



GEF CSO Network

Statement on Agenda 06 : [Evaluation of Food Systems Integrated Program & Management](#) [Response](#)

70th GEF Council Meeting, December 2025

The GEF CSO Network welcomes the IEO evaluation of GEF food systems programs. The report reflects what many CSOs see on the ground: food systems sit at the center of deforestation, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water stress, and climate impacts. It also shows that integrated programs can deliver real environmental and social results when they are well designed.

At the same time, the evaluation points to persistent structural gaps, particularly around governance, power dynamics, and implementation, that risk limiting the transformative potential of food systems programming.

As the GEF moves toward GEF-9, we suggest a small number of practical refinements focused on implementation.

1. From consultation to participation: Civil society, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities are often consulted. Far less often, they are part of decisions. This weakens ownership and accountability.
Refinement: Future food systems programs should bring CSOs and IPLCs into governance, national coordination, and monitoring structures, with resources to support their ongoing role.

2. Land tenure and rights matters: The evaluation rightly points to gaps in political economy analysis. On the ground, insecure land tenure and weak recognition of customary rights remain major barriers. In practice, limited attention to power relations, incentives, and conflicts continues to constrain transformation.

Refinement: Political economy and risk analyses should more systematically assess land tenure, customary rights, gender equity, and access to grievance mechanisms at design stage.

3. Protect smallholders in market approaches : Food systems programs are increasingly linked to value chains, standards, and trade rules. These can help. They can also exclude smallholders or shift costs onto them.

Refinement: Where market or trade oriented approaches are used, safeguards are needed to ensure smallholder inclusion, fair benefit sharing, and support for compliance costs.

4. Coordination needs resources: The evaluation notes that coordination budgets are shrinking while programs grow larger and more complex. This is a real risk. It also highlights a gap between program level design and what is delivered on the ground, reinforced by monitoring systems focused on short term outputs.

Refinement: As food systems programming is shaped for GEF-9, coordination budgets should match program ambition and clearly resource cross-sector linkage, civil society engagement, and adaptive management.