

Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

Guidelines on Actions by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATIONS as of 3 October 2025

I. Background

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) highlights the reliance of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) on biodiversity and their crucial role in its conservation, sustainable management and restoration. This intimate bond between IPLCs and biodiversity is notably recognized in Article 8(j) which states that

Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate [...] respect, preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval of knowledge holders and to encourage equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such knowledge.

Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Likewise, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework refers to IPLCs in seven of its 23 targets,¹ including in the context of recognizing IPLC rights, traditional knowledge, territories and collective action, and protecting their customary sustainable use of biodiversity. Section C of the Framework also refers to IPLCs as a cross-cutting dimension of the entire framework, calling for its implementation to

ensure their rights, knowledge, including traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, innovations, worldviews, values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected, documented, preserved with their free, prior and informed consent, including through their full and effective participation in decision-making [...].

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, paragraph 8

Accordingly, the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund's (GBFF) policies refer to IPLCs on multiple occasions. The GBFF's second of eight action areas focuses on support to IPLC

¹ Targets 1, 3, 5, 9, 19, 21 and 22.

stewardship and governance of lands, territories, and waters.² In addition, the Policy on Allocation of Resources for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund³ includes three portfolio-level targets of which one is dedicated to supporting actions by IPLCs:

An aspirational programming share of 20% at the portfolio level by 2030 from the total amount of resources allocated under the GBFF is to support actions by IPLCs for the conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management of biodiversity.

Policy on Allocation of Resources for the GBFF, paragraph 21

Through GBFF Decision 2/2025,⁴ the GBFF Council requested the Secretariat to develop guidelines for the tracking and reporting of resources to this aspirational target, namely support actions by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, following a consultative process outlined in report GEF/GBFF.04/03.⁵

The following set of guidelines therefore responds to this mandate and focuses on unpacking and better understanding the meaning of this aspirational target, with an emphasis on practical considerations for eligible countries and GEF agencies on how to translate this target at project level. The guidelines aim to enhance integrity, transparency, accountability and consistency in the way progress towards this aspirational target is measured and reported. They also aim to provide guidance to stakeholders on how to embed actions by IPLCs from the earliest stages of project design.

Consistent with Decision 2/2025, consultations were held listed in Table I below were conducted to compile these guidelines.⁶

Activity	Participants/stakeholders involved	Timeline
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² GEF (2023). Programming Directions for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, p. 11. Document available at https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/EN_GEF_C.64_06_%20GBFF%20Fund%20Programming%20Directions_0.pdf

³ GEF (2024). Policy on allocation of resources for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), p. 9. Document available at https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-01/EN_GEF.GBFF_01.03.Rev_01_Policy_Allocation_Resources_Global_Biodiversity_Framework_Fund.pdf

⁴ GEF (2025). GBFF Council decisions 2025, p. 2. Document available at <https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/GBFF%20Council%20Decisions%202025.pdf>

⁵ GEF (2025b). Progress report on the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), pp. 11-12. Document available at https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-05/GEF-GBFF.04.03_Progress%20Report%20on%20the%20Global%20Biodiversity%20Framework%20Fund.pdf

⁶ The GEF Secretariat acknowledges and wishes to thank all relevant stakeholders and participants in these consultations for their input into these guidelines.

In-person sessions on the margins of the GEF/GBFF Council meeting	GEF Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Group (IPAG) GBFF Council Members and observers	June 2025
Online meetings on first draft	GBFF Council Members and observers GEF agencies CBD Secretariat	October 2025 (scheduled)
Open consultation side-event to the first meeting of the CBD Subsidiary body on Article 8j and Other Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (SB8j)	Interested delegates of the SB8j	October 2025 (scheduled)

Table I. List of activities and consultations conducted to design the present guidelines.

The development of these guidelines is also taking place against the backdrop of the programme of work⁷ on Article 8(j) and related provisions, the main instrument that Parties to the CBD have given themselves to achieve the commitments it contains, and the establishment of the Subsidiary Body to facilitate an exchange in relation to its implementation. The guidelines therefore aim to reflect the latest discussions on the topic of IPLC involvement in biodiversity conservation, sustainable management and restoration.

As such, these guidelines are a living document. As IPLC needs and priorities evolve in a fast-moving world, and as CBD issues new decisions, so these guidelines will be updated as necessary.

II. Unpacking Actions by IPLCs

The expression “actions by IPLCs” was not found in any policy or decision of the CBD or the Global Environment Facility (GEF) other than in the context of the GBFF’s aspirational target

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<https://www.cbd.int/traditional/pow.shtml#:~:text=The%20programme%20of%20work%20on,tasks%205%2C%209%20and%2011.>

mentioned above. As such, it is considered specific to the GBFF and can be understood as follows.⁸

First, “actions by IPLCs” represents a shift towards Indigenous-led sustainable development. It places IPLCs as agents of change and in the driver’s seat. It is distinct from actions *for* IPLCs which suggests that they are simple recipients of external aid and whereby they may be expected to undertake or participate in activities developed and implemented by non-IPLC decision-makers, regardless of the intentions of those involved.

By contrast, under this approach, IPLCs determine and take control of the actions supported by donor funds. In this context, GBFF financing becomes a resource which IPLCs can use in line with both their self-determined plans and GBFF policies and programming directions.

Secondly, in terms of process, decisions underlying project design and implementation must be reached through appropriate IPLC decision-making structures, entities, and institutions that represent both men and women. IPLCs often have political and decision-making institutions and organizations that are distinct from public authorities and non-IPLC communities, and which have historically been overlooked or undermined.

In some countries and regions, national and regional IPLC organizations and federations are recognized by IPLCs themselves as channels for IPLC voices or decision-making bodies. As the main entities responsible for designing projects, GEF agencies must conduct their due diligence to identify all such relevant organizations and entities to include them and ensure that IPLCs are adequately integrated into the project’s decision-making processes, both at design and implementation stages. In particular, efforts must be undertaken to conduct outreach to geographically remote or difficult-to-reach IPLCs and their representatives, including women and girls, where relevant.

Under certain circumstances, non-governmental organizations’ claims that they represent IPLCs may require confirmation by IPLCs themselves as part of the GEF agencies’ due diligence mentioned above.

At all times, compliance must be ensured with the provisions of the GEF’s Environmental and Social Safeguards⁹ that are related to Indigenous Peoples, including, but not limited to, Minimum Standard 5 on Indigenous Peoples.

⁸ This understanding is based on input received during the above-mentioned consultations.

⁹ <https://www.thegef.org/documents/environmental-and-social-safeguard-standards>

While distinct from the concept of direct finance which stresses the importance of channelling funds directly to IPLCs and IPLC organizations themselves,¹⁰ “actions by IPLCs” is based on the common foundation of IPLC empowerment and giving IPLCs agency over project resources. In this sense, supporting actions by IPLCs is consistent with, can result in, and/or be considered as a first step towards increasing direct financing for IPLCs. As such, direct financing for IPLCs can be considered as support for actions by IPLCs insofar as it is self-determined by IPLCs through appropriate IPLC and/or traditional decision-making structures.

Elements of direct finance can also include specific elements that facilitate IPLCs’ access to financing such as (i) instruments, e.g., on-granting mechanisms or revolving funds targeted specifically for IPLCs; and (ii) transparency in financial flows from the GBFF during project implementation.

¹⁰ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2024). Financing the future: the financial needs of Indigenous Peoples to support their actions for biodiversity, climate and the protection of Mother Earth. Note by the Secretariat. Document E/C.19/2024/7 available at <https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/n2402291EN.pdf>

What's in an acronym

International law, including the Rio Conventions, uses different terms. As part of the financial mechanism of multiple environmental conventions, the GEF employs the term “Indigenous Peoples and local communities” (IPLCs). To ensure consistency across the GEF family of funds, including the GBFF, this expression is used in these guidelines as well.

Definitions vary significantly, including across regions,¹¹ but common and recurring elements include (i) collective self-identification¹² and the right to self-determination;¹³ (ii) collective attachment to specific geographical areas or habitats;¹⁴ and (iii) distinct cultural, economic, social or political institutions.¹⁵

While the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) currently does not define the term,¹⁶ these guidelines will be updated should the CBD agree on a definition, a characterization or elements of one in the future.

III. A Step-by-step Practical Guide

In addition to the points in section II, the following practical considerations can be used as a set of steps for agencies, countries and other GBFF partners and stakeholders to follow when quantifying support for actions by IPLCs in the projects they are designing or implementing.

¹¹ Human Rights Council (2025). Recognition of Indigenous Peoples Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Albert K. Barume. United Nations General Assembly Document A/HRC/60/29 available at https://media.licdn.com/dms/document/media/v2/D4E1FAQGL4dCcri1UQ/feedshare-document-pdf-analyzed/B4EZkorm9QKsAY-/0/1757324146608?e=1758153600&v=beta&t=wzPnkD3M9nwQU5rqt7OR3H_Chzu8KCW9ghq3R1WTrkA

¹² IPBES (2022). Thematic Assessment Report on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Fromentin, J.M., Emery, M.R., Donaldson, J., Danner, M.C., Hallosserie, A., and Kieling, D. (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. p.32. Document available at <https://zenodo.org/records/10925382>; and GEF (2019). Policy on social and environmental safeguards, p. 6. Document SD/PL/03 available at https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/gef_environmental_social_safeguards_policy.pdf

¹³ United Nations (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 3. Document available at https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf; GEF (2019) op cit. p. 6.

¹⁴ Martínez Cobo. J.R. (1972). Study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations: preliminary report, p.10. Document E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.566 available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/768953?ln=en&v=pdf>; IPBES (2022) op. cit. p. 32; GEF (2019) op. cit. p. 6.

¹⁵ Martínez Cobo. J.R. (1972) op. cit. p. 10; GEF (2019) op. cit. p. 6.

¹⁶ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2019). Glossary of Relevant Key Terms and Concepts within the Context of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, 9 p. (CBD Guidelines Series). Document available at <https://www.cbd.int/doc/guidelines/cbd-8j-GlossaryArticle-en.pdf>

Significant differences arise – across regions but also across peoples and communities themselves – in the ways IPLCs self-identify, govern themselves and engage with biodiversity. Care must be taken to systematically contextualize, anchor and adapt these guidelines to local realities and territories.

a) Project Preparation Grant (PPG) Request¹⁷

The first step of the GBFF’s project development cycle, resulting in the submission of a PPG request, involves project incubation and the drafting of the PPG request itself.

Step 1. Project incubation and design. Any project likely to impact or involve IPLCs which does not already stem from IPLCs themselves should include relevant IPLCs and IPLC decision-making structures from the earliest stages of incubation and design, even when these consist of informal exchanges. This is consistent with the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), a requirement for Indigenous Peoples¹⁸ under the GEF’s Environmental and Social Safeguards.¹⁹

Consult with relevant IPLCs and channel decision-making through traditional and IPLC governance structures where possible during the design phase, ensuring the full integration of activities led by IPLCs that are consistent with project scope, GBFF priorities, action areas and selection criteria. Make sure to document the consultations and input from IPLCs which will need to be evidenced as contribution to the aspirational target. Where possible, include IPLC-led organizations as executing agencies.

IPLCs often consider the multiple facets of the global environmental crisis in an integrated way. While biodiversity should remain the primary focus of any GBFF proposal, integration with related environmental issues, such as climate change and land degradation, is encouraged, as is embedding IPLC knowledge, worldviews and research into project design.

¹⁷ GEF (2025c). GBFF Project Preparation Grant (PPG) Request Form. Document available at <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gbff-project-preparation-grant-ppg-request-form>

¹⁸ Under the GEF Environmental and Social Standards Policy, “Indigenous Peoples” means people belonging to a distinct social and cultural group characterized in varying degrees by (i) self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous social and cultural group and recognition of this identity by others; (ii) collective attachment to geographically distinct Habitats, ancestral territories, or areas of seasonal use or occupation, as well as to the natural resources in these areas; (iii) customary cultural, economic, social, or political institutions that are distinct or separate from those of the mainstream society or culture; and (iv) a distinct language or dialect, often different from the official language or languages of the country or region in which they reside. “To varying degrees” reflects the fact that some characteristics may be less, or no longer, evident, but have been present and are relevant in identifying Indigenous Peoples.

¹⁹ Minimum standard 5, paragraph 10 of the GEF Environmental and Social Standards Policy available at https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/gef_environmental_social_safeguards_policy.pdf

Step 2. Identifying IPLCs among direct beneficiaries. Once the project scope has been defined, identify IPLCs among the proposal’s direct beneficiaries as stated in GEF Core Indicator 11,²⁰ including by using the elements provided in section 2 above and quantify the proportion of direct beneficiaries that qualify as IPLCs. This is consistent with Minimum standard 1 on Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups of the GEF’s Environmental and Social Safeguards.²¹

Step 3. Identifying actions by IPLCs. Identify which activities in the project support actions by IPLCs. Ensure that all the activities identified (i) place IPLCs as agents of change and include their self-determined priorities, and (ii) were designed and will be implemented through appropriate and traditional IPLC decision-making institutions, entities and channels.

Step 5. Costing actions by IPLCs. Tally the costs associated with each of these activities. Budgets need to include costs associated with necessary consultations, including travelling and interpretation.

Step 6: Pro-rating costs. If the project beneficiaries include both IPLCs and non-IPLCs, pro-rate these costs by the proportion of IPLCs among the project beneficiaries.

Step 7: Applying exclusions. Make sure to exclude costs not directly related to activities qualifying as actions by IPLCs, including but not limited to PPG fees, agency fees and project management costs (PMC).

Step 8. Completing the PPGR template

The PPG request template contains three sections relevant to IPLCs:

1. **“Support IPLC” tag:** In the case of IPLC involvement, ensure the project description clarifies the IPLCs involved and their role in the project. This involvement could include but not be limited to any of the following scenarios: (i) IPLCs directly receive resources through the GEF agency for execution of project components/activities, (ii) IPLCs are project beneficiaries of project components/activities but do not directly receive financial resources; (iii) IPLCs are involved in the design and implementation of project components; (iv) IPLCs are envisioned to be part of the project steering committee and/or project governance. This tag is also to be used when IPLCs are beneficiaries of the project. Please note that the identification of IPLCs among beneficiaries of an activity is not sufficient to label the activity as

²⁰ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/Results_Guidelines.pdf

²¹ See paragraph 4(j) of the GEF’s Environmental and Social Standards Policy, op. cit.

supporting actions by IPLCs, which goes above and beyond the sole idea of beneficiary.

2. **“Project concept description”**: the project concept description should explain whether and how the project will engage with and provide support to actions by IPLCs. In the case of involvement of IPLCs in the project, please ensure the project description clarifies which IPLCs are involved and their role(s) in the project. In case a figure is entered later in the form on “Amount (\$) to support actions by IPLCs”, state in this section (i) the proportion of IPLCs among direct beneficiaries, (ii) the activities and costs identified as supporting actions by IPLCs, and (iii) explain how these activities constitute support for actions by, rather than for, IPLCs, as laid out in section II of these guidelines.
3. **“Amount (\$) to support actions by IPLCs”**: use this box to enter the amount of GBFF financing expected to support actions by IPLCs calculated using the steps above. This will be used by the GEF Secretariat to report on progress towards the GBFF’s aspirational target.

b) CEO Endorsement Request²²

Step 1. (i) Repeat, update and expand on information provided in the PPGR (see above) and (ii) explain any divergence, notably:

- Information on IPLCs that are direct beneficiaries, including proportion of IPLCs among the number of core beneficiaries (Core Indicator 11) and break down by number of women and men; and
- Demonstrate how the activities included in the financial amount constitute actions *by* IPLCs rather than *for* IPLCs.

Step 2. In the template, make sure to tick the appropriate boxes to the following questions:

- Are IPLCs to receive and manage resources for the execution of project components/activities?
- Are IPLCs leading the design and management of some project activities but do not manage financial resources?
- Does the project provide in-kind support to actions by IPLCs for biodiversity?
- Are IPLCs part of the project steering committee or an equivalent decision-making body?

²² GEF (2025d). GBFF CEO Endorsement Request Form. Document available at <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gbff-ceo-endorsement-request-form>

Step 3. Provide details and evidence of consultations with IPLCs as part of demonstrating how IPLC decision-making structures were effectively involved and how input from IPLCs, including their self-determined priorities, were integrated into project design.

Step 4. Ensure that appropriate IPLC representatives and/or organizations are also involved in implementation, including within the project steering committee. Demonstrate that due diligence was conducted to identify relevant organizations representing IPLCs.

Step 5. Ensure that the project's support to actions by IPLCs as described in the proposal is adequately included and reflected in project monitoring and evaluation.

Step 6. Provide an Indigenous Peoples' Plan demonstrating compliance with the GEF's Environmental and Social Policy. Noting that the Environmental and Social Policy contains minimum standards, compliance is not sufficient to demonstrate support to actions by IPLCs. Project supporting actions by IPLCs will be expected to deliver benefits to IPLCs well beyond the Environmental and Social Policy's do-no-harm approach.

Step 7. Validation by the GEF Secretariat. Contingent on review and clearance by the GEF Secretariat to ensure consistency across the portfolio, the amount indicated in Section E (policy requirements) of the CEO Endorsement Request constitutes support to actions by IPLCs and will be included as a contribution to achieving the GBFF's aspirational target.

c) Project Implementation Report (PIR)

Step 1. Describe and justify any departure from the CEO endorsement request relative to IPLC involvement.

Step 2. Document involvement of IPLCs so far, with a focus on the period since CEO endorsement.

Step 3. Report on the financial flow effectively disbursed to support actions by IPLCs and justify any deviation from figures indicated at CEO endorsement stage.

d) Mid-Term Report (MTR) and Terminal Evaluation (TE)

Step 1. Describe and justify any departure relative to IPLC involvement.

Step 2. Document involvement of IPLCs to date, with a focus on the period since CEO endorsement.

Step 3. Describe compliance with GEF policies, notably on Environmental and Social Safeguards.

Step 4. In the terminal evaluation, draw lessons on IPLC involvement and critically evaluate the extent to which the project effectively supported actions by IPLCs. Identify (i) success

stories and elements for replication and (ii) suggest how challenges encountered can be overcome in future projects.

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