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Call for Proposal

UNEP Small Grants Programme - Innovative community-based initiatives for conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems.

List of Abbreviations

CBOs	**:**	Community Based Organizations
CSOs	**:**	Civil Society Organizations
FPIC	**:**	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
IPs	**:**	Implementing Partners
LDCs	**:**	Least Developed Countries
MTS	**:**	UNEP Medium-Term Strategy
NAPs	**:**	National Adaptation Plans
NBSAPs	**:**	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NDCs	**:**	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGOs	**:**	Non-Governmental Organizations
PoW	**:**	UNEP Programme of Work
SIDS	**:**	Small Islands Developing States
SGP	**:**	Small Grants Programme

CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations ii

I. Background: 4

II. Small Grants Programme Project proposals 6

III. Scope of the Proposal: 7

IV. Key parameters to be considered in the project proposal 8

V. Language 10

VI. Budget: 10

VII. Co-finance and partnerships 10

VIII. Project Period 10

IX. Eligible Applicants 10

X. Proposal review process: 11

XI. Contact 11

Annex 1 : Proposal Outline and Content 12

Annex 2. Project Logical Framework 16

Annex 3. Annual Work Plan (AWP) Format 16

Annual Work Plan 2027 ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Annex 4 : Technical Evaluation Criteria 18

I. Background:

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.

Marine and coastal ecosystems are under increasing pressure from climate change, overexploitation, habitat destruction, and pollution, despite their essential roles in supporting fisheries and food security, sustaining coastal livelihoods, and storing carbon in ecosystems such as mangroves. Mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs are being degraded at unprecedented rates, threatening biodiversity, weakening coastal protection, and undermining the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on these ecosystems. Coastal communities, particularly in least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are disproportionately affected, facing heightened vulnerability to climate impacts, including sea-level rise and extreme weather events. This underscores the urgent need for scalable, community-driven interventions that restore ecosystem health while strengthening resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

UNEP, guided by the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2026-2029, as an overarching framework prioritizing solutions for a healthy, prosperous and resilient people and planet, and in alignment with the Programme of Work (PoW) for 2026 to 2027, works in close collaboration to deliver integrated, science-based and inclusive solutions addressing the triple planetary environmental crises of climate change, nature, land and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

UNEP supports community-led approaches in the conservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, acknowledging the role of local stakeholders in ecosystem management. The UNEP Small Grants Programme (SGP) is an innovative community-based initiative for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems, supporting community-led actions by civil society partners, local communities, women's groups, youth organizations, and Indigenous Peoples involved in the management and use of these ecosystems. It focuses on critical habitats such as mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, and coral reefs that protect shorelines, store blue carbon, sustain biodiversity, and provide livelihoods for coastal populations facing heightened vulnerability from the triple planetary crises. The programme prioritizes community leadership, gender equality, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, youth engagement, financial resilience, and improved data to guide decision-making, while promoting locally led approaches that strengthen ownership, cost-effectiveness, long-term sustainability, and opportunities for replication and scale-up. The programme is guided by a theory of change that recognizes that empowering local communities with financial resources, technical knowledge, and inclusive governance structures leads to improved

ecosystem management outcomes. By combining restoration activities, capacity building, and access to sustainable financing mechanisms such as carbon finance, the programme aims to generate measurable environmental benefits while enhancing community resilience, promoting social equity, and contributing to national, regional and global environmental targets.

The SGP has previously provided support to 20 UNEP implementing partners, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) across 17 countries, including SIDS and LDCs, in mangrove and coral restoration, community-based Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), sustainable fisheries management, nature-positive livelihoods, and climate-resilient coastal governance. This connects locally driven solutions with national, regional and global biodiversity and climate commitments, while fostering a growing community of practitioners who share lessons and build on each other's experience.

Building on the achievements and lessons learned from the previous SGP, the current Call for Proposals emphasize scaling successful models, enhancing knowledge exchange, and strengthening institutional linkages. Past interventions have demonstrated that locally led approaches not only deliver ecological benefits but also generate sustainable economic opportunities and social co-benefits. The programme now seeks to amplify these successes by fostering innovation, replication, and integration into broader national, regional, and global frameworks.

The overall objective of the programme is to scale up high-impact, community-driven initiatives that advance climate action, environmental justice, and resilient livelihoods in line with UNEP's MTS for 2026–2029 and PoW for 2026–2027 on Land and Nature Action Sub-program, contributing to the Sub-program indicators:

(2.1) *Number of strengthened institutional and operational frameworks, policy and legal instruments, or positive incentives for sustainable and inclusive management of biodiversity and land, or the prevention of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystem degradation at different levels.*

(2.2) *Increase in the area under ecological restoration*

The SGP activities contribute directly to UNEP 2026-2027 PoW, specifically:

Outcome 2*: Strengthened governance to meet international environmental commitments, promote environmental law, and support implementation of national obligations to MEAs.*

Outcome 3*: Sustainable management and restoration of natural and productive ecosystems and enhanced pollution prevention and control, including in areas affected by disasters and conflict.*

A strong emphasis will be placed on monitoring, evaluation, and learning to ensure accountability and adaptive management. Projects will incorporate measurable indicators aligned with UNEP's MTS and

PoW to track ecological restoration outcomes, socio-economic benefits, and governance improvements. Knowledge generated through implementation will be shared across participating countries and partners to inform policy, improve practice, and facilitate scaling.

The success of the programme will rely on strategic partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, research institutions, CSOs, and CBOs. These collaborations will support technical implementation, policy alignment, and access to additional financing. Emphasis will also be placed on sustainability, ensuring that community-led initiatives are embedded in local governance systems, supported by viable financing mechanisms, and capable of continuing beyond the grant's term.

The Call for Proposals focuses on projects that address the following components:
Component 1: Scale up Marine and coastal ecosystem restoration, in line with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses.
Component 2: Strengthen Climate action through blue carbon ecosystems, including developing carbon finance to enhance coastal community resilience through improved livelihoods and incomes
Component 3: Promote Gender equality and women, youth and indigenous people's empowerment,

II. Small Grants Programme Projects

SGP projects will be designed and implemented to pilot innovative, community-based initiatives for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems, with a focus on mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs in SIDS, LDCs, and vulnerable coastal regions. For this Call, SGP projects are defined as field-based, result-oriented interventions that test, validate, and showcase innovative or scalable approaches under real-world conditions. These projects should generate practical evidence of what works, under which conditions, and why, with a clear pathway for replication, policy uptake, or scaling through public or private financing mechanisms.
Selection of SGP projects and implementing partners (IPs) will prioritize contributions to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the conservation of blue carbon ecosystems and generation of carbon credits, the empowerment of women and youth in local decision-making and demonstrated local ownership with clear capacity development outcomes.
Selection will also be guided by criteria such as the presence and restoration needs of critical marine and coastal habitats, the implementing partner's due diligence, and the feasibility of the approach, with women's leadership considered an added advantage. Projects will be required to monitor progress and generate evidence, capturing best practices and lessons learned through targeted communication products, including human-interest stories and multimedia outputs such as videos and story maps, to support sustainability, peer learning, policy engagement, and the replication and scaling

of successful approaches at national, regional, and global levels, while delivering measurable ecological and socio-economic results.

III. **Scope of the Proposal**:

The proposal should articulate a SGP project that contributes to one or more of the following components: (i) scaling up marine and coastal ecosystem restoration, in line with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, including coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses; (ii) strengthening climate action through blue carbon ecosystems, including the development of carbon finance mechanisms to enhance coastal community resilience and livelihoods; and/or (iii) promoting gender equality and women, youth and indigenous people's empowerment.

Projects may be implemented by local or national CSOs, NGOs, CBOs, or consortia thereof. Strong partnerships with local authorities, research institutions, and international NGOs are encouraged to enhance technical capacity, policy coherence, and financial sustainability.

The project proposals should aim to expand conservation and restoration efforts for coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass ecosystems in priority regions and countries. Proposals must clearly justify the selection of SGP projects, with preference given to coastal areas in LDCs and SIDS, where ecosystems are highly vulnerable, and communities are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. Projects should also strengthen inclusive governance by empowering women and youth in decision-making and in the management of marine and coastal ecosystems, while promoting the participation of Indigenous Peoples, where relevant.

The projects will be selected based on agreed criteria, including the extent of threat to the ecosystem, livelihood opportunities, community ownership, and gaps in financing for conservation and restoration. Key challenges may include habitat loss, declining ecosystem services, unsustainable resource use, and heightened vulnerability of coastal communities to climate change and economic shocks. To address these issues, projects should integrate community-based approaches to ecosystem conservation, restoration, and management into local development and livelihood systems. They must ensure alignment with relevant national, regional, and global frameworks, including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the 30x30 commitments, as well as national policies such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), contributing to the achievement of national and international environmental targets.

Proposals should include a clear results framework or theory of change that links project activities to measurable outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts. This should demonstrate how restoration

efforts, governance strengthening, and livelihood interventions collectively contribute to ecosystem resilience, climate mitigation and adaptation, and improved socio-economic outcomes.

During implementation, projects will be expected to identify and test innovative, high-impact solutions with strong potential for replication and scaling, supported by strengthened technical and institutional capacities of local organizations, governments, and communities. This includes improving the availability and quality of ecological data through standardized monitoring and reporting systems, as well as documenting best practices and lessons learned. Projects should also apply innovative approaches, such as improved restoration techniques, strengthened community governance models, financing mechanisms including blue carbon markets, digital tools for monitoring, and integrated livelihood strategies that enhance both environmental and socio-economic outcomes. In addition, proposals should identify potential environmental, social, financial, and operational risks, along with appropriate mitigation measures, and ensure compliance with relevant environmental and social safeguards, including the requirement to obtain Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) where Indigenous Peoples are involved.

Projects should demonstrate clear socio-economic benefits for local communities through nature-based livelihoods and improved income opportunities. Capacity development activities may include ecosystem restoration, sustainable resource management, entrepreneurship, access to finance, and value chain development, with a focus on equitable participation of women and youth. Proposals must also outline a sustainability and exit strategy, demonstrating how project benefits will be sustained beyond the grant's duration. This may include integration into local governance systems, establishment of long-term revenue streams, strengthened community ownership, and alignment with national or regional programmes.

IV. Key parameters to be considered in the project proposal

The SGP project proposals should take the following key parameters into consideration when being developed:

- LDCs and SIDS where marine and coastal ecosystems are highly vulnerable, and communities are disproportionately affected by climate change, such as coastal erosion, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.
- The proposal should provide clear evidence of threats to coral reefs, mangroves, and/or seagrass ecosystems, including habitat loss, reduced ecosystems, or unsustainable resource use.

- Proposals that demonstrate strong alignment with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the 30x30 targets, while showing significant potential for scalable ecosystem restoration, will be given a strong consideration.
- The proposal should demonstrate potential to strengthen climate mitigation, adaptation, and community resilience. Where relevant, opportunities related to blue carbon ecosystems, alternative economic activities, and sustainable financing mechanisms may be considered for communities with limited livelihood opportunities and high dependence on marine and coastal resources such as fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism.
- SGP projects where restoration can contribute to poverty reduction, food security, and diversified income generation.
- SGP projects with existing or emerging community-based management structures such as Beach Management Units (BMUs), CBOs, local committees, or strong potential for co-management approaches.
- Demonstrated willingness of communities to engage in participatory ecosystem restoration and governance. Community sensitization on the goods and services of coastal and marine resources and the benefits of sustainable management.
- Communities where women and youth can be meaningfully engaged and empowered in decision-making, resource management, and livelihood activities.
- Evidence of, or potential for, increased leadership roles and economic participation of women and youth.
- Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples where relevant, ensuring respect for traditional knowledge and application of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Commitment to equitable participation across all community groups.
- Projects led by community-based organizations or local institutions that can strengthen their technical, managerial, and governance capacity through partnerships with local authorities, NGOs, CSOs, and research institutions
- Presence or feasibility of multi-stakeholder collaboration to support technical, policy, and financial sustainability.
- SGP projects clear gaps in financing for conservation and restoration.
- Potential to explore or contribute to sustainable financing mechanisms, where relevant
- SGP projects with a high probability of success for integrated ecosystem-based approaches combining restoration, governance, and livelihoods.
- Strong potential for replication, scaling, and knowledge generation.

- The SGP project should directly benefit a significant number of around 100 or more households, with measurable socio-economic and environmental outcomes.
- SGP project aligned with national and international priorities, including NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, and relevant marine and coastal policies.
- Feasibility of establishing or strengthening ecological and socio-economic monitoring systems for tracking restoration outcomes and impacts.
- Consideration of environmental, social, and operational risks, with feasible mitigation measures.
- Opportunities for community sensitization on ecosystem services, climate resilience, and sustainable resource management.
- Existence or potential for ongoing dialogue mechanisms between communities and project stakeholders.

V. Language

Applicants should submit project proposals in English using the application template provided in the annex

VI. Budget:

The maximum amount per grant award will be limited to USD 100,000, based on the number of target beneficiary communities and the size of the ecosystems planned to be conserved or restored. The applicants are required to provide a detailed budgetary estimate. Administrative cost (including local experts' remuneration) should be no more than 10% of the total budget. The SGP team will monitor the grantee's performance, and fund release will be based on results reporting.

VII. Co-finance and partnerships:

These are mandatory requirements, and the applicant institution, or its partners, must allocate significant co-finance (either in cash or in kind) to the project.

VIII. **Project Period:** 2027-2028

IX. **Eligible Applicants**:

Eligible applicants include community-based organizations and associations, civil society organizations, local and national NGOs, government institutions and other regional not-for-profit entities working directly with coastal and island communities in LDCs and SIDS on marine and

coastal ecosystem conservation, restoration, strengthening livelihoods and climate resilience. The SGP prioritizes community-based organizations/ associations and local NGOs as direct implementing partners, while international NGOs play a complementary role in knowledge transfer, technical and capacity-building. Through the relevant UNEP focal points and implementing partners, the eligible applicants will be selected based on due diligence to assess their technical and financial capacity and on-the-ground presence. Final selection for funding will be made through a competitive assessment process, and all SGP project proposals must meet the minimum requirements and standards set out in the call for proposals and evaluation criteria to qualify for support.

Please Note: although an institution is selected by the Focal Points, the SGP project proposal must meet the minimum requirements and standards outlined in the evaluation criteria to qualify for funding.

X. Proposal review process:

UNEP establishes a technical committee, including the donor, to review the proposals against the set criteria and select those that fully meet them.

XI. Contact:

Please submit your completed proposal by the deadline **02 November 2026** to: Michael Ndiary at email michael.ndiary@un.org and Niloufar Bayani at niloufar.bayani@un.org

Completed proposals should be received (soft copy) by the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Unit SGP Coordination team no later than **02 November 2026.**

Note: Please use the annexed proposal outline below. Please ensure that the project proposal and all attachments are legible. All supporting documents (attachments) should also include the project name.

Annex 1 : Proposal Outline and Content

A. Applicant

Name of Organization:	
Established	
Number of members	
Number of similar projects implemented	
Number of similar projects ongoing	
Mailing Address	
Physical Address:	
Telephone:	
Fax:	
E-Mail:	
Project Title	
Principal Officer (Name and Position)	
Project Contact/Manager (Name and Position)	
Proposed Starting Date	
Expected Project Duration	

B. Project Proposal Content

Background/ introduction	
Project rationale: relevance and linkage to the project principal goal as well as national priorities	
Design principles and strategic considerations	

Project Objective, Outcomes and Outputs/activities	
Key indicators, risks and assumptions	
Cost-effectiveness	
Sustainability	
Replicability	
Project Results Framework (Please use the annexed standard format)	
Detailed Budget and Annual Work Plan (Please use the annexed standard format)	
Management Arrangements	
Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	
Stakeholder Involvement Plan	
Compliance with UN Safeguards	
Exit strategy	
Legal Context	

C. Proposed Budget

Requested Fund	
Fund from other sources, including own contribution	
Total project budget	

D. Organizational Background and Capacity to implement the Propose Project (max 1 page)

This section should clearly demonstrate that the proposed organization has the experience, capacity, and commitment to implement the proposed project successfully. Among the issues to be covered in this section are:

- Nature of the proposing institution – national or sub-national government institution, CSO, community-based organization, etc.
- Purpose and core activities of the institution
- Organizational approach (philosophy) for project implementation, i.e. how does the organization deliver its projects?
- Length of existence and project management experience
- Organizational structure, governance and administrative framework: number of paid staff members, volunteers, if any.
- Membership and affiliation to associations or umbrella organizations
- Legal status - registration with government approved authority
- Target population group (women, local communities, youth, etc.)
- Previous experience relevant to the proposed project that includes innovative community-based projects addressing conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Experience in implementing projects that focus on environment and natural resources management and sustainable development at the community level.

E. Proposed Methodology and Approach to implement the Project

- Provide a description of organizational structure and readiness to implement the project
- Provide suggested work plan and timetable. This section may be presented in graphical (table) form and can be attached as an annex. It should indicate the sequence of all major activities and implementation milestones, including targeted beginning and ending dates for each step.
- Describe how stakeholders and communities will be involved in target setting and implementation of the project.

F. Quality of Personnel and Suitability for the Implementation of the Project - CVs

- This section should demonstrate proven in-house experience – evidence that the applicant can successfully implement the project

- Provide information on team composition and task assignments, and attach CVs/resumes of key experts
- Details of current staff and qualifications: organizational structure that indicates the total number of professional, administrative and support staff etc.

G. Additional information

- Provide additional information or description of resources supporting your institution's qualification for the proposed project, including government endorsement, any recommendations, certificates, awards, brochures, pamphlets, etc., that the grantee wishes to attach.

Annex 2. Project Logical Framework (can be modified)

Project Title:						
Project Goal						
Project-specific objectives						
Objective 1.						
Description	**Indicator**	**Baseline**	**Targets End of Project**	**Source of Verification**	**Risks**	**Assumptions**
Outcome 1						
Output 1.1						
Activity 1						
Activity 2						
Activity 3						
Output 1. 2						
Activity 1.						
Activity 2						
Output 3						
Outcome 2						
Output 2.1						
Activity 1						
Activity 2						
Outcome 3						
(Add here if any)						

Annex 3. Annual Work Plan (AWP) Format

Expected Project Outcome	Planned Activities	Budget Year 2027					Responsible Party	Fund Source
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual Total		
OUTCOME 1: …… **Baseline:** …… **Target:** ……	**Output 1.1.**							
	Activity 1.1.1. **Activity 1.1.2**. Activity 1.1.3. Etc.							
	Output 1.2.							
	Activity 1.2.1							
	Activity 1.2.2.							
OUTCOME 2: …… **Baseline:** ……. **Target:** ……	**Output 2.1.**							
	Activity 2.1.1.							
	Output 2.2.							
	Activity 2.2.1.							
OUTCOME 3: ……. **Baseline:** ……. **Target: ……**	**Output 3.1.**							
	Activity 3.1.1.							
	Activity 3.1.2							
	Sub-total							
Total Budget								

Agreed by Institution: _____

Agreed by Small Grants Programme/Marine and Coastal Ecosystem/UNEP:

Annex 4: Technical Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation forms for technical proposals are presented below. The obtainable number of points specified for each evaluation criterion indicates the relative significance or weight of the item in the overall evaluation process.

The Technical Proposal Evaluation Forms are Form A: Expertise of Organization Submitting Proposal; Form B: Proposed Work Plan and Approach; Form C: Personnel.

Summary of Technical Proposal Evaluation Forms		**Score Weight**	**Obtainable Points**	**Company / Other Entity**				
				A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
1.	Expertise and Experience of the institution submitting the project Proposal	25%	25					
2.	Quality of the project proposal, understanding of the scope of work, knowledge of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems in LDCs and SIDS & proposed work plan and approach	55%	55					
3.	Qualification of personnel and suitability to implement the project	20%	20					
	Total		**100**					

Note: The score weights and points on the evaluation sheet are tentative and may be adjusted based on the needs or key attributes of the technical proposal.

Summary of Technical Proposal Evaluation Forms		Score Weight	Points	Applicants				
				A	B	C	D	E
A.	**Form 1: Expertise and experience of the organization submitting the proposal**							
1.	Reputation of the organization; national and local (community level importance	2						
2.	Experience in implementing similar projects in LDCs and SIDS	10						
3.	Track record of working with LDCs and SIDS in the local community and governments	2						
4.	Ability of organization to deliver tasks in line with the time plan (Reliability)	1						
5.	Geographical knowledge of the LDCs and SIDS, political, socio-economic, ecological landscapes and ecosystems	10						
	Percentage	**25 %**	**25**					
B	**Form 2: Understanding of the Scope of Work & Proposed Work Plan and Approach**							
6.	Understanding of the scope of work defined on the call for proposal	10						
7.	Adequacy of the proposal in achieving the objectives of the project (realistic and efficient)	5						
8.	Proposed Work Plan (sequence of activities and planning)	5						
9.	Cost effectiveness and value for money	30						
10.	Quality Assurance procedures	5						

	Percentage	**55 %**	**55**					
C	**From 3 Quality of personnel and suitability for the assignment.**							
	Experts(s)							
11.	Key experts' knowledge of natural resources management, conservation restoration and sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems, community management in a coastal context, sustainable fisheries and land management and experience in handling similar assignments	10						
12.	Educational qualification and relevance to the project	5						
	Senior Personnel							
13.	Overall technical qualification, proven coordination, planning and design of developmental projects and programmes (Curriculum Vitae, all key personnel must be provided)	5						
	Percentage	**20 %**	**20**					
	Total 100%		**100**					