

The British Academy

Synthesis report:

Integration, financing and just transition for urban sustainability

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About this report

The synthesis report is the result of a research collaboration between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Sustainable Cities Programme (SOP) and the NATURESCAPES project. It follows a workshop held with the British Academy in December 2025 in preparation for the launch of its next international policy programme on 'Humanity, Climate and Nature'. The workshop brought together academics, policy professionals, and practitioners in order to contribute ideas and perspectives about how the challenge of addressing climate, nature and sustainable development together can be supported by national governments and international institutions. The research presented in this report was an important input to this workshop.

This report has been peer-reviewed to ensure its academic quality. The views expressed in the briefing are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the British Academy, but is commended as contributing to public debate.

Executive summary

With their significant concentration of people, infrastructure, investment and activity, cities are central to addressing the intertwined challenges facing humanity, nature and climate. Over the past three decades, growing attention has been given to the role that cities can play in sustainable development, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to the risks of climate change, ameliorating the loss of biodiversity and addressing pollution. While many issues have been identified as critical in moving this agenda forward, three key issues have been particularly prominent: enabling cities to take more **integrated approaches** that both tackle multiple issues in ways that allow co-benefits and synergies to be generated and which allow for greater coordination in contexts of multilevel governance; enhancing **access to finance** to support urban sustainable development; and ensuring that policy, programmes and projects support **just transitions** so that communities are not unfairly disadvantaged or placed at risk, and that all actors undertake their common but differentiated responsibilities for addressing global challenges while guaranteeing that no-one is left behind in the move towards resilient, low carbon economies.

This report synthesizes the results of a research collaboration between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP), the NATURESCAPES project. The results of this research collaboration were presented at a workshop held with the British Academy in preparation for the launch of its next international policy programme on 'Humanity, Climate and Nature'.

The report seeks to provide new insights as to how cities engaged in the SCP were advancing integrated approaches, access to finance and just transitions. As one of few programmes globally that seeks to advance urban action on the interconnected challenges of climate, nature, pollution and sustainable development, the SCP provides the opportunity to build the evidence base on how these challenges can be addressed. Together the collaborating research teams undertook systematic analysis of 29 GEF SCP project design documents using both manual and automated methods to identify trends in relation to how these issues were being addressed and changes over time in the issues and challenges in focus.

Project methodology

Based on existing literature and emerging insights from the NATURESCAPES project, we generated diagnostic tools capable of identifying the different ways in which integration, finance and just transition were being addressed in the cities involved in the GEF SCP. A series of 15 interviews were then conducted with GEF SCP and implementation partners using an interview protocol co-produced by the GEF and Naturescapes teams. For each theme, 20-25 case-study implementation projects were selected based on the trends analysis and policy documentation from each case collected. Through iterative processes of analysis, discussion with the GEF SCP team and an expert workshop convened at the British Academy in December 2025 we identified the key issues, challenges and emerging opportunities that form the basis for this synthesis report. Thematic reports detailing the trends identified and in-depth analysis of the issues of integration, finance and just transitions are available on the [NATURESCAPES project website](#).

Analytical insights

There are four analytical insights we have discerned from our research. These are:

1. The catalytic role in fostering integration,
2. Differentiated finance models are critical to supporting urban action for climate, nature and sustainable development,
3. Growing inclusion of core concepts like just transitions, inclusion, equity and transformative change as projects develop,
4. The fostering of systems-based approaches that generate new approaches to financing.

First, we find that the SCP has a **catalytic role in fostering integration** in diverse ways - merging action and activating what is already there by combining goals, aligning discourse and cohering action. It plays a critical role in steering integration across problem framing and governance arrangements in four broad ways:

- i) combining issue areas,
- ii) aligning discourse and action through grants calls,
- iii) getting diverse actors and interests on board and,
- iv) establishing common ground from which more or less coherent partnerships are built.

As GEF projects demonstrate what is possible for climate, biodiversity and social agendas, actors build trust as they go and the capacity to govern in integrated ways grows over time. These different types of integration can become catalytic: becoming more than the sum of its parts.

Second, when it comes to finance, we find that there are **differentiated finance models** with distinct ways in which co-financing is taking place to support urban action for climate, nature and sustainable development and also an evolution in how the SCP is supporting different co-financing arrangements across programming cycles. Over time, the program has shifted from predominantly multi-scalar, capacity-oriented logics toward differentiated intervention types and diverse organizational architectures, including hybrid, policy-led, and composite archetypes. This reflects evolving mandates (e.g. emphasis within the international climate and biodiversity policy on attracting private capital) and may also be a consequence of learning within and between partners involved in the programme. This has significant consequence for risk and how this is shared, as well as potential constraints such as fragmented accountability across multiple instruments and partners, increased reporting demands, or dependence on actors whose incentives may not fully align with transformative objectives.

Third, in contrast to integration and finance, just transitions, and associated terms such as inclusion, equity, and transformative change, have not been central in shaping the SCP and its requirements at the project proposal and planning stage, however, there is **growing inclusion of just transitions, inclusion, equity and transformative change** with our analysis finding that as the SCP has evolved from GEF-6 (2014–2018) to GEF-8 (2022–2026), an increasing number of projects are including terms that relate to these core ideas. Furthermore, GEF-8 projects are more likely to identify the beneficiaries of interventions as including vulnerable groups, including women and other groups (vulnerable, youth, underserved) in similar proportions. Across issues including improving livelihoods, mitigating risks, changing institutions and empowering actors we find evidence of diverse ways in which the SCP programme is supporting distributional, procedural and recognitional dimensions of justice.

Fourth, the GEF SCP has made significant progress in **fostering integrated, systems-based approaches through which the interrelated challenges of climate, nature and sustainable development can be addressed and has generated new approaches to financing urban responses to these challenges** alongside a growing emphasis on just transitions. Moving forwards, we found opportunities for building learning that moved beyond specific instances of good practice in individual cities to draw out common lessons learned and build learning journeys through which diverse actors could tailor the knowledge generated to their own needs. We also found that the kinds of diagnostic tools generated in this collaborative research effort, bringing conceptual frameworks together with real world understanding, were powerful in providing ways through which to systematically understand the specific ways in which the portfolio supports key policy goals in the Rio Conventions. They also have the potential to better tailor information and support, allowing GEF teams to better direct cities towards agency's funding mechanisms and solutions that can respond more adequately to their needs. There is also greater scope for the SCP to embrace diversity and equity as it moves forward. With the exception of gender, this work is often implicit and its significance in strengthening the outcomes of the programme less visible. At the same time, there is potential to increase engagement with diverse actors outside of formal governance and to take forward further work on just transitions which embraces the diversity of urban conditions.

Key findings from the research collaboration include:

- Research and diagnostic tools can support thinking about which types of integration are taking place, why and for whom. The processes through which different co-benefits, synergies and trade-offs are considered strengthens project impact and builds capacities to tackle complex problems.
- The use of typologies and contextualized approaches can help identify cities where investments would provide better environmental outcomes, as well as better inform advances on integration and just transition. Co-financing arrangements should reflect cities' institutional maturity, financial readiness and evolving trajectories.
- Financing mechanisms are most likely to be effective when embedded within broader structural and governance reforms. This means that it may be more important to consider redirecting existing financial flows than seeking new sources of finance through innovative mechanisms or private sector involvement.
- Within GEF and associated implementing agencies there remains a need for stronger shared understanding of what just transitions mean in practice and how these can be financially supported. In this sense, just transitions should be increasingly understood as enabling conditions for durable and accelerated action across climate, biodiversity, pollution and land restoration agendas.
- By developing a clear vision as to what constitutes integration and just transitions, as well as the forms of co-financing that can be supportive of these outcomes, and strengthening the alignment between stakeholders and across issue areas (climate, biodiversity, pollution, land degradation, and related agendas) through common frameworks and approaches, the SCP can support progress and ensure continuity, capacity-building and commitment over time.

1. Introduction

Cities are key sites for implementing global sustainability agendas. They generate more than 80% of global GDP and over 70% of CO₂ emissions, but at the same time, they concentrate risks of climate hazards, biodiversity loss, and social inequality (Anguelovski et al., 2019; Lwasa et al., 2022; UN-Habitat, 2020). Cities are therefore central to any ambition for transformative change for humanity, nature and climate (Amundsen et al., 2018; Bulkeley, 2010; GEF 2023; Fransen et al. 2025), as recognized in the Paris Agreement, The Convention on Biological Diversity, and the IPCC's 2022 assessment report (Dodman et al. 2022; Lwasa et al., 2022). Yet leveraging the potential of cities towards these goals remains challenging.

While diagnoses vary, three key issues are frequently identified as critical in moving forward (Bulkeley et al. 2023; Dodman et al. 2022; Fransen et al. 2025; Lwasa et al. 2022; Widerberg et al. 2023): enabling cities to take more **integrated approaches** that both tackle multiple issues in ways that allow co-benefits and synergies to be generated and which allow for greater coordination in contexts of multilevel governance; enhancing **access to finance** to support urban sustainable development; and ensuring that policy, programmes and projects support **just transitions** so that communities are not unfairly disadvantaged or placed at risk, and that all actors undertake their common but differentiated responsibilities for addressing global challenges while guaranteeing that no-one is left behind in the move towards resilient, low carbon economies.

There is growing evidence as to how cities globally are tackling these challenges and the extent to which they are contributing to advancing progress towards global goals (Mokhles and Acuto 2024; Reckien et al. 2023). However, this remains skewed to certain regions (Europe, North America and parts of Asia and Oceania) and larger cities with much less data available from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, much of Asia and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), small and medium-sized cities and peri-urban zones of rapidly expanding cities.

The synthesis report is the result of a research collaboration between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) and the NATURESCAPES project. It follows a workshop held with the British Academy in December 2025 in preparation for the launch of its next international policy programme on Humanity, Climate and Nature. It seeks to provide new insights as to how cities engaged in the SCP were advancing integrated approaches, access to finance and just transitions. The report aims to build the evidence base on those cities and urban areas which are less often the focus of research and their contribution towards goals for humanity, nature and climate. Initial research co-produced by the GEF SCP and Naturescapes teams was presented to an international workshop of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners held at the British Academy in December 2025 for discussion and review. Each thematic analysis (on integration, finance and just transitions) was revised in light of the insights generated through the workshop and this synthesis report captures the key findings from the research and insights from these dialogues.¹

Following this introduction, we set out the approach and key findings from our analysis of trends in the development of the GEF SCP programme (2014 – 2025) (Section 2) before turning to our results and recommendations on integration (Section 3), finance (Section 4) and just transitions (Section 5). The final section of this synthesis report provides an overall set of recommendations.

1 The thematic reports can be found on the NATURESCAPES website: www.naturescapes-project.com

2. Approach and GEF SCP portfolio analysis

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) is a multilateral trust fund that provides grants and blended finance to developing countries since 1991, to support tackling biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and land degradation. At its core, the GEF aims to fund environmentally sound initiatives while supporting sustainable development. It is the financial mechanism for the UNFCCC, UN CBD, Stockholm POPs, Minamata Convention on Mercury, and UNOCD. GEF's strategic investments in urban sustainability reflect the importance of cities for the Facility with the creation of initiatives like UrbanShift and Global Platform for Sustainable Cities under the Sustainable Cities Program (SCP). Cities' investments across the GEF phases -successive four year operational cycles- officially started with GEF-6 urban pilot projects, expanding to a more integrated program in GEF 8. Since 2014 (GEF-6), the GEF SCP has mobilized more than 5B USD in 33 countries with investments in 90+ cities improving environmental conditions in cities across low- and middle-income countries.

Our research on the ways in which cities in the GEF SCP have addressed integration, finance and just transitions involved two phases and began with an extensive analysis of trends across the SCP through a manual and supervised automated analysis of interventions in approved project design documents (which are publicly available).² This allowed for an exploration of the sectors involved, the types of interventions and initiatives proposed, as well as the overall trends across the portfolio and individual projects. The manual analysis supports the design of the automatic tool, informs its interpretation, and helps monitor its outputs by allowing the researcher to gain familiarity with each document and the details of the portfolio. The large language model automated filtering tool supports further analysis by consolidating data, integrating and reviewing long documents in a time- efficient manner while allowing the researcher to control how data is sieved. In turn, the manual approach benefits from the automated analysis outputs which enable researchers to examine the documents and the portfolio on the basis of emerging patterns and results that may not have been apparent through the manual reading and coding of one document at a time.

Neither the information extraction nor the analysis presented in this report should be read as evaluation of the GEF portfolio but as a condensed summary of approaches and framing of initiatives supported by the GEF in phases 6, 7 and 8 and their trends over time (2014-2025). In total, 25 national and 4 global project design documents are included in this analysis (13 GEF-6, 10 GEF-7 and 6 GEF-8). The objectives of 17 GEF-8 projects were included as well in the manual analysis.³ While acknowledging that implementation differs from design, a systematic baseline provided valuable portfolio insights, and can further support evaluation, provide an idea of cities' needs and, identify issues not considered during project design that may be barriers or enhancements for implementation. From this baseline assessment, which included interventions in 77 cities, we found that:

- The GEF SCP program has evolved from GEF-6 to GEF-8 in several aspects including: greater integration (spatial, GEF focal areas, planning instruments, and projects'

² The full results of this analysis are presented in a stand alone report available on the NATURESCAPES website: www.naturescapes-project.com

³ Only 6 GEF 8 proposals are fully included in this analysis. All projects that were available by the 31st of July 2025. The objectives of 17 GEF 8 projects according to the GEF project page has also been included.

initiatives), greater detail of the characteristics of beneficiaries and other stakeholders, increased mainstreaming biodiversity in planning processes, increased initiatives directly addressing climate adaptation, more comprehensive project objectives, expanding to other sectors, and greater detail of the how and for whom on project initiatives description.

- Improving planning processes and planning instruments, to strengthen governance and governance functions, are the most frequent approach across SCP cities aligned with the Program objectives. These are being achieved mostly through new/updated planning instruments, capacity building, information sharing, knowledge products and mobilizing finance. Improving planning processes (i.e. engaging actors, inclusiveness) increasingly becomes more relevant in GEF-8 cities.
- Interventions supporting economic development and urban land use have remained constant across the SCP. Environmental quality (air/water/waste) and infrastructure (grey/green/orange) are more relevant in GEF-6 and GEF-7, whereas nature restoration and mainstreaming biodiversity in planning processes is more relevant in GEF-7 and GEF-8.
- Climate action is a common goal across all SCP Projects with emissions reduction being a clear objective across the Portfolio, which is shifting to support climate adaptation as well.
- Most cities are aiming for low-carbon development, often related to sectors' policy (transport, energy, waste) and infrastructure. There is a clear aim, in GEF-8, to increase carbon sequestration and support nature-positive initiatives in addition to the traditional sectors.
- Nature-based solutions and green infrastructure have become more mainstreamed across projects, as has associating nature approaches with benefits for communities. Water management (excess/access/filtration/quality) is the most frequently aimed solution. Flood reduction and heat mitigation are the climate risks most commonly addressed through nature-based solutions.
- Strengthening resilience, disaster risk reduction and emergency attendance approaches are common across SCP; but these approaches appear less frequently in interventions targeting directly individual cities.
- All projects aim to benefit low-income or underserved populations, densely populated areas and/or city-strategic areas and sectors to improve environmental conditions for all. GEF-8 Projects better detail the characteristics of beneficiaries, in some cases indicating their direct involvement.
- Almost 70% of the GEF SCP projects propose finance-oriented interventions or instruments to support the long-term financial viability of interventions and planning processes initiated or enhanced by GEF SCP.

The words and terms' relevance analysis⁴ showed that within projects' description the most common words are associated with "integration" remaining consistently relevant across the Portfolio; words related with "just transition" are the least relevant, although connections and occurrence has increased from GEF-6 to GEF-8; and "finance" associated words loose relevance from GEF-6 to GEF-8 with "investment" being very relevant and maintaining

4 The relevance analysis is based on the frequency and connections of 225 pre-selected words and terms associated with GEF focal areas (106), integration (102), finance (31) and just transition (77), the core themes of this report

its relevance across the portfolio. GEF Focal Areas⁵ keywords are more relevant and connected with other key words in GEF-8; words associated with climate change are the most recurrent, followed by those associated with biodiversity, then chemicals and waste, and land degradation.

Our second research approach was based on qualitative methods. First, we developed analytical frameworks based on the existing literature and emerging insights from the NATURESCAPES project⁶ through which to generate diagnostic tools capable of identifying the different ways in which integration, finance and just transition were being addressed in the cities involved in the GEF SCP. A series of 15 interviews were then conducted with GEF SCP and implementation partners using an interview protocol co-produced by the GEF and Naturescapes teams. For each theme, 20-25 case-study implementation projects were selected based on the trends analysis and policy documentation from each case collected. The analytical frameworks were then used to analyse interview transcripts and policy documents, with each framework iteratively refined in light of the evidence gathered and in dialogue with the GEF SCP team to ensure that these diagnostic tools were effectively capturing the realities of project design and the experience of implementation as relayed in the interviews. Initial findings were presented at a workshop convened by the British Academy in December 2025, London, involving a range of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers, including those currently participating in the preparation of the IPCC Special Report on Cities. The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule. Extensive notes were taken to capture general issues and reflections, and further analysis and refinement of the main research findings for each theme were subsequently undertaken. Key findings from this analysis are presented in Sections 3 – 5 of this synthesis report.

5 GEF Focal Areas are the five core themes—biodiversity, climate change mitigation, chemicals and waste, international waters, and land degradation—that guide how the GEF allocates funding to deliver global environmental benefits aligned with the respective environmental conventions it serves. The GEF Integrated Programs (IPs) draw resources from multiple focal areas to tackle systemic drivers of environmental degradation (e.g., food systems, cities, forests) in a coordinated manner.

6 Please see www.naturescapes-project.com for further details about the project.

3. Towards integration for climate, nature and sustainable development

Over the past decade, there has been growing recognition that complex global environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and pollution, alongside the wider issues of sustainable development, are interlinked and share common underlying drivers. Across research, policy and practice communities, **there is increasing engagement with approaches and interventions that are capable of creating co-benefits and synergies** (e.g. nexus approaches, climate resilient development, nature-based solutions) within a context where a growing range of actors operate together in conditions of **multilevel governance** to address environmental concerns. While the quest for integrated approaches to address environmental challenges is not new, the combination of a growing emphasis on the complexity and interconnected nature of environmental challenges globally, together with the recognition that the governance structures through which they must be addressed remain persistently multiple and fragmented, **has led to a resurgence of interest in how integration can be pursued. Yet exactly what kind of integration could or should be pursued often remains unclear** – while there is a general sense that more integration would be beneficial, implicit assumptions about what integration is, how it works and what it can achieve mean that identifying how to develop and support integrated approaches can be somewhat of a challenge. The GEF SCP provides a unique opportunity to unpack how integration is being approached in diverse cities globally as they seek to tackle the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and sustainable development.

3.1 Unpacking integration

To help distinguish between the multiple forms of integration at play in the domain of urban sustainability, we distinguish between: (i) integrating into or **combining** separate elements into one; (ii) integrating across in the sense of seeking to ensure that different elements are **commensurate**; and (iii) integrating between parts of a problem, place or system to ensure **coherence**. Each of the three forms of integration **can take place either** thematically, spatially or institutionally at the problem framing stage of policy-making and project design, at the point at which governance arrangements for implementation are established or reinforced, or at the end point where outcomes from interventions are realized. Taken together, this provides an analytical framework through which we can unpack the ways in which integration is currently being advanced in the GEF SCP and consider the advantages and limits of these approaches and ways in which integration may be strengthened going forwards (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Diverse Forms of Integration

Form of integration	Problem framing		Governance arrangements		Intended outcomes	
	Thematic (across issue areas)	Spatial (across spatial boundaries)	Spatial (across spatial boundaries)	Institutional - horizontal (within one level of government or between state and non-state actors)	Thematic (across issue areas)	Spatial (across spatial boundaries)
Characteristics of integration as combination	Tackle interlinkages	Tackle interlinkages	Overcoming siloes	Overcoming siloes	Synergy	Synergy
Characteristics of integration as commensuration	Ensure alignment	Ensure alignment	Overcoming misalignment	Overcoming misalignment	No harm principle (incl. trade-offs)	No harm principle
Characteristics of integration as coherence	Need for balance	Need for balance	Overcoming unbalanced action	Overcoming unbalanced action	Co-benefits	

Taking each in turn, we suggest that **integration as combination highlights the need to overcome siloes** both thematically across issue areas (e.g. climate, biodiversity) and spatially (e.g. how biodiverse parks lower temperature across inner city boundaries). Vertical or horizontal governance arrangements could include special agencies or units that merge issue areas into one, such as authorities that govern catchment areas or watersheds (Albert et al., 2019).

Combining these elements into one is considered to be synergistic, leading to mutually reinforcing benefits for climate, biodiversity and society, either across issue areas or space (see the illustrative example of Chengdu in Table 2). Turning to integration as commensuration focuses on **ensuring alignment between action agendas and across spatial boundaries**, e.g. between multiple SDGs (Fuso Nerini et al., 2018; Nilsson et al., 2016). Evidence suggests that vertical and horizontal governance arrangements such as (informal) co-produced collective (landscape) visions, principles, guidelines or strategies among divergent interests is an important means **to overcome misalignment across goals or space** (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Bulkeley et al., 2023; Hajer, 1995; Mehrotra et al., 2020; Tengberg and Valencia, 2018; Sosa and Ivanova, 2025; Seddon et al., 2021). Seeking alignment is envisioned to **avoid the displacement of risk** (i.e. do no harm principle) to other places or across goals: outcomes in one area do not prejudice another (see the example of Kigali in Table 2) (Albert et al., 2019; Bulkeley et al., 2023; Tengberg and Valencia, 2018; Sosa and Ivanova, 2025). Lastly, **integration as coherence involves integrating between parts of a problem, place or system**. Fostering such relationships between parts is considered vital to **avoid problematic, unbalanced action** across issue areas and space that maximises single benefits over balanced, multifunctional outcomes. Evidence suggests that maximizing climate agendas (e.g. the “climatization” of nature and societal agendas) can happen at the expense of other goals (Fransen and Bulkeley, 2024; Osaka et al., 2021). One prominent response to this problem of limited, clear relationships between elements is the “nexus” approach (Pascual et al., 2022; Pörtner et al., 2023), which calls for fostering balance across the benefits generated for multiple agendas over a singular focus on individual challenges. Fostering balance can include formalized public-private partnerships, subnational (city) networks, platforms, and other intermediary processes and organisations that facilitate coordination between multiple actors at both municipal, regional, national and supranational levels (see the examples of Harare and Bulawayo in Table 2) (McGuirk and Dowling, 2021; McCormick et al., 2024; Bulkeley et al., 2023; Tozer et al., 2022; Pot et al., 2025; Roggero, 2025). It is through these means of coordinating action between different levels of government (vertical) and across horizontal networks of state and non-state actors that co-benefits are intended to emerge across space and issue areas.

3.2 Integration in the GEF SCP

Our analysis of GEF SCP documents found that at least 70% of the words most often used are associated with integration and how it takes place, including terms such as planning, stakeholder, capacity, platform and coordination. The framing and objectives of the GEF SCP have always prioritized addressing multiple challenges simultaneously, but our analysis suggests that over time since GEF-6, **thematic integration has expanded in terms of the issue areas it combines**: GEF-8 interventions descriptions show the greatest level of integration of the focal regions across cities, with at least 33% of interventions in GEF-8 integrating at least two focal areas; followed by GEF-7 with 30%; and GEF-6 with less than 6%⁷. Among connections between issue areas, there has also been **increased attention on spatial integration between interventions**. At the city scale, physical interventions are increasingly connected. Whereas several GEF-6 interventions (excluding digital, instruments and training) could be characterised as individual projects across different areas of the cities, in GEF-7 and 8, interventions are connected and complementary. **Stakeholders' integration** is also more evident in project descriptions phrasing. GEF-7 and GEF-8 projects include greater detail about for who and with whom initiatives are implemented. This prevalence of governance arrangements is translated into a focus on **improving planning processes and planning instruments**, which is the most common intervention for integrating climate and biodiversity benefits, with more GEF-8 projects proposing it. Additionally, **enhancing capacity** is another common approach for integration, as are direct interventions with stated dual benefits (i.e. restoration, greening infrastructure, designing investment programs, awareness creation, green corridors, monitoring programs, etc.). In turn, **these integrated governance processes are assumed to translate into spatially and thematically integrated outcomes**. To understand how these overarching trends were shaping practice, we examined 21 GEF SCP projects, which were identified as having a strong focus on integration, seeking to identify the most predominant forms of integration and the stages at which they occur (Table 2).

7 These estimations underrepresent the integration of focal areas in initiatives descriptions, as generic terms such as sustainable development or sustainability that do not specify any further, have not been included. However, it is very likely these initiatives address more than one GEF Focal Area.

Table 2: Integration in the GEF SOP*

Form of integration	Problem framing	Governance arrangements		Intended outcomes
	Thematic	Institutional - vertical	Institutional - horizontal	Thematic
Characteristics of integration as combination	Johannesburg (GEF-6): Tackling sectoral interlinkages by combining waste management, sustainable mobility, food systems, and low-energy activities in project design; Salta (GEF-7): combining electric transport, solar PV, protected areas and green corridor NBS and waste management in project design; Pune (GEF-7): Transit-oriented development, green corridor planning, and electric mobility infrastructure are combined into one demonstration area ; Chennai (GEF-7): Climate adaptation, biodiversity recovery, and hydrological management are fused through the restoration of Kadapakkam Lake ; Surat (GEF-7): coastal ecosystem conservation, storm-water drainage, recreational coastal development, and low-emission mobility challenges are bundled into the redevelopment of the Dumas seafront .		Brasilia (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. municipal planning process) to overcome silo-based interests.	Chengdu (GEF-7): steering towards the intended outcome of synergies through combining biodiversity conservation and carbon neutrality
Characteristics of integration as commensuration		Melaka (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. a common sustainability vision) to overcome misalignment across issue areas between levels of government (e.g. national and state levels).	Asuncion (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. developing policy and regulatory instruments) to establish common goals across policy, planning and investment across municipalities; Kigali (GEF-7): governance arrangements (e.g. standards, tools) to ensure municipal alignment and mitigate the displacement of risk across issue areas and space; Recife (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. strategic vision) to overcome municipal misalignments across short-term and long-term interests	
Characteristics of integration as coherence		Abidjan (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. urban and transport planning programs, legal frameworks, knowledge networks) to strengthen coordination across ministries and municipal bodies; Dakar & Diamniadio (GEF-6): governance arrangements (e.g. master plans) initiated to overcome unbalanced action and ensure collective cooperation between levels of government; Harare and Bulawayo (GEF-8): governance arrangements (e.g. national, local plans) to overcome unbalanced action and achieve formal coordination between levels of government; Freetown (GEF-7): governance arrangements (e.g. planning and development controls) to overcome unbalanced action and insufficient coordination between levels of government; Santiago (GEF-8): governance arrangements (e.g. planning procedures) to overcome the lack of coordination and enable NBS uptake between levels of government; Coyhaique (GEF-8): governance arrangements (e.g. public-private agreements, disaster risk reduction plans, municipal ordinances) to overcome lack of coordination between levels of government.	Teresina (GEF7): governance arrangements (e.g. multi-sectoral plans) to foster coordination between municipalities; Costa Rica (GA-M) (GEF-7): governance arrangements (e.g. legislative and policy reform) to overcome unbalanced action and enhance formal coordination between municipalities	

* Important caveats: (1) The analysis of the studied city projects was based mostly on project design documents and in some cases project implementation reports. Thus, as projects evolve, other forms of integration might become more significant than the ones currently showcased in this table. For instance, a predominance of integration as commensuration can shift over time as common interests are defined and coordination and coherence are perceived to be missing (2) For analytical purposes, for some projects, specific project components (e.g. Component 1, or Component 2), were selected for in-depth analysis as they presented more interesting cases for the analysis of integration aspects, affecting how each project is currently placed in this analysis.

Integration as combination appears to be predominant at the problem framing stage,

where diverse thematic issue areas are combined. Combining involves intentionally challenging institutional, spatial or knowledge silos and joining distinct elements, such as departmental units, policy domains, or thematic fields of action, into a single integrated unit, agenda or project design. For example, in the city of Salta (Argentina), in order to tackle the previously established siloed approaches and separate agendas to urban development in relation to climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land-use planning, the project replaced this siloed model with a combined low-carbon, biodiversity conservation-oriented approach (GEF, 2021c). From the analysis of GEF SCP projects presented in this report, it is evident that GEF actively incentivizes project designs that tackle problems through interlinked, multi-sectoral approaches. While such an understanding of integration is nowadays well established in sustainability discourses, this analysis suggests that GEF SCP projects operationalise integration as combination predominantly in the early stages of project planning. We also found combinations related to institutional integration for governance arrangements. For instance, in Brasilia 'silo-based interests' are exacerbated by scattered information and data, which can be combined into one tool: an Environmental Information System (GEF, 2016a). Rather than being focused on combining all elements into a singular structure or uniform outcome, participants in the research stressed the need to focus on how combination takes place and the importance of mundane and incremental practices in weaving together diverse elements across silos to achieve greater benefits for climate, nature and sustainability (Interview #4; GEF Workshop).

Integration as commensuration involves bringing divergent interests with varying values together and achieving a shared, common goal.

Integration as commensuration appears where misalignment between interests and ideas, between departments, between national, regional and local levels is considered to be the main problem. Misalignment of issue areas occurs between municipalities in a metropolitan region, such as in Asuncion, where a larger metropolitan strategy has helped steer alignment between municipal land use plans, and can appear between departments, such as in Recife, where misalignment between short-term interests and long-term interests across departments is seen as a key problem that the Recife 500 Plan (Recife 2037 strategic plan) was developed to address (GEF, 2016a).

Having interests aligned is important at all stages, but many interviewees argue that the project design phase is critical for setting the project 'up for success'. Across cases and interviews, institutional commitment and understanding shared by multiple levels of governance have been found to be central. In the City of Kigali, an understanding of the importance of Kigali's wetlands as a shared common good has led to wetland restoration. In addition, the regional focus of the project in the City of Kigali that crosses administrative boundaries showcases how a shared common good - an ecosystem, landscape NBS - can unite and is guided by a clear no-harm principle (Box 1). This is especially apparent when cities focus on NBS which are regarded as having significant potential to align interests and provide enabling conditions for action (GEF Workshop). These kinds of shared objectives and discourses are

effective when translated through a range of guidelines, tools, metrics and action plans (GEF Workshop). For instance, in Guatemala, stakeholder alignment has resulted in biodiversity metrics while driving coherence over time (Interview #15). Long-term horizons enacted through climate or biodiversity planning frameworks are also particularly relevant but require mutual understanding. For instance, in Sri Lanka, a GEF project created a plan with local communities, yet decision-makers did not share this vision for the future (GEF Workshop). Shared land ownership, such as through community land trusts or by building shared interests into arrangements between landowners and tenants, was also seen as an effective way to ground common objectives and ideas (GEF workshop).

Participants in the research pointed to how processes of aligning and mainstreaming require ongoing work to build commonality over time through demonstration and momentum, for example through initial pilot projects that demonstrate what is possible and build trust or in response to extreme events which require new ways of thinking and open up the space for interventions. Shifting political priorities, changing personnel and the structures of short-term project funding were seen as reducing the possibilities for this long-term work to sustain integration over time. At the same time, it was recognized that commensuration requires compromise and that allowing space for difference and disagreement is also an important part of change processes that are effective, just and sustainable in the long-term.

Box 1. Integrated urban planning approach to sustainable wetland management, in Kigali, Rwanda

The City of Kigali, Rwanda, consisting of hills and ridges, with wetlands, rivers and streams flowing in its valleys, has been prone to flooding. Therefore, the Government of Rwanda in collaboration with the World Bank has started an urban planning approach to sustainable wetland management, aligning rehabilitation of channels and drains as well as Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) upstream to reduce flood risk. Misalignments in urban planning have been problematized, resulting in governance arrangements that aim to avoid misalignment across projects and space. Taking a landscape approach, Kigali demonstrates how building alignments across institutions can be achieved through NBS, allowing for the management of risk across space and goals (i.e. no harm principle).

First, the City of Kigali was successful in generating a mutual understanding that the wetlands in Kigali would need to be restored due to urbanization and pollution. From this shared understanding, the city was able to align action across departments: “the city was able to articulate the importance of wetlands, for climate resilience, for flood alleviation” (Interview #10). Second, this common understanding was enacted by a range of tools, including a stormwater management master plan that aims to foster a resilient stormwater management system, as well as a climate-resilient standard and topographic model using an aerial LiDAR survey. Foregrounding alignments across space and issue areas is meant to be comprehensive, which is considered to assist in managing risk (i.e. no-harm): “Flood risk and buffer zone investment will be integrated in a comprehensive approach to managing risks across the natural and built environment, upstream to downstream of the catchments, and from the top to bottom of the hills in Kigali” (GEF, 2020, p. 46).

Integration as coherence involves integrating between parts of a problem, place or system. This is usually the dominant means through which integration is undertaken in **designing and deploying governance arrangements that can realize co-benefits.** For

instance, in Teresina, it is argued that “the master plan is not sufficient to guarantee effective urban planning as there is a need to facilitate integrated planning, including interjurisdictional coordination” (GEF, 2021d, p. 38). In the Senegal Sustainable Cities Initiative, they also have an overarching goal to enhance regional coordination between Diamniadio and Dakar due to persisting unbalanced action among these cities: there is a need to coordinate action to move from “isolated” to “collective” impacts (GEF, 2016b, p. 11). Moreover, in Zimbabwe, in both Harare and Bulawayo (GEF-8), fragmentation and a lack of coordination are considered to be problematic for wetland and forest protection, to which regulatory reforms are considered to bring balance between climate, environmental and urban development agendas (GEF, 2025, n.p.). Unbalanced power structures between ministries, where some ministries (e.g. finance) remain more powerful over others (e.g. environment) (GEF Workshop), or between different levels of vertical governance (e.g. where local authorities find themselves subject to high levels of interdependence on regional and national authorities), are also a driver for further coherence (Interview #12).

A range of different actors, tools and instruments were found to support this form of integration in governance arrangements, including land-use planning, coordinating champions and intermediaries, transnational municipal networks such as C40 and ICLEI, and more loosely formed coalitions. What were seen as “homebases” such as joint capacity building platforms such as GPSC and UrbanShift (GEF-7 platform), programs and their child projects foster integration as coherence by facilitating coordination between multiple actors at both municipal, regional, national and supranational levels and enabling data sharing and mutual learning. The presence of formal coordination mechanisms (e.g. roundtables, working groups) and other forms of cross-sector/multi-sectoral collaboration (e.g. dialogues, partnerships) was also regarded as important in supporting integration as coherence. At the same time, it was recognised that perfect coherence is not possible and potentially not desirable. Integration as coherence needs to be built slowly and is fragile in the face of shifts in the many actors and interests involved. Further, too tight dependencies or coherence between actors and the lack of (local) autonomy could paralyze efforts and lead to stagnation and hinder implementation, or in some instances may marginalise minority or less powerful actors or issues. For instance, the fiscal autonomy for local governments was seen as a critical factor for implementing projects and realizing sustainability goals (GEF Workshop). Even more, low coherence can support experimentation and the capacity to govern in new ways (Bulkeley, 2023; Turner et al., 2022). As with other forms of integration, getting the balance right is crucial to support change while cementing progress made.

Box 2. Enhancing nature-based solutions and green infrastructure networks in Chile, Santiago

In Santiago, in order to promote biodiversity conservation and restoration, alongside efforts to mitigate climate change and enhance urban populations' well-being and general health, the city set out to integrate Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) and green infrastructure (GI) into its urban and peri-urban environment (GEF & FAO, 2025).

Integration as coherence is portrayed in the project documentation as the primary strategy for enabling policy coherence and the integration of NBS and GI into regulatory and institutional frameworks of urban planning. The project seeks to address multiple identified barriers of weak institutional frameworks and planning instruments for the integration of NBS in city planning and development, lack of coherence and coordination among ministries and other actors involved in NBS uptake and tackle the decision-makers' limited technical capacity to integrate NBS practices into mainstream urban planning.

Particularly in Component 1 ("Strengthened regulatory and institutional frameworks for integrated urban planning that incorporates and promotes connected networks of GI and NbS"), the project builds the institutional settings needed to better integrate NBS into planning, design, and implementation across several sectors. As a solution, the project proposes new governance arrangements and integrated planning procedures to enable NBS uptake while avoiding institutional fragmentation. This component is described explicitly to build coherence in creating integrated and coherent policy frameworks that support the integration of NBS and GI (e.g. NBS guides, master plans, climate change plans), incorporating NBS and GI concepts into municipal peri-urban planning instruments (e.g. in disaster risk reduction plans) that promote the establishment of connected networks of NBS, and the formation of multi-level coordination platforms.

Although thematic integration is a central aspect of the project, which seeks to address threats across different areas of action (e.g., climate mitigation, biodiversity, and land degradation), the main problem it addresses is the lack of institutional structures needed for creating balance in the integration of NBS and GI practices into current municipal planning.

3.3 Key findings and opportunities for supporting integration in GEF SCP

This analysis shows that GEF has a catalytic role in merging action and activating what is already there by combining goals, aligning discourse and cohering action. By nature, GEF plays a critical role in steering integration across problem framing and governance arrangements in four broad ways: i) combining issue areas, ii) aligning discourse and action through grants calls, iii) getting diverse actors and interests on board and, iv) establishing common ground from which more or less coherent partnerships are built. As GEF projects demonstrate what is possible for climate, biodiversity and social agendas, actors build trust as they go and the capacity to govern in integrated ways grows over time. These different types of integration can become catalytic: becoming more than the sum of its parts. From this analysis, we identify the following opportunities for the future development of integration through the GEF SCP programme and other urban programs and initiatives:

Potential long-term directions:

- Consider designing Integration Guiding Principles. As integration is a continuous practice, programmes such as GEF SCP have the potential for catalysing capacities that remain inactivated. There is the potential for guiding principles or a long-term vision to operate as a “guiding star” to align actions over time.
- Promoting long-term horizons enacted (through, for instance, climate or biodiversity planning frameworks) is also particularly relevant, while at the same time acknowledging that achieving a common understanding among stakeholders is a common challenge.
- GEF SCP is particularly well-positioned for promoting the integration of climate-biodiversity concerns into cities’ master plans to ensure coordinated action between instruments and institutions.

Aligning discourses and shared interests:

- Align discourses (climate, biodiversity, pollution, land degradation, and others) at higher levels of government (e.g. supranational levels such as GEF) to secure commonality on-the-ground, aligning diverse interests and actor types. Such forms of commonality can, in turn, drive coherence over time.
- Aligned discourses could also drive balanced interests that unite a coherent network of actors. Coherent public-private partnerships (PPP) that generate balanced interests also have the potential to enable co-finance that realizes multiple societal goals at once.
- GEF SCP projects have also shown that land ownership is a critical tool to steer alignments when both landowners and the land leasers share interests. Furthermore, in many regions, addressing land ownership is crucial for achieving stakeholders’ alignment.
- Management, preparing for, planning for, and responding to extreme events are important in uniting efforts towards a common goal.

Governance arrangements and space for innovation:

- Acknowledging and promoting intermediaries, champions, city networks and platforms as connectors that steer and/or build coherence governance agreements.
- Efforts to cohere public-private partnerships need to leave space for experimental approaches, informality and surprise to avoid too tight governance arrangements constraining the capacity to innovate and test out new ways of doing and thinking.
- Establish ongoing efforts to review and steer integration, recognizing that alignments between actors and interests are not static, rather they increase over time as trust and commitment grow through thriving initiatives on the ground.

4. Financing urban action for climate, nature and sustainable development

Local authorities face limited fiscal autonomy, underdeveloped credit markets, and constrained borrowing capacity (Dorst et al., 2019; Hagedoorn et al., 2021; Khan and Amelie, 2015; Toxopeus and Polzin, 2021). These conditions constitute core barriers to accessing and deploying finance for urban action to address the increasingly integrated challenges of climate, nature and sustainable development. To address these barriers, municipalities are increasingly seeking co-financing arrangements – structured combinations of funding sources, financial instruments, and governance mechanisms that bring together diverse public, private and civic actors (Toxopeus and Polzin, 2021; UNDP, 2019). However, such co-financing arrangements can either enable or constrain transformative outcomes, depending on how they structure risks, responsibilities and decision rights. The GEF SCP provides a rich data set through which to examine how diverse co-financing arrangements are shaping the ways in which barriers to accessing finance are being addressed and their potential to support long-term transformative change processes.

4.1 Establishing co-financing archetypes

Based on an integrative literature review of 57 publications, six co-financing arrangement archetypes were identified (Table 3). While these archetypes frequently overlap or can be found together in practice, they can be distinguished from one another by the different strategies they pursue to expand financial capacities, but more importantly in terms of how they distribute decision rights, risk, and accountability among actors.

Two interconnected challenges shape the potential of co-financing arrangements. First, barriers to accessing (co-) finance arise from structural and procedural constraints, such as eligibility criteria, transaction costs, co-finance ratios and limited fiscal or technical capacity. Cities and actors can contribute to these restrictions, often with the result that those who are most in need of additional financial resources are unable to access them (Diezmartinez and Short Gianotti, 2024; Hilbrandt and Grafe, 2024; Kyriazi and Miró, 2023; Op De Beeck et al., 2024; Sherifdeen et al., 2023; Toxopeus and Polzin, 2021; Ulpiani et al., 2023). Second, barriers to transformative change stem from organizational and political dynamics that limit the long-term impact of co-financed projects. Influencing factors include the short-term nature of project cycles, the often narrow set of metrics used to assess 'bankability', the inequitable ways in which risk is shared, and weak forms of local ownership. In turn, these issues shape both access to co-finance arrangements and whether this access translates to transformative action on the ground (Arjaliès and Banerjee, 2024; Basak et al., 2022; Chausson et al., 2023; Corson and Campbell, 2023; Diezmartinez and Short Gianotti, 2024; Dobrowski et al., 2024; Forino et al., 2023; Gorelick et al., 2024).

Given these factors, we find that the outcomes of co-financing arrangements depend less on the type of instrument used than on how co-financing is organized (Arjaliès and Banerjee, 2024). Co-financing is a form of hybrid organizing, where diverse institutional logics (public, private, civic) interact to mobilize and govern resources that influence transformative urban development. Building on the literature (Demonsant and Toxopeus, forthcoming) and the main differences between the archetypes, we find that five interdependent organizational dimensions capture how co-financing arrangements are organized (Table 3):

- Decision rights: who holds authority over resource allocation and project or intervention design (centralized, shared, delegated, or local).
- Structural coordination: how actors and budgets are aligned (hierarchical, contractual, or networked).
- Accountability: the direction of reporting and control (upward to donors/investors, downward to communities, or hybrid).
- Risk and burden allocation: how financial risks and burdens are shared or transferred between actors (shared or shifted).
- Value alignment: the extent to which heterogeneous actors negotiate shared purposes and success metrics.

Table 3: Co-financing arrangement archetypes

Co-financing arrangement archetypes	Description	Goal/ drivers	Typical financial instruments	Selected examples
Multi-scalar	International donors or climate funds provide concessional finance or grants which are matched by national governments, complementing municipal budgets. Decision rights are centralized at the donor and national level, coordination is hierarchical, accountability flows upward to funders, and financial risk is shifted to recipient governments.	Providing cities with access to global resources for scaling and capacity building	Concessional loans, grants	GEF-SGP projects (Hasan et al., 2021) GEF cities program (Ijjasz-Vasquez, 2024) Just Transition Fund (Kyriazi & Miró, 2023)
Cross-sectoral	Several urban departments, public agencies or public companies pool their funds for integrated interventions with (often) multiple objectives. Decision rights are shared across participating entities, coordination is contractual or fiscal, accountability is internal, and risk and burden are shared, with value alignment negotiated around multi-benefit goals.	Avoid siloed budgets and realize multi-benefits interventions	Budget pooling, fiscal rules, broad usage of taxes	Climate mitigation and health (Borghi et al., 2024)
Hybrid	Governments, development banks and/ or private investors jointly finance interventions, often using risk-sharing or risk-mitigating logics. Decision rights are shared, coordination is contractual, accountability is between public and private actors, and financial risk is explicitly redistributed to mobilize private capital, requiring negotiated value alignment across public and commercial logics.	De-risk private investments to mobilize private capital in interventions or programs	Blended finance, risk mitigating instruments	Conservation bonds (Arjaliès & Banerjee, 2024) Blended finance for biodiversity (Flammer et al., 2025)
Mosaic	Intermediaries, communities or local interventions holders stack different financial resources for one intervention to piece together financing needs. Decision rights are delegated or local, coordination is networked, accountability runs downward to communities, and risk and burden are distributed across the assembled funders.	Finance seeking and assemblage for specific interventions	Grants, loans, insurance products, crowdfunding	Water funds (Bremer et al., 2016)
Policy-led	Cities and supporting actors improve their access to climate finance by aligning city climate plans with donor/ financiers/ national priorities to unlock joint financing. Decision rights remain centralized or shared, coordination is hierarchical, accountability flows upward to policy entities, and value alignment is achieved through normative compliance with funding requirements	Normative alignment with funding or financing requirements	Regulation, plans, funding, technical assistance grants, land value capture, PES schemes	Developing climate action plans (Khalid & Okitasari, 2023; Ulpiani et al., 2023)
Revenue-based	Cities or local intervention leaders generate revenue to sustain interventions in the long term. Decision rights are local, coordination is contractual or market-based, accountability runs downward to users or beneficiaries, financial risk is internalized by intervention leaders, and value alignment is tied to the viability of the local business model.	Place-based business models for sustainable interventions	PES revenues, local revenue, offsetting schemes, taxes and incentives	Visitors' fee (Gelcich et al., 2013)

4.2 Co-financing in the GEF SCP

Our analysis of how co-financing is being established through the GEF SCP project sought to move beyond the initial act of resource mobilization and its catalytic effect, which is often considered in the literature (Cui et al., 2020; Kotchen and Negi, 2019; Kotchen and Vogt, 2025). Instead, we identify and characterize financial arrangement archetypes embedded in interventions in order to understand how these enable recipient cities to access, structure, and sustain diverse financing capabilities. Our text-based analysis shows that among the existing GEF SCP portfolio of projects, 17 directly propose finance-oriented interventions or instruments to support the long-term financial viability of interventions and planning processes initiated or enhanced by GEF's investment. All GEF-6 projects consider financial arrangements (mechanisms and instruments), 60% of all GEF-7 do and 40% in GEF-8. We see that business models, Projects and investment plans are the most common finance-oriented interventions proposed. However, a host of other instruments including subsidies, collective purchase models, performance-based payments, infrastructure asset-recycling, value capture investments, innovation awards and taxes are also included in project documentation. Notably, GEF-8 shows a growing interest in financing for circular economy, nature-positive interventions and NBS.

As established above, these different financial instruments are embedded in various co-financing arrangements which determine their effectiveness and, together with factors that enable/constrain access and transformative potential, shape their outcomes on the ground. All GEF projects require an initial stage of resource stacking to mobilize international, national, and local contributions (an arrangement that could broadly be characterized as a large-scale mosaic strategy). Our analysis though focuses more narrowly on the co-financing logics deliberately pursued within specific city-level interventions. These interventions are inherently multi-scalar given that international resources are flowing through national and/or implementation partners to the city level. However, in our analysis we reserve this term for those co-financing arrangements in which multi-scalar financing is a strategic objective. We focus our analysis on how cities use GEF resources to generate co-financing arrangements within interventions, including the archetypes mobilized and the financial instruments deployed (Table 4).

Table 4: Archetypes found in the selected cases. NOTE: 'x' refers to primary archetype(s), '(x)' refers to a supporting type of archetype(s) nested within the primary archetype(s) identified.

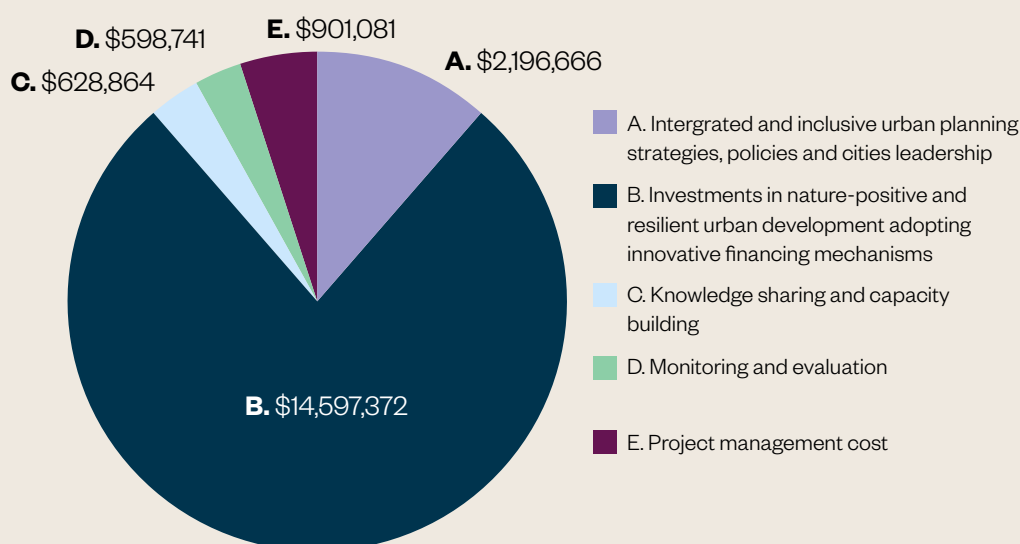
Intervention details		Co-Finance archetypes						Composition type
GEF Cycle	City, Country	Multi-scalar	Cross-sectoral	Hybrid	Composite	Policy-led	Revenue-based	
GEF 6 (2014-2018)	Asuncion, Paraguay	x				(x)		Nested
	Recife, Brazil	x						Single
	Johannesburg, South Africa	x						Single
	Melaka, Malaysia	(x)				x		Nested
	Shenzhen, China	x						Single
	Beijing, China	x						Single
	Shijiazhuang, China	x						Single
GEF 7 (2018-2022)	Salta, Argentina			(x)		x		Nested
	Mendoza, Argentina			x		(x)		Nested
	Marrakech, Morocco	x		x		(x)		Combinatory/ Nested
	Belém, Brazil	x				x	(x)	Combinatory/ Nested
	GAM, Costa Rica					x		Single
	Chennai, India		x	(x)				Nested
	Freetown, Sierra Leone					x	(x)	Nested
	Coyhaique, Chile	x				x		Combinatory
	Santiago, Chile	x				x		Combinatory
GEF 8 (2022-2026)	Belize city, Belize					x	(x)	Nested
	San Pedro, Belize					x	(x)	Nested
	Harare, Zimbabwe			(x)	x			Nested
	Bulawayo, Zimbabwe			x				Single
	Belgrade, Serbia			(x)	x			Nested
	Santiago, Chile					x		Single
	Coyhaique, Chile			x				Single

Our analysis finds that all archetypes derived from the literature (Table 3) were present in GEF SCP interventions except for the mosaic archetype. This is not surprising given that this archetype relies on bottom-up combinations of multiple funding sources which rarely suits the current process through which GEF SCP projects are selected. Our analysis also revealed a new archetype which we term composite: the targeted combination of different financial instruments to realise multiple objectives in a single intervention from the outset. The case of Harare provides a clear example of this configuration (see Box 3). We also observe that many interventions combine or nest archetypes, reflecting diverse coordination logics and responses to the two overarching financing barriers (Section 4.1). In Coyhaique and Santiago (GEF-7), for example, combinatory arrangements strengthen cities' ability to secure policy-led financing while also seeking additional multi-scalar resources through different project components. Nested arrangements, on the other hand, follow a hierarchical structure. In Mendoza and Marrakech (GEF-7) hybrid and multi-scalar financing are the primary approaches, while policy incentives are developed to support these archetypes.

Some archetypes were more difficult to identify. Revenue-based archetypes, for example, often emerge indirectly from policy-led efforts to increase a municipality's own revenues, as seen in the cases of Belém, Freetown, Belize City and San Pedro. In the case of Freetown, a community-based revenue model has emerged as a result of political support and ongoing efforts to secure new sources of finance (Box 4). While revenue-based approaches are seen to be critical for ensuring the long-term durability and impact of project finance, our analysis suggests that such arrangements frequently emerge as positive side effects rather than intentional design features. The cross-sectoral archetype appears only once in the sample. While cross-sectoral collaboration is present in nearly all interventions, this archetype requires a deliberate effort to pool financial resources across municipal departments or government agencies for more targeted or efficient (multi-purpose) use. Only the Chennai project meets this criterion. This intervention illustrates how integrated planning, coordinated knowledge-building, and strong management tools can align operational decisions with financial strategies in a coherent and structured way (Box 5). In doing so, the Chennai case directly addresses several organizational dimensions of financing identified in Section 4.1, particularly structural coordination and value alignment. This case demonstrates how cross-sectoral pooling can mitigate fragmentation in decision rights and improve accountability relationships within municipal administrations. The Chennai case also depicts the intensive capacities required to achieve such cross-sectoral financial arrangements. Interviewees from implementation agencies further emphasize that this may constitute a risk for cities when technical capacities do not match a project's ambition (Interviews #2, #5), highlighting a persistent barrier to accessing finance, as cities with weaker institutional capabilities may struggle to operationalize or sustain such integrated financing models.

Box 3. Structuring composite financing arrangements for nature-based urban resilience in Harare, Zimbabwe

Urban and peri-urban resilience through investment for sustainable ecosystems in Zimbabwe (U-RISE)



In Harare, Zimbabwe, the U-RISE GEF-8 project illustrates how a multi-objective urban resilience intervention can be structured around composite financing arrangements, pairing each component with tailored financial instruments. The city faces mounting climate pressures: degradation of the Monavale-Budiriro Wetland, declining ecological function along the Marimba River Corridor, and rising organic and plastic waste in markets such as Hatoliffe, threats that weaken water regulation, increase erosion, and strain food systems.

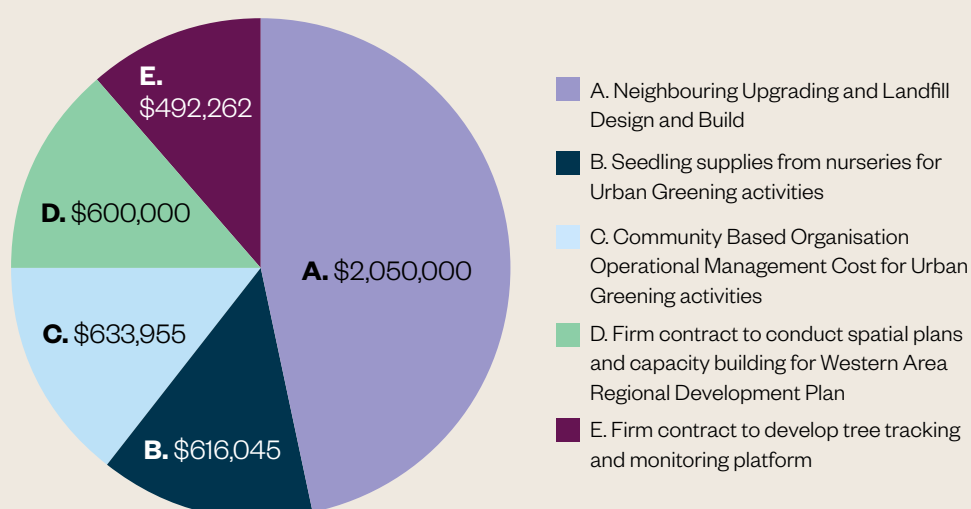
To address these challenges, the GEF intervention develops a green-infrastructure investment framework that links restoration, waste-system improvements and livelihood opportunities. In Monavale Vlei and along the Marimba River, restoration measures (such as wetland margin repair, riparian buffers, terracing, sediment traps and phytoremediation) are supported through Performance-Based Payment Agreements (PBPAs). The intervention focuses on establishing indicators, payment modalities and monitoring systems, while strengthening municipal and community capacity to manage results-linked financing. At Hatoliffe Market, a different instrument is applied. Infrastructure upgrades are paired with Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models to ensure long-term service maintenance. For small/medium enterprises (SMEs) engaged in recycling, composting and waste separation, the intervention facilitates access to grants, revolving funds and micro-loans, combined with training in compliance, business planning and worker safety.

Together, these approaches show how different instruments (PBPAs for ecological restoration, Projects for waste systems, and targeted financing for SMEs) can be structured for one multi-objective intervention to advance complementary climate-resilience goals. Previous GEF experiences also underscores the need for strong technical and financial-reporting capacities, without which (even well-structured) composite financing arrangements may face implementation challenges.

From a financing perspective, the Harare case responds directly to several financing barriers. Composite arrangements help overcome access barriers by combining instruments suited to different actors (i.e., municipal departments, private partners, SMEs), while performance-based agreements help to address short-term project cycles by linking disbursements to longer-term ecological outcomes. At the same time, the complexity of these arrangements can shift coordination and reporting burdens onto a capacity-constrained municipality. These circumstances illustrate how efforts to de-risk private involvement may create new barriers to transformative change if technical capacities are not sustained.

Box 4. A micro-payment community platform for urban reforestation in Freetown, Sierra Leone

Financing data related to the Freetown the Treetown Initiative (incl. co-financing)



The urban reforestation initiative in Freetown, Sierra Leone demonstrates how targeted, long-term restoration efforts can underpin revenue-based financing arrangements that sustain climate and livelihood benefits over time. Developed under GEF-7 and integrated into wider municipal planning, the program focuses on reforesting degraded upper catchments and steep slopes to reduce landslide, flood and erosion risks across a rapidly growing city. Launched in 2021, the “Freetown the Treetown” program aims to plant 5 million trees by 2030 and currently reports an estimated 80% survival rate. Through partnerships with 10 community-based organizations, over 550 short-term employment opportunities have been generated, primarily benefiting youth, women and vulnerable groups engaged in planting and early-stage care.

A central feature of the initiative is its focus on long-term tree survival and the financing mechanisms required to support ongoing maintenance. Each tree is geotagged and monitored using Greenstand’s TreeTracker platform, allowing citizens to document growth and survival through verified photo updates. These digital records enable mobile-money micropayments directly linked to the continued care of individual trees. They also form the basis for issuing impact tokens to be purchased by businesses, investors and individuals. This growing market for verified environmental outcomes provides a practical pathway for revenue-based financing arrangements that can sustain tree maintenance

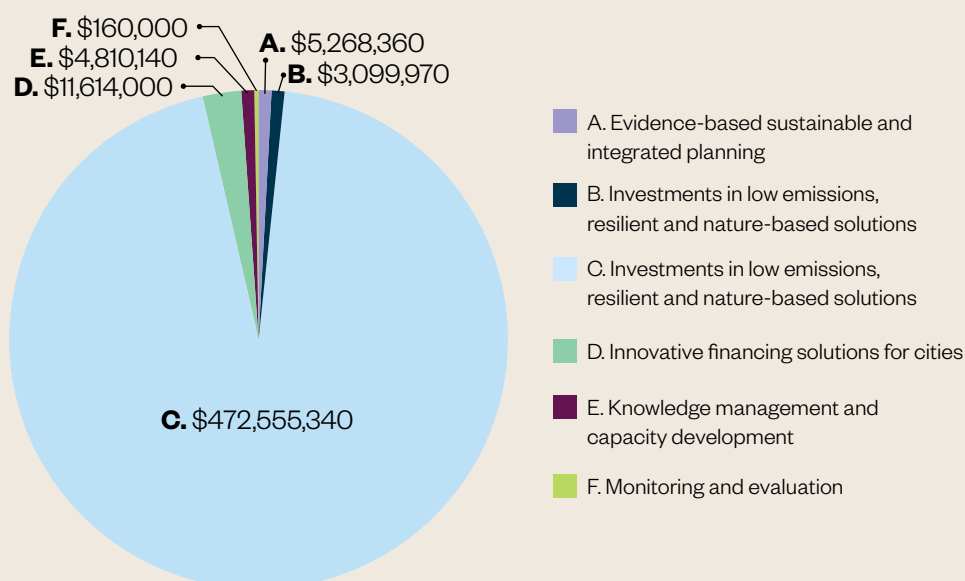
and local incomes well beyond a grant's funding period. Complementary investments in municipal revenue systems and data capacities further strengthen the city's ability to manage monitoring, planning and remuneration over time.

Together, these elements illustrate how targeted interventions, community stewardship and digital verification technologies can converge to create a long-term financing model capable of supporting both ecological resilience and ongoing local livelihood benefits.

This arrangement tackles the barrier of financing long-term maintenance by creating a direct revenue stream for communities beyond the duration of the grant, thereby reducing dependence on external project cycles. The intervention also addresses some barriers to accessing finance for low-income groups by lowering entry thresholds through digital micro-payments. However, the initiative still depends on continued demand for impact tokens, as well as robust digital and institutional infrastructures, which means that some systemic risks and inequalities remain.

Box 5. Cross-sectoral financing arrangement and capacity building for flood management in Chennai, India

Total budget of the 'Livable cities in India: Demonstrating sustainable Urban Planning and Development through integrated approaches' (incl. co-financing)



In Chennai, India, the restoration of Kadapakkam Lake demonstrates how cross-sectoral financing arrangements for nature-based flood management require strong internal capacities to align operational work with financial decision-making. Facing recurrent flooding, water shortages and fragmented water governance, the Greater Chennai Corporation is developing an integrated approach to planning, financing and maintaining urban NBS.

A foundational step is a valuation study capturing the full economic, social and environmental benefits of Kadapakkam Lake. This evidence informs municipal budgeting, clarifies how responsibilities can be shared across departments, and helps shape a future potential for corporate social responsibility contributions to complement public funding

for restoration. GEF-supported capacity development: frontline staff and community members receive training, and partnerships with civil society, research institutions and the private sector embed NBS more deeply in everyday planning. A structured operations and maintenance system, led by the lake management committee, reinforces coordinated, long-term stewardship.

Improved information flow across municipal units is central to operational-financial alignment. Shared indicators, common reporting systems and joint review processes connect drainage and NBS activities with the teams responsible for planning and allocating investments. This coordination is further reinforced through a performance-based incentive system, which ties portions of the municipal budget to indicators such as maintenance reporting, flood-status updates and project timelines. Funds earned through this system are reinvested in resilient and green infrastructure and equipment that support ongoing operation and maintenance.

Chennai's experience shows how multi-scalar financing (Asian Development Bank, Tamil Nadu State Government and GEF), **combined with strengthened cross-departmental coordination, can support more coherent and sustained NBS implementation. Financial evidence, CSR contributions and performance-linked budgeting expand available resources, while capacity building ensures operational practices align with cross-sectoral investment priorities. This integrated approach also informs similar NBS investment preparation in the nearby city of Madurai.**

The Chennai case directly addresses coordination-related barriers to accessing finance by linking cross-departmental budgeting to shared indicators and performance-based incentives. Intervention efforts also mitigate barriers to transformative change by embedding NBS within core municipal planning and operations, rather than treating them as one-off projects. Yet the financing model is highly capacity intensive and may be difficult to replicate in cities with weaker administrative systems, highlighting a tension between sophisticated cross-sectoral arrangements and the uneven distribution of local capabilities.

Beyond the general patterns of which archetypes are being deployed to co-finance city-level interventions in the GEF SOP, a closer look at the different characteristics of each intervention reveals two important patterns. First, the relationship between co-financing archetypes and financial instruments is not fixed or one-to-one: similar financial instruments appear across different organizational configurations, while single archetypes are implemented through heterogeneous bundles of tools. Second, when interventions are grouped by their substantive objectives and indicative budget, more consistent associations emerge between intervention logics, archetype configurations, and instrument portfolios revealing five recurring clusters which illuminate how co-financing strategies are adapted to different kinds of urban transformation (Table 5).

Table 5: Cluster of financing strategies across our sample of 22 GEF SCP interventions. NOTE: Instruments reflect ex ante project designs and should not be interpreted as realized outcomes or as attributable to archetypes alone.

Clusters	Core intervention logic	Typical avg budget per city (in sample)	Typical archetype configuration	Typical instrument bundle	Cities (GEF SCP cycle) in sample
1. Technical readiness and enabling investments	Preparatory interventions for energy efficiency, transit-oriented development, or early-stage NBS frameworks	~USD 4–7 m	Multi-scalar and/or policy-led	Grants; district incentives; regulatory enabling measures	Shenzhen (6), Beijing (6), Shijiazhuang (6), Coyhaique (7), Santiago (7)
2. Localized resilience delivery packages	Component-based delivery of ecosystem or community resilience interventions	~USD 9–11 m	Hybrid or composite	PPP; performance-based payments; SME finance; green-infrastructure frameworks	Harare (8), Bulawayo (8), Santiago (8), Coyhaique (8)
3. Market-creation and revenue-generation models	Establishing carbon, biodiversity, or micropayment markets for long-term maintenance	~USD 16–66 m	Policy-led (revenue-based); multi-scalar/policy-led	Biodiversity credits; PES; impact tokens; sustainability-linked instruments	Belize City (8), San Pedro (8), Freetown (7), Belém (7)
4. Sectoral transformation and economic restructuring programs	Biodiversity, land-use change, or circular-economy restructuring through incentives	~USD 50–55 m	Hybrid/policy-led mixes	Rezoning incentives; business models; circular-economy investment	Salta (7), Mendoza (7), GAM (7)
5. Metropolitan-scale system reform platforms	Citywide planning, finance reform, and multi-objective infrastructure programs	>USD 90 m	Multi-scalar and/or cross-sectoral hybrids	Grants + loans; municipal finance reforms; PPP; PES	Recife (6), Johannesburg (6), Chennai (7), Asunción (6), Marrakech (7), Melaka (6)

Our analysis not only reveals distinct ways in which co-financing is taking place to support urban action for climate, nature and sustainable development but an evolution in how the GEF SCP is supporting different co-financing arrangements across programming cycles. Over time, the program has shifted from predominantly multi-scalar, capacity-oriented logics toward differentiated intervention types and diverse organizational architectures, including hybrid, policy-led, and composite archetypes. This reflects evolving mandates (e.g. emphasis within the UNFCCC and CBD on attracting private capital) and may also be a consequence of learning within and between partners involved in the programme

One consequence of this diversification is a reconfiguration of risk. While financial exposure is increasingly shared across a wider set of actors (often strengthening local embeddedness) it also complicates the assessment of liabilities for GEF SCP, municipalities, and private partners. Increasingly complex and innovative co-financing structures can make it more difficult for participants and investors to evaluate project-level risks, price participation, and satisfy internal due-diligence requirements (GEF workshop, Interviews #1, #10, #11). Combinations of performance-based payments, ecosystem-service revenues, regulatory instruments, and public guarantees may blur lines of responsibility and liability, increasing uncertainty alongside the redistribution of financial burdens. These organizational shifts are mirrored in the changing types of interventions supported across GEF SCP cycles, with a move from the technical readiness and enabling investments that dominated several GEF-6 cases, toward more delivery-oriented resilience packages, sectoral restructuring programs, and market-creation models in later cycles. Earlier in the portfolio, metropolitan-scale system-reform platforms appear primarily in GEF-6 and GEF-7 cycles, while interventions in the sample from the GEF-

8 cycle are concentrated on more targeted, component-based delivery clusters. Across the cases, a wider shift emerges as cities move from treating 'access to finance' as a standalone challenge toward purposefully integrating and aligning financing arrangements with multi-objective social and environmental project designs. While this is a promising move, it does also create new constraints such as fragmented accountability across multiple instruments and partners, increased reporting demands, or dependence on actors whose incentives may not fully align with transformative objectives.

The organisational shifts across program cycles coincide with a changing role for the GEF SCP itself from a multi-scalar co-finance in GEF-6, to a capacity building role in GEF-7 and to a more active role in supporting and integrating co-financing arrangements in GEF-8. This evolution has helped cities design targeted, nested composite arrangements that can operate at larger and more complex scales, but which also require higher technical, fiduciary and monitoring capacities that not all cities can reliably maintain. These changing roles of the GEF SCP imply different timelines and organizational demands. Structural co-financing architectures (especially those involving legal or regulatory reforms) require long-term engagement beyond typical GEF project cycles of 5 years (Interview #11) and thus may struggle to deliver lasting impact within short funding windows. More operational or instrument-focused arrangements, such as those seen in GEF-8, can be deployed more quickly but demand higher levels of local technical capacity. These conditions may become a barrier for project selection or create long-term risk if standards are not fully met. The need for capacity building as a key lever for change was emphasized in various interviews and discussion groups, where participants noted that some cities do not lack funding for projects so much as the technical support to deploy existing resources effectively (GEF workshop). Thus, the durability of each co-financing arrangement depends on the depth of institutional embedding, the governance structure, as well as the form and intensity of local capacity building with weaker institutional anchoring posing a constraint on transformative outcomes.

4.3 Key findings and opportunities for co-financing from GEF SCP

The findings of this study point to several strategic implications for the future design of GEF SCP interventions and those which are being developed by similar multilateral or transnational programmes and interventions for cities. Synthesizing insights from observed programming cycles and stakeholder reflections, our findings highlight the need for differentiated financing approaches, balanced portfolios, and stronger guidance on risk and liability management.

- **Adopt co-financing arrangements reflective of cities' institutional maturity and financial readiness.** The variation in financing approaches observed across programming cycles suggests that cities differ significantly in their starting conditions. Sustainable urban strategies are therefore unlikely to succeed through uniform intervention models. Interventions should be sensitive to local institutional capacity, balance targeted delivery with longer-term reform processes, and incorporate clearer approaches to risk assessment and financial redirection.
- **Foster support in line with cities' evolving trajectories.** Across the sample, cities often move from readiness-oriented and policy-alignment interventions toward delivery-oriented interventions. In some cases, revenue-generating arrangements, administrative capacities, regulatory frameworks, and coordination mechanisms deepen. Long-term trajectories become more explicit at the program level, which could allow early engagements to concentrate on foundational institutional reforms, while later phases support more complex implementation and maintaining financial sustainability.

- **Balance objectives for targeted delivery and metropolitan-scale system reform.** Although recent cycles show a stronger emphasis on delivery-oriented interventions, structural constraints (particularly in land-use regulation, fiscal governance, and infrastructure planning) continue to limit transformative change. Systemic reforms in these domains typically require longer time horizons than individual project cycles allow, underscoring the importance of sustained programmatic engagement.
- **Prioritize reform and redirection of mainstream public finance.** Transformative outcomes often depend on conventional public finance, fiscal reform, and regulatory steering. Redirecting existing financial flows may be more consequential than mobilizing new sources of capital. This implies a strategic emphasis not only on financing ‘positive’ interventions, but also on reshaping the underlying allocation and governance of mainstream (and e.g. carbon-intense) urban investment. In several contexts (particularly biodiversity protection) grant funding and public budgets are likely to remain central components of financing strategies, highlighting the need for differentiated approaches rather than uniform reliance on private capital seeking strategies.
- **Look beyond financial innovation or private capital mobilization.** Evidence from stakeholder workshops and the empirical analysis cautions against an overemphasis on both innovative financial instruments and attracting more private financing as dominant pathways to transformation.
- **Strengthen risk assessment and liability management for co-financing arrangements.** As interventions increasingly rely on layered and composite financing structures, greater attention to fiscal exposure, risk-sharing arrangements, revenue uncertainty, and long-term liabilities for both municipalities and private partners is required. Clearer ex-ante guidance on liability allocation and due diligence could enhance institutional durability and reduce uncertainty.
- **Align financing arrangement design with broader systems of urban governance.** Future programming would benefit from tighter integration between financing arrangements and reforms in urban governance, regulatory systems, and institutional capacity-building. Financing mechanisms are most likely to be effective when embedded within broader structural and governance reforms.

5. Urban just transitions for climate, nature and sustainable development

That addressing climate change will require ‘just transitions’ is an idea that has gained growing traction since its inclusion in the preamble of the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. Momentum comes both from social and labour movements who have campaigned for justice and equity to be central to societal transitions towards low carbon and resilient economies. A growing number of public and private actors have also started to recognise not only that a just transition is a good in and of itself, but that it is also likely to lead to more durable policy outcomes and project implementation (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020; Scott-Buechler and Wang, 2025). As significant contributors to climate change and offering the potential for a diverse array of solutions, cities have become important sites through which the possibilities of just transitions are being developed (Mabon et al., 2024). However, to date, research and practice on just transitions in cities has tended to focus on energy transitions with less attention given to issues of biodiversity or pollution for example or the ways in which justice considerations across sectors, issues and urban systems intersect (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020; Mabon et al. 2024; Phillips, 2022). This not only limits our understanding of what just transitions involve, but also the practical application of this approach in urban contexts and beyond, where policy-makers and practitioners have to address justice considerations across multiple issue areas simultaneously. As the GEF SCP specifically seeks to undertake integrated action across the domains of climate, nature and sustainable development, it provides an ideal data set through which to examine how the concept of just transitions can be developed in the urban context.

5.1 Exploring just transitions

From its origins in the labour movement, the concept of just transitions is now more broadly understood as a “fair and equitable process of moving toward a post-carbon society” (McCauley and Heffron, 2018, p. 2) including “responses to environmental change that minimize negative impacts on the most affected people and places, while ensuring nobody is left behind” (Mabon et al., 2024, p. 1). A growing body of research has emerged that emphasises the inherently plural and competing interpretations of how society can pursue climate action and social justice together (Cui et al., 2024; Fransen et al., 2025; Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Velicu and Barca, 2020; Wang and Lo, 2021). Despite differences in emphasis, this work views just transitions as a means of ensuring that disadvantaged and marginalized people, groups, and communities are not unfairly and disproportionately exposed to the burdens of transitioning to new economies in addition to the costs of environmental damage, and that everyone should be included in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmentally just policies (Stavis and Felli, 2015; Wang and Lo, 2021). This includes matters of distributional, recognitional, and procedural justice (Cui et al., 2024; Huang and Liu, 2021; Hughes and Hoffman, 2020). Distributional justice refers to the fair and equal distribution of the benefits and costs associated with transitions and the use of environmental resources (Abram et al., 2022). Procedural justice is the notion that all those impacted by transitions and environmental policies should be able to legitimately participate in and influence relevant decision-making processes (Huang and Liu, 2021). Recognitional justice involves ensuring that historical and taken for granted ways of valuing particular ideas, identities, and ways of being are respected and legitimized in transitions and challenges the reproduction of existing societal norms and power relations (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013).

These dimensions are interconnected, so that changes in one dimension of justice conditions how the others are expressed and realized in practice. Understanding how justice concerns are addressed in urban projects therefore requires looking at how, for example, recognitional justice relates to the ability to achieve distributional justice and procedural justice, and vice versa (Jenkins et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2025; Sovacool et al., 2019; Revez et al., 2020). It is also critical to understand how far matters of justice relate to both rights and responsibilities, in line with global concerns to ensure that “common but differentiated responsibilities” are fulfilled. Here we understand rights as referring to what society owes to particular people and groups, and responsibilities refer to what particular people and groups owe to society (McCauley and Heffron, 2018; Sardo, 2023). Exploring these issues in depth in relation to the concept of just transitions as defined above, our analysis found that GEF SCP projects have engaged four key aspects of just transitions, recognising that these are a subset of the multiple issues that just transitions entail:

- **Improving livelihoods:** The process of planning transitions that generate decent employment and labour conditions, respond to existing inequalities, and support lasting improvements in people’s overall quality of life.
- **Managing risks:** The process of recognizing and planning for how interventions may unevenly produce risks and costs across communities, as well as how existing inequalities in the exposure to environmental hazards may impact the design and implementation of projects.
- **Changing institutions:** The process of reforming institutions to manage and support just transitions, recognizing and addressing the historical conditions, including social, economic, and political structures that have shaped present-day inequalities.
- **Empowering actors:** The process of building community empowerment alongside the pursuit of developing meaningful and inclusive participatory processes for actors, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, involved in and impacted by transition policies and interventions.

5.2 Just transitions in GEF SCP

While just transitions, and associated terms such as inclusion, equity, and transformative change, have not been central in shaping the GEF SOP programme and its requirements at the project proposal and planning stage, our analysis of GEF SCP project documents did find that, as the SCP has evolved from GEF-6 to GEF-8, an increasing number of projects are including terms that relate to these core ideas. Furthermore, GEF-8 projects are more likely to identify the beneficiaries of interventions as including vulnerable groups, including women and other groups (vulnerable, youth, underserved) in similar proportions. From this initial analysis of trends in GEF SCP, 20 projects that addressed different elements of just transitions were selected for further in-depth analysis.

In relation to the core theme of **improving livelihoods**, our analysis focused on the ways in which GEF SCP projects pursued transitions in labour relations created new quality jobs, and looked to improve overall individual and community wellbeing alongside efforts to mitigate pollution. One key area in which GEF SCP projects are actively supporting just transitions is through the mitigation of pollution and the creation of jobs in waste management, such as in India (GEF-6), Paraguay (GEF-6), South Africa (GEF-6 and 8), Sierra Leone (GEF-7) and Indonesia (GEF-7). Addressing environmental pollution presents opportunities to improve distributional justice by decreasing the negative impacts of pollution on marginalized

communities while also building a more stable and equitable workforce. For example, in cities like Asunción (see Box 5), Jakarta, Salta, Johannesburg, and Guntur, social and economic opportunities have emerged that address the distributional impacts of waste management by increasing access to jobs for groups that have historically lived at the margins of society, including the poor, migrants and women (Interview #1, Interview #3). Projects in South African cities under GEF-8 are currently implementing an integrated program on 'Just Energy Transition' that looks to improve the distribution of electric public transport, reduce traffic pollution, and increase access to mobility services for communities (Interview #6).

Alongside these efforts to address issues of distributional justice, participation was also found to be key to the effectiveness and long-term stability of managing pollution. Participation (especially across lines of class, gender, and race) provides more nuanced perspectives on how communities are dealing with pollution, increases local ownership, and at the same time helps to ensure the conditions needed for just transitions are viable and socially acceptable (Interview #4, #6, #12; Sierra Leone, GEF-7) (Interview #12; Costa Rica, GEF-7). Gender surfaces as an especially prominent component of participatory justice, as multiple projects aimed to ensure that the benefits of transitions in waste management systems, such as access to new jobs and cleaner environments, extended to both men and women, taking the multiple responsibilities of women, such as domestic and care work, into account. Also important was greater recognition of the social dynamics that undermine the livelihoods of marginalized communities which served to expand the potential transition pathways to new waste management systems. Firstly, many of the projects we analysed focused on upgrading waste management services in vulnerable neighbourhoods, recognizing the legacies of poverty and other forms of social discrimination that disproportionately expose these communities to environmental pollution (e.g., Paraguay, GEF-6; Costa Rica, GEF-7; Sierra Leone, GEF-7; South Africa, GEF-6; Vietnam, GEF-6). Secondly, actions in cities like Asunción (Box 5) and Chennai demonstrate that the pursuit of recognition justice is possible without the "formalization" of waste management systems through state intervention. While state intervention is important for ensuring the long-term success of just transitions, transforming "informal" to "formal" service provisions is gradual and embedded within broader political, social, and economic processes. These projects were able to accelerate this process and demonstrated how the state is not the only authority capable of improving the recognition of vulnerable and marginalized communities whose livelihoods suffer from the unequal pressures of environmental pollution. Communities and local, sometimes informal, governance settings can improve resilience and spur just transitions by cultivating social bonds that build respect, cooperation, and – most importantly in the case of cities like Asunción – trust between community members.

Box 6. Building trust and improving waste management in Asunción, Paraguay

Air, water, soil and toxic waste pollution adversely affects the livelihoods of residents in the Asunción Metropolitan Area in Paraguay. Through the development and implementation of "Asuncion Green City of the Americas – Pathways to Sustainability," the Global Environment Facility in collaboration with the implementing partner, the United Nations Development Program, have encouraged the pursuit of a just transition towards more sustainable and inclusive waste management structures. **The project helped build trust between grassroots recyclers and communities via participatory and inclusive processes and generated social benefits through employment opportunities while improving environmental quality, placing a particular emphasis on improving the**

livelihoods of vulnerable and discriminated populations such as women and those experiencing poverty.

Pilot projects like the Mi Barrio Sin Residuos addressed elements of just transition as they relate to the distribution of environmental and economic burdens, fair and inclusive participatory processes, and the recognition of grassroots labour and histories of neglect that have negatively impacted relationships. For example, the project developed the logistics services chain that increased the relative proportion of economic value going to waste pickers, improving the working conditions and access to secure, dignified jobs for residents while also reducing pollution and protecting biodiversity. The active participation of public, private and civil society members has also been a key element throughout the design, implementation and distribution of benefits of the project, removing barriers for participation for underrepresented groups.

Lastly, recognizing the unique ways in which certain populations manage issues of pollution was crucial to project success, such as the ways informal waste pickers, “gancheros,” have been subjected to poor working and living conditions along with social stigmatization. **Building recognition between different groups facilitated one of the project’s core findings and outcomes: the transformative potential of trust.** The pursuit of recognitional justice fostered bonds of trust between grassroots recyclers and communities and ultimately increased the efficiency of the waste management system.

Managing the risks of climate change for the most vulnerable people, groups, and communities is a central concept in just transitions (Galanis et al., 2025; McCauley and Heffron, 2018). Multiple GEF SCP projects looked to address the unequal distribution of climate-related risks through integrated planning approaches, for example in terms of distributing responsibilities for flood management to agencies who were best placed to reduce risk. In Chennai (India, GEF-7), the GEF SCP work enabled the Greater Chennai Corporation and key stakeholders to build integrated spatial plans that used nature-based solutions (NBS) to reduce flood risks, along with the Flood Citizen Observatory that enabled citizens to share information regarding flooding through different devices. A similar process was undertaken in Surat (India, GEF-7), where the integration of NBS into existing land-use planning measures reduced pressure on storm water drainage systems and reduced the surrounding communities’ exposure to flood risks. The measures taken in Asunción (Paraguay, GEF-6) further highlight how integrating the differential needs of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups, can reduce the social impacts of environmental hazards like flooding. In this example, GEF SCP fostered the development of the Capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction that helped mainstream disaster risk reduction planning across multiple sectors, including transportation, waste management and green infrastructure, diffusing the responsibilities for reducing risks across different agencies.

Risks were also identified and managed through participatory practices. Bilateral consultations in Rwanda between the World Bank and the Government of Rwanda helped identify flooding hotspots and key intervention areas for improving wetland function. These consultation meetings led to the (re-)allocation of responsibilities, in this case to the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA). The project set out to design strategies and appoint an Environmental and Social Safeguards Specialist to mitigate the negative environmental and social impacts of the proposed wetland rehabilitation and risk reduction activities, while ensuring local communities benefitted from the positive impacts of the project (Rwanda, GEF-7). Stakeholder engagement also informed risk management processes in Indonesia (GEF-7).

and Costa Rica (GEF-7) in order to improve the project's ability to understand and respond to community needs. For example, in Indonesia, the project emphasized how women and children were more vulnerable to climate-related disasters like flooding due to comparatively lower levels of flood risk awareness and an ability to respond. The project promoted greater inclusiveness in urban development through gender-sensitive urban planning, paying attention to the different roles and responsibilities of woman and men in hazard responses, as well as their rights to mobilize relevant resources.

In terms of recognitional justice, a number of GEF SCP projects highlight the unique risks posed to historically vulnerable groups and populations. For example, multiple project design documents recognized the unique needs and challenges faced by residents of informal settlements, which are especially prone to flooding (India GEF-7; Sierra Leone GEF-7; South Africa GEF-6). Projects were designed with the challenges of these communities in mind, such as the way heavy pollution alongside a lack of waste management facilities in informal living arrangements can lead to clogged drainage systems that increase flood risks (Sierra Leone GEF-7). Importantly, these GEF SCP projects recognized the interconnected drivers of social and environmental risks, such as the links between a country's financial institutions and their ability to mobilize resources to respond to environmental hazards. To address these financial constraints, many GEF SCP projects looked to improve the capacity of local institutions to manage capital investments in ways that increased benefits to communities rather than exposed them to further financial vulnerabilities (Sierra Leone, GEF-7; Interview #2). This process of recognizing and building financial capacity was done, for example, in Hue City (Vietnam GEF-6), where GEF SCP work looked to improve responses to disasters and reduced delays in the reallocation of development funds.

Across the GEF SCP projects included in this analysis, integration and institutional capacity building were used to **change institutions** to support just transitions. First, institutional integration (see Section 3.1) directly shapes how environmental benefits, urban services, and responsibilities are distributed within cities. For example, new detailed urban plans for Abidjan aim to guide growth toward safer, serviced areas by demarcating "public space, green space and main thoroughfares," thereby steering development away from climate-vulnerable zones and improving access to environmental amenities for underserved residents (Côte d'Ivoire, GEF-6). Similar redistributive shifts appear in Kigali, where integrated upgrading of informal settlements and flood-prone wetlands targets neighbourhoods with "the worst living conditions" and disproportionate exposure to environmental risks (Rwanda, GEF-7). Integration also shapes distributive justice indirectly. Practitioners note that even when equity is not explicitly framed in planning processes, integrated approaches systematically guide investments toward underserved areas. For example, one interviewee noted how, in Urban Shift Strategic Planning Labs, "the sites that are selected are the ones where lower-income communities live" due to shared recognition of service deficits and limited green space (Interview #10). This suggests that integrated planning can contribute to equity even without explicit redistributive mandates, if supported by data which relates to equity concerns (see Box 6).

In terms of procedural justice, integrated institutions can also reshape how decisions are made, who participates, and how urban transitions are governed. Across countries, GEF projects invest heavily in data governance systems, cross-sector planning processes, and multi-level coordination mechanisms that constitute procedural structural change. Strengthening data systems is a recurrent feature. Kigali's geospatial information systems, Argentina's metropolitan digital platforms, and Brazil's Sustainable Cities Platform each expand municipal access to spatial data and tools needed for equitable planning (Rwanda, GEF-7; Argentina, GEF-7;

Brazil, GEF-6). The Brazilian project under GEF-6, for example, trained municipal managers to use inequality mapping tools. These and other tools, for example to assess climate risks and incorporate gender-disaggregated data, can support more deliberate prioritization of vulnerable groups in climate adaptation.

Supporting integrated planning procedures to increase local decision-making power and formalize responsibilities is a central part of projects across countries. In Chile, inter-ministerial coordination through the Inter-ministerial Commission of City, Housing and Territory (COMICIVYT) and regional clusters on nature-based solutions formalize responsibilities for integrated land-use, biodiversity, and climate planning; in Zimbabwe and Rwanda, participatory revisions of spatial masterplans embed resilience and inclusivity into statutory planning processes; and in Brazil the national urban department works through their Sustainable Cities Platform to scale solutions (Interview #7). At the city scale, procedural reforms include establishing community upgrade committees and creating grievance mechanisms, such as in Kigali. Training programs through Urban Shift (such as climate action planning and discussions related to circular economy and nature-based solutions) were perceived as key to strengthening procedural integration by bringing “multiple decision makers at the table” and promoting the use of different types of data to break siloes across governance units (Interview #10).

In terms of recognitional justice, integration and institutional capacity building can help expand what is counted, whose needs are considered, and which territories are acknowledged within planning systems. Across countries, GEF projects introduce new indicators and standards that foreground gender, informality, and vulnerability. Chile’s gender-sensitive nature-based solutions technical standards and Côte d’Ivoire’s gender quotas in technical trainings make differentiated needs explicit within institutional procedures. Rwanda and Zimbabwe recognize informal settlements as central planning units requiring targeted investment, while Argentina’s recognition of vulnerable neighbourhoods (e.g., Comunas 4 and 8 in Buenos Aires; La Favorita in Mendoza GEF-7) embeds historically marginalized areas into strategic planning instruments. Finally, recognitional responsibilities emerge where institutions acknowledge structural drivers of inequality and commit to correcting them through integrated planning and institutional reform.

Box 7. Integrating data and planning instruments to redistribute environmental management responsibilities in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire

Like many cities around the world, Abidjan is facing interconnected sustainable development challenges: uncontrolled urban growth compounds vulnerability to climate change risks, industrial growth contributes to high levels of air pollution, and a lack of clear land property rights drive land price speculation and social inequalities. Through the development and implementation of the “Abidjan integrated sustainable urban planning and management” project, GEF-6 supported institutional capacity building and integrated planning processes to contribute to changing institutional structures and procedures in support of a just transition. This case study discusses Abidjan as an example of **how integrated data systems and planning instruments can be used as key tools to create new detailed urban plans and to redistribute responsibilities across levels of governance and sectors** to jointly address sustainability and equity concerns.

First, the Autonomous District of Abidjan (DAA) **assigned new institutional responsibilities** to the Agency of Urbanism and Forecasting (AUPA, French acronym)

to maintain and use geospatial information to support decision-making, thereby redistributing responsibility for environmental monitoring and planning from national institutions toward subnational authorities. Second, the project **increased local authorities' responsibilities for air quality management by supporting capacity building** for air quality monitoring. The project assigned a central coordination role for air quality monitoring to the Ivorian Antipollution Centre (CIAPOL), including responsibility for new monitoring stations, legal frameworks, and industrial inspections. This work was supported through capacity building provided by UNIDO and the African Development Bank (AFDB) and the sharing of operational responsibilities between all three institutions. Similarly to the urban observatory, enhanced air quality monitoring allows for the use of integrated information to enable more **informed and accountable governance**, strengthening procedural capacity for decision-making.

In terms of **empowering actors**, our analysis focused on the diversity of and access to knowledge in creating just transitions that both address environmental change and promote social equity and autonomy (Filho and Pons-Giralt, 2024; Sokolova, 2025). Across the GEF SCP we find that, while not always explicit, the integration of diverse knowledge systems and the improvement of access to knowledge, helped projects address issues of distributional, procedural, and recognitional justice. In Indian cities like Chennai, Pune, and Surat, elements of distributional justice emerged in relation to knowledge-sharing platforms and Smart City initiatives that helped empower city governments and stakeholders to take action on issues of urban planning (India, #10484). Improving the distribution of access to knowledge, tools, and systems for data collection were key for managing a variety of social risks posed by climate change and biodiversity loss. In addition, the distribution of knowledge was facilitated through training, including on issues of equity like gender and racial discrimination (Paraguay, GEF-6; Interview #6). This was also the case in Freetown (Sierra Leone, GEF-7), where the project included actions to improve the distribution of knowledge on gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment, linking the role of knowledge in just transitions to not only the transformation of nature-based institutions but also to social values and norms.

Citizen engagement and participation was undertaken by all projects studied in our analysis, and many of these projects situated stakeholder participation in relation to the need to integrate diverse local knowledge systems into the design and implementation of project work, sometimes empowering and legitimizing historically marginalized knowledge systems including traditional knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge (Costa Rica, GEF-7). For example, multiple cities in South Africa, including Johannesburg and smaller municipalities in the province of Mpumalanga, addressed issues of empowerment and capacity building in relation to just transitions by improving the participation of community members in the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Interview #6). Farmers, for example, were not just included but were at the forefront of the project and were positioned as knowledge holders with significant capacity to influence transitions to more equitable and economically viable farming practices. Recognizing the role of various knowledge systems in the development of projects was also key for improving the outcomes of initiatives for a range of stakeholders, fostering local ownership of projects, and for ensuring that the ideas driving just transitions came from multiple viewpoints and perspectives (Interview #11). Furthermore, many projects approached knowledge-creation activities, including training and stakeholder needs assessments, through an equity lens that promoted the recognition of often- overlooked identities (Interview #8; Interview #9; Paraguay, GEF-6; South Africa, GEF-6). These activities created the conditions

for empowerment by increasing the confidence of local actors to address sustainability issues and also helped many marginalized actors feel valued, heard, and seen – sometimes referred to as “dignity” by interviewees – not only for the work they do but also for their fundamental right to live and thrive in a healthy environment (Interview #1).

5.3 Key findings and opportunities for just transitions from GEF SCP

GEF and other multilateral and transnational organisations can play a vital role in supporting just transitions, both through their day-to-day work and through developing institutional support, not least through partners, governing bodies and in relation to key international conventions. Our analysis suggests that GEF SCP's role is less about defining just transitions, and more about enabling conditions under which equitable pathways can emerge. Together, these findings highlight key opportunities for the GEF SCP and other multilateral and transnational initiatives to strengthen their approach to just transitions.

- Moving forward, there remains a need for stronger shared understanding of what just transitions mean in practice and how these can be financially supported. **Developing more coherent and context-sensitive interpretations of just transitions will be essential to future GEF work in cities and could be developed in partnership with other urban partnerships and initiatives.** Rather than focusing on just transitions as normative goals, there is a need to move towards viewing just transitions as enabling conditions for durable and accelerated action across climate, biodiversity, and pollution agendas.
- **There is a need for shared principles alongside context-specific just transition pathways and stronger alignment on what just transition means in practice, particularly at the project level.** GEF SCP can provide leadership towards this end working with its partners and agencies, while also creating space for communities themselves to define what a just transition means in their context.
- **Rethinking participation and empowerment to support just transitions requires appropriate actions and mechanisms to guarantee that participation meaningfully influences outcomes and ownership.** While existing tools provide an important foundation, further reflection is needed by those working with cities on how participation and empowerment are conceptualized and operationalized in practice to enable just transitions. For example, multiple actions currently exist in GEF SCP to improve inequalities in gender participation with less acknowledgement of exclusion across other identities, such as ability, class, and race. This presents an opportunity for future work to explore how GEF SCP can take a more intersectional approach to participation and empowerment to support just transitions.
- **Developing a shared understanding of just transition for GEF SCP could help inform the design of indicators that both capture the specific contexts of inequality in which projects operate and support the advancement of just transition objectives over time** by the programme and its partners.
- **Data plays a dual role:** improving understanding of local drivers of inequality and exclusion, and guiding project design, implementation, and monitoring in ways that avoid harm and promote more equitable outcomes. In this sense, **data is more than a technical input: it is also a governance tool with implications for inclusion, accountability, and power**, which can either support just transition objectives or

undermine them, depending on how data is produced and shared. The SCP could also expand existing work on **supporting data collection and developing domestic capacity to assess the justice implications of transitions to future projects.**

- A key remaining question revolves around how GEF SCP can operationalize just transition principles. GEF plays a unique role in supporting actions that are risky, innovative, or not yet attractive to markets, helping to build the resilience base for longer-term investment. **GEF SCP could help advance just transitions in practice by supporting experimentation** at the city level, helping to embed just transition principles in planning processes at the local level, enabling diversification of local revenue bases (e.g. away from fossil fuels), and articulating the roles of public and private actors.

Many just transition “entry points” can be advanced through existing SCP’s guiding principles and operational guidance (e.g., safeguards, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and learning). However, structural change requires long-term and stable resourcing; institutional capacity building, while essential, is not sufficient on its own. More formal adoption of just transition as a portfolio-wide requirement — or changes affecting eligibility and programming priorities — would likely require GEF Council approval and, where relevant, alignment with COPs guidance under the conventions GEF serves. In the meantime, progress can be made by treating just transitions as an important lens through which to link GEF’s focal areas with social inclusion and equity can also help support its integration agenda, streamline financing guidance, and accelerate climate action in project work.

6. Conclusions and next steps

From analysis of the GEF SCP over three cycles, with a specific focus on issues of integration, co-financing and just transitions, we conclude this synthesis report with a focus on the potential next steps that can be taken to further develop urban action for people, climate, nature and sustainable development. We begin by synthesising our conclusions related to building **learning opportunities**, the development of **diagnostic tools** and **enhancing diversity**. We then consider in turn specific opportunities for **municipalities and executing agencies**, **implementing agencies** and the **GEF SCP partnership**.

6.1 Building learning opportunities

The SCP's global knowledge platform provides access to hundreds of resources that allow interested individuals to learn about many topics in urban areas including finance, inclusion, culture, data, planning and nature among others. However, there are few resources that capture the lessons derived from the SCP as a portfolio, rather than related to specific topics applied in individual cities. Furthermore, each SCP project gathers substantial facts, technical and scientific information, regulatory and planning instruments from the cities it invests, to design data and evidence-based interventions, which could be used to build learning opportunities. In this context and on the basis of our analysis, there are several issues for consideration:

- **Develop learning journeys:** consider providing a curated means through which stakeholders involved in project design (e.g. GEF, GEF agencies, implementation partners, local authorities) can access existing information in ways that suit their specific needs and draw lessons forward into future initiatives.
- **Identify common lessons learned:** the wealth of information collected through the GEF SCP and analysed here points to some key forms of intervention that are working on the ground (e.g. tailored to specific problems, such as youth employment, waste, green corridors etc. or to particular approaches e.g. integration, finance, just transition) which could be brought together to provide opportunities for collective learning across the stakeholders involved in the portfolio and those seeking to develop new projects. Urban Shift and GSCP provide key platforms within each GEF cycle which provide some of this support, but learning across cycles may be more limited.
- **Enable contextualised learning:** many participants spoke of the need to tailor interventions and lessons to the specific needs of particular cities. Understanding how interventions e.g. green corridors, nature restoration, planning processes etc. have been tailored through their implementation and ensuring that these lessons are captured and categorised by city type will enable project designers to readily identify key approaches and lessons to take when developing interventions for specific urban conditions.

6.2 Developing diagnostic tools

The analysis undertaken for this report has developed a series of diagnostic tools – on integration, finance archetypes, and just transitions – which provide a systematic means through which to identify the specific ways in which key objectives of the GEF SCP as well as imperatives of the Rio Conventions that it serves are being met through the portfolio. In this analysis, these tools have been used retrospectively but their potential is wider, for example in terms of helping to support programme development (e.g. in terms of enabling further engagement with just transitions) as well as in demonstrating how GEF SCP supports key goals

of the Conventions (e.g. in relation to CBD Targets). Their use can also support better tailoring of information and support, allowing GEF Teams to better direct cities towards, agencies funding mechanisms and solutions that can respond more adequately to their needs.

- **Adopt diagnostic tools:** the frameworks and archetypes developed in this synthesis report have been applied to a small set of the GEF interventions to date and this analysis could be extended to provide a systematic account of the ways in which GEF SOP is advancing its goals for integration, how new financial arrangements are emerging, and contributions towards just transitions. These tools could also be refined, e.g. on integration to pick up specific aspects where goals or targets across Conventions are being addressed in synergy. Further diagnostic tools of this kind could also be developed in relation to additional GEF priorities.
- **Enhance monitoring and reporting:** diagnostic tools of this kind can be used to enhance project monitoring and to develop iterative learning. For example, our analysis shows how strategic approaches to sequence finance archetypes can support project implementation. Identifying and strategically aligning new financing archetypes during implementation could provide a valuable resource to enhance outcomes. Equally, these diagnostic tools could provide the basis for evidence collection on the contribution of GEF SOP to the targets of the Rio Conventions (e.g. for global stocktakes) and/or support certification, e.g. in relation to the contribution of projects towards just transitions.
- **Strengthening programme development:** diagnostic tools of this kind can also be used to support programme development, providing criteria to guide calls for projects and assessment criteria. This could support the GEF SOP in addressing any current gaps or limitations in its portfolio.

6.3 Enhancing diversity and equity

Our analysis suggests that the GEF SOP is already taking steps towards enhancing diversity, inclusion and equity in its portfolio, but that, with the exception of gender, this work is often implicit and its significance in strengthening the outcomes of the programme less visible. Integration is a well-established goal for the GEF SOP and multiple actors are integrated into project design and development but there is scope to increase engagement with actors, especially at the community level, who may be excluded from formal governance processes. This is especially the case when it comes to considerations of just transitions, where we find that progress is being made to engage diverse actors and to take forward justice considerations but that this could be extended.

- **Embrace urban diversity:** cities are by nature diverse, with individuals, groups and communities experiencing different situations according to characteristics including employment, shelter, tenure, age, disability, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Understanding the intersectional ways in which these issues are experienced and shape perspectives, capacities, values and knowledge will be valuable in strengthening efforts for urban sustainability. Inclusion can be seen as part of the process of developing and implementing interventions rather than a desirable outcome.
- **Understand potential outcomes:** all interventions generate benefits and risks that are unevenly shared. Developing a greater understanding of who will benefit from interventions, and where there might be individuals, groups or communities who could be negatively affected, can help to support a more active approach to reducing any negative consequences of urban sustainable development. One way to enhance this

understanding is by ensuring that participation of affected groups takes place and meaningfully influences outcomes and ownership, including considering different forms of participation, involving youth or other groups.

- **Advance just transitions:** building in a “do no harm” principle at the project level, alongside participatory approaches that enable bottom-up understandings of justice, could be a means through which GEF can facilitate a greater engagement with just transitions with its partners and across its portfolio.

6.4 Opportunities for GEF SCP stakeholders and wider urban community

Based on these core conclusions, we here set out considerations for the main stakeholders in the GEF SCP – from city official and executing agencies, to implementing partners and the entire GEF SCP – focused on the three main areas of this synthesis report – integration, finance and just transitions.

These opportunities are also relevant for other urban actors working towards a common urban sustainability vision.

Municipalities and executing agencies

- ‘Positive’ projects that are seeking transformative outcomes for climate, nature and society sit within wider landscapes of finance and economic development, thus it is key to be mindful of the ways in which other flows of capital may serve to continually (re)produce increased emissions and vulnerabilities, biodiversity loss and social inequality that co-finance for sustainability is trying to address.
- Financing mechanisms are most likely to be effective when embedded within broader structural and governance reforms. This means that it may be more important to consider redirecting existing financial flows than seeking new sources of finance through innovative mechanisms or private sector involvement.
- Nature-based solutions and green infrastructure have become more mainstreamed in project design documents. It is however relevant to ensure that natural ecosystems’ functionality remains technical sound to avoid failing expectations.
- Land ownership is a critical tool to steer alignment and integration when both landowners and the land leasers share interests. Furthermore, in many regions, addressing land ownership is crucial for achieving stakeholders’ alignment.

Implementing agencies

- Research and diagnostic tools can support to think, at project design, more about which types of integration are taking place, why and for whom. The processes through which different co-benefits, synergies and trade-offs are considered strengthens project impact and build capacities to tackle complex problems.
- Typologies and contextualized approaches can help identify cities where investments would provide better environmental outcomes, as well as better inform advances on integration and just transition. Co-financing arrangements should reflect cities’ institutional maturity, financial readiness and evolving trajectories.

- Within GEF and associated agencies there remains a need for stronger shared understanding of what just transitions mean in practice and how these can be financially supported. In this sense, just transitions should be increasingly understood as enabling conditions for durable and accelerated action across climate, biodiversity, pollution and land restoration agendas.
- Identifying key issues around which just transitions work can progress will be key. One such area is disaster risk reduction (DRR) (reducing risks, preparing, planning for, and responding to extreme events). DRR approaches are key in identifying most vulnerable populations whose involvement is key in just transitions and are also linked to broad financial sources. Another potential area of focus could be jobs, employment, and livelihoods in just transitions, ensuring that SCP projects prioritize these issues and use clear metrics to track their impacts.

GEF SCP partnership and beyond

- While integration and just transitions components are already present in GEF SCP projects, the Program has the potential for catalysing capacities and functioning as a “guiding star” to align actions within and between partners over time. The global knowledge and coordination platform which supports the programmatic approach of the SCP could be used to enable partners to work together to deliver more than any one organisation could achieve working by itself towards these goals.
- By developing a clear vision as to what constitutes integration and just transitions, as well as the forms of co-financing that can be supportive of these outcomes, and strengthening the alignment between stakeholders and across issue areas (climate, biodiversity, pollution, land degradation, and related agendas) through common frameworks and approaches the SCP can support progress and ensure continuity, capacity-building and commitment over time.
- There is further scope to consider which kinds of cities can access support/be engaged in projects, and how SCP could be extended to small and medium sized cities that may have significant impacts on biodiversity, face specific challenges in terms of vulnerability and resilience to climate change, as well as financing and capacity challenges, but where integration and just transitions might be easier. Typologies and diagnostic tools that support a differentiated approach to the kinds of solutions that can work in diverse contexts could be used to this end. This means moving beyond simple metrics to take account of governance, political and socio-economic contexts that condition how projects and interventions work in practice.
- It is also essential in taking this work forward that there is greater attention to who is benefiting from just transitions and that efforts to improve justice and equality take an intersectional approach so that alongside gender other factors that lead to exclusion or marginalization (e.g. age, disability) are also considered in program development and implementation.

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