**Report of the Steering Committee meeting of the**

**GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP)**

**28 April 2021**

On April 29, 2021, the Steering Committee (SC) of the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) met virtually with the objectives:

1. Review and discuss the status of GEF-7 SGP implementation efforts.
2. Agree on the process towards formulating a long-term vision for the Programme and the revision of the Upgrading Country process as recommended by the Joint Evaluation of the SGP.
3. Discuss comments from the Replenishment participants and elements of the proposed strategic directions of the SGP for GEF-8.

**Participants:**

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, GEF Secretariat

Françoise Clottes, PPO Director and Chair of the Steering Committee (SC), GEF Secretariat

Pilar Barrera Rey, PPO Senior Operations Officer, GEF Secretariat and acting as secretary of the SC

Paola Ridolfi, PPO Manager, GEF Secretariat

Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Executive Coordinator and Director, Nature, Climate and Energy, UNDP

Diana Salvemini – Global Coordinator, Upgraded Country Programs and Senior Technical Advisor a.i., Local Action, UNDP

Akhteruzzaman Sano – Chair, GEF CSO Network

Maria Leichner – Vice-Chair, GEF CSO Network

Yoko Watanabe – Global Manager, Central Programme Management Team(CPMT), SGP

Doley Tshering, – Deputy Global Manager, CPMT, SGP

**Invited presenter:**

Sonja Teelucksingh – PPO, GEF Secretariat

**Observers :**

Gabriella Richardson Temm – PPO, GEF Secretariat

Angelica Shamerina – CPMT, SGP

Sulan Chen – CPMT, SGP

Terence Hay-Edie – CPMT, SGP

Nick Remple – Senior Advisor, Local Action, UNDP

*Françoise Clottes, Chair of the SC, presented the meeting objectives and agenda (see Annex 1). The agenda was approved by all members and no other items were added to Any Other Business.*

**Agenda item 1. Status of GEF-7 SGP Implementation and broader portfolio reporting (presentation attached)**

1. **Report on disbursement of funds to SGP participating countries:** Yoko reported that the CEO Endorsement Request for the first tranche of $64 million in core funding of the SGP was approved on May 19, 2020. SGP is executed on a rolling modality, to avoid disruptions in the flow of funds. 60% of resources comes from core and 40% from additional STAR. The second tranche has been submitted for CEO Endorsement to the GEF and is being reviewed. Yoko highlighted that disbursement of funds at the countries are on track in spite of the pandemic with close to 80 percent of the GEF-6 funds being disbursed to date.

**Discussion/Q&A**

* Carlos Manuel asked about countries that are allocating additional STAR to the SGP. Yoko responded that about 60 countries have allocated GEF-7 STAR to SGP in addition to the 16 UCP countries, and she would send an updated list of the countries. Carlos Manuel remarked that the Upgrading policy needs to be reviewed and changed. He stressed that while the policy has brought some benefits, it has challenges, including uncertainty in the flow of funds and the fact that CSOs are subject to governments decisions on the STAR resources. He stressed the need for all to work on universal access and present an ambitious envelope and better access to CSOs in GEF-8.
* Sano highlighted the need for more funding for the SGP and stressed the need to examine more closely the challenges and limitations that CSOs will be facing in the pandemic recovery. He also highlighted the need to engage the GEF CSO Network in the proposed Government-CSO-Private Sector dialogue, potentially with a few regions as pilots.
* Maria spoke about the need for enhanced CSOs capacity development initiatives/efforts, particularly targeting the marginalized and vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in partnership between the GEF CSO Network and SGP. She remarked on the need for support to new and existing countries and take a whole of society approach, by prioritizing support to LDCs, SIDS, and countries in fragile and conflict situations where local communities and groups are affected the most by the impacts of environmental degradation and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Maria also talked about the need to create a dialogue and link with the CSO Network.
* Diana mentioned that UNDP is keen on scaling up with additional partners and resources while bringing down the management costs and strengthening local action.
* Responding to a request from Sano to engage the GEF CSO Network in a Government-CSO-Private Sector dialogue with a few regions as pilots, Yoko responded that by the next SC, CPMT together with the GEF CSO Network will come back with a plan.

1. **Status of grants ratio:** Yoko described significant efforts been made in increasing allocation to grants to CSOs/CBOs under GEF-7, where about 61.5% of the SGP Core Resources is allocated to grants to CSOs and CBOs and ratio to grants is higher when STAR resources are also accounted. Yoko further informed the SC that they have taken important cost effectiveness measures and efforts to deploy capacity development and other services through the grant modality and co-financing. She also highlighted that, in terms of resource mobilization at the global level, total approx. US$40 million dollars has been mobilized in co-financing in 2020 from Germany, Japan, MAVA Foundation, Microsoft, the Adaptation Fund and the Caribbean Biodiversity fund and multilaterals in addition to the country/project level co-financing.
2. **Detailed status of access of new countries to the Programme:** Yoko reported that there are currently 19 GEF eligible countries that are not yet participating in the SGP. During GEF-7, so far, four countries, including Eswatini, Bangladesh, Gabon and Angola have joined and begun the process of establishing the SGP Country Programmes. A letter that expresses country’s formal interest to join the SGP has been received from additional 7 countries. These countries are at different stages of appraisal as per established application and appraisal process.
3. **Status of closure of past projects:** Yoko reported timely closure of the earlier operational phases while SGP takes a rolling modality. GEF-4 is now closed, GEF-5 will be closing by end of this year, and GEF-6 next year.

**Agenda item 2: Joint SGP Evaluation**

1. **Brief overview of main findings and recommendations:** Sonja reminded participants about the joint GEF/UNDP evaluation findings, conclusions, and the recommendations. She highlighted that the evaluation recommendations are directed to multiple stakeholders, including the GEF Secretariat, UNDP and SGP Central Programme Management Team. She further highlighted that the GEF Secretariat has worked with UNDP and the SGP Central Programme Management Team in coordinating their management response (to be presented to the UNDP Executive Board in early June). She further informed that the GEF Secretariat will be presenting their management response to the GEF Council in June 2021.
2. **Individual management responses and joint action items:** Diana presented an overview of UNDP’s management response, highlighting that four are to be jointly addressed by UNDP and the GEF; three are to be addressed by UNDP; and the remaining two are to be solely addressed by the GEF.  She also noted that UNDP is ready to contribute and support GEFSEC on the preparation of the GEF management response.

**Discussion/Q&A**

* Responding to a request from Sano that the CSO Network be engaged in the consultations on any of the action items being proposed,Diana responded that they look forward to engaging with the CSO Network.

**Agenda item 3: Moving Forward: ambition for GEF-8**:

1. **Ambition and expectation moving forward:** Carlos Manuel spoke about his increased ambition of the SGP in GEF-8 and beyond. He stressed the need for a long working session to discuss the formulation of a long-term vision and to explore/determine the governance and modalities of SGP in the context of the 2030 agenda and the green/blue agenda. He highlighted the need to explore/elaborate on the position the CSOs as agents of change and build a true dialogue and open space for CSOs to contribute. He reiterated that the SGP is greatly appreciated, visible, generating concrete results, and that it has proven to successfully promote gender and social inclusion as well as global environmental benefits. He stressed, however, that there is room for improvement, including opportunities to address the fact that SGP runs in parallel to other programs and projects and that there is a need to bring SGP in the integration effort. He also stressed the need to increase the scale of the impact, political aspiration and to help country mainstream better to support political coherence and address institutional failures. Reflecting on his experience in Costa Rica, he highlighted that the SGP is seen to achieve benefits in other sectors, agricultural for instance, not just the environment. He highlighted further that as GEF moves into GEF-8 considerations should include efforts to “going from piloting to policy”, delivering on healthy planet-healthy people, and setting an ambitious envelope to the donors. Carlos Manuel concluded by stating that there is a need to organize a post-first replenishment meeting and working session with stakeholders to begin defining a more detailed vision and program for the SGP for GEF-8 and beyond.
2. **Summary of the first draft proposed directions for SGP in GEF-8**: Pilar presented the overall summary of the SGP strategy for GEF-8 presented to the first replenishment meeting. The participants reflected on the reactions and comments from first replenishment meeting and agreed that there was overall support for SGP and for a greater ambition. The discussion also highlighted the need for greater transparency, possibilities to opening the program to others and efforts to increase administrative efficiency to make more resources available for CSOs and communities.
3. **The SGP upgrading policy:** The participants discussed the SGP upgrading policy in light of the findings and conclusions arising from the joint evaluation on this topic. Considering the benefits, challenges and risks associated with the current upgrading policy, participants agreed on the need to re-examine the upgrading policy. The participants agreed that there was a need to establish a dedicated technical group (Task Force) to examine the upgrading process with participation from UNDP, GEFSEC and other stakeholders to take stock of challenges and risks associated with the current upgrading policy and come up with some draft recommendations. It was agreed that this task force should present their findings and conclusion of this review to the Steering Committee for their review and discussion and to determine incorporation in GEF-8 replenishment documents and SGP Implementation Arrangement paper.
4. **Process for formulating a long-term vision for the SGP:** The participant discussed the Joint Evaluation recommendation to conduct a consultative process towards the formulation of an updated long-term vision for the SGP. Participants agreed on the need to start the process for the formulation of the vision (most likely to start in August-September). It was further agreed that this process should be highly inclusive, including upgraded countries, countries participating in the SGP Global Programme, representatives from recipient countries, grantees, UNDP, GEF Sec, STAP and other CSOs and a number of interested Council members.

* Participants agreed on the need for a longer consultation meeting and technical work to discuss the future of the SGP and identify what the higher ambition means.
* It was agreed to have first an evidence-based technical discussion and open it for consultations. GEF Secretariat will work on a proposed approach, process and participants and share with participants.
* Françoise noted that the thinking of the long-term vision process should also propose directions in terms of governance.
* It was agreed that the GEF Secretariat would work with UNDP to propose a process going forward.

**Agenda item 5. Announcement of changes at the GEF Secretariat- coordination on SGP:** Françoise announced that Pilar is leaving the GEF on April 30th to take on another position with TNC and thanked her for her service to the GEF and to the SGP. She also announced that Gabriella Richardson-Temm will take on the coordination role for the SGP and civil society on behalf of the GEF Secretariat starting May 1st.

**Annexes**

See attached presentations.

**Annex 1 Agenda**

1. **Status of GEF-7 SGP Implementation and broader portfolio reporting:** (total 30 minutes)

**Presentation: Yoko Watanabe**

* 1. Detailed status of access of new countries to the Programme
  2. Report on disbursement of funds to SGP participating Countries
  3. Processing of projects – status of PIFs for core
  4. Status of grants ratio
  5. Status of closure of past projects

**Discussion and Q&A**

1. **Joint SGP Evaluation (IEO - UNDP):** (total 10 minutes)
2. Brief overview of main findings and recommendations – Presentation by **Sonja**
3. Individual management responses and joint action items –Presentation by **Sonja and Diana**  
     
   **Discussion and Q&A**
4. **Moving Forward: ambition for GEF-8**: (total 40 minutes including discussion and Q&A)
5. Ambition and expectation moving forward (10 minutes) **– Carlos Manuel**
6. Summary of the first draft proposed directions for SGP in GEF-8 (5 minutes) **– Pilar**
7. Related reactions and comments from first replenishment meeting (7 minutes)– **Pilar & Pradeep**
8. Upgraded Countries Programs – technical work and timeline (8 minutes)**– Pilar**
9. Process for formulating a long-term vision for the SGP (10 minutes)**– All**
10. **Any Other Business** (5 minutes)

1. **Announcement of changes at the GEF Secretariat- coordination on SGP** (5 minutes) **-** Françoise