



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL'S DISCUSSIONS

### 69TH GEF COUNCIL MEETING

JUNE 19-21, 2024, WASHINGTON D.C

The following is a brief record prepared by the GEF Secretariat of comments, understandings, and clarifications made by Council Members. These points are supplemental to the Joint Summary of the Chair, which records the decisions agreed by the Council. The full video of the Council Meeting can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GEFSecretariat>

#### ***Agenda Item 1            Opening of the Meeting - Adoption of the Agenda***

1. The CEO and Chairperson of the GEF, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, and Mr. Richard Bontjer, Elected Chairperson, opened the 69th GEF Council meeting.
2. The Agenda was adopted, incorporating the requests of two Council Members to discuss Uzbekistan's interest in hosting the Eighth GEF Assembly meeting, as well as a change of Constituency for two countries. The Secretariat also noted that the dates for the 2026 Council Meetings would be addressed under Other Business. For video recording see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

#### ***02. Work Program for GEF Trust Fund***

3. The Secretariat presented the work program requesting a total of \$174.9 million from the GEF trust fund and \$16.0 million in associated Agency fees for a total Work Program of \$190.9 million. It contains an indicative \$2.6 billion in co-financing, with means that each dollar provided by the GEF is matched by \$13.3 in co-financing provided by other sources. This brings GEF-8 programming to 75% at the 75% timeline of the 8<sup>th</sup> cycle.
4. Several Council Members raised concerns over the concentration of resources among a few agencies and requested a diversification of agency participation, including through increased engagement with regional multi-lateral development banks and national agencies.
5. Many Council Members commended the high co-financing ratio achieved in this Work Program, especially co-financing committed from the private sector, and viewed it as a

positive indicator of enhanced GEF partnership and resource mobilization. Several Council Members also expressed concerns on how co-financing is defined and reported across agencies, and called the Secretariat to provide clearer definitions, including standardized methodologies and transparency.

6. Council Members noted that the Work Program includes a limited number of innovation-focused projects and a misalignment between the risk appetite for innovation risk category and the actual risk profile. They called on the Secretariat to increase the use of innovation and to scale up risk-taking in future projects.
7. Several Council Members highlighted the importance of inclusive approaches, including better engagement with women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. Several Council Members encouraged a scale-up of resources toward the Small Islands Developing States and the Least Developed Countries.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 12:00 (presentation) | 23:00 (Council comments)

### **03. GEF Business Plan and Corporate Budget for FY26**

8. The Secretariat presented the document "GEF Business Plan and Corporate Budget for FY2026," which consolidates the projected administrative expenses for the GEF Secretariat, STAP, and the Trustee. The FY26 budget demonstrates a strong emphasis on efficiency and cost savings.
9. Many Council Members expressed appreciation for the cost-conscious approach, referencing the MOPAN report's findings that GEF's costs are lower than those of other Funds. One Council Member noted that GEF represents a sound investment due to its low administrative costs and recommended that this comparative advantage be widely communicated.
10. Several Council Members endorsed the positive outcomes of cost discussions with the World Bank, acknowledging the resulting cost savings in accordance with the decision made at the 67th Council meeting.
11. The Council also inquired about the increased costs associated with the Trustee. The Trustee explained that the rise in expenses is due to supporting the replenishment process.
12. Additionally, the Council welcomed the restructuring and recruitment efforts aligned with GEF-8 priorities, including the reduction in consultant costs.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 2:32:32 (presentation) | 2:39:00 (Council comments)

#### **04. GEF-8 Midterm Review on Performance of Full Flexibility**

13. The Secretariat reported that in GEF-8, countries have full flexibility to allocate STAR resources across all focal areas, thus by June 2024, 33 out of 144 countries have used this flexibility, programming \$66 million (3% of STAR funds) with minimal financial impact.
14. The full flexibility feature has especially benefited SIDS, LDCs, and countries with smaller allocations, allowing for larger, less fragmented projects and increasing the average size of standalone full-sized projects. The relevant shares of financing in the STAR focal areas have surpassed the Rio marker GEF-8 targets, highlighting the effectiveness of the integrated approach that has been embedded in GEF-8 programming.
15. The Council recognized the significant progress in the STAR flexibility, noting its value in helping countries plan strategically and address national priorities. The Council requests the GEF Secretariat to continue monitoring the use of full flexibility in GEF-8.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 3:41:24 (presentation) | 3:50:13 (Council comments)

#### **05. GEF Visibility Policy**

16. The Secretariat reported on the progress made in implementing the Policy on Communication and Visibility, which was established in June 2023. Since the adoption of the Policy, significant advancements have been achieved across several key areas, including branding, media relations, editorial content production, and digital engagement
17. Council Members commended the Secretariat for its work on the GEF Policy on Communication and Visibility, noting in particular how it effectively highlights the GEF Partnership. Several Members emphasized that this is a critical moment for the GEF to enhance its visibility, especially in the context of the GEF-9 Replenishment discussions. Demonstrating the GEF's value as a sound investment is essential for donor countries, including their parliaments and taxpayers, and supports a 'whole of society' approach.
18. Council Members also underscored that responsibility for GEF visibility extends beyond the entire GEF Family. This includes not only the Agencies, but also the Council Members.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 4:23:55 (presentation) | 4:41:24 (Council comments)

#### **06. Strengthening the GEF Partnership: Options for Agency Expansion**

19. The Secretariat presented the Strengthening the GEF Partnership: Options for Agency Expansion document, outlining a targeted expansion of up to three agencies to address persistent gaps in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States

(SIDS). The proposed options include standard and fast-track pathways, with the latter designed to harmonize with GCF/AF accreditation standards to reduce duplication and streamline procedures.

20. Council Members supported the proposed expansion options and the fast-track approach, noting its potential to minimize administrative burden while diversifying the agency network. Some members emphasized that the expansion process should help address agency concentration by diversifying the network while ensuring stronger regional balance. Several interventions also underscored the need for new agencies to demonstrate strong engagement with CSOs, NGOs, indigenous peoples, local communities, and the private sector.
21. The Council adopted the decision on GEF/C.69/05/Rev.1, requesting the Secretariat to proceed with a targeted expansion approach and related preparatory work, so the expansion process can begin in the GEF-9 period, with finalized procedures and supporting gap analysis to be presented at the 71<sup>st</sup> Council meeting in June 2026.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 5:20:07 (presentation) | 5:32:00 (Council comments)

#### ***07. Relations with Conventions and Other International Institutions***

22. The Secretariat introduced the item explaining that it included two sections: 1) Active dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the conventions that GEF serves, moderated by the GEF CEO; 2) Consideration of the report on Relation with Conventions.
23. The GEF CEO first introduced the following Convention representatives: Mr. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; Mr. Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions; Ms. Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention on Mercury; Ms. Louise Baker, Managing Director of the Global Mechanism, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); Mr. Vladimir Jares, Director, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations (DOALOS) for the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ); and Mr. Yibin Zang, CBD Focal Point for GEF, Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Ms. Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora joined the active dialogue. During the session, the GEF CEO posed questions to each of the Convention representatives to elaborate.
24. Mr. Simon Stiell (UNFCCC) highlighted that although finance is the most contentious issue,

there is strong coordination between all of the climate funds since clarity on those resources can result in the strongest possible impact. The major negotiating item is adaptation: the global goal on adaptation and the agreement on indicators. There is also a big focus on the third generation of NDCs to check how much closer we are to bending the emissions curve. The next COP 30 is an opportunity to reflect on the past 10 years since Paris, but also to look forward to the next 10 years.

25. Mr. Rolph Payet (Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm Conventions) noted that the conventions not only operate at the global level, but have significant impacts down supply chains and value chains, as well as multinational and small companies especially in the area of chemicals and waste. The five executive secretaries from the other conventions met at our COP, exchanging experiences and exploring linkages. We are actually addressing multiple problems by joining forces together on the energy sector and working with the private sector.
26. Ms. Monika Stankiewicz (Minamata Convention) said that the COP of the Minamata Convention has given guidance to the GEF to make more efforts to integrate across focal areas, since the GEF has a unique role of serving several MEAs. Integration should be further encouraged in GEF-9.
27. Ms. Louise Baker (UNCCD) noted that investments required for drought could only be reached if the economic investment model is changed. More emphasis is needed on the link between land and food systems and food security and agricultural production including livestock production in the rangelands and the role of the private sector in going to scale. During the GEF-8 cycle, the focus was on synergistic implementation. For GEF-9 we need to target the most vulnerable to ensure balanced representation of land and drought issues while continuing to support innovative financing mechanisms particularly blended finance that generates co-benefits.
28. Mr. Vladimir Jares (BBNJ) stressed that the agreement is on track to enter into force this year or early next year. Its implementation will depend on the decisions taken by the first COP and subsequent COPs. Several priorities and directions for the future have been identified, and capacity building will be a major focus of the present efforts.
29. Mr. Yibin Zhang (CBD) said that a good strategic framework will not be completed without progress measurement, financing, and Institutions to deliver.
30. Ms. Ivonne Higuero (CITES) noted that despite CITES not receiving benefits directly from the GEF as a financial mechanism, it is benefiting from many projects that are dealing with nature and wildlife conservation, such as the global wildlife program. In GEF-9 we have to look further into integration.

31. On the second part of the agenda item, the Secretariat responded to questions from Council Members and observers regarding the report on Relations with Conventions and Other International Organizations, which provides an update on the activities of the GEF in support of the multilateral environmental agreements, covering the period from October 2024 to May 2025
32. Council Members expressed their appreciation for the presence and contributions of the Executive Secretaries and senior representatives. The Council also welcomed and approved the report.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRfG5D81eZw>

Minute 0:00:00 (presentation) | 1:07:36 (Council comments)

#### **08. GEF IEO's Annual Performance Report 2025**

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 00:03:23 (presentation) | 00:17:34 (Council comments)

#### **09. Evaluation of International Waters Focal Area & Management Response**

33. The IEO presented an evaluation covering 277 International Waters (IW) projects across over 140 countries (GEF-5 to GEF-8), totaling over \$1.7 billion in GEF grants and \$17 billion in co-financing, and found the IW strategy highly relevant to national, regional, and global priorities, with improved portfolio balance between marine and freshwater systems but opportunities for intervention remain in high-risk areas such as groundwater. The IEO recommended maintaining IW's transboundary cooperation focus while balancing dedicated IW projects with IW components in integrated programming, strengthening financial sustainability through early planning and capacity building on innovative finance, and improving results tracking with refined indicators to better measure cooperation, socio-economic co-benefits, and shared water health.
34. The Secretariat welcomed the evaluation and agreed with all recommendations. It committed to rigorous review of IW projects to keep transboundary cooperation central all IW programming, to scale up innovative financing and early sustainability planning (including through IW:LEARN and the Country Engagement Strategy in GEF-9), and to refine indicators and guidance for better monitoring of cooperation and socio-economic outcomes, as part of broader GEF-wide efforts. Progress will be tracked through the IEO's Management Action Record.
35. The Council welcomed the report and endorsed its recommendations. Members

underscored the strategic importance of IW in enabling multi-country cooperation across freshwater and marine systems.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 00:48:07 (presentation) | 01:39:42 (Council comments)

### **10. Evaluation of Socioeconomic Co-Benefits of GEF-Funded Interventions & Management Response**

36. The IEO presented an evaluation of socioeconomic co-benefits of GEF-funded projects, focused on the additional positive impacts of a policy or intervention, beyond its primary environmental objectives. The evaluation found substantial evidence that GEF-funded projects contributed to socioeconomic co-benefits alongside environmental and development outcomes, in particular improvements in human and social capital. The IEO recommended clearly defining pathways for generating socioeconomic co-benefits in project design, while identifying potential risks and mitigation measures, promoting the sustainability of co-benefits by strengthening country portfolio coordination, with a central role for the operational focal point and key national stakeholders and tracking co-benefits during project implementation and at completion.

37. In its response, the Secretariat welcomed the evaluation and agreed with all recommendations, noting their alignment with the GEF long-term vision for a Healthy Planet Healthy People. It committed to better reflecting a whole of society approach in project design and results, ensuring that people and communities benefit from and contribute to environmental action.

38. The Council welcomed the report and endorsed its recommendations. Council Members highlighted the need for developing specific guidance on monitoring socioeconomic benefits through a set of indicators without overburdening the monitoring requirements for projects.

39. A Council Member requested the Secretariat to inform Council on progress made to implement recommendation 2 on strengthening the country ownership and recommendation 3 on tracking monitoring of co-benefits.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 01:12:28 (presentation) | 01:39:42 (Council comments)

### **11. Evaluation of GEF Support for Nature Based Solutions & Management Response**

40. The IEO presented the evaluation of GEF Support for Nature Based Solutions. The evaluation reviewed how Nature-based Solutions (NbS), focusing on portfolio, relevance, effectiveness and coherence of simultaneously addressing climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, while offering social and economic co-benefits. The IEO recommended developing NbS-specific guidance for integration, tracking, and adaptive management, scaling private sector engagement through blended finance for NbS, supporting countries in implementing NbS through inclusive capacity building efforts, with a strong emphasis on fostering policy coherence, and strengthening the evidence base on cost-effectiveness and co-benefits of NbS approaches, including by enhancing the integration of Indigenous and local knowledge systems
41. The Secretariat welcomed the evaluation and broadly agreed with all recommendations. It partially agreed with recommendation 1 related to the development of guidance on Nature-based Solutions. Considering that the added value of a GEF-wide theory of change on nature-based solutions was unclear, the GEF Secretariat rather suggested to provide guidance on project-level theories of change. It proposed to incorporate Guidance on NbS in the GEF-9 programming directions currently under discussion by replenishment participants to ensure it is fully embedded within GEF programming. The Secretariat is committed to improving the measurement of socio-economic benefits across the portfolio and exploring ways to more clearly capture and communicate socio-economic benefits of nature-based solution in the forthcoming GEF-9 Results Measurement Framework, particularly as they relate to indigenous peoples and local communities.
42. The Council welcomed the report and endorsed its recommendations. Council Members stressed the need for the integration of NbS and the improvement of monitoring of NbS so that this approach can be more prevalent in GEF-9.
43. Several Council Members highlighted the need to improve capacity building support, multi-stakeholder platforms, and policy coherence to scale up the NbS approach across a broader range of interventions focused on the increased engagement and tailored support for IPLCs to deliver lasting outcomes.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 01:27:29 (presentation) | 01:39:42 (Council comments)

## ***12. FY26 Work Program and Budget of the Independent Evaluation Office***

44. The IEO presented the document on the GEF IEO work program, including the evaluations completed since December 2024: (1) the Annual Performance Report 2025; (2) the Evaluation of GEF Interventions in International Waters; (3) the Evaluation of the

Socioeconomic Co-benefits of GEF-funded Interventions; and (4) the Evaluation of GEF Support for Nature-based Solutions, as well as a Formative Evaluation of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) and the 2025 Annual Evaluation Report of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). The document also included proposed budget for fiscal year 2026, for \$ 7.891 million.

45. The Council welcomed the document. A Council Member asked about the two additional staff that may be required, since the document states that these positions will be accommodated within the overall envelope of the GEF family of funds.

46. The IEO responded that evaluation budget flows from one replenishment to the other, so we will make sure activities continue, and that staff shares costs across funds.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 03:04:52 (presentation) | 03:14:50 (Council comments)

### ***13. Draft Amendments to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Council of the Global Environment Facility***

47. The Secretariat presented the document Draft Amendments to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Council of the Global Environment Facility. It explained that the draft amendments are based on the decision adopted by the UNFCCC COP 29 on the frequency of the communication from the COP to the GEF of any policy guidance approved by the COP concerning the Financial Mechanism.

48. The Council welcomed the document. Several Council Members supported the proposed amendment, mentioning that it will serve as a model for other COP of the other MEAs to consider as well; while other Council Members raised concerns about reducing the timeline and the frequency of the guidance received by the COP.

49. The Secretariat emphasized that the amendment only refers to the guidance provided from the COP to the GEF. The GEF will continue its reporting to the COP on an annual basis.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIsV-UV65zs&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=6>

Minute 03:25:13 (presentation) | 03:37:09 (Council comments)

### ***14. Report of the Selection and Review Committee***

This Agenda item was discussed in Executive Session.

### **15. Report of the Chairperson of the STAP**

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRWGj4k7L-s&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=5>

Minute 00:03:56 (presentation) | 01:03:02 (Council comments)

### **16. Policy Amendments to Streamline the GEF Project Cycle**

50. On behalf of the Council Working Group on the Streamlining Process, the Secretariat introduced the Policy Amendments to Streamline the GEF Project Cycle.

51. Council Members expressed broad support for proposed policy amendments aimed at enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the project cycle. The reforms focus on strengthening quality review mechanisms, ensuring timely submission of projects, and clarifying criteria for dual implementation arrangements.

52. Several Council members commended the direction of the updates, highlighting their potential to reduce bottlenecks and improve delivery standards. Emphasis was placed on maintaining inclusivity, particularly for countries with limited capacity, and ensuring meaningful participation from national institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs). Some Council Members called for practical guidance and flexibility, especially in relation to financial constraints and implementation timelines.

53. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive policy implementation, urging the Secretariat to provide updated guidelines and clear communication to all stakeholders. Concerns were raised about the impact of dual execution roles on accountability, and the need to avoid conflicts of interest in non-grant instruments. Members stressed the importance of continued engagement with local entities to build capacity and ensure fair access to GEF financing. Additional topics included the use of AI for translation to address language barriers and the need for standardized templates to ease reporting burdens—particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The Council adopted the proposed amendments and underscored the importance of monitoring progress through tools like the GEF scorecard, as well as addressing stakeholder feedback in future updates.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHyAkL1AQWM&t=24015s>

Minute 12:00 (presentation) | 23:00 (Council comments)

### **17. GEF Investments and Resource Mobilization: The case of the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN)**

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRfG5D81eZw>

Minute 2:25:25 (presentation) | 3:25:35 (Council comments)

**18. Other Business**

54. The East Asia Constituency welcomed Philippines and Indonesia as part of their Constituency.

55. The Secretariat presented the dates for the 71st and 72nd Council Meetings

56. The Honorable Aziz Abdukhakimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan offered to host the Eighth GEF Assembly and the 71st GEF Council Meeting during the last week of May 2026 in Samarkand, the Council accepted this kind offer.

For details please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRWGj4k7L-s&list=PL3rC5AoFPemX5otBrWNglg0nUxPHfgiWk&index=5>

Minute 03:00:32 (presentation) | 03:18:26 (Council comments)