

How to engage with the **Green Climate Fund**



Why this paper?

As the impacts of climate change intensify and Official Development Assistance resources decline, the interest of developing countries in accessing alternative funding sources is growing. At the same time, development actors – particularly the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation – have built experience and expertise that create opportunities to replicate and scale up successful interventions through dedicated international climate funds. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Adaptation Fund (AF), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) play complementary roles in international climate finance. The funds differ, however, in their mandates, thematic focuses, access modalities, governance structures, and funding instruments.

This paper provides:

- basic knowledge about the Green Climate Fund and considerations for working with the fund
- guidance for SDC staff and development partners on how to complement and support access to GCF funding.

About the Green Climate Fund

Formally established in 2010 by the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the GCF is the largest global fund dedicated to fighting climate change. It supports developing countries in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and in adapting to climate change. Since 2015, it has approved 353 projects for a total value of 80 billion dollars – 20 billion from the

GCF and the rest in co-financing from various sources. The GCF uses a range of financial instruments including grants, loans, equity, results-based payments, guarantees, and debt swaps.

Further information on the GCF is available on the official GCF website ([Green Climate Fund](#)).

What the Green Climate Fund does

Funding of projects:

The GCF finances climate change mitigation and adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries.¹ The GCF is mandated to invest 50 per cent of its resources in mitigation and 50 per cent in adaptation. For adaptation, it has a special focus on Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and African States. While the GCF aims for geographical balance, it has not set any country-specific allocations or caps. The GCF has eight result areas – four in mitigation and four in adaptation.

- Find an overview of the GCF project portfolio on the [Portfolio dashboard](#)
- Learn more about [GCF-approved projects](#)

¹ Eligible countries for GCF finance are Non-Annex I Parties to the UN Climate Convention: [Parties | UNFCCC](#). The Paris Agreement invites developing countries to also contribute to international climate finance.

Project proposals fall into one of four GCF project sizes: less than USD 10 million (micro), USD 10–50 million (small), USD 50–250 (medium) and more than USD 250 million (large).² Currently, approximately 90 per cent of all funded projects have a size of USD 10 million or more.

Figure 1: The eight GCF result areas.



Source: GCF, design adaptation by Zoi Environment Network

Empowering countries to access the GCF:

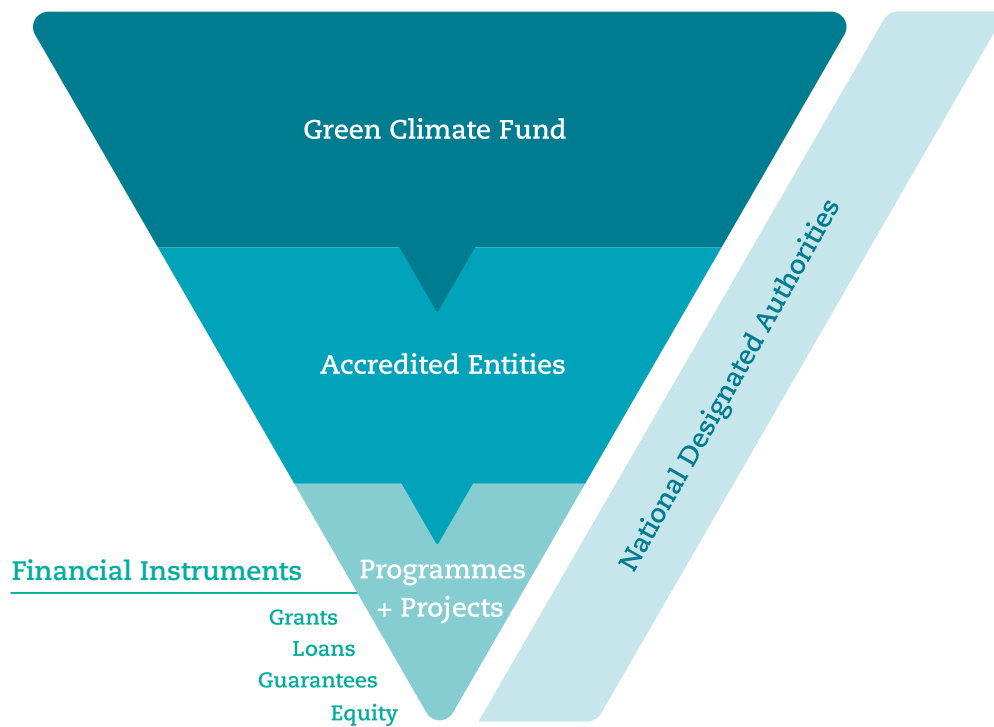
The Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme strengthens the institutional capacities of developing countries, supports their strategic planning and coordination efforts for climate action, and finances the preparation of project pipelines.

- Learn more about the [Readiness support process](#)

² These sums relate to the full project size.

Operational Governance of the Green Climate Fund

Figure 2: Governance structure of the Green Climate Fund.



Source: GCF, designed by Zoi Environment Network

Strong country ownership is a key feature of the GCF

Countries are encouraged to develop a GCF Country Programme to guide their project and programme pipelines and to prioritise projects or programmes for GCF funding. National Designated Authorities (NDAs) are government institutions that link countries and the GCF. They ensure that projects and programmes benefit the country and are consistent with national plans and strategies. All projects submitted to the GCF Board for approval must have a non-objection letter from the countries.

Project funding is channelled through Accredited Entities (AEs). AEs are either Direct Access Entities – subnational, national or regional organisations nominated by their NDA – or International Access Entities including United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, international financial institutions, international NGOs, and selected government-owned development institutions. Accredited Entities do not necessarily implement projects directly. They may act either as direct

implementers of funding proposals or as intermediaries, channelling funds to other institutions. In many cases, Executing Entities (EEs) carry out project implementation on behalf of the AE, while the AE retains overall responsibility and oversight. Depending on the project structure and activities, EEs can range from international multilateral institutions to national institutions, private actors or NGOs.

Engaging the private sector in GCF initiatives

The GCF mobilises private capital through blended finance, instruments for reducing risk, and partnerships. Private capital mainly comes from commercial and investment banks, pension funds, insurance companies, and private companies. In developing countries, the GCF works with local micro, small, and medium enterprises to unlock innovative solutions.

Switzerland and the Green Climate Fund

Switzerland has been involved from the outset in the creation and establishment of the GCF. The GCF is governed by a Board composed of 24 seats, with twelve seats allocated to developed countries and twelve to developing countries. Switzerland shares a seat with Finland, Hungary, Monaco, and Liechtenstein. In this capacity, Switzerland can influence policies and strategic decisions and take positions on project

proposals. The Swiss participation in the Board rotates among the SDC, SECO, and the FOEN. Switzerland contributed USD 100 million in the initial resource mobilisation (2015–2017), increased its contribution to USD 150 million for the first replenishment (2020–2023), and committed another USD 150 million for the second replenishment (2024–2027).

Key things to consider when accessing the Green Climate Fund

Who does what in my country?

The National Designated Authority acts as the interface between governments and the GCF. It is the first point of contact for all GCF-related activities regarding national climate priorities, existing country programmes, the project pipeline, and procedures for GCF engagement. Stakeholders are encouraged to analyse approved GCF projects and programmes to ensure complementarity, avoid duplication, and build synergies.

- Find the NDA in your country of interest: [Countries](#)
- Find the list of [Approved projects](#)

GCF funding is accessed via Accredited Entities

The GCF does not implement projects directly. Funding proposals can only be presented to the GCF by AEs. After the GCF approves programmes or projects, AEs and/or Executing Entities implement them. The role of an AE is to oversee, supervise, manage, and monitor their GCF-approved projects and programmes.

- Find the list of national, regional, and international [Accredited Entities](#)

Consider accreditation as an entry point to the GCF

Organisations may seek direct access to GCF funding by becoming Accredited Entities. Accreditation is a rigorous process requiring institutions to demonstrate strong financial management and the ability to safeguard funded projects against environmental and social harm. This is often a lengthy effort requiring institutional investment and, in some cases, organisational reforms or the development of new policies and procedures.

Subnational, national, and regional entities – public or private – applying for accreditation need to submit a nomination letter from the Government NDA/Focal Point. Direct Access Entities nominated by NDAs may apply for readiness support to enhance their ability to seek accreditation.

Applicants can be accredited for different project sizes (micro, small, medium, large), environmental and social risk levels (low, medium, high), and financial instruments (grants, loans, guarantees, equity).

Accreditation is granted for an indefinite period. The process is complete once the GCF Board approves an application, and the Secretariat confirms accreditation by issuing a certificate. However, being accredited does not automatically mean receiving funding. SDC is not accredited (while other development agencies such as KOICA, JAICA and GIZ are).

The Project-specific Assessment Approach is a pilot modality to GCF accreditation under which an unaccredited entity is assessed for the implementation of one single project or programme, with the accreditation assessment and funding-proposal appraisal conducted in parallel to reduce the overall time to access GCF funding.

How to engage with the GCF without being an Accredited Entity

Instead of seeking accreditation, organisations may participate as Executing Entities, implementing GCF-funded projects or components on behalf of an AE. Such opportunities may arise from existing projects or programmes that could be scaled up through GCF funding. Acting as an EE often involves early and long-term collaboration with an AE, ideally built on a trusted partnership. Organisations may also approach AEs with project ideas, aligning their thematic expertise with the AE's accreditation scope (e.g. project size, risk category and financial instruments).

- Find more information on the Project-specific Assessment Approach: [Project-specific Assessment Approach](#)

- Find more information on current and planned GCF-funded projects in your country of interest: [Countries](#)

How to develop and submit a proposal

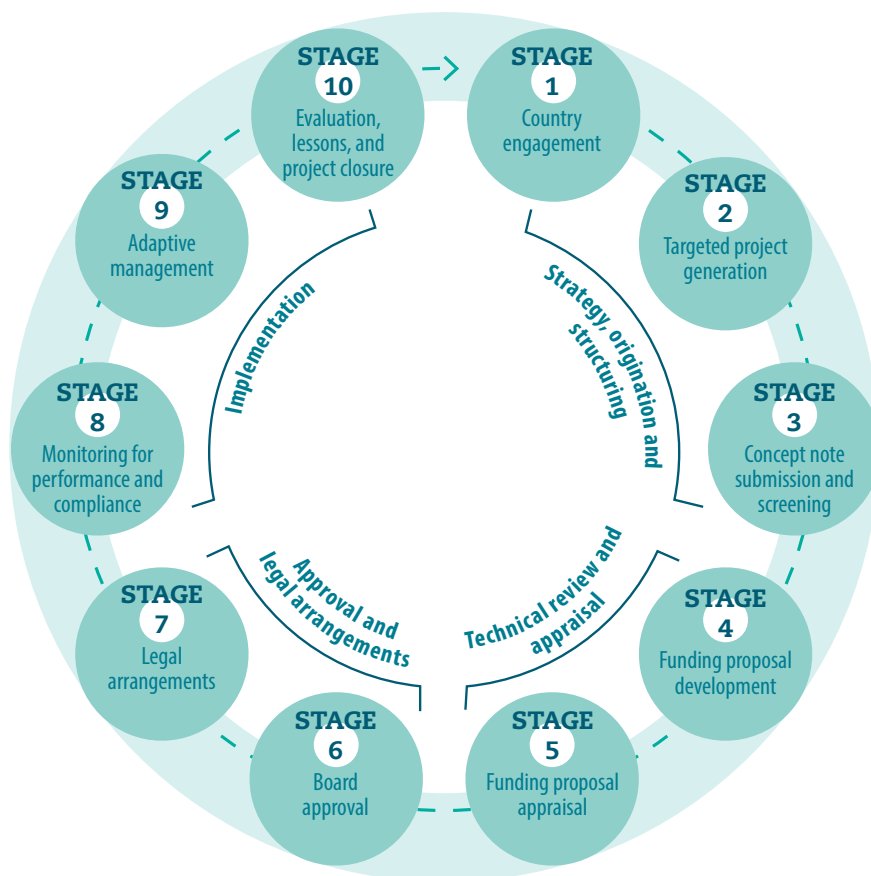
Project development follows the GCF project cycle, ensuring country ownership and alignment with GCF investment criteria. Ideally, proposals are jointly developed with NDAs and are aligned with the GCF country programme. Through the Simplified Approval Process, the GCF provides easier access to resources for smaller-scale activities (up to USD 25 million) that have minimal environmental and social risks and are within the lowest project risk category.

AEs are encouraged to develop a concept note before preparing a full proposal. This step allows AEs to seek feedback from the GCF Secretariat about whether their proposal matches GCF objectives and mandate. The concept is subsequently refined into a full funding proposal. Any funding proposal needs approval in the form of a non-objection letter by the NDA prior to submission. The GCF Secretariat and the independent Technical Advisory Panel assess funding proposals before final approval by the Board.

AEs can get financial and technical support from the GCF Project Preparation Facility (PPF) for project and programme preparation. The PPF supports AEs, particularly Direct Access Entities, as well as Project-specific Assessment Approach applicants. Support is provided to develop funding proposals and related activities, such as the development of environmental, social, and gender studies. Each request is limited to a cap of USD 1.5 million.

- Learn more about the proposal development and approval process: [Project cycle](#)
- Learn more about the [Simplified Approval Process](#)
- Find relevant guidance and templates: [Resources](#)
- Learn more about the PPF and how to apply for support: [Project Preparation Facility](#)

Figure 3: The GCF proposal development and approval process.



Source: GCF, designed by Zoi Environment Network

The GCF encourages co-financing from other institutions

The GCF encourages co-financing from public and private sources. Projects should include co-financing whenever possible, but there is no minimum, and the level of co-financing is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The amount of co-financing has to be included in the funding proposal.

- Read more on co-financing expectations in the [Policy on co-financing](#).
- Find the [Funding Proposal template](#)

The GCF provides resources for strengthening institutional capacities

The GCF provides up to USD 7 million per country over a four-year period under the Readiness Programme for strengthening institutional capacities of countries and NDAs. Of this amount, NDAs or focal points may request up to USD 4 million to strengthen institutional capacity, develop country programmes, and build project pipelines.

The Readiness Programme also supports the establishment and operation of country platforms set up by countries and regions to facilitate coordination and stakeholder engagement.

Countries can also ask for a national consultant to support access. Up to USD 3 million per country can be requested for the formulation of national adaptation plans (NAPs) and/or other adaptation planning processes, and up to USD 3 million to support the transition from NAP development to implementation.

- Learn more about [Country Readiness](#)
- Find an overview of [approved readiness grants](#)
- Learn more about the [Country platforms for climate finance](#)

Potential engagement with the GCF

Swiss embassies and SDC country offices can support engagement with the GCF by carrying out enabling activities, supporting project development, and scaling up.

Enabling activities

- Support national institutions in becoming accredited. Access to the GCF can be facilitated by strengthening the capacities of national institutions to become accredited or work as Direct Access Entities.
- Strengthen the role of national contact points to develop more proactive, coherent, and strategically aligned pipelines for applications to the GCF. This effort could include enhancing intra-governmental coordination – particularly improved alignment and cooperation between ministries and public agencies – early identification of funding opportunities, and more effective inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms.
- Enable the participation of civil society and grassroots organisations. The GCF promotes inclusive, participatory approaches involving CSOs, indigenous peoples, and local communities across all project stages. To enhance their participation, the SDC and development partners can support stakeholder consultations and the integration of local knowledge and can promote the engagement of CSOs and grassroots organisations during programming and project development. The SDC supports the Global Alliance for Gender and Green Action, which works with more than 2,300 grassroots organisations worldwide. The Alliance has developed resources and a toolkit on how to improve stakeholder engagement in GCF activities.

Project development and implementation

- Improve project preparation and fund access by analysing the existing GCF portfolio to identify potential entry points and potential challenges, to explore opportunities to com-

plement the development of new project concepts, and to facilitate coordination during project preparation.

- Facilitate upstream work such as feasibility studies, risk analyses, or technical advisories to reduce risk in proposal ideas and enhance readiness for GCF funding.
- Enhance the quality of GCF projects by applying thematic expertise in areas of Swiss strength, such as depollution, environmental protection, nature-based solutions, integrated water management, hazard prevention, climate services, gender equality, social inclusion, and governance.
- Promote private sector engagement. The GCF's increasing promotion of private-sector involvement makes this a potential area for mobilising co-financing by the private sector.
- Monitor ongoing GCF projects. As a contributor to the GCF, Switzerland can visit and monitor ongoing GCF projects. Swiss embassies and cooperation offices are encouraged to include GCF projects in their monitoring visits to identify possible synergies with Swiss programmes. They may raise issues with the Accredited Entity or the National Designated Authority and can report significant challenges to the Swiss Board member for consideration at the GCF Board.

Scaling-up

- Co-finance projects as a strategic co-financier. The GCF ALBAdapt project in Albania, co-financed by SDC, is an example of scaling up climate change adaptation, in particular the generation, co-ordination and effective use of climate information (see [ALBAdapt – Climate Services for a Resilient Albania](#)).
- Scale up Swiss bilateral projects by linking them to GCF investments or by complementing planned GCF projects with bilateral activities. Successful bilateral pilot projects and best practices can be expanded through GCF financing.

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