



THE INCEPTION AND LAUNCH WORKSHOP

GEF-8
INTEGRATED
PROGRAMME

ELIMINATING
HAZARDOUS
CHEMICALS
IN SUPPLY
CHAINS



9-11th December 2024
Sofitel Hotel Siem Reap



THE INCEPTION AND LAUNCH WORKSHOP

Co-organized by



GEF-8 INTEGRATED
PROGRAMME

ELIMINATING
HAZARDOUS
CHEMICALS
IN SUPPLY
CHAINS

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Overview

The Elimination of Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains Integrated Programme (Supply Chains IP) tackles the significant environmental footprint of the fashion and construction industries – two of the top three economic sectors driving pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, land degradation and biodiversity loss.

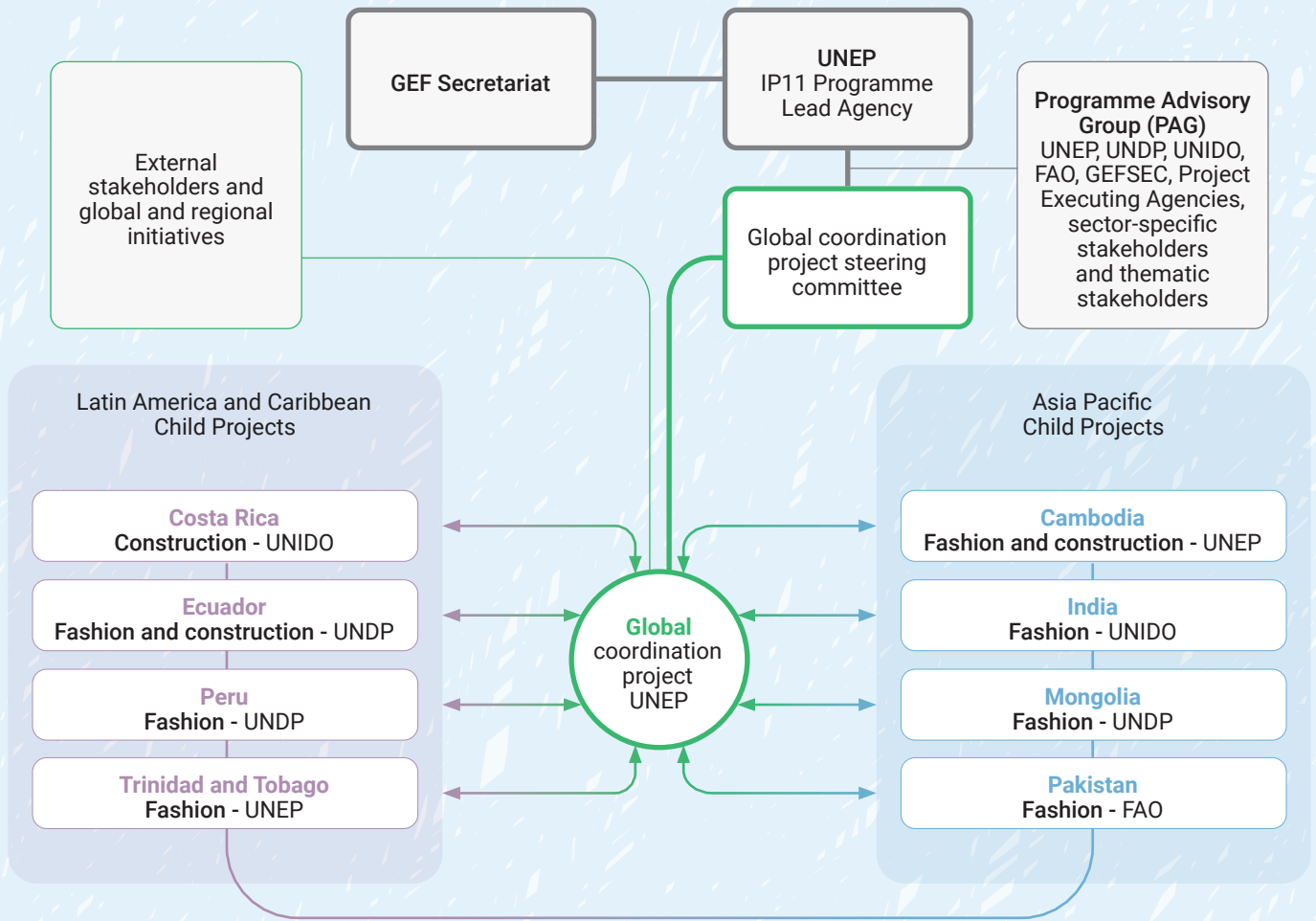
Under the sponsorship of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Ministry of Environment hosted the Launch and Inception Workshop of the GEF-8 Supply Chains IP in Siem Reap, Cambodia from 9-11 December 2024 (Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort). Over 55 attendees joined in person (See Annex 1, attached), with in attendance the GEF secretariat, project country representatives, (Cambodia, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Peru and Trinidad & Tobago), partner implementing agencies the (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Food and Agriculture Organization on the United Nations (FAO)) and other key stakeholders.

The GEF Council approved the programme approach in June 2023, with the implementation of the country-specific child projects expected to take place between 2025 and 2031.

Objectives of the launch and inception

- Launch the GEF-8 Supply Chains IP, engage a wide range of stakeholders and initiate collaborative efforts towards more sustainable supply chains in the global coordination project inception.
- Initiate the engagement and convene potential future Programme Advisory Group (PAG) members, and to facilitate in-depth discussions on thematic topics relevant to the programme.
- Identify pathways to leverage the GEF-8 Supply Chains IP in scaling up transformative actions across target sectors, focusing on impactful, scalable interventions that align with the program's goals and foster sustainable change.
- Generate awareness with GEF Operational Focal Points (OFPs) and National Focal Points on the operational and administrative expectations, including holding the first Project Steering Committee for the global coordination child project (closed session).





Key highlights of the proceedings

- Opening and welcoming remarks from the GEF secretariat, UNEP, a global coordination project co-finance partner and representatives from the Cambodian government.
- UNEP's press release on the launch of the IP (UNEP 2024a).
- Site visits to experience local fashion and construction solutions contributing towards sustainability in Cambodia.
- Showcases of the foreseen work of the IP and its child projects, the priorities of the project countries, and presentation on the implementation strategy, milestones, and expected impact of the global coordination project and the IP.
- Discussions with panellists and meeting participants to explore key topics such as access to finance, transparency and traceability, approaches to communications and policy as an enabler for innovation.

The concept note and detailed agenda for the proceedings of the launch are available online (UNEP 2024b).



Next steps

Following the successful launch, the next phases of the GEF-8 Supply Chains IP and the global coordination project will focus on:

- Developing concrete terms of references for a flexible PAG with a stable core committee and the ability to integrate new expertise and topics.
- Establishing a brand identity for the IP in-consultation with the implementing agencies and the project countries
- Advancing on country project approvals so all country projects to begin by June 2025 to ensure consistency and effective sharing of experiences.
- Creating an independent, interactive platform for information sharing and explore the feasibility of creating an online Community Forum for ongoing engagement.
- Developing grievance mechanisms for all child projects of the IP and quantitative indicators for tracking progress and impact, ensuring alignment with Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) indicators.



Supply chains integrated programme launch

High-level launch

Apoorva Arya, CEO of Circular Innovation Lab (2025) and co-finance partner for the IP's global coordination project moderated the launch, briefly introducing its main objectives. Welcoming remarks were made by *Anil Sookdeo*, Chemicals and Waste Focal Area Coordinator, GEF Secretariat, emphasizing the interconnected challenges of the fashion and construction industries in environmental degradation. The launch was highlighted as a transformative movement aimed at achieving zero waste, integrating nature-based solutions, and transitioning to carbon neutrality through collaboration between governments, businesses, and consumers.

Further opening remarks were heard from made by 4 participants:

-  *Mariano Piñeyrua*, CEO of Ixalab - TraceSurfer (TraceSurfer 2025) and co-finance partner of the global coordination project; discussed the importance of digital product passports in enhancing traceability, sustainability, and transparency, enabling circular economies through scalable technology solutions. He highlighted how technology enables transparency, collaboration across industries, and compliance with regulations, ultimately helping companies and consumers make more sustainable choices.
-  *Mohamed Imam Bakarr*, Integration and Knowledge Management Division Manager, GEF Secretariat; highlighted the GEF's role in addressing environmental challenges through integrated programmes, emphasizing collaboration across sectors and countries to break silos and drive systemic change. He introduced the GEF's new knowledge management division to enhance learning, innovation, and to enhance collective action across the 11 GEF 8 programmes and other ongoing investments, ensuring long-term environmental impact.
-  *Marlene Nilsson*, Asia Pacific Deputy Regional Director, UNEP; stressed the urgent need for sustainable practices in the fashion and construction industries, which significantly contribute to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. She emphasized the IP as a key initiative to transition from linear to circular economies, promote innovative materials, ensure equity, and foster collaboration among stakeholders to drive environmental and social transformation.
-  His Excellency (H.E.) *Lao Tipseiha*, Secretary of State, Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction; emphasized the importance of Cambodia's construction sector for economic growth while acknowledging its environmental challenges, including hazardous chemicals, waste, and reliance on imported



materials. He described the IP as timely and very important for Cambodia's sustainable development and his hope for knowledge exchange, innovative ideas and solutions during the launch.

Keynote speaker H.E. *Sabo Ojano*, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Environment, Cambodia; emphasized the severity of the triple planetary crises, especially from hazardous chemicals in the fashion and construction sectors, stressing the need for action. He referenced Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy and Circular Strategy for sustainable development and endorsed the IP promoting sustainable supply chains and reducing chemical pollution in these sectors and supporting south-south cooperation and regional collaboration. He concluded by emphasizing that sustainable management of chemicals is essential for both human health and environmental protection.



Programme overview

Eloise Touni, UNEP Programme Officer and Task Manager of the IP gave a presentation outlining the objectives and scope of the integrated programme. She highlighted the programme's 5 component structure, working across the whole value chain. She also emphasized the importance of transparency, traceability, and cross-country collaboration, and encouraged active participation for successful programme implementation. *Apoorva Arya* introduced the commonalities between the fashion and construction sectors, discussing examples of the hazardous chemicals and emphasizing their presence across the value chain—from raw material extraction to waste disposal. The presentations provided are available online (UNEP 2024c).

Panel discussion

Panellists

-  *Yiliqi*, Scientist & Senior Manager Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) (NRDC 2025)
-  *Sok Thy*, Founder, Eco-bricks Business (Eco-Bricks 2025)
-  *Zubeida Zwavel*, Founder and executive director, Center for African Resource Efficiency and Sustainability (2023)
-  *Samuil Shiderov*, Blended Finance Expert, UNDP Sustainable Finance Hub (UNDP 2025)

The panel discussion explored the challenges and potential solutions to phasing out hazardous chemicals in the fashion and construction industries. The moderator, *Apoorva Arya*, opened by asking the panellists about the availability and viability of alternatives and whether the right policies and financial infrastructure exist to scale them.

Yiliqi discussed alternatives to toxic chemicals like PFAS, which are used in both fashion and construction, stressing the need for a class-based approach to prevent regrettable substitutions. She highlighted that while alternatives exist, more awareness and effort are needed to ensure their adoption. *Sok Thy* shared insights on his Eco-bricks project, which repurposes plastic waste into eco-friendly bricks, but faced barriers such as quality concerns and the need for better customer education.



Zubeida Zwavel emphasized the importance of lifecycle analysis in driving change in textiles, sharing examples from South Africa where companies are shifting to more sustainable practices after seeing the environmental impacts. *Samuil Shiderov* highlighted the role of blended finance in supporting innovative solutions, explaining how unlocking funding and fostering collaboration between public and private sectors can drive widespread adoption of sustainable alternatives.

Panellists emphasized the importance of government incentives, such as grants and subsidies, to support technological upgrades, especially for smaller companies. For example, for *Sok* a major concern was the economic competitiveness of sustainable products. Several panellists noted that circular products often face stiff competition from cheaper, linear alternatives. *Samuil*, for instance, highlighted how current economic models don't fully capture the environmental benefits of innovative, sustainable products, thus making it harder for such solutions to compete on price.

The panel discussion moved on to discuss challenges and strategies for promoting sustainable business practices, particularly in the context of innovative solutions.

The key themes explored include:

- Need for Government Support and Incentives
- Balancing Social Equity with Environmental Goals
- Gender Inclusion in Sustainability Projects
- Lack of Financing for Sustainable Innovation

Several speakers highlighted the need for government intervention to support green innovations. *Sok* emphasized that access to grants or subsidies, particularly for acquiring new technology, is crucial. These financial aids could make it possible for smaller companies to transition to more sustainable practices. He also mentions the importance of low-interest loans from financial institutions to make such projects financially viable, reducing reliance on high-cost loans with high interest rates.

Zubeida spoke on the intersection of social equity and environmental sustainability, indicating that in South Africa, where her work is focused, balancing economic and environmental goals while tackling poverty is a significant challenge. She stressed the importance of education and community engagement to raise awareness about the benefits of sustainable practices. Additionally, that job creation and upskilling are key elements of their strategy. Companies must ensure that sustainability initiatives do not just benefit the environment but also support the livelihoods of the people involved. *Yiliqi* followed on this expressing how this extends to integrating gender equity in the process, which is demonstrated by *Yiliqi's* textile industry project. She highlighted how women workers are often exposed to toxic chemicals in textile production and advocated for supporting local technological innovations to reduce reliance on expensive international solutions, thereby fostering local capacity building.



There were concerns raised over the lack of financing for sustainable projects by various panellists. *Samuil* added that besides grants, other forms of financial incentives— like carbon taxes and green investments—could also help level the playing field for innovative products. These would allow sustainable products to compete more fairly against cheaper, less environmentally friendly alternatives. He also highlighted the need for financial institutions to reduce the risk for projects that are aligned with sustainability goals.

The discussion's conclusion emphasized the urgency of acting fast to implement sustainable projects, ensuring they are project designed for scalability from the very beginning. Panellists stressed the importance of collaboration, policy changes, and integrating social equity into sustainability efforts. They highlighted the need for quick, adaptable solutions that consider both environmental and social impacts.

Launch closing remarks

The launch was concluded by Eloise Touni who re-emphasized the need for an integrated approach, focusing on bringing in solutions. She highlighted the importance of creative financing, disincentivizing unsustainable practices, and collaborative efforts.



Site visits

On 9 December 2024, in-person participants had the opportunity to visit both a fashion site, the Lotus Farm by Samatao and a Construction Site, Eco-bricks.

Lotus Farm by Samatao, formerly known as Samatao Lotus Textiles, is a social enterprise based in Siem Reap, Cambodia, that showcases innovation in sustainable fashion through its eco-friendly, plant-based textiles, particularly the use of lotus fiber, a natural resource renowned for its remarkable properties. Established in 2003, the company shifted its focus from silk to lotus fiber in 2008, addressing both environmental issues and social inequalities. Participants were able to see how Samatao actively engages local artisans in the processes of fiber extraction and textile production and ask questions directly on the process.



The treatment of lotus fiber is conducted without the use of polluting energy or harmful chemicals, relying instead on a traditional artisanal method. Participants heard how Samatao has garnered international interest from both the luxury sector and various institutions, despite facing production obstacles such as limited capacity and extended lead times.



Eco-bricks, a company dedicated to transforming large quantities of plastic waste into "Eco-Bricks". Participants heard how in response to customer demand and to enhance the upcycling of waste, Eco-Bricks, has franchised its model to ten new enterprises. This business approach has contributed to minimizing plastic waste that would otherwise be thrown away or burned, a process that emits toxic fumes detrimental to both human and animal health and contributes to air pollution.



This enterprise processes between 2 and 3 tonnes of plastic waste each month by grinding the plastic into a fine powder and combining it with raw materials such as soil, sand, and cement. Participants witnessed the process by which this mixture is then pressed into molds to create bricks. Instead of utilizing kiln-dried wood for drying the bricks, the production method employs a water technique and a non-drying chamber. This approach both prevents deforestation but also lowers production costs, producing bricks with a lifespan exceeding 100 years that are five to six times stronger than conventional red clay bricks.

The visits provided a valuable learning experience, seeing local and real-world solutions contributing towards sustainability. Participants left with enhanced knowledge of the eco-friendly production of lotus fiber textiles, learning about its chemical-free artisanal process and international market challenges. Also, how plastic waste can be transformed into durable bricks at Eco-Bricks, reducing deforestation and the immediate burden of discarded plastic. Both visits highlighted the potential of circular economy models in addressing environmental and social challenges through local solutions.



Global inception workshop

The global inception workshop was a key moment for the Supply Chains IP. Gathering IAs, EAs, co-financing partners and other stakeholders for the first time to discuss the global coordination project, and country projects of the IP. Over 45 Participants convened to exchange ideas, deepen their understanding of the IP, identify key topics for the Global project and the IP to address and point to collaboration opportunities.

Participants received an overview of the Global Coordination Project (UNEP 2024c) and had the opportunity to engage directly with representatives from countries, EAs, and IAs while discussing posters detailing the respective country's project (UNEP 2024d). The national priorities from 7 of the 8 project countries were heard from either the national focal points or OFPs.

A panel discussion and simultaneous, rotating breakout group discussions explored three key themes: sustainable materials and processes, creating enabling environments to support responsible innovation and access to finance. Participants actively contributed to each of these discussion topics and finished with a discussion on the global coordination project's plans to establish a programme advisory group.

Overview of the global coordination project

Tapiwa Nxele, project manager of the global coordination project, UNEP introduced the global coordination project, emphasizing collaboration, sustainability, and sector-wide transformation in fashion and construction. The project focuses on knowledge and learning, communication, capacity building and fostering collaboration. Financial and demand side incentives, supply chain transparency and traceability and policy, governance and enforcement were all highlighted as important thematic focuses for the project.

The project will support country child projects as a unifying communications, coordination and knowledge management platform. This includes creating online and in-person communities of practice, discussion forums, ensuring presence at global and regional events, and publishing experiences, lessons and solutions from the programme countries and beyond.

A discussion with the meeting participants emphasized the need for inclusive, consultative branding to ensure shared ownership across stakeholders. Participants stressed that knowledge-sharing platforms must be dynamic and accessible rather than static. Industry collaboration, particularly with existing partnerships, was highlighted as crucial for project success. The discussion reinforced the programme's ambition to be larger than the sum of its parts and funding, urging strong positioning in global supply chains. Concerns about hazardous chemicals, social compliance, and vulnerable workers underscored the importance of holistic approaches. Lastly, the evolving role of the global coordination project was noted, from knowledge intake to external dissemination, ensuring lasting impact beyond the programme's duration.



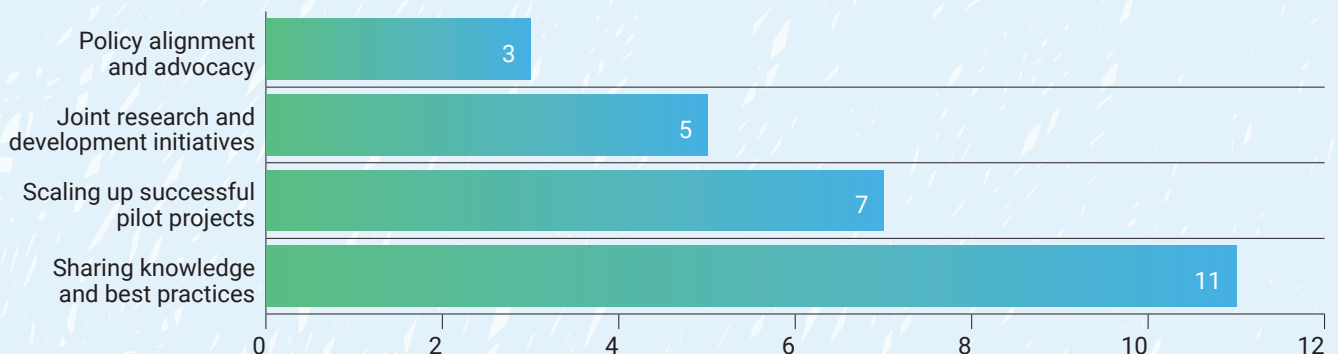


Project posters and stakeholder views

Tapiwa invited participants to explore the country project posters and engage in direct discussions. Country project posters are available online (UNEP 2024d). A mentimeter survey was opened for responses from participants during and after the poster presentations. Below are summaries of responses received.

Potential for collaboration: When asked “where they saw the greatest potential for collaboration between the projects?”, participants indicated that the greatest potential for collaboration lies in knowledge sharing, followed by scaling up pilot projects.

1. Areas of greatest potential for collaboration between the country projects?



Participants were also asked to provide qualitative answers about how they anticipate engaging with the child projects. Similar to question 1 above, sharing knowledge was the most common response provided. There was a strong call as well for collaboration and engagement and providing tools across different topics and sectors.

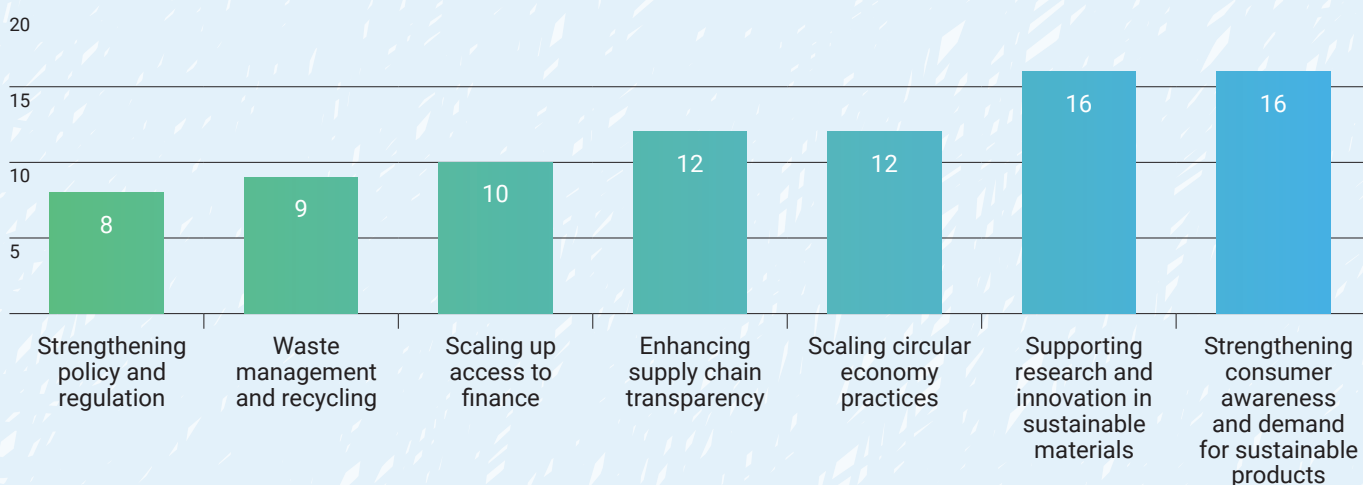
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How do you see yourself, your project or organization engaging with one or more of these child projects? (18 responses)

- Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building (6)
- Engagement with Industry and Stakeholders (4)
- Policy, Advocacy, and Guidance (4)
- Construction sector environmental Impacts (2)
- Access to finance for farming communities (1)
- Textile sector digital product passports (1)

Priorities for sustainability: When asked 'Which area should be prioritized to achieve sustainable supply chains in the fashion and construction industries?', participants strongly favored Supporting research and innovation in sustainable materials and strengthening consumer awareness and demand for sustainable products.

3. Priorities to achieve sustainable supply chains in the fashion and construction industries



Long-term transformative change: When asked about their long-term transformative change expectations from the global coordination project, responses were grouped into 6 categories. Answers indicated that participants anticipate significant long-term changes to be driven by the global coordination project, with a strong emphasis on replicating and scaling solutions, as well as knowledge sharing and capacity building such as developing technical guide amplifying individual outcomes. Specific examples were given on improving transparency, regulatory alignment and adopting best practices.

3

What long-term transformative change do you expect from the global coordination project?(40 responses)

- Replicability, Scalability & Industry Collaboration (9)
- Knowledge Sharing, Capacity Building (7)
- Circular Economy and Systems Change (7)
- Sustainable Supply Chains & Behavior Change (6)
- Chemicals, Materials & Environmental Impact (6)
- Policy, Standards & Regulation (5)

National priorities

In this session the GEF OFPs and national focal points were invited to share insights on them. Representatives from Ecuador were not available to make an intervention, however, a written submission was made by email exchange.

Country Intervention

Costa Rica

Jose Alberto Rodríguez Ledezma, Ministry of Environment and Energy

Costa Rica's intervention outlined national priorities for sustainable construction through research on bio-based materials, cleaner production, environmental labelling, demonstration pilots, hazardous chemical guidelines, training, a sustainable materials platform, and extended producer responsibility. These efforts align with national strategies like the Decarbonization Plan and Circular Economy Strategy, aiming to improve environmental performance and circularity in the construction sector.

Costa Rica also emphasizes integrating sustainability into public procurement, mapping stakeholder practices for hazardous substances, and developing extended producer responsibility guidelines. These efforts aim to reduce environmental impact, promote transparency, and align with broader national climate and circular economy goals.

Ecuador

Daniel Donoso, Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition

Ecuador's intervention focused on reducing CO₂ emissions and hazardous chemicals (e.g., PFAS, UPOPs, PCBs) in the fashion and construction sectors. Ecuador seeks to enable a regulatory environment, foster circular business models, strengthen financing, build capacity, and promote alternative materials.

Ecuador expects to stimulate innovation in sustainable materials and practices, create markets for eco-friendly products, and enhance transparency in supply chains. Collaboration with academia, financial institutions, and global programmes will support these goals, aligning with national decarbonization and pollution reduction efforts.



Country Intervention

Peru

*Dallas Noelia Gonzales
Malca, Ministry of
Environment*

Peru prioritizes transforming its textile sector into a sustainable, circular industry by reducing toxic substances, promoting eco-friendly practices, and advancing circularity. Key goals include adopting circular economy models, developing national regulations, and improving resource efficiency.

Specific needs include cleaner production pilots, eco-design, eco-labelling, and tailored financial mechanisms for SMEs. Peru also seeks global collaboration to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, persistent organic pollutants, and scale sustainable practices for fibers like cotton and alpaca, aiming for a competitive, environmentally responsible textile industry.

Trinidad and Tobago

*Hayden Romano,
Environmental
Management Authority*

Trinidad and Tobago's intervention focuses on aligning with national policies, including the 2018 Environmental Policy, 2023 sustainable procurement legislation, and 2034 waste policies. Key priorities include pollution control, circular economy, and sustainable development, particularly for carnival. Expectations include raising stakeholder awareness, building a knowledge framework, and transitioning to a circular business model for carnival.

Specific needs are knowledge sharing, research, capacity building, and monitoring. The country seeks global collaboration to share strategies and address cultural relevance while promoting sustainability in carnival and waste management.

Cambodia

*Sophal Laska, Ministry
of Environment*

Cambodia's national priorities align with its Pentagonal Strategy, focusing on growth, equity, sustainability, and efficiency, supported by policies like the Sustainable Consumption and Production Roadmap, Circular Economy Strategy, and 2050 Carbon Neutrality Goal. Key sectors include fashion and construction, which face challenges in complying with regulations. Cambodia expects the project to strengthen policy implementation, engage the private sector, and balance environmental protection with economic growth.

Specific needs include capacity building, data management, and knowledge-sharing platforms to meet international standards and achieve sustainable development goals.



Country Intervention

India

Amit Vashishtha,
Ministry of Environment,
Forest and Climate
Change

Gopal Bhushal, Ministry
of Textiles

India's intervention focuses on eliminating hazardous chemicals from the fashion supply chain, aligning with its environmental laws, international commitments, and the Ministry of Textiles' priorities. The textile sector, India's second-largest employer, contributes 2-3% to GDP and 4% to global textile trade. Challenges include excessive chemical use and resource intensity.

The project targets eight textile hubs and four fashion houses to optimize processes, reduce harmful chemicals, and promote sustainability. With strong government and industry support, India aims to enhance capacity, empower women (60% of the workforce), and achieve gender equality while meeting environmental and economic goals.

Mongolia

Battulga Erkhembayar,
Ministry of Environment
and Climate Change

Mongolia prioritizes transitioning to sustainable supply chains in cashmere, wool, and leather, aligned with its Vision 2050 and White Gold Initiative. Key challenges include pollution, ecosystem damage, and hazardous chemical use.

Mongolia seeks global collaboration to improve traceability, reduce chemicals, and enhance raw material quality, aiming to access high-value markets and boost rural livelihoods. The programme supports commitments to the Paris Agreement and Stockholm Convention, fostering sustainable industries, public health, and global competitiveness through cleaner production and international partnerships.

Pakistan

Sheharyar Tahir, Small
and Medium Enterprises
Development Authority
(SMEDA)

Pakistan's textile sector is heavily reliant on cotton. The priority is in finding alternatives that are less hazardous, water-efficient, and pesticide-free through this project. Key focuses include adopting green supply chains, minimizing chemical use, and reducing waste.

Pakistan is exploring banana pseudo-stem fibers combined with natural fibers to create sustainable textiles and expand into global value chains. A key achievement is the near-finalized deal to supply banana-based textiles to Trinidad and Tobago. The project aligns with Pakistan's goals of sustainability, innovation, and global market integration.



Panel discussion

Panelists and topics

- + **Stewart Muir**, Senior Technical Consultant, Bioregional (2025) – *“Suitable solutions for harmful materials and processes”*
- + **Rowena Maguire**, Professor and Director of Centre for Justice, Queensland University of Technology (2025) – *“Creating enabling policy environments to support responsible innovation”*
- + **Samuil Shiderov**, Blended Finance Expert, UNDP Sustainable Finance Hub (UNDP 2025) – *“Access to finance from commercial and development banks for supporting sustainable practices”*

The panel discussion explored key topics surrounding sustainable practices in sectors, with a focus on scaling material solutions, enabling policies, and securing finance. Moderated by Apoorva Arya, the discussion began with questions about examples of successful sustainable solutions, policies for improving market access, and the role of finance in scaling these initiatives.

Stewart Muir shared examples from his experience, discussing specific cases of Green Public Procurement (GPP) influencing product development, such as chemically safer adhesives, wallboard, and furniture, as well as the role of cost-competitive options and extended contracts in making these solutions viable. **Rowena Maguire** highlighted her current work point exploring gaps in environmental permitting for textile factories, the lack of strict chemical regulations, and ongoing efforts to map and analyze national and global policies. She emphasized the need for global cooperation to ensure effective regulation across the textile value chain. **Samuil Shiderov** explained that aligning capital with SDGs requires both regulation and financial mobilization. He highlighted challenges in regulating global value chains and the need to balance regulation with improved access to finance. There was emphasis made on transitioning from “funding” to “financing”, noting that investments are necessary to replace harmful chemicals.





Apoorva shifted the discussion to the need for fair, inclusive market mechanisms to scale innovative solutions reflecting true product costs, and how industries can collaborate without fearing compliance. *Rowena* referenced the “smart regulation theory”, emphasizing the involvement of multiple stakeholders in regulation and the requirement for various regulatory tools—legislation, economic instruments, voluntary mechanisms, and behaviour change strategies. She stressed the importance of scaling the right projects, noting some initiatives may serve local goals over large-scale expansion, with the example given of the Lotus farm site visit. *Stewart* emphasized the importance of a level playing field, supported by standards and test methods. He highlighted the need for voluntary standards, collaboration among industries, and a shared vision for the industry’s future, with government cooperation to drive outcomes.

Samuil discussed de-risking investments in innovative projects, explaining that they often involve subsidizing innovative projects to prove concepts and gather data, making them more viable for financing. He noted that subsidies help reduce risks, especially in sectors like garments or circular economy projects, by sharing the investment burden. He also emphasized the importance of tailoring de-risking strategies, like guarantees, and cautioned against an over-reliance on grants as they can distort markets.

Apoorva also raised the issue of social inclusion and equity, and *Rowena* emphasized the importance of policy tools, such as procurement laws, tax breaks, and subsidy reforms for unsustainable practices. She advocated for mandating legislation like the EU Due Diligence Directive, which integrates human rights and environmental considerations in business practices to avoid siloed approaches.



The discussion concluded with an active Q&A, where participants raised questions about regulating harmful chemicals, particularly in industries with informal economies. Stewart emphasized digital product passports for supply chain transparency, combining top-down policies with bottom-up initiatives. Rowena and Samuil discussed strategies for overcoming policy barriers, while also advocating for tailored regulations for SMEs to ensure compliance without overwhelming smaller businesses.

Key take-away messages from the discussion

1. Successful transition to sustainable practices requires collaboration across industries, governments, and stakeholders, with policies, incentives, and regulation playing key roles in ensuring alignment.
2. To scale innovative solutions, governments and financial institutions must focus on de-risking strategies while also fostering research, development, and industry collaboration to maximize impact.
3. Smart regulation combining various legal tools, is crucial to address harmful materials, and an integrated policy approach is required to create effective frameworks.



Key actionable recommendations from the discussion

1. To enhance market access and supply chain transparency, promote fair market mechanisms, voluntary standards, and digital product passports to create a level playing field and improve traceability in global value chains.
2. To facilitate financing and de-risk investments, shift from grants to financing models that support scaling sustainable innovations, including subsidies, guarantees, and blended finance strategies to attract private investment.
3. To strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks, advocate for smart regulations, including procurement laws, tax incentives, and due diligence directives, to drive sustainable practices and ensure compliance without burdening SMEs.

Thematic breakouts

The panel discussion was followed by a series of 3 simultaneous breakout group discussions chaired by the panelists of the previous session. The breakout sessions lasted for 90 minutes and participants were given an opportunity to engage on a topic of their choice. Every 25-30 minutes, participants were requested to change breakout group tables allowing everyone a chance to engaged on each of the three discussion topics.



The breakout groups on “*suitable solutions for harmful materials and processes*” demonstrated that there is a need for a multi-pronged approach to address harmful materials and processes, combining innovative design, robust policy frameworks, and collaborative practices. The discussions underscored the importance of ensuring affordability, defining clear responsibilities, and fostering open innovation to create impactful, sustainable solutions.

The following 5 actionable recommendations came out from the discussions in sustainable materials, to:

- enhance policy frameworks by promoting the wider use of LCA and establish essential use criteria.
- support SMEs by developing funding mechanisms and grant facilities to assist SMEs in adopting new materials.
- strengthen collaboration and explore collaborative patent models to encourage open innovation.
- introduce clear labelling and educational campaigns to build public understanding of material impacts.
- develop shared criteria for what constitutes ‘scalable’ solutions in sustainable material use.

The breakout groups on “*creating enabling policy environments to support responsible innovation*” looked at identifying regulatory and policy frameworks necessary for advancing the circular economy, with delegates sharing insights and challenges based on their national contexts. Discussions also underscored the importance of integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations into policy frameworks. Participants agreed on the need for a balanced approach that encourages compliance through incentives rather than punitive measures, strengthens inter-agency coordination, enhances private sector collaboration and ensures policy continuity beyond political cycles.

The following 5 actionable recommendations came out from the discussions on policy, to:

- strengthen policy implementation through concrete action plans, inter-ministerial collaboration and assigning technical experts for long-term policy continuity.
- engage SMEs in policy design, improve transparency on the classification of hazardous substances, and use market incentives to drive compliance.
- support developing nations with localized policies, stronger enforcement on banned substances, and a just transition for vulnerable populations.
- adopt best practices from other nations and the “polluter pays” principle and consolidated legal frameworks, e.g. a “One Model Act”.
- align economic, social, and environmental policies while ensuring local adaptability of international conventions.



The breakout groups on “access to finance from commercial and development banks for supporting sustainable practices” emphasized that grants should be used for pilot projects and data collection, not long-term financing. Scaling sustainable practices requires a shift to commercial funding through blended finance, involving development banks, venture capital, and impact investors to de-risk investments. It was pointed out that businesses need to understand financial markets, value chains, and tailor their financing strategies accordingly. In addition, international organizations can bridge knowledge gaps, support financial structuring, and engage brands in co-financing sustainability efforts.



The following 5 actionable recommendations came out from the discussions on access to finance, to:

- provide training on financing instruments like green loans and sustainability-linked bonds.
- leverage multiple funding sources (development banks, impact investors, venture capital) and strengthen financial institutions' capacity to support sustainable projects.
- improve financial literacy, structure projects to attract investment, and align business strategies with investor requirements.
- advocate for government-backed de-risking measures, credit enhancements, and clear green finance taxonomies to guide investors.
- engage brands as impact investors, use corporate sustainability commitments to secure funding, and encourage co-financing for sustainable supply chain transitions.

Programme Advisory Group

Ludovic Bernaudat, head of the Knowledge and Risk Unit, introduced the concept of the PAG in relation to the supply chains IP, and its role in ensuring programme cohesion, engaging stakeholders, and guiding child projects. *Ludovic* emphasized the PAG's role in providing coherence, transparency, and financial guidance. The global coordination project will generate guiding documents for country projects, which will require peer review and external stakeholder input, which is where the PAG plays a role.

Participants questions focused on membership size, incentives, and coordination. They discussed collaboration, the challenges of voluntary engagement with the private sector, and sector-specific concerns. The discussion highlighted the need for

- collaboration across regional projects (Asia & Africa Textile Projects) and a sustainable knowledge-sharing platform.
- conducting a social impact assessment alongside environmental concerns.
- ensuring knowledge transfer across agricultural sectors, with an example given on the portance of eliminating hazardous chemicals in cotton production.

In conclusion to the session, *Mohamed Imam Bakarr* emphasized the need for flexible programme governance to prevent projects from becoming outdated. He advocated for a stable core steering committee and an adaptive advisory group to integrate new expertise. He noted that without flexibility, programmes risk isolation and urged a dynamic approach, likening it to a balloon interacting with external changes.

Inception closing remarks

Eloise Touni thanked participants for their active engagement and highlighted the event's success in fostering connections. She emphasized the importance of prioritizing key discussion outcomes, thanked the hosts in Cambodia, and wished departing participants well.



Closed session inception workshop

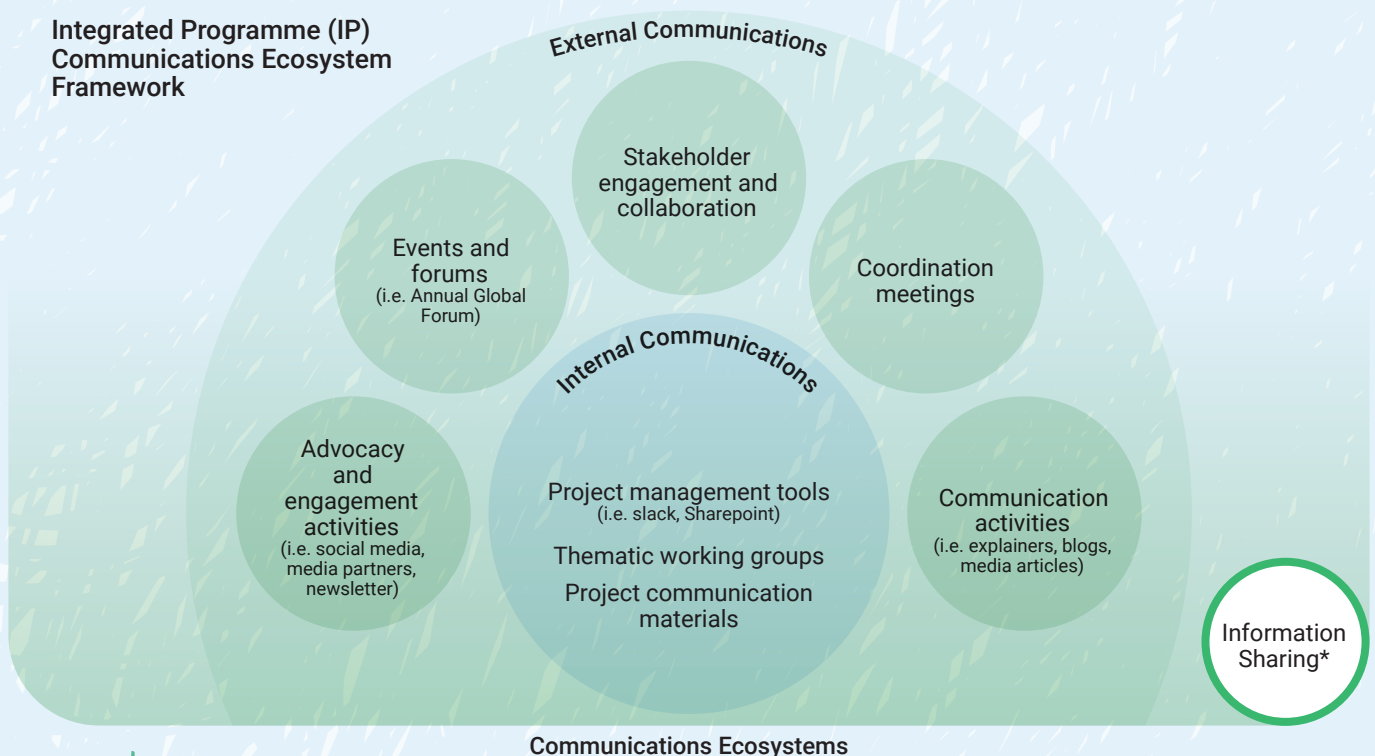
Eloise Touni opened the session and outlined the final day's agenda, emphasizing the need for active participation in the following discussions on the Global Child Project, knowledge management, communications and implementation. She urged attendees to voice concerns and provide honest feedback to ensure realistic and effective implementation.

Deep dive on global coordination

Global coordination project – knowledge management and communications

Tapiwa Nxele, presented in-depth details on the global coordination project (UNEP 2024e). Key elements covered include ensuring consistent IP branding, designing a knowledge management platform, integrating gender analysis, and promoting innovation. *Tapiwa* emphasized the importance of regular reassessment of communication strategies and the need for continuous stakeholder mapping. He outlined the planned in-person and online events to be held throughout the programme.

Figure 1: Strategic framework for the IP communications ecosystem of internal and external communication engagement activities to facilitate two-way communications, collaboration, knowledge sharing.



In the pursuant discussion, participants shared experiences and suggestions for the project. The interventions focused on developing and refining communication strategies early, including translation support to enhance stakeholder engagement, establishing an independent platform for information usage, and incorporate a grievance mechanism into the stakeholder engagement plan. Recommendations were made to align in-person events with other international events to minimize scheduling conflicts and to evaluate the development of an online interactive Community Forum, looking at their sustainability and potential for ongoing.

Principles for functioning as a “knowledge platform”

Mohammed Imam Bakarr, gave a presentation on the importance of a global platform for the success of environmental programmes and to achieve meaningful transformation (UNEP 2024e). He emphasized the need for a platform that goes beyond just coordinating child projects and creates real value for countries and agencies. The goals are to foster integration across sectors and initiatives, mobilize catalytic funding, and facilitate collective action, knowledge sharing, and capacity building.

Mohammed described the foundational principles for such the platform, which are aimed at ensuring a structured approach, and highlighted the interconnectedness of different programmes, such as the net zero and nature-positive initiatives and sustainable cities. He acknowledged that this ambitious goal would take time, effort, and collaboration, but the foundation exists to ensure the success of the platform and the programmes it supports. Participants discussed the intersection between the fashion and construction sectors in terms of impacts. It was emphasized that while the sectors are different, they share challenges, e.g. related to procurement, chemicals, and materials, especially those connected to agriculture. The importance of addressing human health was also highlighted by participants as a key underlying goal which has a challenge of quantifying health impacts.

Alternative approaches to learning and communication

Hartmut Koenitz, Professor in Media Technology at Södertörn University (2025) and *Vrinda Mathur*, Principal Designer at VrindaMathur (2025) joined online to talk about alternative approaches to learning and communication.

Hartmut presented on the power of Interactive Digital Narratives (IDNs) as tools for enhancing learning, system thinking, and understanding complex problems (UNEP 2024e). He explained how traditional, linear narratives (e.g., TV broadcasts and newspaper articles) struggle to represent complexity due to their unchangeable nature. *Hartmut* made the point that IDNs, where the audience has an active role in shaping the narrative, can address these limitations by offering multiple perspectives, decision-making opportunities, and personalized experiences. He highlighted several examples of existing IDNs used to teach about complex topics, such as peacekeeping simulations, human rights violations, and infectious disease outbreaks. Enabling users to explore different outcomes through decisions allows for experiential learning and a deeper understanding of complex issues that can be adapted to different cultural contexts.



Vrinda spoke on harnessing emotion-driven narratives for sustainability to bridge the gap between intention and action gap (UNEP 2024e). She emphasized the importance of human-centered approaches in creating lasting change, and the importance of communicating sustainability in a way that resonates emotionally with audiences. Noting that consumers increasingly demand transparency and action beyond superficial greenwashing, Vrinda introduced the design thinking question *“How might we leverage emotion-driven narratives to advance circularity goals and inspire meaningful action?”*

She outlined three essential elements for effective design-led storytelling: context and adaptability, community, and creativity. These elements ensure that sustainability narratives are culturally relevant, engage the target audience, and foster creative solutions. Vrinda also shared three strategies she uses to drive behaviour change.

1. Reconnecting with nature: Encouraging people to act on their environmental appreciation by directly linking nature to personal actions.
2. Making the invisible visible: Highlighting overlooked issues (e.g., wetland protection) by embedding history and scientific data into public spaces.
3. Flipping the narrative: Turning negative stories into positive, resilient ones, fostering hope and action in the face of challenges.

In a discussion with the participants, both speakers stressed the importance of engaging with local communities to ensure narratives are culturally relevant and inclusive. Hartmut pointed out the flexibility of interactive narratives to present multiple perspectives, allowing users to explore different viewpoints. Vrinda also suggested integrating educational elements to help audiences discern between misinformation and reliable sources.

IP implementation

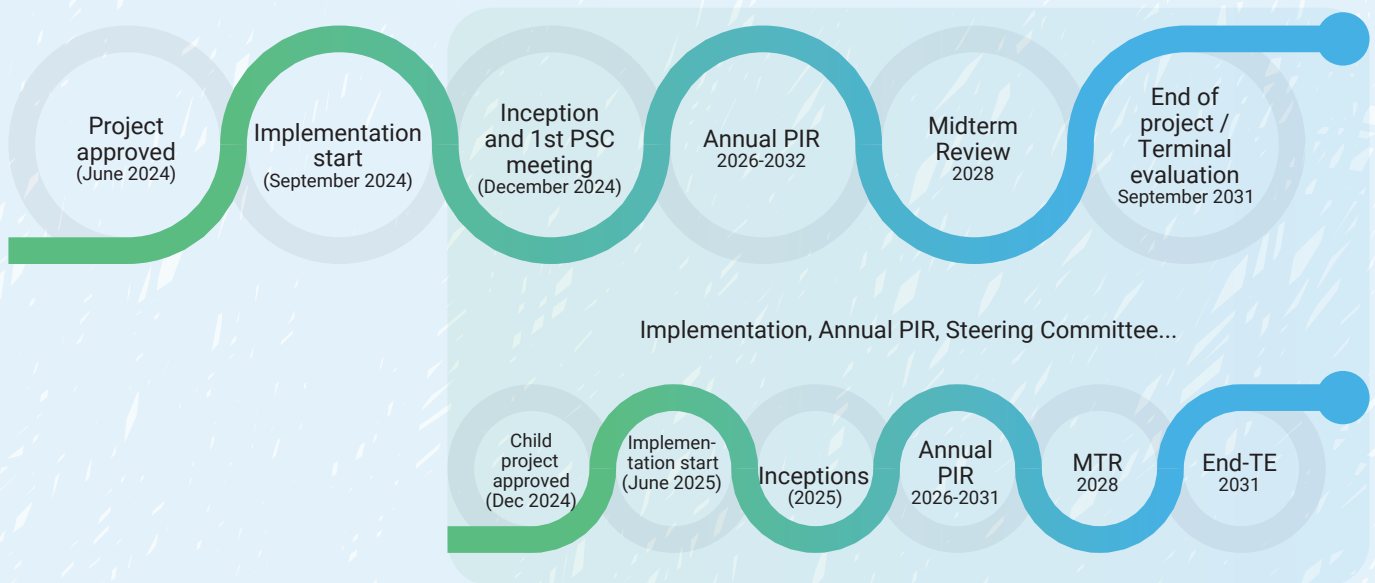
Timeline

Eloise Touni gave a presentation on the timeline and coordination of the global and country child projects and emphasized the importance of synchronizing the projects to ensure a smooth implementation (UNEP 2024e). It highlighted that the global coordination project will run until September 2031, with annual reporting, a midterm review in 2028, and a final evaluation. She highlighted the necessity for all country projects to begin by June 2025 to ensure consistency and effective sharing of experiences. Eloise also stressed the need for timely approvals, strong reporting, and collaboration between countries and agencies, with all progress shared through the knowledge management platform.

The discussion with participants focused on clarifying project reporting requirements, implementation timelines, and challenges related to the approval and signing processes in different countries, which in some cases will involve approvals across various government entities. As a next step, implementing agencies were encouraged to start preparing documents for signature as early as possible.



Figure 2: Global Coordination Project cycle



M&E framework

Eloise discussed the programmatic M&E framework, emphasizing the need for a structured approach to track progress. She outlined the programme's goal of transforming fashion and construction supply chains and how M&E will aggregate individual project results while incorporating additional metrics to measure overall impact. A specialized task force will develop quantitative indicators to track improvements in material use, circular business models, and pollution reduction, ensuring long-term measurable transformation and leveraging existing corporate reporting frameworks to avoid excessive reporting burdens.

Meeting participants discussed aligning of the indicators of the project with the GFC indicators, developing grievance mechanisms and the importance of setting and refining targets early rather than waiting for midterm reviews. There was a call for clear definitions and methodologies to ensure consistency across projects and it was explained that data would come from both bottom-up (child projects) and top-down (global databases, brands, value chains). A suggestion was made that future programmes should integrate programme-level indicators from the design phase to ensure alignment with child projects from the start.



Coordination synergies

The GEF Secretariat was invited to comment on coordination synergies and in connecting with the other integrated programmes. *Anil Sookdeo* highlighted a direct interface with the construction sector and the Sustainable Cities IP and the Plastics IP through its focus on packaging and the link with construction plastics. He stressed that learning from these various sectors would help in adopting best practices across programs. It was highlighted that other existing programmes, such as the agriculture IP, provide insights into transitioning towards hazard-free agriculture. *Anil* further noted that within this specific IP, participating countries need to ensure synergy between different projects. Some projects focus on production, while others address youth engagement, and it is essential to find ways to integrate their efforts and to integrate as part of a broader framework.

Executing agency information session:

GEF-Asia textiles project and lessons learned

- + *Yiliqi*, Scientist & Senior Manager, NRDC (2025)
- + *Sophie Hiltner*, Key Account Manager, GoBlu (2025)
- + *Lars Doemer*, Managing director, GoBlu

Yiliqi introduced the GEF Asia Textiles Project, highlighting four focus areas, particularly chemical mapping and prioritizing persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Beyond POPs, additional chemical criteria established led to a concern list of over 14,000 substances. The team collaborated with GoBlu and its Bhive platform (BHive 2025) to refine the list using existing datasets.

Sophie Hiltner and *Lars Doemer* from GoBlu presented an industry assessment of hazardous chemicals in textile production. Based on data from 2,000+ factories across 63 countries, the study analyzed 700,000+ data points from the beehive chemical management platform which enables factories to upload and analyse their chemical inventories for compliance with industry standards like the ZDHC MRSL. Key findings showed only 45% of factories disclosed CAS numbers, and 20% of chemicals contained hazardous substances. Transparency issues persist, requiring further analysis. GoBlu aims to refine the study by February, emphasizing improved chemical safety in global textile production.



Participants discussed data accuracy, challenges in reporting, and the importance of cautious interpretation. The need for improved data collection and future analysis to close gaps in chemical disclosures was emphasized. It was noted that factories supplying international brands tend to have better chemical compliance but acknowledged gaps in

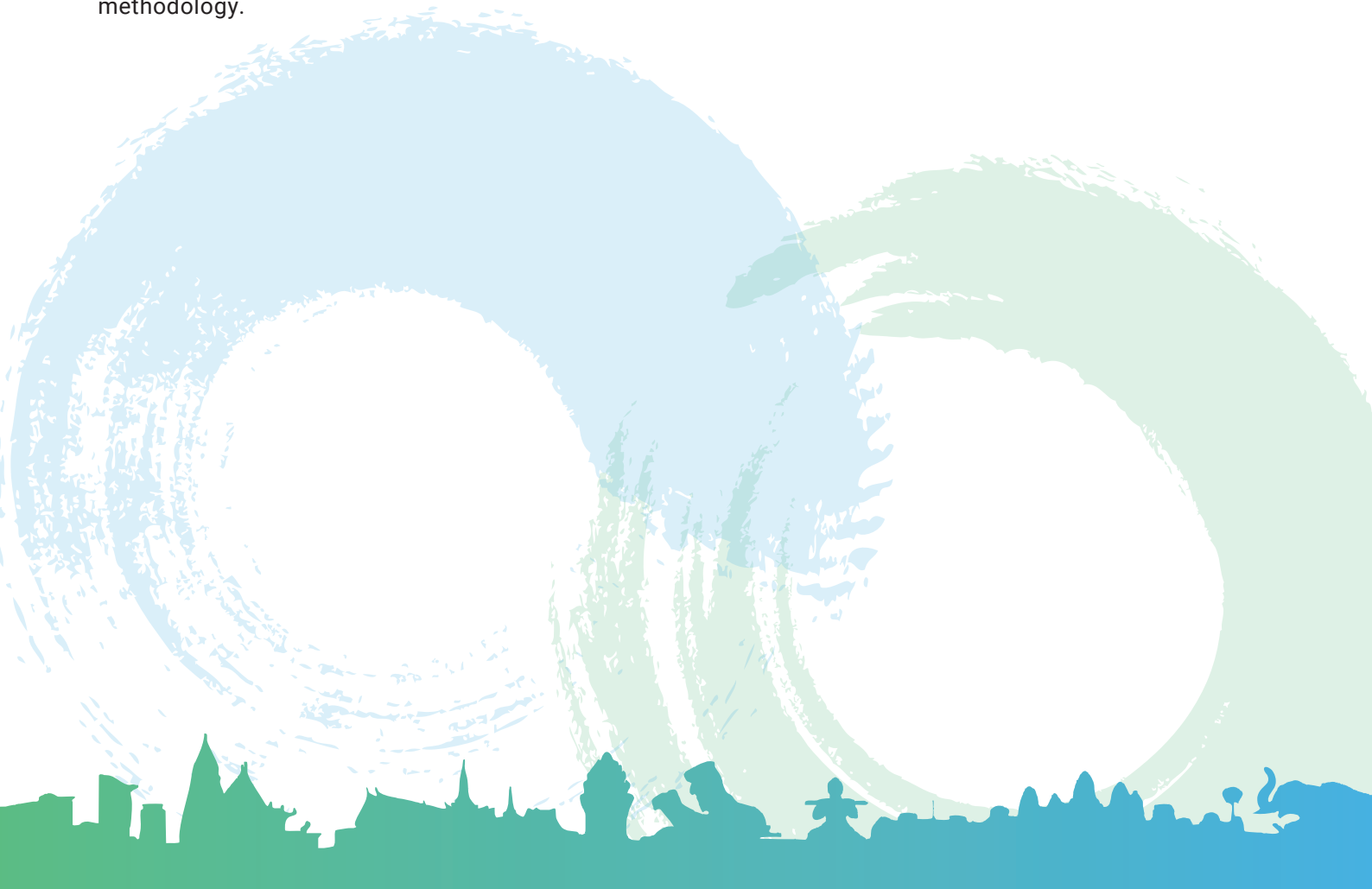
self-reporting. The discussion concluded with agreement on the need for stronger policies and data verification, recognizing this study as an important first step towards improving chemical transparency.

Yiliqi finalized with a presentation on the key challenges and learnings from their project. The main challenges included defining a clear project scope, identifying key national partners, and securing support from international initiatives. Data collection was difficult due to limited availability, varying timelines, and differing priorities among stakeholders. Ensuring proper training, balancing technical language, and engaging brands and suppliers were crucial for success. Moving forward, collaboration across brands, suppliers, and governments is essential to achieving chemical reduction targets in a structured, practical manner.

Executing agency – procedures and expectations

Ludovic Bernaudat led the last session providing guidance on procedures and expectations for the integrated program. He emphasized the importance of coordinated project execution, noting that projects officially begin when the EA receives funds. He shared details on the network of project managers that will be established, the unified communication strategy to ensure program visibility and the single website hosting country-specific pages. Reporting expectations were also detailed, including quarterly progress, annual reports and PIRs to be sent to the global project team and the midterm evaluation coordination. Finally underscored the importance of establishing a grievance mechanism.

Additional inputs were given by participants during the open discussion. In particular to plan ahead and consider initiating TORs and recruitments for key personnel ahead of June 2025, e.g. the project managers. EAs were urged to stick to their budgets, and maintain clear financial accountability, to employ a clear and structured procurement and recruitment methodology.



Conclusion

The meeting emphasized the need for strategic coordination and alignment across projects in the fashion, construction, and related sectors to drive transformative change. Key action points included establishing a structured monitoring and evaluation framework with clear indicators, integrating grievance mechanisms, and ensuring early alignment of project indicators to maintain consistency and transparency.

Discussions on policy, finance, and transparency highlighted the importance of enabling policies to improve market access and financing mechanisms to scale sustainable initiatives. It was noted that de-risking investments through subsidies and guarantees could help mobilize capital for innovative solutions. Participants stressed the need for clear, inclusive market mechanisms and cross-sector collaboration, with a highlight made on plastics and agriculture in addition to fashion and construction, to share best practices and promote a holistic approach.

The meeting also underlined the need for flexibility in program execution, with a focus on open stakeholder engagement and dynamic communication strategies. Gender and social equity were emphasized, particularly through community-driven solutions. The importance of fostering public-private partnerships, securing catalytic funding, and adopting innovative solutions such as interactive digital narratives to inspire behaviour change was also discussed. Furthermore, aligning the project with international sustainability frameworks and continuously reassessing goals will ensure it remains responsive to emerging challenges, fostering long-term, scalable impact.

Finally, proactive planning in recruitment, budget management, and financial accountability was identified as crucial for timely execution.



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