



GEF CSO Network

Programming Directions – Introduction & Plenary

GEF-9 Replenishment (Third Meeting), January 19-20, 2026

The GEF CSO Network acknowledges the substantial effort undertaken to revise the Programming Directions. We appreciate the growing recognition of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities (IPLCs), women, and youth as essential partners in achieving a Healthy Planet, Healthy People.

We strongly welcome several key additions that align with our previous recommendations:

IPOs as Executing Partners: We applaud the expanded recognition of Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) as executing partners in GEF projects, as noted in the Preamble and Paragraph 327. This is a vital step toward mainstreaming IPLC leadership across the portfolio.

Digital Tech Accelerator: The Network enthusiastically supports the inclusion of a digital tech accelerator, which may be supported through the CSO Challenge Program, as referenced in Paragraph 516. This initiative can empower local innovators to develop low-cost digital tools for monitoring and safeguarding their own ecosystems, while building links between community-led innovation and rapidly evolving global technological systems. We echo Germany's position that technological innovation must be mainstreamed, especially beyond the Small Grants Programme and embedded across the wider GEF portfolio.

The Bioeconomy: We welcome the inclusion of bioeconomy projects in Paragraph 319, which offers a nature-positive pathway for inclusive development and Indigenous livelihoods.

On Formalizing Decision-Making Power in National Steering Committees (NSCs)

While we welcome the progress toward a "Whole of Society" approach, we remain concerned by the language in Paragraph 462, which states that the participation of IPLCs, CSOs, women, and youth will be "encouraged" in the development of National Steering Committees (NSCs) and consultative platforms. As we have stated previously, encouragement is not a substitute for formal inclusion. To ensure accountability and meaningful partnership, we request that formal seats be granted to civil society and IPLC representatives on these committees.

On Addressing Resource Shortfalls (SGP and ICI)

We must emphasize that the current financial commitments for local action remain insufficient to meet the scale of the environmental crisis:



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SGP Funding: We are concerned that the proposed financing for the Small Grants Program (SGP) remains nearly identical to GEF-8 levels, representing a reduction in real terms. We reiterate our call for an ambitious commitment of at least USD 360 million to ensure the SGP can effectively lead bottom-up action.

ICI Scaling: While we are excited that the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) reaches USD 100 million in the highest replenishment scenario, We echo the UK, Australia and Finland, that this should be viewed as a baseline, and be applied to all scenarios highlighting investment required to support community-led conservation at scale.

An ambitious GEF-9 replenishment is only possible if it provides adequate resources and formalized roles for the whole of society. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure these Programming Directions reflect a true partnership that delivers both equity and results.