

# GEF Countries Meet with a Strong Mandate for Environmental Action

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## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- *The GEF Council and Assembly meet this week with a new record level of pledges to support developing countries in their work to prevent environmental degradation.*
- *A new publication looks at GEF projects channeled through the World Bank Group, from support for low-carbon cities and renewable energy sources to protection of fisheries and efforts to reduce the impact of climate change.*
- *To date, the World Bank Group-GEF Program has supported more than 790 programs in 120 countries.*

This week, the leadership and member countries of the Global Environment Facility meet in Mexico with a strong mandate – nearly \$4.5 billion in pledges, a record level, to support developing countries as they work to prevent the degradation of the world’s environment.

The World Bank Group helped establish the **Global Environment Facility** more than 20 years ago and is one of its longest standing partners. Through that relationship, it has been helping countries tackle some of the world’s most complex global environmental risks, from **dealing with the effects of climate change to stemming the loss of biological diversity, reinvigorating the health of international waters, halting the encroachment of land degradation and desertification, and eliminating the proliferation of persistent organic pollutants and toxic chemicals like mercury.** GEF grants channeled through the World Bank Group have helped China grow global markets for renewable energy and plan climate-smart cities. In Shanghai, one WBG-GEF project is helping design a low-carbon district that would retrofit buildings to pilot green energy and zero-emissions buildings. The project’s \$4.3 million GEF grant is bolstered by a \$100 million loan from the World Bank.

In Africa and Eastern Europe, GEF-funding has helped to **clean up stockpiles of pesticides and other hazardous chemicals.** In Vanuatu, a Pacific island nation at high risk of natural disasters, the program has pulled in additional support from the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) to help build community and agriculture resilience to climate change and preparedness for disasters.

Those are just a few examples of the **WBG-GEF program’s** work, described in greater depth in the new publication ***When Foundational Acts Generate Significant Impacts***. Since its start in 1991, the WBG-GEF program has launched more than 790 projects in 120 countries.

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**Kanta Rigaud**, Lead Environmental Specialist, World Bank Group

The WBG-GEF program helps to accelerate innovative work that both protects the global environment and meets national development goals in a sustainable manner. A key value it brings is its ability to “crowd-in” a broad range of partners and leverage additional resources, enhancing links between knowledge and finance and helping deliver solutions. WBG-GEF grants go much farther than their original value, leveraging finance at a 7:1 ratio. In all, \$4.8 billion in grants that have mobilized \$35 billion in additional funding for environmentally beneficial projects.

“Countless examples of follow-on investments have helped sustain early stage funding, and partnerships and new institutions were created that continue, on their own, to expand and multiply the work of the GEF today,” said Karin Shepardson, GEF executive coordinator at the World Bank Group.

### **Looking Ahead**

At the GEF Council this week, policy and operational issues will be high on the agenda, while the 5<sup>th</sup> **GEF Assembly** offers member countries a unique opportunity to share knowledge and experiences generated in support of various multilateral environmental agreements.

The Assembly also draws global attention to the **sixth replenishment of the GEF (2014-2018)**, which has received pledges of nearly US\$4.5 billion, the highest level of funding pledged for a GEF replenishment to date. The GEF-6 puts an emphasis on innovation and transformation in the pursuit of global environmental benefits, with special set-asides to expand work with the private sector. It also promotes regional and global cooperation.

The WBG-GEF Program has stimulated valuable knowledge working with countries to integrate environmental protection in broader landscapes, communities, and across economic activities, where priority has been given to addressing policy failures, improving governance, “building-in” resilience through investments in natural infrastructure, and promoting sustainability through financial flows from ecosystem services. Based on experience, it will be essential that the way forward builds from the expertise of partners with established track records managing complex programs, and enhances the GEF partnership’s capacity to work more seamlessly across focal areas, sectors and countries.

“The GEF is an instrument of innovations that can help pilot ideas that could become very big in the future,” said Kanta Rigaud, lead environmental specialist at the World Bank Group. Over the next four years, the WBG-GEF Program looks forward to using GEF-6 funds to help clients integrate global environmental into their national development plans, as well as to demonstrate efficiencies of scale and advocate for simplified processes that will trickle down to spur faster action on the ground. This approach recognizes that it is impossible to separate urgent global environmental issues from the World Bank Group’s core mission of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.