



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL'S DISCUSSIONS

68TH GEF COUNCIL MEETING

DECEMBER 16-20, 2024

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 01. Opening of the meeting

1. The CEO and Chairperson of the GEF, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, and Mr. Dawda Badgie, Elected Chairperson, opened the 68th GEF Council meeting.

For video recording see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9lZk0JOISl>

Agenda Item 02. Adoption of the Agenda

2. One Council Member requested to exchange views on the STAP information document of the 9th replenishment under Other Business.
3. The Secretariat mentioned that the appointment of the Co-Chair for the year 2025 would be addressed under Other Business.
4. The Agenda was adopted.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/m9lZk0JOISl?t=2203>

Minute 36:43

Agenda Item 03. The GEF Monitoring Report 2024

5. The GEF Secretariat presented the 2024 Monitoring Report, showcasing significant results across biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, sustainable land management, and innovative financing mechanisms. Council members commended the inclusion of comprehensive data, compelling narratives, and localized examples, supported by tools like the GEF Geospatial Platform.

Enhanced engagement with countries and agencies to improve efficiency and effectiveness was also noted.

6. Some council members raised questions regarding the variability of results, both positive and negative, and the persistent challenges in implementation, such as operational delays, low co-financing realization rates, and the timeliness of Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) and Terminal Evaluations (TEs).
7. The integration of a risk appetite framework and increased emphasis on innovation were welcomed. Some Council Members noted the value of highlighting project risk assessment and related mitigation measures for countries. They also expressed interest in ensuring the GEF portfolio moves closer to expressed appetite levels, particularly around the Innovation risk dimension.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/m9lZk0JOISI?t=2366>

Minute 39:26 (presentation) | 52: 11 (Council comments)

Agenda item 04. Work Program for GEF Trust Fund

8. The Secretariat presented the work program requesting a total of \$508.4 million of project financing and \$46.2 million in associated Agency fees for a total Work Program request of \$554.6 million from the GEF Trust Fund. It contains an indicative \$4.15 billion in co-financing, with each dollar of GEF project financing matched by \$8.17 in co-financing provided by other sources, and it had no majors from the STAP review of the Work Program. This brings GEF-8 programming to 70.5% at 62.5% of the GEF-8 cycle timeline.
9. The Council welcomed and supported the ambitious Work Program, expressing strong approval of the high co-finance ratio, which exceeded the goal, as well as the increased involvement of the private sector. The Council also commended the regional balance and geographic reach, and appreciated the significant portfolio of investment on chemicals and waste which is in line with the anticipated rate of programming.
10. A Council Member emphasized the importance of the government's participation in the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) at every stage of the project to ensure alignment with government legislation, priorities, and Country Ownership.
11. Several Council Members expressed their support for the ICI, its direct allocation, and its inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.
12. Some Council Members highlighted the issue of Agency Concentration, while also acknowledging that the share of Multilateral Development Banks was met.
13. Many Council Members supported the Small Grant Program, the innovation window, and the Non-Grant Instrument.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/m9lZk0JOISI?t=8887>

Minute 2:28:07 (presentation) | 2:41:02 (Council comments)

Agenda item 05. *Streamlining the GEF Project Cycle: Report from the Working Group on the Streamlining Process*

14. On behalf of the Council Working Group on the Streamlining Process, the Secretariat introduced the document that serves as a final report, summarizing the outcome of the work to date, including consultation with key stakeholders, and outlining recommendations for actions going forward.
15. The Secretariat explained that the Working Group was established by the Council through Decision 3/2024 to identify measures to further streamline the GEF project cycle, taking into consideration ongoing efforts to enhance harmonization across the climate fund and in consultation with stakeholders such as GEF Agencies, GEF Operational Focal Points (OFPs) and others as appropriate. The Secretariat summarized the work of the Working Group to date and reported on the findings of its consultations with GEF agencies as well as GEF OFPs globally. The Secretariat then laid out a set of proposed streamlining options in line with the stakeholder feedback received.
16. The Council Members who had participated in the Working Group commented on the collaborative process that was followed to elaborate the proposed streamlining measures.
17. The Council expressed appreciation for the Working Group's efforts and the analysis by the Secretariat and welcomed the feedback provided by GEF agencies and OFPs.
18. Many Council members expressed support for the diverse set of proposed measures and efficiency improvements to be implemented by various GEF partners while noting the tradeoffs.
19. In response to questions and clarification requests from several Council members about the roles, timelines and modalities for implementing the proposed measures and associated policy/guidelines updates, the Secretariat revised the document, providing an updated implementation plan for Council consideration, indicating which measures would be implemented without policy amendments, which measures would be presented to Council at its 69th meeting for review and approval for implementation by GEF-9, and which measures would be considered as part of GEF-9 negotiations. This revised version was discussed in a second Council session convened on this topic and was subsequently approved by the Council.

For details please see:

First Council session: <https://youtu.be/Sy4OT92VIGI?t=99>

Minute 1:39 (presentation) | 22:16 (Council comments)

Second Council session: <https://youtu.be/q9jgYh4fyHo?t=145>

Minute 2:24 (presentation) | 7:11 (Council comments)

Agenda item 06. *Report of the Chairperson of the STAP*

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/DOjYQdDaa2A?t=11526>

Minute 3:12:06 (presentation) | 4:03:06 (Council comments)

Agenda item 07. IEO Semi Annual Evaluation Report

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/Sy4OT92VIGI?t=8780>

Agenda item 08. Evaluation of GEF Interventions in the Chemicals and Waste Focal Area and Management Response

20. The IEO presented the evaluation which assessed the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of GEF interventions in the chemicals and waste sector. It examined the alignment of these interventions with international conventions and the needs of participating countries, as well as their consistency with GEF strategies and programming directions. The evaluation provided an analysis of GEF's efforts to reduce pollution from persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and mercury. It also evaluated the design and relevance of recent projects that reflect a strategic shift toward sector-based approaches.
21. The Secretariat welcomed the report and findings and was pleased that the evaluation highlights the GEF's success in reducing hazardous chemicals, particularly in projects targeting PCBs, pesticides, and mercury-added products. The Secretariat also valued that the evaluation stresses the importance of technological innovation aligned with local capacities for long-term sustainability.
22. The Council welcomed the report and its findings and supported its recommendations. The Council also acknowledged the hard work involved, noting that the evaluation provides valuable evidence of the results achieved.
23. Many Council Members emphasized the great relevance of this topic and its importance moving forward into GEF-9.
24. Some Council members suggested a close collaboration to the different Conventions as well as capacity building.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/Sy4OT92VIGI>

Minute 2:54:02 (presentation) | 3:19:40 (Council comments)

Agenda item 09. Evaluation of GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States and Management Response

25. The IEO presented the evaluation which reviewed three major GEF programs in Pacific SIDS and their 19 child projects: Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities (R2R), Climate Proofing Development in the Pacific (CPDP), and Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS). It assessed the evolution of GEF integrated programming, analyzed factors affecting performance, and identified lessons to inform future interventions. The

evaluation built on previous IEO assessments, focusing on improving program design and implementation for enhanced effectiveness and sustainability.

26. The GEF Secretariat welcomed the report and agreed with its findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The evaluation highlights significant progress in GEF's programmatic approaches, leading to better alignment with national priorities, enhanced environmental outcomes, and more inclusive interventions. The Secretariat was pleased that GEF programs in Pacific SIDS are strategically aligned with regional priorities, and appreciated the recognition of knowledge management, innovation, and socio-economic co-benefits contributing to program effectiveness.
27. The Council recognized the GEF progress and impact and encouraged the Secretariat to continue strengthening institutional capacity building while preserving the rich traditional knowledge.
28. Several Council Members recognizing the unique challenges of the Pacific SIDS, supported the inclusion of additional agencies with specific regional knowledge and capacity to deliver programming that meets the area's needs.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/Sy4OT92VIGI?t=14266>

Minute 3:57:46 (presentation) | 4:13:01 (Council comments)

Agenda item 10. Evaluation of Components of the GEF's Results Based Management System and Management Response

29. The IEO introduced the document by highlighting the importance of assessing key aspects of the Results-Based Management (RBM) system, including the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework, the performance of the GEF Portal, self-evaluations, and Monitoring and Evaluation in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCS). It highlighted the report's key recommendations.
30. The Secretariat welcomed the IEO's efforts to assess results measurement and introduced the Management Response, expressing agreement with recommendations to improve the Portal's user-friendliness, enhance project monitoring in FCS, and better track transformational change. The Secretariat noted partial agreement with the recommended approach to improving the tracking of portfolio efficiency. It indicated its intent to implement commitments related to each recommendation as part of the update to the current GEF Results Measurement Framework.
31. The Council welcomed the report and supported its recommendations. Comments underlined the importance of ensuring a timely submission of project Mid-Term Reviews, appreciated the specific guidance developed for FCS and continuous reporting on actual results, and welcomed the Secretariat's commitment to better track system change, as well as to review the set of Core Indicators. A comment was also made enquiring about verification mechanisms in place to confirm the accuracy of reported results.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/Sy4OT92VIGI?t=17655>

Minute 4:54:45 (presentation) | 5:09:01 (Council comments)

Agenda item 11. *Relations with Conventions and Other International Institutions*

32. The Co-chair invited the six Executive Secretaries of the conventions that GEF serves to make interventions.
 - a. **Ms. Astrid Schomaker**, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, briefed the Council on the key outcomes of the CBD COP 16, including on inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and on the establishment of finding arrangements for digital sequence information on genetic resources (DSI).
 - b. **Ms. Noura Hamladji**, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, informed the Council on the key outcomes of the UNFCCC COP 29 on behalf of the Executive Secretary, including on the new collective quantified goal and its relevance to the GEF, as well as perspectives on needs ahead of GEF-9.
 - c. **Mr. Stephen Mathias**, Assistant Secretary General, Acting Legal Counsel of the United Nations, updated the Council on the status of ratification of the Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), and the ongoing work to prepare for the entry into force of the BBNJ agreement. The Assistant Secretary General also informed the council about the progress on the cooperation between the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations and the GEF Secretariat.
 - d. **Mr. Rolph Payet**, Executive Secretary for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, shared his perspectives on the upcoming Stockholm COP 12, including inputs to the GEF-9 replenishment through the ongoing assessment of funding needs.
 - e. **Ms. Monika Stankiewicz**, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, shared her perspectives on the partnership between the Convention and the GEF, appreciated the increased chemicals and waste programming, while noting remaining gaps in GEF-8.
 - f. **Mr. Houtan Bassiri**, Innovative Financing and Partnerships Manager of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), addressed the Council regarding the key outcomes of COP16 on behalf of the Executive Secretary, including on funding needs, and encouraged GEF-9 to continue proactive support to drought resilience.
33. The Council expressed appreciation for the presentations by Executive Secretaries and for the report on Relation with Conventions and other International Organizations. The Executive Secretaries and the GEF Secretariat further responded to Council questions. CSO and IPLC observers also welcomed increased inclusion of IPLCs and CSOs in MEA meetings and GEF pavilions and encouraged further engagement and capacity building in the context of the GEF.
34. The Council closed the session by discussing opportunities for enhancing the role of the GEF council as a platform to discuss challenges expressed by Parties in the meetings of MEAs that the

GEF serves, noting both the comparative advantage of the GEF in pursuing integrated programming across these Conventions and the need to find a balance to answer the specific obligations and priorities Parties are subject to in each of these MEAs. Council members highlighted the need to continue discussing these issues in the context of the GEF-9 replenishment. Council continued to welcome the Multilateral Climate Funds Action Plan on Complementarity and Coherence, with some Council members requesting updates as concrete measures are operationalized.

35. The report on Relations with Conventions and Other International Institutions was adopted without comment.

For video recording please see: <https://youtu.be/DOjYQdDaa2A?t=148>

2:28 (presentation) | 1:03:59 (Council comments)

Agenda item 12. *Strength of the Partnership: Coverage by Agencies*

36. The Secretariat presented an updated analysis of agency coverage aspects of the GEF Partnership, responding to a mandate from the GEF-8 replenishment and Council. Progress was noted, with no single agency exceeding 30% of project approvals across the GEF family of funds under GEF-8 and regional MDBs and IFAD surpassing the 10% notional target. Council noted that some challenges remain, particularly in agency engagement, operational performance, and slower disbursement timelines in SIDS and LDCs.
37. Most Council members supported expanding the GEF Partnership to include new agencies to address agency concentration and improve regional support for SIDS and LDCs. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the agency expansion process is data-driven, with new agencies meeting GEF standards and demonstrating proven effectiveness. Some Council members stressed the importance of addressing gaps not only in SIDS and LDCs but also in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, underscoring the need for equitable access across all regions.
38. The unique challenges faced by SIDS were also highlighted, including access barriers to funding and lower operational and disbursement performance. Recommendations included adopting context-sensitive approaches tailored to specific regional needs, such as programmatic strategies aligned with national priorities, additional budget support mechanisms, fast-tracking approvals, and flexible co-financing thresholds.
39. Some concerns were also raised about the low engagement of MDBs and IFIs. A more in-depth analysis of the root causes behind this trend was recommended, including gathering input from OFPs and other stakeholders. The CSO Chair raised concerns about low engagement with CSOs by some agencies and emphasized the need to analyze weighted averages of agency engagement with CSOs, NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples to better reflect the scale and impact of each agency.
40. In terms of accreditation processes and criteria development, there was a call to explore synergies with peer climate funds, such as inviting agencies accredited by the GCF and AF, to enhance operational efficiencies and avoid duplication.

41. Timelines for presenting accreditation processes and criteria at the June 2025 Council meeting, as well as additional options such as set-asides, incentives, and dedicated outreach programs as part of the GEF-9 package at the first GEF-9 Council meeting, were agreed upon.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/q9jgYh4fyHo?t=1381>

Minute 22:01 (presentation) | 31:35 (Council comments)

Agenda item 13. *GEF-8 Midterm Review on Performance of Full Flexibility*

42. The Council agreed to discuss this Agenda item on its 69th meeting.

Agenda item 14. *Report of the Selection and Review Committee*

43. This Agenda item was discussed in Executive Session.

Agenda item 15. *Ninth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund*

44. The GEF Trustee presented the document outlining the background of replenishments, noting that the GEF Trust Fund is replenished every four years. The Trustee emphasized that the GEF is currently in its eighth replenishment period, which ends on June 30, 2026. To ensure seamless continuation of GEF operations, the Trustee invited the Council to begin discussions on the ninth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund.
45. The Council approved the decision requesting the Trustee, in cooperation with the Secretariat, to initiate the discussions on the ninth replenishment of resources of the GEF Trust Fund.
46. Several Council Members highlighted the critical role of the GEF in addressing the global triple planetary crisis, emphasizing the importance of a collective effort. They also stressed the need for an inclusive process that gives voice to recipient countries and indigenous groups.
47. A Council Member from a donor country encouraged participants to scale up their contributions.
48. A Council Member expressed Uzbekistan's interest in hosting a replenishment meeting or the GEF Assembly.

For details please see: <https://youtu.be/DOjYQdDaa2A?t=16446>

Minute 4:34:06 (presentation) | 4:37:39 (Council comments)

Agenda item 16. *Other business*

49. The Secretariat presented the nomination of Richard Bontjer, Council Member for the Constituency of Australia, New Zealand, and Republic of Korea as Co-Chair for the year 2025.
50. The Council Member who initially requested to discuss the STAP information document related to the 9th replenishment under Other Business noted that this topic was already covered under Agenda item 06, the Report of the Chairperson of the STAP.

For video recording please see: <https://youtu.be/q9jgYh4fyHo?t=8728>

2:25:28 (presentation)