

PROCEEDINGS PAPER: HARNESSING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION TO INFORM THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND



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Unit



Introduction and Context

From 9 to 10 November 2023, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) convened a two-day workshop in Songdo, Republic of Korea, to facilitate a dialogue on multilateral climate finance among researchers and thought leaders, the IEU, and the GCF Secretariat. The objectives of this dialogue were to:

- Understand the perspectives of the research community on the GCF and climate finance, in particular on the challenges identified in the recent Second Performance Review (SPR) of the GCF and the opportunities for enhancing GCF impact under the Strategic Plan for the GCF-2 period (2024–2027).
- Inform mutually beneficial research and evaluation directions for climate finance researchers and the IEU to enhance insight and inform GCF operational and strategic performance.
- Identify opportunities for the GCF and IEU to engage with a broader research community of practice on issues related to the GCF and climate finance more broadly.

The two-day workshop included presentations from the GCF Secretariat and the IEU, and thematic discussions led by facilitators and expert participants. This proceedings paper summarizes the key takeaways from the workshop, including future opportunities for collaboration between the IEU and larger research community.

Reflections from the GCF Secretariat and IEU

Workshop proceedings began with opening remarks from the IEU, which highlighted the direction of the Unit in the context of the evolving role of the GCF, provided an overview of the key findings of the SPR, and concluded with a brief discussion of the potential trade-offs between transparency and efficiency in funding allocation mechanisms. Following introductory remarks from the IEU, the GCF Secretariat provided a summary of the Updated Strategic Plan, which framed subsequent thematic sessions.

Key Takeaways: Thematic Sessions

Thematic sessions formed the core of the expert workshop, offering an opportunity for participants to discuss several topics in the context of the GCF and climate finance more generally, including **adaptation impact, access to the GCF, linkages to national policy and planning, and climate finance and governance**. Each thematic session was centred around three primary questions:

1. How is the GCF currently performing on this theme? What are the key challenges and opportunities for enhancing GCF impact?
2. What would an improved trajectory for the GCF look like? How will we recognize success?
3. What would we need to know to support the GCF on this improved trajectory from a research and evaluation perspective? What are our “blind spots” or “known unknowns” in the GCF and climate finance more broadly?

Each session began with introductory comments from leading participants, determined by participants’ thematic expertise, followed by a facilitated brainstorming exercise and group discussions. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants identified potential research questions for further inquiry. The following sections summarize each session and highlight potential research opportunities for the IEU and research community.

Thematic Session 1: Adaptation Impact

The first thematic session of the workshop revolved around the theme of adaptation. A key focus was on localization at the GCF, including Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), and emphasizing the need to direct more financing towards the most vulnerable regions, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), within a competitive proposal framework. Key points from the session included:

- **Limited local ownership and weak participation:** There were concerns about the lack of meaningful exchange and feedback loops, including among accredited entities, governments and local actors, especially once projects move into implementation, leading to a lack of local ownership of adaptation projects.
- **Trade-offs in project implementation:** Participants identified tensions among the scale, impact and speed of implementation of adaptation projects. This was particularly true for LLA projects, which may have a slower pace or smaller scale of delivery due to capacity constraints.
- **Measuring success and resilience:** The group acknowledged the difficulties in developing effective methods, tools and indicators for measuring resilience. Participants questioned whether GCF’s requirement for a clear climate rationale potentially leads to reductionist proposals, limiting what projects articulate they can achieve.
- **Private sector involvement:** Participants discussed the role of the private sector in adaptation, and the need for more research into potential trade-offs in terms of increased vulnerability or maladaptation and for stringent eligibility and monitoring criteria.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND/OR EVALUATION IDENTIFIED DURING THIS SESSION INCLUDED:

- » Identifying additional methods, tools and indicators to measure adaptation impacts, including at the local level, and reductions in vulnerability
- » Defining private sector role in adaptation and potential constraints and trade-offs
- » Drawing lessons from wider development aid relevant to adaptation projects
- » Exploring how adaptation projects evolve from design into implementation
- » Exploring the programmatic logic for cross-cutting projects and how it may affect adaptation outcomes

Thematic Session 2: Access to the GCF

The second thematic session at the workshop centred on the GCF access and accreditation functions, particularly focusing on the importance and role of direct access entities (DAEs). Key points from the session included:

- **Understanding and enhancing access models:** Participants discussed the need to better understand and enhance other forms of direct access to the GCF, beyond accreditation. These might include enhanced direct access (EDA) and the project-specific assessment approach (PSSA), but could also include other strategies.
- **Strategic use of DAEs:** The group focused on identifying and using DAEs strategically and discussed the possibility that countries are “performing up” – for example, nominating entities that they think align with what the GCF wants – at the expense of a wider set of institutions that might meet a country’s needs.
- **DAE performance and trust:** A discussion centred on whether DAEs are given sufficient time and space to develop versus being held to the same standard as long-established international accredited entities. Participants identified the need for more capacity-building for DAEs as well as for increased trust of these entities.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND/OR EVALUATION IDENTIFIED DURING THIS SESSION INCLUDED:

- » Assessing why few DAEs have advanced to having funded activities
- » Evaluating possible trade-offs between the quality of projects and benefits of working through DAEs
- » Measuring the benefits for DAEs in terms of partnership with the GCF and vice versa
- » Exploring who benefits from the new Readiness window open to DAEs and how this aligns with country priorities and pipelines

Thematic Session 3: Linkages to National Planning and Policy

This session focused on the linkages between the GCF and national planning and policy, including the role of the GCF in supporting the design and delivery of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and national adaptation plans (NAPs). Key points from the session included:

- **GCF’s initial planning success:** The GCF has to some extent facilitated planning alignment efforts by requiring national designated authorities (NDAs) to support DAE identification nomination and issue No Objection Letters, although this may not be sufficiently strategic.
- **Variability among NDAs:** Many countries’ NDAs are hosted in less influential ministries, leading to challenges in their effectiveness and unclear alignment with other national planning initiatives.
- **Country programme ambiguity:** The relationship between GCF’s country programmes and other planning initiatives is unclear, raising questions about potential overlap or duplication of efforts, and the potential redundancy of GCF review processes in the context of NDCs.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND/OR EVALUATION IDENTIFIED DURING THIS SESSION INCLUDED:

- » Determining the role of the GCF in supporting national- or sector-level climate investment planning
- » Assessing the value of GCF country programmes
- » Identifying how the GCF should align with other actors engaged in country-level support
- » Assessing what country needs are not being met by the GCF and why
- » Determining how the GCF might adapt to deliver more sectoral and systemic approaches

Thematic Session 4: Other Thematic Areas

The concluding thematic session focused on a series of topics in the larger field of climate finance and governance. These topics included climate finance as a discipline, programming approaches that incorporate uncertainty, the role of the private sector, and loss and damage. Select participants introduced each topic, followed by discussion. Key points from the session included:



- **Climate finance as a discipline:** Participants explored various potential attributes of climate finance as a field, and its distinction from general sector and development finance, with a focus on its potential emergence as a separate discipline.
- **Programming approaches and types of problematization:** The group discussed addressing “super wicked” problems such as climate change through different cognitive frames, considering whether solving one problem simply creates others. There was consideration of the value of path-dependency approaches, identifying levers that are easy to pull and hard to reverse, seeking early lock-in and entrenching support.
- **Private sector role:** Participants examined the private sector’s contribution to GCF objectives, highlighting the need for further research on measuring private finance flows and understanding their optimal use of private finance and expected impacts.
- **Loss and damage considerations:** The discussion on loss and damage (L&D) involved examining the GCF’s potential role in supporting L&D efforts, its alignment with existing adaptation funding and the future role of a dedicated L&D fund in relation to other mechanisms like humanitarian aid and climate risk insurance.

Community of Practice

The final workshop session provided an opportunity to reflect on opportunities for the GCF IEU to engage with a community of practice on research topics related to the GCF and climate finance more generally. During the introduction to this session, the IEU summarized its current workstreams and opportunities for further engagement with researchers and thought leaders.

Workshop participants identified several opportunities for complementary activities given the current needs of the IEU and the comparative capabilities of the IEU and the research community. For example, several participants acknowledged that the IEU’s evaluation schedule is based on annual planning and budgeting, limiting the opportunities for more open-ended, longer-term research activities. The research community, by contrast, could be more flexible in conducting research, offering

GCF IEU WORKSTREAMS

- » Science and data
- » Learning, uptake and knowledge management
- » Capacity-building and Learning-Oriented Real-Time Impact Assessment (LORTA)
- » Quality assurance and review

complementary inputs for future evaluations. Participants also pointed out the need for clearer coordination between the IEU and the broader research community to facilitate such a knowledge exchange.

Opportunities for further coordination could include the development of arrangements to facilitate data sharing, such as memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and clearer guidance on when the research community could engage in the process in a peer review capacity. The IEU is also in the process of developing a data dashboard, to be published early in 2024, and a series of meta papers for all datasets that will explain data collection methods.

Next Steps

At the conclusion of the workshop, the IEU articulated potential next steps, including:

- Develop specific research questions and identify suitable routes to connect with a community of practice.
- Identify near-term peer review opportunities and potential engagement points for reviewers.
- Evaluate windows of opportunity for engagement based on the shift to multi-year planning.
- Develop a road map to align evaluation with research and data best practices.
- Collaborate for uptake and dissemination of respective knowledge products and evaluation products, while exploring common opportunities.



Annex 1. Workshop Participants

ROLE	NAME AND AFFILIATION	
Expert Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benjamin Cashore, National University of Singapore • Bertha Argueta, Germanwatch • Laura Kuhl, Northeastern University • Melanie Pill, Lowy Institute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natalia Alayza, World Resources Institute • Pia Treichel, University of Monash • Thomas Kalinowski, Graduate School of International Studies at Ewha Womans University
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