



Funding the Chief Ecological Officers of the Planet

At Brazil's 64th GEF Council Meeting, it's time to ensure direct access to funding for Indigenous peoples under the Global Biodiversity Framework Trust Fund

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Background

Independent scientific [evaluations](#)¹ confirm that while conservation projects involving Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) have better-than-average implementation records, support for these projects is limited in scale and scope. IPLCs manage over at least 43.5 million km² (32% of global land) in 87 countries and their livelihoods depend on the ecosystems they [inhabit](#)² and yet, less than **1% of funding**³ actually reaches Indigenous Peoples to secure tenure rights and manage forests in tropical countries.

Avaaz considers that specific provisions must be included in the GBF trust fund governing structure, to ensure direct, swift and easy access to financial resources by Indigenous peoples. In Brazil, the Council will need to agree on the objective(s) of the GBF trust fund, its governance structure, a sunset clause (which would be subject to evaluation at UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP 18), and its financial management structure. It is likely that in parallel, negotiations will have been initiated on the capitalization of

the fund with donors, and it is possible that announcements of individual donor commitments would be made during the Council meeting.

Recommendations on draft decision GEF/C.64/05

The Avaaz side event - with an expert panel comprising IP representative - [in the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact held in Paris last week \(22-23 June 2023\)](#)⁴ also concluded that support for direct access to financing and for mainstreaming indigenous peoples' governance systems⁵ - conditions that are integral to their role as conservation stewards - should be seen as cost-effective measures and sound practice for international financial institutions. Consequently, Avaaz calls on GEF Council Members to ensure that paragraph 39⁶ of the draft decision includes specific recommendations on the active, informed and egalitarian participation of IPLC representatives in the governance regime of the GBF trust fund.

1 Evaluation of GEF Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. April 2018. <https://www.gef-fo.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/indigenous-peoples-2017.pdf>

2 The state of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' lands and territories. A technical review of the state of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' lands, their contributions to global biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, the pressures they face, and recommendations for actions. https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/report_the_state_of_the_indigenous_peoples_and_local_communities_lands_and_territory.pdf

3 Falling short Donor funding for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to secure tenure rights and manage forests in tropical countries (2011-2020) https://d5i6is0eze552.cloudfront.net/documents/Publikasjoner/Andre-rapporter/RFN_Falling_short_2021.pdf?mtime=20210412123104

4 Avaaz. Indigenous Peoples and Global Finance: Five key reforms to enable sustainability solutions and advance justice. June 2023. https://secure.avaaz.org/NFP_Indigenous.

5 Larson, A. et al. 2022. "A place at the table is not enough: Accountability for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in multi-stakeholder platforms". <https://landscapesfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/1-s2.0-S0305750X22000973-main.pdf>

6 Para 39: "The GEF Council Rules of Procedure, applied to the GBF Fund Council *mutatis mutandis* as set out below, states that the CEO may, in consultation with the Council, invite representatives of other organizations and entities, including nongovernmental organizations, to attend or observe the Council meetings" https://thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/EN_GEF.C.64.05_Global%20Biodiversity_Framework_Fund_Establishment_0.pdf

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Recommendations on programming directions for the GBF Fund GEF/C.64/06 GBF Fund Programming Directions-June 2, 2023⁷

Regarding paragraph 20, Avaaz calls for specific recommendations for direct access in a manner consistent with GEF's track record as an innovative funding mechanism. Avaaz recommends a series of core aspects that should be considered for direct access for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) that have been documented in [recent](#)⁸ analyses making the case for direct access [funding](#)⁹:

- IPLC initiatives that are led and negotiated by IPLCs
- Longer-term and flexible funding
- Clear and mutual accountability frameworks
- Gender-inclusive funding
- Expedited and accessible funding

7 GEF. 2023. Programming Directions for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund. https://thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/EN_GEF_C.64_06_%20GBF%20Fund%20Programming%20Directions_0.pdf

8 Funding with Purpose. A study to inform donor support for indigenous and local community rights, climate and conservation. September 2022. https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/FundingWithPurpose_v7_compressed.pdf

9 Greening the Grassroots. Rethinking African Conservation Funding. July 2022. <https://www.synchronicityearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Greening-the-Grassroots-July2022.pdf>

The Third Joint GEF-UNDP [Evaluation](#)¹⁰ of the Small Grants Programme (SGP) found that the SGP consistently delivers environmental results with economic and social co-benefits, and that it successfully builds trust and social innovation in projects. Of relevance for the GBF trust fund, SGP has designed specific methodologies to promote direct access for CBOs to execute development projects. Importantly, 95% of the projects reviewed during the evaluation were rated as Highly Satisfactory, Moderately Satisfactory and Satisfactory. Nevertheless, the evaluation notes that challenges exist to the long-term sustainability of SGP projects.

Among the findings of the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) [report](#)¹¹ on SGP, the IEO notes that little progress has been made on several evaluation recommendations, including on the “*testing of new ways to track and aggregate the intangible results of capacity-building activities, monitoring and evaluation, communications, and knowledge management.*” The outcomes of the Avaaz side event carried out during the [Summit for a New Global Financing Pact: \(“Including indigenous peoples and local communities in the New Global Financing Pact: from whys to hows”\)](#)¹² are relevant in this respect. The expert panel concluded that a fun-

10 UNDP. Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme. <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/13051?tab=documents>

11 GEF IEO - Annual Performance Report 2023. June 2022. https://thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/EN_GEF_E_C.64_Inf.01_APR2023_full_report_%20June_23_Rev-01.pdf

12 Avaaz. Indigenous Peoples and Global Finance: Five key reforms to enable sustainability solutions and advance justice. June 2023. https://secure.avaaz.org/NFP_Indigenous

Funding the Chief Ecological Officers of the Planet

damental change in the way impact is measured for indigenous peoples' activities, and that existing indicators developed by indigenous peoples should be incorporated, such as the social and cultural aspects of health and wellbeing important to indigenous peoples, number of effective adaptation and mitigation responses, and trends in ecosystem management and restoration of ecosystem services relevant to indigenous peoples' lifeways¹³ among others. **This is within the GEF mandate to include in the GBF Trust Fund and should be supported by all Council Members as a necessary innovation for this new mechanism.**

Additionally, any funding under the GBF Trust Fund for IPLCs should be in addition and complementary to Small Grants Programme funding under GEF-8, as well as to the resource envelope for the two new mechanisms¹⁴ with focus on youth, women and IPLCs: the CSO Challenge and the MSME Pilot for micro-finance and technical support.

Avaaz notes that the aspect of digital innovation is not addressed in the programming directions. Digital technology is already being applied for community-level grants management, disbursements and fiduciary responsibility, as well as for the monitoring and evaluation¹⁵ of ecosystem-based projects in the field. Land tenure¹⁶ information has also benefited from digital innovation in the form of decentralized and

secure storage through blockchains. In the case of direct access for indigenous peoples, this type of innovation would seem to be in line with the possibilities outlined in the GEF-8 programming directives¹⁷ for the Digital to Environmental Dividend initiative and would enhance and enable financial resource mobilization for indigenous peoples.

Finally, Avaaz invites discussion on the following question to explore: **Is there a role for national and regional environmental trust funds to improve direct access issues such as RedLac¹⁸, Café¹⁹ and APNET²⁰?** Many environmental trust funds have been supported over the years by GEF, through endowment and foundational support, as well as through project implementation support. Several of these funds have experience²¹ in direct access for community-based organizations, such as the Foundation for the Philippine Environment and the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund FUN-BIO. Other mechanisms like the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund²² provides rights-based direct access financing to IPLCs. The fund designed a set of social, ecological and livelihood indicators that is simple to use and that can be used together with or adjusted to other eligibility frameworks; this might be an opportunity to operationalize the above-mentioned direct access principles and guidelines presented at COP 27.

13 FIMI. 2022. Principles & guidelines for direct access funding for indigenous peoples' climate action, biodiversity conservation and fighting desertification for a sustainable planet https://fimi-iiwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/iplc_doc_eng.pdf

14 Summary Of Negotiations Of The Eighth Replenishment Of The GEF Trust Fund, June 2022. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF_C.62_03_Summary%20of%20Negotiations%20of%20the%208th%20Replenishment%20of%20the%20GEF%20Trust%20Fund_.pdf

15 How NGOs are using digital tools in the fight against deforestation. January 2022. <https://diginomica.com/how-ngos-are-using-digital-tools-fight-against-deforestation>

16 Can technology save our forests?. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-can-technology-save-our-forests>

17 Summary Of Negotiations Of The Eighth Replenishment Of The GEF Trust Fund, June 2022. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EN_GEF_C.62_03_Summary%20of%20Negotiations%20of%20the%208th%20Replenishment%20of%20the%20GEF%20Trust%20Fund_.pdf

18 <https://redlac.org/en/>

19 <https://cafeconsortium.org/>

20 <https://www.conservationfinancealliance.org/apnet>

21 Environmental Funds: Lessons Learned And Future Prospects. <https://www.cbd.int/financial/trustfunds/g-fundlessons.pdf>

22 Fondo Territorial Mesoamericano. <https://www.alianzamesoamericana.org/es/fondo-territorial-mesoamericano/>

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About Avaaz

Avaaz –meaning “voice” in several European, Middle Eastern and Asian languages– launched in 2007 with a simple democratic mission: organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want. Currently, Avaaz has a membership of almost 70 million people from all countries and territories.

Avaaz empowers millions of people from all walks of life to take action on pressing global, regional and national issues, from corruption and poverty to conflict and the environment. Our model of internet organising allows thousands of individual efforts, however small, to be rapidly combined into a collective force.

Each year, Avaaz sets overall priorities through all-member polls. For 2023, our membership has chosen the following top five priorities: responding to the climate crisis (64%), fighting destruction of biodiversity (64%), defending democracy from the far-right and autocratic attacks (45%) and defending human rights (45%).

In other words, the Avaaz staff doesn't set an agenda in advance to try and convince members to go along with. It's quite the opposite: Avaaz staff create actions that are in line with priorities chosen by members. Because Avaaz is wholly member-funded, democratic accountability is in our DNA: we don't accept funds from governments, corporations, political parties, or foundations, and have policies in place to limit disproportionate influence of high net worth individuals: we thus only receive small individual donations, and the highest amount we can accept is US\$ 5,000.

Our community runs campaigns in 17 languages, served by a core team on 6 continents and thousands of volunteers. We take action –delivering petitions, researching, emailing, lobbying governments, organizing “offline” protests and events, and funding grassroots campaigns, litigation, or direct actions on the ground– to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform the decisions that affect us all.

Avaaz is mobilized on all three Rio conventions through engaging with civil society at the national and global level, and with officials from Parties and international organizations to connect each sector of society in the common goal of moving towards a sustainable future.