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Virtual Meeting

REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF GEF-8 COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Overview

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

2. This is the second report on the implementation of the CES covering the period since the last report, including the second half Fiscal Year 2024 and most of 2025 and includes details of how financial resources are being utilized.¹ The first report was presented in the 66th Council Meeting².

Implementation of the CES – Fiscal Year FY24

3. The table below summarizes the budget lines categories and funding for the implementation of the CES during FY24 and half of FY 25. The text which follows describes the activities supported during the reporting period by each of these budget line items. The list of events organized during this reporting period can be reviewed in Annex 1.

Implementation of new GEF Country Engagement Strategy as of December 2024 (in US\$ millions)					
Fund	GEF-8 Amount approved by Council	Amount Disbursed in FY23	Amount Disbursed in FY 24	Commitments/disbursements (FY25 to date)	Available Balance
Country Engagement Strategy - Part I (totals)	27.000	3.636	4.821	1.1480	17.396
Upstream Technical and National Dialogues	2.100	0.961	0.409	0.342	0.387
Constituency Workshops	11.740	2.500	1.446	0.434	7.359
Intro Seminars	0.260	0.029	0.000	0.000	0.231
Constituency Meetings	4.000	0.143	2.836	0.368	0.653
Building Execution Capacity of Stakeholders	1.100	0.000	0.065	0.000	1.035
Financial Support to GEF Operational Focal Points	5.800	0.000	0.000	0.000	5.800

¹ See Highlights of 63rd Session of GEF Council: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-03/HIGHLIGHTS_63%20Council.pdf

² <https://www.thegef.org/events/66th-gef-council-meeting#documents>

Knowledge Exchange/Learning	2.000	1.633	0.065	0.003	1.930
Country Engagement Strategy - Part II (totals)	13.200	0.305	2.791	3.524	6.579
Gustavo Fund	10.000	0.000	2.680	3.427	3.893
Site Visits for Council Members	1.200	0.252	0.000	0.000	0.948
Support to Attend COPs & Related Meetings	2.000	0.053	0.111	0.098	1.738

- **Upstream Technical and National Dialogues**

4. These initiatives aim to provide technical and strategic support to GEF stakeholders in recipient countries with the objective to establish a common understanding of the GEF-8 Strategies and commitment to delivering Global Environmental Benefits.

5. In the reporting period, US \$145,357 was used to fund and support these upstream technical and national dialogues. This amount supported activities in 9 countries in Africa and Asia.

- **Expanded Constituency Workshops**

6. Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs) aim at providing training, capacity building and knowledge exchange on the GEF to the major stakeholders of the GEF partnership.

7. During the latter half of FY24, US \$852,000 and in the first half of FY25 a total of \$434,000 was used to fund and support these workshops. This amount supported 3 regional workshops in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The reduced number of workshops resulted from the many meetings during this fiscal year which included several COPs and other meetings to which many of the GEF Focal Points and Convention Focal Points attend.

- **Introduction Seminars**

8. These virtual seminars provide training and relevant information for an enhanced understanding of the GEF, its policies and operations to new Agency staff, Operational Focal Points, selected stakeholders as well as new Convention Secretariat staff. The various key stakeholders are invited to invite their staff to learn more of the Secretariat. The Introduction Seminar also receive a lot of interest from Civil society representatives.

- **Constituency Meetings**

9. These meetings continue to be the main tool for Council Members and Alternates within a constituency to prepare for decision making at the GEF Council. The Secretariat organizes up to two annual in-person Constituency Meetings, at the request of Council Members. Virtual Constituency Meetings can also be organized, in case a constituency requests additional meetings to discuss specific issues of interest.

10. In the second half of FY 24, a sum of US\$1,050,000 was used, and an additional US\$365,475 in first half of FY25 was dedicated to funding these constituency meetings. Some of these meetings were held in person right before the Council meetings, while the majority were virtual meetings, and the funds covered interpretation costs. In total, the funds supported a total of 19 constituency meetings across all regions.

- **Building the Execution Capacity of Stakeholders**

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

12. In FY24, there were no substantive activities under this budget line -as all CSOs supported during the two ECWs in Liberia and in Ecuador were covered under the Expanded Constituency Meeting budget line.

- **Financial Support to GEF Operational Focal Points**

13. This initiative aims to enable GEF OFPs to effectively oversee and monitor their GEF portfolios. Access to these dedicated funds is optional and flexible.

14. This dedicated support will cover the costs of project oversight activities, including field visits, facilitating OFPs to perform their responsibilities in overseeing project execution during the GEF replenishment cycle. Utilization of these resources is optional and flexible, and OFPs are entitled to receive these funds if and when they request access to this additional support³. This support will complement the ongoing continuous efforts provided by the GEF Secretariat to build the capacity of OFPs to manage their GEF portfolio of projects.

³ [Summary of Negotiations of the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund](#), GEF/C.62/03 (June 2022)]

15. The Secretariat has contacted numerous regional institutions which will support the implementation of this component. In partnering with the Secretariat in each of the GEF recipient regions, these institutions will be responsible for transferring these funds directly to OFPs in recipient countries and ensuring that the funds are used appropriately, in accordance with criteria developed by the Secretariat. A training component on project portfolio oversight, including an illustrative project field visit will complement the financial support provided to the OFPs.

- **Knowledge Exchange and Learning**

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

17. With two full-time staff recently joining the GEF Secretariat to focus on knowledge management and learning, steps are now being taken to implement the strategy. Since the last update, the Secretariat has made significant progress in three key areas: strengthening engagement with external entities to harness knowledge and expertise for GEF programs, facilitating interoperability of knowledge platforms for the integrated programs, and enhancing knowledge sharing and learning opportunities for staff.

18. On strengthening engagement with external entities, the Secretariat has convened two key expert workshops to leverage knowledge from GEF investments. The first was on “Advancing the Integrated Approach for Transformative Change in Tropical Forest Biomes” (October 2024, Panama), which engaged 50 scientists and experts from agencies, academia, research, and think-thanks to develop a knowledge-sharing framework for the GEF-8 Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program. The second was on the GEF-6 Resilient Food Systems (RFS) Program (November 2024, Kenya), to synthesize lessons, experiences, and best practices in integrated resource management, stakeholder engagement, and challenges in transforming food value chains in the dryland regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. These events are jointly convened with GEF agencies and involve STAP.

19. Second, on facilitating interoperability of knowledge platforms, the GEF Secretariat engaged with STAP to develop a set of principles that will guide the process. The principles will ensure that platforms of programs addressing related issues, including cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, civil society engagement and social inclusion, are developed and managed in a coordinated manner, which would then provide project developers with useful information on what works, how, in what circumstances, and why; and on what does not work. The principles

cover the following categories: governance and coordination, knowledge and learning, administrative and operational, communication and outreach, and sustainability. The principles, now being socialized with all Lead Agencies of integrated programs, were informed by a recent survey of platforms conducted by the GEF Secretariat, which generated useful information on experiences related to the different categories.

20. Finally, on enhancing knowledge sharing and learning in the GEF Secretariat has initiated plans for a series that will directly involve staff on both substantive and operational issues. In addition to acquiring new knowledge and skills, the series will create opportunity for staff to share knowledge and experiences gained from their work, including visits to projects and engagement with countries, development and piloting of new tools, and synthesis of lessons from project or program achievements. This approach to socializing the knowledge management and learning strategy will ensure that the Secretariat is well positioned to influence and support knowledge exchange and learning across the entire GEF partnership.

21. These ongoing efforts are underpinned by the three key pillars underpinning the strategy: people, process, and systems. The GEF Secretariat is committed to incentivizing knowledge sharing and learning across the GEF partnership, consistent with the need to support scaling-up and influencing of environmental outcomes from GEF investments. This will be further enhanced by streamlining processes and developing systems that will facilitate access to knowledge resources in the Secretariat and across the GEF partnership.

- **The Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program (FONSECA CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM)**

22. The Fonseca Leadership Program was designed to provide opportunities for young conservation leaders from GEF recipient countries to engage in graduate studies and field research in areas related to biodiversity conservation. Over the past year, we have worked diligently to establish a series of regional and global partnerships to achieve this goal. We are pleased to report that 8 partnerships have been established and are already in operation, and one additional partnership is under development.

23. Two programs (WCN's Amazonia Rising Leader's program, and FUNBIO's research support program) focus on conservation training in Brazil and the Amazonia region, recognizing Gustavo Fonseca's history and dedication to the region. WWF's Education for Nature program aims to provide fellowship support to young conservationists in the rest of Latin America.

24. WCS's fellowship program focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, and has special expertise and knowledge in tropical Africa. The Livingthroughwildlife CBNRM program focuses especially on

southern and East Africa. In Asia, the India-based NCBS focused broadly on developing countries in South Asia, Indochina and SouthEast Asia, while the Lincoln University New Zealand program focuses on Asia and the Pacific.

25. Finally, the two field research support programs, that of the Mohamed bin Zayed Foundation and Re:wild have a global reach and are available for field fellowships to all young conservation leaders in all GEF recipient countries.

26. During this past year, the Fonseca Leadership Program has supported 127 Young Conservation Leaders in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and SIDS countries. This support has been divided almost equally between Graduate Fellowships (64) and Biodiversity Field Research (63). Likewise, we have supported 74 male (58%) and 53 female leaders (42%). We have one potential partnership developing with the Central Asia Green University that will lead to the creation of a graduate fellowship program available to East and Central Asia GEF recipient countries. We are also awaiting final selection of fellows from the Lincoln University in New Zealand that will focus on Asia and Pacific SIDS GEF recipient countries youth leaders.

Table X. Number of Young Conservation Leaders supported in each GEF region.

Region	Number of Young Leaders Supported	Comments
Asia	12	This support has come from the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program, and the National Center for Biological Science Partnership in Bangalore.
Latin America	56	This support has come from the Funbio Fonseca Program, the Amazonia Rising Conservation Leaders Program, the Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Latin America, the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program
Africa	57	This support has come from the MBZCF Fonseca Leadership Program, the Gustavo Fonseca Species Conservation Fund, the Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Africa, and the LifethroughWildlife Fonseca’s Fellowships.
Eastern Europe and Central Asia		We presently have a partnership being developed with the Central Asia Green University in Uzbekistan which we hope will develop into a fellowship program in the coming year.
SIDS	2	We have a developing partnership with the Lincoln University in New Zealand, “Gustavo Fonseca Applied Conservation Scholarship

		Program”, which is in the process of setting up the competitive window for fellowships that will focus on Asia-Pacific countries including SIDS.
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Partnership Descriptions:

1. Wildlife Conservation Network’s **“The Amazonia Rising Conservation Leaders Program”** is an early career program focusing on conservationists in Amazonia, with co-funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Participants enroll in a two-year leadership development program, which will depend on (a) workshops, focusing on core leadership competencies and conservation skills, (b) individual capacity building, through in-person training, courses and conferences, and (c) formal and informal mentoring with senior professionals. There were 24 selected participants, 8 male and 16 female: Suriname (1), Ecuador (2), Guyana (2), Colombia (4), Bolivia (4), Peru (6), and Brazil (6).

2. FUNBIO’s **“Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships - Conserving the Future”** is a research support program providing fellowships to support graduate conservation field research across Brazil. In this first year of the Fonseca Fellowships, FUNBIO awarded 8 grants, 6 to students enrolled in PhD programs, and 2 to those enrolled in Masters’ programs. Awardees, 4 male and 4 female are enrolled in universities in Brazil. Their research focused on conservation challenges across different biomes in Brazil – terrestrial and marine, and from the Amazon to the Cerrado and Pampa. FUNBIO is already reviewing 458 applications for the second cohort of Fonseca Fellowships.

3. **Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZF)** is a research support program providing Fonseca Field Grants globally. In this first year of the program, MBZF awarded 26 Fonseca Leadership Program grants (16 male, 10 female) in support of field conservation
 - Cats. 3 grants to early career researcher from Argentina, Uruguay and Chile
 - Mammals (other). 6 grants to early career researcher from Tanzania, Indonesia, Paraguay, Brazil, Mauritius, and Nepal.
 - Reptiles (turtles and tortoises). 2 grants to early career researchers from Mexico and India.
 - Reptiles (other). 1 grant to early career researcher from Guatemala
 - Amphibians. 2 grants to early career researchers from Cameroon and Uganda
 - Fish. 4 grants to early career researchers from South Africa, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Honduras.
 - Invertebrates. 4 grants to early career researchers from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cameroon, and India.
 - Plants. 3 grants to early career researchers from Eswatini, India, and Argentina.
 - Fungi. 1 grant to early career researcher from Togo.

4. Re:wild's "**Gustavo Fonseca Species Conservation Fund**" is a research support program providing grants to field projects that promote species conservation and are led by early career conservationists. In this first year, the Fund will target the support of projects on five species groups: primates, small mammals, tortoises and fresh water turtles, amphibians, and freshwater fish. The first call for proposals targeted the African continent and the Indian Ocean. A second call will target the Asia-Pacific, and the third will target the Americas, including the Caribbean. In the first call, the following 37 grants (23 male, 14 female) were approved:
 - Primates. 12 grants to early career researchers from Tanzania, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Benin, Kenya and Congo DR.
 - Small mammals. 6 grants to early career researchers from Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Malawi.
 - Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles. 5 grants to early career researchers from Tanzania, South Africa, Madagascar, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo.
 - Amphibians. 8 grants to early career researchers from Tanzania, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa and Madagascar.
 - Freshwater Fish. 6 grants to early career researchers from Nigeria, South Africa, Madagascar, Ghana and Ethiopia.

5. WCS's "**Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Africa**" is a fellowship program providing graduate support to conservationists from Africa for M.Sc. and Ph.D. study at universities traditionally in the developed world, but increasingly in the developing world. In this first cohort, the program selected two Fonseca Fellows for full multi-year scholarships, one to Elizabeth Agyekumwaa, a marine conservationist from Ghana, and one to Nilton Cuna, a conservation tourism planner from Mozambique.

6. WWF's "**Gustavo Fonseca Fellowships for Latin America – Education for Nature**" is a fellowship program providing graduate support to conservationists from Latin America that will allow M.Sc. and Ph.D. study at universities. WWF reviewed 158 applicants, and selected 14 inaugural Fonseca Fellows (8 male and 6 female). Fellows came from Mexico (2), Chile (1), Peru (3), Guatemala (2), Ecuador (1), Honduras (1), Bolivia (1), Colombia (2), and Guyana (1). Five will study in universities in Latin America, five in Europe, and four in the United States.

7. National Center for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bangalore, India through its academic program "**Masters in Wildlife Biology and Conservation**" is a conservation training program in India. For this first cohort, the program invested in significant outreach, and received sustained interest from 27 candidates for Fonseca Fellowships from 10

countries. 15 candidates were shortlisted for interviews, and five (4 male, 1 female) were selected for the first cohort, from Philippines (1), Laos (2), Myanmar (1) and Sri Lanka (1).

8. Lifethroughwildlife's "**Fonseca Fellowships**" through the Stellenbosch University in South Africa and the University of Florida in the USA, with funding support from the Jamma Foundation, is a practical, academically-based training program that focuses on building capacity for Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Africa. Candidates from CBNRM sites and projects are encouraged to submit applications. 14 complete applications were received, and from these the program selected 11 for admission into the program, from Botswana (1), Namibia (1), Kenya (4), Mozambique (2), South Africa (1) and Zambia (2).
9. Lincoln University New Zealand, "**Gustavo Fonseca Applied Conservation Scholarship Program**" through its Ph.D. and Masters programs provide a robust conservation leadership training experience. The Fonseca Scholars will be drawn from applicants from Asia and the Pacific. The first cohort is still being selected. There were 40 initial applications or expressions of interest. Of these 20 candidates were invited to submit full applications (9 for Masters study and 12 for Ph.D.s) from Fiji, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea. The program hopes to select 6 or 7 candidates for scholarships.
10. The Central Asian University of Environmental Studies and Climate Change (The "Green University") was established in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in May 2023. The University plans to launch a MSc in Nature Conservation. To evaluate how the University can promote conservation education in Central Asia, the GEF Gustavo Fonseca Conservation Leadership Program brought in consultants to identify the conservation capacity needs in Central Asia and explore with the Green University what might be needed to launch the MSc program in nature conservation. Specifically, the consultancy will examine the human capacity needs in Central Asia; the University's current and potential capacity for conservation training; and the resources, financial and otherwise, that are available to sustainably support this training. The three-member consultancy team all have considerable experience with conservation training and implementation in Central Asia, and are expected to produce a final report at the beginning of 2025, which will hopefully lead to the design of a Fonseca Fellowship Program to serve Central Asian GEF recipient countries.

- **Site Visits for Council Members**

27. This initiative is designed to enable GEF Council Members and Alternates to benefit from a personal in-depth knowledge and understanding of activities, results, and stakeholders of GEF projects, including through field visits with participation of Developed and Developing countries' Council Members and Alternates. The visits will be organized to all types of projects and programs and showcase successes as well as challenges.

28. During the period covered by the report, no site visits were organized. We will certainly include this in the next year and maybe as part of the GEF-9 replenishment negotiations.

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

29. This funding line provides support for country delegations to participate in the Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the Conventions which the GEF serves as financial mechanism. This support compensates for the reduction in the funding country delegations and stakeholders received from the Convention's Secretariats.. Without the GEF's support, a number of countries will not be able to participate in the negotiations in defense of their national interests.

30. During FY24 an amount of \$58,574.90 was used under this fund to support participation by government officials and stakeholders in GEF-recipient countries to attend different meetings.

31. Alongside UNICEF, GEF supported young leaders from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to attend the SIDS Youth Forum held in Antigua and Barbuda. These young leaders were from Micronesia, Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea-Bissau.

32. The GEF supported a woman leader champion from Antigua and Barbuda to attend UNEA-6. Additionally, 10 coastal women leaders attended a workshop in Costa Rica before the UN Ocean Pre-conference. At the workshop, they signed a call to action urging governments to take concrete steps to eliminate gender-based violence and to enhance their visibility in the fisheries sectors.

33. This year, with three major COPs taking place, the GEF supported governments and their national delegations in attending these meetings. For CBD COP16, we supported the Government of Costa Rica. For COP29 in Baku, we supported young negotiators from 12 countries: Micronesia, Zimbabwe, Panama, Liberia, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Peru, Mali, Burkina Faso, Lesotho, and Nigeria. We also supported the Governments of Bhutan, Uruguay, and Argentina. For COP16 UNCCD in Riyadh, we supported the young negotiators from the delegations of Ecuador and the Cook Islands, as well as the government of Uruguay and Somalia.

Annex 1: List of events

Country Engagement Strategy – January 2024 – November 2024

Regions	Upstream Technical and National Dialogues	Intro Seminar	Constituency Meetings	ECW	Other
LAC	1. Suriname National Dialogue (October 2024)		1. In DC, for the Southern Cone Constituency (February 2024) 2. In DC, for the Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador Constituency (February 2024) 3. In DC, for the Southern Cone Constituency (June 2024) 4. In DC, for the Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador Constituency (June 2024) 5. Virtual for the Caribbean Constituency (June 2024)	1. In Dominican Republic Caribbean ECW (March 2024) 2. In Ecuador LATAM Regional Workshop (September 2024)	1. CEO Mission to Mexico (May 2024) 2. CEO Mission to Costa Rica (April 2024)
ECA			1. In Dushanbe, Tajikistan for Azerbaijan Kazakhstan Kyrgyz Republic, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (May 2023) 2. Virtual for Eastern Europe (June 2023)		CEO mission to Uzbekistan & Kazakhstan (March 2024)
SIDS			1. Virtual for Pacific (Jun 2023) 2. Virtual for Pacific (Jan 2024) 3. Virtual for Pacific (June 2024) 4. Virtual Council meeting debrief for Pacific (June 2024)		
Africa	1. Cote D'Ivoire National Dialogue (May 2024) 2. Nigeria National Dialogue (May 2024)		1. Joint Constituency Meeting for West Africa (2 constituencies)– Cote D'Ivoire (May 2024)	1. West Africa (Coastal) Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo In Liberia February 2024	CEO Mission to Madagascar (August 2024)

	3. Equatorial Guinée National Dialogue (July 2024) 4. Burkina Faso National Dialogue (July 2024) 5. Mali National Dialogue (July 2024) 6. Burundi National Dialogue (August 2024) 7. Madagascar National Dialogue (August 2024) 8. Guinée National Dialogue		2. Virtual for Southern Africa, Central Africa and Eastern Africa (May 2024)		
Asia			1. Virtual for E Asia (June 2023) 2. India for S Asia (Jun 2023) 3. Virtual for E Asia (Jan 2024) 4. Virtual for S Asia (Jan 2024) 5. Virtual for E Asia (May 2024) 6. Virtual for S Asia (May 2024)		CEO mission to Bhutan (April 2024).
Other		1. Nov 2023 (virtual)			CEO to AGRA Meeting (August 2024) CEO mission to AMCEN Cote D'Ivoire - September 2024)
Total					