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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY SUPPORT TO THE POST-2020 GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

Note by the Executive Secretary

The Executive Secretary is pleased to circulate herewith, for the information of participants in the second part of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and the concurrent meetings of the Parties to the Protocols to the Convention, a report prepared by the Secretariat of the Global Environment Facility concerning support by the Global Environment Facility to the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The report is presented in the form and language in which it was received by the Secretariat.



**GEF SUPPORT TO THE POST-2020
GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK (GBF)**

November 1, 2022

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GEF-8 REPLENISHMENT SUMMARY

1. For the eighth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-8), 29 countries jointly pledged more than \$5.33 billion towards programming during the upcoming GEF-8 period of July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2026.¹
2. The GEF-8 allocation to the Biodiversity Focal Area is \$1,919 million, representing 36 percent of the total GEF-8 resource envelope. The Biodiversity Focal Area continues to be the largest GEF focal area. Its relative percentage of the GEF funding envelope is increasing from 32 percent in GEF-7 to 36 percent in GEF-8. In absolute terms, it reflects a 49 percent increase in funding allocated to biodiversity compared to the GEF-7 level of \$1.292 million.
3. A minimum of 60 percent of GEF-8 funding commitments will be related to Biodiversity directly and indirectly, as captured by the OECD-DAC Rio Markers.

GEF-7 AND GEF-8 SUPPORT TO THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

GEF-7 Early Action Support to the Global Biodiversity Framework

4. In GEF-7, GEF approved a program of early action grants totaling \$43 million to 138 countries to help countries conduct a rapid review of the alignment of existing national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) with the new Global Biodiversity Framework. The aim of this enabling support is to help countries identify key areas that will need to be updated and refined considering the new global framework and targets. The grants include support to engage key stakeholders in the review process to ensure a whole of society approach and to reduce obstacles in implementation. This review process will aim to ensure continuous implementation of biodiversity goals and targets during and after the review.
5. Activities envisioned in the early action grants include a review and identification of opportunities around policy coherence and biodiversity mainstreaming across national policy, assessments of national monitoring systems, and analyses of biodiversity finance, including possible innovative mechanisms that could help bridge the financial gap. The support for early action is expected to facilitate rapid implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and allow countries to make effective use of the resources provided through the GEF-8 Programming Directions to implement key transformative actions to halt biodiversity loss and restore nature.

¹ GEF, 2-22, *Summary of Negotiations of the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund*, Council Document GEF/C.62/03.

GEF-8 Vision and Theory of Change

6. The vision for GEF-8 is the achievement of a healthy, productive, and resilient environment that underpins the well-being of human societies. This vision is inspired by the fact that challenges facing the planet are intertwined with human development needs. Achieving this vision requires the GEF to anchor its overall approach on a framework that reflects the interdependency between people and the planet. This link between nature, the environment, and human health has been promoted over the past decade around the concept of One Health and embraced by several groups.² The CBD also recognizes this link and the importance of the health of the environment for people's well-being.³ Over the last decade, the multiplicity and complexity of linkages between biodiversity and human health have been increasingly recognized, as reflected in the findings of the State of Knowledge Review on Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health⁴ jointly produced by CBD, WHO, and UNEP. In 2018, the Parties to the CBD welcomed a Guidance on integrating biodiversity considerations into One Health approaches, among other holistic approaches.⁵ In line with decision 14/4, a draft global action plan for biodiversity and health will be considered by the Parties at their 15th conference meeting.⁶ Concurrently, a similar concept of Planetary Health⁷ has been put forward and that expands the interconnections between human health and nature. The mandate and scope of the work of the GEF encompasses all these concepts.

7. The *Healthy Planet, Healthy People* framework helped with the formulation of a Theory of Change outlining the purpose, strategy, impacts, and goals underpinning the GEF vision through 2030 and beyond (Figure 1). The Theory of Change identifies the pervasive environmental challenges confronting the global community, and how the GEF invests to tackle them and generate global environmental benefits. This logic, which has been at the core of the GEF's strategic planning for many years, is further elaborated to acknowledge the urgency to address breakdowns in key economic systems that are exacerbating global environmental threats.

² <https://www.oie.int/en/for-the-media/onehealth/>

³ <https://www.cbd.int/health/>

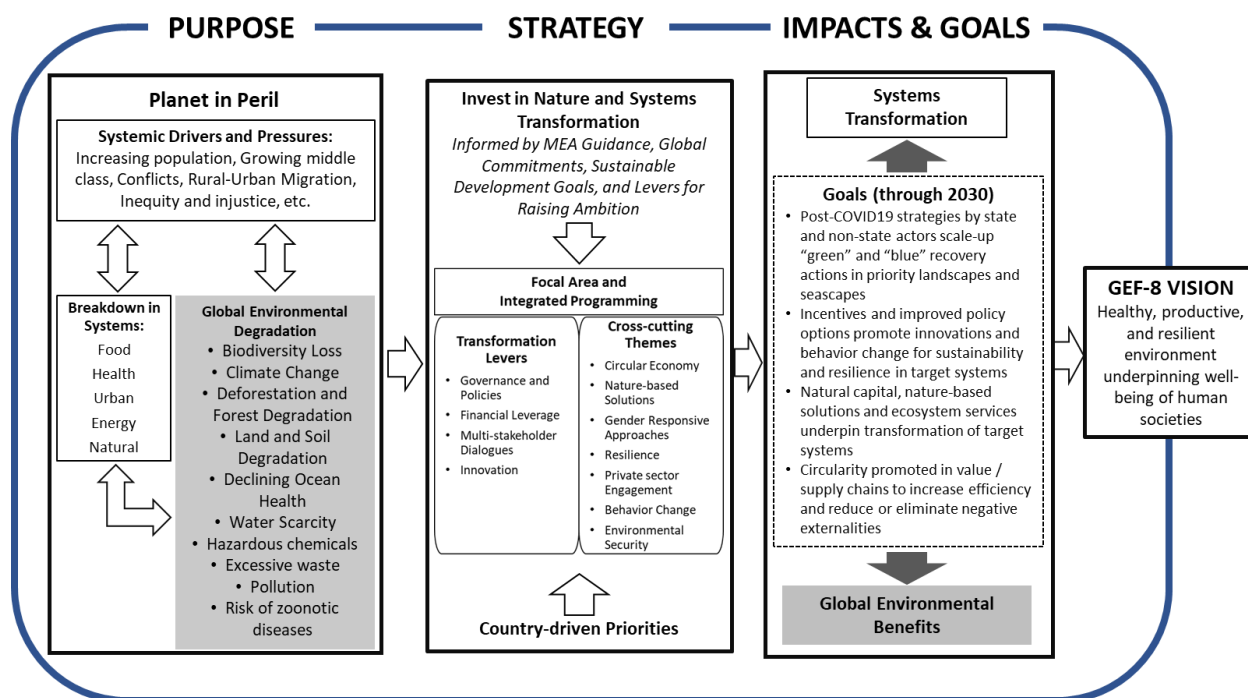
⁴ <https://www.cbd.int/health/SOK-biodiversity-en.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/501c/4df1/369d06630c901cd02d4f99c7/sbstta-21-09-en.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/76f9/1b75/42e360ab3ae6e53d0762c449/sbstta-24-09-en.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/>

Figure 1. GEF-8 Theory of Change



GEF-8 Programming Architecture

8. The GEF-8 programming framework builds on the successful dual approach in GEF-7 of investing in integrated programming and associated focal area specific projects. In GEF-8, we will provide countries with the opportunity to continue programming through large-scale, integrated programs that address most of the major environmental needs of the planet for which the GEF has a mandate. Eleven Integrated Programs will deliver global environmental benefits across multiple focal areas, and this will be complemented by focal area specific investments for priorities that are best suited to single focal area investments.

9. The GEF-8 programming architecture as depicted in Figure 2. below provides a comprehensive investment strategy of direct relevance to the goals and ambitions of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Figure 2. GEF-8 Programming Architecture



GEF-8 Biodiversity Strategy

10. The goal of the GEF-8 biodiversity focal area strategy is globally significant biodiversity conserved, sustainably used, and restored. To achieve this goal, the strategy will support the following three objectives:

- (a) To improve conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of natural ecosystems;
- (b) To effectively implement the Cartagena and Nagoya protocols; and
- (c) To increase mobilization of domestic resources for biodiversity.

11. The GEF-8 strategy builds on GEF’s successful experiences in providing catalytic financing as well as planning and implementation support in a country-driven manner. The strategy also responds to the objectives of the CBD and its Protocols including CBD-relevant objectives of other biodiversity-related multilateral instruments/agreements, thereby promoting mutually supportive implementation and programmatic synergies amongst these instruments/agreements.

12. Several priority activities will be supported with Biodiversity Focal Area set-aside resources in the GEF-8 period.

Enabling Activities

- Support will be quickly and efficiently provided to all GEF-eligible countries at the start of GEF-8 to revise their NBSAP (consistent with forthcoming COP guidance) with a view to align them with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and to ensure that national policies are also aligned with the Framework. This support to NBSAP revision will build on the GEF-7 Early Action Grants which provided \$43 million to 138 countries to begin the process of reviewing and aligning with the GBF their national biodiversity targets, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), policy frameworks, monitoring frameworks and identifying the finance needed to implement the GBF. Support will be provided to produce the National Report to the CBD as well as national reporting obligations under the Cartagena Protocol and Nagoya Protocol identified during upcoming COPs and COP-MOPs.

Inclusive Conservation Initiative

- In GEF-7, the GEF supported a pilot Inclusive Conservation Initiative to help improve IPLC stewardship of over 9 million hectares in areas of high biodiversity importance which will lead to the mitigation of 141 million tCO₂e.
- Given the great potential to generate biodiversity and other global environment benefits through supporting IPLCs and a strong demand for this support, the GEF-8 strategy will provide additional resources for the Inclusive Conservation Initiative. The GEF's Independent Evaluation Office, STAP, and the GEF's Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Group have all made recommendations that larger volumes of GEF resources be made available for IPLCs to enable them to continue to realize their role as stewards of the global environment.

Other Global Programs

- The focal area set aside will also support the Global Program on Resource Mobilization described under objective three and the development of domestic resource mobilization/national biodiversity finance plans. The GEF will also consider funding work to support countries on establishing policy coherence across different sectors to better deliver sound environmental practices, as well as narrow the financial gap for nature.

GEF-8 Integrated Programs

13. Eleven Integrated Programs (IPs) form part of the GEF-8 Programming Directions and strongly complement the GEF-8 biodiversity strategy (see Table 1). The IPs cover a wide array of thematic areas of direct relevance to the CBD and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

and provide opportunities to address the key underlying drivers of biodiversity loss in comprehensive and integrated ways.

Table 1. GEF-8 Integrated Programs

GEF-8 Integrated Program	Program Goal
Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes	Maintaining the integrity of the globally important tropical forests.
Wildlife Conservation for Development	Conserve wildlife and landscapes by transforming the drivers of species loss and ensuring that countries and communities are benefiting from these natural assets.
Blue and Green Islands	Demonstrate the transformational potential of incorporating the value of nature into decision-making and using innovative Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to achieve development and MEA goals and address SIDS challenges related to food security, climate change mitigation and adaptation and reduction of hazardous chemical pollution.
Ecosystem Restoration	Restore degraded landscapes and generate multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits through an integrated approach.
Food Systems	Catalyze the transformation to sustainable food systems that are nature positive, resilient, and pollution-reduced.
Net Zero Nature Positive Accelerator	Accelerate implementation of nature-positive, net-zero pathways by investing in nature and new technologies.
Clean and Healthy Oceans	Contribute to a sustainable blue economy by curbing the inflow of land-based-pollution into the coastal environment of countries situated along the coasts of the world’s Large Marine Ecosystems.
Greening Transportation Infrastructure	Enable countries to meet transportation infrastructure needs and the economic and social benefits critical to the SDGs and Paris Agreement goals.
Sustainable Cities	Advance integrated and systems-based approaches towards building net-zero carbon, nature-positive, inclusive and climate resilient cities.
Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains	Significantly reduce or eliminate the environmental degradation caused by globally significant supply chains, with a focus on fashion and construction.
Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution	Catalyze circular economy approaches to reduce plastic production, consumption, and disposal focusing on packaging, particularly single-use related to the food and beverage sector.

14. The IPs that are *most directly relevant* to the CBD and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework include are summarized below.

15. The objective of the **Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program** is the conservation and effective governance of critical forest biomes. The program will focus specifically on the Amazon and Congo Basin but also target other biologically important regions such as Indo-Malaya, Meso-America, and Western Africa. The Program aims to maintain the integrity of the globally important critical tropical forests to maximize multiple global environment benefits related to carbon and biodiversity. This IP will increase and strengthen the protection and governance of intact forest landscapes, tackling the drivers of deforestation

and forest degradation at jurisdictional or landscape level. Beyond the protected areas, it will be important to consider other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).⁸

16. The objective of the **Wildlife Conservation for Development Integrated Program** is to conserve wildlife and landscapes by transforming the drivers of species loss and ensuring that countries and communities are benefiting from these natural assets. The program will support countries to secure terrestrial, freshwater and marine wildlife⁹ populations and key landscapes through an integrated approach to combat the illegal and high-risk¹⁰ consumption and trade by addressing key elements of the supply chain (poaching, trafficking and demand); and it will support strategies for the coexistence of human and wildlife populations through landscape-level conservation and by managing human-wildlife conflict, while incorporating a new focus on zoonotic spillover risk reduction by promoting control and proper regulation of wildlife trade and unsustainable wildlife exploitation for non-trade purposes. The program is designed to achieve results across multiple sectors including in the conservation of globally important biodiversity (species and landscape conservation and sustainable use); land degradation (restoration of key wildlife habitats); climate change (GHG avoidance through habitat conservation); and human-wildlife health (reduce risk of zoonotic spillover from wildlife into humans, livestock, or domestic animals).

17. The objective of the **Blue and Green Islands Integrated Program** is to apply Nature-based Solutions in key ecosystems that support socio-economic development in SIDS countries. This will place nature at the center of human well-being and generate multiple global and local environmental and societal benefits. The program will support: (a) accounting and valuing of ecosystems, strengthening policy coherence, and domestic public and private sector resource mobilization; and (b) promote landscape level solutions related to 3 key sectors for the SIDS context: tourism, food-fisheries/agriculture, urban development. The integrated nature of the program and the Nature-based Solutions approach will provide an avenue to support countries to meet their commitments and targets under multiple MEAs.

18. The objective of the **Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program** is to implement integrated approaches for restoration of degraded ecosystems which will generate multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits. The IP will support biophysical and technical interventions and complement them with investments on improving and strengthening national policies, governance, institutional, financial, and local social structures. The program provides a means for countries to meet many of the restoration targets that countries have incorporated within their strategies for implementation of the UNCBD, the UNCCD and the

⁸ The CBD has defined “OECMs” as “A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values” (CBD Decision 14/8).

⁹ Includes marine, freshwater and terrestrial wildlife, excludes IUU fishing and timber. Note that sustainably harvested NTFPs can be included in Wildlife-based Economies and Sustainable Diversified Livelihoods activities.

¹⁰ High-risk from a zoonotic transmission perspective, could be legal or illegally traded wildlife species.

Paris Agreement. The benefits of restoration of land, ecosystems and forests include an increase in vegetation cover and biodiversity, and carbon sequestration and mitigation.

19. The objective of the **Food Systems Integrated Program** is to catalyze the transformation to sustainable food systems that are nature positive, resilient, and pollution reduced. The IP will seek to reduce environmental degradation and negative externalities in food production systems (food crops, commercial commodities, livestock, and aquaculture) and on the demand side across supply chains. This will generate Global Environmental Benefits for climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, land degradation and water resources, and contribute to food security, livelihood and climate resilience, and better health and nutrition.

20. The objective of the **Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator Integrated Program** is to accelerate implementation of nature positive, net-zero pathways by investing in nature and new technologies. The program will support countries to develop and implement integrated solutions to reach the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. Actions supported by this IP will include (i) investments in new technologies for sectors like energy and transportation, (ii) investments in sustainable land use and conservation actions and (iii) investments in nature-based solutions across all sectors. Taken together, these intervention can support the implementation of effective decarbonization strategies. The program responds directly to the need to speed up the pace of decarbonization efforts and is directly linked to the ultimate goal of the Paris Agreement. The program is specifically designed to fully incorporate biodiversity and land degradation goals into climate mitigation and net-zero planning and investments.

21. The objective of the **Clean and Healthy Ocean Integrated Program** is to address hypoxic zones by curbing coastal pollution from agricultural, industrial, and municipal sources through infrastructure investments combined with NbS. By limiting inflow of untreated wastewater into the coastal zone, the coastal ecosystem will become richer in biodiversity, which will lead to expansion of the local livelihood opportunities, as coastal ecosystem integrity and resilience increases. The potential of deploying NbS for wastewater treatment will provide entry points for local anchoring, engagement, and economic opportunities. Curbing wastewater flow to the ocean will improve marine habitat important for biodiversity. In addition, preventing run-off from agriculture and cleaning wastewater from municipal and industry sources will directly cut the amount of released methane and nitrous oxide.

22. The objective of the **Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development Integrated Program** is to enable countries to develop portfolios of transportation infrastructure projects at national or land/seascape levels that build in sustainability from inception. The program seeks to ensure that transportation infrastructure projects will emphasize the incremental biodiversity, avoided land degradation, and climate change mitigation benefits and outcomes that the IP aspires to achieve through, inter alia, (i) avoiding placing infrastructure in critical ecosystems (ii) biodiversity restoration around the right of way of a road, (iii) maintaining flows / connectivity for fluvial transport; (iv) maintaining or enhancing wildlife crossings or other natural infrastructure to increase connectivity and facilitate the movement of animals. Key global environmental benefits to be achieved by the program include: a) biodiversity

conservation through conservation of key habitats, maintenance of ecological connectivity, and reduction of negative impacts, including wildlife mortality from transportation infrastructure installations; b) Nature-based planning would avoid placing built infrastructure in areas critical for maintaining biodiversity, and where avoidance is not entirely possible, ensure that critical habitats and ecosystem connectivity are maintained; and c) reducing GHG emissions linked to land degradation and deforestation and unsustainable building materials and practices.

23. The objective of the **Sustainable Cities Integrated Program** is to strengthen institutional capacity to move towards building net zero carbon, nature positive, inclusive and climate resilient cities. The program will enable cities to deliver multiple global environmental benefits including climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, reduced land degradation and reduction of chemicals and waste. The program will place a strong emphasis on integrated land use planning both within cities as well as surrounding ecosystems, support institutional coordination at multiple levels, and catalyze integrated approaches to scale up innovative sustainability solutions. It will also focus on urban priorities including the reduction of plastic and air pollution as key co-benefits.

Contributions of Small Grants Programme to the GBF in GEF-8

24. As an overarching approach, GEF has strived, over the last two replenishment periods to direct its SGP core financing to priority geographical areas. These investments at the landscape and seascape level have promoted community-based and multi-stakeholder governance approaches and efforts that harnessed traditional knowledge, supported innovation, and opportunities for constructive knowledge sharing. Moving forward, building lessons learned in GEF-7, five strategic initiatives are envisaged to be strengthened and further developed in GEF-8:

1. ***Community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species:*** SGP would continue to support conservation and sustainable use, including engaging and supporting local CSOs and CBOs in the management of protected areas and corridors, forest landscapes, integrated river-basins, and large marine ecosystems, as well as mainstreaming biodiversity in key production sectors. This would include support to territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities and to CSOs and CBOs in the management and co-management of other private and public protected areas. These priorities are consistent with the GEF-8 ambition and proposed Integrated Programs outlined in the GEF-8 strategy.
2. ***Sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security:*** SGP would continue to support community-driven initiatives across production landscapes/seascapes to enhance the sustainability and productivity of priority socio-ecological systems, with a focus on food staples and commodities, livestock, and aquaculture. These initiatives could support the application of agroecological, regenerative, and biodiversity friendly principles and practices based on traditional knowledge and agronomic/agroecological science.

3. **Low-Carbon Energy Access and Co-Benefits:** Building on SGP experience in supporting affordable clean energy in remote areas and vulnerable communities, SGP would seek to scale up low carbon transformation by de-risking private sector investment and supporting innovation and adoption of cutting-edge technologies relevant to the community context, including energy access for health services and digital technologies.
4. **Local to Global Coalitions for Chemicals and Waste Management:** SGP would continue to support actions to benefit local communities in rural and urban areas enduring threats from chemicals and waste, either as users or consumers, through innovative, affordable, and practical solutions to chemical and waste management, including plastics and e-waste management, supported by existing multi-stakeholder platforms and partners.
5. **Catalyzing Sustainable Urban Solutions:** SGP would continue to pilot activities to target vulnerable people and communities in the urban context, promoting an integrated management approach through public-private partnerships. This would include support to low-emission and resilient urban development such as waste and chemical management, energy, transport, watershed protection in rural hinterlands through compensatory ecosystem services arrangements, restoration corridors, and biodiversity conservation.

GEF-8 COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

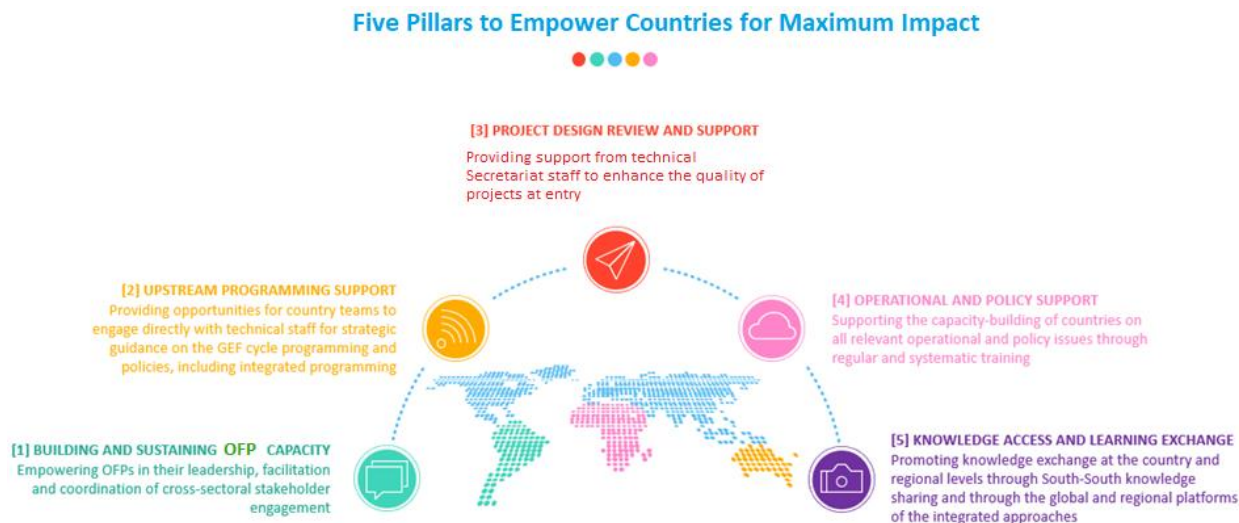
25. The GEF-8 Country Engagement Strategy (CES) aims at providing an expanded and coordinated approach to the GEF's efforts to empower countries and address critical needs to help them achieve impactful outcomes with GEF resources. At its core, the Strategy will ensure recipient countries have the capacity and knowledge to lead strategic decisions on global environmental priorities. The Country Engagement Strategy is therefore expected to help countries achieve lasting, sustainable, and impactful global environmental outcomes.

26. Through a coordinated approach, the CES intends to empower countries in the ownership of their portfolios, and in turn, maximize the impact of GEF resources. Its strategic priorities are:

1. Enhancing the capacity of recipient countries to make informed and impactful strategic decisions on the use of GEF resources, and
2. Sustaining the impact of GEF resources at the country level, towards globally relevant targets, outcomes, impact, and sustainability.

27. To deliver on its ambitious strategic priorities, the CES is organized around five pillars (Figure 3):

Figure 3. The GEF-8 Country Engagement Strategy



1. Building and Sustaining the Capacity of Operational Focal Points and Recipient Countries' Stakeholders

28. Empowering OFPs individually and within their respective governance structure, including when supported by National Steering Committees,¹¹ in their leadership, facilitation, coordination and oversight role is critical to the success of GEF projects and programs in countries. Building the capacity and continuously supporting OFPs will (i) enable OFPs to efficiently manage their GEF portfolio through the project identification, design and execution phases, (ii) enhance policy coherence at the country level, and (iii) play a synergistic role in mainstreaming global environmental considerations through all sectors.

2. Upstream Programming Support

29. At the request of countries, upstream consultation missions will be coordinated. These missions will provide opportunities for OFPs and their teams to engage with the Secretariat's technical staff prior to making decisions on GEF programming using the GEF Trust Fund and using the LDCF/SCCF Trust Funds for activities on adaptation to climate change. The objective of these country-led and demand-driven consultations, both in-person and through follow-up meetings, is (i) to help countries gain an in-depth understanding of the GEF-8 Programming Directions including Integrated Programs and Focal Area strategies, and (ii) to provide strategic guidance on the GEF cycle programming elements and policies, and (iii) to initiate a process of strategic portfolio development and upstream support that will set the foundation for achieving

¹¹ The renewed CSP for GEF-8 envisages broadening countries' engagement by encouraging the establishment of National Steering Committees based on successful experiences.

GEF-8 goals. GEF focal area staff will support through upstream portfolio-level review and feedback based on set-criteria per GEF-8 priorities and targets. Engagement and support for GEF portfolio development is aimed at ensuring a strategic, high-impact and cohesive set of GEF investments as opposed to a project-by-project approach that results in the fragmented use of GEF resources and is aligned with OPS7 recommendations. These interactions are geared towards producing a GEF country portfolio of eligible projects that are ambitious, relevant, coherent, and impactful.

3. Project Design Review and Support

30. Once the priority projects and programs have been agreed on by countries, the Secretariat will provide support from technical Secretariat staff covering all focal areas to enhance the quality of projects at entry, along with the chosen implementing agencies. From concept development to formal project submission and review/clearance, dedicated staff will work with GEF Agencies and OFP teams on providing (i) guidance on eligibility criteria, scope, and impact, and (ii) more detailed comments once the project is submitted for funding consideration. These efforts will improve the overall project review cycle and ensure an efficient overall process, covering all technical, policy, and operational aspect of all projects and programs.

4. Operational and Policy Support

31. As major stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries of the GEF Partnership, recipient countries must be kept abreast of all operational and policy issues that are relevant to their effective participation throughout the replenishment cycle. Regular and systematic capacity building and support will provide OFPs and countries' stakeholders with the knowledge needed to strengthen their capacity to work with the GEF Agencies and other executing partners during project implementation.

5. Knowledge and Learning Exchange

32. Knowledge sharing is an essential element of country empowerment. To further advance knowledge-sharing and help strengthen partnerships on the ground among stakeholders, the GEF will expand its activities for sharing best practices and lessons learned on relevant topics with key stakeholders engaged in GEF events. OFPs will lie at the center of these exchanges, through a Community of Practice that will enable South-South, trans-continental dialogue, for intensive and strategic knowledge sharing on best practices and challenges, including open exchanges on design, implementation, successes/failures, sustainability, co-financing, specific unplanned issues and their resolutions, any challenges with GEF Agencies, and feedback to the Secretariat. Knowledge and learning exchange will also be promoted through the global and regional platforms of the Integrated Programs. These platforms convene yearly meetings of all practitioners of a particular program to discuss technical issues that advance the goal of the Integrated Program.

IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY IN GEF-8 OPERATIONS

33. Seeking improved effectiveness and efficiency of GEF business processes has been a continuous endeavor. Numerous policy and operational changes have been deployed to enhance project development and implementation. Over the last 15 years, these improvements led to a 65% reduction of the average time from first submission of a project concept to the first disbursement of the corresponding GEF project financing to the recipient. Key elements of the changes introduced in GEF 7 are summarized below.

Strengthening Country Capacity

34. In GEF-7, the Country Support Program supported country capacity and leadership in utilizing GEF resources, including through holding 63 Constituency Meetings, 39 National Dialogues, 12 Expanded Constituency Workshops, as well as 4 thematic workshops and 3 introduction Seminars bringing together multiple countries and stakeholders.

35. The GEF-8 Strategy contains a Comprehensive Country Engagement Strategy whose objective is to ensure the maximum impact in the use of GEF resources by supporting countries in their individual contributions to the delivery of Global Environmental Benefits.

Project Review Process

36. During GEF-7, on average, it took a month and a half from PIF submission (project concept stage) to CEO clearance for both full- and medium-sized projects. The CEO directly approved Medium-sized projects, while the Council approved Full-sized projects.

37. The process was streamlined in GEF-7 through an online Portal and is transparent with information published on the GEF website, allowing for comments from countries, agencies, and convention secretariats. Once submitted, it takes 4.5 months on average for the Secretariat and Agencies to clear PIF-approved projects as ready for implementation (CEO Endorsement).

38. In collaboration with STAP and the GEF agencies, the GEF-8 project, and program templates have been further streamlined to improve the quality and relevance of the project information required and to reduce the burden on countries.

Improved Consistency of GEF Policies Within the GEF System

39. During GEF-7 in 2018, the GEF Council adopted policies to ensure strong stakeholder engagement, a focus on gender equality and the involvement of the private sector to improve delivery of global environmental benefits. A coherent set of policies, systems and tracking mechanisms underpin the goal of delivering environmental results on time and with quality. The efficiency measures set in 2018 are the cornerstone of the approach. They include a focus on enhancing operational speed, value for money and efficiency.

Supporting Countries to Disburse GEF-7 Resources in the COVID-19 Context

40. GEF-7 projects are already being implemented on the ground with 532 projects, or 72% of all GEF-7 projects, provided with the go-ahead for implementation as of September 2022. It is noteworthy that GEF-7 resources have been committed at a fast pace, including 94% of country STAR allocations, despite a context marked by the pandemic and mobility restrictions.

41. Since 2020, all projects submitted to and approved by Council include an assessment of potential impact on implementation due to COVID-19 and potential contributions of GEF investments to Blue and Green recovery plans of countries.

42. The disbursement ratio of GEF investments remains high, at 20 percent in fiscal year 2021. On average projects can disburse resources in full within about five years.

Improved Transparency and Accountability

43. During GEF-7 several measures were employed to improve transparency and accountability on the use and implementation of GEF resources. Country factsheets are made available directly to countries to allow them to track the use and implementation of resources.

44. The GEF Corporate Scorecard, upon which some of the GEF's COP report is based, serves as the accountability mechanism to ensure resources of the ongoing GEF phase are appropriately and effectively used in regions and country groups. In addition, the Annual Monitoring Report tracks the performance and the quality of the portfolio of projects under implementation, through metrics in the Portfolio Scorecard. The GEF continued to report in a transparent way on project progress through regular publication on the International Aid Transparency Initiative standard.

IMPROVED TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

45. During GEF-7 several measures were employed to improve transparency and accountability on the use and implementation of GEF resources. The GEF continued to report in a transparent way on project progress through regular publication on the International Aid Transparency Initiative standard. In its recently released report, "Corruption-free climate finance: Strengthening multilateral funds", Transparency International rated the GEF as the best performing fund in the climate space on policy coverage and transparency as depicted below.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF FUNDS' POLICY COVERAGE*

*Green (generally satisfactory); yellow (room for improvement); orange (significant action required).

Governance Area	AF	CIF	GEF	GCF	CAFI
Integrity					
Ethics and conflicts of interest	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Financial management	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Anti-money-laundering due diligence	Green	Green	Green	Green	Orange
Integrity requirements for IEs	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow
Accountability					
Complaints-handling mechanism or anti-corruption hotline	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Appealing/requesting explanations for governing body decisions	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Orange
Sanctions against IEs for fraud and corruption	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Stakeholder engagement	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Accountability requirements for IEs	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Transparency					
Fund-level information disclosure	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow
Information accessibility via websites	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Information disclosure policy requirement for IEs	Yellow	Green	Green	Orange	Orange
Methods for identifying policy effectiveness					
Policies and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Action taken to review policy effectiveness	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Orange
Requirements for IEs to review policy effectiveness	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow