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Promotion and partnerships

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE 1992 WATER CONVENTION AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

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Introduction

Collaboration between the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992 Water Convention), serviced by UNECE and the Global Environment Facility (GEF)¹ is based on complementarity and synergy of support to riparian countries to catalyze cooperation on the governance and management of transboundary waters. The GEF (www.thegef.org) welcomes the opportunity to provide inputs to the Ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention planned September 29 – October 1, 2021, in Geneva, Switzerland.

The 1992Water Convention and the GEF both support countries in the process leading to improved management of shared water resources. Both the GEF and the 1992Water Convention promote the establishment of joint management bodies, cooperation and exchange of information and their availability to the public; and the formulation of joint assessments of the shared water resources based on the best available science. Both organizations support the process leading to formulation and ministerial endorsement of Strategic Action Programs/long-term investment plans, and subsequent implementation of these Strategic Action Programs. Such support may include regional and national policy, legal and institutional reforms that the basin countries agree to implement to jointly address the transboundary concerns identified, as well as supporting cooperation and investments in shared coastal zones and the oceans.

Collaboration between the GEF and 1992Water Convention has been mutually reinforcing in many basins with common support. The results of numerous activities and projects implemented with assistance of GEF funds in the ECE region and beyond contribute to fulfilling the 1992Water Convention Parties to meet their obligation under the Convention, such as to put in place legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation, operationalize joint management institutions, and invest in cooperative actions such as for management of floods or investments in pollution prevention.

The collaboration between the GEF and the 1992Water Convention Secretariat on specific themes and tools continues to mature. The GEF and 1992Water Convention collaboration has continued to grow,

¹ An updated description of the GEF structure is attached as Annex 1.

including through the most recent phase of the GEF supported IW-LEARN², hereunder with an increased focus on the exchange of experiences in basins with common support. Key themes include common advancement of a range of tools to support transboundary cooperation, including within the areas of Water-Food-Energy and Ecosystems Nexus, sharing of costs on benefits of transboundary cooperation, climate resilience, finance of transboundary institutions and investments and capacity building in countries sharing transboundary basins. This collaboration among others includes engagement in shared dialogues, conferences, and trainings. UNECE also provided inputs to GEF IW:LEARN online training courses, programmatic guidance and partnered with the project on global dialogue events to strengthen partnerships.

The collaboration is foreseen to continue during the next phase of GEF IW:LEARN³ and UNECE is envisioned to play a significant role in multiple areas. Areas of collaboration may include continued support to Water-Food-Energy and Ecosystem Nexus activities (including incorporation into the GEF IW Transboundary Diagnostic-Strategic Action Programme Methodology), regional training on water conflict prevention, global dialogue events and Source-to-Sea Action strengthening activities in connecting marine ecosystem dialogues and activities in support of financing transboundary water cooperation.

GEF Programming Directions

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is the largest and most experienced multilateral fund dedicated to addressing environmental threats to the planet. Established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems, the GEF's core mission is to support developing countries protect and sustainably use nature, upon which life depends. The GEF is the only entity whose mandate embraces all facets of a healthy environment, from biodiversity, to climate change, to land degradation, to international waters, and including chemicals and waste.

The GEF operates in 4-year funding cycles, and since its inception, it has provided more than \$21.1 billion in grants and mobilized an additional \$114.0 billion in co-financing for more than 5,000 projects in 170 countries. The GEF was established as the steward of the planet's global common resources and to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems (see Annex 1). The GEF finance is structured within four-year replenishment cycles and the new GEF-8 cycle is expected to begin in the second half of 2022 and following the approval of the GEF-8 programming directions at the seventh GEF General Assembly.

The GEF is committed to catalyze systems changes and address main threats to the stability of the planet. In the face of the scale and the urgency of the threats facing the planet, and the emerging opportunities to significantly accelerate and scale up its positive impacts, the GEF cannot afford to stand still. During GEF-7, the GEF is strategically focusing its investments in areas where it can help catalyze the necessary change in key systems and accelerate change through integrated programming across its areas of funding and commitments by countries to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

Work done through the GEF is of critical importance to the achievement of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which in turn rely heavily on planet earth and its stable and prosperous ecosystems. While not being the financial mechanism for the SDGs; the work of the GEF produce global environmental benefits that play a role in achieving the aims of the SDGs, in particular the goals on life below water (SDG 14) as well as clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), and life on

² IW:LEARN is the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network project, implemented by UNDP and UNEP. See section below.

³ Expected implementation start in 2021.

land (SDG 15), which reflect the GEF's core mission. Environmental threats from e.g., climate change, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, and pressure on forests, freshwater, oceans, landscapes, and wildlife, are negatively impacting human development, livelihoods, and social justice. This creates a strong case for the governance and management of shared fresh and marine water resources at the local, national, and transboundary levels.

The GEF International Waters Focal Area

Cooperation between the GEF and 1992Water Convention has been predominantly through the GEF International Waters (IW) Focal Area⁴. Through the GEF IW Focal Area, the GEF attends to a unique demand in the global water agenda: fostering transboundary cooperation and building trust between states that often find themselves locked in complex and long-lasting water-use conflicts. The GEF IW Focal Area supports countries to jointly manage their transboundary surface water basins, groundwater basins, coastal and marine systems and oceans to enable the sharing of benefits from their utilization. The GEF IW Focal Area embraces an ecosystems approach to enhancing cooperation on the governance and management of shared freshwater and marine ecosystems, including, river basins, aquifers, lakes, large marine ecosystems (LMEs) and areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), and associated natural resources.

The GEF and the 1992Water Convention collaborate towards the enhancement of mutual synergies. Since the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the 1992Water Convention, the GEF and the 1992Water Convention Secretariat have collaborated and aimed for synergies on key themes of common support, either within the GEF IW:LEARN network and/or within the GEF IW Focal Area and UNECE supported activities in transboundary basins (see table 1 below for a list of GEF approved projects since October 2018). Key themes of common relevance to the 1992Water Convention and the GEF – as per the UNECE program of work – include e.g. support to regional legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation and building capacity in transboundary river, lake and groundwater basin institutions, supporting the development and implementation of benefit sharing mechanisms among riparian countries, assessment of water-food-energy and ecosystems nexus dimensions, pollution prevention and control from land based sources of pollution, and resilience against climate change and other shocks, including the management of extreme events, e.g. floods and droughts.

The GEF-International Waters Focal Area long term strategic approach

The GEF IW focal area strategies have evolved and embraced changing priorities but have been consistently focused on supporting transboundary cooperation in shared marine and freshwater ecosystems. This has been coupled with a strategic approach, including joint fact-finding, multi-country strategic planning, and implementation of governance reforms and investments. To date, GEF's IW Focal Area has invested more than \$2.2 billion in grants leveraging approximately \$15.3 billion in co-financing for more than 400 projects in transboundary water bodies.

The GEF experience demonstrates that sustainable environmental management of transboundary resources requires a common understanding of what pressures the shared ecosystems are facing, coupled with national and regional investment plans. The GEF IW Focal Area transboundary approach has been the basis of GEF investments in the International Waters Focal Area to date and therefore the GEF has invested in the process of assessing threats and opportunities (Transboundary Diagnostic Analyses – TDAs)

⁴ For more information on the overall GEF-7 programming directions, please see <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gef-7-programming-directions>. For more information on the overall GEF-8 draft programming directions, please see <https://www.thegef.org/council-meeting-documents/strategic-positioning-and-programming-directions>

and developing regionally agreed action plans (Strategic Action Programs – SAPs), many of which are already under implementation. Now that many transboundary ecosystems have established SAPs, the scene is set for implementation of the regionally agreed national and regional-level actions to ensure the health of the shared water bodies and their valuable services. The GEF plays a critical role in these initiatives as a major global grant funding mechanism to invest in transboundary water ecosystems and their management.

The GEF-7 International Waters Focal Area Strategy (2018 to 2022)

GEF’s support of transboundary cooperation in shared marine and freshwater ecosystems has proven successful in achieving long term benefits. Complex transboundary water ecosystems cut across a myriad of sectoral needs and themes while not being bound by political boundaries. Consequently, setting effective policy goals, coupled with investments, requires working at all scales, with a range of stakeholders, in the public and private sectors and across the watershed from source-to-sea and beyond. These principles remain fundamental to the GEF-7 investments in International Waters. GEF-7 IW investments target three key objectives: 1) strengthening national Blue Economy opportunities to reduce threats to marine and coastal waters; 2) improving management in the ABNJ, and 3) enhancing water security in freshwater ecosystems.⁵

These objectives are elaborated in more detail below.

Objective 1. Strengthening Blue Economy opportunities

Strengthening Blue Economy opportunities requires regional cooperation and national action. The Blue Economy concept identifies the oceans as areas for potential sustainable development of existing and new sectors, including tourism, extractive industries, renewable energy production, fisheries and aquaculture, coastal development, and marine transport. Via the implementation of regional frameworks, the GEF is assisting countries in identifying sustainable public and private national and regional investments within the Blue Economy space, leading to collective management of coastal and marine systems and implementation of the full range of integrated ocean policies, as well as legal and institutional reforms. This is done in tandem with catalyzing regional processes, such as TDA/SAP in order to advance cooperation in Large Marine Ecosystems.⁶

GEF-7 presents a unique opportunity to assist countries in addressing a suite of stressors. Roughly 100 GEF-eligible nations have been reaching agreements via TDA/SAPs to improve ocean management. GEF-7 presents a unique opportunity to assist countries in addressing a suite of stressors such as overfishing, land based sources of pollution, and loss and damage of key coastal and marine ecosystems through a combination of national and regional investments towards strengthening national Blue Economy opportunities. In GEF-7, the focus has been and continues to be on investments that strengthen countries Blue Economy opportunities, through three areas of strategic action: 1) sustaining healthy coastal and

⁵ Water security has been defined as “the availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods, ecosystems and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water-related risks to people, environments and economies”. Water insecurity is perceived when it impairs human and environmental well-being, economic development and resulting in often difficult cross-sector trade-offs and/or straining cross-border relations. Grey, David & Sadoff, Claudia. (2007). Sink or Swim? Water Security for Growth and Development. Water Policy. 9. 10.2166/wp.2007.021.

⁶ The TDA/SAP process consists of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis in which common fact finding, and scientific analysis identifies the shared threats in a given transboundary ecosystem. This process leads naturally into the formulation of the Strategic Action Program, which is a politically endorsed document, that identifies the interventions needed to address the agreed threats in the region.

marine ecosystems; 2) catalyzing sustainable fisheries management; and 3) addressing pollution reduction in marine environments.

Objective 2. Improve management in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

Urgent action is needed to improve conservation and sustainable use of the open oceans that covers 40% of the planet. The Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) are increasingly threatened by over-fishing of migratory species, maritime navigation, ocean energy facilities, bottom trawling on seamounts, pollution, and extraction of minerals and hydrocarbons. The GEF will build on its past experience in successfully supporting an applied ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management of deep sea fisheries, including seamounts, as well as regional tuna fisheries management organizations (tRFMOs) in ABNJ. Through this strategic objective the GEF is renewing its efforts within the ABNJ space.

The complex ecosystems in the ABNJ include both the water column and seabed making the sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation especially challenging. The GEF is fostering information sharing to promote sustainable practices and to inform decision-making by private businesses and regional organisations such as, LME commissions, RFMOs, or the Regional Seas programme. Addressing fisheries and in particular Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the high seas continue to be a high priority. GEF investments is building capacity among concerned states and organisations and foster public private partnerships between the RFMOs and the large commercial fishing fleets harvesting in the high seas and its associated supply chain. Finally, GEF investments facilitate cooperative frameworks between the ABNJs and the Large Marine Ecosystems that they border, to improve management opportunities and cohesion between these two interdependent management frameworks.

Objective 3. Enhance water security in freshwater ecosystems

Global water resources and the hydrological cycle are a global asset. Most surface water resources are shared by more than one country making cooperation a prerequisite for long-term sustainable management. Transboundary river basins cover about 50% of the earth's land surface and are home to about 40% of the world's population. 1.2 billion people live in river basins where human water use has surpassed sustainable limits. Cooperation on water, therefore, is a must in most international basins to support the need for water, food, energy, and ecosystems security and increase resilience for each nation. The need for transboundary cooperation, therefore, has been anchored in the SDGs as an essential element for effective integrated water resources management (SDG 6.5). Shared groundwater resources are especially hard to manage due to the limited knowledge of the resource and its invisibility.

With mounting pressures on water resources and increasing pressures from climate variability and change, managing surface and groundwater is the only sustainable path. Both cooperation on water quantity and quality are of key concern – impacting people and environmental assets of global significance, including wetland biodiversity, freshwater fish stocks, and unique aquatic and terrestrial habitats. GEF IW support in freshwater basins is focusing on three areas of strategic action:

Advance information exchange and early warning

Disaster risk management is often an early entry point for cooperation among countries by creating trust and establishing a track record of cooperation on a wide set of issues. Flood and drought early warning systems can be instrumental for countries and the international community alike to intervene early and increase resilience before the onset of destabilizing social conditions and out-migrations, with obvious humanitarian benefits. GEF support is designed to enhance the availability of sound data and information for science-based policies and decisions. On the regional level this is building the science base and dialogue

for informed prioritization of investments; on a global level this effort is enabling the predicting of future hotspots and basins at risk.

Enhance regional and national cooperation on shared freshwater surface and groundwater basins

Cooperation on water is ‘a must’ in most international basins. GEF support is focusing on interventions in shared basins where water stress creates a challenge but also can be a driver and opportunity for cooperation. Interventions are prioritizing preventative actions in transboundary basins facing multiple stressors and hence reduce the potential for conflict on national and regional levels. Investment in cooperation among countries in shared basins can be one avenue to increase interaction among countries and enhance trade and transport of goods and services. These investments can, consequently, create common interests and provide an entry point for regional integration and peaceful country relations.

Investments in water, food, energy and environmental security

In shared water basins, cooperation can assure greater security of water, energy, food and ecosystems. Realizing benefits from cooperation through national and regional investments with visible impacts enhances stability of country relations and ensures sustainable financing of regional cooperative institutions. Enhanced economic ties and multi-level interactions among countries sharing a basin/sub-region reduce the likelihood of escalating conflict. Priority investments anchored in agreed basin-wide strategic action plans span both national and multi-country support to soft and hard investments in improved information, policies, and innovative technologies. Further, investments ensure the inclusion of the ecosystem dimension into the Water, Energy, Food nexus, which will increase environmental security. The GEF finances the incremental costs of creating regional benefits and de-risk innovation in measures to address water security both in terms of quality and quantity/availability. Country eligibility for national investments is guided by signature of existing SAPs and currently includes over 90 countries with valid SAPs.

Exchanging of Experiences, Lessons, and Enhancing Capacity – GEF IW:LEARN

The GEF IW:LEARN project promotes enhancement of project impacts and the broader uptake of portfolio results. The GEF IW:LEARN (www.iwlearn.net) constitutes the International Waters Focal Area Learning Exchange and Resource Network project, which is implemented by UNDP and UNEP. IW:LEARN provides a critical role in helping to share project experiences, foster learning, replicate results and enhance project impacts across the entire GEF IW portfolio of projects and partners. IW:LEARN promotes knowledge sharing, training and dialogue, partnership-building, programmatic guidance and information management across GEF agencies, countries, and partners around the world. IW:LEARN supports face-to-face activities (workshops, conferences, regional dialogue processes, project-project twinning) as well as online exchanges, including online thematic training, help-desk functions, the IW:LEARN website - a portfolio content management system, and its associated developments, the project website toolkit, visualization tool and Portfolio Results Archive. The fourth phase of GEF IW:LEARN (IW:LEARN 4) was implemented until 2020 and the fifth phase of the project is expected to start in 2021, both with UNECE as a core partner in the execution of the project.

GEF IW:LEARN and 1992Water Convention areas of cooperation (2018-2020). Although IW:LEARN has collaborated with UNECE in its previous IW:LEARN 3 phase (e.g. exchange of experiences in basins with common support), the collaboration has evolved in the IW:LEARN 4 implementation phase (2016-2020), and includes a number of events and technical assistance organized in cooperation between UNECE and IW:LEARN as well as other partners in the last three years, in the following areas:

- A) **GEF International Waters Conference.** UNECE contributed to the 8th GEF International Waters Conference in Sri Lanka in May 2016 and 9th GEF IWC in Morocco in November 2018, leading sessions and supporting the agenda development.
- B) **GEF IW Regional Training Workshops.** UNECE contributed to GEF IW:LEARN's program of regional training and experience-sharing workshops. In particular UNECE joined the 5th targeted workshop for GEF IW projects in Africa in May 2019 to support sessions on climate change and transboundary cooperation.
- C) **Global Dialogue Events and workshops.** UNECE and GEF IW:LEARN collaborated at the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Astana, October 2018) to support a pre-workshop on sustainable finance of transboundary basins, including government representatives and development banks. Also, at this event were workshops on Source-to-Sea Action Management and transboundary commissions. UNECE and GEF IW:LEARN have also collaborated on events at other global dialogues such as Stockholm World Water Week and the World Water Forum to lead joint sessions and foster partnerships.
- D) **Programmatic Guidance and Online Training Courses.** UNECE and GEF IW:LEARN have also collaborated in the area of training and guidance. UNECE contributed to the UNIDO-led IW:LEARN effort on economic valuation guidance. UNECE also contributed heavily, leading a module development of the GWP-Led IW:LEARN Freshwater Security Massive Online Open Course.

While the above activities are the most prominent events within UNECE and IW:LEARN cooperation, there are a number of other events where GEF IW:LEARN has facilitated the participation of stakeholders as global dialogue participants to UNECE events.

Ongoing collaboration between UNECE and IW:LEARN. UNECE is an active and valued member within the IW:LEARN network of partners. It is anticipated that UNECE will continue to be a core partner in IW:LEARN's next phase. The GEF and the IW:LEARN partners are pleased to note that UNECE has voiced its continuing commitment to contribute to the network with lessons learned from UNECE supported basin projects and guidance materials developed under the Water Convention. Furthermore, UNECE contributes to publications produced by IW:LEARN and content to the IW:LEARN website. IW:LEARN and its partners, including UNECE, have outlined an ambitious work program for the next IW:LEARN phase anticipating continued cooperation in the design and implementation of thematic and regional workshops.

GEF portfolio highlights

The GEF International Waters Focal Area supports country cooperation in international waters around the globe. Full size projects are approved by the GEF Council twice a year at regular Council meetings or through intersessional work program submission by e-mail, while medium sized projects are approved on a rolling basis (see annex 1 and www.thegef.org). Since the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the 1992 Water Convention, the GEF IW Focal Area has approved a total of 46 projects⁷ with a total amount of \$332.2 million dollars in GEF IW finance (including GEF grants and fees) and approximately \$2.3 billion in co-finance (see table 1). Out of this total, 24 GEF IW funded projects seek to advance improved governance of shared aquifers, lakes and river basins, totaling \$165.8 million dollars in GEF IW finance (including GEF grants and fees) and approximately \$1.0 billion in co-finance.⁸

⁷ Not including the GEF Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) investments.

⁸ A visualization tool specific to the GEF IW portfolio can be found via: <https://iwlearn.net/iw-projects>

The below project examples represent selected highlights of GEF IW Focal Area projects. The highlighted projects are either under development or currently under implementation and are meant to serve as illustrative *examples* of areas of GEF investments with most relevance to the 1992Water Convention’s program of work in the last three years, and hence with a focus on river-, lake- and groundwater basins and land-based sources of pollution to coastal areas. Detailed information on all GEF approved projects can be found online <https://www.thegef.org/projects>. Furthermore, additional information, news and a portfolio overview of GEF IW investments can be found on the IW-LEARN website (www.iwlearn.net) and in the following GEF publications: “From Ridge to Reef”⁹, “From Community to Cabinet”¹⁰, “From Coast to Coasts”¹¹, “Water for our Future”¹² and “Enhancing Water Security in Shared Freshwater Ecosystems”¹³, which describes experiences based on nearly three decades of GEF IW investments through the lens of the Nexus as driver for cooperation to achieve energy and food security, for the provision of essential ecosystems services and to contribute to regional integration, stability and peace.

Dniester River Basin

The project titled **“Advancing transboundary co-operation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Dniester River Basin through implementation of the Strategic Action Programme”** is UNDP implemented and has been GEF council approved in June 2021. The Dniester River has a length of 1,350 km and is situated within the wider Black Sea basin. Spanning a basin area of more than 72,000 km², the Dniester River Basin is the fourth largest river in Ukraine and the largest in the Republic of Moldova with approximately 8.5 million people living in the basin. The Dniester basin is an essential resource in supporting key economic sectors. At the same time, there are serious ecological challenges within the basin, including increased pressure on the water flow regime and water quality. The basin is currently experiencing an accelerated loss of biodiversity, while the need for addressing increased resilience to climate change and resources management is becoming increasingly evident.

The overall objective of the GEF/UNDP project is to support Integrated Water Resources Management by supporting the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme priority actions. In the framework of implementing the agreed SAP and coordinated River Basin Management Plans, the project will enable the consolidation of country and transboundary efforts to reduce transboundary degradation of the basin. Project activities build on an extensive baseline of completed and on-going national and regional actions, while further strengthening institutional capacity of national bodies and the Dniester Commission and its Working Groups – thereby enabling countries to effectively implement the SAP, 1992Water Convention commitments and the EU WFD. Amongst other elements, the project will support integrated land and water management, such as through advancing the nexus approach in watersheds and basins, prevention of nutrient pollution, and adaptation to climate change via increased resilience to naturally induced disasters.

Extended Drin River Basin

Two sister projects, the Full-Sized **“Enabling transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources in the extended Drin Basin”** (Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro were the project beneficiaries) and the Mid-Sized **“Enabling transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources in the White Drin and extended Drin Basin”** (Kosovo was the project beneficiary), (concluded on July 30, 2021) having the same objectives and structure, were UNDP implemented and GWP executed. The projects are situated in

⁹ <https://www.thegef.org/publications/ridge-reef-water-environment-and-community-security>

¹⁰ <https://www.thegef.org/publications/community-cabinet-two-decades-gef-action-secure-transboundary-river-basins-and-aquifers>

¹¹ <https://www.thegef.org/publications/coast-coast-20-years-transboundary-management-our-shared-oceans>

¹² <https://www.thegef.org/publications/contributing-global-security>

¹³ <https://iwlearn.net/documents/33234>

the extended Drin Basin, which comprises the sub-basins of five water bodies (two rivers and three lakes), each one shared by two or three riparian's. The total geographical area of the Drin Basin is 20,361 km². The basin is home to over 1.6 million people, living in over 1,450 settlements. The basin encompasses ecosystems of major importance both from a European and an international conservation perspective and sustains coastal and marine ecosystems in the Mediterranean.

The objective of the project was to promote joint management of the shared water resources of the transboundary Drin River Basin, including coordination mechanisms among the various sub-basin joint commissions and committees. The Project assisted in the operationalization of the institutional structure in the basin, rendering it capable of undertaking its coordinative and executive role. A key project achievement and a step forward in implementing the Drin MoU was the high-level endorsement by the five Riparian's of the Strategic Action Programme for the sustainable management of the Extended Drin Basin. In addition, a feasibility study on options for a legal and institutional arrangement for the management of the Drin Basin was developed, including a draft international agreement text, and adopted by the DCG. Shared among Albania, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia (the five 'Riparians'), the Drin River Basin provides water resources for drinking, energy, fishing and agriculture, biodiversity, tourism and industry. The endorsed SAP sets out actions to address a series of transboundary issues, i.e. water pollution, biodiversity degradation, water and sediment flow disturbance, marking this the first strategic document for shared water resources in the region.

Limpopo River Basin

The **“Integrated Transboundary River Basin Management for the Sustainable Development of the Limpopo River Basin”** project is implemented by UNDP and has been GEF Council approved in December 2019. The Limpopo River Basin (LRB) shared by Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe is home to an estimated 18 million people, includes major urban centers in Southern Africa and hosts unique protected areas and biodiversity hotspots. Water allocation between upstream and downstream areas and among urban and rural users is an essential challenge for the sustainable management of the Limpopo River Basin with increasing climate variability and change adding to already high seasonal and inter-year variability of water and frequent floods and droughts.

The GEF support is based on the LIMCOM IWRM plan and its priority actions in order to support the countries' Shared Vision of a “dynamic, prosperous and sustainable river basin for all”. The project cooperates closely with other development partners in Support of LIMCOM. Interventions combine the support for enhancing LIMCOM's institutional capacity and sustainability, the formulation of a Transboundary Diagnostic and a long-term Strategic Action Program (SAP) and IWRM plan together with prioritized national implementation plans, as well as aims to mobilize public and private interests to finance implementation. Furthermore, the project supports sediment monitoring and modeling and innovative pilots to address sediment management; a joint basin fresh-water health survey; interventions to better manage small-scale alluvial groundwater withdrawals and their ecosystem impacts, and cooperation and learning exchanges with other SADC region RBOs. Integration of groundwater into overall basin planning is also supported by expertise from the GEF and CIWA supported SADC Groundwater Management Institute (SADC-GMI). The project also will aim to promote a “Source to Sea” approach through awareness raising and institutional linkage between the Limpopo River basin ecosystem (Limpopo Watercourse Commission - LIMCOM) with the Western Indian Ocean Large Marine Ecosystem (Nairobi Convention) in a source-to-sea context.

Lake Tanganyika Basin

The “**Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable Land Management and Enhanced Water Security in Lake Tanganyika Basin**” project is UNEP implemented and has been GEF Council approved in June 2020. Lake Tanganyika lies at an elevation of about 772 m above sea level in the Western part of the Great Rift Valley. It is, after Lake Victoria, Africa’s second largest lake and the world’s second deepest (1,471m), after Lake Baikal. The lake is shared by four countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Zambia. The lake hosts one of the largest freshwater fisheries in Africa and its basin is a recognised global hotspot of biodiversity. The proposed project builds on previous investments of the GEF in the Lake Tanganyika basin.

The project aims to support the implementation of SAP actions through enhancing sustainable fisheries management, biodiversity conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes in selected key biodiversity areas. At the *regional scale* the project will support building a network of community-based *co-managed fisheries areas* in the key fish biodiversity areas of the littoral zone of Lake Tanganyika. The strategic focus of GEF support for fisheries co-management in the four riparian countries will be on strengthening the capacities of, and building collaboration and co-operation between, the Lake Tanganyika Management Authority (LTA), government fisheries institutions and the local fishing communities, to minimize resource use conflict, improve good governance and encourage proactive leadership on the conservation and management of fisheries resources. At the *local scale* of the selected Protected Areas (PAs), and their buffer zones the project will support participative, community driven implementation of a suite of complementary management interventions within each targeted PA to address the key threats and barriers to the conservation and sustainable use of the lake and its basin area, increase household productivity and incomes from these natural resources and increase incentives for communities to continue to invest in the long-term stewardship of these protected areas beyond the term of the project.

Ma and Neun/Ca Transboundary River Basins

The “**Fostering Water and Environmental Security in the Ma and Neun/Ca Transboundary River Basins and Related Coastal Areas**” project is the first bi-lateral GEF-IW project between Lao PDR and Viet Nam focused on shared rivers of Ma and Neun/Ca. The project is FAO implemented and was GEF Council approved in June 2019 and GEF CEO endorsed in June 2021. Establishing bi-national coordination mechanisms for the long-term effective management of Ma and the Neun/Ca River basins is paramount for their sustainable development, mainly involving the transboundary and conjunctive management of surface and groundwater resources enhancing synergies with biodiversity conservation (e.g. biodiversity corridors), forests and inland fisheries management, and resolving conflicts at the food, energy and environment nexus and climate change, which is expected to be one of the biggest drivers of hydrological transformation in the two basins.

The proposed project will adopt the S2S approach, link with ongoing initiatives dealing with sectoral aspects, and directly inform the design and planning of a range of investments in these sectors. The project will support common fact finding and development of a Transboundary Diagnostic (TDA) including assessment of surface and groundwater availability, quality and uses, flood and drought risks, and competing water-food-energy needs; support interim cross-sector and cross-border institutional mechanisms to define a common vision for cooperation; design and harmonize monitoring networks; enhance forecasting capabilities in both basins and their coastal areas through the establishment of transboundary cooperation and information exchange frameworks and mechanisms; agree on and seek finance for a joined Strategic Action Program (SAP) signed off on ministerial levels; invest in on the ground solutions to priority threats e.g. such as with regard to flood risks and threats to inland fisheries; and enhance institutional and human capacities at national and regional levels, and awareness raising on implications of development scenarios.

Mekong Delta Aquifer

The project “**Enhancing Sustainability of the Bi-national Transboundary Mekong River Delta Aquifer**” implemented by FAO has been GEF Council approved in June 2020. The lower section of the Mekong River Basin is underlain by a major transboundary aquifer system shared by Cambodia and Viet Nam: *The Cambodia – Mekong River Delta Aquifer*. This transboundary aquifer system connects two ecosystems of global environmental significance and socio-economic importance: the i) Tonle Sap area and the ii) Mekong Delta.

The sustainability of water resources and the health of the delta and Tonle Sap ecosystems cannot be achieved without a proper and shared understanding of the regional groundwater flow regimes, including the up-gradient recharge zones. The establishment of cooperative management frameworks for this major transboundary aquifer is needed to avoid over-abstraction and pollution of the groundwater resources. Within this context, the proposed foundational GEF-IW project seeks to strengthen environmental sustainability and water security in the Lower Mekong Basin by focusing, for the first time in the region, on the totality of the Cambodia-Mekong River Delta transboundary aquifer and understanding of its functioning and interactions with surface waters and ecosystems, and on its national and transboundary governance. The project will place emphasis on the enhancement of aquifer recharge, pollution reduction, and optimization of groundwater withdrawals through (i) strengthening transboundary cooperation including joint fact finding and information exchange; (ii) enhancing groundwater recharge; (iii) supporting innovative solutions to optimize groundwater use, reverse salinization trends and increase resilience to climate change; (iv) reducing agri-pollutant contamination of ground and surface waters; (v) and contributing to protecting groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Putumayo-Içá river basin

The “**Integrated watershed management of the Putumayo-Içá river basin**” project is implemented by the World Bank and was GEF Council approved in June 2020. The Putumayo-Ica river basin is shared between Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The Putumayo-Içá River is the tenth longest tributary of the Amazon River, and its watershed covers 118,000 km², approximately 1.7 percent of the Amazon basin. Andean countries refer to the main river as the Putumayo. Of the large Andes-Amazon Rivers, the Putumayo-Içá is the only one without plans for large hydroelectric dams. The watershed includes some of the most remote, economically underdeveloped, lowest population density and also best conserved areas of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Overall population density of the watershed is < 14 people/km²), with density declining from the upper to the lower watershed. The socioeconomic conditions and dynamics of the watershed vary along the region. The bulk of the watershed is a nearly entirely roadless wilderness, with the exception of the road network in the upper reaches in Ecuador and Colombia that supports larger towns and oil exploration and exploitation.

The proposed project will be assisting the four countries to implement the strategic actions identified in the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Amazon Basin. With an objective to: “Improve the capacity of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to manage freshwater ecosystems and aquatic resources of the Putumayo-Ica watershed in the Amazon”, the project will support some of the priority regional transboundary problems identified in the SAP that are relevant to this basin. These actions include: addressing water and in particular Mercury pollution by implementing a regional water quality monitoring system and protecting, managing and monitoring aquifers; deforestation by conserving and using water resources sustainably in the headwaters and lowlands and the need to support legal and institutional frameworks to improve water resources management. The project information generated through scientific and traditional knowledge will support the regional information platform that has been prioritized by the SAP.

Pacific SIDS Coastal Aquifers

The **"Managing Coastal Aquifers in Selected Pacific SIDS"** project is implemented by FAO and was approved by the GEF Council in June 2018. The investment will be assisting three Pacific island countries (Republic of Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau, Tuvalu) in addressing the lack of knowledge and information on the status of coastal aquifers in Pacific Island Countries. Building capacity around coastal aquifers is essential to enhance protection, and governance of coastal aquifers and ensure their incorporation into national water policies. This project ultimately aims at providing the countries, and particularly to the selected project sites, the foundation required to support improved aquifer management/governance including the increased engagement of women in island and community level water planning and decision-making processes.

The obvious barrier limiting the generation of knowledge and data on aquifers and groundwater is the limited capacity at local and national level to assess and monitor aquifers and groundwater resources. The absence of dedicated monitoring infrastructure and human capacity impedes the generation of data that is required to support aquifer management and protection. As a result of this data and knowledge gap, there is also a lack of decision-making tools and suitable governance mechanisms at local and national level that could support incorporation of groundwater into applicable national water policies. Further, the low level of engagement by women as primary water users and decision-makers at household level is a key barrier to change.

The proposed interventions will be supporting efforts to increase water efficiency, reduce groundwater pollution, and addressing the drivers of land degradation which can have detrimental effects on the health of coastal aquifers and hinder the ecosystem services and water security they provide.

Table 1: GEF International Waters and multi-focal area projects approved since the previous Meeting of the Parties (Astana, October 10-12, 2018). The approved projects total an amount of \$332 million dollars (including GEF grants and fees).

	Countries	Project title
Europe and Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic	Strengthening the Resilience of Central Asian Countries by Enabling Regional Cooperation to Assess High Altitude Glacio-nival Systems to Develop Integrated Methods for Sustainable Development and Adaptation to Climate Change (GEF ID 10077)
	Belarus	Conservation of Wetland Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Freshwater Ecosystems in the Western Dvina/Daugava Transboundary River Basin (GEF ID 10462)
	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia	Sava and Drina Rivers Corridors Integrated Development Program (GEF ID 10553)
	Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine	Fisheries and Ecosystem Based Management for the Black Sea - (FishEBM BS) (GEF ID 10558)
	Albania, Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey	Fisheries and Ecosystem Based Management for the Blue Economy of the Mediterranean - (FishEBM MED) (GEF ID 10560)
	Georgia, Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine	Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) (GEF ID 10563)
	Afghanistan, Tajikistan	Institutionalizing transboundary water management between Tajikistan and Afghanistan for the Panj River Sub Basin (GEF ID 10714)
	Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine	Implementing Ecosystem Based Management approaches in the Black Sea LME (GEF ID 10725)
	Moldova, Ukraine	Advancing transboundary co-operation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Dniester River Basin through implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (GEF ID 10805)
Africa	Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe	Integrated Transboundary River Basin Management for the Sustainable Development of the Limpopo River Basin (GEF ID 10182)
	Libya	Management Support and Expansion of Marine Protected Areas in Libya (GEF ID 10158)
	Africa, Burundi, Congo DR, Tanzania, Zambia	Biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and enhanced water security in Lake Tanganyika basin (GEF ID 10388)
	Guinea, Guinea-Bissau	Integrated transboundary water resources management in the Corubal basin between Guinée and Guinée-Bissau (GEF ID 10508)
	Angola, Namibia	Enhanced Water Security and Community Resilience in the Adjacent Cuvelai and Kunene Transboundary River Basins (GEF ID 10565)
	Burundi, Congo DR, Rwanda	Lake Kivu and Rusizi River Basin Water Quality Management Project (GEF ID 10566)
	Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Montenegro	Build back a blue and stronger Mediterranean (GEF ID 10685)
	Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Sustainable Groundwater Management In SADC Member States Project Phase 2 (GEF ID 10797)
Regional Benin, Togo	Regional Initiative for Water and Environment in the transboundary basin of the Mono River (RIWE-Mono) (GEF ID 10799)	
Latin America Caribbean	El Salvador, Guatemala	Enabling concerted Source to Sea management in the Paz river watershed (GEF ID 10074)
	El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras	Fostering Water Security in the Trifinio Region: a TDA/SAP approach (GEF ID 10108)
	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay	Implementation of the Guarani Aquifer Strategic Action Program: Enabling Regional Actions (GEF ID 10139)
	Costa Rica, Panama	Towards the Transboundary Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) of the Sixaola River Basin shared by Costa Rica and Panama (GEF ID 10172)
	Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, St. Lucia	"BE-CLME+": Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (GEF ID 10211)
	Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru	Integrated watershed management of the Putumayo-IÑá river basin (GEF ID 10531)

	Colombia, Jamaica, Panama	Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach (GEF ID 10547)
	Brazil, Uruguay	Binational and integrated water resources management in the Mern Lagoon Basin and Coastal Lagoons (GEF ID 10550)
	Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay	Transboundary cooperation for the conservation, sustainable development and integrated management of the Pantanal - Upper Paraguay River Basin (GEF ID 10554)
	Ecuador, Peru	Implementation of the Strategic Action Programmes and the National Strategic Action Plans for the Integrated Water Resources Management in the Puyango-Tumbes, Catamayo-Chira and Zarumilla Transboundary Aquifers and River Basins (GEF ID 10700)
	El Salvador, Honduras	Gulf of Fonseca Transboundary Management (GEF ID 10778)
	Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines	Caribbean BluEFin (Caribbean Blue Economy Financing Project) (GEF ID 10782)
	Regional Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago	Protecting and Restoring the Ocean's natural Capital, building Resilience and supporting region-wide Investments for sustainable Blue socio-Economic development (PROCARIBE+) (GEF ID 10800)
Asia Pacific	Costa Rica, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama	Towards Joint Integrated, Ecosystem-based Management of the Pacific Central American Coastal Large Marine Ecosystem (PACA) (GEF ID 10076)
	Vietnam, Laos	Fostering Water and Environmental Security in the Ma and Neun/Ca Transboundary River Basins and Related Coastal Areas (GEF ID 10193)
	Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	Mainstreaming climate change and ecosystem-based approaches into the sustainable management of the living marine resources of the WCPFC (GEF ID 10394)
	Cambodia, Viet Nam	Enhancing sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River Delta Aquifer (GEF ID 10520)
	Indonesia	"Plastik Silit: Accelerating Circular Economy for Difficult Plastics in Indonesia (GEF ID 10546)
	Philippines, Viet Nam	Blue Horizon: Ocean Relief through Seaweed Aquaculture (GEF ID 10573)
	Indonesia, Timor Leste	Management of Indonesian and Timor-Leste Transboundary Watersheds (MITLTW) (GEF ID 10679)
	Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Viet Nam	Promoting the blue economy and strengthening fisheries governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (GoTFish) (GEF ID 10703)
	Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu	Enhancing water-food security and climate resilience in volcanic island countries of the Pacific (GEF ID 10712)
	Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	Pacific I2I Regional Project: Ocean Health for Ocean Wealth - The Voyage to a Blue Economy for the Blue Pacific Continent (GEF ID 10783)
Global	Global	GEF IW:LEARN 5: Supporting Portfolio Coordination Within and Beyond the International Waters Focal Area, particularly in Small Island Developing States, Through Knowledge Sharing, Information Management, Partnership Building and Programmatic Guidance Services (GEF ID 10374)
	Global	Blue Nature Alliance to expand and improve conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems (GEF ID 10375)
	Global	Strengthening the Blue Economy: the Economic Case, Science-Informed Policy, and Transparency (GEF ID 10424)
	Global	Facilitating dialogue and strengthening transboundary cooperation with legislators to improve marine governance (GEF ID 10426)
	Global	Coral Reef Rescue: Resilient Coral Reefs, Resilient Communities (GEF ID 10575)

Annex 1

The Global Environment Facility

GEF was established in the early 1990s to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has become an international partnership of countries, international institutions, civil society organizations, and private sector entities providing approximately \$21.1 billion in grants and mobilizing an additional \$114 billion in co-financing for more than 5,000 projects in 170 countries across the globe. The GEF serves as the financial mechanism for the following conventions; Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Further, although not formally linked to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the GEF supports implementation of the Protocol in countries with economies in transition. As the financial mechanism of the UNFCCC, the GEF also finances concrete adaptation actions on the ground, through independent, distinct, yet complementary trust funds, the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).

Structure of Global Environment Facility

The **GEF Assembly** is the governing body of the GEF in which representatives of all member countries participate. It meets every three to four years and is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the GEF's general policies, the operation of the GEF, and its membership. The Assembly is also responsible for considering and approving proposed amendments to the GEF Instrument, the document that established the GEF and set the rules by which the GEF operates. Ministers and high-level government delegations of all GEF member countries take part in the Assembly meetings.

The **GEF Council** functions as an independent board of directors, with primary responsibility for developing, adopting, and evaluating GEF programs. Council members representing 32 constituencies (16 from developing countries, 14 from developed countries, and two from countries with transitional economies) meet twice a year for three days, while also conducting GEF business via mail. Council meetings are attended regularly by civil society organizations.

The **GEF Secretariat** is based in Washington D.C., USA, and reports directly to the GEF Council and Assembly, ensuring that their decisions are translated into effective actions. The secretariat coordinates the formulation of projects included in the work programs, oversees its implementation, and makes certain that operational strategy and policies are followed. The GEF Secretariat is addressing environmental focus areas through interventions in five focal areas, namely, Climate Change, Biodiversity, International Waters, Land Degradation and Chemicals and Waste. The GEF CEO and Chairperson is Mr. Carlos Manuel Rodriguez.

The **Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)** is established as an advisory body to the GEF. The STAP provides objective, strategic scientific and technical advice on GEF policies, operational strategies, programs and on projects and programmatic approaches; and, maintain a database of institutions, networks and individual scientists to provide the necessary expertise and advice for the GEF.

The **GEF Independent Evaluation Office** is also located in Washington D.C., and reports directly to the GEF Council. Its goal is to improve accountability of GEF projects and programs and to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing.

The **GEF's 18 implementing partners** are: Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (AFDB), Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Conservation International (CI), Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Foreign Economic

Cooperation Office - Ministry of Environmental Protection of China (FECO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Fundo Brasileiro para a Biodiversidade (FUNBIO), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), West African Development Bank (BOAD), World Bank Group (WBG), World Wildlife Fund U.S. (WWF).

GEF Projects are differing in size and scope, but most are implemented within a timeframe of 4-6 years. Generally, there are three types of GEF grants, namely Medium Size Projects (up to \$2 mill in grant size), Full Size Projects (more than \$2 mill) and Programmatic Frameworks (more than \$2 mill). All three types can be both multi-focal area and multi-national. GEF projects generally go through the following main steps:

- Identification of issues to be addressed by potential project
- Formulation of Project Identification Form (PIF)
- Country endorsement of PIF
- GEFSEC technical review of PIF and GEF CEO PIF Approval
- PIF inclusion into Work Programs or possible intercessional Work Programs
- Following GEF Council approval of PIF, development of the full project document is initiated (a Project Preparation Grant (PPG) can be applied for at PIF stage)
- Full Project Document is submitted for GEF CEO Endorsement; upon receipt of the endorsement the project initiates implementation.

