

Why IUCN is well positioned to deliver on GEF-9 priorities

IUCN's comparative advantage and strategic alignment with the ninth replenishment cycle of the Global Environment Facility

June 2026



Mongolia, a participant in the GEF Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

IUCN is a membership Union of governments, civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples' organisations, and experts. Together, IUCN works to advance sustainable development and create a just world that values and conserves nature. IUCN is composed of over 1,500 Member organisations across more than 160 countries, and 19,000 expert scientists who provide technical and policy advice to six commissions. IUCN has eleven regional offices and hundreds of committed staff in more than 60 countries who provide data, analysis, and convening support to Members, and implement direct conservation action.

IUCN's Global Environment Facility (GEF) portfolio

Since becoming an accredited GEF Implementing Agency in 2014, IUCN has grown its GEF portfolio to 73 projects valued at USD 367 million. IUCN GEF projects focus on leveraging Nature-Based Solutions to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Areas of emphasis include expanding, managing, and improving the governance of terrestrial, coastal, and marine protected areas and Key Biodiversity Areas; protecting tropical primary forests and reducing deforestation in critical forest biomes; sustainably managing and restoring rangelands, drylands, and degraded landscapes; leveraging nature-based solutions to deliver ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation; integrating Land Degradation Neutrality into spatial and land-use planning frameworks; transboundary freshwater and marine diplomacy; and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, youth, and women in decision-making and project governance frameworks.

IUCN and GEF-9 alignment

Based on IUCN's 20-year Strategic Vision (*Unite for Nature on the Path to 2045*) and the IUCN Programme 2026–2029 (*Nature 2030: One Nature, One Future*), as well as the GEF-9 Programming Directions, these are the priority thematic areas for IUCN to support countries in GEF-9:

- **Protected areas, biodiversity, and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) implementation:** Scaling up inclusive and socially just conservation on land, in freshwater and the ocean. IUCN brings unique comparative advantage through the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas, and KMGBF policy expertise.
- **Forest biomes and wildlife:** Preventing and reducing crimes that affect the environment, including illegal deforestation, mining, land conversion, wildlife exploitation, trafficking, and illegal fishing (Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program, and Global Wildlife for Development Integrated Program).
- **Ocean, islands, and the blue economy:** Promoting the development of a regenerative blue economy, which protects ocean species and guides people to use marine resources sustainably – building on IUCN's deep presence in Pacific, Caribbean, and Indian Ocean Small Island Developing States, combined with its work on marine protected areas, coastal fisheries, and Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction implementation (Blue and Green Islands Integrated Program).
- **Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the Inclusive Conservation Initiative:** Pioneering innovative mechanisms that promote and enable their direct participation in decision-making and direct access to conservation funding (Inclusive Conservation Initiative).
- **Nature-based Solutions, climate change, and the nature-climate nexus:** Framing Nature-based Solutions as central to climate change adaptation and mitigation at all levels, and recognising them as a key delivery instrument in all three Rio Conventions (Drylands and Drought Management Integrated Program, and Sustainable Cities Integrated Program).
- **Emergent areas for Nature Positive transformational sectors:** Sustainable food and agricultural systems (Food Systems Integrated Program), pollution in freshwater and marine environments (Circular Solutions to Plastics Integrated Program, Pollution-Free Supply Chains Integrated Program), and blended finance and private sector. Aligning financial and economic systems to reflect how human wealth and prosperity depend on finite natural resources, and expanding partnerships into the private sector, particularly through conservation finance, Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes, and Nature Positive value chains.





Vanuatu, a participating country in the GEF Least Developed Countries Fund and Special Climate Change Fund.

IUCN alignment with the GEF Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)

- **Nature-based Solutions and infrastructure:** Advances climate-resilient infrastructure systems incorporating Nature-based Solutions, including mangrove restoration, catchment rehabilitation, and urban green spaces that buffer infrastructure from climate extremes and restore ecosystem services. IUCN's science provides the evidence base and the standards framework that differentiates project quality.
- **Agriculture and food systems:** Identifies unsustainable agricultural production as a leading driver of nature loss, causing at least a third of terrestrial biodiversity loss. Promotes sustainable food and agricultural systems on land and at sea that are Nature Positive rather than extractive. Agroforestry is particularly resonant, as biodiversity conservation, land degradation neutrality, and climate adaptation converge. IUCN's work on forest-agriculture landscape integration, sustainable use of wild species in food systems, and agrobiodiversity provides scientific grounding for these investments.
- **Water security and sustainable management:** Freshwater ecosystem conservation, transboundary river basin management, and wetlands conservation, including the valuation of healthy catchments as climate-resilient water infrastructure.
- **Whole-of-society and locally led adaptation:** Stronger collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and girls, and global youth, and protection of environmental and human rights defenders. IUCN's unique institutional feature — that Indigenous Peoples' Organisations are full IUCN Members, not just stakeholders — gives it operational legitimacy and direct relationships.
- **Innovative finance and market development:** Nature-based Solutions like ecosystem-based coastal protection, payments for ecosystem services, and community-based wildlife enterprises need incubation funding before they can attract larger private investment.

IUCN comparative advantage to support countries in GEF-9

IUCN, through its role as a GEF Implementing Agency, mobilises funding to support countries in meeting their global and national environmental and climate commitments, and leverages its global network of Members and experts to deliver lasting impact for both nature and people.

- **Science-based targeting:** The IUCN Red List, Key Biodiversity Areas data, and the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas Standard allow countries to prioritise GEF-9 investments based on where conservation return on investment is highest.
- **KMGBF accountability:** Countries need to show KMGBF progress and use GEF-9 resources to deliver on national targets. IUCN can help to ensure projects are direct contribution to countries 30x30 commitments and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) implementation.
- **IPLC partnership as a requirement, not a checkbox:** With 20% of GEF-9 programming targeting IPLC actions and the USD 100 million Inclusive Conservation Initiative, countries that have strong IPLC constituencies but weak institutional mechanisms to channel funds can count on IUCN's standards framework, direct relationships with Indigenous Peoples' Organisations, and on-granting platform to access these resources effectively.
- **Integrated programming:** The GEF-9 Integrated Programs require cross-sectoral integration — linking forest conservation to food systems, wildlife protection to One Health, island conservation to blue economy. This is precisely the multi-dimensional, scientifically grounded role that IUCN plays best.



IUCN works with the Hadzabe Indigenous Peoples through the Ujamaa Community Resource Team, under the Inclusive Conservation Initiative in Tanzania. Photo: Hope Kiwely.

IUCN offers countries a dedicated global and regional team, support on design and implementation, seed funding for joint design under a country-driven approach, and the leveraging of the IUCN Programme 2026-2029 for synergies and co-financing.

For more information, please contact IUCNGEF@iucn.org.

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,500 Member organisations and some 19,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership enables IUCN to fill the role of incubator and trusted repository of best practices, tools and international standards.