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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE GCF'S COUNTRY OWNERSHIP APPROACH

Approach paper

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GREEN CLIMATE FUND
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Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Country Ownership Approach

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations	iii
Executive summary.....	iv
A. Background and context.....	1
1. The GCF and the principle of country ownership.....	1
2. Evolution of country ownership: early policies and guidance	2
3. Recent developments and reforms	4
B. Evaluation objectives and scope	6
1. Objectives of the evaluation.....	6
2. Scope of the evaluation	7
C. Evaluation questions	8
D. Approach and methodology	9
1. Overall approach	9
2. Components of the methodology	9
3. Overview of the methodology.....	14
E. Timeline and workplan	15

APPENDICES..... 19

Appendix 1. Documents referenced in this approach paper	21
Appendix 2. Details of sources of primary and secondary data for this evaluation.....	22
Appendix 3. Evaluation communication plan.....	24
Appendix 4. Key milestones in the importance of country ownership	27
Appendix 5. Evaluation matrix	29

FIGURES

Figure 1. Timeline and workplan: Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Country Ownership Approach	17
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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Accredited entity
AF	Adaptation Fund
B.43	Forty-third meeting of the Board
COP	Conference of Parties
CP	Country programme
CSO	Civil society organization
DAE	Direct access entity
FP	Funding proposal
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GI	Governing Instrument
IAE	International accredited entity
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
NDA	National designated authority
NOP	No-objection procedure
RPSP	Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme
SIDS	Small island developing State
ToC	Theory of change
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has embedded **country ownership** as a core operating principle, reflecting guidance from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the GCF's Governing Instrument (GI). This approach paper outlines the plan to (i) evaluate how effectively the GCF's country ownership approach has been operationalized and (ii) provide timely evidence and lessons to inform decisions of the Board. The evaluation was approved by the Board (decision B.40/14) and is managed and implemented by the GCF's Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU). It is scheduled for delivery to the Board at the forty-third meeting of the Board (B.43), in October 2025.

Although this evaluation will refer to the findings of the IEU's 2019 independent evaluation of the GCF's country ownership approach, it will primarily focus on new evidence gathered since then, to take into account the evolution of the GCF's approach to ownership since that earlier evaluation's final report was released. Key focus areas will include the GCF's policies and processes (such as the no-objection procedure, direct access and readiness support), the clarity of guidance and definitions of country ownership, the extent of stakeholder engagement at the country level, and the coherence of the GCF's approach with countries' priorities and with those of other climate finance partners. The evaluation will employ a mixed-methods approach – combining document and portfolio review, interviews across stakeholder groups, country case studies (“deep dives”), and comparative analysis – to answer a set of evaluation questions aligned with the GCF's evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and complementarity).

The **scope** of the evaluation covers GCF activities from the Fund's inception to 2025, including recent institutional reforms. Two in-depth country case studies will illustrate how the principle of ownership has been adopted at the country level, highlighting successes and challenges. Findings from these cases, together with a substantial set of semi-structured interviews and a synthesis of evidence from prior GCF evaluations, will ground the analysis in country contexts. The evaluation is timed to **inform an update of the GCF's country ownership guidelines** in 2025, as requested by the GCF Board. Given this context, the evaluation process will be iterative and consultative, feeding interim insights to the guideline development team. This approach paper details the evaluation's background and rationale, key questions, methodology, data sources, case study selection strategy, timeline of activities, and governance arrangements. It is intended to guide the evaluation team and inform GCF stakeholders.

Country ownership is paradoxical. It is totally pervasive in development cooperation policy and best practice, yet most practitioners are exasperated by this un-implementable and pluralistic concept.

– Jonathan Barnes¹

A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. THE GCF AND THE PRINCIPLE OF COUNTRY OWNERSHIP

The GCF is the largest dedicated multilateral climate fund, established to support developing countries in pursuing low-emission, climate-resilient development pathways. From its outset, the GCF has been mandated to follow a **country-driven approach** as a cornerstone of its operations. The GCF's GI (2011) explicitly emphasizes country ownership: paragraph 3 states that the Fund will strengthen engagement at the country level through effective involvement of relevant institutions and stakeholders, and paragraph 31 links this principle to the Fund's modalities – including direct access and consideration of vulnerable groups and gender aspects. Over time, “country ownership” has been widely understood to imply that recipient countries lead the identification, design and implementation of GCF-funded activities in alignment with national priorities and that a wide range of country stakeholders (not only central governments) participate in GCF processes. While the GCF has not adopted a single formal definition of country ownership, it has operationalized this principle via several key processes and requirements, including the following:²

- **National designated authorities (NDAs):** Recipient countries appoint an NDA or focal point to act as the interface with the GCF. NDAs provide strategic oversight of GCF activities in country and communicate national priorities for climate finance. They are responsible for providing no-objection letters to support funding proposals (FPs) prior to the consideration by the Board of the GCF. Nearly all GCF-eligible countries have established NDAs or focal points, forming the backbone of the GCF's country-driven approach. The capacities and ability of the NDAs to provide oversight of the GCF project before and during implementation is variable.
- **No-objection procedure (NOP):** The GCF requires a formal letter of no-objection from the NDA for every project or programme FP submitted to the Board. The NOP mechanism aims to operationalize country consent for GCF financing, although the transparency of these letters and their criteria have recently been identified as areas for improvement.
- **Country programmes (CPs):** Countries are encouraged to prepare CP documents outlining their strategic priorities for GCF funding and a pipeline of project ideas. These are meant to guide both countries and accredited entities (AEs) in developing proposals that align with

¹ Barnes, Jonathon, “What can we learn about the ‘country ownership’ of international climate finance by employing a relational conception of scale?”, in *The political economy of climate finance: Lessons from international development*, C. Cash and L.A. Swatuk, eds. (pp. 99–128) (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12619-2_5.

² This list is based on the previous analysis undertaken by the IEU. The list of other factors will be developed and assessed during the course of the current evaluation.

national needs. However, the use and updating of CPs have been inconsistent and some remain informal or unpublished, limiting their effectiveness.

- **Direct access entities (DAEs):** In line with promoting country ownership, the GCF accredits national or regional organizations nominated by NDAs as DAEs, enabling them to access GCF funds directly. To date, the number of DAEs has grown, but the GCF portfolio is still largely delivered through international entities, indicating ongoing challenges in fully realizing direct access potential.
- **Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP):** Established in 2014 (Board decision B.05/14) as a dedicated funding programme to enhance country ownership and direct access, the RPSP provides grants and technical assistance to strengthen NDA capacities, support the development of CPs and assist candidate DAEs in accreditation preparation. The RPSP has been instrumental in building institutional readiness; for example, it has funded the establishment of NDA secretariats and stakeholder coordination mechanisms in many countries. The programme has been refined over time (e.g. decision B.08/11 increased annual country allotments and prioritized support for small island developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and African States).
- **Project cycle enhancements:** The **simplified approval process** (launched in 2017) is expected to streamline requirements for certain small-scale proposals, benefiting in particular DAEs and projects with high country ownership. An **enhanced direct access** pilot was also initiated, devolving decision-making to the country level for certain activities to foster stronger local multi-stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, country ownership is explicitly included as one of the investment criteria against which FPs are assessed by the GCF Secretariat and independent Technical Advisory Panel. A **Project Preparation Facility** provides preparatory grants to help DAEs (and other entities) develop project proposals, which is especially useful for entities with less experience in international funding.

In the GCF's strategic plans, strengthening country ownership has been a recurring priority. The **GCF Strategic Plan 2020–2023** highlighted “country-driven programming” as a strategic objective, calling for clearer articulation of how countries access the Fund and empowering them in project development. Following this, the **GCF Strategic Plan 2024–2027** set an expectation to “evolve a more dynamic and inclusive approach to country ownership”, including updating the country ownership guidelines (by the Board) and clarifying what country ownership should mean beyond the NOP. These strategic mandates emphasize the Fund's commitment to continually enhancing the principles and practices of country ownership.

2. EVOLUTION OF COUNTRY OWNERSHIP: EARLY POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

Over time, the GCF Board has taken decisions that clarify and support the country ownership approach and provide guidance to both the Secretariat and countries. Early Board decisions established country ownership as “a core principle” and created the institutional architecture to support it. For instance, **decision B.04/05** (2013) formally introduced the mechanism of NDAs or focal points and the NOP, reaffirming country ownership at the heart of GCF governance. Subsequent decisions refined these concepts: **B.07/03** and **B.08/10** (2014) set out best practices for country coordination and multi-stakeholder engagement, with B.08/10's annex XIII providing initial guidelines for NDA establishment and annex XIV detailing options for inclusive stakeholder engagement in GCF-funded activities. These early policies recognized that effective country ownership requires not only government endorsement but also the involvement of civil society, the private sector and subnational actors in climate programming.

In 2017, the Board approved the *Guidelines for Enhanced Country Ownership and Country Drivenness* (at B.17), the first attempt to comprehensively articulate how the GCF and countries should work together to uphold country ownership. The 2017 guidelines covered aspects such as the roles of NDAs, stakeholder consultation processes and the integration of CPs into the GCF project cycle. However, since 2017 no further Board decisions have significantly updated these guidelines or introduced new policies specific to country ownership. The GCF has therefore continued to implement the principle through the existing mechanisms described above.

In 2019, the IEU undertook its **first independent evaluation of the GCF's country ownership approach** (referred to here as COA2019). That evaluation provided a stocktake of how well the GCF's policies and activities were ensuring country ownership. It found notable achievements: for example, virtually all recipient countries had an NDA in place; the GCF's portfolio was broadly aligned with countries' climate priorities (as projects were typically rooted in nationally determined strategies); and many countries were using existing national climate coordination structures to engage with the GCF. These findings indicated that the basic building blocks of country ownership, including country institutions and alignment with national plans, were being established.

However, COA2019 also identified **critical gaps and challenges**. Key issues included a lack of a clear, shared definition of what "country ownership" entails, leading to varied interpretations; inconsistent engagement of stakeholders beyond the national government (with some countries doing broad consultations and others limited to a few officials); inefficient and fragmented communication channels between countries and the GCF Secretariat, causing frustration and delays; difficulties in translating CPs into viable project pipelines; capacity constraints faced by NDAs and DAEs, limiting their ability to lead programming; and limited transparency of important documents such as no-objection letters and CPs, which hindered broader accountability and local ownership. These weaknesses meant that in some cases the GCF's operations were not "country-driven" beyond formalities, and opportunities for deeper local ownership have been missed.

The IEU's COA2019 evaluation provided **recommendations** aimed at refining the Fund's country ownership approach, including the following:

- Developing a **normative standard** or clearer definition of country ownership (moving beyond treating it merely as an investment criterion)
- Elevating country ownership from a project selection criterion to an **eligibility requirement** for funding (to ensure every funded activity demonstrably has strong country ownership)
- Enhancing transparency (e.g. publicly disclosing no-objection letters and CP documents)
- Broadening stakeholder engagement to systematically include non-state actors and vulnerable populations in country dialogues
- Leveraging local systems for implementation (encouraging AEs to use country systems for procurement and financial management, where possible)
- Providing more sustained support and incentives for NDAs (such as long-term capacity-building and possibly embedding experts in NDAs)
- Increasing the role of DAEs to help strengthen country ownership (for instance, by improving the "choice architecture" so that countries can more easily partner with DAEs and by accelerating DAE accreditation)

These recommendations collectively aimed to push the GCF to more fully realize its vision of country-driven climate finance.

In response to these recommendations, the GCF Secretariat prepared a **management response**, detailing actions taken or planned on the IEU's recommendations. The Secretariat agreed (fully or partially) with all nine recommendations and has since reported some progress in implementing them. For example, steps were taken to reorganize the Secretariat to better serve countries (addressing a recommendation on Secretariat structure – see section 3 below) and efforts to expedite DAE accreditation were initiated. However, implementation progress was mixed, and several gaps persisted as of late 2022, as noted by the IEU's tracking of the recommendations in the management action report.³ The IEU commented that the absence of a clear standard for country ownership was still a **significant gap**, meaning the Fund lacked a benchmark for what good country ownership looks like. Transparency issues remained – for instance, not all NDA no-objection letters or CP documents have been made public in a timely manner, which can undermine trust. Capacity-building for NDAs has continued via readiness support, but without long-term sustainability; many NDAs still rely on short-term projects and lack secure funding or staff to consistently engage in the GCF process. In sum, by 2022 the GCF had made only **limited progress** in adopting the 2019 evaluation's recommendations (with the IEU rating most of them as “low” on implementation, except for a few areas such as internal Secretariat changes, for which progress was rated “medium” or “substantial”). This context set the stage for a follow-up evaluation to reassess country ownership.

3. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND REFORMS

Since 2019, the GCF has undergone important changes and taken new initiatives that affect country ownership. These include both internal institutional reforms and broader climate finance trends.

- **Updated Readiness programme:** In October 2023, the Board approved the *Readiness Programme Strategy 2024–2027* and a subsequent **revamp of the RPSP** (launched in 2024). The revamped RPSP introduced streamlined objectives – notably directing 60 per cent of readiness resources towards building country-owned project pipelines, 30 per cent to strengthening country coordination capacities and policy environments, and 10 per cent to knowledge-sharing. It also shifted from annual approval of readiness grants to a **four-year programming cycle** for countries, aiming to improve predictability and reduce transaction costs to access support. Additionally, more comprehensive support is now offered to DAEs for “last mile” accreditation steps and for bolstering their programming and reporting capacities. These changes are specifically intended to deepen country ownership by empowering national institutions with better planning and implementation tools.
- **GCF Secretariat restructuring:** To address past issues of fragmented communication and improve country support, the GCF Secretariat underwent a significant reorganization in late 2024. At B.40 (October 2024), the Board introduced a new structure that **integrates operations into four regional teams** (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Middle East). Subsequently, at B.41, the Board decided to begin to establish a GCF regional presence. Many details of this decentralized model are yet to emerge. This decentralization is intended to bring Secretariat expertise closer to countries and strengthen relationships with NDAs and regional contexts. The expectation is that a region-focused set-up will enhance responsiveness to country needs and improve guidance to NDAs and AEs, thereby reinforcing country ownership in daily operations.

³ Available as an annex to the report on the IEU's activities at B.34; see annex VI at <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b34-inf10>.

- **Accreditation framework revisions:** Recognizing that direct access was still lagging, the GCF initiated reforms to its accreditation process. In 2022, the Board introduced a **project-specific assessment approach** to provide an alternate pathway for entities to get limited accreditation for specific projects – this pilot (running 2023–2026) could lower barriers for national entities to work with the GCF without full accreditation. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the accreditation framework is under way (with a proposal expected at B.42, mid-2025). A detailed review of the revised accreditation framework would not be within the scope of this evaluation, but it is anticipated that the revisions will have implications for country ownership.
- **Partnerships for complementarity and coherence:** The GCF, together with other major climate funds (Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund (AF), Climate Investment Funds), drafted a **Multilateral Climate Funds Action Plan** to enhance collaboration (presented at B.39 in July 2024). One of the focus areas in this plan is joint efforts on **capacity-building to strengthen country ownership** across funds. This includes coordinated support for country-driven climate planning (such as developing national investment plans or climate finance “platforms” at the country level). Such external partnerships acknowledge that recipient countries engage with multiple funds and that streamlining support can empower countries to lead their climate finance agendas more holistically.
- **Evolving global discourse on country ownership:** The importance of country ownership in climate finance has been echoed in international forums. For example, an independent review of multilateral climate funds, commissioned for the *2024 G20 Sustainable Finance Report*, recommended strengthening country ownership across all funds. It suggested measures such as reinforcing the role of national focal points (potentially having one focal point coordinate across multiple funds), establishing national climate finance coordination platforms, and supporting countries in developing integrated investment plans and access strategies. These recommendations align closely with the GCF’s own direction, indicating a broader consensus that empowering countries is critical for effective climate action. The GCF can draw on such emerging best practices and lessons from peer institutions as part of this evaluation’s comparative analysis. Further, the draft discussion at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development reaffirms that development and climate finance must be country-led – yet it also exposes how emerging international financial approaches may increasingly constrain countries’ ability to own and operationalize their pathways to resilience and growth.
- **Revision to the NOP:** At B.41, the Board also revised the initial NOP it had approved in decision B.08/10, paragraph (b), as contained in the decision’s annex XII: Initial no-objection procedure. It further requested the Secretariat to consider broader issues, which have been raised by Board members, concerning the initial NOP, as referred to in document GCF/B.41/12, “Co-Chairs proposal on modifications to the initial no-objection procedure”, in the context of the review and update of the *Guidelines for Enhanced Country Ownership and Country Drivenness*, in line with the *Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund 2024–2027*.

In summary, since the last IEU evaluation, the GCF has taken important steps to address known gaps – updating readiness support, restructuring internally, revisiting accreditation and engaging in broader partnerships – all with the aim of enhancing country ownership. The context in which this evaluation takes place is one of significant change and momentum. Additionally, the GCF Board has mandated an **update of the 2017 country ownership guidelines by 2025**, reflecting the need to capture these changes and lessons learned into formal policy. The timing of this evaluation is therefore critical to **inform the GCF’s policy evolution** on country ownership. The next sections

detail the rationale, scope and approach of the evaluation that will assess these developments and remaining challenges.

B. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The primary impetus for this evaluation is the GCF Board's decision to review and update its country ownership guidelines in 2025, after several years of operational experience and institutional change. As noted above, the **previous country ownership evaluation (COA2019)** was completed in 2019, but its findings have not yet been comprehensively acted upon via new Board decisions or updated policies. The 2017 guidelines have remained in effect without revision since their approval at B.17. In October 2024, at B.40, the Board approved the IEU workplan for 2025, which includes an independent evaluation of the GCF's approach to country ownership. Elsewhere, there is a general expectation that the Board may wish to consider a review of the 2017 country ownership guidelines at B.43, to take place in October 2025. Thus, there is a **demand from the GCF's governance system** for up-to-date evaluative evidence on country ownership to guide policy improvements. Given the lapse of time since the last evaluation and the significant developments in the interim, the current evaluation is expected to **update and deepen the analysis** of how the GCF promotes country ownership and what more can be done. This evaluation serves the purposes of **accountability, learning and dialogue**, consistent with the mandate of the IEU.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

Building on the above rationale, the evaluation has three specific objectives, as outlined in its terms of reference:

- 1) **Assess performance of the country ownership approach:** Provide a credible and independent assessment of how well the GCF's current approach is promoting country ownership of programming. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of mechanisms such as NDAs, NOPs, direct access, and the like, and the degree to which country needs and inputs are reflected in GCF activities. This will address the accountability question: How has the GCF performed in promoting country ownership?
- 2) **Inform the 2025 policy update with timely evidence:** Generate actionable evidence and analysis to directly inform the drafting of the updated **guidelines for country ownership** to be presented to the Board in 2025. The evaluation will identify what clarifications or changes in policy are needed by examining current ambiguities or gaps (for example, defining country ownership more clearly, delineating the roles of stakeholders, proposing improvements to procedures). Wherever possible, findings will be shared on an ongoing basis with the Secretariat team preparing the guidelines, enabling incorporation of the evaluation's lessons in real time. The IEU will also facilitate ongoing discussions on emerging lessons – for example, on the margins of Board meetings. In essence, this dimension of the evaluation serves a **dialogue** function to help shape a more effective country ownership policy framework.
- 3) **Derive lessons for broader uptake:** Synthesize and disseminate lessons learned about country ownership that are useful not only for the GCF but also for a wider audience (countries, AEs, other climate funds, etc.). This includes highlighting good practices and persistent challenges observed across different contexts, and recommending how the GCF and others can facilitate stronger country-driven climate action. For instance, lessons may cover how to balance country leadership with the need for international expertise, or how other funds

(such as the AF, GEF, Climate Investment Funds) handle country ownership. This objective aligns with the learning mandate of the IEU – to contribute knowledge that can help improve climate finance delivery.

These objectives align with **the accountability dialogue and learning** functions of the IEU and are guided by the GCF Evaluation Policy and the GI's provisions on evaluation. Achieving these aims will ensure that the evaluation not only looks backward at what has been done but also looks forward at what can be improved, thus adding value to the GCF at a pivotal moment of policy revision.

2. SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The scope defines the boundaries of what will be evaluated and how. **The evaluation will be led, owned and delivered by the IEU**, with an external evaluation team (consultants) acting as an extension of the IEU for this purpose. The evaluation covers GCF activities and frameworks **from the Fund's inception (2014) up to 2025**. It will encompass both **GCF corporate policies and processes** and **country-level experiences** under the country ownership approach, with an emphasis on how institutional changes and external developments in 2020–2025 have affected country ownership.

Several dimensions frame the scope of analysis:

- **Interpretation and implementation of country ownership in the GCF:** The evaluation will examine how the concept of “country ownership” is understood and implemented by the GCF. This includes assessing the clarity (or lack thereof) of guidance on country ownership (e.g. in the GI, policies and operational guidelines) and to what extent there is shared understanding among the GCF's many partners and stakeholders. Essentially, this dimension asks, “What does country ownership mean for GCF operations, and is it happening as intended?”
- **Country ownership in GCF policies, processes and operations:** The evaluation will focus on the various **processes, policies and operational modalities** through which country ownership is expected to be promoted, including those outlined in section A.1 above. These aspects will include the NDA system, NOP, CPs, direct access (accreditation of DAEs), the RPSP, the project approval process (e.g. simplified approval process), the project implementation cycle and the use of country systems, among others. For each of these, the evaluation will assess effectiveness and efficiency in fostering genuine country ownership. For example, are CPs actively used to guide funding decisions? How well are DAEs utilized versus international AEs (IAEs)? Do the GCF's project development and approval timelines facilitate country-driven proposals or create bottlenecks that disempower countries? This analytical dimension will also consider how these processes have played out at the **country level**, identifying any emerging patterns (e.g. certain modalities working better in some country contexts than others).
- **Learning needs for updated guidelines:** A specific focus is to capture any **emerging issues or needs** that the GCF Secretariat and stakeholders have identified in relation to country ownership, which the new guidelines should address. This may involve topics such as defining the roles of NDAs vis-à-vis AEs more clearly, improving stakeholder consultation requirements, or mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability. By engaging early with the Secretariat's efforts on the guideline update (during the inception phase), the evaluation may be able to incorporate emerging priority questions. This learning-focused approach will enhance the extent to which the evaluation can speak directly to the practical needs of updating the guidelines.

- **Forward-looking aspects in a rapidly evolving institution:** Recognizing that the GCF is growing and changing (with new strategies and funding targets and a dramatically different external context), the evaluation will explore the **future trajectory** of country ownership in the Fund. This includes examining how the principle of country ownership can be upheld as the GCF scales up, engages with new themes (e.g. regional presence, novel financing approaches), and as countries themselves evolve in their climate capacities. The evaluation will seek to answer the overarching question: “What is the way forward to operationalize country ownership in a rapidly evolving institution?” This will help develop recommendations that may help “future-proof” country ownership in the GCF’s next phase. It will consider best practices from other institutions and innovative ideas (such as digital platforms for stakeholder participation or multi-country programming led by countries) to advise how the GCF can consolidate its position as a leader in country-driven climate finance.

The **GCF evaluation criteria**, which will guide the evaluation, are those set out in the GCF Evaluation Policy. These criteria draw on those established and revised as the Development Assistance Committee’s Evaluation Guidelines.

Importantly, although the evaluation covers Fund-wide policies and the collective portfolio (“GCF corporate” level focus), it will **also use country-level evidence** to inform its assessments. This is not an evaluation of individual CPs or projects per se, but country case studies and data will be carefully used to gauge how the GCF’s institutional approach is experienced in practice. The scope explicitly includes all regions and contexts where the GCF operates, with particular attention to the diversity of country conditions – e.g. LDCs, SIDS and countries with diversity of socioeconomic contexts – to ensure findings are inclusive and can be widely applied in generating conclusions and recommendations.

To ensure that the evaluation is tightly focused and remains within its intended timeline and budget, some potentially relevant topics may be addressed through a “broad brush” approach, with a low level of detail. For instance, although the evaluation will touch on how the GCF’s results (climate impacts) relate to country ownership (since ownership can affect the sustainability of outcomes), it will not attempt a full evaluation of project results or progress towards impact. Similarly, although stakeholder engagement will be an important dimension, the evaluation cannot provide a detailed social assessment of every stakeholder’s experience. Its emphasis remains on the institutional approach to country ownership. Any aspects beyond the mandate of this evaluation or overlapping with other ongoing evaluations (such as a separate evaluation on the simplified approval process) will be coordinated to avoid duplication.

By focusing on the above dimensions within the given time frame, the evaluation will maintain a **strategic scope**: it is neither a narrow project-level review nor a generic policy study but is instead a targeted assessment of how well the GCF is structured and performing to empower countries in leading climate action, and how it can do so better in the future.

C. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

To operationalize the evaluation’s objectives and scope, a set of key questions has been defined. These questions align with the evaluation criteria and thematic areas described above and will guide data collection and analysis. Some questions will contribute to more than one of the criteria. The evaluation will address the following **key questions** under the criteria.

- 1) How does the GCF define and operationalize country ownership, and how is this approach aligned with the international narrative, UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) guidance and the GCF's strategic objectives, and international good practices?
- 2) How effectively do the GCF's funding modalities, processes and institutional mechanisms enable meaningful country ownership and address the needs and priorities of recipient countries?
- 3) What are the key factors that influence country ownership, including those within GCF operations and those outside such as institutional capacity?
- 4) In a rapidly evolving institution, what emerging lessons and ongoing/recent developments should inform the operationalization of country ownership moving forward?

The approach to addressing these questions is outlined in the **evaluation matrix** provided in Appendix 5. Following this matrix will enable the evaluation to assess both **process** (how things are done) and **outcomes** (what difference it makes) regarding country ownership. It should be noted that although a large number of questions are listed, they are interrelated; the evaluation team will organize the analysis under coherent themes to address them efficiently (for example, three questions may be addressed together under an "effectiveness of country ownership implementation" section in analysis). It is important to emphasize that the matrix and the associated theory of change (ToC) are based on the current understanding of the evaluation and may be updated as more knowledge and issues emerge.

D. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

1. OVERALL APPROACH

The evaluation will use a **mixed-methods approach**, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to help answer the evaluation questions. It will adhere to the standards of rigour, independence and utilization-focused evaluation established in the GCF Evaluation Policy. An iterative, consultative process will be employed, particularly given the policy development work being conducted in parallel (i.e. the updated guidelines for country ownership) – implying that emerging findings will be shared and can influence ongoing GCF work in real time.

2. COMPONENTS OF THE METHODOLOGY

The methodology is structured around several components:⁴

- **ToC analysis:** At the outset, the evaluation team will construct a ToC for the GCF's country ownership approach, building on available documentation. This analytical framework will map how the GCF expects country ownership to lead to desired outcomes and impacts (e.g. stronger alignment of projects with country needs, improved sustainability of results, empowerment of local institutions). The ToC will identify the inputs/activities (e.g. NDA support, capacity-building, direct access), the outputs (e.g. CPs produced, DAEs accredited), and the intermediate outcomes (e.g. proposals originating from countries, stakeholders engaged) that would logically contribute towards greater country ownership and ultimately to better climate results and a paradigm shift in such areas as energy use and adaptation approaches. By articulating this anticipated results chain, the evaluation can interrogate each link: for example, are the

⁴ Further details of these components are provided in Appendix 2 of this approach paper.

assumptions valid? Where do they not hold true? The evaluation team will develop the ToC in consultation with the GCF Secretariat to ensure it reflects the current institutional understanding and will further refine it as data are collected. In the process of analysis to prepare the final report, the ToC will be used to help frame conclusions and recommendations.

- **Document and literature review:** A comprehensive review of evaluation documents is currently under way (as a synthesis review) to gather evidence and set the context for this evaluation. Documents will be systematically analysed for evidence pertaining to the evaluation questions (if appropriate, using qualitative data analysis software). This review will summarize key points of documents such as the following:
 - GCF foundational documents (GI, Board decisions related to country ownership)
 - GCF policies (e.g. 2017 country ownership guidelines, accreditation framework, stakeholder engagement policies)
 - Strategic plans
 - Operational manuals
 - UNFCCC guidance to the GCF on country-driven approaches
 - Decisions from the COP that pertain to ownership
 - The COA2019 final evaluation report
 - The Management Action Report on the recommendations of the 2019 evaluation
 - Recent IEU evaluations (2019–2024) that touch on country ownership. The IEU has published numerous evaluations (e.g. on the RPSP, country portfolios in LDCs and Africa, performance reviews) – these often include country case studies and relevant findings.
 - Academic literature and evaluations from other funds/agencies – for example, evaluation reports from the GEF on its country ownership approach or studies by climate finance think-tanks on country-driven approaches. This broader review will situate the GCF's approach in the wider landscape and provide benchmarks.
- **Portfolio and data analysis:** The evaluation will conduct an analysis of relevant portfolio data to quantitatively assess aspects of country ownership. Potential areas for analysis include the proportion of FPs originating from national DAEs versus IAEs over time; trends in no-objection issuance (e.g. any rejections or conditions imposed by NDAs); the completion and updating rate of CPs across countries; and the allocation and utilization of readiness funds by country. The team will use the GCF's data systems, including the GCF's pipeline database, the **annual performance reports** of approved projects (which may contain information on stakeholder engagement or use of country systems during implementation), entity work programmes and other monitoring data. The IEU's DataLab team will lead in extracting data. A particular focus will be on **readiness project data** (interim progress and completion reports) to see how readiness support was used to enhance ownership (e.g. number of NDA offices established, consultations held). Within the constraints of available data, the evaluation will seek to quantify aspects of **timeliness** (efficiency) – for instance, measuring the time from concept note to approval for DAE-led versus other projects, which may reveal any additional hurdles faced by country-driven proposals. Qualitative information from documents (such as evaluation reports, Board documents) will be systematically analysed and, where appropriate, may be **coded into quantitative variables** to facilitate analysis across the portfolio. As an example of such quantification, based on project documents, each project could be tagged for whether it aligns with a CP priority or whether it underwent multi-stakeholder consultation.

This tagging will help calculate a portfolio-level statistic of how many projects meet certain country ownership criteria. The DataLab will support such mapping and possibly the use of text analysis or machine learning to scan many documents for relevant content. This mix of descriptive statistics and structured data from qualitative sources will help answer questions about trends and patterns related to country ownership in the GCF's operations.

- **Key informant interviews and focus groups:** A major component will consist of **primary data collection through interviews**. The evaluation team will conduct semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders to gain first-hand insights, explanations and perspectives, allowing for comparison with evidence from documentary sources. Interviewees will be identified from categories such as the following:
 - **GCF Secretariat staff:** particularly those from regional teams, the Office of the Chief Investment Officer (including NDA relations, Readiness programme managers), the accreditation team, and others involved in processes such as the direct access programme and proposal approvals. Their views will illuminate internal efforts and challenges in implementing country ownership (e.g. how do they balance ensuring quality with respecting country decisions?).
 - **NDA representatives:** from a purposive sample of countries across regions and categories (LDCs, SIDS, Africa, large countries, etc.). NDAs can provide on-the-ground accounts of such processes as engaging with the GCF: how they coordinate nationally, their experiences with the NOP and support received from the GCF. Their feedback will provide crucial evidence to help assess effectiveness and areas for improvement.
 - **GCF Board members or Alternate Board members:** especially from recipient countries who can share perspectives on Board-level discussions of country ownership and any concerns or directions from the governing body.
 - **AEs:** both IAEs and DAEs. The IAEs can provide insights on how they work with countries in developing proposals (for instance, do IAEs feel that countries drive the process or that they do?), and DAEs can discuss accreditation and implementation challenges from a country ownership standpoint. Private sector AEs will also be consulted to consider how country ownership is maintained in private sector operations.
 - **Civil society and private sector observers and thematic experts:** including members of the GCF's active observer network (civil society organization (CSO) and private sector observers) and perhaps national civil society organizations engaged in GCF processes. These can provide an alternative perspective (to that of government bodies) on stakeholder engagement and transparency at the country level. In addition, the evaluation will seek interviews with thematic experts.
 - **Other climate finance bodies:** such as representatives of the AF, GEF or multilateral development banks who have experience with country-driven approaches, to inform the comparative aspect.

The evaluation team will prepare generic interview protocols for different stakeholder categories, which can be further tailored for individual respondents. Focus group discussions may be organized where appropriate and feasible – for example, a focus group with several NDA representatives to discuss common experiences, or with civil society representatives across countries.

Interviews will be documented and, where appropriate, coded according to the evaluation questions. The evaluation will ensure a balance of perspectives, including those that may be

critical of GCF practices, to build a well-rounded evidence base. The IEU's ethical guidelines for evaluations will be followed, ensuring confidentiality for interviewees, as needed to encourage candid feedback. The principle of "informed consent" will be applied.

- **Country case studies ("deep dives"):** To gain direct insights into the real-world application of country ownership, the evaluation will conduct **two in-depth country deep-dive** studies. These deep dives will involve country travel by members of the evaluation team for primary data collection. Each case study will examine a particular country's engagement with the GCF, looking at such areas as the NDA's role and capacity, the country's portfolio of GCF projects (and who initiated them), the extent of multi-stakeholder involvement, the use of country systems, and any specific innovations or obstacles encountered. Since the inclusion of two case studies cannot yield statistically significant data, the concept of "sampling" does not apply. Rather, the case studies will be purposefully and theoretically selected to provide contrasting examples of country ownership dimensions, thereby promoting opportunities to learn from varying experiences of collaborating with the GCF. During data collection, the team will hold interviews and possibly workshops with national and project stakeholders. These may include NDA office staff, relevant line ministries and project implementing entities, as well as civil society, the private sector and representatives of intended beneficiaries. The team will also review country-specific documentation (e.g. national climate strategies, GCF project documents), which may not be accessible at GCF headquarters. The output of each deep-dive will be a brief analysis highlighting findings and illustrative examples, which will feed directly into the overall evaluation analysis. Although only two countries will host missions, a limited number of additional **remote case studies** (through virtual interviews) may be conducted, and country-level evidence from existing evaluation documents will also be analysed to build a broader picture of country-level experience.

For each deep-dive country, a **case study plan** will be developed, outlining specific evaluation questions to explore there (drawn from the overall questions but tailored), key people to interview and a schedule. It is anticipated that the Secretariat will be able to provide initial contact points in the countries selected, to speed up preparations and mission planning.

The **role of the deep dives** in the evaluation is to provide concrete examples that ground the evaluation's findings. They will not be exhaustive evaluations of those countries' engagement with the GCF, but rather deep explorations illustrating the experience and evolution of country ownership. The findings from case studies will be integrated into the evaluation analysis (e.g. as boxes or annexes in the report) and will highlight real-world manifestations of issues such as stakeholder engagement, coordination mechanisms or capacity-building. Importantly, the case studies also serve a **validatory purpose**: they can either confirm or challenge the trends seen in the global analysis.

Beyond the two deep dives, the evaluation will incorporate insights from other countries through interviews (some NDAs not visited will still be interviewed virtually) and by reviewing case examples documented in previous reports. For example, the COA2019 evaluation and subsequent IEU studies have mini-case studies that can be referenced. This broader canvas of country examples ensures that even with two primary case studies, the evaluation is informed by a wider set of country experiences.

- **Benchmarking and comparative analysis:** To address how the GCF compares or complements the efforts of other institutions addressing aspects of climate change, the evaluation will perform a **benchmarking analysis** of the GCF's country ownership approach against those of other institutions. This will involve selecting comparator organizations – such

as the GEF (to draw on its longer history of support to climate change mitigation and adaptation), the AF (known for its direct access modality) and the Climate Investment Funds (which work through country investment plans or bilateral donors' climate programmes) – and summarizing how they have operationalized country ownership and with what results. The evaluation will then compare key elements – such as how NDA-like roles are structured, how proposals are country-endorsed and the use of country-based executing entities – to see how the GCF compares with these institutions. Additionally, the evaluation will consider any international standards or frameworks concerning the contribution of country ownership to aid effectiveness (starting from the Paris Declaration). This analysis will help identify best practices that the GCF could adopt (or may have adopted) and ensure that evaluation recommendations take account of relevant experience outside of the GCF as well as the evolution of its own approaches to country ownership.

- **Outcome harvesting / process tracing:** Should the need become evident, the evaluation will consider using outcome harvesting and process tracing. Outcome harvesting is a utilization-focused technique that would retrospectively collect and verify significant changes in behaviour, relationships, policies or practices (“outcomes”) and then analyse the contribution of the Fund to those changes. Process tracing is a within-case causal-inference method that tests each step of a hypothesized mechanism with evidence graded for probative value (e.g. hoop, smoking-gun tests). Outcome harvesting would surface and document unanticipated shifts in country ownership across the portfolio, whereas process tracing, applied in a small number of deep-dive cases, would validate whether observed changes plausibly flowed from specific structural enablers (such as NDA capacity or revised procedures) rather than rival explanations. Used together, these tools would provide rigorous, complementary evidence on an otherwise intangible construct, without relying solely on pre-set indicators.

Triangulation will be a core principle guiding the evaluation to ensure findings are both coherent and comprehensive. This means that evidence from documents, data, interviews, case studies and other sources will be cross-checked with each other to validate insights and uncover patterns. When stakeholders express differing views – such as on the strength of country ownership – the evaluation will explore the reasons behind this divergence, which may stem from variations in capacity or levels of engagement. The mixed-methods design will enable the evaluation to capture both the broad, quantitative trends and the richer, qualitative dimensions that provide context. This deeper understanding of not just what happened, but why, will help shape clearer and more actionable recommendations. The IEU DataLab provides a potential resource to implement any necessary **qualitative-to-quantitative coding** that may be needed (for instance, rating the strength of country ownership in each project or country case on a uniform scale).

Given that this evaluation will run in parallel to the process of updating the country ownership guidelines, the approach includes periodic **reflection and validation** steps. After initial evidence gathering (document review and some interviews), the evaluation team will produce as a distinct body of secondary evidence a preliminary synthesis of relevant findings from previous evaluations (as a companion note to this approach paper). This synthesis will be used by the IEU internally and may also be shared with the Secretariat team preparing the updated guidelines if useful. In turn, their feedback may be used to further refine focus areas for the remaining evaluation approaches. The IEU will ensure that such collaboration does not compromise the independence of the evaluation. Rather, feedback from the Secretariat is expected to promote factual accuracy and alert the evaluation team to any areas of inadequate coverage. Before finalizing its conclusions, the evaluation team will also conduct an **analysis workshop** in which the evaluation team will review

all evidence, discuss emerging answers to the evaluation questions, and promote consensus on interpretation. This will strengthen the robustness of findings and recommendations.

The **limitations of the evaluation** will be carefully documented and, as far as possible, addressed. The IEU is already aware of several potential limitations. These include the availability and reliability of data (e.g. if certain CP documents or NDA surveys are unavailable), response bias in interviews (stakeholders might be diplomatic or, conversely, overly critical), the small number of deep-dive cases, and timing constraints (conducting analysis in parallel with a “moving target” as guidelines are drafted). Some other potential major limitations are as follows:

- **Limited institutional knowledge among GCF personnel.** With the restructuring and turnover of GCF staff, there is limited institutional knowledge relative to previous times.
- **Changes within the GCF.** Even while the evaluation is under way, the GCF is undergoing fundamental changes. For example, at B.41, the Board approved the GCF's regional presence. In addition, at B.42, the Board is expected to consider fundamental changes to the accreditation framework. The evaluation will not be able to consider the specific implications of some of these changes, as the GCF has yet to develop experience with their implementation.
- **The immeasurability of the key concept.** Country ownership is complex and to some extent intangible, making it difficult to comprehensively measure. The evaluation will therefore assess performance regarding country ownership based on qualitative evidence, in conjunction with limited aspects of the concept that can be measured (such as the existence of national committees, etc.), which points to the importance of evidence triangulation, as mentioned above.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

As noted above, some of the basic principles that will be adopted by the evaluation team include triangulation, ensuring anonymity in sensitive interviews to encourage openness, carefully selecting case studies, and maintaining flexibility in the workplan (e.g. if an opportunity arises to get additional data or if a planned mission is not possible, adjusting accordingly). In addition to the strategies already outlined, the IEU will pursue further measures to strengthen the evaluation's robustness. These include drawing on prior evaluations and existing data sources to compensate for gaps in documentation and using retrospective methods – such as outcome harvesting – to reconstruct institutional memory where needed. The evaluation will also seek perspectives beyond core stakeholders through broader outreach, including secondary data and digital tools, and engage thematic experts to help interpret complex or contested findings. Where relevant, scenario testing may be used to assess the implications of ongoing reforms. Throughout, the team will remain transparent about what the evaluation can and cannot assess and will build in opportunities for early feedback and course correction to enhance the utility and responsiveness of the evaluation.

In terms of **data management**, all secondary data sources will be documented with citations or references in the evaluation report. The evaluation team will maintain a **repository of collected data**, ensuring confidentiality as needed. Source triangulation and quality verification will be part of the analytical steps – for instance, checking a piece of information from an interview against a Board document or vice versa.

In summary, the methodology is designed to be **comprehensive** – looking at policy, practice and perceptions – and **utilization-focused**. It will have regular engagement with its intended users, especially counterparts at the Secretariat. It combines rigorous evaluation techniques with a pragmatic approach to inform real-time decision-making.

E. TIMELINE AND WORKPLAN

The evaluation will be conducted in four main stages, aligned with the IEU workplan timeline and its scheduled deliverables. The overall timeline spans from late 2024 to the end of 2025, in order to deliver the final evaluation report to the Board at B.43 (expected October 2025). Below is an overview of the phases, key activities and outputs:

- Phase 1: Inception and planning (Nov 2024–May 2025).** During this inception phase, the evaluation team will be onboarded and initial planning completed. Key activities will include the following: refining the evaluation framework and questions (e.g. developing the detailed evaluation matrix linking questions to indicators, sources and methods); conducting preliminary document review and compiling existing evidence (including the IEU's synthesis of evidence on country ownership note); stakeholder mapping and scheduling initial interviews; reconstructing the ToC; and identifying countries for deep dives. During this period the evaluation team will meet internally and with a limited set of GCF Secretariat staff to discuss expectations and gather early inputs. The primary output of this stage is **this approach paper**, which summarizes the design of the evaluation.
- Phase 2: Data collection and early analysis (May to early July 2025).** This is the main phase for gathering information. Its activities will include conducting the full suite of **interviews** (and any focus groups deemed appropriate) with stakeholders among the NDAs, Secretariat, AEs, Board and others). Where possible, some of these may “piggyback” on international meetings, which the IEU may attend, to reach multiple stakeholders. These interviews will be mainly conducted between mid-May and late June 2025. The two **deep-dive country case studies** are also planned for this phase, probably in the period from late May to the end of June, depending on travel logistics and the availability of key national stakeholders. During this same period, the evaluation team will also work on **portfolio data extraction and analysis** – pulling data from GCF systems, cleaning them and analysing them for trends related to the evaluation questions. Document review will continue for any remaining or newly produced documents (for instance, if the Secretariat produces a draft of the new guidelines, the evaluation will review it to assess its alignment with evidence). During this phase, the evaluation team and IEU's DataLab will meet regularly to discuss preliminary observations and ensure data needs are met, within the scope and limitations of available data. By the end of June 2025, data collection will be largely complete.
- Phase 3: Analysis and reporting (mid-June to late July 2025).** Initial **triangulation of findings** will be conducted to identify any gaps or apparent contradictions that need follow-up. If any important stakeholders could not be reached or any critical data are missing, early June will be used to fill those gaps. This phase will focus on synthesizing evidence and formulating findings, conclusions and recommendations. Its overall outputs will include interview summaries, coded or otherwise analysed qualitative data, a database of qualitative and quantitative indicators related to country ownership, and a brief internal note providing a summary of emerging findings to inform approaches to the final report. If deemed necessary, this note may be discussed at a virtual workshop of the evaluation team. At this point, the draft initial ToC may be revised to reflect key findings based on evidence gathered. The evaluation team will ensure that for each question, conclusions are backed by adequate sources (documents, interviews, data), using a matrix of evidence to support transparency. The team will also develop lessons learned and recommendations in this period, drawing on the analysis and in consultation among team members. **The factual draft of the evaluation report** will be

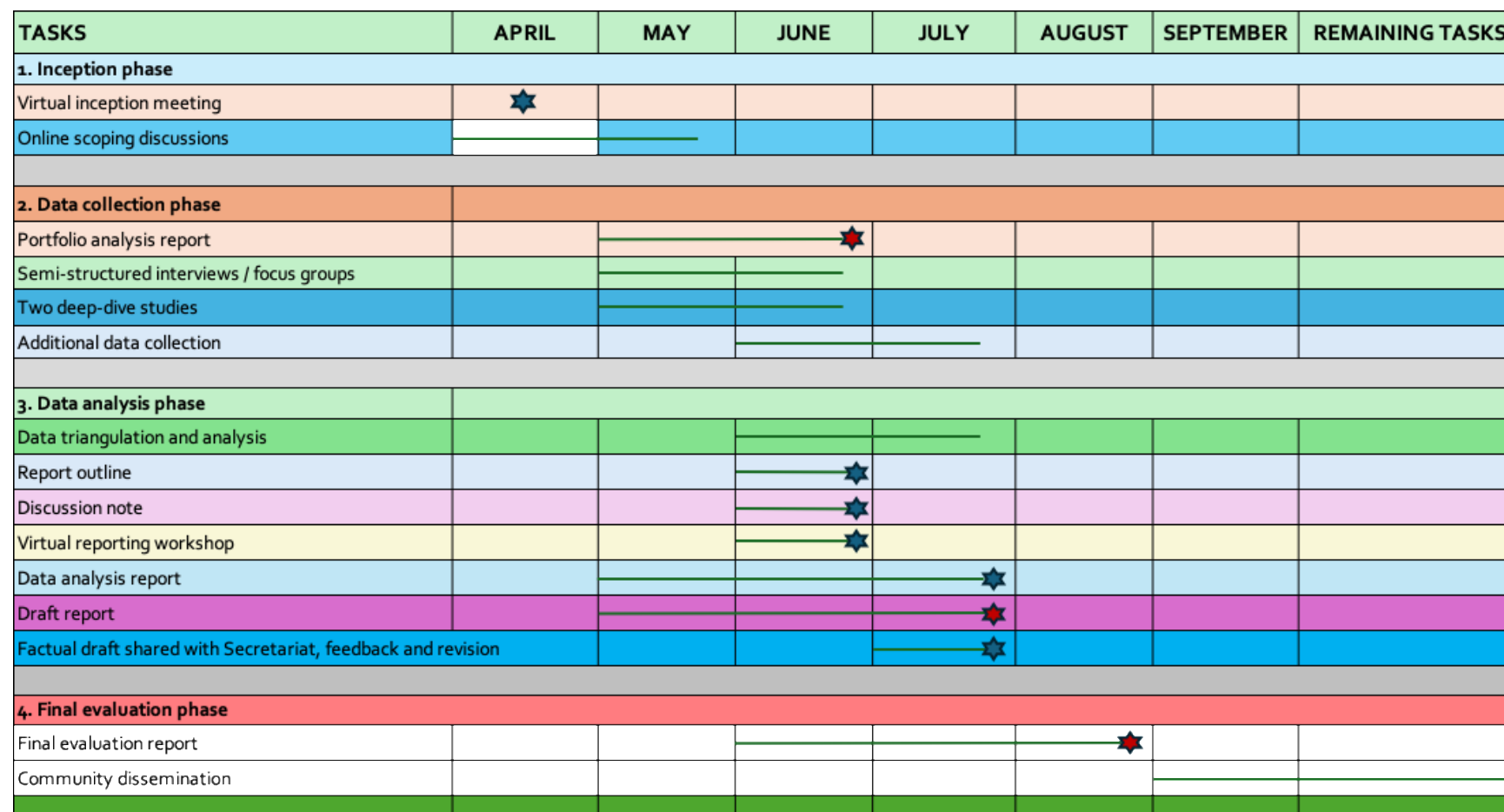
produced in late July. This draft will be circulated to key stakeholders (e.g. the GCF Secretariat) for rapid factual verification and initial comments (following standard IEU practice).

- **Phase 4: Report finalization and dissemination (September to December 2025).** In the final stage, the evaluation report will be revised and finalized, taking into account comments from IEU peer reviewers, the Secretariat and others. The evaluation team will work iteratively on the draft to ensure clarity and accuracy and that it meets the quality expected by the Board. The **final evaluation report** (with an executive summary) will be completed by September 2025. According to current plans, the evaluation results are to be ready for B.43, which is anticipated to be in October 2025. The main report (and any separate volumes such as annexes) will be submitted in advance of that meeting. The evaluation team will support **presentations and outreach** around the findings; this could include a presentation to the Board at B.43, webinars or briefings for the Secretariat and NDAs, and the production of communication materials (e.g. a two-page evaluation brief, slides) for wider dissemination of lessons. The evaluation's recommendations will be discussed with stakeholders to facilitate uptake.

The timeline and workplan described above are summarized in Figure 1 below. This timeline will be kept under review and adjusted as necessary. Contingencies (such as delays in getting interviews or changes in Board meeting schedules) will be managed by compressing internal timelines or reallocating team resources to catch up. Overall, the workplan is designed to ensure that the evaluation's critical insights are delivered in time to inform the GCF's update of the country ownership guidelines in 2025, while still providing a thorough and credible assessment to the Board and stakeholders. Some of the key deadlines are as follows:

- 1) Release of the approach paper: second week of May 2025
- 2) Factual draft shared with the Secretariat: 29 July 2025
- 3) Receipt of feedback on factual draft: 12 August 2025
- 4) Final report: 1 September 2025

Figure 1. Timeline and workplan: Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Country Ownership Approach



KEY

★ = Major deliverable

★ = Deliverables

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. DOCUMENTS REFERENCED IN THIS APPROACH PAPER

- Adaptation Fund, *Study on Readiness and Capacity Building for Direct Access to Adaptation Finance* (2020). Available at <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Study-on-Readiness-pub-v7.pdf>.
- G20 Independent High-Level Expert Group, *Accelerating Sustainable Finance for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies: Independent High-Level Expert Group Review of the Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds* (G20 IHLEG, 2024). Available at <https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/G20-IHLEG-VCEF-Review.pdf>.
- Green Climate Fund, decision B.04/05: Business model framework: Country ownership (2013).
- Green Climate Fund, decision B.05/14: Readiness and preparatory support (2014).
- Green Climate Fund, decision B.08/10: Country ownership: Best practice options for country coordination and multi-stakeholder engagement (2014).
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- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (Paris, 2005). Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2005/03/paris-declaration-on-aid-effectiveness_glg12949.html.

Appendix 2. DETAILS OF SOURCES OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA FOR THIS EVALUATION

Elaborating on the methodology (section D.2 of this report), the main data sources for this evaluation will include the following:

- **GCF institutional documents:** GI, Board decisions (especially B.04/05, B.05/14, B.08/10, B.17/21, B.41/02, etc., related to country ownership, accreditation, readiness), GCF policies (2017 country ownership guidelines, 2021 Evaluation Policy, etc.), GCF strategic plans 2020–2023 and 2024–2027 (sections on country ownership) and Secretariat guidance materials (NDA handbook, templates for no-objection letters, etc.). These will provide the intended framework and expectations for country ownership.
- **IEU evaluation reports:** The COA2019 evaluation report and its summary of findings, plus other IEU evaluations from 2018 to 2023 that touch on aspects of country ownership (e.g. evaluations of the Readiness programme; the direct access synthesis (2022); country portfolio evaluations for Africa, LDCs, and SIDS; the Forward-Looking Performance Review (2019)). These are rich sources of evaluative evidence and lessons already identified. The evaluation team will use the **synthesis of evidence on country ownership** being prepared by the IEU as a compendium of these findings. This synthesis note will effectively serve as a secondary data source summarizing what is known so far.
- **GCF portfolio data and reports:** Data from the GCF portfolio management systems, including lists of FPs (which can be analysed for origin by DAE versus IAE, regional distribution and other dimensions); **annual performance reports** of projects (which may include sections on country ownership or stakeholder engagement during implementation); **entity work programmes** and CPs (to see how many projects in the portfolio align with those plans); **readiness grant data** (number of readiness grants per country, focus of those grants – e.g. NDA strengthening versus adaptation planning). The DataLab will extract relevant fields such as project metadata indicating whether a project came through a CP pipeline or not, or whether an NDA provided a specific input. **Accreditation data** are another source – how many entities accredited per country, type (national versus regional versus international), time taken for accreditation – that can highlight direct access progress. If available, results of any **NDA surveys or country surveys** conducted by the Secretariat would be valuable (for example, the Secretariat has in the past surveyed NDAs on their needs). Also, records of **no-objection letters** could be examined (for example, to see if any project failed to get one, or any conditions set by NDAs). Another data source is the log of **readiness requests and usage**: since readiness funding is aimed at enhancing ownership, tracking how countries request and utilize those funds (e.g. how many have completed CPs, how many have strengthened NDA offices) provides evidence of capacity and ownership changes.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** As detailed, interviews will be a major source of qualitative data. Each interview will produce notes or transcripts that are considered data for analysis. The stakeholders include NDAs (providing data on coordination mechanisms, NOP experiences, etc.), AEs (data on their collaboration with countries), Secretariat (data on internal process and support), Board members (insight on governance perspective), and others. These conversations will yield both “factual” information (e.g. “X number of stakeholder meetings were held in country Y for their CP”) and perceptual information (e.g. “NDA feels empowered in project development with AE Z”). Both types are important; factual elements may be verifiable from

appropriate documentary sources, and perceptions highlight areas of satisfaction or concern, which may relate to dimensions of performance.

- **Deep-dive study materials:** For the deep-dive countries, the evaluation will gather country-specific sources: the country's own climate strategies (nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, etc.), GCF project documents for projects in that country (FP narratives, which often mention how the idea was generated and stakeholder inputs), any country-level evaluations of GCF projects, and possibly media or civil society reports about GCF activities in the country. During field visits, the team may also obtain internal documents from NDAs, including minutes of national climate coordination committee meetings, stakeholder consultation reports or national budget allocations for climate, which may reflect country ownership. These contextualize how GCF processes interface with country systems.
- **External reports and literature:** Publications from other climate funds (e.g. the AF's evaluation of its readiness programme), academic articles or case studies on country ownership in climate finance, UNFCCC reports (e.g. the Biennial Assessment by the Standing Committee on Finance may have relevant sections), and relevant policy papers (such as the 2024 G20 report). These sources are expected to provide external points of reference and lessons that the evaluation can use, especially for evaluation questions Q11 and Q12.
- **IEU data systems and analytics:** The IEU's in-house data (such as geospatial data and portfolio databases compiled in previous evaluations) can also be leveraged. For example, IEU's DataLab may have compiled data on stakeholder participation from project documents in previous analyses. Where applicable, these will be re-used to maximize their contribution to understanding the evolution of GCF ownership concepts and practices.

Appendix 3. EVALUATION COMMUNICATION PLAN

Background

Paragraph 64(a) of the Evaluation Policy for the GCF, as outlined in annex I of decision B.BM-2021/07,⁵ stipulates that “The IEU and the Secretariat will include a **dissemination/knowledge management plan for evaluations** in their respective work programmes. The Secretariat’s knowledge management function will also play a critical role in this space.”

Furthermore, paragraph 64 (d) of the Evaluation Policy states that “the GCF will promote the sharing of evaluative evidence across GCF partners through **different modes of dissemination and communication.**”

Context and communication objectives

In this context, the IEU has developed this draft communication plan as its dissemination/knowledge management plan for the Independent Evaluation of the GCF’s Country Ownership Approach. The plan outlines the evaluation team’s envisioned approach for disseminating the evaluation’s findings and learnings, detailing the suggested modes of dissemination and communication, along with an indicative timeline for key dissemination and engagement activities. Additionally, the plan is designed to raise awareness of the evaluation, both during its implementation and after its completion, with a particular focus on promoting and disseminating its findings and recommendations to decision makers and other key stakeholders within the GCF ecosystem.

⁵ See <https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/decision/bbm-2021/decision-bbm-2021-07-bbm-2021-07-decision-board-evaluation-policy.pdf>.

Table A - 1. Target audiences or stakeholders

Key audience group	Target subgroup (if applicable)	Desired change	Key outputs, engagement	Key outputs, products
GCF Board	All Board members, including the Co-Chairs; in particular, Board members with an interest in the country ownership guidelines can be considered as “champions” for this evaluation	Board members are aware of the evaluation’s key findings and use the evaluation’s recommendations. The Board takes note of the evaluation report.	IEU webinars, Board side events, bilateral consultations between the IEU staff and the Board members, IEU newsletters, social media, COP30 side event(s)	Executive summary, final evaluation report, evaluation briefs in EN/FR/ES/AR, IEU newsletters (including Board-special editions), the “evaluations” section of IEU activities/annual reports
GCF Secretariat	Particularly the Office of the Chief Investment Officer (given its interest in developing the country ownership guidelines) and relevant divisions, and the policy team of the GCF Secretariat	The Secretariat becomes aware of the evaluation’s key findings and recommendations and submits a timely and thoughtful management response to the evaluation. The Secretariat considers the evaluation learnings in designing the country ownership guidelines.	IEU webinars, Board side events, regular meetings between the IEU staff and the Executive Director, IEU newsletters, news updates on the GCF intranet, GreenShift, and social media, COP30 side event(s) and engagements	Executive summary, final evaluation report, evaluation briefs, regular GreenShift updates, IEU newsletters, focusing on the evaluation findings and recommendations
GCF partners (NDAs, AEs, executing entities, etc.)	The GCF’s AEs, implementing entities, NDAs and focal points and observers, particularly those who work in or take a special interest in country ownership	The AEs’ and the observers’ understanding of the GCF is improved, and they become aware of the IEU evaluation’s key findings and recommendations.	IEU webinars, Board side events, IEU’s engagement in external conferences/events hosted by GCF partners, IEU newsletters, social media updates, IEU Learning Talks, COP30 side events	Executive summary, final evaluation report, evaluation briefs, press release, IEU’s video/podcast focusing on content regarding the evaluation findings and recommendations

Table A - 2. Communications-related outputs

Output	Key audience	Content/comments	Expected delivery
IEU website	All	Serves as a hub for all public resources generated by the evaluation; updated immediately once new content becomes available	A designated web page created as early as February 2025, and updated throughout the year
Approach paper	Board, Secretariat	Approach, questions, timeline of the evaluation	9 May 2025
Approach webinars	Board, Secretariat, AEs, CSOs, private sector organizations, others	Brief on the approach of the evaluation	March 2025
Board side events to present key findings	Board, Secretariat	In these Board side events, the evaluation team will present the evaluation's key findings and answer any questions the attendees may have.	B.41 B.42
Webinar in emerging findings	Board, Secretariat, AEs, CSOs, private sector organizations, others	To familiarize audience with the emerging findings, to seek feedback on the draft emerging findings	August 2025
Final evaluation report	All	Contains the evaluation question, in-depth data analyses, conclusions, findings and recommendations	September 2025
Executive summary	All	A 5- to 10-page executive summary of the evaluation report	September 2025
Summary document "Evaluation Brief"	All	A 2- or 4-page summary brief that focuses primarily on the evaluation's background, key questions, findings and recommendations. This summary brief is designed for busy readers and is a useful tool to disseminate to a wider audience.	September 2025
Social media	All	Key updates for every product/event related to the assessment evaluation	Throughout the evaluation process

Appendix 4. KEY MILESTONES IN THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNTRY OWNERSHIP

Conference	Year	Major discussions	Outcomes
Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development ^a	2002	Mobilizing financial resources for development, role of trade, debt relief and systemic issues in global economic governance	Emphasis on partnership between developed and developing countries, commitment to increase official development assistance, and better coordination of global economic policies ^b
Rome Declaration on Harmonization ^c	2003	Improving aid effectiveness through better harmonization of donor practices, reducing transaction costs, and aligning aid with recipient country priorities	Commitment to harmonize donor procedures, align aid with national development strategies, and enhance donor coordination
Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness ^d	2005	Ownership, alignment, harmonization, results and mutual accountability in aid delivery Goal was to enhance aid effectiveness significantly by 2010	Five principles for effective aid: ownership by recipient countries, alignment with national priorities, harmonization of donor efforts, focus on results, and mutual accountability
Accra Agenda for Action ^e	2008	Strengthening country ownership, building more effective partnerships and achieving development results	Enhanced focus on country ownership, inclusive partnerships and transparency in aid delivery Emphasis on predictability of aid and use of country systems
Busan Partnership Agreement ^f	2011	Broadening the concept of development cooperation to include emerging economies, civil society and the private sector Focus on effective development cooperation, country ownership, inclusive partnerships, results, transparency and accountability	Establishment of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation Emphasis on inclusive development partnerships and shared responsibility for development outcomes Regular monitoring of development effectiveness, sharing of best practices, and fostering partnerships among governments, the private sector and civil society
Third International Conference on Financing for Development ^g	2015	Financing for sustainable development, including domestic resource mobilization, private sector investment and international development cooperation	A comprehensive framework to align financial flows with Sustainable Development Goals Emphasis on innovative financing mechanisms, technology transfer and capacity-building

Note: ^a Monterrey Conference. See <https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/overview/monterrey-conference.html>.

^b United Nations, United Nations Department of Public Information, *Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development* (New York, 2003). Available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.198_11.pdf.

^c *Rome Declaration on Harmonization*. See https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/category/coordinate/rome_dec0302.html.

^d Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Aid Effectiveness 2011 Progress in Implementing the Paris Declaration* (Paris, Better Aid, 2012). Available at https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2012/03/aid-effectiveness-2011_g1g1530a/9789264125780-en.pdf.

^e Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA)* [summary] (Paris, 2008). Available at <https://www.effectivecooperation.org/system/files/2020-09/Accra%20Agenda%20for%20Action.pdf>.

^f Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, *Enhancing Effectiveness to Accelerate Sustainable Development: a Compendium of Good Practices* (2019). Available at <https://www.effectivecooperation.org/system/files/2020-05/Global-Compendium-of-Good-Practices-Document.pdf>.

^g United Nations, *Third International Conference on Financing for Development: Taking Stock of Side Events and Voluntary Commitments and Initiatives* (New York, 2016). Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2359ffd3_SideEvents_Commitments.pdf.

Appendix 5. EVALUATION MATRIX

Key evaluation questions:

- 1) How does the GCF define and operationalize country ownership, and how is this approach aligned with the international narrative, UNFCCC COP guidance and the GCF's strategic objectives?
- 2) How effectively do the GCF's funding modalities, processes and institutional mechanisms enable meaningful country ownership and address the needs and priorities of recipient countries?
- 3) What are the key factors that influence country ownership, including those within GCF operations and those outside such as institutional capacity? Has the international climate change community promoted any key lessons on promoting country ownership?
- 4) Since the GCF is a rapidly evolving institution, what emerging lessons and ongoing/recent developments should inform the operationalization of its country ownership approach moving forward?

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
Relevance	1. How does the GCF define and operationalize country ownership, and how is this approach aligned with the international narrative, UNFCCC COP guidance and the GCF's strategic objectives?	1.1 What are the main trends in the international narrative on country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key trends in the definition of country ownership in development cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COA2019 • Grey literature (incl. 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, Bridgetown Initiative, G20 documents, V20 documents, national development banks report by Boston University, Overseas Development Institute) • Peer-reviewed literature • Key informants at agencies selected for benchmarking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape review • Interviews • Benchmarking with maximum five agencies (GEF, AF, and 2 or 3 non-climate agencies with a well-developed approach to country ownership) • Theory of change analysis
		1.2 What is the UNFCCC COP guidance related to country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolution of COP guidance on country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COA2019 • UNFCCC COP decisions 	Document review (update COA2019 analysis of COP)

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
		1.3 What is the guidance from the GCF Board on country ownership, and to what extent is it aligned to UNFCCC COP guidance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolution of the discussions on country ownership in the Board • Alignment of Board guidance to UNFCCC COP guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COA2019 • Board documents (discussions on country drivenness, no-objection letters, NDA designation, climate rationale, multi-country and single-country projects, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review (update COA2019 analysis of Board guidance)
		1.4 How does the GCF define and promote country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolution in the GCF definition of country ownership • Overview of processes through which country ownership is operationalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF Investment Framework, <i>Guidelines for Enhanced Country Ownership and Country Drivenness</i>, other relevant policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Theory of change analysis
		1.5 To what extent does the operationalization of country ownership align with the GCF's broader strategic goals and vision, including USP-2 and the 50by30 vision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of policies and processes related to country ownership with the GCF's strategic goals and vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USP-2, 50by30 vision, relevant policies • GCF Secretariat staff • GCF Board members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews
		1.6 What progress have multilateral climate funds made on complementarity and coherence, and to what extent does this advance country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress in collaboration with the GEF, AF and Climate Investment Funds with relevance to country ownership • Emerging good practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports of the GCF Secretariat to the Board and the COP, Draft Action Plan, Board meeting reports • GCF Board • GCF Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews
Effectiveness	2. How effectively do the GCF's	2.1 To what extent is country ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of country ownership as an investment criterion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
	funding modalities, processes and institutional mechanisms enable meaningful country ownership and address the needs and priorities of recipient countries?	embedded in investment decisions by the GCF?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade-offs in the application of the country ownership investment criterion (e.g. efficiency versus country ownership, or risk management versus ownership) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews
		2.2 How effectively does the GCF's engagement with NDAs and focal points enable a broad spectrum of country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which GCF guidelines on NDA/focal point appointment and responsibilities enables broad country ownership • Extent to which the support provided by the RPSP to NDAs and focal points enables country ownership • Examples of the role played by NDAs/focal points in fostering country ownership • Stakeholders' perception of the role played by NDAs/focal points in fostering country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points • Other country stakeholders⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives
		2.3 How effectively does GCF stakeholder engagement enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which stakeholder engagement guidance under the Revised Environmental and Social Policy enables country ownership • Extent to which the support provided by the RPSP for stakeholder engagement enables country ownership • Examples of the role played by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points • Other country stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives

⁶ These may include, as relevant, line ministries, executing agencies, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities groups, private sector organizations, and other country stakeholders engaged in GCF projects.

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
			<p>stakeholder engagement processes in country ownership (at what stages, to what effect, good practices)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders' perception of the role played by stakeholder engagement processes in country ownership 		
		2.4 How effectively does country programming enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which GCF policies leverage country programmes for country ownership • Extent to which the support provided by the RPSP for country programming and investment planning enable country ownership • Examples of how country programmes are used to create and sustain country ownership (at the government and societal level) • Emerging lessons from experiences with country platforms (what rationale, how many, to what effect) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points • Other country stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives
		2.5 How effectively does the no-objection procedure enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key enablers / barriers to country ownership in the no-objection procedure • Extent to which the no-objection procedure is used in practice to ensure country ownership • Good practices in the use of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs/focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
			no-objection procedure		
		2.6 How effectively do accreditation and direct access enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key enablers / barriers to country ownership in accreditation procedures (incl. for direct access) • Extent to which RPSP support for DAEs enables country ownership • Relationship between direct access and country ownership across different country contexts • Relationship between efficiency of accreditation and country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • DAEs • NDAs / focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives • Portfolio analysis
		2.7 How effectively does the Project Preparation Facility enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key enablers/barriers to country ownership in the Project Preparation Facility • Examples of how the Project Preparation Facility has supported country ownership (what activities, when, how) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points • Other country stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives
		2.8 To what extent does the project approval process enable country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key enablers/ barriers to country ownership in the project approval process • Extent to which the project approval process has supported country ownership • Relationship between efficiency in the project approval process and country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives • Portfolio analysis
		2.9 To what extent is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key enablers / barriers to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
		country ownership sustained during the post-approval processes and implementation?	country ownership at post-approval / implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders' perceptions of country ownership during implementation • Relationship between efficiency in the post-approval process and country ownership 	guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Country deep dives
		2.11 To what extent are country-level systems used and supported by the GCF?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which country systems (e.g. procurement, financial management, monitoring and evaluation) are used and supported by the GCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF policies and guidelines • GCF Secretariat • NDAs/focal points • DAEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives
		2.12 What are the key dimensions of country ownership in different countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot signals of country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDAs/focal points • AEs • Other country stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Country deep dives • Theory of change analysis
Factors of effectiveness	3. What are the key factors that influence country ownership, including those within GCF operations and those outside such as institutional capacity?	3.1 What are they key factors that influence country ownership within GCF operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of country ownership of single versus multi-country projects • Alignment of FPs using different financial instruments (grants, loans, etc.) to country needs, priorities and capacities • Alignment of public/private sector FPs to country needs and priorities • Other key factors within GCF operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF Secretariat reports • Board discussions and decisions • GCF IEU evaluations • NDAs/focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Country deep dives • Portfolio analysis

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
		3.2 What are the key factors outside GCF operations that influence country ownership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors outside the sphere of control of the GCF that influence country ownership (incl. institutional capacity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points • Other country stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Country deep dives • Documentary review
		3.3 What is the relationship of country ownership with project effectiveness and sustainability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which progress towards project outcomes and impacts is related to the level of country ownership • Stakeholder perception on the correlation of country ownership with project effectiveness and sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects' annual and evaluation reports • GCF Secretariat • AEs • NDAs / focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio analysis • Interviews • Country deep dives
Lessons and emerging trends	4. In a rapidly evolving institution, what emerging lessons and ongoing/recent developments should inform the operationalization of country ownership moving forward?	4.1 What lessons have emerged with respect to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50by30 • Revisions of USP • Vulnerability • Access • Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons related to country ownership in the current context of the GCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports of the GCF Secretariat to the Board, Board meeting reports, review of the <i>Guidelines for Enhanced Country Ownership and Country Drivenness</i> • GCF IEU evaluations • GCF Board • GCF Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews
		4.2 What ongoing/recent developments in the GCF have implications for its approach to country ownership? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring of the GCF Secretariat (approved in October 2024)/ ongoing discussions on regional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing/recent developments with implications for the GCF approach to country ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports of the GCF Secretariat to the Board, Board meeting reports • GCF Board • GCF Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews

Evaluation foci	Key question	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods for data collection and analysis
		presence <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing review of the accreditation framework (due in June 2025)• Revised RPSP (launched in October 2024)			

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