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Agenda Item 10

**EIGHTH COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE GEF - (OPS8)
APPROACH PAPER**

(Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, having reviewed Document GEF/ME/C.58/02, "Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8): Approach Paper," approves this approach paper. The Council requests the Independent Evaluation Office to conduct the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation (OPS8) and to provide the evaluation report to the replenishment process and to the Council according to the schedule presented.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	civil society organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IAP	integrated approach pilot
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
OPS	comprehensive evaluation (formerly overall performance study)
RBM	results-based management
REDD	reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
SCCE	strategic country cluster evaluation
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SGP	Small Grants Programme
SIDS	Small island developing states
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
UN	United Nations

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Beginning with the First Overall Performance Study (OPS1) in 1998, the replenishment negotiations for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) have been informed by an independent comprehensive evaluation of its progress and performance.¹ Accordingly, in advance of the ninth replenishment, the Eighth Comprehensive Evaluation of the GEF (OPS8) will be undertaken by the GEF's Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Like its predecessors, OPS8 will provide a crucial evidence base for guiding negotiations for GEF-9. Its intended audience includes replenishment meeting participants, the GEF Council, the GEF Assembly, members of the GEF partnership, external stakeholders, and various civil society groups and academic institutions. Findings will be disseminated through multiple channels including workshops, webinars, and the IEO website. It is expected that the report will be presented at the GEF replenishment meeting in October 2025. Subsequently, it will serve as a working document for the GEF Council in December 2025 and will be formally presented at the next GEF Assembly in 2026.

2. This approach paper outlines a roadmap for the preparation of OPS8, aiming to define the range and scope of inputs into the study and to facilitate constructive dialogue within the GEF and among its partner agencies around the evaluation. OPS8 will particularly focus on two interconnected themes: (1) the GEF strategy, institutional issues, and programming; and (2) GEF performance, impact, and sustainability, drawing on evaluations conducted by the IEO, and evidence collected by the evaluation units within the GEF Agencies. OPS8 is designed to evaluate the outcomes and insights derived from OPS7, monitor the progress achieved on OPS7 recommendations, and assess the advancement in implementing the GEF-8 Strategy and Programming Directions. OPS8 will encapsulate its primary findings and main conclusions, present an assessment of the overall competitive advantage of the GEF within the contemporary environmental and economic context, and develop strategic recommendations for consideration by the replenishment group.

3. Preparation of this approach paper has involved a consultative process with numerous stakeholder groups, including the GEF Secretariat, GEF Council members, the GEF Agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and country focal points. The preparation of the approach paper was also guided by an external panel of experts comprising Monika Weber-Fahr, Patricia Rogers, Stefan Schwager, Vinod Thomas, and Hasan Tuluy, who will advise the IEO team through the preparation of the report.

4. The paper begins with a summary sketch of the environmental and economic trends that form the backdrop for GEF-9, situating the GEF in the economic realities pertaining in a post-COVID world. It is within this context, and to acknowledge these realities, that OPS8 is being undertaken. Section 2 digs deeper into this context from the GEF's perspective, looking at the coverage and considerations of GEF-8. Section 3 details how OPS8 will look at the work performed during the replenishment period, setting out the key focus areas and evaluation questions, along with sources of evaluative evidence; Section 4 discusses the methodological considerations and limitations.

¹ See annex 1 for a summary of the evolution of the GEF OPSs.

II. SECTION 1: CONTEXT FOR OPS8: ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS

5. The GEF's ninth replenishment will occur within an extraordinarily challenging context. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the world is in social and economic recovery mode, necessitating a delicate balance between stimulating economic growth and addressing systemic vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis. This has imposed substantial limitations on available finance for international efforts to progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, inflationary pressures, tightening monetary policies, the imminent threat of recession in major economies, and the persistent occurrence of extreme weather events contribute to continued pressure on global economic growth overall. This burden is even more pronounced in the least developed countries and countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence, amplifying their economic challenges.

6. Compounding the major challenges of COVID recovery, the world is facing numerous wars and geopolitical conflicts, the effects of which stretch far beyond their immediate location in terms of global supply chains and finance flows. Food and water insecurity is also on the rise.

7. In addition to these localized wars, there is an overriding, overarching conflict in process. As United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres observes, "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is senseless and suicidal." The consequences are evident in environmentally induced human suffering and economic losses, and the accelerating erosion of life on Earth. These effects range from weather-related disasters, which have caused a fivefold increase in deaths over the past 50 years, to the displacement of 21.5 million people annually due to climate-change-related disasters.

The Triple Planetary Crisis

8. The negative effects of human behavior on the environment have resulted in what has been categorized as the "triple planetary crisis,"² referring to three interconnected issues humanity currently faces: climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Each issue has distinct causes and effects, all of which must be addressed to secure a sustainable future on Earth.

9. Climate change stands as the most urgent challenge humanity confronts today. It denotes long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns that fundamentally reshape ecosystems. Human activities—notably energy consumption, industry, transportation, construction, and agriculture—are the primary drivers of climate change. Its consequences include intensified droughts, water scarcity, wildfires, rising sea levels, floods, polar ice melting, severe storms, and declining biodiversity.

10. Pollution is a major environmental issue, and it comes in various forms (for example, air, water, soil, chemicals, plastics), with each form having profound impacts on health and the environment. Air pollution ranks as the leading cause of disease and premature death globally, claiming over 7 million lives annually. It has been estimated that 9 out of 10 people worldwide breathe air containing pollutants exceeding World Health Organization

² <https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis>

guidelines. Pollution stems from such sources as traffic, industries, wildfires, volcanoes, mold, and indoor household activities such as cooking with polluting fuels.

11. Biodiversity loss denotes the decline or disappearance of biological diversity, encompassing animals, plants, and ecosystems. It results from diverse factors including overfishing, habitat destruction (e.g., deforestation for development of settlements or agriculture), and desertification due to climate change. Biodiversity loss undermines food security, access to clean water, and the overall sustainability of the planet.

12. The triple environmental crises are intricately linked to the [planetary boundaries](#) framework, which underscores the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to manage human impacts on Earth's systems, ensuring a sustainable future. Six of the nine planetary boundaries have now been transgressed—climate change, biosphere integrity, freshwater change, land system change, biogeochemical flows and novel entities—emphasizing the urgent need for environmental policies to simultaneously address climate change, biodiversity and pollution.

Environmental Risks, Financing and the GEF Role

13. As the World Economic Forum notes, “Countries are grappling with the impacts of record-breaking extreme weather, as climate-change adaptation efforts and resources fall short of the type, scale and intensity of climate-related events already taking place.”³ Its most recent perception-based Global Risks survey suggests that, while the short-term (2-year) assessment of global risk is weighted toward immediate challenges such as geopolitical tensions, warfare, financial stress and technological risks, the long-term (10-year) risk perspective produces a much stronger focus on the environment (table 1).⁴ Half of the perceived key global risks for this time period are centered on the environment, including all dimensions of the triple planetary crisis. However, while environmental risks are more pronounced in the long term, viewing them primarily as long-term issues can impede immediate policy action on critical matters such as biodiversity loss and climate change.

³ World Economic Forum, [Global Risks Report 2024](#), p. 4.

⁴ Source: World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2023-2024. This year's survey included insights from 1,490 experts across academia, business, government, the international community, and civil society.

Table 1: Perceptions of key global risks over the next 10 years

Long term (10 years)	
1 st	Extreme weather events
2 nd	Critical change to Earth systems
3 rd	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
4 th	Natural resource shortages
5 th	Misinformation and disinformation
6 th	Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
7 th	Involuntary migration
8 th	Cyber insecurity
9 th	Societal polarization
10 th	Pollution

Source: World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2023–2024.

Financing for Climate and the GEF Role

14. International fund flows have increased in response to accelerated environmental risks, most notably in relation to climate change (mitigation and adaptation). The GEF is one of several major international funding facilities helping countries address the challenges of climate change (box 1). However, despite the increasing number and capacity of funding facilities in the climate field, the total volume of public resources still falls far short of requirements. The [2024 Financing for Sustainable Development Report: Financing for Development at a Crossroads](#) notes that financing challenges imperil the SDGs and environmental and climate action. In addition, average global growth has declined, while policy and regulatory frameworks still do not set appropriate incentives. Private investors are not incentivised to invest enough in environmental interventions and climate change, and several donor countries are facing fiscal constraints.

15. To prevent some of the worst impacts of climate change, estimates suggest that public climate finance of at least \$1.3 trillion will be needed every year by 2030.⁵ In 2020, such funding had reached \$333 billion, still significantly below the levels required to meet 2030 climate targets. Other environmental challenges, notably biodiversity loss, have received even less financing, and policies and programs in biodiversity are struggling to promote sustainable development.

⁵ See, for example, World Resources Institute, *State of Climate Action 2022*.

Box 1: UN-backed international climate funds

- *Global Environment Facility*. The GEF aims to “catalyze transformational change in key systems that are driving major environmental loss,” particularly energy, cities and food.
- *Green Climate Fund (GCF)*. Set up by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2010, the GCF is the world’s largest dedicated climate fund, mandated to support mitigation and adaptation action equally in developing countries.
- *Adaptation Fund*. The fund has committed some \$830 million since 2010 to help vulnerable communities in developing countries adapt to climate change.
- *UN-REDD*. Three UN agencies (United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) teamed up in 2018 to protect forests, a “pre-eminent nature-based solution to the climate emergency.”
- *Clean Technology Fund*. The \$5.4 billion fund is “empowering transformation in developing countries by providing resources to scale up low carbon technologies.”
- *Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF)*. Managed by the GEF the LDCF aims to help the least developed countries integrate climate change considerations into development policies.
- *Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)*. Managed by the GEF, the SCCF provides funds for mitigation and adaptation activities, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

16. In addition to the UN backed climate funds, several multilateral development banks (MDBs), many of which are GEF Agencies, have also increased their financing for climate and environmental initiatives. In response to COP28, the MDBs collectively pledged over \$180 billion in climate finance and committed to enhanced collaboration and reporting mechanisms. Another recent significant development is the joint announcement by a group of MDBs of common principles to track nature-positive finance in line with COP28 commitments and the objectives of the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#). “Nature-positive finance” involves funding directed toward protecting, restoring, or enhancing the sustainable use and management of nature.

17. While the increasing interest and commitments of the MDBs are encouraging, they continue to face challenges in fulfilling their COP28 commitments. This necessitates adjustments in their approaches and institutional reforms. Specifically, they need to leverage their history of financial innovation to support the reform of global environmental management. The most effective way to achieve this is through enhanced partnerships with major institutions that have extensive expertise in the field. The GEF is well positioned to play a key role in facilitating these partnerships.

18. In response to the evolving challenges in environmental finance, and institutional responses described above, the GEF will need to maintain its distinct position within the

environmental financing architecture by facilitating global benefits across numerous sectors. Its uniqueness stems from its role in providing financial support to a broad range of major multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Moreover, the GEF allocates funding to assist economies transitioning away from ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol, as well as to activities related to international waters and sustainable forest management, which contribute to the implementation of several global and regional multilateral environmental agreements.

19. To implement its strategy and achieve its overall objective of enhancing global environmental benefits, the GEF operates through a network of implementing partners. This network has expanded from an initial 3 Agencies (the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Bank Group) to its current level of 18 [Agencies](#).

III. SECTION 2: GEF-8 THEMES AND PRACTICES: BUILDING ON OPS7

20. This section presents a snapshot of GEF-8, grounding its programming and priorities in the recommendations made by OPS7.

21. Based on its detailed analysis of extensive data sets and evaluation reports, OPS7 drew broadly positive conclusions concerning the GEF's relevance and performance to date and during GEF-7 (box 2).

Box 2: Conclusions of OPS7

- (1) The GEF continues to be a **relevant financing mechanism** of numerous conventions and multilateral environmental agreements, while advancing integrated programming on priority environmental issues and systemic transformation.
- (2) The GEF has a **strong record of performance**. Over its 30-year history, the GEF has demonstrated improvements on all performance measures. Cumulatively, 80 percent of all completed GEF projects, accounting for 79 percent of GEF grants, are rated in the satisfactory range for outcomes.
- (3) The GEF is a **robust and adaptable partnership**, comprising environmental, development, and financial expertise, convening multistakeholder programs and projects at multiple levels.
- (4) The GEF is a source of predictable environmental finance, enabling the mobilization of cofinancing and project scale-up. However, **the GEF still has unrealized potential for mobilizing additional resources** in strategic and complementary ways. Possibilities include partnering with financing institutions—such as the Green Climate Fund, multilateral development banks, bilateral donors, foundations with complementary visions, and the private sector—to pursue synergies.

- (5) The GEF supports upstream policy work and the development of enabling environments at the country level, and its projects have contributed to building stronger country institutions; however, the GEF’s ability and effectiveness in **promoting policy coherence and institutional synergy will require substantial efforts by the GEF**, together with complementary efforts in enforcement within countries.
- (6) The GEF has a **tried and tested set of implementation mechanisms**, and each is effective in realizing its stated purposes—albeit with scope for increasing efficiencies in terms of time and financial resources.
- (7) The GEF is recognized as **more innovative than other environmental funding institutions**, balancing the pursuit of innovation with risk and performance considerations in its selection of projects, and preparing the groundwork for other donors to scale up its successful pilots... The GEF is moderate in its risk-taking, but valuable and useful in allocating its grant funding for pilot and innovative activities, including for new technologies such as solar and wind energy. The approach to innovation, piloting and scaling up is not very clear and systematic.
- (8) GEF **policies and systems are generally consistent with global good practice** and provide opportunities for the GEF to strengthen inclusion. With regards to systems, both results-based management (RBM) and knowledge management improved significantly in GEF-7.

22. At the same time, OPS7 made several recommendations to strengthen the GEF’s contribution while implementing GEF-8—particularly considering the many and growing challenges prevailing in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. While the recommendations of OPS7 were based on a detailed assessment of GEF performance during the seventh replenishment, they were framed within the evolving context of continuing environmental degradation and international resource shortfalls. The recommendations thus emphasized the need to maximize the use of available GEF resources to promote innovation, integrated programming, and coherence and synergies among stakeholders—all while continuing to meet its obligations to a broad range of international and regional conventions and agreements. The conclusions presented in box 2 and the recommendations in table 3 together highlight the micro-macro disconnect where project level successes do not necessarily aggregate up to macro level achievements. The GEF’s contribution towards addressing this disconnect will be examined in OPS8. The OPS7 recommendations are listed in table 2 by theme.

Table 2: Summation of OPS7 recommendations

Topic	Summary
Innovation and risk	The GEF should continue to pursue innovative projects to advance transformational change. GEF project review mechanisms should incentivize innovative projects across the partnership. The preparation process should explicitly allow for consideration of the risk associated with these projects and be streamlined.
Integrated programming	The GEF should continue pursuing integration in programming but should clearly demonstrate the additionality of this approach in terms of environmental benefits, socioeconomic co-benefits, policy influence, and inclusion.
Synergies and cooperation among Agencies	The GEF should establish clear ground rules for GEF Agency interactions with respect to project development and implementation, and in terms of engaging with operational focal points and executing agencies. Ground rules should provide guidance to the Agencies about what is—and is not—acceptable at the country level.
Country engagement	The GEF should develop and implement a more strategic and coherent approach to engagement at the country level to better address varying country needs and capacities.
Priority country groups	The GEF should increase its support to least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) to have greater impact in these priority countries.
Private sector engagement	The GEF should strengthen private sector engagement through targeted support.
Small Grants Programme (SGP)	The GEF should reappraise its vision for the SGP in order to expand its purpose and potential for impact.
Administrative processes	The GEF should review its requirements, processes, and procedures to allow countries, Agencies, and the private sector to secure GEF resources and move to implementation and execution more quickly in the post-pandemic period.
Policies and systems	Monitoring implementation of GEF policies needs to be continued and done better. The recent GEF policies on safeguards, gender, and stakeholder engagement will need to be monitored with adequate data and evidence to be able to assess their effectiveness. The GEF’s RBM and knowledge management systems should adapt to the shift to integration.

23. The GEF responded to the OPS7 recommendations with an ambitious set of policy and programming initiatives, encapsulated in the GEF-8 Programming Directions and implemented during GEF-8, to improve various aspects of the GEF’s operations. Several of these initiatives stemmed from the OPS7 recommendations and collectively aimed to enhance the GEF’s effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in addressing global environmental challenges while promoting sustainable development.

24. The most notable themes and policy measures implemented during GEF-8 can be summarized as follows; these include a mix of new initiatives and emphases and continuations of ongoing efforts.

Increasing Emphasis on Integrated and Impact Programs

25. The most comprehensive aspect of these initiatives is a substantially increased emphasis on integrated programming. This attention can be seen as an evolution from earlier GEF experiences, starting with multifocal area activities⁶. The integrated programs have been designed to address complex and interlinked environmental challenges more effectively as traditional, single-sector approaches often fail to capture the interdependencies and synergies between different environmental domains. These programs allow for the implementation of holistic solutions that can address multiple environmental objectives simultaneously, making them more likely to yield sustainable and impactful results.

26. The GEF-8 programming architecture has built on progress made in GEF-7, emphasizing a combination of integrated programming and focal area actions to maximize the potential for impactful outcomes, ultimately supporting global convention needs and expectations. In GEF-8, the aim has been to encourage countries to channel more of their GEF funded initiatives through 11 integrated programs addressing the major environmental needs of the planet within the GEF's mandate. The programs have been supplemented with targeted GEF-8 investments focusing on specific entry points within focal areas to ensure that all GEF commitments to international and regional conventions and agreements are addressed.

Box 3: Integrated programs under GEF-8

- Food Systems Integrated Program
- Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program
- Sustainable Cities Integrated Program
- Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program
- Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program
- Blue and Green Islands Integrated Program
- Clean and Healthy Ocean Integrated Program
- Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator Integrated Program
- Wildlife Conservation for Development Integrated Program
- Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development Integrated Program
- Elimination of Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains Integrated Program

27. The integrated programs aim to collectively tackle major drivers of environmental degradation and deliver multiple benefits across various thematic dimensions mandated for the GEF. Their thematic scope and geographical coverage align with global aspirations for nature-positive, climate-neutral, and pollution-free development pathways, fostering harmony with nature. Additionally, they aim to address diverse country needs for investing in a blue and green post-COVID-19 recovery, utilizing global or regional platforms to attract stakeholders and resources in response to political commitments. Integrated programs also intend to facilitate the involvement of other stakeholders—including the private sector—

⁶ See annex 2.

promote knowledge sharing and learning and ensure more effective utilization of GEF resources.

28. While integrated programs are intended to yield substantial global benefits across different focal areas of the GEF, some aspects of guidance from conventions are best addressed through complementary investments in each distinct focal area, focusing on objectives not fully covered within the proposed integrated programs. These aspects have been programmed into individual focal area investment frameworks for biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and chemicals and waste.

Deepening the Focus on Policy Coherence

29. GEF-8 programming recognizes that policy coherence is crucial for the GEF to maximize benefits, address transboundary impacts, avoid negative spillovers, and release funding from perverse investments. To this end, GEF-8 initiatives have sought to deepen the focus on policy coherence in GEF operations, particularly in the upcoming GEF-9 replenishment and programming phase.

30. A proposed [Coherence Roadmap](#) outlines actions to enhance policy coherence in GEF operations, including assessing existing project portfolios, rolling out dedicated programming, and mainstreaming policy coherence into GEF-8 design and implementation. It emphasizes engaging with recipient countries and GEF Agencies, building tools for assessment, and focusing on knowledge activities. The document also highlights the importance of addressing the nature financing gap and the role of policy coherence in maximizing the benefits of GEF investment. Overall, the roadmap underscores the significance of policy coherence in achieving global environmental goals and maximizing the impact and sustainability of GEF resources.

Emphasizing Co-Benefits

31. As a component of the OPS8 programming exercise, the GEF has drafted a [document](#) outlining its approach to co-benefits. These co-benefits refer to positive outcomes resulting from GEF investments that extend beyond its formal set of global environmental benefits and are crucial for ensuring the sustainability of GEF benefits. These co-benefits include, *inter alia*, improvements in incomes, livelihoods, health, employment, gender equality, market development and improved access to services. Key measures identified include the creation of a checklist for project developers, expansion of the Results Measurement Framework to incorporate dedicated co-benefit indicators, capacity-building initiatives within the GEF partnership, and the establishment of institutional arrangements for monitoring and reporting on co-benefits.

Defining Risk Appetite

32. In response to OPS7 recommendations and incorporated into GEF-8 programming, the GEF produced a [document](#) outlining its approach to managing risk in pursuit of global environmental benefits. This approach emphasizes the criticality of risk assessment and management in achieving transformative environmental impacts. The GEF aims to take bold and innovative approaches to address environmental challenges, setting a risk appetite across three dimensions: context, innovation, and execution. It highlights the need for rigorous analysis and adaptation to diverse contexts, encourages purposeful innovation, and

underscores the necessity of effective execution while maintaining zero tolerance for fraud or exploitation.

33. The GEF is implementing the Risk Appetite Framework under GEF-8 by integrating risk considerations into decision-making processes, updating project templates, providing training, and ensuring annual reporting on risk. Additionally, knowledge management and learning practices are being promoted to better manage risks and leverage innovative approaches.

Reforming the Country Engagement Strategy

34. The Country Engagement Strategy under implementation during GEF-8 builds on earlier initiatives aimed at empowering countries to maximize the impact of GEF resources. The strategy seeks to combine activities from the Country Support Program with upstream engagement approaches. It aims to strengthen country ownership of GEF portfolios, promote policy coherence, and enhance stakeholder engagement to achieve greater environmental impact.

35. Activities supporting country engagement include upstream technical dialogues, national dialogues, GEF workshops, constituency meetings, and pre-Council meetings. Additionally, the Country Engagement Strategy may incorporate specific activities to enhance the scope of engagement with countries during GEF-8. These include the Gustavo Fonseca Youth Conservation Leadership Program, aimed at building the capacity of young professionals in developing countries; a field visit program for GEF Council members to deepen their understanding of GEF projects and programs; and support for country delegations and relevant stakeholders to attend COPs to the conventions, ensuring that developing countries have the necessary support to participate effectively in negotiations.

Rolling out SGP 2.0

36. The Small Grants Programme (SGP) supports Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations help achieve global environmental goals. Overall, GEF-8 aims to implement a comprehensive strategy and operational framework for SGP 2.0, emphasizing the importance of civil society engagement and local action in achieving global environmental objectives. Resource allocation in GEF-8 for the SGP includes funding from core resources, country allocations under the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR), and cofinancing from other sources.

37. SGP 2.0 strategic priorities include community-based management of ecosystems, sustainable agriculture and fisheries, low-carbon energy access, effective chemicals and waste management, and sustainable urban solutions. It also emphasizes social inclusion and supports decision-making of women, youth, and indigenous peoples and local communities. The key features include expansion, innovation, diversification, and optimization. SGP 2.0 envisions using multiple GEF Agencies for implementation, rather than spearheading by the United Nations Development Programme alone; introducing competitive CSO initiatives; maximizing financing for CSOs and community-based organizations; and enhancing monitoring and reporting.

Implementing the Private Sector Engagement Strategy

38. The [GEF Private Sector Engagement Strategy](#) (PSES) aims to provide the rationale for a more coordinated approach to private sector engagement. The PSES has three core elements: (a) working strategically with multi-stakeholder platforms to achieve scale and impact (b) supporting multiple private sector entry points (c) engaging the private sector beyond a transactional level. The PSES aims to enhance value chain connectivity to generate efficiencies and collaborative models that connect market demand signals of sustainable consumption with sustainable models of supply. The strategy also aims to expand the use of blended finance (non-grant instruments).

Implementing Policy and Institutional Measures

39. To enhance efficiency and collaboration, a series of policy and institutional measures are being implemented in the GEF. Ongoing reforms and changes in organizational structure aim to streamline the project cycle, minimize bureaucratic hurdles and expedite project delivery. Efforts are also under way to foster collaboration with other climate funds enabling resource leverage, mitigating duplication of efforts, and maximizing overall impact.

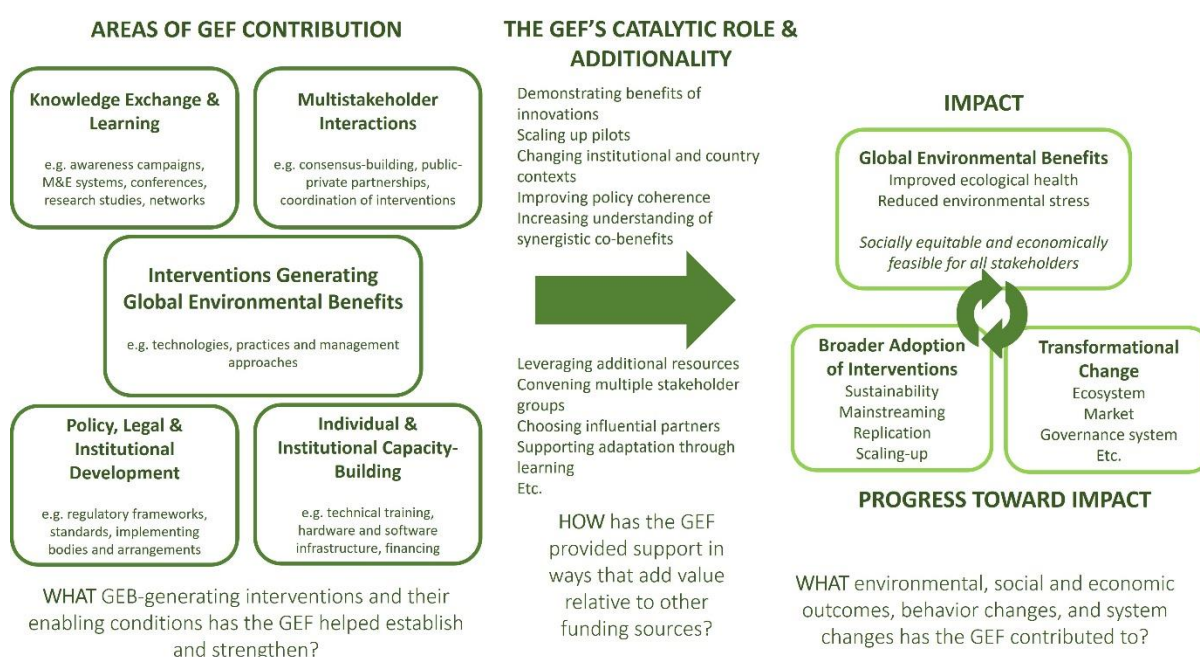
IV. SECTION 3: COVERAGE AND CONSIDERATIONS

40. This section outlines the theory of change applied by the IEO, the proposed scope, content, methods, and organizational arrangements for OPS8, with guidance provided by a five-member external review panel.

The IEO Theory of Change

41. OPS 8 and the component evaluations align with the IEO's theory of change framework shown in figure 3 and address the questions outlined in the evaluation matrix provided in table 3. The theory of change highlights two critical pathways to impact for the GEF.

Figure 1: GEF IEO Theory of Change



42. First, direct and sustained impacts from specific projects: These are the immediate and long-term benefits derived directly from the implementation of targeted environmental projects. These impacts result from interventions designed to address specific environmental challenges, leading to measurable outcomes and improvements in ecological health and sustainability and transformational change.

43. Second, broader Impacts from GEF's catalytic effects: These are the wider, systemic changes facilitated by GEF projects. Catalytic effects include:

- (a). *Scaling Up*: Expanding successful project models through learning and knowledge sharing, multistakeholder interactions, to larger scales or new contexts to maximize their benefits.
- (b). *Changing Institutional and Country Contexts*: Influencing and improving the frameworks within which environmental projects operate, including governance, policies, and institutional capacities.
- (c). *Improved Policy Coherence*: Promoting alignment and integration of policies across different sectors to enhance overall environmental outcomes.
- (d). *Understanding of Co-Benefits*: Fostering a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic outcomes, leading to synergistic benefits.
- (e). *Supporting Adaptation*: Enhancing the ability of communities and ecosystems to adapt to changing environmental conditions and climate change.
- (f). *Catalytic Financing*: Mobilizing additional financial resources by demonstrating the viability and effectiveness of environmental projects, thus attracting further investment from public and private sectors.

44. These pathways together would ensure that GEF's efforts not only produce tangible project-level outcomes but also drive broader systemic changes that support sustainable development on a larger scale, consistent with the objectives of GEF-8.

OPS8 Framing of GEF-8 Initiatives

45. The GEF IEO four-year work program⁷ discussed with, and approved by the GEF Council in June 2022, was developed to assess the progress of the GEF against the key strategic priorities included in the GEF-8 Programming Directions,⁸ and in the implementation of policies designed to support the GEF's effective functioning. In response to Council requests, evaluations on cofinancing and portfolio-level risk were subsequently added to the work program. This inclusion reflects the critical importance of these topics in leveraging and scaling up efforts, as well as seeking integrative solutions in OPS8. In all, 31 evaluations conducted by the IEO will feed into the overall OPS8 report, conducted over the

⁷ GEF/E/C.62/01

⁸ Source: GEF Secretariat, 2022, [GEF-8 Programming Directions](#).

FY 2023–25 period. The full range of this body of work is outlined in figure 2. The approach papers and concept notes for the listed evaluations are available on the [IEO website](#).

46. As depicted in figure 2, the OPS8 evaluation report will cover the broad themes of the GEF-8 program outlined in the previous section.⁹ Additionally, our assessment will include the customary review of performance and impacts of focal area interventions and GEF country engagement, GEF policies, and the effectiveness of long-running programs such as the SGP.

47. The performance of the GEF partnership in terms of relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness will be assessed through the annual performance reports, terminal evaluations, and post-completion verifications at the project, program, and country levels. Evaluations of the integrated approach pilots (IAPs) and impact programs will provide evidence on the results of the GEF's focus on programming for greater integration. The implementation of GEF policies on gender, engagement with stakeholders, civil society, the private sector, and indigenous peoples will be addressed through the thematic evaluations as cross-cutting issues. The evaluation of GEF systems to support effective results management and knowledge sharing will be assessed based on specific evaluations related to these topics, and in the annual performance reports. Institutional governance issues will be addressed through the evaluations of the IAPs and the impact programs; the evaluation of the Country Engagement Strategy; and through an assessment of the dynamic relationships between the various members of the GEF partnership. A special focus study will be conducted on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), as the last review of STAP was conducted ten years ago. Besides the evaluations of work funded by the GEF Trust Fund, evaluations of the achievements of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) will also contribute to this comprehensive evaluation of the GEF.

48. In general, the evaluations contributing to OPS8 will assess completed GEF-6 projects, as many GEF-7 activities will still be under way and GEF-8 activities will largely be at an early stage of implementation. To take this time lag into best account, projects that are at an early stage or under implementation will mainly be assessed in terms of their quality at entry in the various thematic evaluations. All evaluations conducted between 2022 and 2025 and approved in the work program will contribute to this eighth comprehensive evaluation. Several major evaluations are now under way or in their early stages. They include:

Evaluation of GEF Food Systems and Land Use Integrated Programs

49. The primary aim of this evaluation is to appraise the GEF's systemic approach to its programmatic interventions, particularly concerning food systems and land use. It will assess the degree to which GEF food system programs and their constituent projects address the root causes and downstream effects of environmental issues stemming from targeted food systems in both design and implementation phases. Additionally, the evaluation will examine whether project proponents have accounted for crucial interactions (e.g., global market

⁹ But see paragraph 44

dynamics, geopolitical tensions), and the role of policy coherence that influence the achievement and sustainability of outcomes.

Evaluation of the Sustainable Cities Program

50. The GEF Sustainable Cities Program has undergone assessments in OPS-6 through the Review of the Integrated Approach Pilot Programs (GEF IEO 2018) and OPS-7 through the GEF Integrated Approach to Address Drivers of Environmental Degradation (GEF IEO 2022). These evaluations primarily examined design and implementation aspects. The ongoing Evaluation of the Sustainable Cities Program, conducted within the framework of O-8, shifts focus to program outcomes, the effectiveness of its knowledge platform, sustainability of interventions supported, and the value added by the GEF.

Evaluation of GEF Programs in Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

51. The main objective of this evaluation is to provide GEF stakeholders with insights into how relevant, coherent, and effective these programs are in Pacific SIDS. The evaluation also aims to understand how GEF programs in these countries have evolved and whether they have integrated lessons from past projects. Evaluative evidence will be collected through a comprehensive review of the program and project documentation, key informant interviews, contribution analysis and country field visits.

Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation of the Amazon Biome

52. The strategic country cluster evaluation of the Amazon aims to gather evidence of the GEF's impact on strengthening biodiversity conservation, reducing deforestation and degradation, and enhancing community livelihoods in the region. Examining the three phases of the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes (ASL) Program, this evaluation seeks to extract insights and lessons to inform future programming, design, and implementation of GEF initiatives in the area. The evaluation will operate at three levels: strategic, program and project, and country levels, providing a comprehensive analysis of the GEF's efforts in the Amazon.

A Study on the Environmental and Socioeconomic Co-benefits of GEF Interventions

53. This study will provide one of the first systematic, global-scope assessments of the environment and the associated socioeconomic co-benefits of GEF activities—a topic on which limited evidence is available in the literature. It builds on an IEO pilot study in Uganda, which measured income benefits alongside environmental outcomes. The evaluation will draw on currently available geospatial data and socioeconomic survey data in addition to country case studies.

Evaluation of GEF Support to Nature-based Solutions

54. This evaluation marks the first systematic examination of GEF support for nature-based solutions (NbS). Employing a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation centers on identifying influencing factors related to project results and effectiveness, as well as assessing the value and challenges in integrating NbS to deliver global environmental benefits. It will also extract key lessons for implementing NbS in future GEF interventions and strategies.

Assessing Inclusion of Marginalized Groups in GEF-Supported Projects in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations

55. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which GEF projects have been inclusive of historically marginalized groups, with a particular focus on women, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), youth, and persons with disabilities. It aims to compare the level of inclusion across Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS) and non-FCS contexts. Furthermore, the evaluation seeks to examine the outcomes, both intended and unintended, of this inclusion on the success of GEF projects and any associated socioeconomic co-benefits.

Annual Performance Report 2025

56. The Annual Performance Report (APR) 2025 aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the results and sustainability of GEF activities, with a particular emphasis on projects within the OPS8 cohort. It will focus on projects for which terminal evaluations were submitted after the closure of OPS-7, providing insights into the progress to impact of the OPS-8 cohort. Additionally, the report will present an aggregated analysis of the results achieved by GEF-5 and GEF-6 projects, comparing them with the respective targets set for those periods. It will delve into topics such as the performance of the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) and the distribution of GEF resources among its Agencies.

Evaluation of GEF Engagement with the Private Sector

57. This evaluation focuses on the GEF's implementation of its approved private sector engagement strategy. Feeding into this evaluation will be the thematic evaluations and integrated program evaluations that will look at the GEF's engagement with the private sector to assess the extent to which large companies, associations, and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMES) are engaged by the GEF to effectively address supply chain constraints. Recent developments in the non-grant instrument will be also reviewed as part of this broad study.

Leveraging Technologies for the Environment: An Assessment of the GEF partnership efforts and readiness

58. The GEF's strategic direction and advisory documents underscore the pivotal role of technology in driving environmental sustainability. Building on prior evaluations by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) concerning transformational change, innovation, and risk assessment, this evaluation aims to appraise the GEF's collaborative endeavours and preparedness to aid its members, particularly countries and agencies, in capitalizing on technological opportunities while mitigating associated risks for the environment.

Evaluation of Policy Coherence in the GEF

59. Given the GEF's renewed focus on policy coherence, this evaluation seeks to appraise the integration of policy coherence across portfolio/corporate, program, and project levels. Through methods including document analysis, stakeholder interviews, an online survey, and field-based case studies, the evaluation aims to gather evidence on the GEF's role in

enhancing policy coherence among sectoral agencies and government levels, both presently and historically.

Evaluation of Results Based Management in the GEF

60. The review of Results-Based Management for OPS8 will delve into the measurement and reporting of core indicators, along with other results indicators delineated in project results frameworks. Moreover, the evaluation will analyse the influence of country context on monitoring practices adopted by GEF Agencies, with a particular emphasis on practices observed in fragile, conflict, and violence (FCV) affected situations. By examining the impact of these contexts, the review aims to identify any unique challenges or adaptations in monitoring processes.

Small Grants Programme Evaluation: An Update

61. The main objective of this evaluation is to evaluate progress made since the 2021 joint SGP-IEO evaluation and the extent to which the SGP is achieving the objectives set out in its strategic and operational directions SGP2.0 under GEF-8.

The Country Engagement Strategy Evaluation (CES): An Update

62. This evaluation will appraise the progress made in implementing the CES, probing into the factors that have either facilitated or impeded this progress. It will explore how the CES has influenced the evolving dynamics within the GEF partnership, particularly in facilitating country access to climate and environmental finance. The evaluation will analyse CES activities on a global scale and within the various regions the GEF operates, including Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Pacific, and South Asia.

An Evaluation of the Partnership Dynamics and Competitive Advantage of the GEF

63. This evaluation aims to delve into key aspects as they relate to:

- (1) **The GEF's Strategic Role:** The evaluation will assess the strategic and competitive positioning of the GEF in the contemporary environmental finance landscape, particularly in delivering global environmental benefits.
- (2) **Partnership Dynamics:** A central focus of the evaluation will be to examine the relationships among the various stakeholders within the GEF partnership. By evaluating the strengths and dynamics of these relationships, the study aims to identify areas of synergy and opportunities for enhanced collaboration.
- (3) **Role and Contribution of STAP:** The evaluation will include a special focus on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) to understand its contribution, influence, and impact within the GEF framework. This analysis will shed light on the role of scientific expertise in shaping GEF strategies and initiatives.

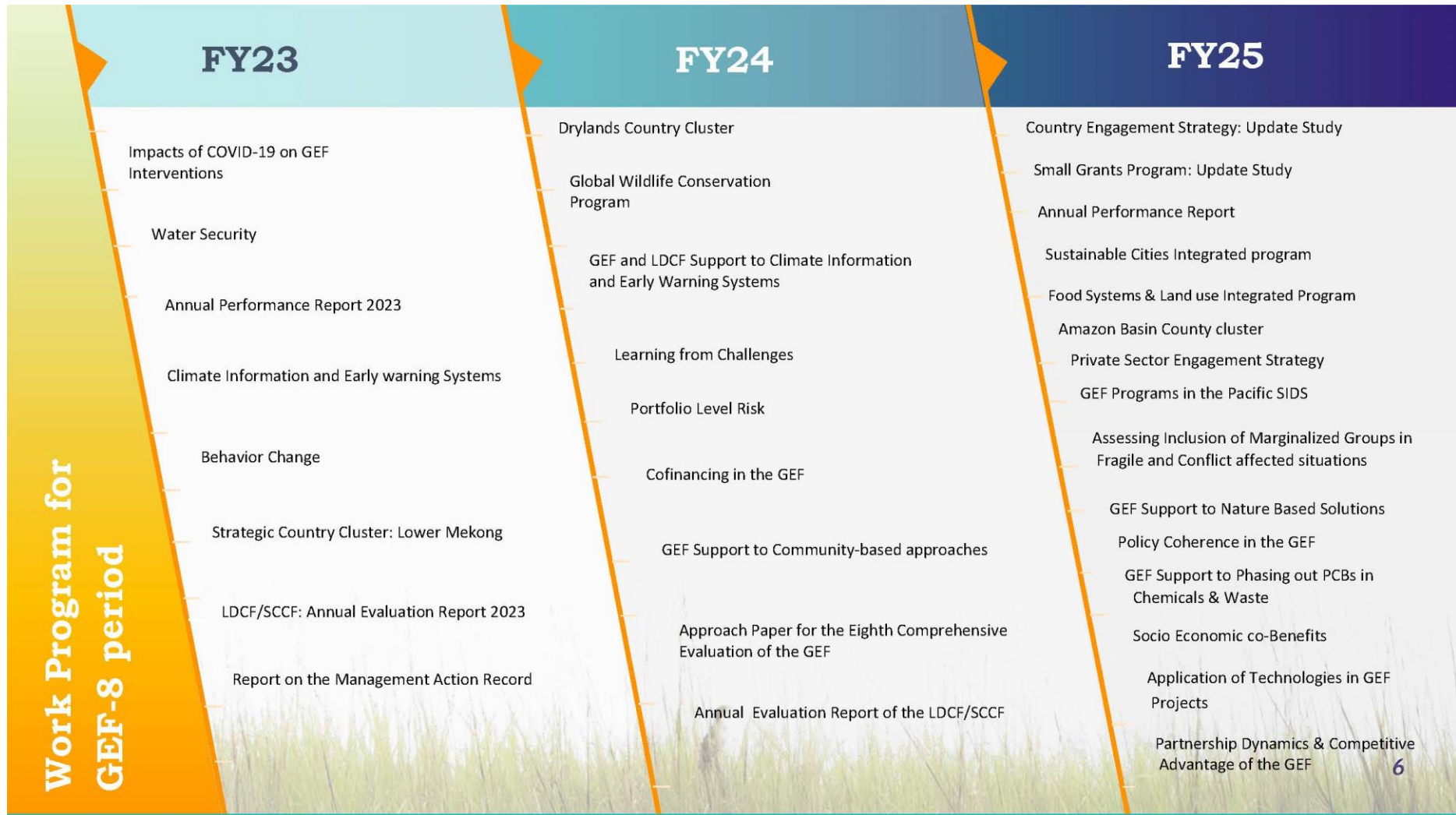
Evaluation of the GEF's Chemicals and Waste Focal Area

64. The objective of the Chemicals and Waste evaluation is to conduct a comprehensive review of GEF programming from 2010 onwards. A primary focus of this evaluation is to examine the recent transition from a chemical-by-chemical approach to a more holistic strategy for addressing pollution. In particular, the evaluation will analyse the shift towards an integrated approach that encompasses the entire supply chains of industries such as garment, food, and beverage. By doing so, it seeks to ascertain the extent to which this integrated approach aligns with and supports the commitments delineated in the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions.

LDCF/SCCF Annual Evaluation Report 2024 and Program Evaluations

65. LDCF and SCCF annual evaluation reports and program evaluations will also provide insights into the performance of projects that are jointly funded through the GEF and the LDCF/SCCF trust funds. The AER 2024 covers evaluations that have integrated adaptation to climate change including: Evaluation of the GEF's Approach and Interventions in Water Security (GEF/E/C.64/01/Rev.01); Evaluation of GEF Support to Climate Information and Early Warning Systems (GEF/E/C.66/04); GEF Support to Drylands Countries (GEF/E/C.66/01); Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF (GEF/E/C.66/02); and, Learning from Challenges in GEF Projects (GEF/E/C.66/03/Rev.1). Program evaluations of LDCF/SCCF conducted every four years have also informed GEF adaptation strategies.

Figure 2: IEO Work Program Inputs into OPS8



66. Evidence from the comprehensive range of evaluations of the IEO Work Program (figure 2) will be used to analyze key evaluation questions covering broad strategy and performance areas as shown in the evaluation matrix in table 3. The main sources of evidence will be the GEF-8 Programming Directions, external scientific and economic literature, individual component evaluations that dive into specific themes, the terminal evaluation database, Chief Executive Officer–endorsed documents, midterm reviews, and relevant evaluations conducted by GEF Agencies.

Table 3: Evaluation Matrix of Questions: Relevance, Policies and Systems, Performance and Impact, Financing

Key issue	Evaluation question	Scope and Sources of Evidence
Relevance of the GEF	<p>To what degree does the GEF maintain global relevance and what strategies could be implemented to further its global significance?</p> <p>Is the GEF’s programming effectively aligned with country specific priorities and overarching global environmental concerns?</p> <p>How does the relevance of the GEF intersect with the guidance provided by the Conventions? Additionally, does GEF programming adequately align with focal areas and objectives delineated by both Conventions and individual countries, particularly in light of the increasing emphasis on integrated and impact programs?</p> <p>Have the policies implemented by the GEF facilitated the necessary flexibility to maintain relevance and respond efficiently to recent crises?</p> <p>How well positioned is the GEF to support countries in addressing the triple environmental crises, ensuring attention to socio-economic co-benefits, social justice, and equity in its assistance efforts?</p>	<p>Relevance and coherence will be assessed in terms of both alignment with the global context (including the Sustainable Development Goals) and alignment with the Conventions.</p> <p>Alignment with country needs and priorities will be assessed in the broader context of global environmental challenges, public and private funding available to address environmental degradation and the GEF resource envelope, drawing on external and internal evaluations and the literature.</p> <p>Relevance findings will be synthesized from focal area studies, the Country Engagement Strategy, thematic and project-level evaluations, evaluations of the integrated and impact programs.</p>
Implementation of the GEF-8 Strategy	<p>What is the current status of progress toward achieving the main objectives outlined in the GEF-8 Strategy?</p> <p>Is the current business model of the GEF conducive to supporting the strategy and effectively facilitating its implementation?</p>	<p>Progress on the GEF-8 Strategy will be assessed through all formative components of the various thematic evaluations; the evaluation of the Results Based Management System, a quality-at-entry analysis of the design elements of Chief Executive Officer–endorsed projects in GEF-8.</p> <p>Responsibilities and relationships among members of the GEF partnership including STAP, the Agencies, the operational focal points and CSO Network, will be examined in the context of the Integrated and</p>

Key issue	Evaluation question	Scope and Sources of Evidence
<p>Implementation of GEF policies on safeguards; gender; engagement with stakeholders, indigenous peoples, and civil society</p>	<p>Have GEF policies been effectively implemented to foster a whole of society approach?</p> <p>Do GEF projects prioritize support for gender, inclusion of indigenous peoples, civil society, and youth? What findings and lessons emerge from these endeavors?</p>	<p>Impact Programs and the evaluation of the Country Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>OPS8 will review the implementation of recommendations on prior IEO evaluations on implementation of GEF policies in the context of recently closed projects and a quality at entry assessment of recently approved projects.</p> <p>Other sources include evaluations of socio-economic co-benefits, evaluation of gender and inclusion in fragile and conflict affected situations, and the evaluation of Community Based Approaches.</p>
<p>Systems for results-based management and Knowledge management</p>	<p>Is the Results Based Management System adequately meeting the needs of the GEF Partnership for effective project monitoring information?</p> <p>Are the self-evaluation systems yielding high quality information for both for accountability and organizational learning purposes?</p> <p>Is the GEF effectively fulfilling its role as a significant data and information provider, and are there any systemic issues that need addressing in this regard?</p> <p>How well is the GEF positioned as a “learning organization”? Does it have the right level of evidence, analysis and knowledge to be able to prioritize its projects and programs?</p>	<p>Evaluation of the GEF’s RBM system, indicators and quality of information in the GEF Portal. Annual Performance Report will assess the extent to which information underpinning GEF evaluations is of high quality, candid and consistently applies terminal evaluation guidelines.</p> <p>A special study of results frameworks in FCV contexts will shed light on monitoring and evaluating in difficult country contexts.</p> <p>The Learning from Challenges study, and an assessment of knowledge platforms through the evaluations of the integrated and impact programs will inform the status of Knowledge Management.</p>

Key issue	Evaluation question	Scope and evaluation sources
<p>Performance and Impact, Policy Coherence, Socio economic co-benefits, sustainability of outcomes</p>	<p>What are the environmental and socio-economic outcomes of GEF interventions, and how sustainable are these over the long term?</p> <p>What are the impacts of GEF support within countries, and how sustainable are GEF interventions over the long term?</p> <p>What strategies best help countries achieve policy coherence in the context of competing environmental, social and economic priorities?</p> <p>What role does behavior change play in influencing the long-term sustainability of outcomes?</p> <p>In the context of a whole-of-society approach, what strategies best help recipient countries recognize the synergies between global environmental benefits and social and economic co-benefits particularly those related to social justice and equity?</p>	<p>Performance trends will be observed from portfolio analysis, Annual Performance Reports, Annual Evaluation Reports, mid term reviews, focal area studies, Strategic country cluster evaluations on drylands, Small Islands, the Amazon, Lower Mekong Region, as well as evaluations of the integrated and impact programs. The study on co-benefits will provide evidence on socio economic outcomes, and the study on policy coherence will delve into the GEF experience of driving policy coherence towards achieving greater impacts.</p> <p>Special focal area themes include evaluation of water security, sustainable forest management, sustainable cities, drylands, early warning systems, phasing out PCBs, mercury reduction.</p>
<p>Catalytic Role of the GEF, Nature Based Solutions, Risk Appetite, and Innovation in the pursuit of transformational change</p>	<p>Has the GEF effectively acted as a catalyst in promoting broader adoption and scaling up for transformational change either through its own interventions, through partnerships or demonstration effects?</p> <p>How has GEF effectively implemented Nature Based Solutions to achieve transformational change?</p> <p>What is the evidence on the GEF record for supporting the use of new technologies?</p> <p>To what extent does the GEF promote a level of risk taking aligned with its mission to enhance Global Environmental Benefits?</p> <p>How is the GEF effectively using governance and policies, financial leverage, multi-stakeholder Dialogues and innovation to drive transformational change?</p>	<p>These cross-cutting themes will be addressed through studies on portfolio risk, use of advanced technologies in projects, the implementation of Nature Based Solutions, support for broader adoption, quality at entry analysis for elements of transformational change, the evaluations of Integrated and Impact Programs, the focal area assessments, the private sector analysis on the commodities and cities programs, and the study on policy coherence.</p>

Key issue	Evaluation question	Scope and evaluation sources
Finance for Transformational Change	<p>How does the GEF effectively catalyze financing to scale its interventions?</p> <p>How does the GEF leverage non grant instruments to innovate and scale up conservation financing?</p>	<p>This theme will draw on the cofinancing study, external sources, the private sector study, the evaluation of integrated and impact programs, evaluation of the NGI.</p>
Overall Competitive Advantage of the GEF in Addressing Global Environmental Challenges	<p>What specific advantages does the GEF partnership offer in addressing contemporary environmental challenges?</p> <p>Are the policies, structure, administrative processes and financing of the GEF well suited to fulfill its mission effectively?</p> <p>Is the GEF's balance of priorities contributing to better outcomes?</p>	<p>This will draw on all OPS8 component evaluations and culminate in a special focus study to address efficiency, roles and relationships among the various parties of the GEF partnership, a special focus on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and an assessment of the competitive advantage of the GEF.</p>

V. SECTION 4. OPS8 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Tools and Methods

1. The evaluative inputs into OPS8 utilize a variety of methods, depending on the objectives of the individual evaluations. A systems approach is adopted in most evaluations to evaluate along the theory of change presented in figure 3. The methods used adhere to international good practice standards and typically involve a mixed-methods approach. Methods include literature reviews, theory of change development, document reviews, interviews, surveys, geographic information system (GIS) and remote sensing, rapid impact evaluations, stakeholder consultations, country case studies, field verification, statistical and qualitative analysis, and triangulation of findings. The limitations of each evaluation are clearly reflected in the respective approach paper/concept note.

2. **Post completion verification and quality-at-entry analysis.** The IEO has developed methodologies for post completion verification and quality-at-entry analysis of projects. These will be applied consistently in thematic evaluations for GEF and LDCF/SCCF projects to facilitate comparisons and aggregated reporting. Geospatial analysis will be applied where and as appropriate to measure environmental outcomes.

3. **Impact pathways and drivers.** OPS8 will analyze the full portfolio of GEF projects and activities, identifying impact pathways and specifying impact drivers and assumptions for modeling progress toward impact as specified in the IEO theory of change. Evidence on progress toward impact will be gathered from completed projects between January 2021 and June 2024. The GEF-IEO theory of change (figure 1) provides a general framework for evaluating GEF interventions.

4. **Data limitations.** As part of the fallout from the COVID pandemic, some project timelines may have been disrupted, leading to delayed midterm reviews and terminal evaluations. OPS8 will report on any resultant data limitations and ensure that its findings take appropriate account of these.

5. **Credible claims of contribution.** Credible claims of contribution will be made based on the logical and feasible design of interventions, their implementation as designed, the occurrence of expected early results, and consideration of potential alternative explanations for results. Analysis will attempt to determine the added value of the GEF's contributions.

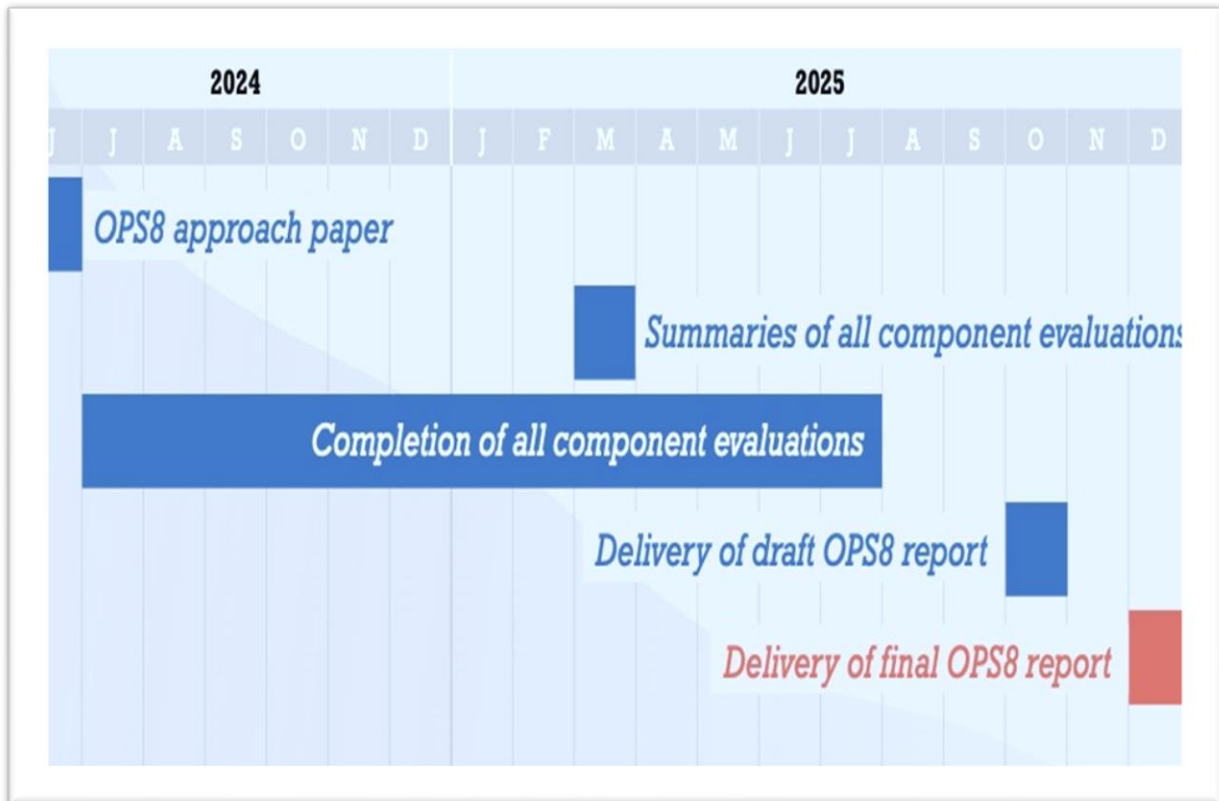
Organizational Aspects

6. **Stakeholder consultations.** OPS8 will be an in-depth evaluation using a participatory approach characterized by regular stakeholder consultation and involvement throughout the evaluation process, notably through reference groups and targeted dissemination and outreach to key stakeholders. Subregional meetings of GEF focal points and Expanded Constituency Workshops will offer an invaluable learning opportunity for the IEO to gain insights from country stakeholders on issues of relevance to them. These meetings will enable the IEO to gather feedback from countries on a variety of issues related to GEF projects and processes.

7. **Quality assurance.** Five external expert quality assurance advisers from developed and emerging economies have been appointed. The external review panel consists of the following experts: Monika Weber Fahr, Patricia Rogers, Stefan Schwager, Vinod Thomas and Hasan Tuluy. These individuals are recognized international development professionals in the fields of the environment, development, and evaluation and will provide quality assurance through all stages of preparing OPS8. They will provide guidance throughout the evaluation process—including conceptualization of the evaluation, interpretation of the findings, and framing of the recommendations. The IEO has already benefited from the panel’s feedback in the development of this approach paper. Another key component of the quality assurance process is review of the individual evaluations and studies. Peer reviewers and reference groups have provided, and will continue to provide, quality feedback and inputs into the individual evaluations as they are prepared. At this stage, every component evaluation is either completed or under way, and quality review meetings with internal and external reviewers have been held for all evaluations.

8. **Deliverables and timelines.** OPS8 will be prepared and delivered in time for the GEF-9 replenishment discussions, with the first draft submitted for comment in September 2025. The component evaluations will be shared (or, in some cases, have already been shared) with the GEF Secretariat and the GEF Agencies for comment and discussion of recommendations. They will be presented at Council meetings during the GEF-8 period; they will then be published as evaluation reports and uploaded to the IEO website as they are endorsed by the Council. Early findings of the individual component evaluations will be shared with the GEF Secretariat and the Agencies in February 2025 and made available for the first replenishment meeting in the spring of 2025. The draft OPS8 report will be shared with the GEF Secretariat, Agencies, country stakeholders, and civil society in September 2025 for comment and will inform the GEF-9 replenishment meeting in October 2025. The final report will be delivered to the Council in December 2025. Besides the GEF Council and replenishment participants, the OPS8 report and component evaluations will be distributed widely to GEF partners, stakeholders, and civil society, and will be uploaded to the IEO website. The report will be completed within the GEF-8 budget envelope of the IEO.

Figure 3: Timeline of OPS8 deliverables



VI. ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE GEF'S OVERALL PERFORMANCE STUDIES

9. The evolution of the Global Environment Facility's overall performance studies provides valuable insights into the Facility's effectiveness and contribution toward impacts over time. They have provided critical feedback for the GEF to continually evolve and improve its strategies and operations to address global environmental challenges effectively.

- **OPS1.** Requested by the Council in 1996, this study concluded that the GEF had effectively established new institutional arrangements and programming approaches across its four focal areas. It had successfully leveraged cofinancing for projects and demonstrated positive impacts on policies and programs in recipient countries.
- **OPS2.** Conducted to assess the achievement of the GEF's primary objectives, OPS2 found that GEF-supported projects significantly addressed global environmental problems and had produced important project results by 2002.
- **OPS3.** Prepared between September 2004 and June 2005, OPS3 evaluated GEF activities' results and sustainability at the country level; and the GEF's catalytic role, policies, institutional structure, partnerships, and implementation processes. It highlighted substantial progress in the GEF system, but emphasized the need for constructive dialogue in defining baselines.
- **OPS4.** This study determined that the GEF remained relevant to the global conventions and national priorities, with effective projects producing sustainable outcomes. However, it identified the need to improve the GEF's efficiency in programming, project identification, formulation, and results-based management.
- **OPS5.** This study affirmed the GEF's role in achieving its objectives and supporting countries in meeting their environmental obligations. It recognized the need for the GEF to reflect on its organizational and business model and enhance efficiency in project approval processes.
- **OPS6.** This study comprehensively assessed the GEF's relevance, performance, impact, institutional, and governance issues. While acknowledging the GEF's strong track record in project performance and catalytic role, it emphasized the need for further improvements in programmatic approaches, integration across focal areas, and operational governance.
- **OPS7.** The OPS7 comprehensive evaluation assessed the GEF's progress in addressing the gaps identified in OPS6 and the extent to which it had further enhanced its effectiveness and impact.

VII. ANNEX 2: EVOLUTION OF INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING IN THE GEF¹⁰

10. The Global Environment Facility invests in projects tailored by countries to tackle specific focal area objectives, guided by the relevant conventions for which GEF serves as a financial mechanism. Over the years, the use of GEF grants has evolved from multifocal area to integrated approaches, driven by the need for better integration and the creation of multiple global environmental benefits based on country-specific needs.

Multifocal Area Programming

11. Multifocal area programming involves utilizing GEF financing from multiple focal areas to address various GEF objectives and outcomes within each area. The prevalence of multifocal area projects has grown over time, representing 13 percent of GEF funding in GEF-4 and increasing to 28 percent in GEF-5. This approach provides countries with opportunities to leverage GEF financing according to their priorities, aiming to generate global environmental benefits. Multifocal area programming has been instrumental in advancing initiatives such as the Sustainable Forest Management program, encouraging countries to exploit synergies across focal areas for preserving crucial forest landscapes. However, a challenge of multifocal area programming lies in the expectation that global environmental benefits will directly correlate with the investment in focal areas, which can be difficult to establish and may limit synergy harnessing while risking negative trade-offs.

Integrated Approach Programs

12. During GEF-6, the “integrated approach” was introduced with three pilot programs targeting major drivers of global environmental challenges. These IAPs—focused on urbanization (Sustainable Cities), commodity-driven deforestation (Commodities), and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa’s drylands—were structured to allocate GEF financing coherently, aiming for sustained generation of multiple global environmental benefits while preventing adverse impacts on related objectives. Integrated programming enables projects to exploit synergies and mitigate negative trade-offs. Moreover, it facilitates multistakeholder engagement due to its alignment with sectoral priorities crucial for economic growth and development.

Impact Programs

13. Building on the experiences of GEF-6, GEF-7 introduced impact programs to drive transformative changes in key economic systems, aligning with multiple convention goals and focal area strategies. GEF financing closely corresponds to convention objectives while accommodating priorities that are best addressed through separate investments within each focal area. This approach aligns with the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature, advocating for enhanced integration across multilateral agreements. Impact programs empower countries to pursue holistic approaches in line with their national development priorities, fostering integration among GEF investments and attracting private sector financing.

¹⁰ Source: GEF Secretariat, 2022, [GEF-8 Programming Directions](#),

Integrated Programs

14. In response to the escalating global environmental challenges, GEF-8 and beyond will increasingly rely on integrated programming to scale up investments for global environmental benefits. Proposed integrated programs for GEF-8 aim to promote blue and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the urgency to address pressing threats to the planet.