

GEF-8 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF)

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General Project Information

Project Title

SGP CSO Challenge Program

Region

Global

GEF Project ID

Country(ies)

Global

Type of Project

FSP

GEF Agency(ies):

IUCN

GEF Agency ID

P04950

Executing Partner

Executing Entity: TBD

Selected CSOs supported with direct investment and programmatic supports

IUCN

Executing Partner Type

Others

CSO

GEF Agency

GEF Focal Area (s)

Multi Focal Area

Submission Date

Project Sector (CCM Only)

Small Grants Program

Taxonomy

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Climate Change, Climate Change Adaptation, Livelihoods, Focal Areas, Biodiversity, Protected Areas and Landscapes, Community Based Natural Resource Mngt, Mainstreaming, Agriculture and agrobiodiversity, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Climate Change Mitigation, Chemicals and Waste, Private Sector, Stakeholders, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, Local Communities, Type of Engagement, Consultation, Information Dissemination, Partnership, Participation, Communications, Awareness Raising, Civil Society, Community Based Organization, Indigenous Peoples, Gender Equality, Women groups, Gender Mainstreaming, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Knowledge Generation and Exchange, Gender results areas, Participation and leadership, Access to benefits and services, Innovation, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Knowledge Generation, Workshop, Training, Knowledge Exchange, South-South, Peer-to-Peer

Type of Trust Fund

GET

Project Duration (Months)

48

GEF Project Grant: (a)

9,075,229.00

GEF Project Non-Grant: (b)

0.00

Agency Fee(s) Grant: (c)

816,771.00

Agency Fee(s) Non-Grant (d)

0.00

Total GEF Financing: (a+b+c+d)

Total Co-financing

9,892,000.00	4,500,000.00
PPG Amount: (e)	PPG Agency Fee(s): (f)
99,083.00	8,917.00
PPG total amount: (e+f)	Total GEF Resources: (a+b+c+d+e+f)
108,000.00	10,000,000.00
Project Tags	
CBIT: No NGI: No SGP: Yes Innovation: No	

Project Summary

Provide a brief summary description of the project, including: (i) what is the problem and issues to be addressed? (ii) what are the project objectives, and if the project is intended to be transformative, how will this be achieved? (iii), how will this be achieved (approach to deliver on objectives), and (iv) what are the GEBs and/or adaptation benefits, and other key expected results. The purpose of the summary is to provide a short, coherent summary for readers. The explanation and justification of the project should be in section B “project description”. (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The CSO Challenge Program is an initiative of GEF SGP 2.0 to pilot and test complementary approaches to achieve Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). The program will establish a competitive mechanism with the objective 'to identify, reward and support high impact innovative environmental approaches and solutions spearheaded by civil society organizations and actors.' The Program will prioritize youth and youth-led CSOs, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) and offer finance and opportunities for cross learning and creating new strategic partnerships for the GEF to deliver on GEBs.

The Program will support implementation of a global, transparent, open call for proposals to identify projects and grantees directly from proponents. The selection of projects will ensure a global balance, including a subnational, national, regional and global reach, as well as balance among the 5 eligible SGP priority areas. Total direct grant investment in winning CSO initiatives will total 76% of CSO Challenge Program GEF project grant resources, with the maximum grant to any single winning initiative limited to \$300,000 USD

A key feature of the program will be to provide extensive and high-value opportunities and platforms for partnership, knowledge creation and peer-to-peer learning. This will be facilitated in part by integration within each supported CSO-led initiative of a proven learning methodology including knowledge management outputs and activities to document and share experiences and learning from each project with other actors who have the potential to replicate and improve upon the approaches, and support further scaling-up of CSO-led solutions and approaches.

Indicative Project Overview

Project Objective

To identify, reward, support, and foster replication and scaling up of high-impact innovative environmental approaches and solutions spearheaded by civil society organizations and actors, for the benefit of people and planet.

Project Components

1. Identification and Recognition of High Impact CSO-led Initiatives

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET

GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
500,000.00	564,750.00

Outcome:

Outcome 1.1. Cohort of high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives and pool of empowered CSO innovation champions;

Outcome 1.2. Enhanced awareness and support among policymakers, CSOs, donors, investors, for CSO-led environmental solutions

Output:

Output 1.1: Global call and identification of 2 cohorts (15-20 winners, 15-20 semi-finalists);

Output 1.2: High impact events, communications, and exchanges

2. Direct and Programmatic Support for Enhanced and Strengthened Impact

Component Type	Trust Fund
Investment	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
7,150,208.00	2,360,250.00

Outcome:

Outcome 2.1. Accelerated development, implementation, replication and scale up of high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives;

Outcome 2.2. Enhanced technical, organizational, leadership capacity to design, implement, grow and manage high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives;

Outcome 2.3. Replicable training systems and supports for enhanced CSO-led innovation

Output:

Output 2.1: Direct investment in innovative CSO initiatives for strengthening, replicating, scale up;

Output 2.2.1: Tailored demand-driven capacity building on management, leadership, etc.

Output 2.2.2: Tailored demand-driven capacity and support for assessing impacts to BD and ecosystems and enhancing design of winning CSO-led innovative initiatives

Output 2.3.1: Methodology, guidelines and tools developed to support training of global and local innovation mentors and coaches

Output 2.3.2: Pool of global and local innovation mentors and coaches trained to support CSO-led innovation

3. Enhanced Partnership, Knowledge Creation, Learning

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
300,000.00	787,500.00

Outcome:

Outcome 3.1. Accelerated creation and awareness of new CSO-led environmental solutions, best practices;

Outcome 3.2. New partnerships, initiatives, synergies btw CSOs, governments, donors, private sector on CSO-led innovation

Output:

Output 3.1.1: New knowledge products, case studies and tools based on CSO Challenge program experiences;

Output 3.1.2: CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform and CSO Innovators Community of Practices

Output 3.2.1: High quality CSO Challenge Program workshops, peer-to-peer trainings and exchanges

Output 3.2.2: Two Investor Roundtables with financiers and CSO innovators

M&E

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
300,000.00	337,500.00

Outcome:

M&E Outcome. Robust and credible M&E at CSO and Programmatic levels, supporting adaptive management

Output:

M&E Output: Capacity building and support for establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation at CSO and Programmatic levels

Component Balances

Project Components	GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
1. Identification and Recognition of High Impact CSO-led Initiatives	500,000.00	564,750.00
2. Direct and Programmatic Support for Enhanced and Strengthened Impact	7,150,208.00	2,360,250.00
3. Enhanced Partnership, Knowledge Creation, Learning	300,000.00	787,500.00
M&E	300,000.00	337,500.00
Subtotal	8,250,208.00	4,050,000.00
Project Management Cost	825,021.00	450,000.00
Total Project Cost (\$)	9,075,229.00	4,500,000.00

Please provide justification

Component 2 considers both Investment (INV) and Technical Assistance (TA) funding. GEF INV will be \$6,897,000 (76% of the project’s GEF funding) and TA will be \$253,208 for a total of \$7,150,208 in GEF financing to this Component. In co-financing, \$1,680,750 will be TA and \$679,500 is expected as INV, for a total of \$2,360,250 in support of Component 2.

PROJECT OUTLINE

A. PROJECT RATIONALE

Briefly describe the current situation: the global environmental problems and/or climate vulnerabilities that the project will address, the key elements of the system, and underlying drivers of environmental change in the project context, such as population growth, economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors, including conflicts, or technological changes. Describe the objective of the project, and the justification for it. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

Humanity faces several interrelated global environmental crises including **biodiversity loss, climate change, land and water pollution, and degradation of ecosystems**. Loss of biodiversity – with species extinction rates over the past 50 years estimated to be 100 to 1,000 times higher than the natural background rate – is driven by habitat destruction, overexploitation of species, pollution, and the introduction of invasive species, and threatens ecosystem functioning, stability and resilience, undermining food security and human well-being. The rapid increase in greenhouse gas emissions beginning in the mid-20th century, largely due to fossil fuel consumption and deforestation and forest degradation, has led to rising global temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, and melting polar ice caps. This, in turn, exacerbates sea level rise, threatens coastal communities, and disrupts agricultural productivity. These climate change impacts are closely linked to other environmental issues including ecosystem degradation. As natural habitats are destroyed or altered, ecosystems lose their ability to provide essential services such as carbon sequestration, water filtration, and biodiversity support. And land and water pollution, particularly from industrial activities, agriculture, and plastic waste, severely degrades ecosystems and poses risks to human health. Polluted waterways disrupt aquatic ecosystems, while contaminated soils affect agricultural productivity. Combined, these challenges highlight the urgent need for coordinated global efforts to protect the environment and ensure the sustainability of natural resources for future generations.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) as well as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration highlight **the essential role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in implementing shared goals and objectives** to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, part of a “whole-of-society approach”. Similarly, the Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of inclusive, bottom-up approaches involving local communities and civil society in addressing climate change, including local and indigenous knowledge, in creating climate-resilient strategies and advancing climate action. And the UNCCD and 2030 Sustainable Development Goals recognize the importance of CSOs and CBOs in addressing land degradation, desertification, drought and other challenges facing communities, and working in partnership with local governments and the private sector to support sustainable development, enhance wellbeing, and generate global environmental benefits.

Such findings and strategic directives are reflected throughout the GEF-8 Programming strategy, which emphasizes “the centrality of local innovation and civil society actions and coalitions in meeting global sustainability and climate goals, as well as SDGs and poverty alleviation priorities,” and which seeks “to maximize engagement of non-state actors and strategically engage new organizations and partners at the global and local levels.”

The GEF’s flagship mechanism for engaging civil society, the Small Grant Program (SGP), has a thirty-plus year track record^[1] of success in supporting local actions and civil society actors to influence and deliver on national and global sustainable development and environmental goals and commitments. With the launch of the SGP 2.0 in GEF-8, GEF has put forward an ambitious plan “to further mobilize, engage and support civil society organizations and actors needed to leverage the transformational change proposed in the GEF-8 strategy and beyond”^[2]. This includes support for the **SGP CSO Challenge Program** – one of two new competitive CSO initiatives, and that is the project proposed here by IUCN and partners.

The CSO Challenge Program will complement the Core SGP program in supporting civil society actions to protect and conserve the environment while providing new approaches for delivery of support that address key barriers to expanded development and scaling up of CSO-led environmental solutions and innovation. These barriers include:

- *Insufficient participation of youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples and local community organizations (IPLCs).* Solutions from CSOs that are youth-led, women-led, and led by IPLCs often face additional challenges in receiving recognition and support due to structural inequalities and biases and are under-represented in the wider marketplace for environmental solutions. Decision-making processes often exclude or limit the participation of youth, women and IPLCs, and women, youth, and IP entrepreneurs are more likely to be constrained by access to finance and technical support.
- *Insufficient and limited opportunities and means for recognition, awareness raising, partnership, sharing of experiences and learning from other CSOs,* practitioners and organizations working on the same, interlinked and relevant environmental challenges and approaches. The 2021 Joint GEF-UNDP evaluation of the Small Grants Program found that “incomplete knowledge management and communications strategies were reported by several countries as a factor preventing or hindering upscaling, despite high volumes of information being generated”^[3]. Similarly, numerous evaluations looking at innovation and transformational change have emphasized the importance of robust knowledge capture and sharing to support innovation, scaling and transformational change^[4]. In conclusion, CSOs/CBOs often lack access to effective and relevant peer-to-peer learning mechanisms.
- *Limited access to finance* due to a number of reasons including lack of interaction between CSO entrepreneurs and potential investors and donors, and lack of capacity to prepare and present compelling business plans and financial statements.^[5]
- *Local CSOs/CBOs often lack the operational frameworks and skills to translate their know-how and traditional knowledge into fundable projects that optimize ecosystem functions and protection of threatened biodiversity* in production and protected rural and urban landscapes and seascapes.
- *Lack of capacity including organizational, financial, management, communications,* to develop and implement solid business plans and marketing strategies to reduce risk of failure.^[6]
- *Lack of trained experts for mentoring and coaching CSO-led start-ups and entrepreneurs* working in the environmental solution space.^[7]

The limited participation of youth, women and IPLCs in the marketplace for CSO-led environmental action and solutions is particularly detrimental for a number of reasons. As noted in the GEF-8 Programming Directions, “The transformative potential of effectively engaging and supporting youth, women and IPLC’s stems not only from the opportunity to engage more people in environmental efforts in terms of absolute numbers, but also from (i) the inclusion of their unique skills, knowledge, and experiences, including their roles as primary users and stewards of many natural resources; and (ii) their important role in changing the causal chain of environmental degradation through their involvement in governance and the public and private sectors, as well as their choices as consumers in the global market, to investment choices.”

As identified in the Implementation Arrangements for SGP 2.0^[8], the SGP CSO Challenge Program is an opportunity to bring in additional institutional and organizational strengths to the SGP program, supporting new opportunities for innovation and engagement with CSO partners. Key IUCN strengths and resources to be drawn upon include:

- *Recognized leadership and proven experience and capacity supporting and engaging with CSOs including those led by youth, women, and IPLCs.* This includes support of the world’s largest environmental network and a membership union that includes over 1,000 national non-governmental and community-based organizations as well as 27 Indigenous People’s organizations from throughout the world. These networks, partners and programming will support wide dissemination of the call for proposals and the delivery of programmatic support including knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning.
- *Leadership, knowledge, tools and aligned programming advancing science-based conservation throughout the world.* A number of flagship resources, tools and expertise will be drawn upon to support winning CSO initiatives for enhanced learning, impact, and monitoring. These include PANORAMA, a proven learning methodology and online solution platform supporting knowledge creation and peer-to-peer learning, and the IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species* knowledge platform and tools, *Agrobiodiversity Monitoring Framework*, and *Urban Nature Indexes*, supporting identification, design and monitoring of high value conservation actions in natural, mixed-use, agricultural and urban environments.

- *Effective capacity-building and knowledge sharing capabilities and platforms that target local communities and CSOs.*

Another key rationale for this SGP CSO Challenge Program is to provide benefits to the Core SGP Program and support delivery of a number of aligned GEF-8 Integrated Programs. GEF-8 IPs identified as having strong potential for partnership with the CSO Challenge program include the *Food Systems; Ecosystem Restoration; Sustainable Cities; Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biome; Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution; Blue and Green Islands; and Wildlife Conservation for Development* IPs due in large part to strong thematic overlap with the CSO Challenge Program priority areas and involvement of CSO delivery partners. Challenge Program design features supporting complementarity and synergies with GEF-8 are described in the Project description section below.

CSOs selected through an open, transparent, inclusive, global call for proposals will be identified over the course of Program implementation, and key selection criteria will include potential to generate Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). Based upon SGP experiences, utilization of the same five SGP 2.0 priority areas^[9], and intention to ensure selection of a diverse and balanced set of CSO-led interventions both in their geographic distribution and priority are focus, the CSO Challenge Program is expected to make a significant contribution to MEAs for which GEF serves as financial mechanism through the generation of GEBs (see Core GEB contributions below).

In summary, in a context of multiple interrelated global environmental crises and a recognized need to expand, incentivize, and support CSO-led environmental action to address these challenges, the SGP CSO Challenge program will provide a vital means for the GEF partnership to reach new CSO partners and constituencies and identify and support new and promising CSO-led solutions with the potential to strengthen and scale up impacts across a broad range of GEF programming and investments.

^[1] Among the findings of the Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the SGP (2021) are: “The SGP continues to be highly relevant to evolving environmental priorities at all levels”; “The SGP has been consistent in its delivery of environmental results at local, national, and global levels and in generating economic and social benefits”; and “As a unique mechanism that channels funds to civil society organizations, the SGP promotes new ways of working that are flexible enough to adapt to local circumstances”. Online at: <https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/sgp-2021>

^[2] GEF/R.08/29/Rev.01, GEF-8 Programming Directions

^[3] GEFIO (2021). *Third UNDP-GEF Small Grants Program Evaluation*. Online: <https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/sgp-2020>

^[4] Referenced evaluations and guidance documents include: GEF STAP (2023), *Leveraging Innovation for Transformational Change*, A STAP Advisory Document; GEFIO (2021), *GEF Support to Innovation: Findings and Lessons*; and *Progress Report on the Challenge Program for Adaptation Innovation under the Special Climate Change Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund*, GEF/LDCF.SCCF.29/Inf.o4/Rev.01. 2020.

^[5] Eighth Operational Phase of the GEF Small Grants Program approved PIF (GEFID 11285).

^[6] GEFIO (2023) *Evaluation of Community-Based Approaches at the GEF*. Providing adequate capacity-building activities was identified as a critical factor in the implementation of successful CBA projects (page 50 and 124). GEF/E/C.66/02.

^[7] GEFIO (2020). *Evaluation of the GEF-UNIDO Global Cleantech Innovation Program*

^[8] *GEF Small Grants Program 2.0 Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8*; GEF/C.63/06/Rev.01, (2022).

^[9] The five SGP 2.0 strategic areas are: (i) community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species; (ii) sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security; (iii) low-carbon energy access and co-benefits; (iv) local to global coalitions for chemicals and waste management; and (v) catalyzing sustainable urban solutions.

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description

This section asks for a theory of change as part of a joined-up description of the project as a whole. The project description is expected to cover the key elements of good project design in an integrated way. It is also expected to meet the GEF’s policy requirements on gender, stakeholders, private sector, and knowledge management and learning (see section D). This section should be a narrative that reads like a joined-up story and not independent elements that answer the guiding questions contained in the PIF guidance document. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

The CSO Challenge Program will establish a competitive mechanism with the objective **“to identify, reward and support high impact innovative environmental approaches and solutions spearheaded by civil society organizations**

and actors.” The Program will prioritize youth and youth-led civil society organizations, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and offer finance and opportunities for cross learning and creating new strategic partnerships for the GEF to deliver on Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs).

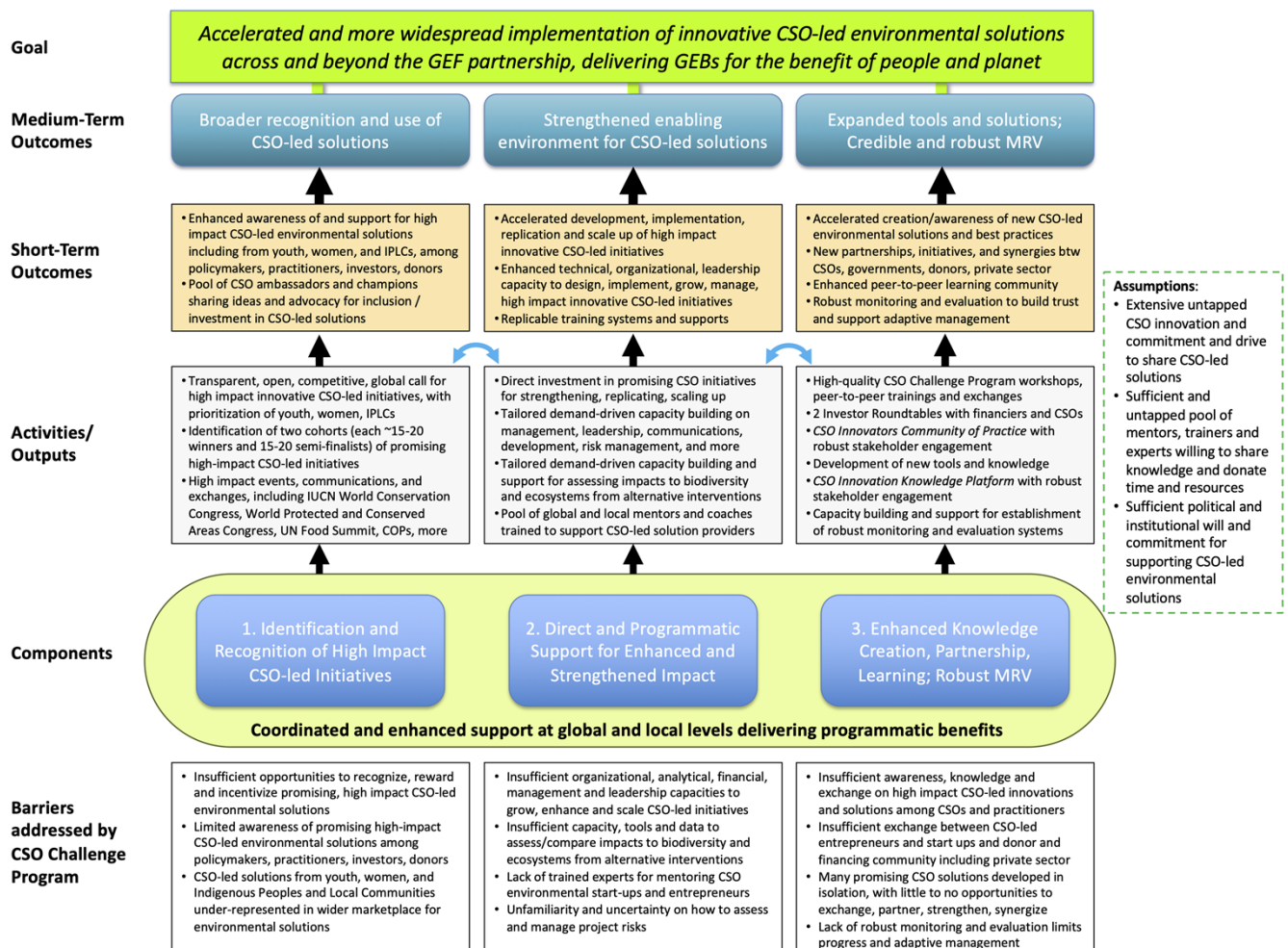
The Program will support implementation of a global, transparent, open call for proposals to identify projects and grantees directly from proponents. The selection of projects (see below) will ensure a global balance, including a subnational, national, regional and global reach, as well as balance among the 5 eligible SGP priority areas. Moreover, each initiative and grantee will be sited in a GEF-eligible country, or span regions which include GEF-eligible countries. Total direct grant investment in winning CSO initiatives will total 76% of CSO Challenge Program GEF project grant resources, with the maximum grant to any single winning initiative limited to \$300,000 USD.

A key feature of the program will be to provide extensive and high-value opportunities and platforms for partnership, knowledge creation and peer-to-peer learning. This will be facilitated in part by integration within each supported initiative of a proven learning methodology including knowledge management outputs and activities to document and share experiences and learning from each project with other actors who have the potential to replicate and improve upon the approaches supported. Reflection and learning around the challenges, limitations, and failures along with good practices, success stories, innovative approaches and opportunities through peer-to-peer exchanges are expected to contribute to enhancing the quality and impact of the GEF’s investments by identifying areas for increasing awareness, knowledge, capacity and collaboration among grantees, decision makers and the further scaling-up of CSO-led solutions and approaches.

Program Theory of Change

The CSO Challenge Program’s theory of change (see Figure 1 below) is summarized as follows: **“If CSOs working to advance high impact environmental solutions can be incentivized and supported with broader recognition, finance, capacity building, mentorship and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and expanded opportunities for partnership and synergies, and if these new and promising initiatives, solutions, approaches, and best practices can be effectively captured and broadly shared within and outside of the GEF partnership, this will in turn lead to** accelerated and more widespread implementation of CSO-led environmental solutions across and beyond the GEF partnership, delivering GEBs for the benefit of people and planet.”

Figure 1. CSO Challenge Program theory of change



Program Component Structure, Activities and Outputs, Outcomes

The CSO Challenge Program will be organized and delivered through three interlinked Components, described in brief below.

Component 1 – Identification and Recognition of High Impact CSO-led Initiatives

Component 1 of the Program will manage implementation of an inclusive, global, transparent, competitive, open call for proposals to identify high impact projects and grantees directly from proponents. Component 1 will also support development of high-impact events, communications, and exchanges to both recognize and enhance awareness and support among policymakers, CSOs and practitioners, investors, and donors of high impact CSO-led environmental solutions including from youth, women, and IPLC-led organizations and support greater use and investment in CSO-led environmental solutions. It is anticipated that a pool of CSO innovation ambassadors and champions including many from the Program’s youth-led, women-led, and IP-led supported initiatives will be incentivized and strengthened to support sharing of ideas and advocacy for enhanced inclusion of, and investment in, CSO-led environmental solutions.

Outcome 1.1 Cohort of high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives and pool of empowered CSO ambassadors and champions

Output 1.1: Global call for high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives, with prioritization of youth, women, IPLCs; Identification of two cohorts (each ~15-20 winners and 15-20 semi-finalists) of promising high impact CSO-led initiatives

Under Output 1.1, a transparent, open, global call for proposals to identify projects and grantees directly

from proponents and targeting youth and youth-led civil society organizations, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities will be implemented. Two calls for proposals in total are envisioned, each lasting approximately 90 days – the first resulting in identification of an initial cohort of 15-20 winners and 15-20 semi-finalists in Year 1 of the Program and the second call resulting in identification of a similar-sized cohort of winners and semi-finalists in Year 2 of the Program. Winners will receive direct investment in their respective initiatives and full programmatic support, while semi-finalists will receive recognition and access to programmatic supports under Component 3 including community of practice, knowledge platform, and invitation to participate in peer-to-peer trainings and exchanges.

The call for proposals will describe in clear language the objectives and scope of the CSO Challenge Program, its intended target beneficiaries, direct and programmatic support to winners and semi-finalists, five strategic areas of focus, the Program's approach to knowledge creation and learning, partnership, eligibility requirements, and the proposal selection criteria and process. The call will transparently prioritize and encourage proposals from CSOs led by youth, women, and IPLCs.

The CSO Challenge Program as designed by IUCN will utilize the SGP2.0 five priority areas^[1] to ensure complementarity with the Core SGP program, GEF Integrated programs and GEF focal areas, and to facilitate knowledge capture and sharing between the CSO Challenge program and GEF-8 programming. These five priorities areas also provide a proven taxonomy and framework to communicate the types of environmental challenges where CSO-led solutions are most needed.

Key selection criteria will include:

- The **impact potential** of the proposed initiative, approach, and solution, including potential to generate GEBs^[2], and the **scalability** of the proposed initiative, approach, and solution.
- Potential to enhance the **inclusiveness** and the diversity of stakeholders and expand the CSO networks GEF partners with including those led by youth, women, and indigenous peoples.
- Degree of **innovation** in the proposed CSO-led initiative that supports and aligns with at least one of the SGP2.0 five priority areas. The call for proposals will clarify that the CSO Challenge Program seeks to identify and support a wide range of innovations including technological, finance, business models, policy, and institutional, with descriptive examples of each and a link to further reference material for proponents to consult. Moreover, as will be explained in the call for proposals, innovation in the context of the CSO Challenge Program is understood to also encompass engagement with new and underrepresented CSO solution providers and networks including those from youth, women, and IP-led organizations.
- Degree to which the proposed initiative is supported by a **sound theory of change** that identifies barriers to change, clear and realistic pathways to overcome barriers and achieve project goals, including uptake pathways, risk and risk mitigation measures.
- **Financial viability, resourcing and sustainability** of proposed initiative.
- **Demonstrated commitment to knowledge sharing and learning** including engagement with relevant communities of practice, stakeholder groups and fora, knowledge sharing platforms, and communication of experiences, good practices, challenges and successes, and demonstrated adoption of existing knowledge and learning into the proposal design.

Concepts will be rated based on these criteria and further selected to ensure a diverse and balanced distribution among eligible proponents operating at subnational, national, regional and global levels, as well as prioritization of proposals from youth and youth-led civil society organizations, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities. **It is expected that submissions will be based on existing ongoing initiatives instead of just concepts.**

Disseminating the call for proposals and proposal submission

An informational video will be developed and presented alongside the call for proposals and distributed on IUCN, GEF, GEF Core SGP and relevant GEF-8 IP networks (see below), CSO Network, IPAG, PANORAMA, GYBN, YOUNGO, Women4Biodiversity, and other partner platforms and social media to help further increase awareness,

understanding, and interest in the CSO Challenge Program among eligible proponents and CSOs. IUCN's existing online portal will be used for proposal submissions, to allow for efficient submission, storage and retrieval of proposals from proponents.

Review and selection of proposals

IUCN will follow an inclusive process to engage key stakeholders for the selection of semi-finalists and winners. A diverse Selection Committee will be constituted with representatives from the GEF CSO Network, IPAG, youth groups including potentially GYBN, YOUNGO, and IUCN Youth Advisory Committee, women's groups such as Women4Biodiversity, STAP, GEF Sec, Core SGP partners UNDP, FAO and CI, IUCN Commissions and Secretariat, and tasked with identifying and agreeing on the best proposals to receive direct and programmatic support. IUCN will recuse itself from voting on any decisions involving IUCN members to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

Outcome 1.2. Enhanced awareness and support among policymakers, CSOs and practitioners, investors and donors for high impact CSO-led environmental solutions including from youth, women, and IP-led organizations

Output 1.2: High impact events, communications and exchanges to enhance recognition, awareness, and support among policymakers, CSOs and practitioners, investors and donors for high impact CSO-led environmental solutions

Under Output 1.2, the CSO Challenge Program will identify and design a series of high impact events, communications and exchanges showcasing the CSO Challenge Program cohort of successful grantees. CSO ambassadors and champions, including those from winning youth-led, women-led, and IP-led initiatives, will be supported and empowered, including through leadership and communications and other supports under Components 2 and 3, to attend these events and share their ideas and solutions with audiences of policymakers, CSOs and practitioners, private sector, investors and donors. Events will be led and co-designed with CSOs, and with invited participation of leaders from GEF, GEF CSO Network, IPAG, partnering GEF agencies, private sector, investor communities and more. The events will be webcast to allow participation of greater number of winners. High-quality communications to expand the reach and impact of these events will be developed and disseminated through IUCN and partner platforms and social media.

Anticipated fora for CSO Challenge Program events include:

- *IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025* – Held every four years, the IUCN World Conservation Congress brings together several thousand leaders and decision-makers from government, civil society, indigenous peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to global challenges. The next WCC will take place from October 9-15, 2025, in Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- *IUCN World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress 2027 (IUCN WPC)* – The IUCN WPC is a landmark global forum held every ten to twelve years and sets the global agenda for conservation involving the world's protected and conserved areas.
- *UN Food Systems Summit +4 in 2025* – The UN Summit is held every two years to review progress in transforming the world's food systems achieve the 2030 Agenda. It brings together governments, private sector, civil society organizations and development partners.
- *Multilateral Environmental Agreement COPs* – Annual Conference of the Parties for the five major global Conventions for which the GEF serves as financial mechanism offer opportunities for showcasing CSO Challenge initiatives.

In addition, where high value opportunities exist to partner with relevant GEF-8 Integrated Programs and GEF Core SGP in developing shared events, exchanges and communications to advance shared goals, action and learning, these will be cooperatively pursued (see "Alignment with GEF-8 IPs and Other Programs and Projects" section for more detail).

Component 2 – Direct and Programmatic Support for Enhanced and Strengthened Impact

Under Component 2, the CSO Challenge Program will provide **direct grant investment totaling 76%^[3] of CSO Challenge Program resources** in selected CSO-led initiatives to pilot, enhance, replicate and scale up high-impact

innovative work, **as well as programmatic, demand-driven tailored support** to further strengthen and enhance selected initiatives. Utilizing an approach modeled after its successful use in the GEF Global Cleantech Innovation Program, the CSO Challenge Program will support rapid identification and training of a pool of global and local mentors and coaches to support CSO-led initiatives, building on the significant tools and training materials available to support entrepreneurship, leadership, business development, and advocacy, including from the IUCN Academy^[4] platform and knowledge resources.

Outcome 2.1. Accelerated development, implementation, replication and scale up of high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives

Output 2.1: Direct investment in innovative CSO initiatives for strengthening, replicating, scaling up

Under Output 2.1, the CSO Challenge Program will efficiently develop grant agreements and disburse funding to selected CSO-led initiatives, **ensuring inclusion of a proven learning methodology** including knowledge management outputs and activities to document and share experiences and learning from each project with other actors who have the potential to replicate and improve upon the models tested. Grant agreements will also ensure inclusion of IUCN financial, social, and environmental safeguards, and robust monitoring, results and verification systems that include assessment of impacts on nature using a science-based, scalable and comparable approach. Where there are identified opportunities to strengthen the design of winning CSO initiatives, including strengthening positive impacts to biodiversity and ecosystems and mitigating risks, these will be supported immediately following selection of winning CSO initiatives (under Output 2.2.2). Total direct grant investment in winning CSO initiatives will total 76% of CSO Challenge Program GEF project grant resources, with the maximum grant to any single winning initiative limited to \$300,000 USD.

Outcome 2.2. Enhanced technical, organizational, leadership capacity to design, implement, grow, and manage high impact innovative CSO-led initiatives

Output 2.2.1: Tailored demand-driven capacity building on management, leadership, communications, development, innovation and risk management, and more.

Under Output 2.2.1, a tailored demand-driven program of supports will be co-designed with winning CSO proponents and delivered through a combination of trained mentors and coaches (identified and supported under Output 2.2.3, see below), as well as existing online resources and tools including the IUCN Academy and those of partners. Potential supports will include training on business development, market research, financial management, leadership skills, innovation and risk management, proposal development, policy influencing and communications, among others.

Output 2.2.2: Tailored demand-driven capacity building and support for assessing impacts to biodiversity and ecosystems from alternative interventions and enhancing the design of winning CSO-led innovative initiatives.

Practitioners who seek to design and implement initiatives and interventions that positively impact threatened biodiversity and ecosystems frequently lack sufficient capacity, tools and data to do so effectively. Under Output 2.2.2, where there is opportunity and demand **to strengthen and enhance the design, implementation and monitoring of CSO-led initiatives to ensure they deliver maximum benefits to biodiversity and ecosystems and do not cause unintended harms**, these opportunities will be supported immediately following selection of winning CSO initiatives.

A set of flagship IUCN resources that can strengthen and enhance the design, implementation and monitoring of winning CSO-led initiatives will be drawn upon as needed, including the following:

- ***IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*** and ***Species Threat Abatement and Recovery metric*** – The Red List of Threatened Species is the gold standard for assessing the conservation status of species, with over **150,300 species assessed to date**. The Red List database provides critical information to inform the design and monitoring of conservation actions. Moreover, a new tool developed with GEF support, the **Species Threat Abatement and Recovery metric (STAR)**^[5], presents this information in a powerful way, providing a means to

measure and compare impacts of conservation actions at any scale and location. Red List/STAR can help improve the design (including targeted areas and actions) and monitoring of winning CSO initiatives working to advance management of threatened ecosystems and species, as well as initiatives working in an integrated manner on the other 4 SGP priority areas.

- **Agrobiodiversity Monitoring Framework and Land Health Indicators** - A comprehensive framework to improve monitoring of the impacts of sustainable agriculture on biodiversity and address important gaps in monitoring systems. The Agrobiodiversity Monitoring Framework and Land Health Indicators can help improve the design and monitoring of winning CSO initiatives working to advance solutions on sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security.
- **IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas** – The world’s first standard for evaluating the effectiveness of area-based conservation measures to achieve biodiversity and social outcomes. It currently involves more than 60 countries and more than 600 sites, with applicability to all kinds of conserved areas including those in the custodianship of IPLCs. The standard can help improve the design and monitoring of winning CSO initiatives working to advance area-based conservation.
- **IUCN Urban Nature Indexes (UNI)**^[6] – Launched in 2023, the Urban Nature Index is a flexible framework that enables stakeholders to comprehensively assess and understand cities’ impacts on nature, set science-based targets for improvement, and monitor progress. A distinguishing feature of the UNI is its broad scope and linkages to global and regional measures of ecosystem health and species conservation, reflective of both the degree to which the ecological impacts of cities extend far beyond their boundaries, and the complexity of urban systems. UNI has been applied in Guatemala City, Berlin, Mexico City, Paris, Tegucigalpa, Curridabat (Costa Rica) and informed actions of city planners and stakeholders. UNI can help improve the design and monitoring of winning CSO initiatives working on urban sustainability.
- **IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions (NbS)** - NbS Standard guides the effective deployment of nature in addressing climate change and other contemporary challenges. The Standard enables users to assess, design, and continuously improve interventions that are environmentally sound, socially just, and economically feasible. It has an on-line self-assessment tool with a community of practice of 3000 users.

Outcome 2.3. Replicable training systems and supports for enhanced CSO-led conservation

Output 2.3.1: Methodology, guidelines and tools developed to support training of global and local mentors and coaches to support CSO-led solution providers and initiatives.

Under Output 2.3.1, a *CSO Challenge Grant Support Guidebook* will be developed early in Program implementation, with inputs and support from SGP2.0 partners, UNIDO, IUCN Center for Science and Knowledge, and IUCN Commission on Education and Communication, GEF Sec, GEF CSO Network, IPAG, and others, to serve as a resource to providers of priority capacity building and training for CSO-led initiatives. Building on the significant expertise, knowledge, tools and training materials available to support business development, innovation and entrepreneurship including through the IUCN Academy platform, the guidebook will be a practical, tailored and concise compendium of knowledge/curricula, best practices and tools supporting expert mentors and coaches in delivering capacity building and training. Anticipated needs include training on business development and sustainability, market research, financial management, leadership, policy influencing and communications, proposal development, and innovation and risk management. The *Guidebook* will make sure to cover issues relating to tailoring for cultural sensitivities, gender-responsiveness and different target audiences (age groups).

Output 2.3.2: Pool of global and local mentors and coaches trained to support CSO-led initiatives

Under Output 2.3.2, utilizing an approach modeled after its successful use^[7] in the GEF Global Cleantech Innovation Program (GCIP), the CSO Challenge Program will support rapid identification and training of a pool of global and local mentors and coaches to support CSO-led conservation. The mentor training program will make use of the *CSO Challenge Grant Support Guidebook* developed under Output 2.3.1 and the existing global ecosystem of innovation accelerators, incubators, mentors and coaches interested in supporting transformational social and environmental

change. One of the key features of the GCIP model and experience is how GCIP delivery partners have been able rapidly identify and train a network of mentors, many of whom provide their expertise and time on a pro bono basis. An executing partnership with a global organization with a similar focus and skill set to *Cleantech Open*^[8], the executing partner for the GEF GCIP program, will be sought to support this part of Program operations.

Component 3 – Enhanced Knowledge Creation, Partnership, Learning

Under Component 3, the CSO Challenge Program will provide high-value opportunities, exchanges and platforms for knowledge creation and peer-to-peer learning, partnership, and investment in CSO-led solutions. This will be facilitated in part by integration within each supported initiative of a proven learning methodology, PANORAMA^[9], and including knowledge management outputs and activities to document and share experiences and learning from each project with other actors who have the potential to replicate and improve upon the models tested.

Established in 2014 with support from the GEF and other donors, PANORAMA has grown in scope and partners to include UNDP, UNEP, GRID-Arendal, the World Bank, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IFOAM – Organics International, Rare, OCTO and EcoHealth Alliance. IUCN manages eight of the 11 PANORAMA Communities (themes), on topics such as species conservation, protected and conserved areas, nature-culture interlinkages, sustainable urban development, as well as marine and coastal issues.

The PANORAMA initiative includes a **robust, comprehensive knowledge management and learning methodology**, which can be applied through a wide range of virtual and in-person formats. Another key feature of the initiative is the **PANORAMA web platform** (<https://panorama.solutions/en>) - the leading global online database of good practice cases on biodiversity conservation and broader sustainability issues. It currently includes a portfolio of 1,489 vetted solution case studies, contributed by over 1,000 individual solution providers from 120+ countries, many representing CSOs. It receives an average of 5,000 visits per week (for additional information on PANORAMA please see Annex 3). IUCN has an MOU with the CBD Secretariat for capacity development and knowledge management in support of the GBF that recognizes the important role of the PANORAMA platform

Under Component 3, a facilitated *CSO Innovators Community of Practice* will be established and supported, providing a way for Program winners and semi-finalists to connect, share experiences and support peer-to-peer learning including between GEF-8 Integrated Programs, GEF SGP2.0 Core Program participants, and other relevant networks and communities of practice. A dedicated *CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform* will be established within the PANORAMA platform to provide global access to CSO Challenge Program knowledge products and case studies.

Outcome 3.1. Accelerated creation and awareness of CSO-led environmental solutions, best practices

Output 3.1.1: New knowledge products, case studies and tools based on CSO Program experiences

Under Output 3.1.1, a set of high-quality, high-value knowledge products, case studies and tools will be developed based on CSO Challenge Program experiences and that make use of the embedded learning methodology that will be part of all CSO Challenge Program supported initiatives. Supported CSO project leads will receive targeted support in reflecting on, and documenting their insights and lessons learned as case studies, transferring tacit into explicit knowledge that can form the basis for further knowledge exchange (see particularly output 3.2.1) and can inform future granting decisions, building on “what works”. Outputs will include **1 solution case study per winning supported initiative** following the PANORAMA format and being published on the PANORAMA web platform and disseminated further through the IUCN website, newsletters, PANORAMA external communication channels, and Program events, **2 Program-wide progress reports** for general audiences on program experiences, and **demand-driven support for more targeted, thematic knowledge products and/or tools developed by CSO partners** including online and in-the-field learning modules. Linkages and partnership with GEF Integrated Programs and Core SGP 2.0 partners will be pursued on relevant areas of interest and action to support identification, uptake and use of high value knowledge products and tools.

These CSO Challenge Program knowledge products will serve to enhance awareness of CSO-led environmental solutions and also provide the basis for CSO project proponents to communicate better about their results to stakeholders including other CSOs, partners, donors, governments, and more.

Output 3.1.2: CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform and CSO Innovators Community of Practice, with robust stakeholder engagement

Building on the success of platforms including PANORAMA, GEF IW:Learn Network, and IUCN Academy, a dedicated and tailored online *CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform* and *CSO Innovators Community of Practice* knowledge exchange program will be established for the CSO Challenge Program. This will be a cross-cutting initiative supporting all 5 strategic priority areas of the SGP CSO Challenge Program. The digital platform will support innovation in learning practices, include curated thematic communities of practice, peer-to-peer learning, online and in-the-field learning modules and high-impact knowledge products including those developed under Output 3.1.1., communications, exchanges and networking, and other support. The *CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform* will take advantage of developments in Artificial Intelligence to offer state-of-the-art approaches to data collection and mining, knowledge creation and dissemination, as well as cost-effective translation in local languages.

Outcome 3.2. New partnerships, initiatives, and synergies between CSOs, governments, donors and the private sector on CSO-led environmental solutions

Output 3.2.1: High quality CSO Challenge Program workshops, peer-to-peer trainings and exchanges

Under Output 3.2.1, a number of CSO Challenge Program workshops, peer-to-peer trainings and exchanges will be supported and organized at global, regional and national levels and making use of existing opportunities and fora for exchange and cost savings. All workshops, trainings and exchanges will be co-designed and co-led by CSO Challenge Program grantees. Workshops will include participation of mentors and coaches supported by the Program under Output 2.3.2. Workshops will have a strong focus on reflecting on, consistently tracking (through the use of globally available biodiversity metrics), and documenting solutions resulting from implementation of projects funded under the CSO Challenge, resulting in PANORAMA case studies, and will accommodate peer-to-peer solution exchange to learn about successful approaches around mutual topics of interest. Linkages and partnership with GEF Integrated Programs and GEF Core SGP 2.0 partners will be pursued on relevant areas of interest and action to support a richer, more expansive exchange, partnership, and uptake of innovative approaches and good practices.

Output 3.2.2: Two Investor Roundtables with financiers and CSO innovators

To support enhanced mobilization of funding for CSO-led environmental solutions, the Challenge Program will organize two *Investor Roundtables*, modeled after venture capital funding opportunities, and with participation from interested private sector companies, financiers and donors, and tailored to the particular needs and offerings of the CSO Challenge Program cohorts. While the CSO Challenge Program does not have the same private sector focus as the SGP2.0 Microfinance Initiative and other relevant programs, it is expected that many of the supported CSO Challenge Program winning initiatives will include engagement with markets and likely face constraints in accessing finance, as has been widely observed in evaluations of the GEF SGP program. CSO Challenge Program *Investor Roundtables* will provide opportunities for CSO Challenge Program project proponents seeking to raise additional funding for their enterprises to pitch their respective partnership and investment opportunities to an audience of interested private sector companies, financiers and donors, and receive instant feedback.

Based on their documented PANORAMA solution case studies, CSO solution providers will receive targeted support in preparing for, and engaging in the roundtables, with compelling pitches.

Under the Program's M&E Component, support will be provided for establishment of a robust monitoring, reporting and verification system to provide accurate tracking of progress at the CSO initiative and Programmatic levels, and facilitate adaptive management.

M&E Component Outcome: Robust and credible monitoring and evaluation at CSO and Programmatic levels, supporting adaptive management

M&E Component Output: Capacity building and support for establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation at CSO and Programmatic levels

Under the M&E Component Output, capacity building and support will be provided for the establishment of a robust and credible monitoring, reporting, and verification system at both CSO initiative and programmatic levels. This will include integration of a common set of indicators, targets, and underlying accounting methodologies (e.g. EXACT for carbon, STAR for biodiversity) to facilitate apples-to-apples comparisons and learning. On-demand support will be provided throughout implementation of the Program.

Supporting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

IUCN will ensure that the CSO Challenge Program is fully aligned and supportive of the GEF Policy on Gender Equality and its objective to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from GEF-financed activities in support of the GEF's efforts to achieve global environmental benefits. Support for gender equality and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men is integrated in the overall design of the Program, including prioritization of proposals from women and women's groups along with those from youth and youth-led civil society organizations, and from Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

At the global project level, a gender analysis will be undertaken prior to CEO endorsement. The analysis will identify and describe gender differences, gender differentiated impacts and risks, and opportunities to address gender gaps and promote women's empowerment in CSO Challenge Program activities. Based on such findings, a gender action plan will be developed to provide concrete guidance on achieving gender mainstreaming results across the Program. The gender action plan will include gender-responsive measures to address differences, identifying impacts and risks and opportunities for equality and women's empowerment; and associated actions, gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated targets for men and women involved in landscape-seascape management activities. Both the gender analysis and gender action plan will ensure the project is gender responsive and focused on gender equality and women's empowerment and are an integral part of Program interventions.

At the CSO-led project/grant level, the CSO Challenge Program will ensure that all awarded grant projects include a gender analysis and an action plan for gender responsive implementation of the individual initiatives, aligned with the overall Gender Action Plan for the overall Program. Grantees will be required to provide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) feedback in periodic reports. In terms of beneficiary selection, all the projects will use gender criteria to select beneficiaries. Criteria will include representation of women in project activities.

^[1] The five SGP 2.0 strategic areas are: (i) community-based management of threatened ecosystems and species; (ii) sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and food security; (iii) low-carbon energy access and co-benefits; (iv) local to global coalitions for chemicals and waste management; and (v) catalyzing sustainable urban solutions. From "GEF Small Grants Programme 2.0 Implementation Arrangements for GEF-8" GEF/C.63/06/Rev.01

^[2] <https://www.thegef.org/documents/global-environmental-benefits>

^[3] IUCN is open to assessing with GEF and partners during the project development stage whether additional resources can be provided directly to CSOs.

^[4] <https://iucnacademy.org>

^[5] <https://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tool/species-threat-abatement-and-recovery-star-metric>

^[6] https://iucnurbanalliance.org/tools_and_resources/resource-1/

^[7] GEFIEO (2020). *Evaluation of the GEF-UNIDO Global Cleantech Innovation Program*. Among trainings provided, beneficiaries rated "business development training" as the very highest quality service followed by mentorship. Moreover, "Mentoring, technical know-how, investment and market access were brought in primarily on a pro bono basis to contribute to enhanced climate action and job creation" (pg x). Conclusion 2 of the evaluation states "With the relatively limited resources of an MSP... Start-ups benefited through the development of business skills and access to mentoring, new markets, and investment."

^[8] <https://www.cleantechopen.org>

^[9] <https://panorama.solutions/en>

Coordination and Cooperation with Ongoing Initiatives and Project.

Does the GEF Agency expect to play an execution role on this project?

Yes

If so, please describe that role here. Also, please add a short explanation to describe cooperation with ongoing initiatives and projects, including potential for co-location and/or sharing of expertise/staffing

A suitable private firm with the resources, expertise, and reach to manage the Program and deliver core supports will be identified during full project development, through publication of a public Expression of Interest (EoI) following IUCN procurement rules and guidelines. Responsibilities and supports from the lead execution agency will include managing and coordinating the Program, producing events and workshops, communications, contracting with CSOs, and capacity building on a range of demand-driven needs including business development, leadership, innovation, risk management, communications, and more.

IUCN intends to execute targeted supports under Components 2 and 3, to which it can bring specific and unique skills to build capacities on biodiversity assessment and management, as well as knowledge management and learning.. Under Component 2, IUCN will deliver **Output 2.2.2, Tailored demand-driven capacity building and support for assessing impacts to biodiversity and ecosystems from alternative interventions and enhancing the design of winning CSO-led initiatives.** Under this output, where there is opportunity and demand to strengthen and enhance the design, implementation and monitoring of CSO-led initiatives to ensure they deliver maximum benefits to biodiversity and ecosystems and do not cause unintended harms, these opportunities will be supported following selection of winning CSO initiatives. As described in the Project Description section above, a number of IUCN resources will be drawn upon to support CSOs in this way. Support will be provided in a tailored, context appropriate way, including online through the **IUCN Academy**^[1] including via tailored courses and e-learning, as well as through in-person workshops and training using IUCN's global network of offices and partner facilities.

Under Component 3, IUCN will deliver support for integration of the **PANORAMA** learning methodology within supported CSO-led initiatives. This includes supporting delivery under **Output 3.1.1** of 1 solution case study per winning supported initiative following the PANORAMA format and being published on the PANORAMA web platform and disseminated further, as well as delivery of **Output 3.1.2, CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform and CSO Innovators Community of Practice, with robust stakeholder engagement.** These will be a cross-cutting outputs supporting all 5 strategic priority areas of the SGP CSO Challenge Program. The digital platform will support innovation in learning practices, include curated thematic communities of practice, peer-to-peer learning, online and in-the-field learning modules and high-impact knowledge products including those developed under Output 3.1.1.

All the proposed supports to be executed by IUCN build off of substantial past and ongoing investments including the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species initiative, IUCN Academy, and PANORAMA. These are global IUCN initiatives with support staff located in IUCN HQ in Switzerland and IUCN regional and country offices.

[1] <https://iucnacademy.org>

Core Indicators

Indicator 3 Area of land and ecosystems under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
12000	0	0	0

Indicator 3.1 Area of degraded agricultural lands under restoration

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
Cropland	2,675.00			
Rangeland and pasture	2,675.00			

Indicator 3.2 Area of forest and forest land under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
2,675.00			

Indicator 3.3 Area of natural grass and woodland under restoration

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
Natural grass	800.00			
Woodlands	500.00			

Indicator 3.4 Area of wetlands (including estuaries, mangroves) under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
2,675.00			

Indicator 4 Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares; excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
159000	0	0	0

Indicator 4.1 Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (hectares, qualitative assessment, non-certified)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
145,000.00			

Indicator 4.2 Area of landscapes under third-party certification incorporating biodiversity considerations

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
4,000.00			

Type/Name of Third Party Certification

Indicator 4.3 Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
6,000.00			

Indicator 4.4 Area of High Conservation Value or other forest loss avoided

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
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High Conservation Value Forest	4,000.00			
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Indicator 4.5 Terrestrial OECMs supported

Name of the OECMs	WDPA-ID	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
		4,000.00			

Documents (Document(s) that justifies the HCVF)

Title

Indicator 5 Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 5.1 Fisheries under third-party certification incorporating biodiversity considerations

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
0			

Type/name of the third-party certification

Indicator 5.2 Large Marine Ecosystems with reduced pollution and hypoxia

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)

LME at PIF	LME at CEO Endorsement	LME at MTR	LME at TE

Indicator 5.3 Marine OECMs supported

Name of the OECMs	WDPA-ID	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
		3,800.00			

Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	12,500			
Male	12,500			
Total	25,000		0	0

Explain the methodological approach and underlying logic to justify target levels for Core and Sub-Indicators (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

Selected indicators are to represent the programmatic alignment of the CSO Challenge Program’s scope of work with the GEF-8 results guidance, and specifically with the GEF-8 SGP Operational Guidelines (February 2024), where a specific set of SGP 2.0 results indicators are defined. These correspond to Core indicators 3, 4, 5, 6 and 11 (noting that 5 and 6 are encouraged yet optional) and 12 to 15 (noting that 15 is encouraged yet optional) that are additional and specific to SGP 2.0. As they are not available to select on the GEF Portal at PIF stage, indicators 12, 13, 14 and potentially 15 will be considered at the CEO Endorsement/Approval stage. The current PIF (8/09/2024) therefore includes preliminary targets for indicators 3, 4, 5 and 11 only, in line with those selected for the UNDP GEF-8 SGP 2.0 proposal (GEF ID 11285).

Target levels for each of the core and sub-indicators were calculated based on the historical performance of the Core SGP and on proportionality with respect to the GEBs estimated for GEF-8 SGP 2.0 (GEF ID 11285), which in terms of GEF funding is 14-fold the size of the current GEF grant. Taking into account that existing and new SGP grantees may be eligible and selected under the current CSO Challenge Program, and that the CSO-led efforts may also align with other GEF-funded Integrated Programs, targets calculations were further adjusted to reduce the likelihood of double counting. Using the same funding:GEB ratio as for UNDP GEF-8 SGP 2.0 project, the targets values for sub-indicators 3.1 to 3.4 were further downsized by 25%, for sub-indicators 4.1 and 4.3 by 40% and for sub-indicator 5.3 by 80% considering that few or pilot-sized CSO-led proposals to support marine OECMs are expected. Although the UNDP GEF-8 SGP 2.0 project did not consider sub-indicators 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5, conservative values for these GEBs were calculated for the CSO Challenge Program, drawing from the hectares initially included in sub-indicator 4.1. For indicator 11, starting from the same 1:14 ratio, the expected number of beneficiaries was calculated at 70% to factor in possible overlaps with ongoing SGP and other GEF-funded projects.

Overall, the targets of the CSO Challenge Program reflect the underlying logic and historical performance of the results pathways adopted by the Core SGP. The CSO Challenge Program will continue to measure and report on additional indicators beyond Core indicators to enable capture of entirety of scope of impact made by the Program towards global-environmental and socio-economic impacts.

Key Risks

	Rating	Explanation of risk and mitigation measures
CONTEXT		
Climate	Substantial	Risk of project being affected by climate change and/or natural disasters. CSO-led projects will be informed by hazard assessments of potential climate impacts, to ensure proper disaster preparedness and risk mitigation measures are included.
Environmental and Social	Moderate	Risk of adverse impacts on critical habitats, environmentally sensitive areas, or cultural heritage due to project activities Small grants applicants will be required to comply with IUCN's Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) as well as relevant national environmental protection legislation and international commitments. Proposed projects will include baseline assessments and plans to mitigate adverse impacts on significant biodiversity, critical ecosystems, tangible/intangible cultural heritage, and local livelihoods.

Political and Governance	Moderate	Risk of low country ownership as a result of changes in country political conditions. Projects will include contingency plans outlining actions and communication strategies to be implemented in response to potential changes in political conditions.
INNOVATION		
Institutional and Policy	Low	Risk that approaches promoted in the program are not adopted due to opposing national policies/strategies Design program in collaboration with local stakeholders to ensure alignment with national priorities/strategies; only work in countries where letter of endorsement has been received and parties have agreed to abide by IUCN and GEF policies. These include: -IUCN Code of Conduct and Professional Ethics Policy -IUCN Evaluation Policy -IUCN Enterprise Risk Management Policy -IUCN Policy on Gender Equity and Equality -IUCN Policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse, and Sexual Harassment -IUCN Whistleblowing and Anti-Retaliation Policy - IUCN Environmental and Social Management System -IUCN Anti-Fraud Policy -IUCN Investment Principles and Socially Responsible investment Framework -IUCN Data Protection Policy -IUCN Procurement Policy -IUCN Travel Policy (https://iucn.org/about-iucn/accountability-and-reporting/values-policies-and-procedures)
Technological	Moderate	Risk of inadequate knowledge management due to limited digital/technical capacities of CSOs. The program will build upon the historic successes of the Core Small Grants Program, and utilize IUCN's key platforms (World Conservation Congress, PANORAMA, IUCN Engage, etc.)
Financial and Business Model	Moderate	Risk of limited engagement/attention from government officials and/or private sector partners due to adverse macroeconomic or depressed market conditions. Explore opportunities to diversify funding sources through co-financing; regular monitoring of project's financial health to make necessary adjustments in response to global economic conditions.
EXECUTION		
Capacity	Moderate	Risk of ineffective implementation due to low financial/technical/institutional capacities of CSOs. Build capacity of CSOs through learning exchanges, mentoring, and multi-stakeholder dialogues; IUCN's experience working with grassroots organizations, as well as history as a GEF-accredited agency, will enable the program to provide effective grant management, adaptive support, and financial oversight to assure quality of project delivery.
Fiduciary	Moderate	Risk that funds will be misspent due to lack of financial transparency. IUCN's Multilateral Finance Unit will ensure proper financial management by utilizing IUCN's procurement policy and other tools for effective grant oversight. Training sessions for reporting, audit, monitoring and evaluation will be conducted for project partners as needed.
Stakeholder	Low	Risk of program lacking inclusivity due to ineffective collaboration among government, private sector, CSO, IPLC, women's groups, etc. Individual projects will include analyses of issues related to IPLCs, women and girls, and

		other vulnerable communities to ensure that action plans mitigate potential risks. Processes to obtain free prior and informed consent, as well as grievance mechanisms, will be put in place.
Other		
Overall Risk Rating	Moderate	All assessed risk ratings are low to moderate except Climate risks.

C. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Describe how the proposed interventions are aligned with GEF- 8 programming strategies and country and regional priorities, including how these country strategies and plans relate to the multilateral environmental agreements.

Confirm if any country policies that might contradict with intended outcomes of the project have been identified, and how the project will address this.

For projects aiming to generate biodiversity benefits (regardless of what the source of the resources is - i.e., BD, CC or LD), please identify which of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework the project contributes to and explain how. (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

Ensuring that the CSO Challenge Program both benefits from and provides benefits to the Core SGP Program, GEF-8 Integrated Programs, and other GEF programs and projects is a prime objective of the design and implementation of the Program. Many GEF-8 IPs overlap in their scope and work with the likely cohort of supported CSO initiatives (selection of proposals will seek a balance among supported CSO initiatives’ thematic focus and scope). GEF-8 IPs identified as having strong potential for partnership with the CSO Challenge program include the *Food Systems; Ecosystem Restoration; Sustainable Cities; Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biome; Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution; Blue and Green Islands; and Wildlife Conservation for Development IPs* due in large part to strong thematic overlap with the CSO Challenge Program priority areas and involvement of CSO delivery partners^[11].

Key Challenge Program design features supporting complementarity and synergies with GEF-8 include:

- **Adoption of the five SGP 2.0 priority areas** in the Challenge Program Call for Proposals and eligibility requirements to ensure complementarity and to facilitate knowledge capture and exchange between the CSO Challenge program and GEF-8 programming. Eligible proposals must be focused on at least 1 of the 5 SGP priority areas.
- **Governance arrangements of the CSO Challenge Program.** The Steering Committee of the CSO Challenge Program will include representatives of the Core SGP Implementing Agencies, the GEF Secretariat and others. A key focus of the Steering Committee will include identifying and enabling opportunities for partnerships, exchanges, and synergies with GEF-8 programming including the Core SGP, IPs and more. Opportunities could include joint events, workshops, linked communities of practices, joint knowledge products, communications and awareness raising, linked program portals, linked conservation work, more.
- **Dissemination of the Call for Proposals** – Dissemination of the call for proposals is an important opportunity to ensure inclusivity and foster linkages with relevant GEF-8 programming. The call for proposals will make clear that existing SGP initiatives are eligible to apply for the CSO Challenge program. Moreover, the call for proposals will be disseminated with the engagement of Core SGP and relevant GEF-8 IP partners including networks and dissemination channels.
- **Joint workshops and events** – Shared workshops and events are one the best ways to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange, foster partnerships, and strengthen awareness and impact. Joint organization of workshops and events also offers opportunities for cost savings. Identifying and developing high value joint

workshops and events with the Core SGP and relevant GEF-8 IP partners will therefore be a continuous focus of the Challenge Program management and Steering Committee. Workshops and events will be co-designed and led by CSO participants.

- **Shared Communities of Practice** – Under Component 3 of the CSO Challenge Program a *CSO Innovators Community of Practice* knowledge exchange program will be established for the Program. Where opportunities exist for expanding and linking this dedicated Community of Practice with those of the Core SGP and relevant IPs, these will be pursued including in the full design of this proposal, noting that most GEF-8 IPs are still under development.
- **Linked knowledge and program portals** – Under Component 3 of the CSO Challenge Program a dedicated *CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform* will be established for the Program and hosted within the PANORAMA platform to provide global access to Program knowledge products and case studies. Where opportunities exist for establishing useful operational links and postings on Core SGP and relevant GEF-8 IP platforms and portals, these will be pursued including in the full design of this proposal. The *CSO Innovation Knowledge Platform* and partner platforms also provide opportunities to post articles and blogs about relevant past and upcoming relevant work and events, and this will be fully utilized in the Program’s communication strategy.
- **Joint knowledge products** – Under Component 3 of the CSO Challenge Program, support will be provided for generation of high-quality, high-value knowledge products, case studies and tools based on Program experiences. Where opportunities exist for joint production between the Challenge Program and the Core SGP and/or relevant IPs for knowledge products, particularly those on shared thematic areas of interest (e.g., CSO-led solutions; CSO-led restoration; Community-based management of ecosystems and threatened biodiversity, etc.), these will be pursued including in the full design of this proposal and Program implementation.
- **Linked on-the-ground work** – While the cohort of winning CSO initiatives is unknown, where there are opportunities for mutually beneficial on-the-ground linked work between supported CSO initiatives and relevant GEF-8 IPs, Programmatic support will be provided to facilitate partnership which could in turn present valuable insights into this operational model for GEF-9.

¹¹ IUCN is leading 2 of the regional implementations of the CFB IP and serving as IA for child projects in all of the identified IPs except for *Circular Solutions*, which will help facilitate partnership and exchange between the Challenge Program and the IPs.

D. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment:

We confirm that gender dimensions relevant to the project have been addressed as per GEF Policy and are clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Stakeholder Engagement

We confirm that key stakeholders were consulted during PIF development as required per GEF policy, their relevant roles to project outcomes and plan to develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan before CEO endorsement has been clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Were the following stakeholders consulted during project identification phase:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: Yes

Civil Society Organizations: Yes

Private Sector:

Provide a brief summary and list of names and dates of consultations

Stakeholder engagement is and will be an integral and continuous part of the development of the SGP CSO Challenge Program. A full Stakeholder Engagement Plan is presently under development and will be uploaded to the GEF Portal in October 2024. IUCN will employ a **collaborative approach to development** of the CSO Challenge program, to ensure optimal complementarity, synergy, learnings and uptake of the CSO-led solutions in the Program within the wider portfolio of relevant GEF programming including the Core SGP program and GEF-8 Integrated Programs. This will include establishment of a working group with representatives from GEF Secretariat, GEF STAP, UNDP, CI, and FAO, the GEF CSO Network, IPAG, youth, women and IP groups, and others. This group will meet at least twice during the full development and approval of the GEF Full-Sized Project, to share ideas and opportunities for a successful CSO Challenge Program including shared high-value events, and partnerships supporting learning and scaling up, linked community of practices, platforms, tools, approaches, and more.

The following consultations on the SGP CSO Challenge Program have taken place:

- **GEF Secretariat** – Conversations with SGP leads Gabriella Richardson and Charles Gray were held to better understand GEF objectives and requirements for this Program, ideas for strengthened impact, as well as integration with GEF-8 programming. Meeting dates were August 27, 2024; July 25, 2024; June 6, 2024. A meeting with GEF Adaptation Challenge lead Jason Spensley was held on May 30, 2024, to better understand the GEF Adaptation Challenge program and how Adaptation Challenge program experiences can inform the design of the CSO Challenge Program. A meeting with GEF Global Cleantech Innovation Program lead Filippo Berardi was held on May 15, 2024, to better understand the GEF GCIP Program and how program experiences can inform the design of the CSO Challenge Program.
- **GEF CSO Network** – Conversations with GEF CSO Network Chair Faizal Parish and CSO Network staff member Muhammad Ameen Keryo were held to discuss the Challenge Program and learn about GEF CSO Network's suggestions for design, governance and implementation of the Program. Key takeaways included suggestion to provide support to both "winners" and "semi-finalists," to broaden reach of the Program; designing a participatory, bottom-up selection process; support from GEF CSO Network in the Program Steering Committee and to support widespread dissemination of the call for proposals, and partnership at key events. Meeting dates were May 29, 2024, and June 20, 2024. Follow up consultations and collaboration with GEF CSP Network is expected throughout Program development.
- **Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG)** – A conversation with IPAG Coordinator Aliou Mustafa was held June 20, 2024, to discuss the CSO Challenge Program objectives and learn about GEF CSO Network's suggestions for design, governance and implementation of the Program. IPAG welcomed the program and IUCN's concept. Follow up consultations and collaboration with IPAG is expected throughout Program development.
- **UNDP** – Conversations with UNDP SGP lead Terence Hay-Edie on the GEF Core SGP program and how SGP experiences can help inform the design and implementation of the CSO Challenge Program. A key focus of the conversation was upon governance and execution of the SGP and ensuring complementarity and synergies between the Core SGP and the CSO Challenge Program including through shared communities of practice, knowledge platforms, events, workshops, communications, and more. Meeting dates were May 23, 2024; January 25, 2024.

(Please upload to the portal documents tab any stakeholder engagement plan or assessments that have been done during the PIF development phase.)

Private Sector

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

And if so, has its role been described and justified in the section B project description?

Yes

Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

We confirm that we have provided indicative information regarding Environmental and Social risks associated with the proposed project or program and any measures to address such risks and impacts (this information should be presented in Annex D).

Yes

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate			
Medium/Moderate			

E. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge management

We confirm that an approach to Knowledge Management and Learning has been clearly described in the Project Description (Section B)

Yes

ANNEX A: FINANCING TABLES

GEF Financing Table

Indicative Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non-Grant	GEF Project Grant(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total GEF Financing (\$)
IUCN	GET	Global	Multi Focal Area	Small Grant Program	Grant	9,075,229.00	816,771.00	9,892,000.00
Total GEF Resources (\$)						9,075,229.00	816,771.00	9,892,000.00

Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

Is Project Preparation Grant requested?

true

PPG Amount (\$)

99083

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

8917

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non- Grant	PPG(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total PPG Funding(\$)
IUCN	GET	Global	Multi Focal Area	Small Grant Program	Grant	99,083.00	8,917.00	108,000.00
Total PPG Amount (\$)						99,083.00	8,917.00	108,000.00

Please provide justification

Sources of Funds for Country Star Allocation

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Sources of Funds	Total(\$)
Total GEF Resources					0.00

Indicative Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Co-financing(\$)
SGP	GET	9,075,229.00	
Total Project Cost		9,075,229.00	0.00

Indicative Co-financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
GEF Agency	IUCN	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	4500000
Total Co-financing				4,500,000.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

Not Applicable. Fundraising is a key focus of project development efforts with outreach to corporate and philanthropic partners and other potential donors ongoing.

ANNEX B: ENDORSEMENTS

GEF Agency(ies) Certification

GEF Agency Type	Name	Date	Project Contact Person	Phone	Email
GEF Agency Coordinator	Joshua Schneck	9/12/2024	Joshua Schneck	6502699903	joshua.schneck@iucn.org

Record of Endorsement of GEF Operational Focal Point (s) on Behalf of the Government(s):

Name	Position	Ministry	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

ANNEX C: PROJECT LOCATION

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place

TBD through global, open, transparent call for CSO-led proposals and selection by Program Selection Committee that will seek a diverse and balanced distribution among eligible proponents operating at subnational, national, regional and global levels, as well as prioritization of proposals from youth and youth-led civil society organizations, women and women groups as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

ANNEX D: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS SCREEN AND RATING

(PIF level) Attach agency safeguard screen form including rating of risk types and overall risk rating.

Title

Preliminary ESMS Screening_CS0 Challenge Program

ANNEX E: RIO MARKERS

Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation	Biodiversity	Land Degradation
Principal Objective 2	Significant Objective 1	Principal Objective 2	Principal Objective 2

ANNEX F: TAXONOMY WORKSHEET