-honey-and-protect-biodiversity-in-mexico.html>

	<p>Ecological restoration of the botanic reserve at Fourah Bay College (Sierra Leone) ²²</p>	<p>producers but later evolved to foster a nationwide alliance of honey cooperatives.</p> <p>This support not only strengthened producer organizations and increased honey production but also prompted a shift in national policy regarding beekeeping. The Mexican government adopted new regulations that align with indigenous values, including the recognition of traditional melipona bee farming. This has allowed for the legal registration and empowerment of grassroots groups (especially Indigenous organizations) to secure resource rights.</p> <p>In Sierra Leone this project aimed to restore the ecological integrity of a degraded university botanical reserve in Freetown by incorporating ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) techniques. It focused on rehabilitating forest areas, boosting native biodiversity, and establishing interpretive trails for environmental education. Additionally, the project advocated for the formal inclusion of green spaces in institutional land-use policies. Its legacy features improved biodiversity, educational opportunities for students, and enhanced climate resilience in urban environments.</p>
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Source: UNDP SGP Innovation Library.

Note: Examples of innovations extracted from UNDP SGP Innovation Library with publications produced for projects in OP7.

123. Most survey respondents, including grantees, national SGP coordinators, or GEF focal points agree that innovativeness is a key feature of the SGP at least some of the time, and report that the key mechanisms for such innovation stem from the adoption of community-driven knowledge, adoption of new technologies, and creative business models, as seen in Figure 8. From 2020 to 2024, there is also evidence that many pilot innovations from the SGP were adopted by governments or further developed by the communities themselves.

²² Small Grants Programme. 2022. Ecological Restoration through Ecosystem-Based Adaptation of the Botanic Reserve at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone (Project No SLE/SGP/OP7/Y3/STAR/BD/1/11/2022/45). UNDP. Retrieved from <https://sgp.undp.org/innovation-library/item/2637-ecological-restoration-through-ecosystem-based-adaptation-of-the-botanic-reserve-at-fourah-bay-college.html>

In what ways has innovation been fostered within SGP projects? (Select all that apply)

In what ways has innovation been fostered within SGP projects? (Select all that apply)
 Answered: 489 Skipped: 42

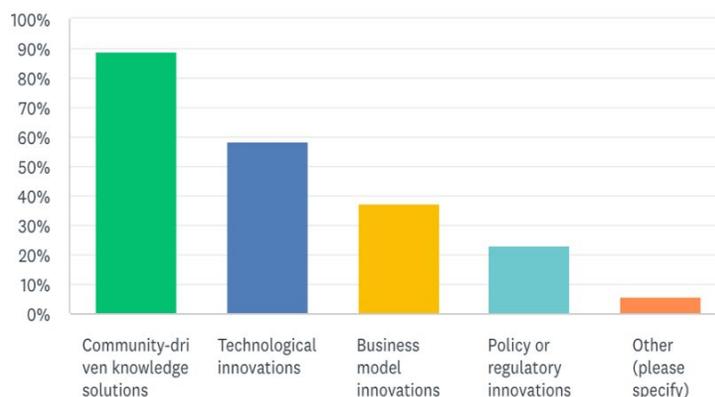


Figure 8. Survey respondents’ ranking of the types of innovation under OP7

Source: Evaluation survey.

Towards OP8: prospects for innovativeness under SGP 2.0

124. **Looking ahead, SGP 2.0 continues to formalize this trajectory through the global program but also through the special initiatives.** SGP 2.0 introduces a suite of new mechanisms to systematically support innovation across the program, including the CSO challenge program implemented by IUCN and the global microfinance initiative for locally led action implemented by the World Bank. At the global level, the CSO challenge program intends to “identify and scale high-impact environmental solutions led by civil society, representing institutional, social and technical innovation.”²³ The specific mechanisms and definitions through which innovations will be identified are not yet spelled out.

125. FAO is also expected to bring added technical innovation through the intended incubation and acceleration services delivered to grantees to help refine proposals and scale solutions. In particular, a process has been set up within FAO to support the integration of technical and institutional innovation by drawing on internal FAO expertise and communities of practice. These services, supported by an online platform, aim to reduce transaction costs, improve technical quality, and boost local capacity. Together, these innovations mark a shift from ad hoc creative projects to a deliberate ecosystem for nurturing, codifying, and scaling CSO-led innovation at both grassroots and policy levels.

²³ CSO challenge program PIF, GEF ID 11757, IUCN.

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V. ANNEXES

Annex A – Status of implementation of the 2021 joint evaluation recommendations

Introduction

The Small Grants Programme (SGP) remains a cornerstone of the Global Environment Facility’s (GEF) efforts to support community-driven environmental initiatives. This note provides an update for OPS 8 on recent progress within the SGP, with a particular focus on the implementation of recommendations (table A.1) from the 2021 joint evaluation conducted by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office and the UNDP Evaluation Office.

Table A.1: Recommendations articulated by the Third GEF UNDP Joint Evaluation on the Small Grants Programme, 2021

Strategic Recommendations	
Recommendation 1 (to the GEF and UNDP)	As recommended in the 2015 evaluation, the SGP should conduct a consultative process towards the formulation of an updated long-term vision for the SGP. This process should begin by taking stock of the past 25+ years of programming and should serve to inform future replenishment discussions. The process should be inclusive of upgraded countries, countries participating in the SGP global program, GEF Council and UNDP, and the final vision should be adopted by the GEF Council/Assembly. The purpose would be to ensure that the vision, mission and mandate of the SGP are clear and consensual and serve as a guiding framework for policy decisions through GEF periods.
Recommendation 2 (to the GEF)	In developing the implementation arrangements for SGP, the GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with UNDP, should provide Council and the next replenishment with a detailed analysis of the impacts of a shrinking SGP funding envelope on the operations of the SGP, the pressures placed on STAR allocations, demands to add new countries to the global program without concomitant growth in core funding, and the risk of losing the goodwill and social capital the SGP brings to the GEF as a whole. Going forward, the level of resources provided to the SGP must be considered in proportion with the requirements for expansion and “universal access,” and the upgrading policy could be designed so as to maximize benefits rather than primarily as a means for creating “fiscal space.”
Recommendation 3 (to the GEF and UNDP)	The SGP should reconsider whether it needs a continued upgrading policy. If upgrading is maintained, the SGP should rethink the means for its implementation in order to reduce the risk borne by countries and CSOs. This applies to all stakeholders involved in policymaking for the SGP. This would include a revision of the upgrading criteria, as recommended in the 2015 evaluation, as well as implementation arrangements and operational modalities. The two cycles of upgrading have brought to light significant challenges that need to be taken into consideration if and when continuing to upgrade countries. The revised policy should be focused on CSO capacity and potential for global environmental benefits and should consider the effects of upgrading on transaction costs, operational considerations, risks in all fiscal contexts; and also consider the risks in having small community projects go unfunded. To conserve the high levels of efficiency when transitioning from global program to upgraded status, assumptions about civil society capacity and the CSO-government relationship need to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Programmatic Recommendations	
Recommendation 4 (to the CPMT)	The ways that SGP interventions are packaged, such as strategic initiatives, focal area results, innovation programs and Grantmakers Plus initiatives, should be simplified. A small number of thematic frameworks (e.g., landscape/seascape approach) may be adopted to steer or shape programming, incentivize innovation or address urgent and emerging issues, but the pace of change should be slow enough to allow for local adoption and internalization by local communities.
Operational Recommendations	
Recommendation 5 (to the SGP Steering Committee and CPMT)	As recommended in the 2015 joint evaluation, the SGP should review and re-energize its governance at the global and national levels. This will help to avoid misunderstandings and strengthen the relationship, through revised terms of reference, improved communication, agreed operational language or more frequent meetings. At the national level, the terms of reference of the national steering committees should be reviewed with emphasis on building synergies with the national UNDP programs and creating spaces for new steering committee members that could help in increasing the broader adoption of SGP projects (such as including members with expertise in building business models or inclusion of private sector representatives).
Recommendation 6 (to the CPMT)	The SGP should test new ways to track and aggregate the intangible results generated by countries from SGP inputs such as the benefits received from its capacity-building activities, monitoring and evaluation, communications and knowledge management. There should be a systematic process in which the global program countries benefit from the experiences of the upgraded countries and vice versa. At the country level, the SGP should be able to track the evolution of the grantees it supports and the broader adoption of activities that have been implemented, to maximize the space for innovation and support the evolution of its grantees. The Central Program Management Team should continue to ensure that adequate knowledge management strategies are in place with related capacity to implement them, which would allow the maximization of broader adoption opportunities stemming from SGP initiatives.
Recommendation 7 (to the CPMT, UNDP and the GEF)	The approach to and measurement of sustainability in the SGP should be improved to capture the tangible and intangible benefits of the program. A first layer of sustainability could be measured at grant or project level, while another could be measured at the level of grantees. A measure of sustainability in this context may be whether the organizations continue to operate in the environmental space after the SGP grant is concluded. A scale of CSO capacity could be devised that would allow for long-term tracking of SGP grantees and their progression along the development continuum, especially for those who receive repeat funding or whose activities are replicated or upscaled through new projects.
Recommendation 8 (to the CPMT)	The Central Programme Management Team should create operational mechanisms to improve and incentivize innovation and business-oriented approaches in country programs. These mechanisms would maximize the potential for environmental benefits and social inclusion while creating opportunities for long-term viability of projects supported by the SGP. The social economy model provides a useful avenue for the SGP to expand to new beneficiaries and to optimize the sustainability of its results. Enhanced and more systematic synergies between UNDP and the SGP at the country level could facilitate this process. Examples include priority selection of innovative projects, varied scales of financing for business-oriented initiatives and the broader adoption of SGP projects into UNDP programming.
Recommendation 9 (to the GEF)	The GEF secretariat should apply the explicit, accepted accounting standards that are applied to the rest of the GEF portfolio when assessing SGP management costs. The appropriateness of the level of management expenditures should be a factor of the level of management activities that are required. Programmatic activities related to CSO capacity-building, monitoring, knowledge, technical assistance and communication

	<p>should not be considered part of management costs even if they are expenditures incurred by UNDP and the United Nations Office for Project Services in their respective capacities as implementing agency and executing agency. There should be further discussion on this matter between the GEF and UNDP to clarify the future vision for the SGP. At the time of the next replenishment, the GEF may wish to consider setting benchmarks for programmatic costs in relation to the demands placed on and resources provided to the SGP.</p>
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Progress in implementing 2021 evaluation recommendations

1. Long-term vision and strategic direction

In response to the recommendation for a consultative process toward formulating a long-term vision for the SGP, a series of stakeholder consultations were initiated in 2022. The GEF Secretariat, in collaboration with UNDP and the SGP Steering Committee, has worked to develop a comprehensive strategy that aligns with GEF-8 objectives. A part of this result, new operating modalities and structuring for the SGP (SGP 2.0) were adopted, with the stated objective to: “Catalyze and mobilize civil society actors and local actions needed to address major drivers of environmental degradation and help deliver multiple benefits across the GEF’s mandated thematic dimensions, while promoting sustainable development and improved livelihoods.”

However, while initial steps have been taken, there is no evidence that a finalized long-term vision has been formally adopted by the GEF Council or fully integrated into the new operational framework.

2. Enhancing financial and operational sustainability

Recognizing concerns about the impact of a shrinking funding envelope, the SGP has actively pursued diversified funding sources. The integration of new implementing partner agencies in the SGP (Conservation International and FAO) could support resource diversification. This diversification is critical to maintaining program sustainability while reducing dependence on GEF core funding.²⁴ However, there is as yet no evidence of a long-term financial strategy that goes beyond the traditional donors. Uncertainties related to replenishments remain. While funding sources have certainly been diversified, there is no clear evidence of a formalized financial sustainability plan that ensures long-term stability beyond GEF-8.

3. Reconsideration of the upgrading policy

The upgrading policy has been reviewed to assess its impact on transaction costs and operational efficiency. The findings indicate that while upgraded countries have greater autonomy, the transition process has introduced administrative burdens and potential gaps in

²⁴ Third Joint SGP Evaluation Draft Report for GEF Sec and UNDP Management, p. 40.

CSO funding. The GEF Secretariat has proposed revised upgrading criteria to better reflect CSO capacities and the economic contexts of participating countries. These adjustments aim to minimize risks while ensuring that small-scale community projects remain adequately supported. The GEF-8 programming directions for SGP (2022) mention the “GEF’s ambition to pursuing universal access/opportunity and eliminating the SGP Upgrading Policy.” The SGP upgrading policy was officially cancelled in the GEF Council-approved *SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8* document in 2023.

4. Programmatic Streamlining and Simplification

Efforts have been made to simplify SGP interventions, particularly in relation to thematic frameworks such as landscape/seascape approaches. The 2023 program adjustments have aimed to slow the pace of change, ensuring that local communities can adopt and internalize new programming structures more effectively (GEF-8 Programming Directions, p. 10). The 2.0 Guidelines outline the governance structures for the SGP at both global and national levels, emphasizing resource allocation, budget planning, grant disbursement, and the framework for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The GEF-8 SGP Results Framework, detailed in the SGP 2.0 Operational Guidelines, aligns with the GEF-8 Core Indicators, incorporating specific indicators to assess social inclusion and livelihood outcomes. These guidelines have successfully aided the three core implementing agencies in formulating SGP projects. (Management Action Record, March 2025, p 5).

It is not evident whether these programmatic changes have been uniformly applied across all participating countries or whether they have led to measurable improvements in efficiency.

5. Strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The GEF Secretariat has taken significant steps to improve monitoring and reporting mechanisms within the SGP. In 2023, a new Results-Based Management (RBM) system was introduced to facilitate real-time tracking of program outcomes. Additionally, the SGP has launched an online repository for lessons learned, ensuring that experiences from various country programs can inform future implementation strategies (Management Action Record 2024 – Full Annex, p. 12).

While new monitoring tools have been introduced, there is limited documentation on their effectiveness in improving project accountability and learning outcomes.

Recent Developments in SGP 2.0

SGP 2.0, launched under GEF-8, has introduced key changes to governance, funding mechanisms, and program execution:

- Expansion of implementing agencies beyond UNDP to include FAO and Conservation International, broadening expertise and operational reach.

- Increased emphasis on cost efficiency, with administrative overhead reductions while maintaining quality assurance in project implementation.
- A new CSO Challenge Program to foster high-impact, innovative environmental initiatives led by civil society organizations, with a focus on youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples.²⁵ The IUCN will implement this initiative.
- The SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements have allocated \$10 million for a Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally-led Action financing window. This initiative aims to enhance the capacities of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) in designing and offering innovative financial products and solutions. It focuses on supporting low-income households, small producers, and microenterprises by improving their access to financing for climate and environmental solutions, ultimately leading to positive livelihoods and global environmental benefits. Additionally, the initiative is expected to strengthen partnerships between local public and private sectors.²⁶ The World Bank has been identified to lead this initiative, details to be presented at the 68th Council Meeting.

Some components, such as expanding new implementing agencies, are still in early implementation phases with limited evaluation of their effectiveness. Table A.2 provides an update on the progress made as at end of March 2025.

Table A.2 – Overview of recommendations from the 2021 and status of recommendations implementation as of March 2025.

Recommendation		Status (March 2025)	Assessment	Sources
1. Formulate an updated long-term vision for the SGP	1a. Conduct a broad consultative process involving global and national stakeholders	Partially implemented	SGP 2.0 commits to stakeholder engagement and outlines a new objective, but the consultative process is ongoing. It is not clear whether a consensus on a new Vision for SGP was achieved.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements; MAR 2024; GEF-8 Programming Directions
	1b. Ensure vision informs replenishment and policy decisions	In progress	Planning to inform GEF-9; consultations with new agencies (Conservation International and FAO) ongoing.	MAR 2024; SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements
2. Provide detailed analysis to Council	2a. Analyze shrinking envelope, STAR pressures, and risks	Implemented	Analysis appears to have informed policy changes, including elimination of upgrading and core access for all countries.	GEF-8 Programming Directions; SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements
3. Reconsider the upgrading policy	3a. Evaluate need for continued upgrading	Implemented	Policy removed for GEF-8; STAR access no longer required for mature programs.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements

²⁵ SGP CSO Challenge Program, IUCN, PIF, p. 7.

²⁶ GEF IEO Management Action Records, 2025 p.11.

	3b. Reduce burdens and risks to CSOs and countries	Implemented	Unified access through core resources could reduce inequity and risk of exclusion from SGP. Further analysis is needed to confirm.	Note on SGP Mexico; GEF-8 Programming Directions
4. Simplify program frameworks	4a. Consolidate thematic platforms	Partially implemented	Fewer focal areas under SGP 2.0; simplified priority areas, but complexity remains at operational level.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements
5. Re-energize governance structures	5a. Strengthen global coordination and Steering Committee function	In progress	New agencies added; operational guidelines updated; consultations ongoing.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements; MAR 2024
6. Improve tracking of intangible results	6a. Develop tools to measure CSO capacity and learning	Partially implemented	Mobile apps and improved M&E introduced; qualitative tracking of intangible benefits remain limited.	Note on SGP Mexico; SGP 2.0 Guidelines
7. Improve sustainability tracking	7a. Include intangible and long-term capacity in sustainability metrics	In progress	M&E guidance acknowledges this need, but implementation still largely output-based.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements; SGP Evaluation Report
8. Incentivize innovation and entrepreneurship	8a. Support innovation through new funding windows	Implemented	CSO Challenge Program and Global Microfinance Initiative for Locally-led Action directly support innovation at scale.	CSO Challenge Program PIF; SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements
9. Apply standard cost accounting for SGP management	9a. Align with GEF portfolio cost norms while protecting quality	Partially implemented	Fee set at 9%, but concerns remain about impact on quality of delivery. Cost Efficiency ratio has been revised with all approved Tranche 2 PIFs adhering to 72% grant ratio.	SGP 2.0 Implementation Arrangements; Note on SGP Mexico; MAR 2025

Challenges and Next Steps

While progress has been made, several challenges remain:

- **Resource Allocation:** Ensuring sufficient and equitable distribution of funds among countries.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Strengthening mechanisms for cross-country learning to maximize program impact.
- **Scaling Up Successes:** Identifying and replicating successful community initiatives to achieve broader environmental benefits.
- **Lack of concrete implementation evidence:** Several proposed changes lack clear documentation of measurable progress or successful application.

Going forward, the SGP will continue to refine its operational model to enhance effectiveness and sustainability. The next phase of consultations will focus on finalizing the long-term vision and addressing outstanding implementation challenges.

Conclusion

The SGP has made notable strides in addressing the recommendations from the 2021 evaluation. Through ongoing reforms, diversification of funding, and enhanced monitoring, the program is well-positioned to continue delivering meaningful global environmental benefits while supporting community-driven initiatives. However, gaps remain in formalizing policy revisions, ensuring financial sustainability, and demonstrating the impact of new monitoring systems. Further engagement with stakeholders will be crucial in shaping the next phase of the SGP and ensuring its continued success under GEF-8 and beyond.

Annex B – Interviewees

GEF Secretariat

Gray, Charles Edward Dixon, Consultant

Temm, Gabriella Richardson, Senior Operations Officer

Conservation International

De Koning, Free, Conservation International GEF Program Manager and Vice President, Project Development and Impact

Tordoff, Jack, Managing Director, Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund

IUCN

Schneck, Joshua, GEF and Green Climate Fund Portfolio Manager for Global Programs

FAO

Bergigui, Mohamed Fouad, GEF Programming Specialist

Jaouad, Leila, Senior Environment, Social and Governance Consultant

UNDP

Murphy, Ben, Evaluation Specialist

Pinto, Carlos Montenegro, Technical Advisor for Local Action

Salvemini, Diana, Global Technical Advisor

Tshering, Doley, Principal Technical Advisor, Biodiversity

Central Programme Management Team (CPMT)

Canestrelli, Ana, Communications & Knowledge Management Specialist

Edoo, Rissa, Partnership Specialist, UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme

Hay-Edie, Terence, Programme Manager

Hwe, Han, Programme Management Associate

Shamerina, Angelica, Program Advisor for Climate Change and Regional Focal Point for Latin America and Caribbean

Xiong, Biao, Project Management Support Specialist

Country Stakeholders

Mavita, Manuel, GEF Small Grants Programme, National Coordinator, Peru

Pandey, Manish, National Coordinator - GEF-UNDP Small Grants Programme, India

Araujo Resenterra, Ariana, GEF SGP National Coordinator, Costa Rica

Sanchez, Ingrid, Programme Assistant, GEF Small Grants Programme, Costa Rica

Spencer, Ruth, GEF Civil Society Organization Network, Antigua and Barbuda

Annex C – Survey questions and key data

The survey was available online from April 15, 2025 to June 1, 2025

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NZDMSMS>

Instructions

This survey aims to assess the impact and effectiveness of the SGP grants in achieving environmental and social goals. Please answer the following questions based on your experience. Your responses will be treated confidentially.

Relevance

1. How aligned are the SGP-funded initiatives with your country's environmental and development priorities?
 - Highly aligned
 - Moderately aligned
 - Slightly aligned
 - Not aligned
2. To what extent do you think SGP responds to the needs of local communities and CSOs?
 - Very effectively
 - Somewhat effectively
 - Neutral
 - Not effectively
3. Which thematic areas funded by SGP have been most relevant in your country? (Select all that apply)
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Climate change adaptation/mitigation
 - Sustainable land management
 - Sustainable forest management
 - Pollution reduction
 - Other (please specify)

Effectiveness

4. How would you rate the effectiveness of SGP-funded projects in achieving their stated objectives?
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Somewhat effective

- Not effective
- 5. What are the main factors contributing to the success of SGP projects in your country? (Select up to three)
 - Strong local engagement
 - Availability of technical support
 - Government collaboration
 - Access to funding
 - Knowledge sharing and partnerships
 - Other (please specify)
- 6. What have been the biggest obstacles to project implementation?
 - Lack of funding
 - Bureaucratic hurdles
 - Limited technical expertise
 - Political constraints
 - Other (please specify)

Sustainability

- 7. Have the benefits of SGP projects been sustained after project completion?
 - Yes, most of them
 - Somewhat, but many projects require additional support
 - No, benefits decline after the project ends
 - Not sure
- 8. What factors most influence the sustainability of SGP projects? (Select up to three)
 - Long-term funding availability
 - Community ownership and involvement
 - Government and institutional support
 - Capacity building and training
 - Market access for project outputs
 - Other (please specify)

Innovation

- 9. Have SGP projects introduced innovative approaches to environmental conservation or sustainable development?
 - Yes, frequently
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely

- Not at all
- 10. In what ways has innovation been fostered within SGP projects? (Select all that apply)
 - Technological innovations
 - Business model innovations
 - Policy or regulatory innovations
 - Community-driven knowledge solutions
 - Other (please specify)

Inclusion and Social Impact

- 11. How well does SGP promote gender equality in project implementation?
 - Very well
 - Moderately well
 - Poorly
 - Not at all
- 12. Have SGP projects effectively engaged Indigenous Peoples and local communities?
 - Yes, fully
 - Partially
 - Limited engagement
 - Not engaged at all
- 13. What are the main benefits communities have gained from SGP projects? (Select all that apply)
 - Improved livelihoods
 - Strengthened local governance
 - Access to new technologies
 - Capacity building and education
 - Other (please specify)

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- 14. What are the top challenges SGP projects face in your country? (Select up to three)
 - Administrative and reporting burdens
 - Lack of funding for scaling up
 - Limited technical capacity
 - Weak institutional support
 - Market access constraints
 - Other (please specify)

15. Based on your experience, what lessons should be considered for future SGP implementation?
16. What recommendations would you make to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of SGP-funded projects?

Future Directions

17. Are you aware of forthcoming changes to the SGP modalities, and if yes, how do you think they will impact your country's programming?

How have SGP modalities evolved during the period 2020-2024, and what impact have these changes had on project implementation, funding mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement?

18. In which areas should SGP focus more in the future? (Select up to three)
 - Strengthening policy linkages
 - Expanding funding for scaling successful projects
 - Increasing cross-country learning
 - Strengthening community entrepreneurship
 - Enhancing climate adaptation efforts
 - Other (please specify)
19. Would you support an increase in the scale of SGP funding in your country?
 - Yes, significantly
 - Yes, but with better management
 - No, current funding is sufficient
 - No, it should be reduced
20. Would you support an increase in the scale of SGP funding in your country, considering the necessary resources for effective implementation?
 - Yes, significantly, with increased financial, technical, and institutional support
 - Yes, but only with improved management and capacity-building measures
 - No, current funding and resources are sufficient for effective project implementation
 - No, funding should be reduced, and resources should be reallocated elsewhere
21. Are there any additional comments you would like to share about your experience with SGP?

Survey Key Data

of responses: 559

of countries: 101

women respondents: 210

Representation

Academic institutions: 41

Government: 66

Multilateral organizations: 115

NGOs: 325

Private sector: 29