



Earth911[®]

More Ideas, Less Waste

[How to Recycle](#)

[Where to Recycle](#)

[Business & Policy](#) [Earth Watch](#)

Reading time: 3 mins

How the GEF Helps Governments Get Greener



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

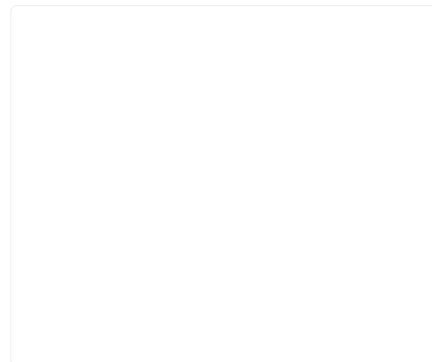
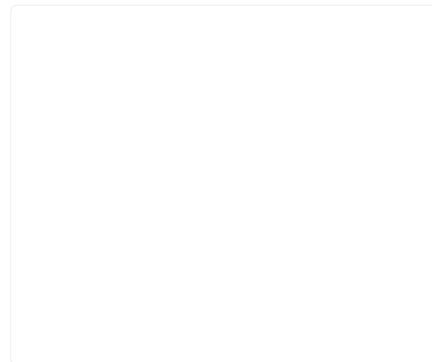
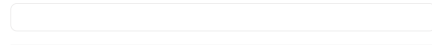
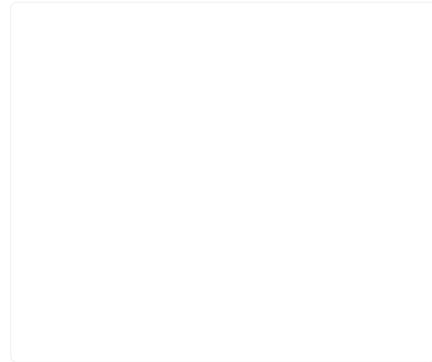
© JUL 11, 2022 [environmental equity](#), [environmental trust](#),

[GEF](#), [Global Environmental Facility](#)

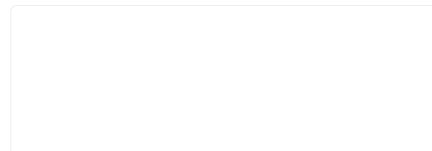


Most people have never heard of it, but the **Global Environmental Facility** (GEF) is the largest environmental trust fund in the world, with 184 member nations. They support environmental equity by directing donations from 40 wealthier donor nations to fund environmental efforts in developing ones. It presents a rare bright spot in a political landscape filled with headlines about government inaction on environmental problems. And the news just got better; 29 of the donor nations have pledged a record \$5.25 billion for the GEF's next four-year operating cycle.

CLOSE



[Westlake Home - Luxury Organic Bedding](#)



What Is the GEF?

The GEF has a **complicated history** beginning with an initial proposal by France in 1989. It launched with an initial investment of a billion dollars and 27 participants. They established a Small Grants program in May 1991. The implementing agencies for the fund included two United Nations programs and the World Bank. They earmarked the money for developing nations to spend in four focal areas. These were climate change, biodiversity, ozone depletion, and international waters. Mohamed El-Ashry (who worked for the World Bank) became GEF Chairman in November 1991.

Leading up to the 1992 Rio "Earth Summit," developing nations raised awareness that the environmental issues they faced often resulted from the actions of wealthier industrial nations. The world was recognizing that regardless of who caused environmental damage, the impacts would eventually be felt globally.



Plastic waste and other litter pollute this shoreline in Senegal, Africa

The need for industrialized nations to subsidize environmental action in developing ones was apparent to everyone. But the two groups had very different ideas about the funding mechanism. Developing nations were suspicious of the World Bank's involvement in the GEF. They feared that the GEF would replace, rather than supplement, existing aid. Wealthy nations ignored or rejected the agreements their representatives made at the Earth Summit; a subsequent round of negotiations failed entirely.

El-Ashry convened a last-ditch negotiation to reestablish a functioning organization in 1994. This time the meeting was successful, and the GEF received \$2 billion in funding for the next four-year cycle. Since then, it has provided more than **\$22 billion** in grants and financing and helped to co-finance \$120 billion more. The funds have been applied to more than 5,200

[CLOSE](#)

major **projects** and programs. The GEF has supported more than 27,000 initiatives in 136 countries through its Small Grants Program.

In April 2022, 29 of the GEF's donor countries raised the organization's funding by almost 30% with a pledge of **\$5.25 billion** for the next four years with an increased focus on biodiversity.

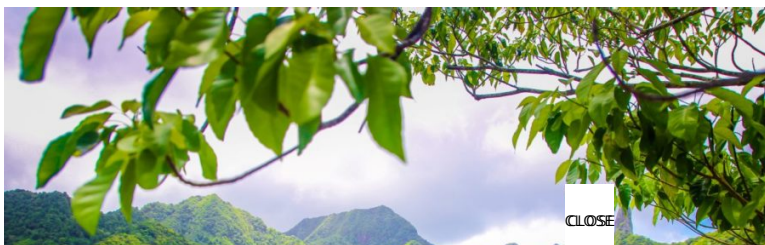
How Does the GEF Work?

Today, the GEF is the largest multilateral trust fund focused on enabling developing countries to invest in nature. Its mission supports the implementation of major international environmental conventions in five **focal areas**: biodiversity loss, chemicals and waste, climate change, international waters, and land degradation. Committed to broad stakeholder involvement, GEF involves the private sector, nonprofits, and affected communities. They are working toward greater gender equality and indigenous involvement in their processes.

The projects that receive funding can sound deceptively dry, with titles like **"Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species."** But the funds have provided critical support to developing nations that lack the resources to tackle major environmental issues on their own.

For example, the **Cook Islands** in the South Pacific are among the WWF's **Global 200**, a roster of 238 global conservation priorities. Home to some 4,000 known species and fewer than 20,000 people, the country's ecosystems face many threats. These include development; climate-linked floods, droughts, cyclones, and rising seas; and the largest immediate threat to biodiversity in the Cook Islands – pollution.

With GEF funds, the Cook Islands developed a classification system to prioritize which natural lands to protect. They also developed a comprehensive Protected Areas Management Policy. Continued GEF funding will help implement that policy. Now previously identified protected areas and the newly protected cloud forests on Rarotonga will be protected in more than name. New funding will also support the development and enforcement of environmental regulations to reduce pollution and climate impacts in developed areas of the islands.





GEF funds are helping the Cook Islands protect natural areas and develop regulations to reduce pollution and climate impacts.

Supporting Biodiversity

Biodiversity protection represents the biggest share of the GEF's eighth programming period, known as GEF-8, which will run from July 2022 to June 2026. This support will be vital to the achievement of the **Leaders' Pledge for Nature**, which aims to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 by protecting biodiversity hotspots like the Cook Islands.

Few individuals can match the budgets of major governments, but you can help support biodiversity by **donating** to habitat restoration programs, **old-growth forest** protection efforts, and **reforestation** initiatives. Learn how foods like **palm oil**, **soy**, and **meat** contribute to deforestation. You can support biodiversity at home by **planting trees**, replacing grass with a **clover lawn**, and including **native plants** in your garden. And **register to vote** so that you can help elect local officials who support sustainable land use and development policies.

advertising



Reading time: 3 mins

[Earth911 Podcast: cirplus Cofounder Christian Schiller Aims for a Circular Plastics Marketplace](#)

Reading time: 3 mins

[We Earthlings: Native Plants Thrive With Minimal Care](#)



By **[Gemma Alexander](#)**

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

CLOSE