

## **A FRESH START GEF REFORM AND GEF NGO REVITALIZATION**

The Global Environmental Facility NGO Consultation and Council Meeting were held in Washington DC, from December 4-8, 2006.

The GEF NGO Consultation was co-chaired by Dorothy Manuel, Executive Director of ZERO Regional Environment Organization and Central Focal Point for the GEF NGO Network, and Alaa Sarhan, Senior Institutional Officer/NGO Coordinator, Corporate Affairs, representing the GEF Secretariat.

The meeting was divided into presentations by GEF Secretariat, Evaluation Office and Network members, plenary discussions and a question and answer session with Ms Monique Barbut, Chief Executive Officer/Chairperson of the GEF, who was attending her first Consultation Meeting since taking over the helm in July 2006.

She outlined her vision and strategy for a “GEF with soul”, one built on five key elements --- strategy, innovation, equity, accessibility and focus. Among her top priorities was to “break apart the complex web of bureaucracy” which characterized the project cycle.

“We have to put an end to too-slow response to global environmental concerns complicated by long delays in disbursing funds, long lists of sometimes-questionable projects in an unaccountable pipeline, complex structures, arcane requirements, and supply-driven portfolios,” she said.

This was echoed by delegates, who emphasized that after 15 years of “business as usual”, the GEF was now ripe for change. The changes included reducing the project cycle period from 66 months to 22 months, long-term partnership with the private sector and academia, a bigger role for NGOs and the GEF NGO Network members. Lucy Mulenkei, Indigenous Information Network (Kenya), for example, urged Council to treat the NGO Network and indigenous people’ as partners and acknowledge them as important actors and contributors.

A major breakthrough highlighted in the NGO Consultation Meeting was the long overdue recognition in the Instrument of the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, which received unanimous support from African countries.

In closing, Dorothy Manuel was happy to note that the importance of adaptation as a cross-cutting issue had been underlined. On the other hand, the formula used by the GEF to calculate Marine Biodiversity Indicators had been successfully challenged.

The meeting, she said, should be regarded as “a fresh start” for a reinvigorated and vibrant GEF. The need for GEF to embrace cross-cutting issues such as adaptation, forestry management was also stressed.

In plenary, while many Council members expressed confidence in the capability of the Evaluation Office to independently undertake OPS4, concerns were raised about potential conflicts of interest, the potentially weakened perception of independence outside the GEF and the impact that implementing OPS4 would have on the regular activities the Evaluation

Other issues raised in plenary included:

- Poor understanding of incremental costs;
- The need to clean up the pipeline of non-moving projects;
- The legal and financial implications of reducing funds for projects in the pipeline to US\$700 million;
- The need to move from paper-based evidence to results-based management;
- Monitoring was more important than evaluation;
- During project implementation global benefits were sometimes pushed into the background as the only legally binding documents were those between the Implementing Agency and the host country;
- The need for GEF to tackle adaptation issues, especially in Small Island Developing States;
- The need to protect developing country farmers from the negative impacts of GMOs and biopiracy;
- The need for GEF to tackle challenges such as poverty, drought, desertification, climate change, etc in a holistic manner in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; and
- Focal points did not stay long enough in their jobs to fully understand the GEF processes.

The Council welcomed the long overdue recognition in the Instrument of the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD and acknowledged with gratitude the leadership of the Council members representing African countries and the CEO in advancing this issue.

A number of Council members noted the importance of extensive stakeholder consultations in the preparation of the mid-term review of the RAF and recommended that such consultations include dialogue with representatives of the Parties who participate in the deliberations of the Conventions.

In a statement, the GEF NGO Network endorsed the restructuring of the GEF, but emphasized that this process could not succeed in the absence of “greater transparency, clarity of structure, and group ownership of the processes and systems defined”.

“Without this, restructuring will not deliver the desired benefits for the global environment at the centre of which is the people,” the NGO Network said in a statement released at the end of the meeting. [-top](#)