INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND'S SIMPLIFIED APPROVAL PROCESS

Approach paper

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Independent Evaluation of the Green Climate Fund's Simplified Approval Process

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Accredited entity
AI	Artificial intelligence
APR	Annual performance report
B.18	Eighteenth meeting of the Board
DAE	Direct access entity
FP	Funding proposal
GCF	Green Climate Fund
IAE	International accredited entity
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
IRMF	Integrated results management framework
KPI	Key performance indicator
MAR	Management action report
NDA	National designated authority
PAP	Project approval process
PMF	Performance measurement framework
PPF	Project Preparation Facility
PSAA	Project-Specific Assessment Approach
RPSP	Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme
GEF	Global Environment Facility
RFP	Request for proposals
SIDS	Small island developing State

A. BACKGROUND

Paragraph 31 of the Governing Instrument of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) states that the Fund will provide simplified and improved access to funding, including direct access, basing its activities on a country-driven approach. Adopted during the eighteenth meeting of the Board (B.18) in October 2017 and updated at B.32 in 2022, the Simplified Approval Process (SAP) intends to provide simplified and improved access to funding and improve the efficiency and timeliness in the design, review, approval and disbursement procedures for small-scale proposals.

The GCF introduced the SAP in decision B.18/06 for proposals under USD 10 million with limited social and environmental risks.[1] The Independent Evaluation Unit's (IEU) workplan for 2020 included an independent assessment of the SAP (hereinafter referred to as "SAP2020"). This assessment was delivered to the Board and approved in decision B.30/02.

The IEU's SAP2020 evaluation crafted a set of recommendations for both the Board and the Secretariat. The evaluation encouraged the Board to consider developing a strategy and processes for the SAP to accelerate, simplify and meet the guidelines from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Further, the evaluation proposed to (i) simplify and tailor the SAP review and investment criteria, (ii) simplify financial terms, consider delegated authority, and (iii) implement a rolling independent Technical Advisory Panel (iTAP) review process alongside a robust monitoring system.

Regarding the Secretariat, the IEU's SAP2020 evaluation recommended simplifying requirements and documentation, especially for small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), fast-tracking post-approval processes, and offering a capacity enhancement programme for direct access entities (DAEs) within the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP). Further, the evaluation suggested a bespoke approach for the private sector and the implementation of incentivizing key performance indicators (KPIs) within the Secretariat.[2]

The IEU submitted a management action report (MAR) to the Board one year following decision B.30/02 (see annex VIII to document GCF/B.34/Inf. 10). The MAR assessed the Secretariat's progress with the evaluation's recommendations.[3]

The GCF Secretariat made several alterations to the SAP modality between the approval of the IEU's workplan for 2020 at B.24 and the completed independent assessment in decision B.30/02. For example, the Secretariat's 2021 work programme introduced a new KPI to track performance against service standards for SAP concept note feedback and SAP funding proposal (FP) reviews (GCF/B.27/04).

Moreover, the GCF Secretariat emphasized identifying and reporting SAP co-benefits by adopting the integrated results management framework (IRMF) in decision B.29/01. Specifically, that co-benefits must be reported at the same level as the level of project or programme outcomes in the SAP theory of change diagrams in section D2.[4]

The IRMF also introduced a new section for mapping outcomes to GCF result areas and categorizing co-benefits for the SAP.[5] Further, corresponding indicators were included in the

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[1] At this stage two key changes were (i) making the application process simpler with fewer pages, and the completion of simplified concept notes and FPs, and (ii) a streamlined review and approval process.
[2] Independent Evaluation Unit (2020d).
[3] Details of the management action report for the SAP evaluation are presented in Appendix 2.
[4] Green Climate Fund (2022b), figure 3, p. 9.
[5] Green Climate Fund (2022b), section B.2.

project templates' log frame along with a baseline, means of verification, and midterm and final targets.[6]

Further adjustments to Secretariat policies and procedures at this time include clarifying and streamlining links between GCF support programmes, such as the Project Preparation Facility (PPF) and the SAP. For example, the Secretariat simplified PPF funding and the PPF service to cater to the different needs of countries and accredited entities (AEs), particularly for LDCs and DAEs, including via the RPSP, as illustrated in the 2021 and 2022 work programme of the Secretariat (see documents GCF/B.27/04, GCF/B.30/09, respectively).

Measures taken at this stage also include designing and approving administrative instructions for delegating the approval of PPF grants, services, and technical assistance to the Deputy Executive Director and allowing PPF to be approved based on project ideas.

The SAP modality was updated in 2022 at B.32. Importantly, document GCF/B.32/05 confirmed total GCF contributions to SAP projects will increase to USD 25 million per FP, while ensuring no to minimal adverse environmental and social risks or impacts. Through the *Updated simplified approval process and activity cycle* approved at B.32 (annex IV to decision B.32/05), the GCF intended to target DAEs, aiming to reach, over time, a portfolio where 50 per cent of the approved SAP proposals are from DAEs.

Further, through decision B.32/05, the Board requested the Secretariat to continue identifying areas for further simplification in GCF processes and to support the review of the SAP, the implementation of strategic programming activities, and the overall policy cycle for the next programming period.

In this respect, decision B.32/05 made a number of important changes to the SAP programme, many of which reflected the IEU's recommendations and the IEU's MAR (see document GCF/B.34/Inf. 10, annex VIII). These include embedding increasingly ambitious KPIs for the SAP, including for the post-approval stage, and the continued and enhanced provision of readiness support for SAP proposal preparation and access.

Overall, decision B.32/05 reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to simplify the documentation for SAP proposals, ensuring projects or programmes are expected to possess significant climate impact potential and scaling up the potential for transformation and paradigm shift. In addition, and in line with the updated SAP, the Secretariat started implementing capacity-building initiatives aimed at DAEs, national designated authorities (NDAs) and private sector AEs to facilitate access to SAP.

During B.40, the GCF Board approved the 2025 IEU workplan (see annex VI to decision B.40/14), which includes an independent evaluation of the GCF's SAP.

At the time of writing this approach paper, the GCF Board had approved 47 SAP projects, 23 before and 24 after the updated SAP at B.32, with total GCF financing of USD 607.26 million and co-financing contributions of USD 394.88 million. These projects span 38 countries and include commitments of USD 404.34 million specifically directed to LDCs, SIDS, and African nations.

Of the 47 approved projects, five focus on mitigation, 33 on adaptation and nine cross-cutting. Regionally, the Asia-Pacific is most frequent with 21 projects, followed by Africa with 19 projects, Latin America with four, and Eastern Europe with three. Most projects – 41 in total – are classified as public sector, while six projects are categorized as private sector.

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[6] Green Climate Fund (2022b), section E.

All of the projects are single-country initiatives, except one multi-country. By entity type, 26 projects are implemented through international accredited entities (IAEs), six through regional DAEs and 15 through national DAEs. All projects bar one are financed fully or partially through grants. Three use senior loans, two rely on equity, one includes a subordinated loan, another uses a guarantee, and one includes a reimbursable grant.

At the time of writing this approach paper, SAP projects mainly focus on three result areas. A total of 23 SAP projects are mapped to the "Livelihoods of People and Communities" results area. These projects focus on improving community resilience and adaptive capacity, often through sustainable agriculture, ecosystem management, and empowering vulnerable groups. Eleven projects contribute to the "Health, Wellbeing, Food and Water Security" result area, a similar number to the SAP projects mapped to "Ecosystems and Ecosystem Services" result areas.[7]

This approach paper outlines the current GCF policy context and how this has evolved since the SAP2020 evaluation, as well as the evaluation methods and approaches. It details the evaluation questions, timelines, deliverables, and the evaluation team's structure and responsibilities.

1. THE SAP ACCESS MODALITY WITHIN THE GCF'S CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

After decision B.32/05, the GCF's policy and procedural landscape has evolved considerably, with implications for the continued importance and relevance of the SAP modality. The GCF has recently revised key pillars of its operating business model. These pillars include the revised accreditation strategy (decision B.34/19), RPSP strategy 2024–2027 (decision B.37/21), and the revised accreditation framework (decision B.40/15), all of which have implications for SAP's continued role within the GCF landscape.

The Secretariat is currently mandated to review GCF policies, including the updated SAP (document GCF/B.32/05), to ensure coherence with the new accreditation and project development landscape. More widely, from 2024, the GCF Secretariat has embarked on a reform and efficiency process, including but not limited to re-examining internal project review and approval processes, streamlining internal processes and documentation through using revised, simpler, shorter templates, as well as reviewing the 1-year pipeline priority list with a focus on country ownership and alignment.

The next section of this approach paper summarizes key aspects of the broader revised policy and procedural landscape, starting with the revised accreditation strategy (decision B.34/19).

2. BROADER GCF POLICIES

With decision B.07/02, paragraph (a), the Board adopted the "initial guiding framework" for the GCF accreditation process, stating that "the Accreditation Framework will be an evolving process". It also stipulated that the guiding framework should be reviewed to incorporate the knowledge gained from the Fund's experience.[8] Through decisions B.08/02 and B.08/06, the Board adopted guidelines to operationalise a "fit-for-purpose accreditation approach." These guidelines state that "the accreditation process will take into account the scale of funding that the entity intends to access,

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[7] The number of projects mapped to each of the GCF results areas is shown in Appendix 1.
[8] See annex I to decision B.07/02, paras. 59–61.

its track record in undertaking climate-related projects and activities, as well as the nature of its intended activities."[9] [10]

The IEU conducted a synthesis of the accreditation function in 2020[11] and an independent synthesis on direct access in the GCF.[12] The latter synthesis recommended a need to ease direct access through different project approval channels, including the SAP, and to incentivize and facilitate access by a wider range of institutions. This synthesis further encouraged the Secretariat to develop an SAP strategy while focusing on processes that accelerate and simplify the project cycle and respond to the Conference of the Parties' guidance. The synthesis also offered further key recommendations for the SAP, including simplifying the SAP review criteria and developing different and tailored investment criteria.

Revised Accreditation Strategy

In decision B.34/19, the Board adopted the revised accreditation strategy to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and inclusiveness in GCF programming goals. It proposed the Project-Specific Assessment Approach (PSAA) as a tool for strategically identifying new partners, countries, and technologies underserved by the Fund. The PSAA pilot offers an alternative approach for accessing GCF resources compared to institutional accreditation (see decisions B.29/06 and B.31/06, paragraph (h)). The PSAA pilot framework was approved for three years, from April 2023 to March 2026. In 2024, 10 entities were encouraged to submit concept notes and FPs, with at least nine PSAA documentation packages submitted to the Secretariat. At the time of writing this approach paper, at least three entity or proposal partnerships have been endorsed at the CIC2 stage, and at least one PPF service request was approved. Prior to B.41, one project had been approved under the PSAA – an SAP project in Burundi (SAP045) delivered through the One Acre Fund.

Following the revised Accreditation Strategy, the Board approved the Accreditation Framework at B.40 (decision B.40/15). The framework aims to better align accreditation with the updated Strategic Plan 2024–2027 and includes principles for enhancing access and improving speed, predictability, efficiency, flexibility and transparency of procedures and modalities. In addition, it aims to reduce administration and bottlenecks and to ensure predictable and appropriate accreditation time frames.

Overall, the framework aims to link accreditation more explicitly to AEs best suited to GCF programming, to build capacities and, via re-accreditation, to manage partner performance and results. The Accreditation Framework recognized key administrative operational challenges, including significant transaction costs associated with re-accreditation, delays for applicants in the accreditation pipeline, and entities that, despite successfully completing accreditation, face burdensome conditions or capacity limitations, which hinder their ability to engage in programming.

As of December 2024, GCF had 134 AEs, including 87 DAEs, of which 65 have programmed with GCF. As of July 2024, 46 developing countries had at least one DAE accredited, and 48 had a DAE applicant in the pipeline.

Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme

The RPSP, as stipulated in paragraph 40 of the Governing Instrument for the GCF and operationalised by decision B.08/11, is mandated to provide resources for readiness and preparatory

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[9] Decision B.08/02, annex I, paragraph 5.
[10] These guidelines also state that "it is expected that the accreditation process will generally be completed within six months after submission of all the required documentation. The Fund will work on continuously improving its efficiency to reduce this timeframe…." (decision B.08/02, annex I, paragraph 7).
[11] Independent Evaluation Unit (2020b).
[12] Independent Evaluation Unit (2023c; 2024).

activities that strengthen countries' capacities to access GCF funding. The RPSP has supported NDAs and focal points in developing low-emission and climate-resilient strategies, fostered multi-stakeholder engagement and coordination for climate planning and programming, and supported knowledge-sharing and learning.[13]

The first IEU evaluation of the RPSP found that various factors hindered and enabled RPSP results across its portfolio[14], including political changes, reshuffles in government departments and limited awareness, accessibility and utilization of the RPSP. In addition, the location of the NDA within governmental structures, the country's sociopolitical context, and the DAE and delivery partner landscape were found to impact effectiveness. Implementation timelines also hindered the delivery of RPSP outputs.

Despite these challenges, the evaluation found that the RPSP was effective in supporting NDAs or focal points by coordinating and integrating national climate finance systems. Further, the evaluation found that the RPSP was effective for adaptation planning.

Regarding the second IEU evaluation of the RPSP in 2023, the IEU found the revised readiness strategy aligned well with national circumstances and targeted vulnerable countries, although access for the most vulnerable could be improved. The revised RPSP strategy 2024–2027 (GCF/B.37/17) provides up to USD 7 million per country to NDAs or focal points to support pipeline development, capacity-building, policy development and strategic frameworks.[15] Moreover, the RPSP strategy extends further support to DAEs by allocating USD 1 million per entity over four years through grants under the DAE support modality. Further, LDCs and SIDS can now receive up to USD 320,000 for direct access per country over four years.

However, the IEU evaluation found little harmonization between the release of the RPSP strategy and tools for operationalisation and implementation. This has contributed to a perception of constant change among stakeholders and led to ex-post adjustments and retrofitting tools and frameworks to operationalise the strategy.[16]

The Secretariat aims for RPSP to complement PPF support and, as illustrated through the RPSP work programme and budget for 2022–2023 (document GCF/B.33/07), continues to support the development of concept notes for priority areas, including SAP and PSAA.

Project Preparation Facility

As mandated by decision B.13/21, the PPF can provide financial support to AEs preparing full FPs for consideration by the Board based on a concept note cleared for project preparation support vis-à-vis GCF investment criteria.[17] The PPF is specifically designed to support DAEs developing micro projects under USD 10 million and small projects of USD 10–50 million, aligning with the scale of projects supported by the SAP. The PPF aims to enhance the balance and diversity of the GCF project portfolio. Decision B.37/22 endorsed the revised operating modalities for PPF, including an allocation of USD 90.3 million for the PPF. This decision outlined how up to 2.5 per cent of the PPF resource allocation can be employed for partnership-building and knowledge-sharing activities for project preparation.

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[13] GCF/B.37/17.
[14] Independent Evaluation Unit (2023d).
[15] In addition, up to USD 3 million per country over four years can be provided to NDAs or focal points if needed beyond the initial USD 7 million. However, it is contingent upon the near exhaustion of the main envelope, with less than USD250,000 remaining, and must be based on a clear, justified need and demonstrable impact on NAP implementation.
[16] Independent Evaluation Unit (2023d).
[17] Green Climate Fund (2020).

Integrated Results Management Framework

Through decision B.05/03, the Board adopted initial results areas and performance indicators to support the development of the initial Results Management Framework (initial RMF). Subsequently, in decision B.07/04, the Board adopted the initial RMF, and later, through decision B.08/07, adopted correlated performance indicators through the performance measurement frameworks (PMFs).

The IRMF responds to Board decision B.22/13 to revise the initial RMF and ensure better integration with other policies, including the initial Investment Framework. It seeks to enhance consistency and harmony between the initial Investment Framework, sub-criteria, and assessment factors (see decisions B.07/06 and GCF/B.09/05). Part of this process involves merging the initial RMF and PMFs. At B.28, the Board considered document GCF/B.28/04, titled "Addressing gaps in the current portfolio for measurement", and subsequently adopted the IRMF in decision B.29/01.

In addition, the IRMF aims to track progress towards the purpose, long-term vision, and strategic direction of the GCF, as outlined in the "Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund 2024–2027" (document GCF/B.36/17/Rev.01), with a particular focus on achieving a paradigm shift. Overall, the IRMF identifies paradigm shift and sustainable development potential as the key investment criteria for measuring the GCF's impact in terms of scalability, replicability, and co-benefits, making them central to evaluating GCF-2 after the GCF's 2024–2027 programming cycle.

Appendix 3 outlines the timeline for the policy updates, while Figure 1 presents them in a graphic.

Figure 1. Timeline for key policy updates
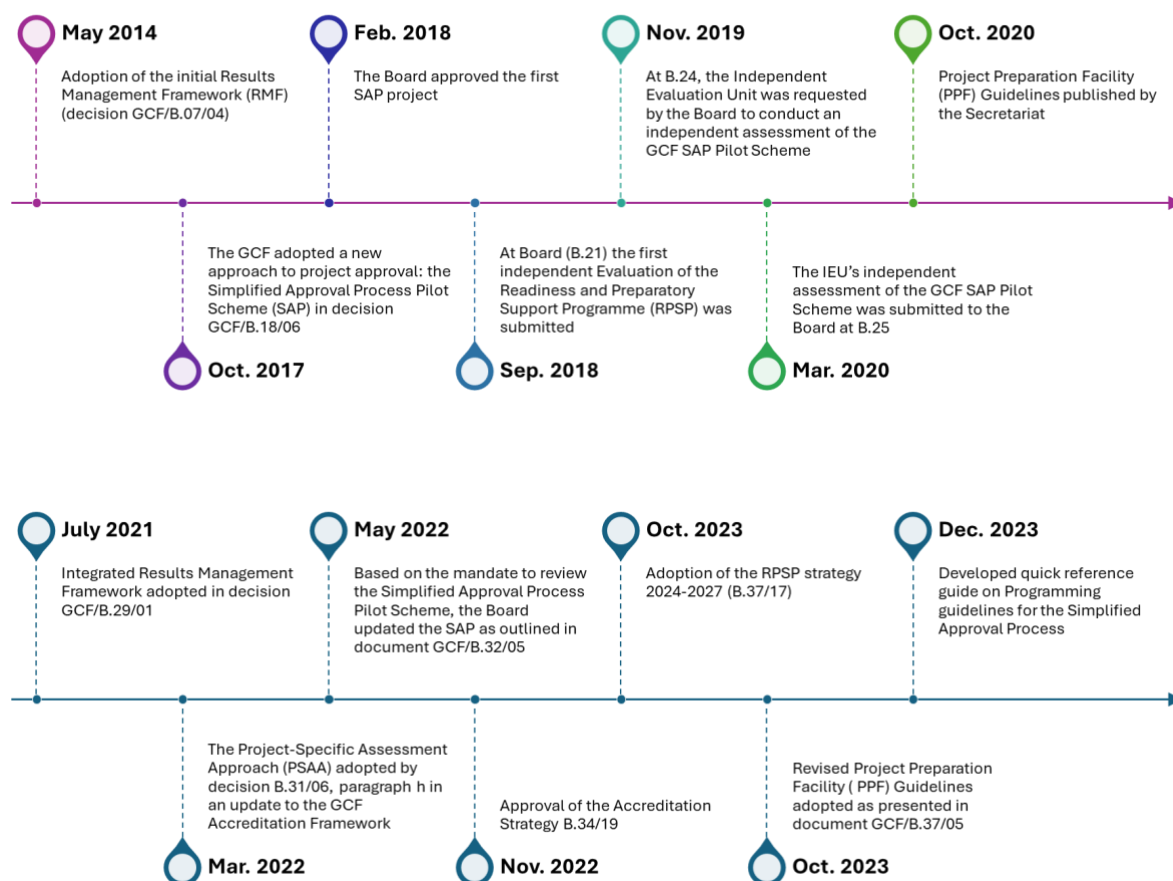
B. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF EVALUATION

1. OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL SCOPE

The evaluation's objective is to assess the SAP's continued coherence, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in ensuring easier access to GCF resources and addressing the needs of developing countries. The findings from this evaluation are scheduled to be submitted at B.42 of the GCF Board.

Specifically, the independent evaluation will examine the following five criteria:

- **Coherence**: The degree to which the SAP operates alongside other internal GCF modalities and policies to achieve strategic goals and objectives (internal coherence) and the level of consistency, complementarity, harmonization and coordination it has with other climate funds (external coherence), ensuring SAP adds value while not duplicating effort.

- **Relevance**: The degree to which the GCF's SAP is fit-for-purpose, sufficiently targeted and agile in meeting the needs of developing countries, with an emphasis on the extent to which the objectives, design and operationalization of the policy respond to and adapt to institutional needs.

- **Effectiveness**: The degree to which the SAP successfully delivers on its mandate to streamline and speed up effective programming of climate projects, including explaining the factors driving or hindering successful implementation and the extent to which the SAP achieves its objectives and expected results.

- **Efficiency**: The extent to which the SAP modality delivers results using minimum financial and human resources and in a timely fashion compared to feasible alternatives in the GCF context.

- **Impact**: The extent to which the SAP has generated significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.

Through benchmarking, the evaluation will analyse the contribution to promoting best practices across the GCF, especially by reviewing how simplified access policies, standards, and modalities fit within the business models and context of comparator institutions and partners.

The evaluation team will generate, triangulate and analyse evaluative evidence, insights and learning that respond to the evaluation questions. Evidence collected through all methods will be synthesised to form evaluative judgments and provide recommendations on the GCF's SAP modality.

2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Table 1 presents the evaluation questions mapped to evaluation criteria, along with a description of the approach and the data to be used.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria and evaluation questions

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	How the questions will be addressed through evaluation methods
Coherence	The degree to which the SAP operates alongside other internal GCF modalities and policies to achieve strategic goals and objectives (internal coherence) and the level of consistency, complementarity, harmonization and coordination it has with other climate funds (external coherence), ensuring SAP adds value while not duplicating effort.	**Document review**: To assess the internal coherence of GCF's SAP, the evaluation will undertake a detailed desk-based review of GCF's internal documentation. The review will examine the alignment of SAP with other internal policies and frameworks and assess how they collectively contribute to achieving the GCF's strategic and institutional objectives. **Key informant interviews** (KIIs): Interviews with GCF staff and external stakeholders will assess alignment of GCF's SAP modality with broader internal policies and frameworks to achieve strategic goals and objectives. KIIs will also provide lessons learned from the simplified access modalities in other multilateral organizations. **Benchmarking**: External coherence will be assessed by comparing simplified access modalities across comparator funds using the document review and the KIIs. **Online stakeholder survey**: A survey with AEs will collect perception data on SAP's value added compared to other GCF access modalities and similar simplified access modalities within other multilateral organizations.
Relevance	The degree to which the GCF's SAP is fit-for-purpose, sufficiently targeted and agile in meeting the needs of developing countries, with an emphasis on the extent to which the objectives, design and operationalisation of the Policy respond to and adapt to institutional needs.	**Workshops**: Formative workshops will gather input from a range of GCF staff on their perceptions and preferences regarding the relevance of SAP and the project approval process (PAP) access modalities. **Document review**: To examine the evolution of the SAP modality and analyse whether its design aligns with and responds to GCF's current strategic objectives and institutional needs, including its role in promoting a paradigm shift. **Secondary data analysis**: To understand whether the operationalisation of the SAP policy effectively responds and adapts to institutional needs and contributes to promoting a paradigm shift. **KIIs**: To gather insights from GCF staff, former staff and external stakeholders, including IAEs, DAEs and others, on the design and implementation of the SAP in the context of GCF funding activities. **Benchmarking**: To compare SAP with other similar funds, assessing its targeting, agility and responsiveness to evolving institutional needs. **Online stakeholder survey**: To collect AEs' perceptions of SAP's continued relevance within the evolving GCF policy landscape.

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	How the questions will be addressed through evaluation methods
Effectiveness	The degree to which the SAP successfully delivers on its mandate to streamline and speed up effective programming of climate projects, including explaining the factors driving or hindering successful implementation and the extent to which the SAP achieves its objectives and expected results.	**Literature review**: The evaluation will explore best practices and emerging innovations in academic and grey literature related to process simplification within multilateral organisations, focusing on enhancing access to resources and better addressing the needs of developing countries. **Document review**: The desk review will help assess project-level data, midterm evaluation reports, and annual performance reports (APRs). **Benchmarking**: The evaluation team will measure SAP's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate to streamline and accelerate programming, comparing it to similar simplified access modalities in comparable funds. **Secondary data analysis**: To measure SAP's effectiveness in achieving outcomes, secondary data will be reviewed and analysed, assessing timeliness, achievement of objectives, and results, with the possibility of conducting a cost-effectiveness analysis. **Online survey**: A series of closed and open questions and Likert scale assessments will capture AEs' perceptions about and experiences with the SAP access modality. **KIIs**: In-depth interviews with GCF personnel and external stakeholders, particularly AEs, will explore their perspectives on SAP's effectiveness and usefulness.
Efficiency	The extent to which the SAP modality delivers results using minimum financial and human resources and in a timely fashion compared to feasible alternatives in the GCF context.	**Workshops**: Formative workshops will gather input from a range of GCF staff on their perceptions and preferences regarding the efficiency of SAP and PAP access modalities. **Document review**: An assessment of project-level data, midterm evaluation reports and APRs. **Secondary data analysis**: Secondary data will be analysed to measure the efficiency of SAP's implementation process and compare operational speed and financial and human resource utilization vis-à-vis the PAP access modality. This will include timestamp analysis, KPI achievement, and cost comparison between SAP and PAP. **Online survey**: Personnel from AEs will share their perceptions of the efficiency of SAP in comparison to PAP. **KIIs**: In-depth interviews with GCF personnel and external stakeholders, particularly AEs, will explore their perspective on the efficiency of streamlined processes in SAP and PAP access modalities.
Impact	The extent to which the SAP has generated significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.	**Document review**: The review will help compare beneficiary and project-level achievements using midterm evaluation reports and APRs. **Secondary data analysis**: GCF data sets, in the form of secondary data, will be analysed to determine if SAP has generated similar or different outputs, outcomes and impacts compared to PAP modality. **Case studies**: The evaluation will conduct an outcome harvest of a purposefully stratified sample of projects to assess the theory of change and identify signs of progress or early indications of impact. **KIIs**: In-depth interviews with GCF personnel and external stakeholders will explore their perspectives on the impacts of SAP and PAP project portfolios.

The IEU aims to offer the SAP2025 evaluation for consideration at B.42 from 30 June to 3 July 2025, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Table 2 identifies key GCF stakeholders anticipated to consider, in some shape or form, the key findings and recommendations from this independent evaluation.

Table 2. Key stakeholder groups for the evaluation

Key stakeholder groups
COP
GCF Board
GCF Secretariat
GCF partners and stakeholders, including AEs, executing entities, active observers
GCF beneficiaries, including Indigenous Peoples
External partners of the IEU (other evaluation offices)

C. KEY METHODS

The evaluation will use a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods and data to inform its evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Based on IEU evaluation criteria, the team will use a series of evaluation questions mapped to inform data and information collection. Team members will triangulate, verify and validate all data to ensure it is reliable and usable for analysis.

The team will ascertain and document the strength of the evidence generated and ensure that the evaluation's findings, recommendations, and conclusions are rigorous and robust. Stakeholders will include GCF Board members, staff and management, government officials, and individuals in peer institutions that fund climate projects.

1. DESK-BASED REVIEW

The evaluation will involve collecting, analysing and synthesizing internal and external data documentation to respond to the evaluation questions and inform the subsequent stages of the primary data-collection.

a. Document review

To cover the five evaluation criteria, the independent evaluation shall examine three areas:

- **GCF strategies, policies, standards, manuals and guidance documents**: Each document will be reviewed, coded and mapped. This review will capture key elements, including the main purpose, key requirements, changes introduced, and explicit and implicit links to the SAP. The analysis will look for inconsistencies concerning SAP processes. Table 3 lists the Board decisions included in the document review.

Table 3. Key documentation for this evaluation

Board decision	Document
B.07/02	Annex II: Initial fiduciary principles and standards

Board decision	Document
B.17/09	Annex IV: Updated project and programme cycle
B.17/11	Annex V: Risk management framework component I – revised risk register
	Annex VI: Risk management framework component II – risk appetite statement
	Annex VII: Risk management framework component III – risk dashboard
	Annex VIII: Risk management framework component IV – "Risk guidelines for funding proposals"
	Annex IX: Risk management framework component V – risk rating approach
B.19/04	Annex IV: Investment risk policy
	Annex V: Non-financial risk policy
	Annex VI: Funding risk policy
	Annex VII: Risk dashboard – revised reporting on concentration
B.19/11	Annex XI: Indigenous Peoples Policy
B.24/12	Annex XXIII: Gender Policy of the GCF
	Annex XXIV: Gender Action Plan of the GCF 2020-2023
	Annex XXV: Gender Action Plan Indicators
B.24/14	Annex XXVIII: Policy on Co-financing
B.29/01	Annex 1: Integrated results management framework
B.BM-2021/18	Annex I: Revised Environmental and Social Policy
B.32/05	Annex IV: Updated and Simplified approval process and activity cycle
B.34/19	Annex VIII: Accreditation strategy of the GCF
B.36/13	Annex III: Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund 2024-2027
B.37/17	Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme: revised strategy 2024-2027
B.37/20	Annex IX: Investment framework
B.40/15	Accreditation Framework

- **GCF processes, operations and implementation**: The SAP will be analysed from an implementation perspective, looking at where it intersects or links with other GCF processes, specifically the PPF and the PSAA.

  To assess how the PAP intersects with the SAP, the evaluation will compare project design, project cycles and processing timelines, documentation requirements and review criteria, and outcomes regarding processing speed and approval rates. The evaluation will also consider request for proposal projects, including those financed through the following access modalities: enhanced direct access; micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises; REDD+RBP; and mobilizing funds at scale.

- **Results, outcomes and impacts of the SAP modality**: The degree to which the SAP consistently achieves its stated aims and generates significant outcomes and impacts – positive or negative, intended or unintended – including higher-level effects.

b.   Literature review

The evaluation team will comprehensively review academic and grey literature, synthesizing the approaches identified in these sources. These documents will also inform the benchmarking

analysis. The literature review will be ongoing throughout the evaluation, refining and enhancing the evaluation framework. Appendix 6 lists the initial set of documents selected for review.

c. Use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) will play a key role in this evaluation, supporting data extraction and synthesis. This will be conducted according to core principles which will guide how we evaluate with Generative AI. Given that AI models are complex and opaque, they can easily be seen as a "black box" models. This can lead to a lack of transparency and subsequently a lack of accountability for decisions that are made based on such models. In GCF's multilateral climate setting, we have a balance of Board members from Annex I and non-Annex I countries. To ensure that the use of AI is not misinterpreted as an attempt to obfuscate evaluative processes, our use of AI for this evaluation is fully transparent to enhance trust in the IEU's evaluation function and process – not undermine it.

The evaluation team will apply AI-driven methods to enhance efficiency, consistency, and scalability in reviewing evaluation reports and other textual sources. The team will use AI in the following ways:

- Implementing a keyword-based extraction process using Python scripts to summarize previous evaluations, identify and organize relevant content based on predefined key terms, and extract salient insights in their original context. Generative AI will then synthesize findings from extracted text and map them against evaluation criteria.

- Analysing narrative data from SAP project proposals to assess how well they articulate scaling ambitions and transformation pathways. This initial AI-assisted screening will be cross-referenced against two large data sets: the GCF's project portfolio (286 projects) and the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) historical database (6,315 projects). Using AI for this data analysis will enable rapid identification of cases where SAP projects have built upon previous climate investments, revealing clear scaling pathways that can be explored through KIIs with selected AEs, DAEs and other project stakeholders.

- Training AI on the characteristics of SAP using existing GCF guidance. These characteristics will then be compared to other GCF strategies, policies, standards, manuals and guidance documents to identify inconsistencies concerning SAP processes.

- Applying machine learning to explore clustering or predictive modelling for identifying patterns in project characteristics linked to higher efficiency or impact.

- Using ChatGPT to condense and summarize publicly available documents, such as strategies and annual reports from comparator agencies in the benchmarking exercise, and to structure the data in a comparable format.

- Employing AI tools embedded in video conferencing apps Teams and Zoom to transcribe KIIs with respondents' consent.

- Assessing the extent to which project APRs and midterm reviews document results, outcomes and impacts in line with approved project expectations. The team will use AI to compare a sample of SAP and PAP projects similar in maturity, result area, budget, and AE type.

By leveraging AI, the evaluation team aims to enhance the rigour of qualitative data analysis while optimizing the time and resources required for manual review. Evaluation team members will carefully review and validate all AI-generated outputs to ensure the accuracy and relevance of findings.

2. SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

This analysis will examine the secondary, quantitative data available to the IEU, structuring the quantitative data analysis around the areas detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. List of secondary data sources for analysis

Data sets	Owner/data sources	Key variables of interest
Power BI semantic model: Funded activities general	• Integrating data from multiple Secretariat sources, the semantic model (database) draws from systems such as the integrated portfolio management system (iPMS) and the portfolio performance management system. • The iPMS is the primary system for the intake and storage of most funded activities' ex-ante data, including expected targets and projected data. It captures high level project or programme data from Board-approved FPs, including project name, budget, co-financing details, key expected results and financial instruments. It also integrates information from additional databases uploaded periodically, including disbursed amounts, disbursement projections, funded activities' change-related information, investment income, etc. • The portfolio performance management system functions as a data intake platform for ex-post data, capturing actual and reported results by AEs that receive GCF resources to implement funded activities. While data intake is separated between ex-ante and ex-post data, they are connected via this semantic model, which allows the evaluation to analyse and compare ex-	Key variables available in the semantic models are as follows for demonstration purposes. However, new variables can be created based on combinations of existing/ available variables depending on the request of the evaluation team. • FP number (string) • Project name (string) • AE (string) • Accredited entity type (categorical) - IAE, DAE, regional • Country (string) • Region old (categorical) • Region new [based on new GCF organizational structure] (categorical) • Project size (categorical) • Theme (categorical) – adaptation/ mitigation/ cross-cutting) • Is under implementation (binary) • Is SIDS (binary) • Is LDCs (binary) • Is African state (binary) • Approved date (date) • FAA execution date (date) • FAA effectiveness date (date) • GCF financing (USD) (integer) • Co-financing (USD) (integer) • Funding in grant equivalent terms (USD) (integer) • GCF financing by country (USD) (integer) • GCF disbursed amount (USD) (integer) • GCF disbursement dates (date) • Project duration (months) (integer) • Results areas distribution (percentage) • Core adaptation impact indicator baseline (# of adaptation beneficiaries reached) (integer) • Core adaptation impact indicator target (# of adaptation beneficiaries reached) (integer) • Core adaptation impact indicator actual, ex-post (# of adaptation beneficiaries reached) (integer) • Core mitigation impact indicator baseline (greenhouse gas emission reduced in CO_2 equivalent) (integer) • Core mitigation impact indicator target (greenhouse gas

Data sets	Owner/data sources	Key variables of interest
	ante and ex-post data.	emission reduced in CO_2 equivalent) (integer)
		• Core mitigation impact indicator actual, ex-post (greenhouse gas emission reduced in CO_2 equivalent) (integer)

The secondary data analysis will provide evidence for evaluating relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact evaluation criteria. This will involve comparing the performance of SAP versus PAP project modalities in terms of potential outcomes, which include:

- Processing time, such as from approval to disbursement

- Cost-effectiveness, including AE administrative overheads

- Outcome achievements, comprising timeliness, attainment of objectives and results, broader positive or negative effects – intended or unintended – higher-level effects, as well as the speed and efficiency of financial and human resource use in operational processes

Further, the secondary data analysis will apply rigorous methods to generate robust insights to inform the evaluation. This may include using hypothesis tests to compare SAP and PAP projects of similar size and risk status. In addition, and dependent on the availability of sufficient time series data from APRs, the evaluation team may assess the impact of the SAP access modality using an appropriate regression framework. The secondary data analysis may include:

- Descriptive statistics: Summarizing key variables, such as median approval time and funding disbursed, to establish baseline comparisons.

- Comparative hypothesis testing: Using t-tests, analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) or non-parametric tests to assess differences between SAP and PAP projects on key metrics, such as efficiency and cost.

- Regression frameworks:
  - Applying regression models to identify factors influencing project efficiency and outcomes, controlling for covariates such as region, project size, and risk category.
  - Conducting time series analysis to evaluate trends in efficiency and performance over time for SAP and PAP projects, if sufficient longitudinal data is available.
  - Exploring machine learning techniques, such as clustering or predictive modelling, to identify patterns in project characteristics linked to higher efficiency or impact.

The secondary data analysis will ensure quality assurance of data sources by reviewing data completeness, consistency, and reliability to ensure robust analysis. It will document limitations and address potential biases, such as selection bias in SAP project adoption. Additionally, the secondary data analysis will ensure full integration with qualitative insights. Finally, secondary data analysis will be combined with insights from KIIs and surveys to triangulate findings.

3. BENCHMARKING

The team will compare how key multilateral organizations implement simplified access modalities, highlighting their unique features and strengths. In addition to comparing the GCF's SAP to those of similar institutions, the study will identify differentiating factors and standard practices in other institutions for further exploration through wider evaluation methods. The comparative study will

focus on simplified access modalities for specific subgroups of entities and modalities for all. Table 5 lists the indicative institutions for benchmarking.

Table 5. Comparative funds or organizations for landscape analysis and benchmarking

Comparative funds/organizations for landscape analysis and benchmarking		Channel(s)
Green Climate Fund	https://www.greenclimate.fund/#	Simplified Approval Process
Global Environment Facility	https://www.thegef.org	Least Developed Countries Fund Special Climate Change Fund
Adaptation Fund	https://www.adaptation-fund.org	Readiness Grant Funding
Climate Investment Funds	https://www.cif.org	Strategic Climate Fund Dedicated Grant Mechanism
Development Bank of Southern Africa	https://www.dbsa.org/about-us	Project Preparation Green Fund
Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria	https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/	Challenging Operating Environment policy
Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance	https://www.gavi.org	Fragility, Emergencies and Refugees policy

Key dimensions for comparison will include:

- Objective and scope of the modality
  – What is the specific purpose of the simplified modality, and does it focus on the speed of disbursement, targeting specific groups, etc.?
  – What is the financial cap for eligible proposals under the simplified track?
- Eligibility criteria
  – What types of entities can apply – governments, NGOs, private sector, etc.?
  – Are there requirements for accreditation or pre-qualification?
- Review and approval process
  – What steps are involved in reviewing and approving proposals – one-step or multi-step process, etc.?
  – What is the time frame for approval, from submission to disbursement?
- Technical assistance and capacity support
  – What types of support are provided to applicants with limited technical capacity, such as project formulation grants, readiness support, etc.?
  – Are there built-in mechanisms to support proposal preparation?
- Monitoring and reporting
  – How are reporting obligations structured to balance accountability and simplicity?
  – Are there simplified reporting tools or templates for smaller-scale recipients?
- Funding disbursement
  – What mechanisms are used to disburse funds – tranche-based, lump-sum, etc.?

- Are there fast-track disbursement options?
- Innovations and differentiating features
    - What unique practices or policies exist to streamline access or provide flexibility – GEF's Small Grants Programme, Gavi's Fragility Policy or similar?

The evaluation team will conduct KIIs with informants in all comparator funds. Having discussed the evaluation's secondary data analysis, the approach paper now provides an overview of the primary data-collection methods.

4. PRIMARY DATA-COLLECTION

a. Online survey

The team will conduct an online survey of AE representatives and to obtain a broad view of different entities' experiences and opinions. The questionnaire design will follow the principles of simplicity, flexibility, customization, and standardization, ensure representation while incorporating sufficient open-ended questions for expression and clarification.

The evaluation team will pilot the questionnaire before its formal launch to ensure it is comprehendible, logical, and feasible to complete in the estimated time.

The evaluation team will craft the questions for the online survey based on early responses from workshops, KIIs and the desk review. Table 6 outlines the questions under consideration for the online survey of AEs.

Table 6. Provisional online survey questions for AEs

Accredited entities
Relevance
In your view, is the SAP modality relevant and fit-for-purpose to meet the needs of developing countries?
Have SAP's objectives and design met your institutional needs over time?
Effectiveness
Has SAP streamlined and sped up the approval process for climate projects?
What challenges have hindered the SAP from contributing to GCF's strategic goals?
Have your SAP-funded projects met their expected results?
Efficiency
Has SAP improved the timeliness of the project development and review cycle?
If SAP has not improved timeliness, what are the main delays?
Coherence
Compared to the PAP, to what extent has the SAP modality used more or less financial and human resources in your AE to access or attempt to access GCF resources?
To what extent does SAP align with other GCF access modalities and windows, such as the PAP, PPF, PSAA or RPSP?
To what extent does SAP add value compared to other GCF mechanisms, such as the PAP and RfP windows (MSMEs, EDA, etc.)?
Impact
In your view, has the SAP produced a positive or negative, intended or unintended change?

Accredited entities
Compared to simplified access modalities within other organizations, how does SAP add more value?

b.   Key informant interviews

The team will develop interview protocols, which will be piloted and tested prior to being customized according to the stakeholder type. During interviews, team members will follow all ethical standards and procedures, as discussed in section C.4.d below.

Interviewers will write or type detailed notes during interviews. These notes will be anonymised per standard evaluation ethics and stored securely. Notes will be thematically coded for qualitative analysis based on the evaluation matrix for this evaluation. The evaluation will gather the coded interview excerpts and summarize the responses to determine interview-based findings for triangulation with other evidence to identify key evaluation findings.

Respondents will be sampled based on their designation, mandate, authority, and functions. To ensure an objective and in-depth response, the team will conduct semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions to prevent bias and avoid leading respondents. Interviews will encourage informants to share their perspectives, experiences, examples and insights without pressure, duress, expectations or time pressure. Table 7 lists the informants identified as important for interviews in the evaluation.

Table 7. List of informants identified as key respondents for in-depth interviews

Interview categories		Interview rationale
GCF Board members, alternates, and advisers, including active observers such as civil society organizations and private sector entities	10	Focused on governance, strategic decision-making, policy and overall guidance, particularly in balancing efficiency and accountability
Accreditation Panel and iTAP	4	Directly involved in the approval process to ensure that projects meet high quality standards, compliance and effectiveness. Interviews with the Accreditation Panel will focus on institutions, while discussions with iTAP will address the technical quality of projects.
Secretariat: offices and departments	30	Fluent about operational processes, project pipelines and fund management and have individual perspectives on efficiency
IAEs	8	Have a broader perspective across various contexts and in-house expertise in preparing complex proposals
DAEs	8	National actors leading localized project design with direct engagement to the GCF as well as key beneficiaries of the SAP's aim to make the approval process easier
Executing entities (EEs)	4	Oversee the implementation of SAP projects, including their practical challenges and impact, enabling them to assess if SAP projects are well-designed
Total	**64**	

Where possible, the sampling approach to select key informants among AEs and DAEs will apply an Outcome Harvesting lens to assess whether prior climate finance projects in the 37 SAP-

supported countries have contributed to scaling up ideas or approaches aligned with SAP's transformational objectives.

The evaluation will identify cases where earlier initiatives share thematic, technological, or methodological similarities with a later GCF SAP project by mapping projects from the GCF, GEF, AF, and Climate Investment Funds databases. Where instances can be identified, key informants from these countries will be prioritized for in-depth interviews to explore if and how past project experiences informed the design, scale-up, or replication of approaches, shedding light on the pathways through which SAP investments contribute to transformational change.

c. Workshops

Data-collection will start with in-person workshops to gather initial observations and attitudes among GCF personnel regarding the GCF's SAP access modality. To ensure a variety of views, the evaluation team will invite stakeholders from across the organisation to participate in the hour-long participatory workshops. Participants will represent different GCF divisions and offices, and specific individuals will be invited to ensure a range of experience, contract type and gender.

d. Ethical considerations

The evaluation will follow the ethical principles outlined in the GCF Evaluation Standards, which are based on the United Nations Evaluation Group's Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. The evaluation team will uphold integrity, honesty, professionalism, independence, impartiality, incorruptibility and sound judgment in all communications and actions. The evaluation team will remain answerable for all decisions and actions taken during the evaluation, honour commitments, and report any potential or actual harms observed through the appropriate channels. These principles will be upheld through transparency in the evaluation's purpose, design, conduct and responsiveness to questions and emerging events. Accountability will be ensured by meeting the evaluation's purpose, exercising due care, ensuring redress and recognition, and providing fair and accurate reporting to stakeholders, including affected people, on decisions, actions, and intentions. The team will also ensure the evaluation process and outputs reflect impartiality, objectivity, and the absence of bias at every stage. Multiple layers of internal and external quality assurance will be applied to safeguard impartiality and mitigate the risk of bias.

Further, the evaluation team will engage all stakeholders with respect, honouring their dignity, wellbeing and personal agency while being responsive to socio-biographical characteristics. The evaluations will ensure fair representation of different voices and perspectives, granting all relevant stakeholders access to the evaluation process and outcomes while promoting meaningful engagement and equitable treatment. The evaluation team will maintain an explicit and ongoing focus on risks and benefits, maximizing positive outcomes and ensuring no harm. The aim is to ensure that the evaluation does no harm while making a positive contribution.

e. Limitations and risks

Several limitations and risks will require careful management and mitigation.

- **Results, outcomes and impacts**: Several limitations exist in assessing impact, including the early implementation stage of several SAP projects. This has not allowed enough time for impact-level changes to become evident. Second, the heterogeneous nature of the portfolio, with projects varying substantially in contexts, intervention types and results areas, makes it challenging to conduct a robust comparative impact analysis or generate broad findings. Third, standard project reporting tools tend to focus more readily on verifiable outputs rather than

higher-level results. To address these constraints, the evaluation will draw a purposive stratified sample of projects for in-depth case studies. Through stakeholder interviews and analysis of project theories of change, these case studies will identify common factors contributing to success or challenges across different contexts. This approach will help build a more robust understanding of how SAP projects are progressing towards their intended impacts while being transparent about the limitations of early-stage impact assessment.

- **Data consistency after policy changes**: The 2021 introduction of the IRMF and the 2022 updated SAP resulted in key changes in reporting frameworks, potentially creating complications in comparing project outcomes, co-benefits, and performance. The team will mitigate this by conducting sub-period analyses where needed, focusing quantitative comparisons only on consistently measured indicators, and using normalized metrics such as cost-per-beneficiary rather than absolute values in cases where the frameworks differ.

- **Staff changes impacting institutional memory**: As with any maturing organisation, changes in personnel over time may affect institutional memory, particularly regarding the evolution of the SAP modality since its introduction in 2017 and the various changes that have occurred since then. The evaluation team will address this by interviewing long-standing and former staff members.

- **Stakeholder participation constraints**: The geographic dispersion of stakeholders across countries, language barriers, and time constraints may lower participation rates in primary data-collection. To mitigate this, the team will begin stakeholder outreach early, offering flexible interview time slots across different time zones, clearly communicating the purpose of the interviews and the information being sought. The team will also offer translation services and extend the interview window to accommodate as many key informants as possible.

- **Time pressure and analysis depth**: The need to complete the evaluation in time for B.42 in June–July 2025 creates timeline pressure, potentially requiring trade-offs between depth and breadth of analysis. To address this, the team will divide the workload and start data-collection activities in parallel where possible while including a buffer time between the preparation of drafts and publication to allow for internal discussions of the findings within the GCF Secretariat. Additionally, the team will identify minimum evidence requirements early and establish contingency plans for delayed inputs.

- **Benchmarking data access**: Benchmarking against simplified approval processes of peer organizations is an important part of the envisaged process. However, some funds may be unwilling or unable to share their experiences and insights about their approaches. To mitigate this, the evaluation team will triangulate publicly available information with targeted interviews, focus on specific comparable elements rather than comprehensive process mapping, and ensure transparency about any information gaps in the benchmarking analysis.

- The **use of AI in the evaluation** will adhere to the principles of full disclosure, transparency and accountability. The team will ensure its use of AI will enhance trust in the evaluation function and process rather than undermine it. The evaluation will maintain full transparency by explaining which steps used AI and how the text was verified, cross-checked and validated. This will be detailed in the evaluation report.

The evaluation team will continuously monitor risks throughout implementation and adjust mitigation measures as needed to ensure a robust and credible evaluation. The IEU leads the study and is responsible for its substantive content and presentation, up to and including a decision by the Board.

D. DELIVERABLES AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

The IEU will work closely with an external consultant throughout all stages of the evaluation cycle, particularly in the lead-up to key deliverables. The evaluation will comprise six phases described below and summarized in Table 8.

1) **Inception and planning phase** (December 2024–January 2025). This phase will culminate in the final approach paper. It may also involve establishing an advisory group to guide the evaluation.

2) **Data-collection and analysis phase** (February–March 2025). The focus will be on planning and implementing data-collection and analysis methods to support the evaluation.

3) **Factual draft phase** (March–April 2025). During this phase, the factual draft of the evaluation report shall be prepared, reviewed and revised based on feedback.

4) **Final report phase (**April–May 2025). The full evaluation report will be drafted, edited, shared and socialized, with feedback incorporated as necessary.

5) **Socialization phase** (May 2025). Key findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be iteratively refined in an inclusive manner that involves all relevant stakeholders.

6) **Communication phase (**June–December 2025). The final evaluation report will be submitted at B.42. Additional opportunities will be pursued to present findings where possible.

Table 8. Expected deliverables and milestones

Dates	Key deliverables and processes
December 2024–January 2025	Approach paper
February–March 2025	Data-collection
March–April 2025	Factual report
April–May 2025	Final report
May 2025	Key findings, conclusions and recommendations
June–December 2025	B.42 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and wider uptake and use

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. GCF RESULTS AREA BREAKDOWN

GCF results area	SAP projects	No. of projects
Mitigation		
Energy generation and access	Initial RMF: SAP004, SAP013, SAP016 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP024, SAP037, SAP047	6
Transport	None	0
Buildings, cities, industries, and appliances	None	0
Forests and land-use	Initial RMF: SAP005, SAP014, SAP015, SAP019, SAP021 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP031, SAP043	7
Adaptation		
Livelihoods of people and communities	Initial RMF: SAP002, SAP005, SAP006, SAP007, SAP008, SAP011, SAP012, SAP019 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP025, SAP026, SAP027, SAP028, SAP031, SAP032, SAP034, SAP035, SAP038, SAP039, SAP040, SAP042, SAP043, SAP044, SAP045	23
Health, food, and water security	Initial RMF: SAP002, SAP003, SAP007, SAP011, SAP017, SAP020 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP025, SAP030, SAP034, SAP042, SAP043	11
Infrastructure and built environment	Initial RMF: SAP010, SAP018, SAP022 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP033, SAP038, SAP039, SAP040, SAP041, SAP042, SAP046	10
Ecosystems and ecosystem services	Initial RMF: SAP001, SAP005, SAP006, SAP009, SAP021, SAP023 IRMF, B.32 and beyond: SAP027, SAP029, SAP036, SAP044, SAP045	11

Appendix 2. MANAGEMENT ACTION REPORT FOR SAP2020

The IEU submitted a MAR to the Board one year after the adoption of decision B.30/02 (annex VIII to document GCF/B.34/Inf.10). The MAR assessed the Secretariat's progress in adopting the evaluation's nine recommendations.

The adoption of one recommendation – developing KPIs for Secretariat performance to incentivize processing SAP proposals and projects – was rated "high". The adoption of two other recommendations was rated "substantial". The first was for the Secretariat delivering specific guidance for AEs on the SAP post-approval stage as part of the 2021 SAP delivery plan, along with revising internal SAP standard operating procedures. The second was the Secretariat development of an SAP capacity-building programme tailored to the needs of DAEs and delivered through the RPSP's delivery partners.

A "medium" rating was assigned to the adoption of two recommendations. The first concerned the update of SAP (document GCF/B.32/05), which included enabling the iTAP to review SAP FPs on a rolling basis and developing a SAP-specific results-based monitoring and reporting system based on the GCF IRMF. This rating would have been higher had SAP FPs been reviewed continuously rather than at Board meetings and had financial terms been simplified in SAP FPs. The second "medium" rating regarded the Secretariat's improving the clarity of its guidance on review criteria by establishing clear definitions for the Secretariat and iTAP, refining key GCF concepts related to the SAP modality, and further simplifying documentation requirements for proposals, particularly those from SIDS, LDCs, and projects addressing urgent climate impacts.

The adoption of four recommendations was rated "low". These included (i) limited progress by the Secretariat in developing SAP programming guidance, (ii) limited progress in simplifying the SAP's review criteria, (iii) not delegating authority to the Executive Director for SAP approvals, and (iv) not taking tailored approach to the private sector.

Appendix 3. TIMELINE FOR POLICY UPDATES

Timeline	Update of key policy pillars
May 2014	The initial Results Management Framework was adopted with decision B.07/04.
October 2017	The SAP was adopted as a new approach to project approval with decision B.18/06.
February 2018	The Board approved the first SAP project.
September 2018	The first IEU assessment of the RPSP was submitted at B.21.
November 2019	The Board requested the IEU evaluate the SAP Pilot Scheme.
March 2020	The IEU's initial assessment of the scheme was submitted at B.25.
October 2020	The Project Preparation Facility Guidelines was published.
July 2021	The IRMF was adopted with decision B.29/01.
March 2022	Through decision B.31/06 the PSAA was adopted as an update to the GCF Accreditation Framework.
May 2022	The update of the Simplified Approval Process policy was adopted at B. 32.
November 2022	The Accreditation Strategy was approved with decision B.34/19.
October 2023	The RPSP strategy 2024-2027 was adopted with decision B.37/17.
October 2023	Revised PPF Guidelines was developed.
November 2023	Reference guide on SAP programming guidelines was published.

Appendix 4. DATA SOURCES

Category	Data sources
GCF data source (ex-ante)	Approved SAP FPs
GCF data source (ex-ante)	Approved PPF linked to SAP FPs
GCF data source (ex-ante)	Readiness grants linked to SAP FP formulation
GCF data source (ex-ante and ex-post)	PMF/IRMF indicators reported by SAP (SAP versus FPs)
GCF data source (ex-post)	APR section 2
GCF data source (ex-post)	Financial data set (funding, disbursement and expenditure and reflow) from DPM
GCF data source (ex-post)	GCF interim/final evaluations for SAP projects
GEF project database	Projects and Programmes dashboard
CIF project database	
AF project database	

Appendix 5. EVALUATION MATRIX

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Methods	Data sources
Coherence	The degree to which the SAP operates alongside other internal GCF modalities and policies to achieve strategic goals and objectives (internal coherence) and the level of consistency, complementarity, harmonization and coordination it has with other climate funds (external coherence), ensuring SAP adds value while not duplicating effort.	1.1 To what extent has the GCF's SAP operated alongside other internal modalities and policies to achieve strategic goals and objectives, such as the Updated Strategic Plan 2024–2027?	Document review KIIs	Board documents and decisions, GCF strategies, frameworks, policies, guidance, operational material, and interviews with GCF personnel
		1.2 How consistent, complementary, harmonized, and coordinated is SAP with other climate funds?	Literature review Benchmarking Online survey with AEs	Academic and grey literature Public documents and evaluation reports from other climate funds Interview data from personnel in other climate funds AE survey responses
		1.3 How does SAP avoid duplication and ensure added value internally and externally?	Benchmarking KIIs	Public documents and evaluation reports from other climate funds Interview data from personnel in other climate funds AE survey responses
Relevance	The degree to which the GCF's SAP is fit-for-purpose, sufficiently targeted and agile in meeting the needs of developing countries, with an emphasis on the extent to which the objectives, design and operationalization of the Policy respond to and adapt to institutional needs.	2.1 To what extent is the SAP fit-for-purpose sufficiently targeted and agile enough to meet the needs of developing countries?	Document review KIIs Benchmarking Secondary data analysis Online survey with AEs	Board documents and decisions, GCF strategies, frameworks, policies, guidance, operational material Interviews with GCF personnel Public documents and evaluation reports from other climate funds GCF data sets, including IPMS AE survey responses
		2.2 To what extent do the SAP's	Document review	Board documents and decisions, GCF

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Methods	Data sources
		objectives, design, and operationalization currently respond and adapt to institutional needs, and how have these evolved? For example, regional presence, PSAA and GCF efficiency.	Secondary data analysis KIIs	strategies, frameworks, policies, guidance, and operational material with a focus on SAP operational changes GCF project portfolio data Interviews with GCF personnel, IAEs, DAEs
Effectiveness	The degree to which the SAP successfully delivers on its mandate to streamline and speed up effective programming of climate projects, including explaining the factors driving or hindering successful implementation and the extent to which the SAP achieves its objectives and expected results.	3.1 To what extent has the GCF's SAP successfully delivered on its mandate to streamline and speed up the effective programming of climate projects?	Document review Benchmarking Secondary data analysis KIIs	Performance data from comparator funds, APRs, and project evaluation reports Public documents and evaluation reports from other climate funds GCF data sets Interviews with GCF personnel, IAEs, DAEs, and staff from other climate funds
		3.2 What are the key factors driving or hindering the successful implementation of SAP?	KIIs Online survey with AEs Document review	Interviews with GCF personnel, IAEs, DAEs AE survey responses APRs, project evaluation reports
		3.3 To what extent has SAP achieved its objectives and expected results?	Online survey with AEs Secondary data analysis KIIs	AE survey responses GCF data sets for timestamp data and the achievement of objectives and results Interviews with GCF personnel, IAEs, DAEs
Efficiency	The extent to which the SAP modality delivers results using minimum financial and human resources and in a timely fashion compared to feasible alternatives in the GCF context.	4.1 To what extent does the SAP modality promptly deliver results using minimum financial and human resources?	Workshops Secondary data analysis Document review KIIs	Qualitative data from workshops GCF data sets, including comparing costs across the SAP and PAP modalities Project cost data, GCF efficiency reports, and annual performance reviews Interviews with GCF personnel, NDAs, IAEs, DAEs

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Methods	Data sources
		4.2 How efficient are SAP's processes compared to the PAP access modality?	Document review Secondary data analysis KIIs	Project cost data, GCF efficiency reports, annual performance reviews Comparison of SAP vis-à-vis PAP, including timestamp analysis, the achievement of KPIs Interviews with GCF personnel, IAEs, DAEs
		4.3 How do SAP's financial and human resource requirements compare to feasible alternatives in the GCF context?	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Financial and human resource data from SAP and PAP project documents Interview data with GCF personnel
Impact	The extent to which the SAP has generated significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.	5.1 What significant positive or negative, intended or unintended effects has SAP generated at a higher level?	Secondary data analysis, including machine learning clustering or predictive modelling for identifying patterns in project characteristics linked to higher efficiency or impact	Secondary data sets and documents
		5.2 What outputs, outcomes, or impacts have been achieved through SAP compared to the PAP modality?	Secondary data analysis, including regression models to identify factors influencing project efficiency and outcomes	GCF data sets, including longitudinal data
		5.3 How do stakeholders perceive the broader impacts of SAP in comparison to PAP?	Online surveys	AE survey

Appendix 6. INDICATIVE LITERATURE

Hereunder is the indicative list of literature to inform the evaluation.

Caldwell, Molly, and Gaia Larsen (2021). Improving Access to the Green Climate Fund: How the Fund Can Better Support Developing Country Institutions. Working paper. Washington D.C.: World Resources Institute. Available at https://www.wri.org/research/improving-access-green-climate-fund-how-fund-can-better-support-developing-country.

Colenbrander, Sarah, and others (2023). The new collective quantified goal and its sources of funding: Operationalising a collective effort. Working paper. London: Overseas Development Institute. Available at https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI_The_new_collective_quantified_goal_and_sources_of_funding.pdf.

Colenbrander, Sarah, David Dodman and Diana Mitlin (2018). Using climate finance to advance climate justice: the politics and practice of channelling resources to the local level. *Climate policy*, vol. 18, issue 7, pp. 902–915. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2017.1388212.

Garschagen, Matthias, and Deepal Doshi (2022). Does funds-based adaptation finance reach the most vulnerable countries? *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 73: 102450. Available at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102450.

Kalinowski, Thomas (2023). The Green Climate Fund and private sector climate finance in the Global South. *Climate Policy*, vol. 24, issue 3, pp. 281–296. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2023.2276857.

Manuamorn, Ornsaran Pomme, and Robbert Biesbroek (2020). Do direct-access and indirect-access adaptation projects differ in their focus on local communities? A systematic analysis of 63 Adaptation Fund projects. *Regional Environmental Change*, vol. 20, No. 139. Available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10113-020-01716-4.

Osuna, Andrea Rodriguez (2022). *Accessing UNFCCC-linked multilateral climate funds: lived experiences*. Part of the Financing Climate Action: iGST Discussion Series. Available at https://www.climateworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/iGST_Access-to-Climate-Finance_Nov2022.pdf.

Appendix 7. IEU EVALUATIONS

The evaluation will draw on evidence from previous IEU evaluations.

Independent Evaluation Unit (2018). Independent Review of the Green Climate Fund's Results Management Framework, Evaluation Report No. 2, Green Climate Fund, Songdo, South Korea. Available at https://ieu.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/document/230321-rmf-review-main-report-2-column-top-web-isbn.pdf.

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Appendix 8. DRAFT REPORT OUTLINE

Volume I

Chapter 1. Introduction, background, and scope

A. Objectives of the evaluation

Chapter 2. The urgency of climate finance

    A. Introduction

    B. Climate finance architecture

    C. The evolution of the Green Climate Fund

Chapter 3. GCF's simplified approval process policy and its discontents

    A. Introduction

    B. Evolution of SAP modality in GCF

    C. SAP portfolio

    D. Relevance – targeting and agility

    E. Internal coherence

Chapter 4. Benchmarking

    A. Introduction

    B. Simplified access modalities in climate programming

    C. Benchmarking with climate and vertical funds

    D. External coherence

Chapter 5. Operationalization and implementation

    A. Introduction

    B. Effectiveness

    C. Efficiency

Chapter 6. Results and impact

    A. Introduction

    B. Results, outcomes and impacts

    C. Higher-level impacts and longevity

Chapter 7. Conclusions

Chapter 8. Recommendations

Volume II. Annexes

Annex 1. Detailed literature review

Annex 2. Methodology

Annex 3. Data analysis

Annex 4. Survey

Annex 5. Others

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