



GEF CSO Network

Statement on Agenda 09 : [Evaluation of International Waters Focal Area & Management Response](#)

69th GEF Council, June 2025

The GEF CSO Network welcomes the **Independent Evaluation of the International Waters (IW) Focal Area**. We recognize the IW focal area's critical role in advancing transboundary cooperation and delivering global environmental benefits across marine and freshwater systems. The evaluation highlights key achievements, including improved project performance, strengthened knowledge management, and commendable progress in gender inclusion and stakeholder engagement. However, we wish to highlight several areas of concern and priority for further action:

1. Transboundary Focus and Integration

The IW mandate for transboundary cooperation must remain central, even as the GEF moves toward integrated, multi-focal area approaches. We urge the Council to ensure that integration does not dilute the core focus on collective action and cooperation across borders—particularly in high-risk basins, aquifers, and coastal zones that require sustained multilateral engagement.

2. Coverage of High-Risk Water Bodies

The evaluation identifies critical gaps in IW project coverage, particularly in relation to groundwater systems and the most at-risk transboundary water bodies. We call for an expansion of GEF support to these underrepresented areas, guided by robust risk assessments and community vulnerability indicators.

3. Addressing Water Hazards and Contamination in Developing Countries

Communities in developing countries face acute challenges related to water pollution, unsafe wastewater discharge, and hazardous contaminants. These issues are often compounded by weak regulatory enforcement and inadequate infrastructure. We urge the GEF to:

- Prioritize projects that address waterborne hazards and contamination at the community level;
- Support safe wastewater management and decentralized treatment solutions;
- Strengthen safeguards and monitoring systems to prevent cross-border pollution impacts.

These threats pose serious risks to public health, biodiversity, and development outcomes. They must be addressed with urgency, equity, and inclusion at the heart of IW programming.

In conclusion, the CSO Network stands ready to support the GEF in strengthening the International Waters focal area. We urge the Council to adopt the evaluation's recommendations and to ensure that civil society voices remain central in shaping future strategies, tracking progress, and fostering innovation—for the benefit of people, ecosystems, and our shared planet.