

World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2026

SGP Thematic Track Concept Note

Project Title - *Seventh Operational Phase of the GEF Small Grants Programme in India*

Partners: MOEF&CC, UNDP India

Title: *Women at the Frontlines of Climate Action, Biodiversity & Land Restoration -Community-Led Pathways to achieve SDGs*

Objectives

This session brings together policymakers, UN agencies, corporates, knowledge partners, media, and civil society to advance dialogue, learning, and collaboration on women-led, community-based climate action. Specifically, it seeks to:

- **Facilitate dialogue** on the role of women's leadership in accelerating SDG localisation and climate resilience.
- **Enable learning** through evidence and lessons from GEF-SGP India OP7 on integrated, gender-responsive solutions.
- **Catalyse collaboration** to scale, finance, and align policies supporting women-led climate and nature solutions.

Context

The world is far off track in achieving climate and sustainable development goals. To meet the Paris Agreement, global emissions need to fall by 43% by 2030, yet current national pledges would achieve only a 2% reduction. Similarly, only 13% of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets are on track, while many remain unmonitored. These interconnected challenges—spanning climate change, inequality, biodiversity loss, and governance gaps—cannot be addressed in isolation. They require long-term vision, inclusive participation, and values-driven approaches to enable transformative change. Marking its Silver Jubilee, the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2026 will address these issues under the theme “Transformations: Vision, Voices, and Values for Sustainable Development.”

Against this backdrop, the session “Women at the Frontlines of Climate Action, Biodiversity and Land Restoration: Community-Led Pathways to achieve SDGs” will highlight how women's leadership, voices, and values can accelerate SDG localisation and climate resilience, improve biodiversity and restore degraded land areas. It will showcase how women-led organisations drive integrated solutions that advance multiple SDGs—from livelihoods and food security to governance and social inclusion—while promoting ecosystem restoration through the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme in India.

In India, the Seventh Operational Phase of GEF-SGP (SGP-OP7), implemented by TERI under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and with support from UNDP, addresses these challenges at the community level. Operating across three key landscapes—the highlands of the Northeast, the Central Semi-Arid region, and the Coastal Region—SGP-India OP7

supports 71 projects led by local grassroots organisations, promoting climate action, biodiversity conservation, land restoration, and sustainable livelihoods.

Over 8,000 hectares have been restored through plantations, assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, and degraded land rehabilitation, while improved land-use practices have been adopted across more than 17,000 hectares through sustainable agriculture, water management, agroforestry, and SALT. Marine conservation interventions have enhanced over 700 hectares through ghost gear removal, artificial reefs, and community-led actions. Climate co-benefits include 0.67 MW of renewable energy installed. Knowledge management partners helped the SGP-grantees on documenting and disseminating their achievements through knowledge management portals. Moreover, capacity building has been strengthened through four regional workshops on GIS, proposal development, agro-biodiversity, and energy efficiency. All these benefitted over 28,000 community members, more than half of whom are women.

Gender mainstreaming has been a core principle of GEF-SGP India OP7, based on the understanding that strong and lasting climate and development outcomes are not possible without addressing gender inequalities. Women, especially in rural, tribal, and coastal areas, face greater climate risks and care burdens, making their leadership and participation critical. Through women-led NGOs, gender-responsive planning, and targeted interventions that reduce drudgery, improve health, and strengthen livelihoods, the programme supports women not just as beneficiaries but as leaders and decision-makers. The near-equal share of women beneficiaries and their growing role in community institutions show that gender equality is a key driver of resilient ecosystems and inclusive development.

Expected outcomes

- **Shared understanding:** Stronger, evidence-based understanding among stakeholders of how women-led, community-driven approaches accelerate SDG localisation, climate resilience, and nature-positive outcomes.
- **Actionable insights:** Clear lessons and practical strategies drawn from GEF-SGP India OP7 to inform policy, programmes, and investments in gender-responsive climate action.
- **Partnership pathways:** Identified opportunities for collaboration, scaling, and financing among governments, UN agencies, corporates, and civil society to strengthen women-led climate and nature solutions.