

# Women Ocean Guardians: Empowering Women for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Large Marine Ecosystems

Review PIF and Make a recommendation

## Basic project information

**GEF ID**  
11933  
**Countries**  
Global  
**Project Name**  
Women Ocean Guardians: Empowering Women for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Large Marine Ecosystems  
**Agencies**  
CI  
**Date received by PM**  
4/29/2025  
**Review completed by PM**  
5/3/2025  
**Program Manager**  
Ines Benabdallah  
**Focal Area**  
International Waters  
**Project Type**  
MSP

## GEF-8 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF) REVIEW SHEET

### 1. General Project Information / Eligibility

**a) Does the project meet the criteria for eligibility for GEF funding?**

**b) Is the General Project Information table correctly populated?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Overall comments applying to the PIF:

Please remove repetitive paragraphs in the PIF, for example those on GEBs and Innovation.

The project is aiming to be gender-transformative and has used the term throughout. Please have a paragraph on what gender-transformative means (more than a footnote) in the context of the project, for clarity.

1.

a) Yes, the project aims to improve the conservation and sustainable use of large marine ecosystems through empowering women. This is aligned to both Objective 1 of the GEF-8 IW strategy and the GEF policy on gender equality. It could also serve as a model of gender transformative initiatives in marine ecosystem conservation and management for future projects.

b) Yes.

**3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:**

Addressed.

#### Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

Repetitive paragraphs have been removed/revised.

The paragraph on the "gender transformative" definition is added as requested under paragraph 14.

#### **2. Project Summary**

**Does the project summary concisely describe the problem to be addressed, the project objective and the strategies to deliver the GEBs or adaptation benefits and other key expected results?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Partly.

a) Please elaborate on the approach the project aims to adopt to deliver on its objective, to better describe the components and how they aim to drive transformational change, as well as the expected results.

- b) Please ensure that an explicit links to regional priorities, existing governance mechanisms and/or SAP implementation are made in the summary.
- b) As some GEF financed activities will be carried out in countries, it is understood that those countries have not been yet identified. Please include that participating countries will be identified during PPG and include the process/criteria for selection.
- c) Please ensure that at the time of CEO Approval of the fully developed project, the Letters of Endorsement from said countries are included
- d) Please include the global environmental benefits the project aims to acheive.
- e) Please add a footnote to briefly describe the 2024 Coastal Women Leaders? Exchange and its Call to Action.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

#### Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

- a) The summary further elaborated on the approach the project aims to adopt to deliver on its objective, to better describe the components and how they aim to drive transformational change, as well as the expected results.
- b) Given the word limit for the project summary, a concise reference has been included to address the project's alignment with regional priorities and existing governance frameworks. Additional details are provided in the section Alignment with GEF-8 Programming Strategies and Country/Regional Priorities. (paragraph 75-81).
- b) Country identification and selection criteria are included in the summary and further elaborated in para 54.
- c) This is noted. At CEO Approval stage, LoEs will be provided for each participating country.
- d) The GEBs were already included in the summary, it has been further elaborated to detail improved management in MPAs/OECMs, people impacted and gender-responsive ocean governance models across transboundary marine systems

???e) Footnote included as requested.

#### **3 Indicative Project Overview**

**3.1 a) Is the project objective presented as a concise statement and clear?**

**b) Are the components, outcomes and outputs sound, appropriate and sufficiently clear to achieve the project objective and the core indicators per the stated Theory of Change?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Partly. Please delete the sentence on objective indicators and targets.

b) Partly.

i) Please delete all indicators and targets from the table. These could be best presented as draft in the outcome and outcome descriptions below, and better refined in the CEO ER.

ii) Please consider the overlap between outputs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2; and consider either merging or clarifying the difference in output: It is difficult to distinguish between the establishing regional hubs and establishing structures and execution arrangements, as the latter is implied in the former.

iii) Output 2.1.3: Please consider a more results-oriented phrasing. Based on the baseline and the desired target, this output should focus more on how partnerships and momentum could be built based on the pledge, rather than launching it (assumed low-hanging fruit).

iv) Outcome 2.2: Please consider rephrasing to explicitly indicate that enhanced capacity will be built through the WOG network.

v) Output 3.1.2 has two parts: 1) enhance financing access for women-led enterprises, and 2) enhance sustainable livelihoods. There is no indicator on sustainable livelihoods. Is the project expecting that the partnership with the financial institutions would enhance both financing access and sustainable livelihoods? Increased financing access may enhance sustainable livelihoods but these actions are separate and should have separate indicators.

vi) For coherence in framing, please consider using the same phrasing for outcome 2.2, 3.1, 4.1 and 5.1 as for the first two outcomes. For example, Outcome 2.2: "*women have enhanced capacity to effectively engage in ocean governance, leadership, and decision-making to sustain healthy marine ecosystems*".

vii) Please rephrase outputs 4.1 and 4.3, which currently reads as outcomes.

viii) Please ensure that the barriers are mapped (with arrows) to the components/outputs to establish the full pathway of change.

#### Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

**a)** Indicators and targets in the table have been removed and will be provided at CEO stage upon confirmation during the PPG phase.

**b-i)** While it is a standard practice to include the indicators at PIF stage, given the comment, we have deleted them from the table and included them under the outcome and output descriptions.

**b-ii)** The two outputs are merged as suggested.

**b-iii)** The output has been renamed and adjusted.

**b-iv)** Outcome rephrased accordingly.

**b-v)** We would like to kindly note that the output-specific indicators are not yet included in the PIF stage, yet it is very well noted for the PPG stage to include dedicated indicators for these two aspects.

**b-vi)** Respective outcomes are renamed in line with the comment received.

**b-vii)** Outcomes rephrased in line with the comments.

**b-viii)** Barriers are mapped with arrows to better demonstrate the full pathway in the ToC diagram.

**3.2 Are gender dimensions, knowledge management, and monitoring and evaluation included within the project components and appropriately funded?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

#### Agency's Comments

**3.3 a) Are the components adequately funded?**

**b) Are the GEF Project Financing and Co-Financing contributions to PMC proportional?**

**c) Is the PMC equal to or below 5% of the total GEF grant for FSPs or 10% for MSPs? If the requested PMC is above the caps, has an exception (e.g. for regional projects) been sufficiently substantiated?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Yes.

b) Yes.

c) PMC is equal 5%.

#### Agency's Comments

### 4 Project Outline

#### A. Project Rationale

#### 4.1 SITUATION ANALYSIS

**a) is the current situation (including global environmental problems, key contextual drivers of environmental degradation, climate vulnerability) clearly and adequately described from a systems perspective?**

**b) Are the key barriers and enablers identified?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Yes.

b) Yes.

Agency's Comments

#### **4.2 JUSTIFICATION FOR PROJECT**

**a) Is there an indication of why the project approach has been selected over other potential options?**

**b) Does it ensure resilience to future changes in the drivers?**

**c) Is there a description of how the GEF alternative will build on ongoing/previous investments (GEF and non-GEF), lessons and experiences in the country/region?**

**d) are the relevant stakeholders and their roles adequately described?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Yes: By adopting a transformative model for ocean governance that embeds gender equity not as an add-on, but as a structural enabler of marine conservation, and through a scalable and replicable design and network architecture, the project approach is innovative and conducive to long-term sustainability.

b) Yes, as indicated above, the project has outputs that focus on embedding the Guardians network within existing institutions and tackling systemic root problems

c) Yes.

d) Yes.

Agency's Comments

#### **5 B. Project Description**

##### **5.1 THEORY OF CHANGE**

**a) Is there a concise theory of change that describes the project logic, including how the project design elements will contribute to the objective, the expected causal pathways, and the key assumptions underlying these?**

**b) Are the key outputs of each component defined (where possible)?**

## Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Yes.

b) Partly. In addition to above comments about outputs and outcomes, please:

i) Revise output 3.1.1 to include the selection criteria that will be used to define the pilot countries and communities during the PPG stage. Please ensure this is coherently presented across the PIF.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

## Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

**b)** Output has been revised with a table outlining the selection criteria included in paragraph 54.

### **5.2 INCREMENTAL/ADDITIONAL COST REASONING**

**Is the incremental/additional cost reasoning properly described as per the Guidelines provided in GEF/C.31/12?**

## Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes; in addition to the global environmental benefits, this project has the potential to pilot an innovative approach to advancing gender equality by placing women empowerment at the heart of LME management and conservation approaches at community, national, regional and global contexts.

## Agency's Comments

### **5.3 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

**a) Is the institutional setting, including potential executing partners, outlined and a rationale provided?**

**b) Comments to proposed agency execution support (if agency expects to request exception).**

**c) Is there a description of potential coordination and cooperation with ongoing GEF-financed projects/programs and other bilateral/multilateral initiatives in the project area**

**d) Are the proposed elements to capture and disseminate knowledge and learning outputs and strategic communication adequately described?**

## Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) No. The EA is identified (WCS) and several partners are listed, but there is no section on implementation. Please include a section elaborating more on the institutional setting and rationale.

b) N/A.

c) Yes.

d) Yes.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

#### Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

Please refer to the newly introduced paragraph 20 for more details on the selection for EA and preliminary information on the institutional arrangements which will be further clarified during the PPG phase and presented in the CEO document.

**5.4 a) Are the identified core indicators calculated using the methodology included in the corresponding Guidelines (GEF/C.54/11/Rev.01)?**

**b) Are the project's indicative targeted contributions to GEBs (measured through core indicators)/adaptation benefits reasonable and achievable?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Partly.

i) If the pilot sites are to be defined in PPG, CI2 should only be understood as indicative. Please see comment below on criteria for pilot country selection and revise CI 2 to reflect this accordingly in the GEB target and methodology description.

b) Partly.

i) Please indicate (at least) one or more LMEs that will be under improved management - this is implied in the PIF and should be reflected in the project's GEB ambition.

ii) The target for CI.11, 1750 direct beneficiaries, is underwhelming, please make efforts to increase this target and the project reach.

iii) The project should target more than 50 policymakers and technical experts from relevant institutions to be trained in inclusive policy and governance frameworks. This is where the project's long-term scalability and sustainability will be ensured. For this set of beneficiaries, please consider targeting more men, especially those in leadership positions, to raise their awareness and also to get their support.

iv) For CI.7, IW:LEARN should be marked "1" at PIF and aspire to "4" at closure, rather than "4" at PIF.



3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

## Agency's Comments

CI-GEF May 30, 2025

**a-i)** This is noted, please see our response below.

**b-i)** The indicative nature of the figure provided under Indicator 2.2 has been further elaborated. The methodology section below the Core Indicators table and in the Core Indicators sheet has been updated as follows:

Indicator 2.2 reflects an indicative estimate of 203,079 hectares of marine protected areas expected to be under improved management, based on potential pilot sites in Belize and Costa Rica. This includes Glover's Reef (86,653 ha) and Sapodilla Cays (38,594 ha) in the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef LME, and Cahuita National Park (22,188 ha), Tortuguero National Park (50,284 ha), and Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge (5,360 ha) in the Caribbean Sea LME.

This figure is provisional and will be revisited and validated during the PPG phase once pilot countries and site-specific interventions are confirmed. While concrete interventions are currently anticipated in the Caribbean region, the project maintains a global aspiration, with additional engagement opportunities in other LMEs ? such as the Western Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal ? to be explored during the PPG phase, particularly through regional platforms and knowledge-sharing activities.

**b-ii)** The number of target beneficiaries has been more than doubled following careful analysis (3,560). While every effort was made to increase this figure, it is important to note that the project's total GEF financing amounts to USD 4 million, which sets a realistic ceiling for beneficiary reach.

**b-iii)** The target for policymakers and technical staff have been significantly increased, from 50 to 400. Also, to increase the male target beneficiaries, the ratio of targets have been revised as 65% women and 35% men.

**b-iv)** This is noted. Core Indicator 7 (IW:LEARN) has been updated in the Core Indicators sheet to reflect a rating of ?1? at PIF stage, with the aspiration to achieve Level ?4? at project closure. The text below the Core Indicators table has also been updated accordingly as follows:

Indicator 7.4 The project is currently rated at Level 1 for IW:LEARN engagement at the PIF stage. It aims to reach Level 4 by project closure by developing an IW-compliant website, producing and sharing knowledge products through IW:LEARN, and actively participating in IW portfolio learning events and exchanges.

**5.5 NGI Only: Is there a justification of financial structure and use of financial instrument with concessionality levels?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A

Agency's Comments

#### **5.6 RISKS**

**a) Is there a well-articulated assessment of risk and identification of mitigation measures under each relevant risk category?**

**b) Is the rating provided reflecting the residual risk to the likely achievement of intended outcomes after accounting for the expected implementation of mitigation measures?**

**c) Are environmental and social risks, impacts and management measures adequately screened and rated at this stage and consistent with requirements set out in SD/PL/03?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Partly. Please revise the overall risk section, which still appears as draft "*The overarching risk to this project is XXX.* "

i) Please revise the political and governance risk ratings: the political climate should reflect a moderate risk. Given that the participating countries have not been selected, a new and robust risk assessment needs to take place once the countries are determined.

b) Yes.

c) Yes.

**3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:**

**Addressed.**

Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30,2025**

**a) The overarching risk to this project is moderate. Revised.**

**i) The risk rating has been changed from Low to Moderate with the below addition to the mitigation measure part:**

A context-specific review of political and governance risks will also be undertaken once the pilot countries are selected, ensuring that risks are appropriately evaluated and mitigation measures tailored to each context.

#### **5.7 Qualitative assessment**

**a) Does the project intend to be well integrated, durable, and transformative?**

**b) Is there potential for innovation and scaling-up?**

**c) Will the project contribute to an improved alignment of national policies (policy coherence)?**

#### **Secretariat's Comments**

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

a) Yes. The project is promising in the way it outlines potential long-term sustainability measures of the interventions it plans to employ to achieve the objective of empowering women in LME management and conservation. It is transformative by design.

b) Yes. The project is innovative and scalable by design, anchoring its approach in co-design and empowerment of women in LME management and conservation at the local, national, regional and global levels.

c) Yes. By integrating gender transformative approaches to local and regional ocean governance policies and frameworks, the project contributes to an improved alignment of national socio-economic and environmental policies.

#### **Agency's Comments**

### **6 C. Alignment with GEF-8 Programming Strategies and Country/Regional Priorities**

**6.1 Is the project adequately aligned with focal area and integrated program strategies and objectives, and/or adaptation priorities?**

#### **Secretariat's Comments**

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

#### **Agency's Comments**

**6.2 Is the project alignment/coherent with country and regional priorities, policies, strategies and plans (including those related to the MEAs and to relevant sectors)**

#### **Secretariat's Comments**

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Partly. Please elaborate better on how the project is aligned with the regional priorities of the regional institutions/organisations and the Strategic Action Plans of the three potential LMEs (Caribbean Sea, Western Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal) the project aims to target.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

Agency's Comments

CI-GEF May 30, 2025

More information on the alignment with the regional priorities and SAPs of the three potential LMEs has been provided in paragraphs 78-81.

**6.3 For projects aiming to generate biodiversity benefits (regardless of what the source of the resources is - i.e. BD, CC or LD), does the project clearly identify which of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework the project contributes to and how it contributes to the identified target(s)?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Partly. Please elaborate on what KMGBF targets the project contributes to and how, ideally in table format.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

Agency's Comments

CI-GEF May 30, 2025

Done, more information on how the project contributes to the KMGBF targets has been provided in a table format. Please refer to paragraph 77 and in portal section C. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES.

#### **7 D. Policy Requirements**

**7.1 Is the Policy Requirements section completed?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

Agency's Comments

**7.2 Is a list of stakeholders consulted during PIF development, including dates of these consultations, provided?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes, the list is included in above sections

Agency's Comments

**8 Annexes**

**Annex A: Financing Tables**

**8.1 Is the proposed GEF financing (including the Agency fee) in line with GEF policies and guidelines? Are they within the resources available from (mark all that apply):**

**STAR allocation?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A

Agency's Comments

**Focal Area allocation?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

Agency's Comments

**LDCF under the principle of equitable access?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A

Agency's Comments

**SCCF A (SIDS)?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A

Agency's Comments

**SCCF B (Tech Transfer, Innovation, Private Sector)?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A.

Agency's Comments

**Focal Area Set Aside?**

Secretariat's CommentsN/A.

Agency's Comments

**8.2 Is the PPG requested within the allowable cap (per size of project)? If requested, has an exception (e.g. for regional projects) been sufficiently substantiated?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

Agency's Comments

**8.3 Are the indicative expected amounts, sources and types of co-financing adequately documented and consistent with the requirements of the Co-Financing Policy and Guidelines?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Please provide an explanation for the lack of other types of co-financing such as grants and "investment mobilized".

Please also comment on any ambition to secure a variety of co-financing during PPG stage.

Please spell out all acronyms.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Addressed.

Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

The following text has been introduced underneath the Co-financing table:

The co-financing presented at this stage reflects initial partner commitments. During the PPG phase, the project team will proactively explore opportunities to secure additional sources of co-financing, with an emphasis on grants and investment-type contributions. Efforts will focus

on identifying funding and technical support aligned with the project's objectives on gender-transformative ocean governance and sustainable coastal livelihoods.

All acronyms have been spelled out.

**Annex B: Endorsements**

**8.4 Has the project been endorsed by the country's(ies) GEF OFP and has the OFP at the time of PIF submission name and position been checked against the GEF database?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Pilot countries and locations will be selected during PPG, thus, securing respective LOEs will happen in the PPG phase. This is in line with previous IW Global projects.

Agency's Comments

**Are the OFP endorsement letters uploaded to the GEF Portal (compiled as a single document, if applicable)?**

Secretariat's Comments 15 May 2025, IBenabdallah: see above (8.4).

Agency's Comments

**Do the letters follow the correct format and are the endorsed amounts consistent with the amounts included in the Portal?**

Secretariat's Comments 15 May 2025, IBenabdallah: see above (8.4).

Agency's Comments

**8.5 For NGI projects (which may not require LoEs), has the Agency informed the OFP(s) of the project to be submitted?**

Secretariat's Comments N/A

Agency's Comments

**Annex C: Project Location**

**8.6 Is there preliminary georeferenced information and a map of the project's intended location?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Project locations will be identified during PPG phase.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

Project locations will be identified during PPG in line with the criteria for selection.

Agency's Comments

**Annex D: Safeguards Screen and Rating**

**8.7 If there are safeguard screening documents or other ESS documents prepared, have these been uploaded to the GEF Portal?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

Agency's Comments

**Annex E: Rio Markers**

**8.8 Are the Rio Markers for CCM, CCA, BD and LD correctly selected, if applicable?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Yes.

Agency's Comments

**Annex F: Taxonomy Worksheet**

**8.9 Is the project properly tagged with the appropriate keywords?**

Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:



Yes.

#### Agency's Comments

#### Annex G: NGI Relevant Annexes

**8.10 Does the project provide sufficient detail (indicative term sheet) to take a decision on the following selection criteria: co-financing ratios, financial terms and conditions, and financial additionality? If not, please provide comments. Does the project provide a detailed reflow table to assess the project capacity of generating reflows? If not, please provide comments. Is the Partner Agency eligible to administer concessional finance? If not, please provide comments.**

Secretariat's Comments N/A.

#### Agency's Comments

### 9 GEFSEC Decision

**9.1 Is the PIF and PPG (if requested) recommended for technical clearance?**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah: No. Please revise the proposal as per the comments below and resubmit.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah: Yes.

#### Agency's Comments

**CI-GEF May 30, 2025**

GEF Sec comments have been reviewed and addressed accordingly.

**9.2 Additional Comments to be considered by the Agency at the time of CEO Endorsement/ Approval**

#### Secretariat's Comments

15 May 2025, IBenabdallah:

Please ensure a variety of sources and types of co-financing ahead of CEO Endorsement, if possible.

At PPG and in the development of the Gender Action Plan, it would be good to further explore what activities the project should do to advance the project's gender-transformative goal. This project is innovative and there is an opportunity for it to be the model in promoting gender-transformative approaches in GEF projects.

3 June 2025, IBenabdallah:

In addition to the above comments, please ensure SAP implementation is an integral part of component 3 and the pilot initiatives.

Agency's Comments

CI-GEF May 30, 2025

This is noted, during the PPG phase, efforts will be made to identify a variety of sources and types of co-financing.

Thank you for this encouraging feedback. We appreciate the recognition of the project's potential to serve as a model for gender-transformative approaches in GEF projects. During the PPG phase and through the development of the Gender Action Plan, we will further refine and expand the proposed activities to deepen the project's gender-transformative impact. This will include close consultation with women leaders, gender experts, and key stakeholders to ensure that interventions are grounded in local realities while advancing systemic change across governance, policy, and community levels.

Review Dates

First Review

Additional Review (as necessary)

Additional Review (as necessary)

Additional Review (as necessary)

Additional Review (as necessary)

PIF Review

5/15/2025

6/3/2025

Agency Response

5/30/2025