GENDER SYNTHESIS

Approach

June 2025

Gender Synthesis

APPROACH

06/2025

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TABLES

FIGURES

BOXES

ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Accredited entity
AI	Artificial intelligence
APR	Annual performance report
B.43	Forty-third meeting of the Board
CIF	Climate Investment Funds
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil society organization
FP	Funding proposal
GAP	Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GI	Governing Instrument
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
KII	Key informant interview
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
NDA	National designated authority
NLP	Natural language processing
PPF	Project Preparation Facility
RPSP	Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

This document outlines the proposed approach for conducting a Synthesis of the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) Gender Approach (herein referred to as the "Gender Synthesis"). This document is informed by a preliminary review of documentation, and consultations with key stakeholders (see Appendix 1 for a list of stakeholders consulted).

It is structured as follows:

- Section 1 provides contextual information on the GCF's approach to gender, at both the organizational and project levels.

- Section 2 outlines the purpose and scope of this synthesis. It also details the overall technical approach and specific methodology for the synthesis note, literature review and benchmarking study.

- Section 3 maps the timeline for key deliverables, and the proposed workplan – including suggested dates for key activities, the submission of deliverables, and review periods.

A. CONTEXT: GCF'S APPROACH TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The GCF demonstrates a commitment to gender equality through its established framework for mainstreaming gender considerations. This commitment is anchored in the GCF Governing Instrument (GI), that embeds a **gender-sensitive approach**.[1] Additionally, it is framed by the foundational pillars of the GCF's Gender Policy, and the Gender Action Plan to support the operationalization of the Gender Policy, outlining roles, responsibilities, and requirements for different actors to mainstream gender. The operationalization of the Gender Policy commitments is further supported by a toolkit for mainstreaming gender in GCF projects, which was itself developed in partnership with UN Women (Green Climate Fund and UN Women, 2017). Combined, this framework establishes a clear mandate for gender to be mainstreamed across all GCF processes and operations at both corporate and project levels (each level is detailed in sections a and b below), through all result areas across adaptation and mitigation, and all interventions. An overview of how gender is integrated across the GCF is provided in Figure 1 below.

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[1] Specifically, paragraph 3 of the GI states that "The Fund will strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation … promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits and taking a gender-sensitive approach".

Figure 1. GCF gender at a glance
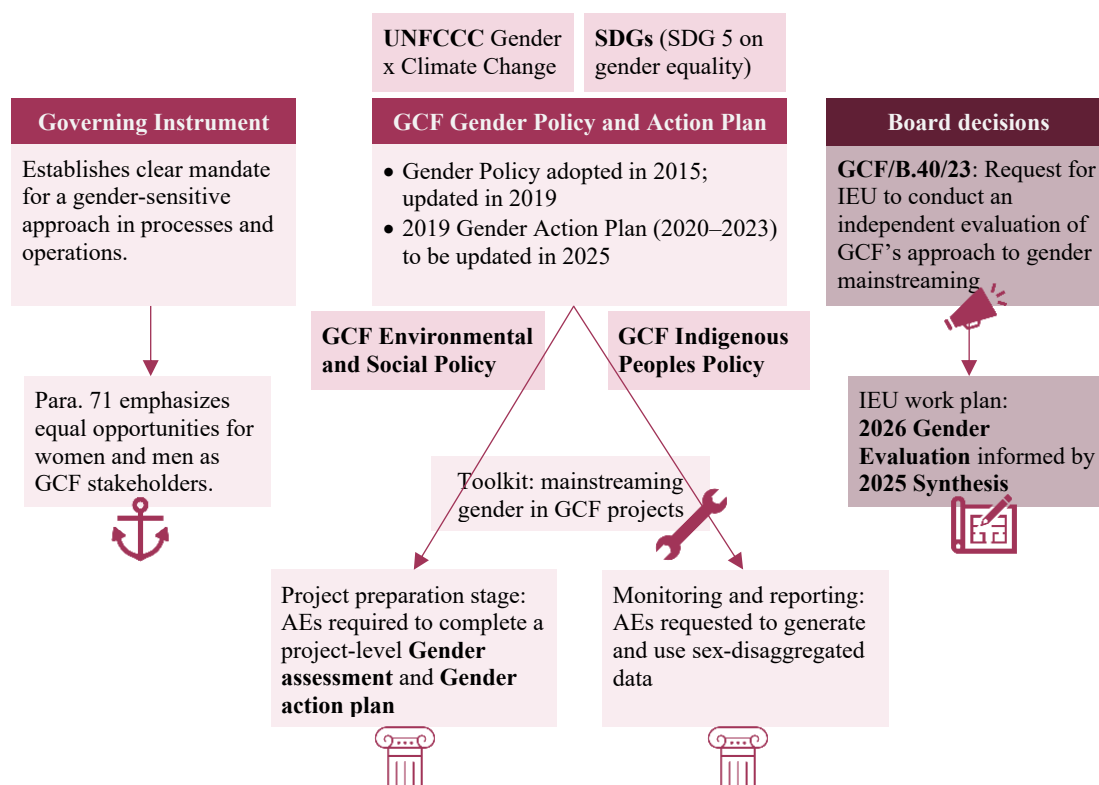
Abbreviations: UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; SDG – Sustainable Development Goal; IEU – Independent Evaluation Unit; AEs – Accredited entities

a. Organizational level

To support the pursuit of a paradigm shift to transformational, low-emission and climate-resilient development, the GCF Gender Policy was adopted in March 2015 (GCF/B.09.10) and later updated in 2019 with the Gender Action Plan (2020–2023) (Green Climate Fund, 2019). The Gender Policy was designed in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – particularly SDG 5 – and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that acknowledge the gendered impacts of climate change and promote gender mainstreaming across all climate actions. Specifically, the UNFCCC highlighted the importance of integrating gender considerations into climate finance mechanisms, further informing the trajectory of gender at the GCF. The GCF Gender Policy is guided by the following four key principles: (i) human rights approach, (ii) country ownership, (iii) stakeholder engagement, and (iv) disclosure of information.

Guidance for the operationalization of the GCF *Gender Policy* is provided in the *Gender Action Plan of the GCF 2020–2023* launched in 2019 (B.24/12) (Green Climate Fund, 2019). Key objectives of the GCF Gender Action Plan are aimed at promoting gender-sensitive climate actions by minimizing gender-related risks, addressing gender gaps, ensuring equal participation, and mainstreaming gender considerations throughout the entire project cycle (see section b on project-level considerations).[2] Specifically, the Gender Action Plan outlines the following roles and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender at the corporate level.

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[2] For further details on the process of developing the GCF Gender Action Plan, see Green Climate Fund (2018).

- The Board approves and reviews the Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan, oversees annual progress reporting on the implementation of the GCF Gender Policy and monitors performance on requirements for gender equality in accreditation.

- The Secretariat conducts periodic monitoring on the implementation of the GCF Gender Policy, Gender Action Plan and performance on requirements for gender equality in accreditation; raises awareness and builds capacities (e.g. training) of GCF partners, national designated authorities (NDAs)/focal points and accredited entities (AEs) to have a better understanding of programming for gender equality and climate change; disseminates the GCF gender toolkit and other applied toolkits and sourcebooks; provides guidance to NDAs/focal points and AEs through the GCF Operational Manual; provides funding support for targeted gender support at the programme/project level; provides guidance on integrating gender in funding proposals (FPs) through a gender analysis/assessment and project-level Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan (GAP)[3]; is accountable to the Board for gender and climate change results and outcomes, and reports annually in a transparent manner.[4]

- AEs meet the project-level requirements of the Gender Policy and submit FPs that contain gender assessments and project-level gender action plans which include implementation budgets.

This policy framework provides a comprehensive strategy for integrating gender into the GCF at corporate level and also in climate finance projects and programmes. It recognizes that climate change impacts disproportionately affect women and girls, with gender inequality exacerbated by climate change, and gender roles influencing access to and control over climate resources and assets, demanding gender-sensitive approaches for achieving effective and equitable climate outcomes. GCF's policy framework also emphasizes the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes as part of the solution, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed in the design, implementation, and evaluation of climate projects. Ultimately, this gender-sensitive approach aims to ensure that GCF interventions and financing equally benefit both women and men.

GCF also makes efforts to mainstream gender internally across the organization to ensure that GCF internal practices are also gender-sensitive, aiming to maintain gender-balance across the organization and foster a culture of gender sensitivity within the GCF. At the organizational level, GCF promotes knowledge-sharing and capacity-building on gender and climate change.

Finally, this is situated within the context of a recent reorganization that has taken place within the Secretariat, initiated by the "50 by 30" blueprint for reform aimed at enhancing its efficiency and impact through adjustments to the partnership model (Green Climate Fund, 2023). As part of this reform agenda, GCF is transitioning to a new organizational structure with a reconfigured senior management team that distributes roles across strategy and operations divisions, and greater decentralization towards the regional level with the launch of regional offices/sub-offices (Green Climate Fund, 2024a).[5] The reconfiguration of management roles entails a division of roles and responsibilities for gender and social safeguarding, and how gender is mainstreamed at the corporate level.

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[3] This is used interchangeably with "Gender Action Plan".
[4] For gender analysis/assessment and Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan templates, see Green Climate Fund (n.d-b).
[5] The GCF has launched three regional offices and one regional output in: (1) Africa, (2) Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, (3) Latin America and the Caribbean, with plans for a smaller regional outpost in the Pacific. For more information see Mersie (2025).

b. Project level

At the project level, it is important to note that the GCF Secretariat does not directly implement projects, but instead works through AEs. As such, a large share of responsibility to implement gender mainstreaming lies with AEs as the implementing agencies, with the GCF providing oversight through key checks and balances as part of its due diligence system in place to consider gender across the project lifecycle. Drawing on the GCF project activity cycle, Figure 2 below maps where, when and how gender is mainstreamed across the lifecycle.

Figure 2. Mainstreaming gender across the GCF project activity cycle
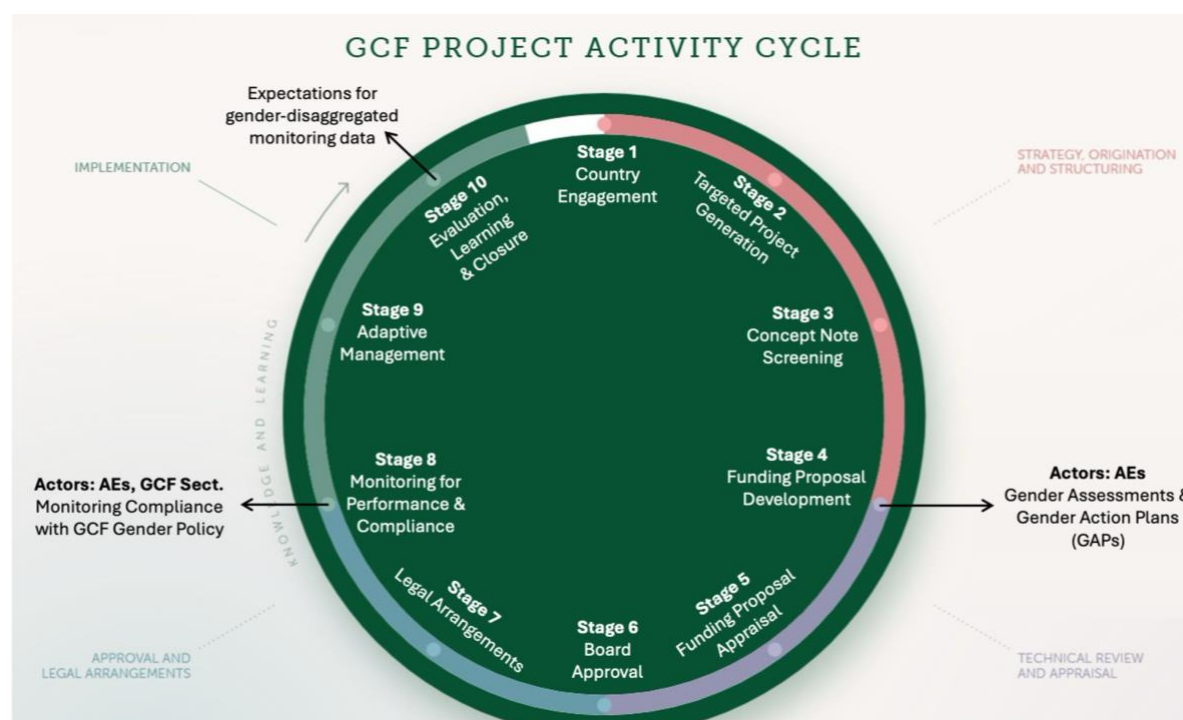
Source: Green Climate Fund (n.d-a).

As illustrated in Figure 2 above, gender mainstreaming is integrated at the following key stages in the GCF project activity cycle as part of its system of second-level due diligence: (1) stage 4 during FP development; (2) stage 8 when assessing compliance with the GCF Gender Policy; and (3) as part of monitoring and evaluation, the GCF also expects the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data to monitor the impact of its projects on women and men, allowing for evidence-based adjustments and improvements.

- Stage 1 – Engagement: Stage 1 of the GCF project activity cycle may also include stakeholder engagement and consultation with attention to gender, diversity and inclusion of stakeholders.
- Stage 4 – Design: The GCF mandates AEs to demonstrate a clear understanding of gender issues and to outline how they will integrate gender considerations into their project proposals as part of project preparation. This is achieved through the design of GAPs informed by a gender analysis/assessment that is premised on consultations that include the active participation of both women and men stakeholders.[6] GCF provides a moderate level of

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[6] For gender analysis/assessment and Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan templates, see Green Climate Fund (n.d-b).

financing to meet these requirements for gender analysis/assessments and GAPs. As part of accreditation, potential partners are assessed with compliance with GCF Gender Policy commitments, and whether they have the capacities in place to effectively meet Gender Policy commitments. Moreover, the GCF has a Project Preparation Facility (PPF) that is available to address any gender-related capacity gaps or issues AEs may have in mainstreaming gender. Also, the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP) is available to support AEs, NDAs/focal points and other key national actors to enhance capacities or gaps in gender policies.

- Stage 8 – Implementation: The GCF expects AEs to report on the implementation of GAPs, submitted as part of annual performance reports (APRs).

- Stage 10 – Monitoring and evaluation: Monitoring frameworks are also expected to enable the collection of gender-disaggregated data to assess gender-related climate results and impacts. AEs are encouraged to include both qualitative and quantitative data on gender equality. However, a majority of gender-related reporting in APRs focuses on quantitative data, such as the number of women and men reached with more limited qualitative reporting (e.g. on the process, contributing factors, or implications of gender-related results).

B. PURPOSE AND APPROACH

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The primary purpose of this synthesis is to conduct the preparatory work for informing the Independent Evaluation Unit's (IEU) 2026 independent evaluation of the GCF's approach to mainstreaming gender (herein referred to as the "2026 Gender Evaluation"). This aims to gather, critically review, and synthesize existing evaluative evidence concerning the GCF's gender mainstreaming approach, both at corporate and project levels. Specifically, this will cover the compendium of evaluative evidence and relevant documentation at:

- The corporate level on the GCF's overall organizational policy environment, its programmatic landscape, and its capacity for ensuring that gender is mainstreamed across its different key actors (e.g. the GCF Secretariat, NDAs/focal points and AEs).

- The project level, across the entire project life cycle (project identification, design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation).

The synthesis will concentrate on the GCF's specific approach to gender mainstreaming. It will in part do so by examining wider global trends and assessing the GCF against comparators within the international climate financing landscape.

As outlined in the IEU's 2025 annual workplan, the synthesis note and the draft approach paper prepared as part of this synthesis will serve as foundational references for the subsequent 2026 Gender Evaluation, informing and shaping its approach and direction (Green Climate Fund, 2024b). Doing so requires the articulation of clear boundaries between what is within the scope of this synthesis and what will be addressed as part of the 2026 Gender Evaluation. The scope of this synthesis from the 2026 Gender Evaluation is distinguished as follows:

- 2025 Synthesis: The current synthesis will be a largely descriptive exercise drawing on existing evaluative evidence and relying largely on secondary data. Specifically, this synthesis will provide key contextual information on GCF's gender framework and policy landscape, map existing evidence and relevant documentation, and conduct preliminary analysis to identify key

trends, shifts, tensions and unresolved dilemmas, gaps, and other specific areas of interest. These insights will enable further discussion and clarity on the intended focus of the 2026 Gender Evaluation, including specific areas for deeper examination, and remaining evidence gaps.

- 2026 Gender Evaluation: The prospective evaluation will examine the use and value of evidence with expanded primary data-collection. It will also provide actionable recommendations and guidance for improvement and heightened gender equality results.
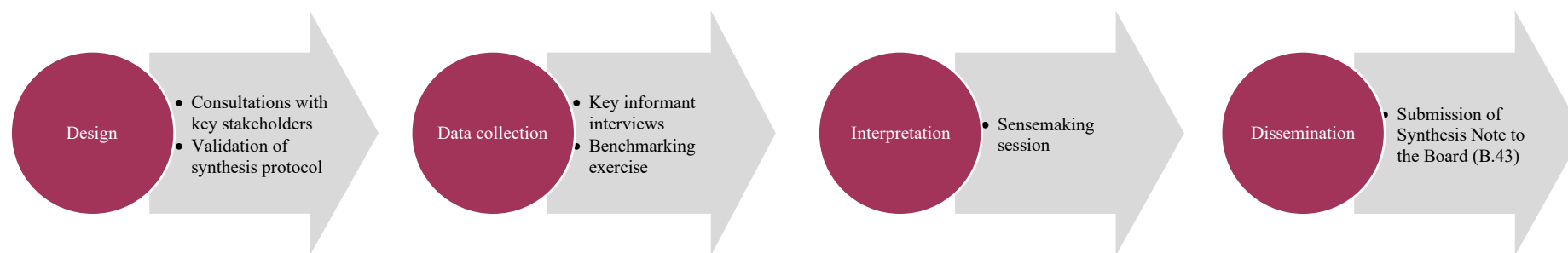
2. APPROACH

To undertake this synthesis, a utilization-focused, participatory and gender-sensitive approach will be pursued, to enable quality delivery with wide buy-in and high-level of usability.

a. Utilization-focused and participatory

This synthesis review will adopt a **utilization-focused and participatory approach**, ensuring that the synthesized information and trends are relevant and useful for intended users in terms of providing the appropriate preparatory work for the prospective 2026 Gender Evaluation. The synthesis will prioritize the identification of specific information needs for the 2026 Gender Evaluation, tailoring the methodology to directly address these. Information needs identified through the synthesis will be clearly outlined in the final deliverable in the draft approach paper, providing valuable input into the design and approach for the 2026 Gender Evaluation.

A participatory methodology will be integrated to the extent possible, fostering engagement with stakeholders, including GCF staff and comparator organizations. While the synthesis will include limited primary data-collection, it will consult with select stakeholders to validate and clarify evaluative evidence (see Figure 3 below for details on how stakeholders will be engaged across the synthesis). This includes select consultations with internal (e.g. for the synthesis note) and external (e.g. for the benchmarking exercise) stakeholders, and a sensemaking session involving a collaborative virtual workshop to validate the synthesis note. This will also include iterative feedback loops on key deliverables to obtain input to fill any gaps, clarify, verify or fact-check information, and achieve consensus such that the synthesis reflects a shared understanding of the GCF's gender mainstreaming approach.

Figure 3. Stakeholder engagement across the synthesis

Design
- Consultations with key stakeholders
- Validation of synthesis protocol

Data collection
- Key informant interviews
- Benchmarking exercise

Interpretation
- Sensemaking session

Dissemination
- Submission of Synthesis Note to the Board (B.43)

The synthesis will adopt a learning-oriented disposition throughout the exercise, and maintain a flexible approach for adaptive management, adjusting the trajectory of the work to be performed accordingly, if and as required.

b. Gender-sensitive approach

This synthesis will be aligned with United Nations Evaluation Group *Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations* (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2024). In keeping with GCF's approach, this synthesis will employ a **gender-sensitive approach**, recognizing the importance of understanding the distinct experiences and perspectives of women and men. To achieve this, the review will integrate a critical **gender lens** throughout all stages, from data-collection and analysis to the interpretation and dissemination of insights. This includes ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices, particularly those of women and marginalized groups through targeted interviews. This will also involve the application of gender analysis and feminist evaluation principles that carefully considers how gender roles, norms, and power relations may influence the design and implementation of mainstreaming gender.

In alignment with the intent of the Secretariat to "effectively address gender equality, intersectionality, and more broadly, social inclusion, to achieve more equitable and sustainable climate change results", this synthesis will be complemented by the application of an **intersectional lens** to consider the interaction of diverse social identities, such as age, disability, indigeneity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, and how these might influence lived experiences to produce differentiated impacts (Green Climate Fund, 2018).

Finally, a gender-sensitive methodology necessitates an awareness of potential biases that may exist within data sources. The synthesis will actively seek to identify and mitigate these biases, ensuring that the synthesis accurately reflects the complexities of gender mainstreaming within the GCF's context and the wider global climate financing landscape.

3. METHODS

Four key deliverables are planned for this synthesis, as follows: (1) Synthesis note, (2) Literature review, (3) Benchmarking study, and (4) Draft approach paper. Each comprises a series of methods and activities, as described below.

a. Synthesis note

A synthesis note will be prepared based on an analysis of documented evidence on GCF's approach to mainstreaming gender at both the corporate level and project level. The synthesis note will draw primarily on secondary data-collection through a review of existing evaluative evidence, with select key informant interviews to validate analysis and clarify observed trends. This will involve both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques, with triangulation of data from various sources to ensure validity and reliability.

The synthesis note will be guided by the following questions, which will structure both the analysis and reporting.

- **Organizational level**: What is the corporate architecture in place for mainstreaming gender across the GCF?
  - Framework, policies and plans: What is the GCF's policy framework for mainstreaming gender across all processes and operations at the corporate and project level?

+ What guidance is available to support AEs in adhering to policy commitments, standards and expectations?

+ What are mechanisms in place to ensure that GCF gender priorities and policy commitments are pursued by AEs (e.g. risk management approaches, due diligence systems)?

+ What are the challenges/opportunities in ensuring alignment between GCF's Gender Policy framework and AEs' respective policies and practices?

− Resource allocation: What resources are in place to mainstream gender across the GCF?

+ How are roles and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender distributed across the GCF?

+ How have these resources changed over time, and in response to what considerations?

+ How has the recent reorganization impacted the organizational structure and distribution of roles and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender?

- **Project level**: What are the GCF's different levels of due diligence for integrating gender considerations across the project lifecycle (project origination and design, implementation, monitoring and reporting)?

− Project origination and design:

+ What is the level of compliance with GCF expectations for mainstreaming gender (i.e. gender assessment/GAP requirements, GCF Gender Policy commitments)?

+ To what extent are diverse stakeholders, including women and women's organizations, engaged in this process (e.g. consultations, steering committees)?

+ What support is provided by PPF and RPSP to enhance capacities for gender mainstreaming?[7]

− Implementation:

+ What are the opportunities and challenges for mainstreaming gender in diverse national contexts?

+ How is the level and quality of gender mainstreaming critically appraised?

+ What are the key trends or main (capacity) gaps observed? How are these mitigated or addressed?

− Monitoring: To what extent is gender-disaggregated data collected and used?

− Reporting: To what extent are gender-related results or issues captured in project reporting?

i. Document review

The synthesis note will be informed by in-depth document review of relevant documentation on the GCF's approach to mainstreaming gender. This will focus on gathering and synthesizing available evaluative evidence, with preliminary analysis in the identification of trends, gaps, tensions, and shifts in the GCF's approach to mainstreaming gender over time. The Box 1 provides an initial list of documents to be reviewed.

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[7] This will include review of approved PPF and RPSP proposals that relate to gender, complemented by interviews with PPF and readiness teams to fill documentation gaps.

Box 1. Documents for review

- GCF documentation: policies, strategic documents, Board documents and decisions, guidance notes, toolkits, sector guides
- IEU evaluations, including reviews, assessments, syntheses or other studies
- APRs
- Annual reports
- Approved PPF proposals related to gender
- Approved RPSP proposals related to gender
- Conference of the Parties (COP) guidance to GCF (2018–2024)
- Gender action plans

To support the identification of relevant evaluative evidence and related documentation, document review will be guided by a systematic search for specified keywords related to gender (see Appendix 2 for full list of keywords). This approach will support the identification of relevant Board decisions and documents, and extract relevant excerpts from APRs, IEU evaluations, and COP guidance to GCF. This will be further supported by targeted use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning for review of structured large data sets (e.g. APRs, GAPs), governed by a clearly defined AI utilization protocol that dictates the scope, methodology, and control of AI usage to ensure consistency, reproducibility, transparency, and ethical AI use (see Appendix 3 for a detailed outline of the proposed approach for the use of AI).

ii. Key informant interviews

The synthesis note will draw on a small sample of key informant interviews (KIIs), primarily to validate the analysis of evaluative evidence, clarify gaps and elucidate emerging trends. This will include approximately 10 total interviews (comprised of individual or small groups of up to four people), with the following GCF staff outlined in Table 1 below. Moreover, document review and interviews will be mutually reinforcing, with document review forming the basis of consultations with key stakeholder groups, and interviews further supporting the identification of relevant documentation and informing the sampling approach for the 2026 Gender Evaluation.

Table 1. Suggested stakeholder sampling for synthesis note

Stakeholder group	Target
GCF gender and social specialists (strategic investment team and operations team)	2
GCF PPF, readiness, accreditation teams	3
Integrity unit and redress mechanism	1
IAE and DAE offices	1
Other GCF-relevant staff	1
Observer network (CSO active observer and/or private sector active observer)	2
Total number of interviews	**10**

Abbreviations: IAE = international accredited entity; DAE = direct access entity; CSO = civil society organization.

Of note, the Secretariat can also speak to ongoing developments in updating the GCF Gender Action Plan (to be presented to the Board at its forty-third meeting (B.43)). Findings from the recent *Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Approach to Indigenous Peoples* (January 2025) highlight the need for stronger interlinkages between the intersections of gender and Indigenous Peoples, underscoring the importance of consulting with the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group. Moreover, the observer network acts as an advisory Board for the public and private sectors, and may be useful in shedding light on gender-related CSO monitoring data.

iii. Stakeholder engagement

Relevant stakeholders will be engaged in sensemaking sessions to validate the synthesis note, highlighting the key findings and integrating any feedback. This will take the form of a virtual presentation or online collaboration tool (e.g. Mural). The synthesis note will be submitted to the Board at its 43rd Board Meeting.

b. Literature review

Building on the document review conducted for the synthesis note that focuses on GCF-specific documentation, a literature review will broaden the study to encompass the wider international forums and global discourse on gender mainstreaming in climate finance. This will contextualize the GCF's approach to mainstreaming gender and its positioning within the global discourse on gender. This will be situated within prevailing gender frameworks such as the gender integration continuum from gender-blind, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, to gender-transformative approaches.[8] The literature review will examine trends, best practices, and thematic areas related to gender mainstreaming in climate adaptation and finance. It will establish the scope and parameters for understanding global developments, thereby setting the stage for the subsequent benchmarking study.

This literature review will draw upon a wide and diverse range of sources, including academic journals, research papers, studies/case studies, reports of United Nations agencies, international organizations, multilateral development banks (MDBs), and climate finance mechanisms, national adaptation plans and nationally determined contributions, and other grey literature. To enhance the efficiency and comprehensiveness of the literature review, **machine learning techniques** may be employed to automate the identification and extraction of relevant documentation from online sources (see Appendix 3 for a detailed outline of the proposed approach). Specifically, a web scraping tool, coupled with natural language processing algorithms, will be utilized to systematically gather and analyse selected documents, using keyword and thematic filters informed by the review's key questions. As a matter of quality control, a manual validation of the machine learning-generated results will be undertaken based on a sampling approach.

KIIs will be conducted with up to five external stakeholders, such as gender experts (e.g. evaluators for the recent evaluation of Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans by the United Nations Children's Fund (2025; n.d.) who possess a deep understanding of the climate finance landscape, to gather diverse perspectives and insights. Interviews will address the following key questions:

- The evolution of gender mainstreaming in climate finance, including trends, frameworks, and paradigm shifts.
- Use of gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative climate financing approaches and models in climate finance organization.

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[8] For example, see Box 2: Gender Continuum (p. 4) in United Nations Children's Fund (2019).

- How different climate finance organizations are addressing the differentiated impacts of climate change on women and girls.
- How intersectionality is being considered within the climate finance space, including interlinkages with other marginalized groups (e.g. Indigenous Peoples) and bridging different social justice movements (e.g. climate change movement and women's rights movement).
- How different climate finance organizations are framing and addressing the role of women in climate finance decision-making.
- Best practices for integrating gender considerations into climate financing.
- Learning and knowledge-sharing processes on gender equality in the climate finance space, inclusive and exclusive of the GCF.

Box 2. Literature review report

Key takeaways from the literature review will be submitted in a comprehensive literature review report (deliverable 3) for review and validation. Feedback received will be integrated into the draft approach paper (see section d), which will synthesize findings from the literature review report.

c. Benchmarking study

Building on the synthesis note study, we will conduct a benchmarking exercise that aims to conduct a learning study of the GCF's approach to gender mainstreaming relative to comparable international organizations. A comparative approach will be undertaken of comparators' policies and resources, and their available organizational and project level support. This will be compared against the findings from the synthesis note, which outlines the GCF's policy framework, mechanisms and resources in place at the corporate and project level across the lifecycle. Relevant best practices from comparator organizations will be identified and documented. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques will be utilized, with triangulation of data from various sources to ensure validity and reliability.

Data-collection will be guided by a defined benchmarking framework, outlining benchmarking questions and specific indicators for comparison. This framework will emerge from the synthesis note study that will precede it. Nevertheless, a preliminary list of guiding questions for the benchmarking exercise is outlined below:

- Comparator gender framework: How does the comparator integrate gender at the corporate/organizational and project levels?
  - What is the comparator's policy framework for mainstreaming gender? (e.g. gender policy, gender action plans, consideration of gender in other policies.)
  - What tools, mechanisms and guidance are provided for mainstreaming gender?
  - What are the comparator's objectives, targets, indicators related to gender mainstreaming?
  - To what extent does the comparator have mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of its gender policy framework?
  - To what extent does the comparator report on the integration of gender, or on gender-related results?

     – How are resources (e.g. human, financial), roles and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender distributed within the comparator's organizational structure?

     – To what extent does the comparator support capacity strengthening for mainstreaming gender across the Secretariat? (e.g. training, workshops, expertise, guidance)

- Project cycle integration: How are gender considerations integrated across the different stages of the project lifecycle?

     – How is gender integrated in projects across the project lifecycle: origination (including stakeholder engagement, and notably consultation with diverse groups, including women's organizations), design (e.g. gender analysis/assessment), appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (e.g. disaggregated data), reporting, closure?

     – What mechanisms are in place to ensure AEs or implementing partners adhere to organizational standards and policy commitments for gender equality?

Methodology will include a comparative document review of gender policies, strategies, action plans, implementation mechanisms across the project cycle, evaluation reports, annual reports, and resource allocation. This will be complemented by semi-structured interviews (3-4 interviews with each comparator, for a total of approximately 15 interviews) with gender specialists, project managers, and evaluation staff from comparator organizations to gather qualitative insights on implementation, challenges, and best practices.

Selection criteria

The comparator selection process will prioritize institutions with similar mandates and operational models, relevant climate portfolios, a demonstrated commitment to gender equality with gender mainstreaming mechanisms, publicly available documentation, and a global or regional presence. To support a rigorous approach that ensures a comparable basis for analysis, the selection of comparators for the benchmarking study will be based on the following selection criteria:

- Climate finance portfolio: To enable a relevant and applicable assessment of gender mainstreaming practices within a similar mandate, comparators will be selected on the basis of having comparable experience and scale in managing climate-related funding.

- Institutional mandate and operational model: Comparators will have a similar operating model to the GCF, working through implementing partners and not involved in direct implementation.

- Gender policy framework: Comparators will be selected on the basis of having established gender policies with demonstrable commitment and practical experience in mainstreaming gender, allowing for a relevant analysis of their approaches.

- Evaluative evidence: Comparators will also be selected on the basis of having publicly accessible evaluative evidence, which will allow for a robust and verifiable comparison of gender mainstreaming practices, contributing to the credibility and applicability of the benchmarking study.

Box 3. Benchmarking study report

A benchmarking study report (deliverable 4) will be prepared, with a summary of the comparative analysis and key findings from the benchmarking exercise. Feedback received will be integrated into the draft approach paper (see section d), which will synthesize findings from the benchmarking study report.

Table 2 outlines a shortlist of suggested comparators against the identified selection criteria, with full details on each comparator provided in Appendix 4.

Table 2. Comparators against benchmarking criteria

Comparator	Similar mandate	Climate finance portfolio	Gender framework	Evaluative evidence
Global Environment Facility (GEF)	✓ Similar model of implementation through system of GEF agencies	✓ Financial assistance for biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, and international waters	✓ Gender Policy (2017) (with Guidance for operationalization) Gender Equality Action Plan	✓ Evaluation of gender mainstreaming (2018) Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network assessments Evaluation on the inclusion of marginalized groups (2024)
Adaptation Fund	✓ Similar model, working through national implementing entities and multilateral implementing entities	✓ Finances adaptation projects in countries vulnerable to climate change	✓ Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan (updated in 2021) Gender guidance documents for implementing entities (updated in 2022) Compilation and analysis of gender-related policies and procedures of the Fund (2015)	✓ 2022 Study on intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions Assessing progress: Integrating gender in Adaptation Fund projects and programmes (2020) Assessment report on progress in the implementation of the Adaptation Fund's Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan (2019)
Climate Investment Funds (CIF)	✓ Similar model of operation, through a system of MDBs as implementing entities	✓ Pilots and scales up transformational climate solutions through climate-smart development	✓ 2018 CIF Gender Policy 2022 Gender integration guidance note for CIF projects	✓ 2022 Portfolio review of gender integration in the CIF
International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)	✓ Somewhat similar model, working with a range of implementing partners	✓ Invests in rural people to reduce poverty, increase food security, resilience and nutrition	✓ IFAD policy on gender equality and women's empowerment (2012) IFAD's 2003–2006 plan of action for mainstreaming a gender perspective in IFAD's operations	✓ 2010 Corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment IFAD's work and results on gender equality and women's empowerment (2014)

d. Draft approach paper

The overall gender synthesis will culminate in the development of a draft approach paper for the upcoming 2026 Gender Evaluation. The draft approach paper will synthesize evidence from the synthesis note, literature review, benchmarking exercise, and any other relevant data collected to inform the approach, design and direction of the 2026 Gender Evaluation of the GCF's gender mainstreaming approach.

The draft approach paper will present initial analysis of trends, gaps, shifts, and tensions, and identify gaps or areas for deeper examination as part of the 2026 Gender Evaluation. Based on this analysis, the draft approach paper will outline the proposed scope and methodology for the 2026 IEU Gender Evaluation, providing key insights to inform the sampling approach such as for stakeholder consultations or the selection of case studies. The draft approach paper will also shed light on potential data limitations, such as gaps in evidence, and areas where the GCF's gender mainstreaming approach will likely require further clarification.

Box 4. Approach paper

A comprehensive approach paper will present the analysis and findings across the synthesis note, literature review and benchmarking report, and any other data collected in a clear and concise manner. The draft approach paper will reflect the Board's discussions and incorporate any feedback received during the Board meeting where the synthesis note is presented at B.43.

C. TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

This synthesis is structured by four phases, with the approval of this protocol marking the completion of phase 1. The four phases comprise the following deliverables:
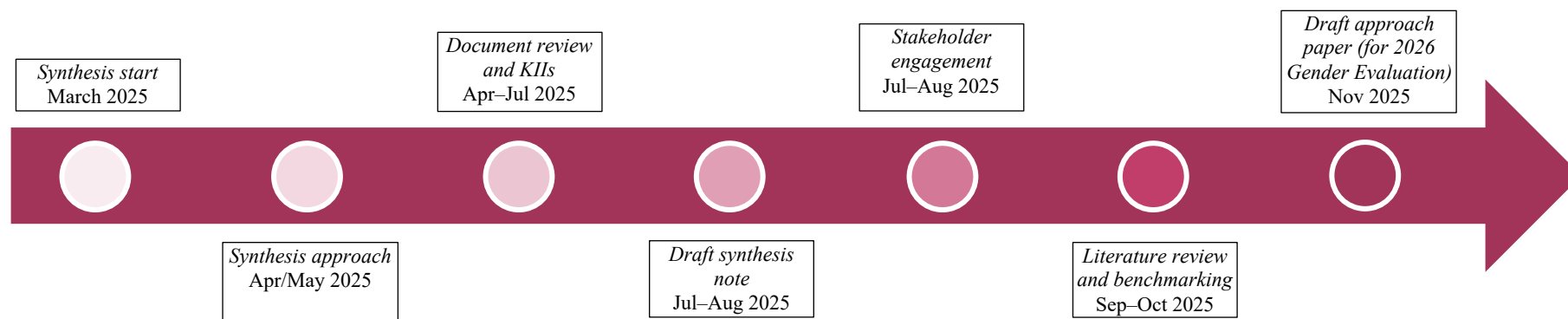
- Phase 1: Inception and synthesis protocol
    - Deliverable 1: Gender synthesis protocol
- Phase 2: Synthesis and stakeholder engagement
    - Deliverable 2: Synthesis note
- Phase 3: Literature review and benchmarking
    - Deliverable 3: Literature review
    - Deliverable 4: Benchmarking study
- Phase 4: Draft approach paper – 2026 Gender Evaluation
    - Deliverable 5: Draft approach paper for the IEU's 2026 Gender Evaluation

The proposed workplan, detailing the timeline of key activities and deliverables, is provided in Table 3 below and mapped along the timeline in Figure 4.

Table 3. Proposed workplan

Phase	Deliverable	Proposed date
Gender Synthesis Approach	Draft approach	April 2025
	Final approach	May 2025
Synthesis note and stakeholder engagement	Document review and stakeholder interviews	April - July 2025
	Draft synthesis note	By July 2025
	Final synthesis note	By mid-September 2025
	Stakeholder engagement/validation	July–August 2025
Literature review and benchmarking	Draft literature review report	By September 2025
	Final literature review report	By October 2025
	Draft benchmarking study report	By September 2025
	Final benchmarking study report	By October 2025
Draft approach paper	Final draft approach paper for the 2026 Gender Evaluation	By the end of November 2025

Figure 4. Timeline of key activities and deliverables

Synthesis start March 2025	

Document review and KIIs Apr–Jul 2025

Stakeholder engagement Jul–Aug 2025

Draft approach paper (for 2026 Gender Evaluation) Nov 2025

Synthesis approach Apr/May 2025

Draft synthesis note Jul–Aug 2025

Literature review and benchmarking Sep–Oct 2025

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

A list of key stakeholders consulted during the inception phase to inform the preparation of this protocol is provided below.

Last name	First name	Position	Organization
Ghosal	Rajib	Global Head, Climate, Portfolio and Quality (Former GCF Gender and Social Specialist)	Save the Children International
Negussie	Seblewongel	Gender and Social Specialist	GCF

Appendix 2. LIST OF GENDER KEYWORDS

The following keywords will be used to identify relevant GCF Board documents and decisions, and UNFCCC COP guidance to the GCF on integrating gender:

	Keywords		Keywords
1	gender	6	sex
2	equality	7	mainstream
3	empowerment	8	gender-sensitive
4	women	9	gender-responsive
5	girl	10	transformative

Appendix 3. PROPOSED AI APPROACH

For this synthesis, AI tools will be developed and harnessed for the following two deliverables: the synthesis note (deliverable 2) and the literature review (deliverable 3), each with a distinct functionality. The use of AI tools will complement, not replace, a thorough manual review conducted by the evaluation team.

User protocols

To complement the tools, the synthesis will develop a rigorous AI utilization protocol that details the safeguards established and methodological rigour behind the tool, including the mitigation steps taken against potential biases in AI analysis.

First, a sample of the different types of GCF internal documentation will be manually reviewed in order to establish which document formats are most appropriate for AI synthesis and relevant to the guiding questions. Then, a sample percentage of the documents will be identified and iteratively reviewed, manually by our evaluation experts and by the AI, in order to calibrate prompting and ensure consistency and quality of analysis. Whenever possible, prompts will be engineered for transparency, enabling team members to understand the AI process and follow the logical connections made in reviewing documents.

All AI-assisted analysis will be thoroughly verified through manual expert review, with team members maintaining full control over interpretation and analysis. The AI system will be centred in "human-in-the-loop" machine learning design, allowing for human intervention at each step of the workflow – including with document uploading, evaluation assessment questions, and output review. Outputs will be able to be manually adjusted, and any findings that come out of AI-generation will be comprehensively triangulated with other data sources. We will consistently document instances where human reviewers differ from machine output, and rely on human judgment and decision-making as the standard for quality. Particular care will be paid to the highest relevant documents, as identified by the synthesis team.

On bias and data privacy

The synthesis team will be well versed in the potential risks and biases inherent in using pre-trained AI models. The primary risks associated with using AI in this context include misinterpretation or omission of key details, bias in outputs, and data privacy and security concerns. The AI may misinterpret context, overlook nuances, or reflect biases present in its training data, source material, or instructions. Additionally, ensuring the confidentiality and security of sensitive information when engaging AI tools is crucial.

To address these risks, the synthesis team will implement human oversight, rigorous guidelines, and secure AI practices. We recognize that pre-trained AI/large language models might have inherent biases depending on their training data. Given the potential for bias within natural language processing systems, AI outputs will be validated by multiple team members with diverse perspectives in a manual review of AI generated content for output accuracy to correct errors and identify instances of bias (e.g. related to gender, disability, and culture).

Clear, detailed instructions, prompts, and analysis criteria – combined with iterative testing – will help align AI performance with human judgment. Team members contain a keen awareness of potential bias in AI generated content, which is essential to mitigating its impact concerning sensitive topics, particularly those such as gender dynamics, inclusivity and equity concerns, or the reproduction of cultural stereotypes. Moreover, all team members engaging with AI tools have

completed certification trainings about the biases, hallucinations and privacy risks inherent to AI use.

The team employs custom-designed AI tools built onto commercially available models, harnessing state-of-the-art machine learning models, augmented with tailored analysis approaches, database management and enterprise level security.

TOOL 1: GCF DOCUMENTATION REVIEWER

Purpose and technical approach

This tool will analyse hundreds of internal GCF documents to identify and synthesize content related to gender mainstreaming. It will use a retrieval-augmented generation vector database to efficiently search across documents and provide a cross-portfolio perspective rather than project-by-project analysis. The retrieval-augmented generation process will search the vector database for relevant sections from the documents – matching keywords, concepts, or topics that are relevant to the question prompt. These extracts will then be assembled together and sent to the AI model to generate the response. AI output will produce a custom report that presents the response with citations, and a list of the relevant documents directly consulted. The tool will maintain clear source attribution to allow for verification and spot-checking, while significantly reducing the manual review time needed to process hundreds of documents. User control over search parameters will ensure the team can refine queries based on emerging findings. This integrated approach will allow the team to identify patterns in how gender considerations are being integrated across different levels and contexts.

Key features

- Bulk upload system with verification checks for hundreds of documents of different types/formats including gender assessments, GAPs, APRs, and FPs
- Vector database storage for efficient cross-document searching
- Prompt writing interface structured by guiding questions
- Response generation with proper citations and source tracking
- Custom report formatting with relevant document lists

Document types and analysis focus

The tool will process various GCF documentation available online, including gender assessments, GAPs, APRs, and FPs. These documents are highly structured with qualitative and quantitative metrics. They can be easily scraped by AI, and are publicly available, minimizing confidentiality concerns related to AI tools.

TOOL 2: EXTERNAL LITERATURE REVIEW ASSISTANT

Purpose and technical approach

This tool will identify and organize external literature on gender mainstreaming in climate finance to contextualize GCF's approach within the global discourse. It will leverage multiple AI research tools (Perplexity, Elicit, Claude, etc.) to gather and synthesize findings from various sources. The AI Assistant will use a variety of different search tools and subsequently store the results together in a single database where we could combine and synthesize the findings. The tool would pull from

publicly available sources, in compliance with websites' terms of use, and store data securely for the duration of the Synthesis.

The database would connect related data together from different sources, and serve as a resource holding the combined knowledge on that research topic. The tool will maintain source quality control while providing an efficient way to gather diverse perspectives on gender in climate finance. It will organize findings by review question with clear links to source documents, enabling the team to easily verify information and incorporate it into the literature review.

Key features

- Integration with multiple research application programming interfaces
- Source filtering by document type and quality
- Structured storage of findings organized by review questions
- Quality assessment mechanisms for source reliability
- Output generation with links to source documents

Source types and research focus

Source quality will be a key consideration in the design. This will include the option to configure the search parameters for each research tool to target or exclude specific sources or source types.

Appendix 4. FULL DETAILS ON COMPARATOR SELECTION

This section provides details on the proposed selection of comparators, mapping their gender frameworks and any evaluative evidence or relevant documentation that can be drawn on for their assessment as part of the benchmarking exercise.

A. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

Both the GEF and the GCF operate as financial mechanisms, with the GEF operating through its network of GEF agencies as AEs for implementation, rather than being the direct implementers of projects. The GCF and GEF are also similarly based on key principles for a country-driven approach.

The GEF's gender framework is premised on a 2017 *Gender Policy*, with accompanying guidance for its operationalization. This is further complemented by its *Gender Equality Action Plan*. Of note, there is also an established *GEF Gender Partnership*.

In terms of evaluative evidence, there is a 2018 evaluation of gender mainstreaming in the GEF. There is also the possibility to draw on past Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network assessments of the GEF (2025, and 2017–2018), which assess organizational structures, policy frameworks, and mechanisms to support the implementation of cross-cutting issues in line with the SDGs (including gender equality and women's empowerment as part of key performance indicator—KPI 2), as well as the achievement of results contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment (as part of KPI 9). There is also a 2024 evaluation assessing the inclusion of marginalized groups in GEF-supported projects, with attention to fragile and conflict-affected situations that likely contain a focus on gender/women.

B. ADAPTATION FUND

The Adaptation Fund similarly does not implement projects directly, but rather provides funding to work through national implementing entities and multilateral implementing entities for implementation. The Adaptation Fund has a somewhat narrower mandate than the GCF in financing climate adaptation projects and programmes, whereas the GCF encompasses both adaptation and mitigation projects.

The Adaptation Fund's gender framework includes their *Gender Policy* and *Gender Action Plan* (updated in 2021). This policy framework is accompanied by *Gender Guidance Documents for Implementing Entities* (updated in 2022), with additional tools and guidance for mainstreaming gender across the project lifecycle. There is also a *Compilation and Analysis of Gender-Related Policies and Procedures of the Fund* (2015).

A review of available evaluative evidence on mainstreaming gender highlights a 2022 study on intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions and *Assessing Progress: Integrating Gender in Adaptation Fund Projects and Programmes* (2020). There is also an *Assessment Report on Progress in the Implementation of the Adaptation Fund's Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan* (2019), as well as *Environmental, Social and Gender Policy case studies* (2019).

C. CLIMATE INVESTMENT FUNDS

The CIF has a similar model of operation to GCF, where both function as mechanisms to channel funds through a system of MDBs as implementing entities (e.g. the Forest Investment Program and Scaling Up Renewable Energy Program in Low Income Countries programmes). While CIF works primarily through MDBs as implementing agencies, the GCF has a broader scope working with MDBs among a range of other entities. Moreover, CIF has less of a relationship to the UNFCCC as compared to GCF, GEF and the Adaptation Fund.

The CIF's approach to mainstreaming gender is framed by the 2018 CIF *Gender Policy*. Operationalization is supported by a 2022 *Gender Integration Guidance Note for CIF Projects*, and a strategic event in November 2024 to promote equality through climate finance ("CIF Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy Consultation"). There is also relevant publicly available documentation that provides additional guidance, case studies, thematic analyses, podcasts/blogs/features on gender-transformative climate finance, entry points for integrating gender into design and implementation, translating from policy to practice, and lessons on gender impacts in different contexts.

Regarding existing evaluative evidence on the integration of gender, there is a 2022 *Portfolio Review of Gender Integration* in the CIF, as well as a 2020 podcast on assessing gender dimensions that can be a useful resource.

D. INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

While both IFAD and GCF operate through a network of implementing entities, IFAD relies on a partnership model that partners primarily with government agencies, local organizations and other development institutions. IFAD contains a narrower and specific mandate on empowering smallholder farmers and rural populations in developing countries.

The IFAD is strongly rooted in gender-transformative approaches, with a 25-year long history of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment. There is reference to a foundational "1992 paper" that initiated key paradigm shifts, with the establishment of IFAD's *2003–2006 Plan of Action for Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in IFAD's Operations*, and the IFAD policy on gender equality and women's empowerment in 2012. These are further supported by *Strategies for the Economic Advancement of Poor Rural Women*, with gender equality identified as 1 of 5 principles of engagement in IFAD's 2016–2025 Strategic Framework. IFAD also has an established gender network, with the development of a "Gender-Transformative Mechanism" in the context of climate adaptation. Additional relevant documentation includes an *IFAD Briefing Note on Gender and Climate: Scaling Gender and Climate Investments*, among other publications, policy briefs, features, podcasts, and "how to do" notes on gender-transformative approaches.

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