

Formative Evaluation of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF)

CONCEPT NOTE

Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office

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Purpose and Objective

1. This formative evaluation will assess the strategy, operations, processes, and organizational design of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) and provide feedback on its fit-for-purpose to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

Background

2. The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) was established in response to the COP decision (CBD/COP/DEC/15/15), which requested the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to establish a special trust fund to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)¹ that was produced in 2022. The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) was ratified and launched at the Seventh Assembly of the GEF on 24 August 2023. The programming directions of the GBF Fund are informed by the GEF mandate to provide new and additional grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental costs of measures to achieve global environmental benefits. *Since its inception in June 2023, the GEF has allocated \$211 million to GBFF project activities, with an additional \$163 million announced in COP16 in Cali, Colombia, in October 2024 to support the same KMGBF goals.*
3. The GBFF focuses on eight thematic Action Areas, including i) biodiversity conservation, restoration, land/sea use planning; ii) policy alignment; iii) resource mobilization; iv) support for Indigenous peoples and local communities; v) sustainable use of biodiversity, vi) biodiversity mainstreaming, vii) invasive alien species management; and viii) capacity building. As per the *Programming Directions*, monitoring and evaluating the fund's performance will adhere to the current policies and indicators used by the Global Environment Facility. The document provides a proposed set of Core Indicators for the GBFF and includes indicators from the GEF Trust Fund proposed for use in the GBFF. To monitor policy elements of projects supported by the Fund, an additional set of results indicators aligned with those of the KMGBF will be introduced.
4. The programming directions of the GBFF are informed by the GEF mandate to provide new and additional grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental costs of measures to achieve global environmental benefits. The Fund is intended to complement the existing support and scale up financing to ensure the timely implementation of KMGBF. Therefore, GBFF aims to leverage additional resources, including official development assistance, philanthropies, and the private sector. The document also mentions the need for adequacy, predictability, and timely flow of funds.
5. The programming directions for the GBFF outline three principles for resource allocation. First, the allocation system must accommodate financial contributions on a rolling basis. Second, the GBFF should consider the unique needs of the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS). Third, the allocation of resources should consider the potential for generating global biodiversity benefits in different areas.

¹ With Target 19a –To provide US\$20billion p.a. by 2024 for biodiversity in developing nations; COP 16 in Oct 2024 saw eight countries pledging, bringing the total contributions to US\$0.406billion (2% of the target) These resources are not just for GBFF, but also for parallel funds, such as Kunming Biodiversity Fund (KBF) managed under UNDP's Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

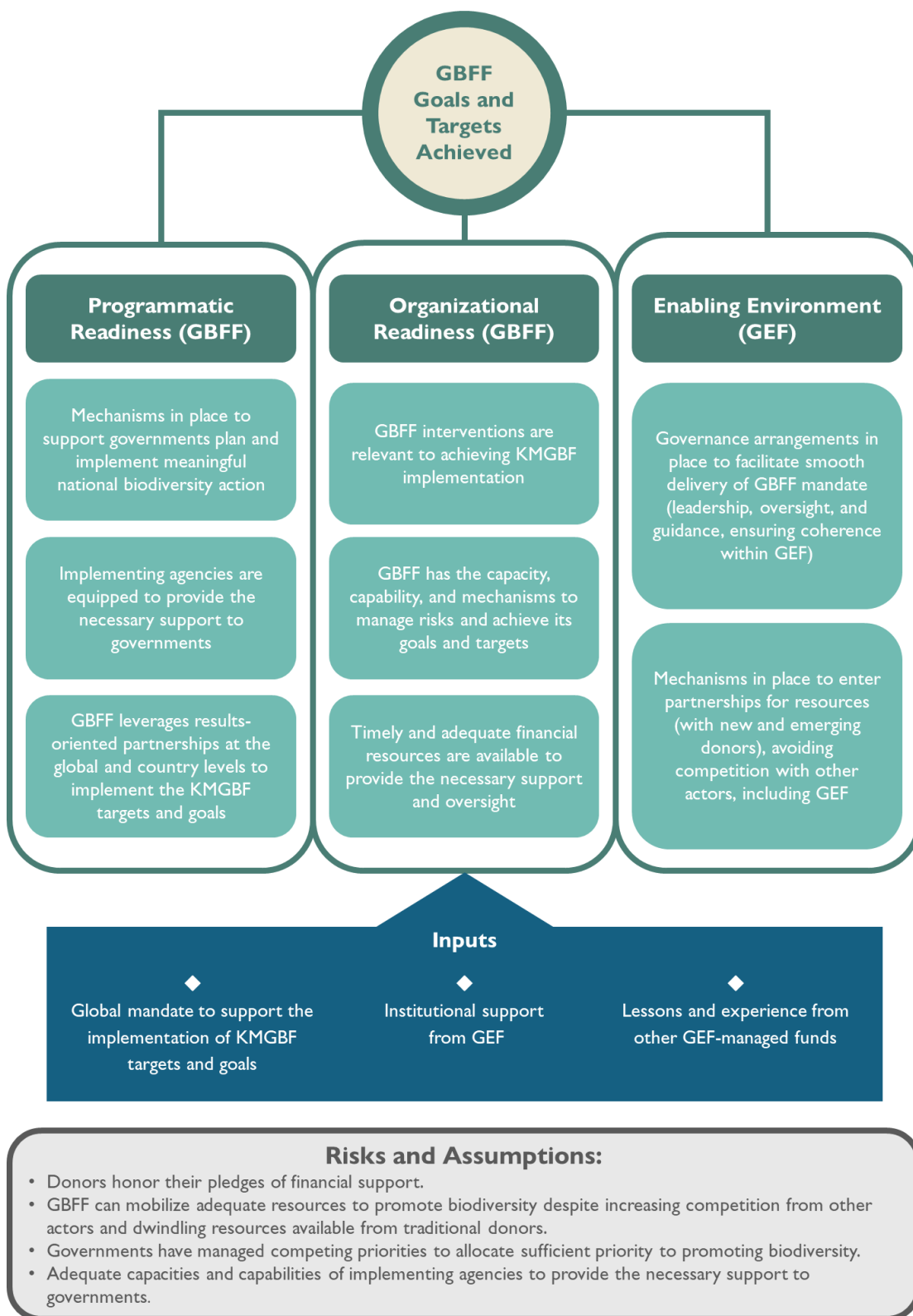
6. Based on these principles, the allocation system is designed to be country-driven, with resources allocated to projects and programs through consecutive selection rounds. The selection criteria for projects and programs include factors such as their potential to generate global environmental benefits, alignment with the GBFF programming directions, alignment with national biodiversity strategies and action plans, policy coherence and coordination, balance among regions, mobilization of private sector and philanthropic resources, and engagement with and support to indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). A key aspect of the GBFF is that it aims to allocate 20% of the total funding directly to Indigenous Peoples for their conservation efforts.
7. The programming directions also propose differentiated resource allocation based on country-specific potential for generating global environmental benefits in the biodiversity focal area. GBFF will use the GEF-8 biodiversity focal area country allocations of the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) to determine the maximum allocations for each country. The share of funding received by a government would be limited to a maximum of twice its share of the GEF-8 STAR allocation. The maximum allocation amounts would be contingent on capitalization and increase as financial contributions grow. *At the Second GBFF Council, three fully developed projects from the first selection round totaling \$37.82 million, including GEF project financing and Agency fees, were approved²As of October 2024, 22 concepts totaling 110 million USD from 24 countries, including six Least-Developed Countries and seven Small Island Developing States, had already been approved, with others in the pipeline.³*
8. The monitoring and evaluation of the Fund's performance will adhere to the current policies and indicators used by the Global Environment Facility.

Evaluation Approach

9. **Scope.** The evaluation will assess GBFF's strategy, processes, organizational design, and portfolio, particularly its contribution to achieving the Kunming-Montreal goals and targets. It will cover the period since its launch in August 2023.
10. **Evaluation criteria:** This formative evaluation will assess GBFF using four of the six internationally recognized evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence.
11. **Conceptual Framework.** The diagram below shows the intermediate results needed for GBFF to achieve its targets and goals. These milestone results are pegged to the programmatic and organizational readiness and enabling environment needed to achieve the necessary milestones. The inputs, risks, and assumptions involved are also presented.

² Para 94: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/f7eb/1022/42137a9a27f30a63615e3fd9/cop-16-08-rev1-en.pdf>

³<https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/news/joint-statement-donors-pledge-163-million-and-confirmation-support-global>



12. **Initial key evaluation questions:** This assessment will be based on generating evidence-based answers to the following four key evaluation questions. The sub-evaluation questions under each question capture the necessary probes under each question.

- **Relevance:** Evaluation Question 1: What is the relevance and value addition of GBFF to implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)? The sub-questions to address this key evaluation question are:
 - Does GBFF have comparative advantages over other actors, including GEF, in implementing KMGBF priorities?
 - Does the GBFF programming adequately focus on the KMGBF priorities?
 - Does GBFF have the mechanisms to identify and implement course corrections necessary for GBFF to remain relevant and add value in a rapidly changing context?
- **Effectiveness.** Evaluation Question 2: Is GBFF likely to achieve its goals and targets related to implementing KMGBF?
 - How well is it positioned to raise resources per its mandate, including through concessional finance and partnerships with philanthropies and the private sector? [will cover the prioritization, strategy, mechanisms in place, and partnerships underway, given the high level of competition and diminishing resources]
 - How well is it positioned to address the recognized challenges of implementing the KMGBF at the national level? In particular, to facilitate national governments plan and implement locally appropriate National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans [Mechanisms in place, partnership strategy and partnerships at the national level, tracking system, to name a few].
- **Efficiency.** Evaluation Question 3: Is GBFF fit (in the dimensions listed below) to deliver its commitments related to the KMGBF in a timely and efficient manner in terms of:
 - ✓ Organizational design – institutional arrangements and governance structures
 - ✓ Human resources - capacities and capabilities
 - ✓ Processes (selecting projects, support to design and oversight, M&E)
 - ✓ Policies (operational guidance, safeguards, priorities)
 - ✓ Resources made available for the administrative budget and programming.
 - How well were the short and long-term risks to succeeding identified and addressed from the beginning?
- **Coherence:** Evaluation Question 4: To what extent do GBFF and other GEF interventions and organizational arrangements cohere?
 - Are the governance arrangements of GBFF and GEF adequately promoting synergies?
 - Do the programming policies and processes (prioritization, design, implementation, oversight, and reporting) of GBFF and GEF cohere?
 - Do the resources mobilized for GBFF and GEF avoid competition and rely on complementary sources?

Approach

13. The evaluation will combine different data collection and analysis methods to answer the proposed evaluation questions. The data from different methods and sources will be triangulated to arrive at credible, reliable evidence. Data collection methods include:
 - i. A desk review
 - ii. Purposively selected case studies of the four CEO-approved GBFF projects and
 - iii. Stakeholder interviews.
 - iv. An electronic survey
14. **Desk review.** This review includes related Council submissions, decisions, and discussions; GBFF documents; GEF policies and guidelines for GBFF programming; and proposals for approved GBFF projects.
15. **Portfolio analysis.** A portfolio analysis would examine the proposals of the four CEO-Endorsement Cleared projects and review those purposively selected among the 18 proposals of the PIF-cleared projects and those of the 48 rejected projects. The findings will be compiled with other evidence and synthesized to understand GBFF's biodiversity investment criteria.
16. **In-depth Case studies.** A case study analysis of all four CEO Endorsement Cleared projects will be considered if desk studies and remote interviews are inadequate to answer the evaluation questions. The strength of the evaluation lies in the multiple sources of evidence discussed. The cases will study the biodiversity needs of the country, the status of implementation of the national biodiversity action plan, the capacity of implementing agencies, and the type of GBFF intervention selected, including the innovativeness and adaptability to future needs. In conjunction with interviews with key stakeholders in the country (including but not limited to clients, government counterparts, other actors, and subject experts in the country), social network analysis (Scott 2009) will be used to assess the likelihood of GBFF influencing government policies and strategies towards conserving biodiversity.
17. **Stakeholder interviews.** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders identified among the Council members, the GEF Secretariat, GBFF staff, national counterparts, project implementing agencies, project staff, STAP, and selected global actors working on biodiversity. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques will cover appropriate stakeholder groups relating to the different (in-depth) analyses included in the evaluation. The interviews will help identify and represent perceptions relevant to the comparative advantages, priorities, programming arrangements, fit-for-purpose, and future directions of GBFF.
18. **Electronic survey.** The survey will collect key data from a broader pool of stakeholders contacted in the earlier data collection methods. The survey will target relevant staff in the GEF secretariat and implementing agencies and stakeholders in countries that have projects with CEO endorsement cleared, PIF cleared, PIF prepared, and PIF rejected. Survey questions will be designed to provide answers to the evaluation questions and will be refined to reflect evidence from other data collection methods to an extent feasible.

Strengths and Limitations

19. With the first batch of projects just approved, GBFF's strategy, policies, organizational design, and programmatic approach will likely evolve with experience. This dynamism is an opportunity and a challenge. This evaluation's timely feedback will help improve the Fund's contributions to the KMGBF and Agenda 2030. On the other hand, this dynamism requires assessing the present situation as well as the likely direction of the Fund. To this end, the evaluation will draw evidence from the abovementioned sources and triangulate it to arrive at an evaluative judgment.
20. The evaluation's methodological strength lies in the multiple sources of evidence discussed above, which will be compared and mapped to the concepts within the TOC and assessment questions. The suggested sources of evidence and subsequent triangulation will provide a sound evidence base to assess GBFF's strategic role and readiness to deliver on its mandate, particularly its ability to learn and correct course.
21. With the first generation of projects yet to be implemented, assessing what will work (or not) and why it is challenging. Drawing from multiple sources (governing bodies).

Quality Assurance Process

22. The evaluation will adopt relevant quality control measures stipulated in the IEO evaluation policy. These include engagement and feedback from key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.
23. The approach paper will be reviewed by IEO's management team and the Steering Committee to ensure that the evaluation questions and issues covered are relevant, the scope of the evaluation is adequate, and the tools and methodology are appropriate. The feedback process will continue during data collection, analysis, and reporting. The team will identify independent external peer reviewers and subject matter experts to review the draft final evaluation report.
24. The final report will address comments received from GEF IEO, GEF Secretariat, GEF council, the CBD, representatives of GEF Agencies, and STAP.

Stakeholder Engagement

25. The stakeholders include Council members, the GEF Secretariat, GBFF staff, national counterparts, project implementing agencies, project staff, STAP, and selected global actors working on biodiversity. A steering committee of members purposively chosen from these groups will be established. To enhance the quality of the evaluation and strengthen organizational ownership of the evaluation, the evaluation team will engage with the steering committee through all evaluation phases – from the design, data collection, and reporting. The approach paper and the draft final report will be shared with the steering committee to check for factual errors or errors in interpreting the data.

Expected Outputs

26. The primary output will be a concise report (25 pages of main text) that captures key findings, lessons, and recommendations. This report will be presented to the key stakeholders, including the GEF Council.

27. A learning workshop will be held with the participation of GBFF management and other relevant stakeholders within GEF, as well as representatives from selected Member States.

Annex: GBFF Portfolio Summary

(as of December 31, 2024)

This portfolio summary provides an overview of the current status and key financial and geographical highlights of projects under the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), as of December 31, 2024. The analysis mostly includes 40 projects that have been selected throughout all three selection rounds of the first programming tranche of GBFF out of a total of 127 proposals submitted (see Figure 1). All 4 proposals submitted in the first selection round were selected, while only a minority of submitted proposals were selected in the second (27% selected) and third rounds (32%). The second and third selection rounds selected 18 projects in each round.

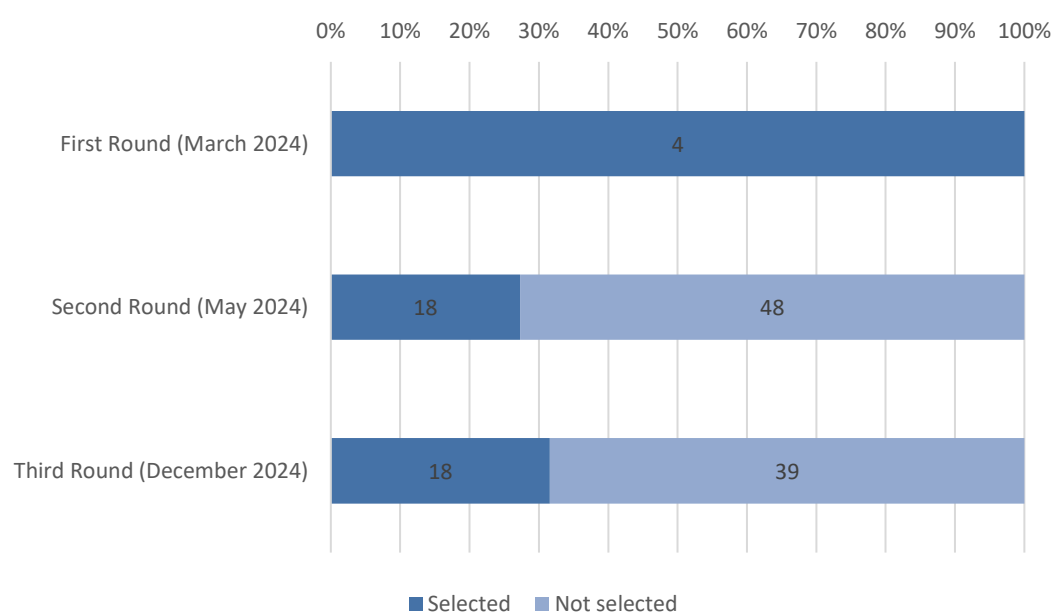


Figure 1: Numbers of selected and non-selected proposals throughout the three selection rounds of the first programming tranche of GBFF. Months in parentheses indicate when the results of each round were announced.

The majority of selected GBFF projects are still in the CEO endorsement stage (see Figure 2). Only four projects, all from the first selection round, have successfully cleared CEO endorsement but not started implementation yet. Three of these projects endorsed in August 2024 (2 projects in Brazil and a project in Mexico)⁴ and one project in Gabon⁵ endorsed in July 2024. All 36 projects from both the second and third selection rounds and are currently under the CEO endorsement stage.

⁴ Projects in Brazil are implemented by Funbio (GEF ID: 11508) and WWF-US (GEF ID: 110509). The project in Mexico is implemented by Conservation International (GEF ID: 11510).

⁵ Project implemented by WWF-US (GEF ID: 11512).

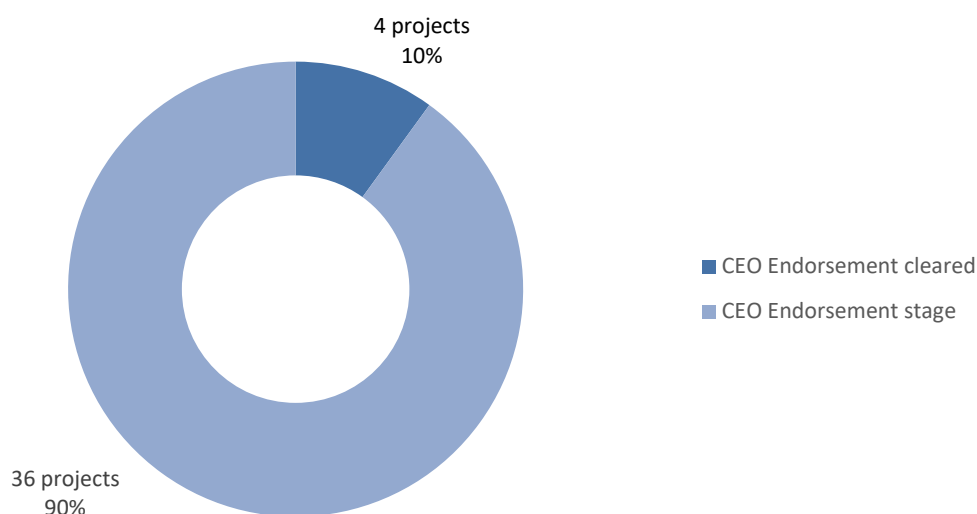


Figure 2: GBFF projects by status

The total GBFF funding (approved or set aside) for all the selected projects, inclusive of PPG and fees, amounts to \$201.6 million (see Figure 3). This amount represents 96% of the first programming tranche which made \$211 million available for GBFF programming. The projects that have cleared CEO endorsement, which were all selected in the first selection round, represent 10% of the number of projects but nearly 20% of the total programmed GBFF funding. “Mex30x30”, a Conservation International project in Mexico (GEF ID: 11510), is the largest project in the current GBFF portfolio, with a financing amount of \$18.5 million. A total of three projects requested less than \$1 million in GBFF funding—all requested \$870 thousand each. These include UNDP projects in Botswana (GEF ID: 11778), Iraq (GEF ID: 11766), and Jordan (GEF ID: 11616).

The total co-financing commitments for all of the selected projects is \$530.7 million, resulting in a co-financing ratio of 2.63 (see Figure 3). Projects from the third selection round exhibit the highest overall co-financing ratio of 3.50, while projects from the second selection round has the lowest co-financing ratio with 1.10. The median co-financing ratio is 0.99, which means the co-financing amount is slightly smaller than the GBFF financing amount. The project with the highest co-financing amount is “Mex30x30” (GEF ID: 11510) mentioned above. However, “Strengthening Globally Significant Biodiversity Corridors in the Philippines through Local Community Empowerment,” a project implemented by the ADB (GEF ID: 11589) has the highest co-financing ratio at \$9 in additional financing mobilized for each \$1 of GEF resources.

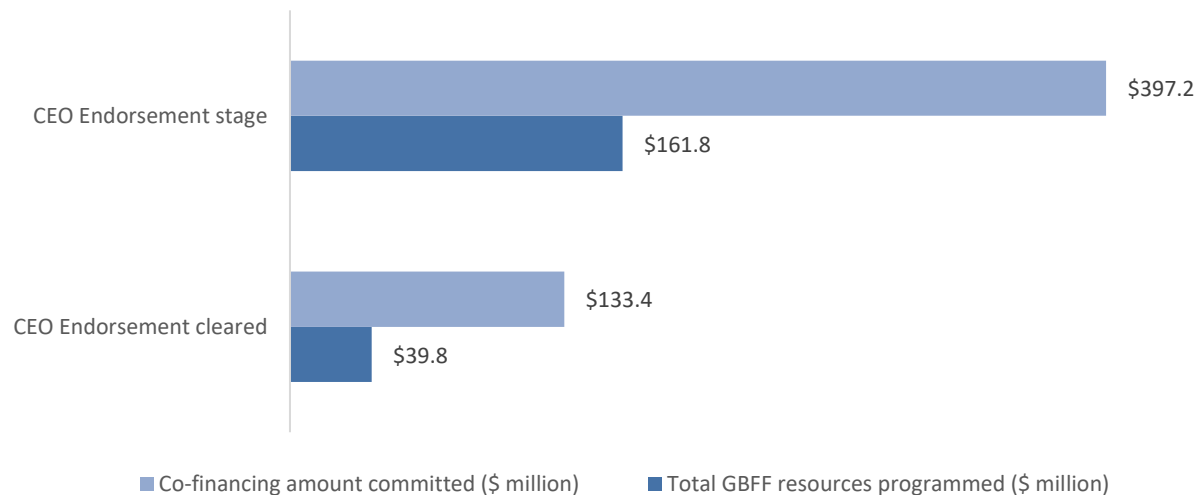


Figure 3: GEF financing and co-financing amounts by project status. Total GBFF resources include project financing amount at PIF/CEO endorsement, PPG amount and fee, and agency fee.

The current GBFF portfolio includes projects in four different regions (see Figure 4).⁶ The largest amount of GBFF financing (approved and set aside) is allocated to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with 12 projects accounting for \$87.1 million—more than 43% of programmed GBFF resources. Africa and Asia host more projects, but are only allocated \$63.2 million and \$50.4 million, respectively. Nevertheless, the median project size in Africa (\$4.6 million) is slightly larger than that in LAC (\$4.3 million). Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region only has a single project implemented by UNDP in Iraq, with a GBFF financing amount requested of \$870 thousand.

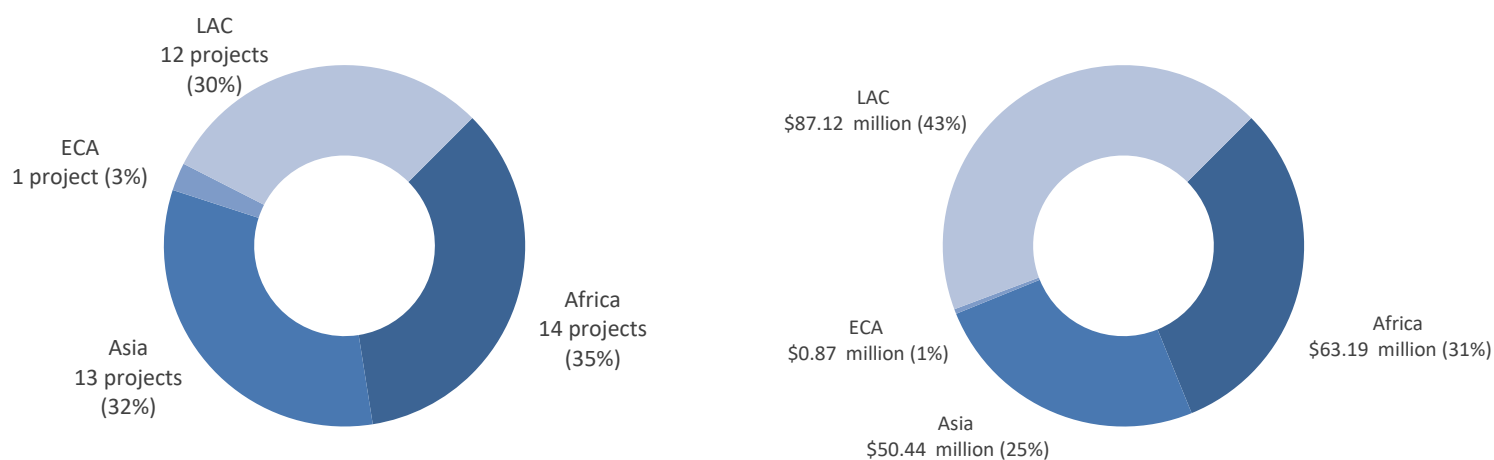


Figure 4: Distribution of GBFF projects and resources by region

⁶ Based on GEF regional classification.

Resources under the first programming tranche of the GBFF have been allocated to 41 countries (see Table 1). These include 11 least developing countries (LDCs),⁷ 10 small island developing states (SIDS),⁸ and one country that is both an LDC and a SIDS (Solomon Islands). All but three LDCs in the portfolio are located in Africa. Meanwhile, the portfolio includes SIDS from the Pacific and the Caribbean. The four CEO-endorsed projects are mostly located in LAC. Brazil is the only country hosting two CEO-endorsed projects, one implemented by Funbio and another by WWF-US. The remaining two projects are located in Gabon and Mexico. The remaining projects still in CEO endorsement stage have a broader geographical distribution. The Philippines hosts two projects, implemented by ADB and UNDP, respectively. Madagascar also has two projects: one implemented by IUCN and another by WWF-US. Additionally, the GBFF portfolio includes 2 regional projects—one in Central Africa spanning Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Congo, and another involving Pacific SIDS of Fiji, Tonga, and Nauru. The remaining 14 projects are distributed across 14 individual countries.

Projects that have cleared CEO endorsement

2 projects	Brazil
1 project	Gabon, Mexico

Projects that are still in CEO endorsement stage

2 projects	Madagascar, Philippines
1 project	<i>Africa</i> (13 countries): Angola, Botswana, Cameroon[†], Central African Republic[†], Congo[†], Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania <i>Asia</i> (14 countries): Cambodia, Fiji[‡], India, Indonesia, Jordan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nauru[‡], Nepal, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga[‡] <i>Europe and Central Asia</i> (1 country): Iraq <i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i> (9 countries): Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Peru, Suriname

[†] part of a regional project in Central Africa (GEF ID: 11609)

[‡] part of a regional project in the Pacific (GEF ID: 11606)

Table 1: Distribution of projects across countries and status

Top GBFF recipient countries mostly correspond to those with the highest country ceiling. Indonesia is a notable exception: the country had the highest maximum total dollar value of funding request(s) among all countries in the first programming tranche at \$25.94 million. However, Indonesia only requested \$7 million—about a quarter of the maximum value. Furthermore, China, which has the 7th highest country ceiling per allocation policies at \$13.78 million, do not have any GBFF projects in this programming tranche. The 3 countries with the largest GEF financing programmed are located in Latin America: Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia. Together they receive an allocation of 25% of total GBFF resources programmed.

⁷ Angola, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania.

⁸ Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Suriname, Tonga.

While the top 10 countries by country ceiling⁹ only include 1 LDC (Madagascar) and no SIDS, the top 10 countries by GBFF financing programmed includes 2 LDCs (Madagascar and Tanzania) and 1 SIDS (Papua New Guinea).

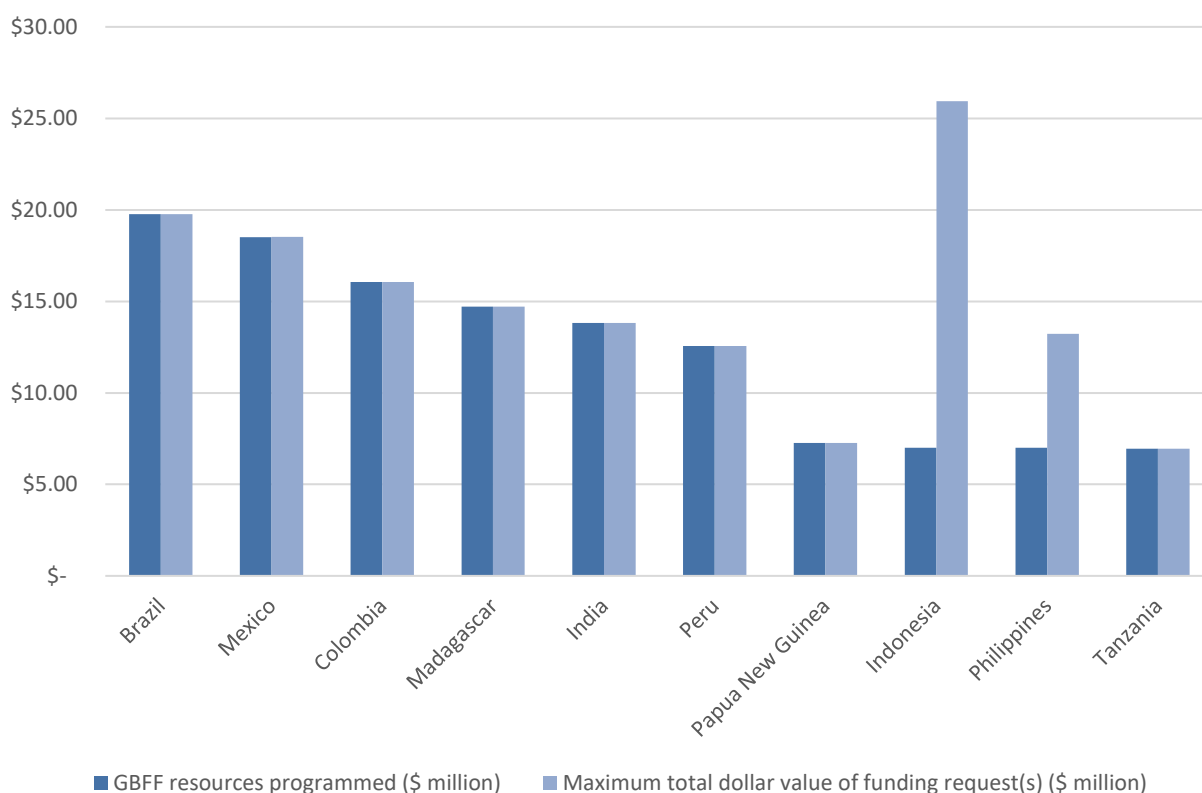


Figure 5: Comparison of GBFF resources programmed across top 10 recipient countries and the maximum total dollar value of funding request(s) for each country in the first programming tranche of GBFF.

Half of projects in the current GBFF portfolio are implemented (at least partially) in LDCs and/or SIDS.

The allocation to LDCs and SIDS currently stands at 36%, equaling the portfolio target set for the GBFF (see Figure 6).¹⁰ A total of 13 projects are implemented in LDCs, including the regional project in Central Africa that involves the Central African Republic. LDCs are allocated 12% of the total GBFF resources programmed. Meanwhile, 9 projects are implemented in SIDS and they represent 12% of the total GBFF resources programmed.

⁹ From highest to lowest: Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Madagascar, India, China, Philippines, Peru, South Africa.

¹⁰ The progress towards the additional 3 percentage point is to be reviewed three years after the ratification of the GBFF as per allocation policies.

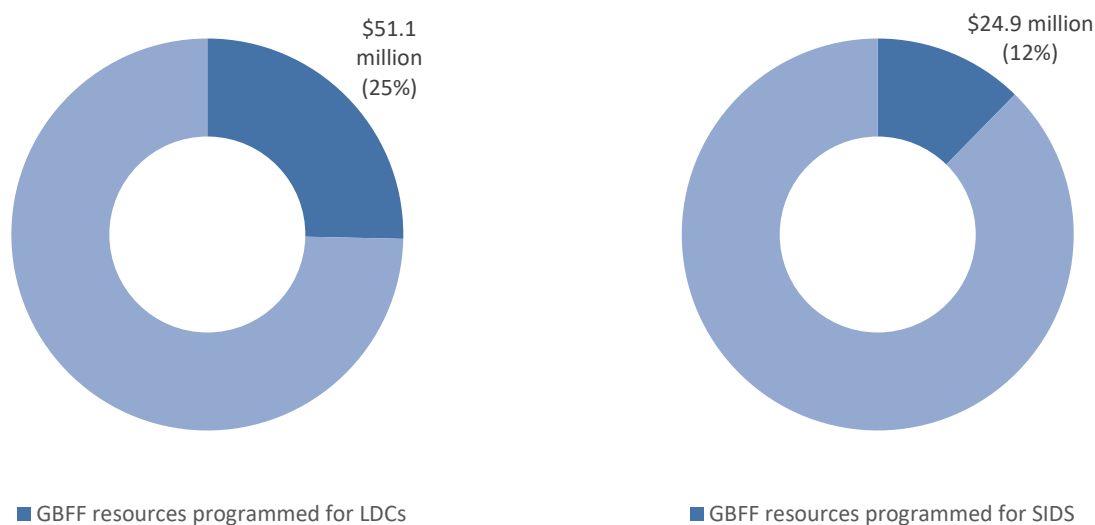


Figure 6: Shares of GBFF resources programmed for LDCs and SIDS

Nearly half of GBFF resources are programmed for Action Area 1. A total of 31 out of 40 GBFF projects contribute towards this Action Area which concerns biodiversity conservation, restoration, land/sea-use and spatial planning (see Table 1). Meanwhile, less than 1% of GBFF resources are programmed to contribute to Action Area 7 related to invasive alien species (IAS).

GBFF Action Area	KMGBF Targets	Number of Projects	GBFF Resources (\$ million)
1. Biodiversity conservation, restoration, land/sea-use and spatial planning	1,2,3	31	\$92.27
2. Support to IPLC stewardship and governance of lands, territories, and waters	1,2,3,22	25	\$55.38
3. Policy alignment and development	14,15,18	10	\$5.71
4. Resource mobilization	18,19	15	\$19.59
5. Sustainable use of biodiversity	5,9	7	\$7.50
6. Biodiversity mainstreaming in production sectors	7,10	14	\$16.20
7. Invasive alien species (IAS) management and control	6	2	\$1.74
8. Capacity building and implementation support for biosafety, handling of biotechnology and access and benefit sharing, including under the Nagoya and Cartagena protocols	13,17	3	\$3.22

Table 2: Distribution of programmed GBFF resources by GBFF action areas

A total of 11 out of 18 GEF agencies are involved in the implementation of GBFF projects (see Figure 7). UNDP leads in terms of the number of projects, implementing 15 projects (37.5% of all selected GBFF

projects), including a project jointly implemented with the World Bank in India.¹¹ UNDP also has the largest GBFF financing approved or set aside with a total of \$47.2 million, representing 23.4% of the total GBFF resources programmed. No agencies reach 30% of resources, which is the ceiling discussed under GEF-8. Most agencies implement more than one GBFF project (including the World Bank which leads the implementation of one project and participates in the implementation of another). The 7 GEF Agencies that have yet to participate in the GBFF are AfDB, BOAD, EBRD, FECO, IADB, UNEP, and UNIDO.

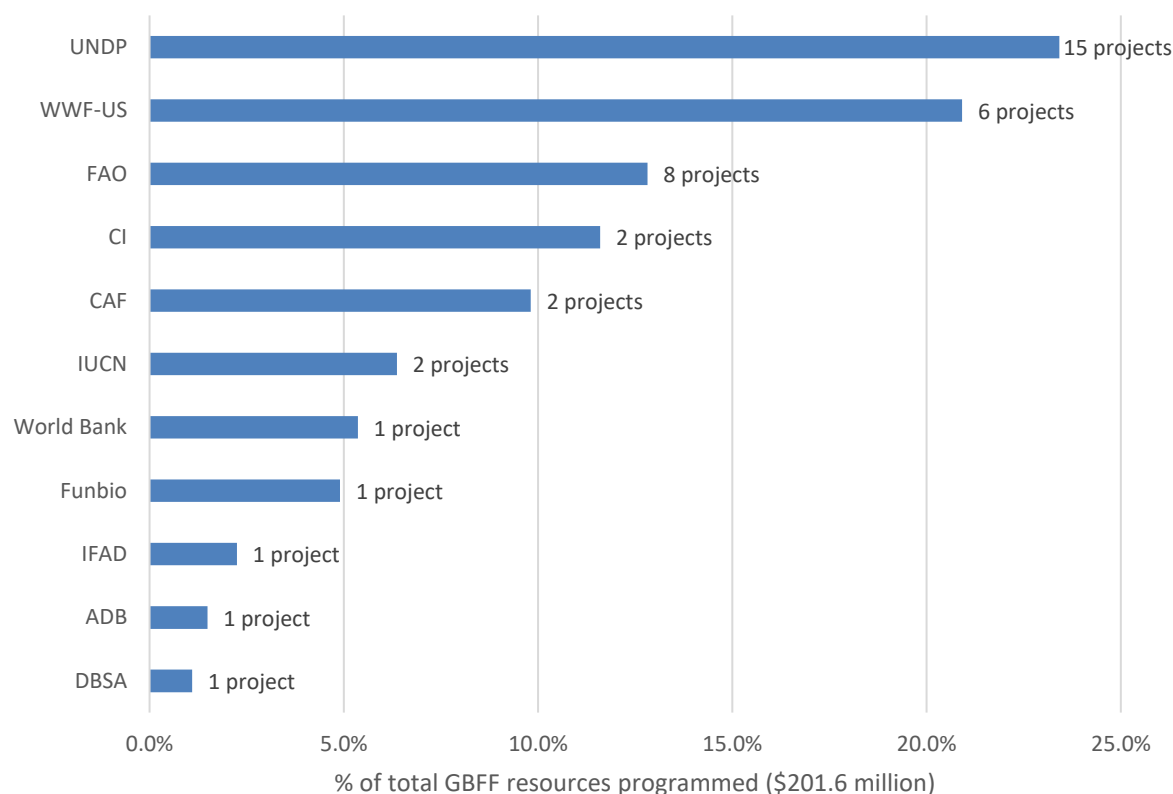


Figure 7: Distribution of GBFF projects and resources across GEF agencies. Project count indicates number of projects led by each agency. Resource calculation includes allocations to participating agencies.

¹¹ Conservation of Biodiversity, its Sustainable Use, Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits in India (CONSERVE) (GEF ID: 11784).