



## **Global Forum for the GEF Integrated Programs**

*Theme - Integrated Approach Programming in the GEF: From Design to Impact*

April 13-17, 2026

UNEP Offices, Nairobi, Kenya

*Briefing Note, December 2025*

## **Introduction**

Since its inception in 1992, the GEF has channeled more than US\$27 billion in grants and mobilized an additional US\$155 billion in co-financing for over 5,000 projects in 145 countries. The GEF grants are “incremental” and focused primarily on actions that result in measurable improvements in the global environment. The use of GEF grants by countries is largely based on country-specific context for embedding environmental priorities in development aspirations.

Through the normal GEF programming, grants are provided to recipient countries for projects or programs that seek to address specific focal area objectives in accordance with guidance from the relevant conventions that the GEF serves as financial mechanism. Over the years, countries have increasingly used GEF resources to invest in projects that harness synergies and generate global environmental benefits across multiple focal areas. These “multi-focal area” investments by countries helped lay the foundation for integrated approach programming in the GEF.

## **Integrated Approach Programming**

With environmental threats increasing around the world, the GEF has sought to strengthen its role in tackling systemic drivers by advancing the integrated approach. The focus on “integration” ensures that GEF financing is not siloed by focal area but rather invested in a coherent manner to promote synergy in generating multiple global environmental benefits. Through the integrated approach, countries have the option of using the GEF grants to address focal areas priorities through participation in programs that generate multiple environmental benefits and influence systemic shifts. The integrated approach therefore enables recipient countries to tackle environmental challenges in a holistic and coherent manner, while ensuring that progress in any dimension of the global environment does not negatively affect other related objectives.

Since GEF-6 (2014-2018), GEF has invested nearly US\$2 billion in grants for integrated programs that cover multiple global environmental challenges. The first three “pilot” programs launched in 2016 were focused on:

- Smallholder Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa (Resilient Food Systems led by IFAD)
- Commodity-driven Deforestation (Good Growth Partnership led by UNDP)
- Sustainable cities (led by the World Bank)

In GEF-7 (2018-2022), the integrated approach was further advanced through three impact programs covering:

- Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR, led by the World Bank)
- Sustainable Forest management in the Amazon (led by the World Bank), Congo Basin (led by UNEP), and Dryland regions (led by FAO)
- Sustainable Cities (led by UNEP)

The GEF-8 (2022-2026) cycle further expanded the challenges targeted through the following 11 integrated programs:

- Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes (CFB IP) covering five distinct and globally significant biomes – Amazon (led by World Bank), Congo Basin (led by UNEP), Guinean Forests (led by CI), MesoAmerica (led by IUCN), and Southeast Asia and Pacific (led by IUCN and FAO)
- The Global Wildlife Program (GWP IP led by World Bank)
- Blue and Green Islands (BGI IP led by UNDP)
- Food Systems (FS IP led by FAO and IFAD)
- Ecosystem Restoration (ER IP led by CI)
- Greening Transportation Infrastructure Development (GRID IP led by WWF-US)
- Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator (NZNPA led by UNEP, CAF, ADB)
- Sustainable Cities (SC IP led by the World Bank)
- Clean and Healthy Oceans (CHO IP led by FAO)
- Circular Solutions to Plastics Pollution (CSPP IP led by UNEP, WWF-US)
- Elimination of Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains (EHCSS IP led by UNEP)

With the progress and achievements made on multiple fronts, from programming to design and implementation, there is considerable opportunity to learn and share experiences across the GEF partnership. The proposed forum will be the first time the GEF Secretariat brings together GEF agencies, STAP, country project teams, and executing partners to foster such learning and knowledge sharing on the IPs. Hence, it will facilitate networking and create momentum for interoperability, which is critical as we look to increasingly push for collective active action toward influencing transformative change in systems.

## Objective of the Forum

The overall objective of the IP forum is to strengthen learning and knowledge exchange on the GEF integrated approach programming for impactful and durable outcomes. The forum will focus on processes to facilitate and promote the integrated approach and achieving systems transformation rather than on designing a specific integrated program. Specifically, the forum will enable the GEF partnership to explore and identify innovations, best practices, and lessons from the integrated programs: for implementation of current GEF-supported programs, and future investments within GEF and beyond.

Examples of areas to explore include the following:

1. **Design Principles** – From theory of change to pathways for systems transformation, how do the IPs embrace complexity in tackling drivers of global environmental degradation while delivering GEBs consistent with priorities of MEAs served by the GEF? Considering the focus on multiple environmental challenges, what lessons can we draw from IPs experience on integrating reporting systems for MEAs at the country level? How are policy or financing instruments (blended finance, etc.) being integrated during the design phase?
2. **Multi-scale Integration** – From planning to delivery, how is integration promoted across spatial (global, country, landscape, transboundary, source-to-sea, ridge to reef, etc.), vertical (institutional, governance, etc.), and sectoral (land use, water, energy, etc.) dimensions to harness synergies, avoid negative trade-offs, and deliver impactful outcomes?
3. **Integrated solutions** – How are integrated programs supporting the delivery of innovative and practical solutions to harness synergies, manage trade-offs across different scales and geographical contexts and increase impact? *E.g. circularity, regenerative, NbS, PES, agroecology, certification schemes, territorial approach, etc.*
4. **Stakeholder engagement** – From global platforms to country-level and local delivery, how do the IPs foster engagement by diverse stakeholders (public, private, civil society, IPs and LCs) to influence collective action toward impactful outcomes? *E.g. whole-of-government, policy coherence, multi-stakeholder dialogue, behavior change, etc.*

5. **Social inclusion** – How are the integrated programs embracing the critical role of gender mainstreaming, youth engagement, and working with IPs and LCs and vulnerable groups in addressing the interface between environment and development? *E.g. empowerment, entrepreneurship, etc.*
6. **Innovative financing** – This is critical for advancing transformative change in systems through the integrated approach programming. A key focus is on using blended finance to mobilize capital from the private sector. How are the IPs leveraging blended finance and other innovative models to deliver impactful outcomes across multiple scales?
7. **From integration to systems transformation** – With three phases of programming linked to natural, food, and urban systems, there is an opportunity to explore how priority actions under the GEF integrated approach programs are mapped to support desired shifts. Given the fact that GEF operates as a country-driven facility (i.e. we invest in country-driven projects to deliver GEBs), how can the IPs be aligned with priority needs for “nudging” systems toward nature-positive, net-zero, and reduced pollution? What are potential targets, leverage points, pathways, and “signals” to consider in tracking such shifts?
8. **Anchoring durability** – From outcomes to impacts, how are the integrated programs strategically positioned to align and influence long-term durability of achievements across institutions and target geographies? How do we capture this experience to assess opportunities for transitioning (or not) IPs across GEF replenishment phases?
9. **Results Based Management** – How can the integrated programs support and drive shifts or transformative change in systems? How would such shifts or transformation be tracked, considering that system change is inherently dynamic, non-linear, and shaped by multiple interacting pathways?
10. **Coordination and governance** – The GEF programmatic approach presents inherent challenges and opportunities for effective coordination and governance of IPs, including for knowledge exchange and learning. How can we harness lessons and experiences from GEF-6 through to GEF-8 to increase efficiency of key operational issues, implementation arrangements, and reporting frameworks? This includes roles of lead agency, co-leading arrangements, program-level reporting, aligning and linking global and child projects, interoperability of platforms, etc.

**11. Communication and Knowledge Management** – The GEF emphasizes these as major requirements for projects and programs. For the IPs, communication and knowledge management are critical for awareness raising and visibility about the program, as well as for socializing tools, approaches, and best practices during implementation. What are the models, platforms, etc. being deployed across the IPs to support communication and knowledge exchange?

## Format

The forum will take place over four full days comprising the following activities (see Table for an indicative structure):

- Field Trip – Full (first) day of visit to project sites (TBC)
- Plenary
  - Opening – setting the stage and framing the forum discussion
  - Closing – synthesis of key lessons and recommendations to take forward
- Parallel Sessions
  - Workstreams – focused on key topics proposed and led by GEF agencies and partners and organized around IP related themes
  - Knowledge Café – focused on socializing tools and best practices based on contributed proposals
- Training Workshops – focused on developing skills and capacity building relevant to IPs and proposed by agencies and partners
- Open space – focuses on networking and building communities of practice around key topics to foster interoperability of platforms
- A dedicated day for Lead Agencies to organize SEPARATE meetings for their respective IPs

A provisional structure for the Forum is presented below.

Time Slots	APR 13	APR 14	APRIL 15	APR 16	APR 17
AM1	Field Trip (Optional)	Opening Plenary	Training Workshops	Training Workshops	Optional Day for IP Meetings
AM2		Parallel Workstreams	Parallel Workstreams	Open Space for bilateral meetings	
PM1		Parallel Workstreams	Parallel Workstreams	Closing Plenary	
PM2		Parallel Knowledge Cafés	Parallel Knowledge Cafés		

GEF Secretariat, in consultation with STAP, will develop the framework to inform and guide the call for contributions, which will then be issued to all agencies, countries, and partners associated with the IPs.

## **Outcomes**

The Forum will synthesize progress and achievements on key aspects of the integrated approach programming while generating new ideas to inform future programming. In addition to knowledge sharing and exchange by agencies, countries, and technical partners, important achievements and lessons learned will be distilled for publication and dissemination as technical papers or peer-reviewed journal articles.

## **How to Contribute and Participate**

The Forum is open to all GEF Agencies, countries, and technical entities that have participated or are participating in the GEF integrated approach programs. Because the focus is on knowledge sharing and exchange, all participants are expected to contribute ideas, lessons, or best practices from their experience with the programs. ***However, prospective participants must find their own funds for travel and board in Kenya.***

The “[Call for Contributions](#)” will enable prospective participants from agencies, countries, and technical partners to submit concrete ideas, lessons, and practices, covering the issues highlighted earlier in this note and others that are equally important. A key criterion for consideration will be the extent to which the proposed contribution addresses an issue of broad relevance across IPs as opposed to technical topics related to a specific sector. The proposals will be reviewed by the GEF Secretariat for suitability as a contribution to one of the following:

1. Workstream – Contributions considered here must address program-level priorities, particularly considering the need to deliver impactful outcomes through collective action and at scale. Selected contributions will be organized around specific topics to foster sharing of experiences in the form of parallel sessions during the Forum. The format for each session will be a moderated discussion, with participants highlighting what works or does not work for advancing the integrated approach. Highlights will then be distilled as inputs for the Forum report.

2. Knowledge Café – Contributions considered here will include country-specific or topical case studies that showcase concrete experiences in the form of presentations, stories, etc. by project teams and executing partners. Selected contributions will be organized around specific geographies or topics to foster sharing of experiences between countries and across programs in the form of parallel sessions during the Forum. The case studies will be compiled as inputs for the Forum report.
3. Training Workshops – Contributions here will focus on socializing innovations, tools, best practices, models, etc. that have been tested and proven to support implementation of the integrated approach and advancing systems transformation.

### **Timeline**

- December 20, 2025 – Call for contributions launched
- January 15, 2026 – Briefing Session for Agencies and Countries
- February 15, 2026 – Deadline for submission of contributions
- February 28, 2026 – Review of contributions completed, and proponents notified; Draft program prepared and disseminated
- March 1, 2026 – Registration for Forum open
- April 13-17, 2026 – Forum in Nairobi