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A Benchmarking Study

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GCF Gender Synthesis: Benchmarking Exercise



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First Edition

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgment.....	d
List of Authors	e
Abbreviations.....	f
I. Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose and Scope	1
1.2 Methodology.....	2
II. Insights from Benchmarking Study.....	3
2.1 Evolution of Gender Mainstreaming in Climate Finance.....	3
2.2 Use of Gender-sensitive, Gender-responsive, and Gender-transformative Climate Financing Approaches	6
2.3 Alignment with UNFCCC Guidance	8
2.4 Intersectionality in the Climate Finance Space	9
2.5 Integrating Gender across the Project Cycle.....	11
2.6 Accountability Mechanisms	12
2.7 Private Sector Engagement.....	13
2.8 Guidance and Tools.....	15
2.9 Competencies and Capacities Required for Gender Mainstreaming.....	16
2.10 Integrating Gender in Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms	18
2.11 Learning and Knowledge-sharing Processes on Gender Equality in the Climate Finance Space	21
2.12 Lessons Learned and Good Practice.....	22
III. Conclusions	23
Annex I: Comparator Table.....	26
Annex II: Bibliography	47
Annex III: List of Consulted Stakeholders.....	50

List of Tables

Table 1. Policies and Action Plans Across Comparators	3
Table 2. Objective of the GAPS.....	4
Table 3. Guidance for Integrating Gender in Projects	15
Table 4. Personnel Dedicated to Gender	17
Table 5. Approaches to Reporting on Gender Outcomes Across the Portfolio	19
Table 6. Lessons Learned and Good Practices Implemented Across Funds	22



List of Boxes

Box 1. Adaptation Fund Gender Scorecard20



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Abbreviations

APR	Annual Performance Report of the Adaptation Fund
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CIF	Climate Investment Funds
CMA	Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement
CMP	Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol
ESP	Environmental and Social Policy of the Adaptation Fund
FIP	Forest Investment Program of the CIF
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GTM	Gender Transformative Mechanism
JP GTA	Joint Programme on Gender-Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit of the GCF
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LWPG	Lima Work Programme on Gender
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDBs	Multilateral Development Banks
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PPCR	Pilot Program for Climate Resilience of the CIF
PPR	Project/ Performance Report of the Adaptation Fund
RIDE	Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness
RMF	Results Management Framework of IFAD
SRF	Strategic Results Framework of the Adaptation Fund
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WFP	World Food Programme



I. Introduction

1. The benchmarking study was undertaken as part of the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) Gender Synthesis and the preparatory work informing the Independent Evaluation Unit's (IEU) evaluation of the GCF approach to gender. The study examined relevant comparators' gender frameworks, including their respective gender policies, action plans, and approaches for mainstreaming gender. By examining the approaches of GCF's peer institutions, the study assessed the extent to which gender considerations are integrated in climate finance decision-making and implementation.

1.1 Purpose and Scope

2. The purpose of the benchmarking study was to assess relevant comparable international climate financing institutions' approach to gender mainstreaming relative to the GCF. The study aimed to generate insights into how the GCF's policies, mechanisms, and resources compared to those of peer institutions. The purpose of the benchmarking study's comparative lens was to provide insights into best practices and lessons that can inform the IEU's forthcoming gender evaluation, which aims to inform GCF's efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming and enhance gender responsiveness. By situating the GCF's efforts within the broader climate finance landscape, the study provides further evidence to support the overall effort to strengthen the GCF's gender-responsive programming and policy development.

3. The scope of the benchmarking study encompassed a comparative review of four climate finance organizations with mandates and operational models similar to the GCF. Comparators were identified based on the following selection criteria:

- (a) **Climate finance portfolio:** Comparators were selected based on their comparable scale and experience in managing climate-related funding, ensuring that the assessment of gender mainstreaming practices was relevant and applicable to the GCF's mandate.
- (b) **Institutional mandate and operational model:** Institutions were chosen that operate through implementing partners rather than direct implementation, to align with the GCF's operating model.
- (c) **Gender policy framework:** Comparators were required to have established gender policies and demonstrable commitment to mainstreaming gender, providing a solid basis for analysing their approaches and practices.
- (d) **Evaluative evidence:** Selection prioritized organizations with publicly accessible evaluative evidence, enabling a robust and verifiable comparison of gender mainstreaming practices and strengthening the credibility and applicability of the benchmarking study.

4. Based on this selection criteria, the following comparators were included in the analysis: the Adaptation Fund (AF), the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

5. The benchmark exercise addresses the following questions:

- (a) **Comparator Gender Framework: How does the comparator integrate gender at the corporate/organizational and project levels?**
 - (i) What policy framework does the comparator use for mainstreaming gender, such as a gender policy or gender action plan (GAP)?
 - (ii) What tools, mechanisms and guidance are provided for mainstreaming gender?



- (iii) What objectives, targets and indicators does the comparator use for gender mainstreaming?
 - (iv) To what extent does the comparator have mechanisms to monitor the implementation of its gender policy framework?
 - (v) To what extent does the comparator report on gender integration or on gender-related results?
 - (vi) How are resources, including human and financial resources, and roles and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender distributed within the comparator's organizational structure?
 - (vii) To what extent does the comparator support capacity strengthening to mainstream gender across its secretariat or equivalent administrative structure, for example through training, workshops, expertise and guidance?
- (b) **Project Cycle Integration: How are gender considerations integrated across the different stages of the project lifecycle?**
- (i) How is gender integrated across the project lifecycle: from origination, including stakeholder engagement and consultation with diverse groups, notably women's organizations; through design, including gender analysis and assessment; implementation and appraisal; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including the use of disaggregated data; to reporting and closure?
 - (ii) What mechanisms are in place to ensure accredited entities or implementing partners adhere to organizational standards and policy commitments on gender equality?

1.2 Methodology

6. The benchmarking study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques based on the available data. The specific methodology included:

- (a) **Document review:** Comparative analysis of gender policies,¹ strategies, action plans, evaluation reports, reviews, annual reports, and relevant publicly available presentations or webinars across selected comparator organizations. See Annex II for the full bibliography of documents reviewed.
- (b) **Semi-structured interviews:** Interviews were conducted with gender specialists, project managers, and evaluation staff from each comparator to gather qualitative insights on implementation, challenges, and best practices. One small group interview of two to three people was conducted with each comparator (4 total KIIs), with a total of eight individuals. See Annex III for a list of stakeholders consulted.
- (c) **Triangulation:** Findings from document review and interviews were triangulated to ensure the validity and reliability of the evidence presented.

7. This methodology enabled a robust comparison of gender mainstreaming practices of peer organizations and facilitated the identification of actionable lessons and opportunities for improvement.

¹ The Gender Policies, GAPs and related practices of all four comparators were reviewed and compared across several themes, including the use of gender-responsive and gender transformative approaches; approaches to intersectionality; private sector engagement; knowledge management; and others.

II. Insights from Benchmarking Study

8. This section presents key insights from the benchmarking exercise in response to the questions posed in Section 1.1.

2.1 Evolution of Gender Mainstreaming in Climate Finance

9. **Key Insight #1: Across all comparator funds, gender mainstreaming has evolved into a core institutional priority, reflected not only in the adoption of gender policies and action plans but also in increasingly explicit objectives that promote women’s access to resources and services, participation and leadership in decision-making, and the systematic integration of gender considerations across project design, implementation, and results frameworks.**

10. Across the four comparator organizations, the evolution of gender mainstreaming reflects a clear shift from broad commitments to gender equality towards more explicit, outcome-oriented objectives embedded in dedicated gender policies and action plans. Table 1 provides an overview of the evolution of gender policies and action plans across comparators.

Table 1. Policies and Action Plans Across Comparators

COMPARATOR	GENDER POLICY	GENDER ACTION PLANS / OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES
Adaptation Fund	Gender Policy and Action plan adopted 2016; amended through a participatory process and approved in 2021, informed by a 2016–2020 implementation assessment ² and aligned with evolving UNFCCC gender guidance	GAP FY 2017-2019 (GAP-1) adopted 2016; GAP FY 2021-2023 (GAP-2), updated alongside the policy in 2021, with increased focus on implementation, tracking, and results. As of 2025, GAP-2 is still under implementation and has not yet been updated
CIF	CIF Gender Policy adopted 2018, establishing an organizational framework for integrating gender across governance, investment planning, and project implementation	GAP Phase 1 2014–2016; GAP Phase 2 2016–2020; GAP Phase 3 2021–2024; GAP 2025–2030 under development
GEF	Policy on Gender Equality adopted 2017, replacing the 2012 Policy on Gender Mainstreaming following evaluation findings	Gender Implementation Strategy adopted 2018, operationalizing the policy across GEF operations
IFAD³	Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment adopted 2012; continues to guide successive strategic frameworks	GAP 2019–2025; GAP 2026–2030, strengthening accountability, capacity, and alignment with emerging priorities

11. While the timing and sequencing differ, all comparator organizations now articulate gender mainstreaming through concrete areas of change, notably women’s access to assets, services, and livelihoods; women’s voice, participation, and leadership in decision-making; and

² Updated Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan 2020–2023. Annex v: Report on the implementation of the Gender Policy and summary of survey findings on the implementation of the Gender Policy

³ Of note, IFAD is not a vertical climate fund as are the Adaptation Fund, the GEF and the CIF, but rather an accredited entity of the GCF.

the integration of gender considerations across the project cycle to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of climate and development investments.

12. A first point of convergence is the growing emphasis on women’s access to resources and socioeconomic benefits as a core objective of gender mainstreaming. The CIF Gender Policy frames gender equality in terms of improving women’s access to assets, services, skills, livelihoods, and leadership opportunities within climate-resilient and low-carbon development. IFAD’s 2012 Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment similarly focuses on economic empowerment and equitable sharing of benefits in rural areas, with these objectives reinforced through accompanying GAPS. In the GEF, the strengthening of gender mainstreaming following the 2017 Policy on Gender Equality translated into clearer operational priorities concerning increasing women’s access to and control over resources and targeting socioeconomic benefits for women, as articulated in its Gender Implementation Strategy⁴. The Adaptation Fund’s approach similarly positions gender mainstreaming as integral to improving adaptation outcomes for women and men, with gender-responsive project design intended to address differentiated vulnerabilities and access to benefits.

13. A second shared trend is the increasing attention to women’s participation, voice, and leadership in decision-making, though expressed in different ways across the organizations. IFAD’s gender policy explicitly targets women’s voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations, reflecting its long-standing focus on institutional and community-level change. The GEF and CIF embed similar objectives within their gender frameworks through requirements and guidance aimed at strengthening women’s participation in natural resource governance, planning processes, and investment decision-making. The Adaptation Fund’s amended 2021 policy reinforces expectations around inclusive consultations and stakeholder engagement as part of gender-responsive adaptation, while maintaining flexibility to reflect diverse national and sociocultural contexts. The objectives outlined in the four comparators’ objectives regarding gender are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Objective of the GAPS

COMPARATOR	OBJECTIVES ON GENDER OUTLINED IN THE GAP ⁵
IFAD	<p>GAP 2026-2031 Action Areas and related outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action Area 1: Country programme delivery. Outcome: Improved integration, quality, performance and sustainability of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) interventions in IFAD operations. 2. Action Area 2: Capacity development and learning for results. Outcome: Improved capacity to design and implement evidence-based GEWE interventions and monitor outcomes and results). 3. Action Area 3: Corporate, human and financial resources and coordination mechanisms. Outcome: IFAD’s corporate, human and financial resources and coordination mechanisms support the achievement of the GEWE objectives. 4. Action Area 4: Policy, partnerships and resource mobilization. Outcome: IFAD and its partners catalyse investments in GEWE to scale up results. <p>GAP 2019-2025 Action Areas and related outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action Area 1: Programme and project support. Outcome: GEWE issues addressed systematically in IFAD-supported country programmes and projects. 2. Action Area 2: Advocacy, partnerships and knowledge management.

⁴ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.54.06_Gender_Strategy_0.pdf

⁵ This table presents the aims of ongoing GAPS only. For IFAD, the objectives of the upcoming GAP have also been included.



COMPARATOR	OBJECTIVES ON GENDER OUTLINED IN THE GAP ⁵
	<p>Outcome: IFAD contributions to advocacy, partnerships and knowledge management on gender equality improved.</p> <p>3. Action Area 3: Capacity-building. Outcome: Capacity of partners to address gender issues in agriculture and rural development strengthened.</p> <p>4. Action Area 4: Resources, monitoring and professional accountability. Outcome: IFAD's corporate human and financial resources, and monitoring and accountability systems fully support GEWE.</p>
<p>CIF</p>	<p>GAP Phase 3 2021–2024:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance upstream gender integration in CIF investment plans and projects through enhanced analysis, technical support, and monitoring. 2. Support pilot countries in implementing their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with a gender lens. 3. C. Strengthen CIF evidence base, knowledge and capacity on gender and climate change. 4. Improve CIF gender monitoring and reporting. 5. Enhance knowledge and practice on measures to reduce gender gaps through renewable energy programming. 6. Improve women's tenure security and livelihoods base through gender-responsive Dedicated Grant Mechanism investments. 7. Deepen women's climate leadership efforts through the CIF. 8. Expand private sector participation in gender-responsive mitigation and adaptation investments.
<p>GEF</p>	<p>Strategic entry points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supporting women's improved access, use, and control of resources, including land, water, forest, and fisheries. 2. Enhancing women's participation and role in natural resources decision-making processes, with women as agents of change at all levels. 3. Targeting women as specific beneficiaries. 4. Investing in women's skills and capacity. 5. Encourage gender mainstreaming efforts which are guided by the Conference of the Parties (COP) in activities linked to the conventions for which the GEF serves as a financial mechanism. 6. Seek targeted collaboration around knowledge and analytical efforts. <p>Priority Action Areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action area 1: Gender-responsive approaches and results are systematically promoted in GEF programmes and projects. 2. Action area 2: Strengthened the capacity of GEF's Secretariat and its partners to mainstream gender and seize strategic entry points to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. 3. Action area 3: GEF's collaboration with partners to generate knowledge and contribute to learning on the links between gender and the environment is improved. 4. Action area 4: GEF's corporate systems for tracking and reporting on gender equality results are enhanced.
<p>Adaptation Fund</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide women and men with equal opportunities to build climate resilience, address their differentiated vulnerabilities, and increase their capacity to adapt to climate change impacts. 2. Ensure equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men in all Adaptation Fund-supported projects and programmes,



COMPARATOR	OBJECTIVES ON GENDER OUTLINED IN THE GAP ⁵
	<p>including equal consideration of their respective interests, vulnerabilities, needs, and priorities throughout the project cycle.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Address and mitigate assessed potential project and programme risks for women and men, as part of the Fund’s broader environmental and social risk management approach. 4. Promote women’s leadership and participation in decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation planning and implementation. 5. Accelerate learning about effective gender-equal adaptation measures and strategies to improve the effectiveness, sustainability, and equity of adaptation outcomes and impacts.

2.2 Use of Gender-sensitive, Gender-responsive, and Gender-transformative Climate Financing Approaches

14. **Key insight #2: Gender approaches across comparator funds have progressively strengthened along the gender continuum, with gender responsiveness now firmly established as a baseline across all institutions, while some commitments to gender-transformative approaches have emerged more selectively, most strongly in IFAD and CIF, more cautiously in the Adaptation Fund, and not yet formally in the GEF.**

15. Across the four comparator organizations, gender approaches have evolved from earlier gender-sensitive practices towards gender responsiveness as a minimum standard, accompanied by growing, though uneven, engagement with gender-transformative approaches. All funds now require or systematically promote gender-responsive project design, underpinned by gender analysis and gender-responsive measures. However, only IFAD and CIF explicitly frame gender transformation as an institutional objective within their policies and action plans. By contrast, the Adaptation Fund positions gender transformation as an aspirational and context-dependent goal, and the GEF remains formally anchored in a gender-responsive approach.

16. In the GEF, the 2017 Policy on Gender Equality marked a decisive shift away from earlier, more limited mainstreaming towards a clearly articulated gender-responsive approach, with mandatory requirements for gender analysis and gender-responsive actions across the project cycle. While the policy and guidance emphasize addressing structural gender gaps, particularly in access to resources, participation, and socioeconomic benefits, they do not explicitly commit the institution to gender-transformative approaches. While some stakeholders believe there are opportunities to raise ambitions towards gender transformation,⁶ GEF staff explained during KIIs that the GEF follows intergovernmental mandates under the conventions it serves, and that these do not commit to gender-transformative approaches. They further noted that, while such approaches may be desirable in the future, there is currently a lack of understanding of what gender-transformative approaches mean for climate finance institutions. It is therefore not possible for the GEF to provide implementing agencies with clear guidance regarding expectations for integrating such approaches. Moreover, the short five-year GEF project cycle makes it difficult to monitor and track gender-transformative results, which can take years to manifest.

17. Similarly, the Adaptation Fund’s gender framework has evolved from gender-responsive approaches towards greater recognition of gender transformation, particularly through its 2021

⁶ According to qualitative responses to the stakeholder survey conducted by the 2025 MOPAN Assessment.

policy update, which explicitly articulates the gender continuum and encourages implementing entities (IEs) to pursue gender-transformative practices where feasible. However, gender responsiveness remains the binding requirement for access to funding, and, according to key informant interviews (KIIs), the Adaptation Fund has deliberately avoided making gender transformation a condition for financing, citing the diversity of sociocultural contexts in adaptation and concerns about access to finance.

18. By contrast, CIF and IFAD demonstrate a more explicit and sustained strengthening of gender-transformative ambitions over time. CIF's progression across successive GAP phases illustrates a deliberate move along the continuum: from an initial focus on strengthening gender-responsive design and quality at entry (GAP Phase 1), to the introduction of explicitly gender-transformational objectives centred on women's assets, voice, and livelihoods (GAP Phase 2), and further scaling under Phase 3, whose theory of change explicitly foresees transformative impacts through gender-responsive institutions and markets, with increased emphasis on women's climate leadership. This trajectory is reinforced by the 2018 CIF Gender Policy, which commits to a gender-transformative approach. At the same time, CIF has opted not to introduce formal tagging or numerical targets for gender transformation, reflecting a view that transformation is best assessed qualitatively and contextually rather than through binary classification.

19. IFAD stands out as the institution with the strongest and most explicit commitment to gender-transformative approaches. Building on its 2012 Gender Policy, IFAD formalized a shift towards gender transformation in 2019 through the Mainstreaming Gender-Transformative Approaches Action Plan⁷ and its first GAP, explicitly moving beyond addressing gender gaps to tackling underlying drivers of inequality such as social norms and power relations. In doing so, IFAD also adopted a corporate target that at least 35 per cent of its investments be gender transformative. The GAP 2026–2030 consolidates this approach by reaffirming gender transformation as a core institutional priority and strengthening accountability, resourcing, and capacity to deliver transformative results.

20. To operationalize its gender-transformative ambitions, IFAD has complemented policy commitments with dedicated mechanisms and strategic partnerships that go beyond standard project-level mainstreaming. The Gender-Transformative Mechanism (GTM), launched in 2022 in the context of climate adaptation, provides targeted grant financing to support government-led investments that explicitly aim to deliver gender-transformative results. According to KIIs, the GTM is designed to enable more intensive, programmatic, and context-specific interventions than would typically be feasible within loan-financed operations, with a focus on addressing underlying social norms, power relations, and institutional barriers that constrain women's agency and resilience. In addition, the Joint Programme on Gender-Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition (JP GTA), launched in 2019 by IFAD in partnership with FAO and WFP with support from the European Union, aims to move beyond gender-responsive interventions by explicitly addressing the root causes of gender inequality in food systems. JP GTA focuses on challenging discriminatory social norms, unequal power relations, and structural barriers affecting women's agency and decision-making. Through joint development of a theory of change, piloting of gender-transformative interventions, and the generation of operational guidance and evidence, the JP GTA supports institutional learning and capacity-building across the Rome-based agencies and partner governments, informing the design of more ambitious gender-transformative programming.

⁷ IFAD mainstreaming gender-transformative approaches at IFAD – Action Plan 2019-2025.
<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/126/docs/EB-2019-126-INF-6.pdf>

2.3 Alignment with UNFCCC Guidance

21. **Key Insight #3: Alignment with UNFCCC gender guidance is most explicit and institutionally embedded where funds operate within, or in proximity to, the UNFCCC financial mechanism (Adaptation Fund). Other comparators align more indirectly: either by clearly positioning their gender frameworks as complementary to UNFCCC guidance without formal COP accountability (CIF), by embedding UNFCCC gender guidance within a broader multi-convention accountability model (GEF), or by anchoring gender commitments primarily in wider United Nations normative and institutional frameworks while treating climate as a priority area (IFAD).**

22. Across the four comparator organizations, alignment with UNFCCC guidance on gender is shaped primarily by each fund's institutional relationship to the UNFCCC. The Adaptation Fund shows the most direct and formalized alignment. Its gender policy and GAP explicitly reference UNFCCC gender decisions, including the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and subsequent UNFCCC GAPs, and frame gender equality as central to effective adaptation. The policy also reflects the Fund's mandate, as an operating entity of the UNFCCC financial mechanism, to implement COP guidance on gender-responsive climate action. The 2021 update strengthened requirements for gender assessments, participation of women and marginalized groups, and more systematic consideration of gender-differentiated vulnerability. In addition, the updated policy and action plan explicitly adopt an intersectional framing of vulnerability and adaptive capacity. This goes beyond the core language of the LWPG, which focuses on gender balance, gender sensitivity, and gender-responsive climate policy rather than on intersectionality as such. Progress on gender integration is reported through the Fund's regular institutional reporting, including its annual report to the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP)/Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), rather than through a separate gender report to the COP.

23. The CIF's approach to gender aligns with UNFCCC gender guidance more indirectly. KIIs confirmed that CIF operates outside the formal UNFCCC governance framework and therefore does not report directly to the UNFCCC or the COP. Nonetheless, the CIF Gender Policy and successive GAPs explicitly situate CIF's gender approach within the broader international climate and gender landscape, including the UNFCCC, the LWPG, and subsequent UNFCCC GAPs. This framing positions CIF's gender commitments as consistent with, and supportive of, UNFCCC principles, while remaining outside formal COP accountability. Core elements of the UNFCCC gender agenda, such as women's participation in climate decision-making, capacity-building, and leadership, are reflected in CIF's policy and operationalized through its GAPs, with Phase 3 placing stronger emphasis on upstream integration of gender in investment planning and institutional change, both of which are emphasized by the LWPG. The policy also encourages coordination and exchange with other climate finance institutions and UNFCCC gender focal points.

24. The GEF addresses UNFCCC gender guidance through a broader accountability framework linked to the multiple multilateral environmental agreements it serves. The GEF Gender Policy and Gender Implementation Strategy reference gender-related decisions of the Conferences of the Parties of the UNFCCC alongside those of other conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Rather than treating UNFCCC guidance as a standalone reference point, the documents position the GEF as responsible for supporting the implementation of COP guidance on gender across conventions. In this context, gender equality is linked to improved environmental outcomes, including through women's participation in environmental governance and more equitable access to natural resources and benefits. The strategy also encourages gender mainstreaming in convention-related national processes, such as NDCs and

other national environmental planning instruments. Reporting on gender progress is carried out through annual reporting to the GEF Council, rather than through UNFCCC-specific reporting channels.

25. IFAD's GAPs align with UNFCCC gender guidance more indirectly. IFAD operates outside the UNFCCC governance structure, and its GAPs anchor gender equality and women's empowerment primarily in broader United Nations normative and accountability frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and system-wide gender equality commitments. The plans do not make explicit reference to the LWPG or the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan. However, climate change is treated as a core area for gender mainstreaming, and successive action plans have strengthened the integration of gender objectives within IFAD's climate-related strategies and investments. As a result, IFAD's alignment with UNFCCC gender guidance is mediated through its own institutional mandates and broader United Nations system-wide frameworks, rather than through direct reference to UNFCCC gender instruments.

2.4 Intersectionality in the Climate Finance Space

26. **Key Insight #4: Intersectionality has gained increasing prominence across comparator funds, with a clear shift from implicit inclusion towards more explicit and operationalized intersectional approaches—most strongly articulated in the Adaptation Fund and IFAD, emerging in CIF, and addressed through a broader inclusion agenda in the GEF.**

27. Across the four comparator organizations, approaches to intersectionality have evolved from implicit attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups towards more explicit recognition of overlapping and intersecting forms of disadvantage, although the degree of formalization and operational clarity varies. All funds now acknowledge that gender inequalities are shaped by broader social, economic, and cultural factors, but they differ in how clearly intersectionality is articulated in policy and how consistently it is translated into project-level requirements.

28. The Adaptation Fund and IFAD demonstrate the most explicit and operationalized approaches to intersectionality. KIIs with the Adaptation Fund indicate that intersectional approaches were significantly strengthened in the 2021 update of the gender policy and GAP, which explicitly commits the Fund to applying an intersectional analysis to understand differentiated vulnerability and adaptive capacity. This commitment is translated into clear operational requirements, with IEs required to conduct gender assessments that identify gender gaps in light of intersecting vulnerabilities. To translate this commitment into action, the Adaptation Fund updated its gender guidance in 2022, which provides practical direction on applying an intersectional lens throughout project design. The guidance instructs implementing entities to analyse how gender inequalities intersect with other dimensions of vulnerability, such as age, disability, ethnicity, Indigenous status, poverty, migration status, and social norms. It also requires that these differentiated risks, barriers, and capacities be reflected in stakeholder engagement, activity design, and results frameworks, supported by concrete examples and guiding questions.⁸

29. In interviews, IFAD staff explained that its approach to intersectionality is closely tied to its long-standing emphasis on targeting and social inclusion in rural poverty reduction. While the 2012 Gender Policy recognized differentiated constraints among rural women and men, its focus on targeting and social inclusion became more explicit under the GAP 2019–2025, which emphasized reaching women and girls facing multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities. This focus is further reinforced in the GAP 2026–2031, which explicitly commits to targeting women and girls most at risk, including those affected by intersecting vulnerabilities related to fragility,

⁸ Adaptation Fund Board (2022). Updated Gender Guidance Document for Implementing Entities.



climate shocks, disability, displacement, Indigenous status, and exposure to violence. Rather than treating intersectionality as a standalone concept, IFAD integrates it through project-level targeting strategies and participatory approaches that address gender alongside other dimensions of exclusion throughout the project cycle. This approach is further anchored in IFAD's Poverty Targeting Policy (2023), which explicitly recognizes that rural poverty is shaped by multiple, intersecting drivers of exclusion, including gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geographic isolation, climate vulnerability, and fragility. The policy requires that these intersecting inequalities be addressed throughout the programme and project cycle.⁹ IFAD's approach to social inclusion is further supported by complementary policies, notably the Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples (2022) and the Disability Inclusion Strategy (2022–2027), which provide guidance on addressing structural barriers faced by Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities within IFAD-supported operations.¹⁰

30. The CIF has also strengthened its commitment to intersectionality in recent years. Both GAP Phase 1 and Phase 2 addressed gender largely as a standalone category, with limited attention to intersecting forms of exclusion. Under GAP Phase 3 (FY21–24), CIF recognizes that gender-based exclusion intersects with other vectors of disadvantage, including class, ethnicity, age, disability status, religion, Indigenous Peoples' status, and sexual orientation. This shift is reflected in a broader inclusion lens and emerging attention to issues such as disability inclusion, alongside commitments to improved disaggregation and analysis to better understand how multiple dimensions of disadvantage shape the impacts of climate investments.¹¹ In interviews, CIF staff explained that they are still undertaking analytical work to understand how to best operationalize their approach to intersectionality. Most progress has been made around disability inclusion, with the publication of a background paper on CIF's approach to disability inclusion.¹²

31. GEF's approach to intersectionality has evolved from an implicit, policy-embedded focus to a more explicit and institutionally articulated inclusion agenda under GEF-8. Historically, inclusion considerations were addressed across multiple frameworks that acknowledged that a range of social factors, including gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status shapes vulnerability. These included the Policy on Gender Equality (2017), the Policy on Stakeholder Engagement (2017), and the Environmental and Social Safeguards (2019). However, the 2025 MOPAN assessment of the GEF found limited inclusion of certain vulnerable groups in GEF programming, particularly persons with disabilities, people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and individuals with non-binary gender identities. In response to these gaps,

⁹ IFAD (2023). IFAD Poverty Targeting Policy 2023 (Document No. EB 2023/138/R.3). International Fund for Agricultural Development. Available at https://www.ifad.org/documents/38711624/47758862/targeting-policy-2023_e.pdf

¹⁰ IFAD (2022). IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: 2022 update (Document No. EB 2022/137/R.6). International Fund for Agricultural Development. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/corporate-documents/policies/ifad-policy-on-engagement-with-indigenous-peoples>; IFAD (2022). IFAD's Disability Inclusion Strategy 2022–2027 (Document No. EB 2022/137/R.7). International Fund for Agricultural Development. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/corporate-documents/policies/ifad-disability-inclusion-strategy-2022-2027>

¹¹ CIF (2014). CIF Gender Action Plan FY15-16 (CTF-SCF/TFC.12/7, approved June 4, 2014). Climate Investment Funds. https://www.cif.org/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/cif_gender_action_plan_fy15-16_1.pdf; CIF (2016). CIF Gender Action Plan – Phase 2 (CTF-SCF/TFC.16/6). Climate Investment Funds. https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/default/files/meeting-documents/ctf_scf_16_6_gender_action_plan_phase_2_final.pdf; CIF (2020). CIF Gender Action Plan – Phase 3 (FY21–24), Revised (Joint CTF-SCF/TFC.22/7/Rev.1). Climate Investment Funds. https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/cif_enc/files/meeting-documents/ctf_scf_22_7_rev.1_cif_gender_action_plan_phase_3_final.pdf

¹² CIF (2024). Disability inclusion in climate finance: A background paper for the disability inclusion approach for climate investment funds. Climate Investment Funds. https://d2qx68gt0006nn.cloudfront.net/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/disability_inclusion_in_climate_finance_feb6.pdf

GEF-8 has placed renewed emphasis on an explicit inclusion agenda, and the GEF Secretariat has undertaken analytical work to identify approaches to operationalize this agenda. The 2024 Inclusion Approach Paper and accompanying social gap analysis note that these provisions were dispersed across policies, leading to uneven interpretation and implementation and more limited attention to certain groups, including persons with disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity, and non-binary gender identities. In response, GEF-8 places renewed emphasis on a coherent, people-centred inclusion agenda, aimed at strengthening non-discrimination, improving guidance, and aligning gender, inclusion, and safeguards policies within a more integrated institutional framework. While this agenda does not yet introduce new mandatory requirements, it signals a shift towards a more intentional and systematic treatment of intersecting forms of exclusion across GEF programming.¹³

2.5 Integrating Gender across the Project Cycle

32. **Key Insight #5: Integration of gender across the project cycle has become institutionalized across all comparator funds, but the strength of requirements, accountability mechanisms, and the translation from analysis into action vary.**

33. All four funds have embedded gender considerations across key stages of the project cycle—design, consultation, implementation and accountability—through formal policy requirements. However, they differ in how prescriptive these requirements are and how consistently gender analysis is translated into concrete project actions.

34. Both the Adaptation Fund and the GEF apply mandatory requirements that explicitly link project-level gender analysis to project-level GAPs. The Adaptation Fund's Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan (2016; amended 2021) require implementing entities to conduct a project-specific gender assessment at the preparation stage and to translate the findings into gender-responsive measures articulated through a project-level GAP embedded in the overall project design and budgeting; projects lacking gender considerations are not eligible for approval. In KIIs, the Adaptation Fund explained that there are usually strong linkages between the assessment and the GAP because, even though these tasks are often outsourced to consultants, they are carried out in close collaboration with project teams, ensuring a strong connection between gender-related processes and project design.

35. Similarly, the GEF's Policy on Gender Equality (2017) mandates gender analysis and project-level GAPs for all projects. MOPAN and GEF-IEO evidence indicate that these requirements are consistently applied in design documentation and are supported by a centralized technical review by a GEF gender specialist. KIIs report that this approach has strengthened coherence between gender assessments and GAPs. CIF and IFAD also have requirements to integrate the findings of gender analysis into project design. However, both the CIF Portfolio Review of Gender Integration (2022) and an IFAD thematic evaluation find that, while gender analysis is included at the design stage, the strength of linkages between identified gender gaps, proposed actions, and implementation arrangements varies by sector, implementing partner, and context.

36. Consultation requirements are present across all funds but differ in emphasis and enforceability. The Adaptation Fund and GEF both require inclusive, gender-responsive stakeholder engagement as part of project preparation, reinforced through dedicated stakeholder engagement policies (GEF, 2017) and technical guidance (Adaptation Fund, 2022). CIF and IFAD similarly emphasize participatory design and consultation with women and affected communities. However, evaluative evidence suggests that documentation of how

¹³ Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). (2025). MOPAN assessment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). MOPAN. <https://www.mopan.org/content/dam/mopan/en/publications/our-work/evidence/gef/gef-2025/mopan-gef-assessment-2025.pdf>



women's inputs influence design decisions is often limited, particularly in IFAD-supported operations, where consultation quality varies across regions and implementing partners.¹⁴

37. Grievance and accountability mechanisms are systematically addressed in all four funds through environmental and social safeguard frameworks, though responsibility is exercised through different institutional arrangements. The Adaptation Fund and GEF require projects to establish accessible grievance mechanisms capable of addressing gender-related complaints, complemented by Fund-level accountability mechanisms, namely the Adaptation Fund's Ad Hoc Complaint Handling Mechanism and the GEF Conflict Resolution Commissioner. CIF and IFAD rely primarily on the grievance systems of implementing Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) or national partners. Evaluative evidence suggests that while grievance mechanisms are generally in place, their gender sensitivity and accessibility, particularly for rural women and marginalized groups, are not always clearly articulated and their uptake often depends on national systems and project management capacity.¹⁵

38. Across the comparator organizations, integration of gender during project implementation is generally framed around ensuring women's participation in project activities and access to benefits, with varying degrees of institutionalization and ambition. The Adaptation Fund and GEF articulate relatively clear expectations that gender-responsive measures identified at the design stage must be actively operationalized during implementation, including through inclusive participation arrangements, targeted capacity-building for women, and measures to address practical barriers such as time poverty, mobility, and care responsibilities. CIF relies more heavily on implementing MDBs to translate gender commitments into practice, resulting in uneven implementation across sectors, with stronger evidence of inclusive implementation and women's leadership in community-based and forestry-related programmes than in large-scale mitigation investments. IFAD demonstrates the most systematic approach, embedding gender-responsive and, in some cases, gender-transformative practices throughout implementation via participatory methodologies, targeted capacity development, and structured support for women's economic and leadership roles. Overall, while all four funds emphasize implementation as a critical stage for translating gender commitments into results, the depth and consistency of implementation remain closely linked to operating modalities, the availability of gender expertise, and the extent to which enabling measures are built into delivery mechanisms rather than left to project-level discretion.

2.6 Accountability Mechanisms

39. **Key Insight #6: All comparator funds have institutionalized accountability for gender integration across the project cycle, but differences are evident across funds. Accountability ranges from "hard" eligibility and approval conditions backed by centralized review and Board oversight, to models that rely on procedural requirements, partner systems, and corporate quality processes.**

40. Across the four comparator organizations, accountability for gender integration is not left solely to project teams but is embedded in formal institutional arrangements for project preparation, approval, and oversight. However, the nature of accountability varies substantially. Some funds rely on explicit eligibility conditions, centralized technical review, and Board-level enforcement, while others emphasize procedural compliance, quality assurance processes, and

¹⁴ IFAD Independent Office of Evaluation (2025). Thematic Evaluation on IFAD's Support to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Available at <https://ioe.ifad.org/documents/38714182/50776572/Thematic+evaluation+on+IFAD%27s+support+to+gender+equality+and+women%27s+empowerment/9982ef79-88a2-e542-bcaf-addc0a76f918>

¹⁵ Ibid.; CIF (2022). Portfolio Review of Gender Integration in CIF. Available at https://www.cif.org/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/portfolio_review_of_gender-integration_in_climate_investment_funds.pdf

partner-led accountability. These different models reflect broader operating modalities and have implications for how gender commitments are internalized and enforced.

41. The Adaptation Fund demonstrates the most explicit and enforceable accountability framework for gender integration. Gender requirements are treated as binding conditions for project approval, with clear expectations that gender analysis must be conducted and translated into concrete, budgeted actions. The Board has committed to refusing approval of projects that do not meet gender requirements, and accountability is reinforced through systematic screening during technical review and approval processes. Gender accountability is further institutionalized through accreditation and re-accreditation requirements for implementing entities, which must demonstrate organizational capacity and systems to support gender mainstreaming. Responsibility for gender integration is therefore clearly defined, centrally overseen, and backed by formal decision-making authority.

42. The GEF also applies a strong, centralized accountability model, although through a different institutional configuration. Gender integration is mandatory under the Policy on Gender Equality, and accountability is reinforced through standardized project templates and formal approval requirements. According to KIIs, the GEF Gender Specialist systematically reviews all gender analyses and project-level GAPs as part of the Secretariat review processes, and gender is therefore firmly embedded in design before approval. This centralized quality assurance function strengthens coherence between gender assessments and project-level GAPs. Beyond individual projects, accountability extends to partner agencies through minimum standards and Council oversight, with provisions for remedial action where requirements are not met. Independent assessments by MOPAN and GEF-IEO confirm that these mechanisms have strengthened compliance with gender requirements.

43. CIF has a more distributed accountability model that relies on the processes and systems of its implementing MDBs. Accountability for gender integration is embedded primarily in governance-level requirements, standardized review processes, and due diligence at the investment planning and project submission stages. Gender considerations are formally reviewed by the CIF Administrative Unit and trust fund committees, and gender expertise is institutionalized through dedicated roles and observer structures. However, CIF does not explicitly frame gender non-compliance as a basis for rejecting projects, and enforcement at the project level depends largely on MDB gender and safeguards systems. Accountability is therefore strongest upstream, during investment planning and approval, and weaker at the point of project-level enforcement, resulting in greater variability across sectors and implementing partners.

44. IFAD's accountability framework is distinct in that it relies primarily on corporate quality assurance systems and performance ratings, rather than hard approval conditions. Gender integration is institutionalized through mandatory design and completion ratings, internal review processes, and formal expectations that gender expertise be integrated into design, supervision, and implementation support. The 2019-2025 GAP link accountability to quality processes, consultant rosters, and staff roles, and the forthcoming GAP further strengthens this by revising rating criteria and standardizing their application across regions.

2.7 Private Sector Engagement

45. **Key Insight #7: Three of the four comparator funds (CIF, GEF, and IFAD) address private sector engagement within their gender policies and action plans, as the Adaptation Fund does not articulate a dedicated gender approach to private sector engagement. Among those that do, approaches vary in ambition and operationalization, with CIF demonstrating more advanced practice in linking gender objectives to private sector performance and incentives, while gaps remain in results-level measurement across most funds.**



46. Across the comparators, CIF, GEF, and IFAD all explicitly recognize private sector engagement as relevant to advancing gender equality, though they do so through different institutional and policy entry points. CIF GAPs directly address private sector–led investments and acknowledge the challenges of integrating gender considerations in market-driven and infrastructure-heavy contexts. GEF’s Gender Implementation Strategy frames women as economic actors whose participation in production, consumption, governance, and investment decisions can support transformative environmental outcomes. This framing is reinforced through the Private Sector Engagement Strategy, which explicitly commits to applying gender policy requirements to private sector–related activities. IFAD’s GAPs for 2019–2025 and 2026–2031 emphasize private sector engagement as a pathway for women’s economic empowerment, particularly in rural and agricultural value chains, and the GAP for 2026–2031 explicitly aligns gender action with IFAD’s Private Sector Operational Strategy. The Adaptation Fund is the only comparator whose gender policy and gender action plan do not articulate a dedicated approach to private sector engagement, nor include specific guidance or provisions addressing gender integration in private sector–led or private sector–financed adaptation activities.

47. The comparators differ in how gender is operationalized within private sector engagement. CIF demonstrates the most developed approach to linking gender objectives to the functioning of private sector investments. Documentation shows a progression from earlier efforts focused on gender-responsive project design towards a stronger emphasis under GAP Phase 3 on upstream investment planning, institutional and market-level change, and women’s participation and leadership within systems shaping private sector climate finance. This evolution is corroborated by KIIs, which highlighted emerging practices in performance-based finance for gender. KIIs describe the use of gender-related key performance indicators embedded in private sector lending arrangements, where concessional finance terms are linked to company-level actions such as adopting GAPs, providing training, or creating internship opportunities for women. According to KIIs, adjusting concessionality based on performance against these key performance indicators (KPIs) has generated incentives that influence corporate practices beyond individual project activities. However, KIIs also confirmed that CIF is still refining its approach to women’s integration into markets and private sector value chains.

48. GEF and IFAD adopt more policy-driven approaches. In the GEF, gender integration in private sector engagement is primarily embedded through the application of mandatory gender policy requirements to private sector activities, supported by explicit recognition in the Private Sector Engagement Strategy of the business case for gender equality and women’s economic participation. KIIs confirmed that the gender specialist provided input into the design of the Private Sector Engagement Strategy to ensure that gender was adequately integrated. IFAD’s approach places stronger emphasis on partnerships, guidance, and capacity development to support gender-responsive and gender-transformative engagement with private sector actors, including in non-sovereign operations, with a particular focus on inclusive business models and women’s participation in value chains.

49. Differences are also evident in how gender integration in private sector engagement is measured. CIF’s GAP Phase 3 results framework includes an indicator explicitly tracking progress towards expanding private sector participation in gender-responsive investments, indicating an intention to monitor the gender-related dimensions of private sector engagement at the portfolio level. By way of comparison, neither GEF nor IFAD includes dedicated indicators to measure gender integration or gender-specific outcomes within private sector engagement. Rather, the IFAD GAP 2026–2031 results framework includes activities and outputs related to private sector engagement that are largely process-oriented, focusing on the development of guidance and tools, the delivery of training and capacity-building, and the establishment of partnerships with private sector actors. Gender results are monitored through broader gender equality and women’s empowerment indicators linked to IFAD’s gender policy strategic objectives, rather than through indicators that measure gender integration or outcomes

specifically within private sector engagement or private sector-related operations. In the GEF, gender integration in private sector engagement is monitored primarily through the application of mandatory gender-policy requirements to private sector-related activities. While the Private Sector Engagement Strategy explicitly commits to gender-responsive design, implementation, and monitoring, the gender monitoring framework does not include dedicated indicators to track gender outcomes specifically associated with private sector engagement.

2.8 Guidance and Tools

50. **Key Insight #8: All four comparator funds provide guidance to support the integration of gender considerations in projects, but they differ in the degree of operational specificity, thematic focus, and emphasis on intersectionality and gender-transformative outcomes.**

51. Across the four funds, guidance on integrating gender into projects differs in scope and level of detail, ranging from focused guidance notes tailored to climate projects to more extensive toolkits embedded in broader institutional frameworks. The Adaptation Fund and CIF emphasize practical, step-by-step guidance tailored to climate projects, including tools, checklists, and examples to support application at the project level. CIF further complements its gender guidance with thematic inclusion guidance, notably in relation to disability inclusion.

52. The GEF and IFAD embed gender guidance within broader institutional approaches. GEF’s guidance operationalizes mandatory gender requirements across the project cycle, supported by standardized tools to promote compliance and consistency across agencies. IFAD provides an extensive suite of “how-to” notes that integrate gender with poverty targeting and social inclusion in both design and implementation, complemented by specialized guidance on measuring gender-transformative change. Table 3 provides an overview of the guidance materials and tools offered by the four funds.

Table 3. Guidance for Integrating Gender in Projects

ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
Provides dedicated guidance through the Adaptation Fund Gender Guidance (2022) to operationalize the gender policy and GAP at the project level. The guidance supports IEs in conducting gender assessments, analysing gender gaps and differentiated vulnerabilities, and ensuring meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups throughout the project cycle. It explicitly incorporates an intersectional perspective, guiding analysis of how gender interacts with factors	Provides operational guidance through the Gender Integration Guidance Note for Climate Investment Fund Projects (2022) , which sets out a step-by-step approach for integrating gender into CIF-supported investments, including sector-specific gender analysis, definition of gender-responsive actions, and development of gender indicators, including sex-disaggregated indicators. The guidance promotes an intersectional perspective, considering how gender interacts with factors such as	Provides operational advice through Guidance to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programs (2018) to support implementation of the GEF Policy on Gender Equality across the project cycle. The guidance outlines mandatory requirements for gender integration at key stages of project identification, design, implementation, and monitoring, including gender analysis, GAPs, gender-responsive stakeholder engagement, and sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive	Provides operational guidance through a suite of tools on poverty targeting, gender equality, and social inclusion, notably How to Do Poverty Targeting, Gender Equality and Empowerment during Project Design (2018) and How to Do Poverty Targeting, Gender Equality and Empowerment during Project Implementation (2018) . These tools provide step-by-step guidance across the project cycle, including participatory gender and social analysis,



ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
<p>such as age, disability, ethnicity, Indigenous status, and socioeconomic conditions. The guidance includes practical tools, such as guiding questions, checklists, and step-by-step instructions, to support gender integration in project design, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting, including the formulation of gender-responsive indicators.</p>	<p>ethnicity, Indigenous identity, disability, age, and socioeconomic status, and includes practical examples and tools to support integration in both public and private sector-led projects.</p> <p>This guidance is complemented by the Disability Inclusion in Climate Finance guidance (2024), which strengthens attention to disability inclusion within CIF operations and supports more intersectional project design and implementation.</p>	<p>indicators. It focuses on addressing gender gaps in access to resources, participation in decision-making, and access to socioeconomic benefits.</p> <p>The guidance includes practical tools, such as checklists for project preparation and CEO endorsement, guiding questions for stakeholder engagement, examples of gender-sensitive indicators, and instructions for integrating gender into results frameworks, budgets, and reporting. The guidance applies to all GEF agencies and project types and supports consistent compliance with gender policy requirements.</p>	<p>identification of target groups, integration of gender objectives and budgets, and the use of checklists and guiding questions to support implementation and supervision. The guidance applies an intersectional approach, addressing gender alongside age, youth, Indigenous Peoples, disability, and socioeconomic factors.</p> <p>In addition, the Guidelines for Measuring Gender-Transformative Change in the Context of Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture (2023), developed under the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches, provides specific guidance on measuring gender-transformative outcomes, including changes in agency, power relations, and social norms, using mixed methods and intersectional indicators.</p>

2.9 Competencies and Capacities Required for Gender Mainstreaming

53. **Key Insight #9: Comparator organizations have strengthened institutional capacity for gender equality over time. However, approaches to resourcing and capacity-building vary significantly by operating model, with persistent constraints at the project level—particularly in funds working through implementing entities.**

54. Across the four comparator organizations, there is clear evidence of increased attention to institutional capacity for gender equality, including dedicated gender expertise, formal roles and responsibilities, and clearer expectations for gender integration at the project level. However, the depth of these arrangements, the extent to which they are resourced, and the mechanisms available to build capacity among implementing partners differ substantially.

55. At the organizational and project levels, IFAD demonstrates an extensive and formalized gender architecture, with dedicated staff and consultants housed within a specialized gender and social inclusion function, reinforced by senior management leadership and a network of gender focal points across offices and divisions. Gender and social inclusion staff are embedded in project design teams and supervision processes, supporting the consistent integration of gender requirements. In comparison, the Adaptation Fund and the GEF, which operate through implementing agencies, maintain leaner secretariat-level gender capacity, complemented by formal requirements for implementing partners to demonstrate gender expertise and appropriate institutional arrangements. The Adaptation Fund has established a designated gender focal point within the secretariat and requires IEs to meet gender capacity standards as part of accreditation and re-accreditation, while the GEF relies on a partnership-wide network of Agency-appointed gender focal points. The MOPAN assessment found, however, that unclear roles and limited availability of focal points can constrain effective project-level support. CIF reflects a different model altogether, with gender expertise and operational capacity largely embedded within implementing MDBs, without fund-wide requirements for dedicated gender specialists or project-level GAPs. Table 4 provides an overview of each comparator organization’s staff dedicated to gender.

Table 4. Personnel Dedicated to Gender

ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
One Governance Specialist who acts as the gender focal point, supported by two gender analysts.	One Gender Specialist, supported by one gender consultant.	One Gender Specialist, supported by one junior gender consultant.	Gender desk (covering gender, targeting, and disability) comprising four staff and four consultants. Network of gender focal points in multi-country offices and divisions.

56. In terms of financial resources, all organizations face constraints, but to varying degrees. IFAD allocates a measurable share of staff costs to gender-related activities and has institutionalized gender within its core staffing model, but the 2024 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network review of IFAD points to insufficient operational budgets for design and supervision to sustain consistent gender engagement across the portfolio. The Adaptation Fund’s Gender Policy and GAP require both administrative and project-level budgeting for gender activities, such that projects lacking articulated gender considerations are deemed ineligible for approval. Still, evidence suggests that resource limitations—particularly within national implementing entities—continue to affect the depth of implementation. The GEF similarly lacks a dedicated corporate budget line for gender equality, and the MOPAN assessment highlights that financial and human resource constraints at both the Secretariat and agency levels have affected policy implementation. CIF does not mandate gender budgets at the project level, relying instead on MDB systems and resources, which contributes to variability in how gender is resourced across investments.

57. Capacity-building opportunities for implementing organizations are most developed in funds that operate through IEs. The Adaptation Fund has put in place a range of readiness and technical assistance mechanisms for strengthening IEs’ capacity on gender, including targeted support for gender assessments, reporting, and compliance with the gender policy, as well as small technical assistance grants aimed particularly at national IEs. According to KIIs, recent capacity-building efforts have also focused on strengthening qualitative reporting and supporting implementation of the Gender Scorecard. However, uptake of available gender-focused technical assistance grants has been limited, suggesting challenges related to



awareness, grant size, or competing demands. The GEF similarly supports capacity development through its gender policy, Gender Implementation Strategy, and the GEF Gender Partnership platform, offering outreach, guidance, and learning opportunities to agencies and partners. While evaluative evidence confirms progress in expanding capacity-building activities, it also finds that these efforts are often insufficiently technical and unevenly accessed, limiting their effectiveness in supporting implementation. GEF interviewees mentioned that it has nonetheless made progress in strengthening the capacities of its implementing agencies through on demand workshop and conferences on particular gender topics. CIF, in contrast, does not operate a dedicated readiness or capacity-building facility focused on gender, relying instead on upstream guidance, analytical work, and MDB-led project preparation processes to strengthen capacity indirectly.

2.10 Integrating Gender in Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

58. **Key Insight #10: Across comparator organizations, gender monitoring and reporting systems have strengthened over time, but remain uneven in their ability to capture and aggregate gender outcomes—particularly gender-transformative results—beyond compliance, design-stage integration, and achieved outputs.**

59. Across all four comparator organizations, gender monitoring and reporting have evolved from limited or ad hoc tracking towards more structured systems embedded within broader results and accountability frameworks. All funds now require gender-related reporting at the project level, producing portfolio-level reporting on implementation of gender policies or action plans. However, the depth, coherence, and outcome orientation of these systems vary considerably.

60. A common feature across the funds is that gender monitoring is strongest at the project level and at entry, where requirements for gender analysis, sex-disaggregated indicators, and reporting on gender-responsive actions are most clearly articulated. The Adaptation Fund, CIF, and GEF all embed gender reporting within standard project reporting instruments—such as annual performance or implementation reports, mid-term reviews, and terminal evaluations—while relying heavily on sex-disaggregated data and output indicators; for example, participation, training and beneficiaries reached. Evaluative evidence as well as KIIs indicates that this approach has improved the consistency of gender reporting over time at the GEF, CIF, and Adaptation Fund, but that it remains limited in capturing higher-level outcomes related to empowerment, voice, or structural change.

61. Across the four comparator organizations, portfolio-level monitoring of gender results is structured through a mix of core corporate results systems and gender-specific monitoring instruments, with important differences in the degree to which gender results are integrated into mainstream M&E frameworks, as detailed in Table 5. The Adaptation Fund and IFAD embed monitoring of gender results primarily within their core corporate results architectures, reporting gender outcomes alongside other development results through regular institutional performance reporting, while complementing this with qualitative or rating-based tools. By contrast, CIF and GEF rely more explicitly on gender-specific results frameworks linked to their GAPs or gender implementation strategies, supported by scorecards and tagging systems that assess the quality of gender integration and selected thematic results. Across all four funds, portfolio-level monitoring combines quantitative indicators—often focused on participation, beneficiaries, or proxy outcome measures—with qualitative assessment tools, reflecting ongoing challenges in consistently capturing and aggregating gender-transformative results across diverse portfolios and implementing partners.

Table 5. Approaches to Reporting on Gender Outcomes Across the Portfolio

ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
<p>At the portfolio level, gender results are tracked through the Strategic Results Framework (SRF), which includes five core indicators linked to two impact-level results on reduced vulnerability/increased resilience and strengthened adaptive capacity, with mandatory sex-disaggregated reporting. These quantitative indicators are complemented by a Gender Scorecard, which reviews qualitative evidence on the quality of gender integration and gender-responsive or transformative practices across the portfolio. Portfolio-level gender results are reported to the Board through the Annual Performance Report (APR) as part of regular corporate reporting, which aggregates SRF indicators and includes analysis from the Gender Scorecard. Implementation of GAP-2 is tracked through a workplan with process-oriented indicators (Table 2), monitoring delivery of institutional actions such as guidance development, capacity-building, communication, and internal coordination. Progress against the GAP workplan is not reported through a standalone gender report but is incorporated into the APR and secretariat activity reports.</p>	<p>At the portfolio level, CIF reports on gender results primarily through two instruments: the GAP Phase 3 results framework and the Gender Scorecard. The GAP results framework includes two results-oriented indicators that track gender-related results in specific areas of CIF programming: (i) improvements in women’s tenure security and livelihoods through gender-responsive investments under the CIF Dedicated Grant Mechanism, and (ii) progress in deepening women’s climate leadership across CIF-supported programmes. These indicators draw on information reported by implementing MDBs and provide a high-level view of gender-related results within targeted CIF windows. The Gender Scorecard complements this by providing a portfolio-level assessment of gender integration at the design stage, reviewing investment plans and project documentation for the presence of gender analysis, gender-responsive actions, and sex-disaggregated indicators. Findings from both instruments are consolidated and reported annually to the trust fund committees of the Clean Technology Fund and Strategic Climate Fund through the Annual Gender Action Plan Progress Report.</p>	<p>At the corporate level, gender results are monitored through a results framework embedded in the Gender Implementation Strategy, which includes indicators tracking gender integration and gender-related results across the portfolio. Progress against this framework is consolidated and reported annually to the GEF Council through a dedicated progress report on gender equality. This corporate reporting draws on project-level reporting by GEF agencies, the gender tagging system, and qualitative portfolio analysis to provide an overview of gender integration and results.</p>	<p>IFAD reports on gender results through its core corporate results architecture rather than through a standalone gender reporting system. GEWE outcomes are embedded in IFAD’s Results Management Framework (RMF) and reported annually through the report on IFAD’s Development Effectiveness, including two corporate outcome indicators tracking the proportion of projects rated satisfactory or above on gender equality at completion. Portfolio-level reporting is further informed by IFAD’s gender marker system, which rates projects at design and completion stages and feeds into management accountability and performance oversight. While IFAD’s GAPs include results frameworks, these primarily track process and institutional indicators (e.g. capacity development, guidance, coordination and policy actions), with development-level gender results reported through the RMF and RIDE rather than through a separate GAP results report. Process-related actions are monitored through internal management systems.</p>

62. Across all four funds, portfolio-level monitoring combines quantitative indicators, often focused on participation, beneficiaries, or proxy outcome measures. However, at the portfolio level, all funds face persistent challenges in aggregating gender results across diverse projects and implementing partners. CIF and the Adaptation Fund both rely on gender scorecards to assess gender integration across their portfolios, but with different emphases. CIF's scorecard is primarily used to assess the quality of gender integration at the design stage—such as the presence of gender analysis, gender-targeted actions, and sex-disaggregated indicators—reflecting a monitoring architecture that is stronger at entry than during implementation. By way of comparison, the Adaptation Fund introduced its scorecard specifically to address the limitations of quantitative and tagging-based approaches. According to KIIs, the Adaptation Fund deliberately avoided project-level gender tagging, viewing it as overly simplistic and insufficient to reflect context-specific gender-transformative practices. Instead, the scorecard systematically reviews qualitative evidence drawn from annual project reports to identify gender-responsive and gender-transformative results, as discussed in Box 1. As for the GEF, KIIs explained that while projects are encouraged to report on gender-specific results through their M&E components, many gender-related outcomes—particularly those related to implementation challenges, qualitative change, or results not captured in formal indicators—are currently reported mainly in narrative form, rather than through standardized outcome indicators. Looking ahead to GEF-9, the Secretariat has proposed the introduction of portfolio-level indicators on socioeconomic co-benefits, including sex-disaggregated livelihood outcomes and women's economic empowerment linked to natural resource management. While still under negotiation, these proposed indicators are expected to strengthen outcome-level reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment at the portfolio level.

Box 1. Adaptation Fund Gender Scorecard

The Gender Scorecard was introduced by the Adaptation Fund under its Gender Action Plan FY 2021–2023 (GAP-2) as a portfolio-level tool to strengthen the assessment of gender integration is assessed beyond compliance and quantitative indicators. The scorecard has been applied annually since FY2023, with FY2024 and FY2025, representing its second and third cycles of implementation.

The primary purpose of the Gender Scorecard is to systematically review qualitative evidence on gender integration across the project cycle, drawing on information reported by IEs in Annual Project Performance Reports (PPRs) and other standard reporting instruments. Rather than applying a project-level gender tag, the Fund deliberately adopted the scorecard approach to avoid simplistic classifications that could obscure context-specific and evolving gender practices. According to key informant interviews, the Fund considered gender tagging insufficient to capture the distinction between gender-responsive and gender-transformative actions, which often depend on context, the quality of gender analysis, and implementation choices.

The scorecard assesses projects against a structured set of criteria covering quality of gender analysis, the integration of gender considerations into project design and implementation, and evidence of gender-responsive or gender-transformative actions. It is explicitly designed to capture practices that go beyond minimum standards and safeguards, recognizing that gender integration is not only about risk management but also about advancing adaptation effectiveness and equity.

Findings from the Gender Scorecard are consolidated at the portfolio level and reported to the Board through dedicated Gender Scorecard implementation reports. These reports are also summarized in the APR as part of regular corporate reporting. While the scorecard is described by the Secretariat as a “learning-by-doing” instrument, its role within the Fund's monitoring architecture is positioned to complement the Strategic Results Framework, enabling the Fund to report on the quality and depth of gender integration alongside aggregated quantitative results.

63. Finally, across the comparator organizations, GAPs also include process-oriented indicators that focus on institutional, operational, and enabling actions required to support effective gender integration. These process indicators track activities such as the development and updating of gender policies, strategies, and guidance; delivery of capacity-building, training, and technical support to staff and implementing partners; integration of gender considerations into project preparation templates, review processes, and internal systems; strengthening of coordination mechanisms and partnerships; and communication, knowledge-sharing, and outreach activities. In the Adaptation Fund, CIF, GEF, and IFAD alike, GAP process indicators are primarily used to monitor implementation of institutional commitments and progress against planned actions. They are reported through management and governance reporting mechanisms rather than through corporate results frameworks.

2.11 Learning and Knowledge-sharing Processes on Gender Equality in the Climate Finance Space

64. **Key Insight #11: Learning and knowledge management have increasingly been recognized as critical enablers of gender integration across climate funds. However, the extent to which learning is systematically translated into improved practice varies considerably.**

65. Across the four comparator organizations, learning and knowledge management are formally embedded in gender policies and action plans and are increasingly used to support improvements in gender integration. All the funds capture gender-related lessons through project-level reporting and evaluations. However, they differ in how systematically learning is structured, synthesized, and fed back into policy, design, and decision-making processes. Across the comparator funds, learning and knowledge management are primarily oriented towards internal, operational learning rather than outward-facing public awareness or advocacy. None of the comparator GAPs include explicit objectives or indicators related to public campaigns or broad-based gender awareness-raising. Instead, learning efforts focus on strengthening implementation quality, compliance, and technical practice.

66. The Adaptation Fund captures lessons on gender through annual project performance reports, mid-term reviews, and terminal evaluations, which require implementing entities to reflect on how gender considerations were addressed and what challenges and lessons emerged. This learning orientation was explicitly operationalized through the 2016–2020 review of gender policy and GAP implementation, which directly informed the participatory 2021 policy update. More recently, the Fund has strengthened its learning architecture through the introduction of a Gender Scorecard, designed to systematically extract qualitative evidence from project reporting. According to KIIs, the scorecard was intentionally developed not only to support monitoring but also to identify good practices and lessons related to gender-responsive and gender-transformative actions across diverse adaptation contexts. Interviewees explained that lessons learned are expected to be shared periodically with implementing entities through webinars and other exchange mechanisms. Learning processes are thus largely inward-facing and operational, with no explicit emphasis on public outreach or awareness-raising on gender beyond project and partner communities.

67. The CIF puts a strong emphasis on learning and analytical work as enablers of gender integration, particularly at upstream stages of investment planning and project design. The CIF Gender Policy and successive GAPs explicitly position knowledge generation and learning as tools to address persistent sectoral challenges, notably in mitigation, energy, and private sector-led investments. GAP Phase 3 reinforces this orientation by prioritizing targeted analytical work intended to inform investment plans and institutional and market-level change related to women's leadership and agency. Knowledge management activities aim to synthesize and disseminate lessons across CIF programmes. Learning is primarily organized through

analytical products, portfolio reviews, and internal knowledge exchanges rather than public-facing awareness activities. At the same time, evaluative evidence, including the 2022 Portfolio Review, indicates that the translation of analytical insights into consistently stronger project design and monitoring remains uneven, pointing to gaps between learning outputs and their systematic uptake in operations.

68. At the GEF, learning and knowledge management on gender are articulated in the Policy on Gender Equality and operationalized through the Gender Implementation Strategy, which frames knowledge exchange and the dissemination of good practices as partnership-wide responsibilities. The GEF Secretariat has supported learning through platforms such as the GEF Gender Partnership, guidance materials on the gender–environment nexus, and the inclusion of gender in agency retreats and global outreach events. The 2025 MOPAN review of the GEF confirms that these efforts have increased awareness and facilitated knowledge exchange across agencies. However, these outreach and exchange activities are primarily aimed at partners and implementing agencies, rather than the general public, and are not framed as public gender awareness campaigns. Nevertheless, learning remains uneven in depth and reach. While forums and orientations have raised general understanding of gender commitments, they have not consistently provided sufficiently technical, practice-oriented guidance to support implementation at the project level, nor ensured consistent uptake across agencies and country partners.

69. Finally, learning in IFAD is explicitly embedded in its GAP and reinforced through corporate reporting and evaluation systems, including the annual report on IFAD’s Development Effectiveness and periodic thematic evaluations. Evidence from the 2024 corporate evaluation confirms that IFAD has invested in learning-oriented instruments, such as gender markers, portfolio reviews, and thematic studies, to track performance and extract lessons. These learning mechanisms are complemented by communities of practice, operational toolkits, and analytical work linked to gender-transformative programming and climate adaptation. IFAD’s learning framework prioritizes internal capacity development and operational improvement rather than public awareness-raising on gender. While these efforts have contributed to improved quality at design and greater consistency in gender integration, evaluative evidence also highlights ongoing challenges in capturing and applying learning related to higher-level outcomes, such as empowerment, social norms change, and resilience, and in ensuring consistent uptake across regions.

2.12 Lessons Learned and Good Practice

70. **Key Insight #12: Across the comparator funds, several targeted practices stand out as strengthening gender integration beyond minimum compliance, including the operational use of intersectional analysis, dedicated guidance on inclusion, qualitative tools to capture gender outcomes, partnership-wide knowledge platforms, and dedicated mechanisms aimed at delivering gender-transformative results.**

71. Table 6 identifies the lessons learned and the good practices implemented by the four comparator organizations.

Table 6. Lessons Learned and Good Practices Implemented Across Funds

COMPARATOR	LESSON LEARNED/GOOD PRACTICE
IFAD	Institutionalization of gender-transformative approaches: IFAD stands out for explicitly committing to gender-transformative programming, including a corporate target that at least 35 per cent of projects integrate gender-transformative approaches. This ambition is supported by dedicated tools, guidance, and rating systems that go beyond gender-responsive mainstreaming.



COMPARATOR	LESSON LEARNED/GOOD PRACTICE
	<p>Dedicated mechanisms to operationalize gender transformation: IFAD has complemented policy commitments with targeted instruments, notably the GTM and the JP GTA. These mechanisms provide focused financing, partnerships, and technical approaches aimed at addressing underlying social norms, power relations, and institutional barriers that constrain women’s agency and resilience.</p>
CIF	<p>Targeted guidance on disability inclusion in climate finance: CIF has developed dedicated guidance on disability inclusion, complementing its broader gender integration guidance. This reflects an emerging good practice in addressing intersecting forms of exclusion in climate investments, particularly in sectors and contexts where disability has historically been overlooked.</p> <p>Innovative use of performance-based finance for gender outcomes: KIIs highlighted CIF-supported approaches that link concessional finance terms to achievement of gender-related KPIs at the company level; for example, adoption of GAPs, workforce training, internships for women and creating incentives that extend beyond individual activities and influence corporate practices.</p>
GEF	<p>Partnership-wide knowledge-sharing through the GEF Gender Partnership: The GEF has established a Gender Partnership to facilitate the exchange of guidance, tools, and good practices on gender across GEF agencies. This supports a common understanding of gender requirements and promotes learning across a multi-agency partnership.</p> <p>Centralized technical oversight to support consistency: The role of the Secretariat Gender Specialist in reviewing gender assessments and action plans contributes to more consistent application of gender requirements and provides an institutional entry point for sharing lessons across agencies.</p>
Adaptation Fund	<p>Operationalizing intersectionality in adaptation programming: The Adaptation Fund demonstrates a strong practice in translating intersectional analysis into project-level requirements. Its gender policy and 2022 gender guidance require IEs to assess how gender inequalities intersect with other dimensions of vulnerability, such as age, disability, Indigenous status, poverty, social norms, and to reflect these intersections in project design, stakeholder engagement, and activities.</p> <p>Capturing qualitative gender outcomes through the Gender Scorecard: Rather than relying on gender tagging, the Adaptation Fund has developed a Gender Scorecard that systematically reviews qualitative evidence from APRs to identify gender-responsive and gender-transformative practices. This approach allows the Fund to capture context-specific outcomes and practices that are not easily measured through standardized indicators.</p>

III. Conclusions

72. The benchmark analysis shows sustained strengthening of gender approaches across all four climate finance organizations over time, reflecting both evolving international norms and learning from implementation experience. All four funds have moved beyond early, largely aspirational commitments towards more structured gender frameworks anchored in formal policies, action plans, and operational requirements. Gender mainstreaming is now firmly institutionalized as a core dimension of climate finance, with each fund articulating explicit objectives related to women’s access to resources and services, participation and decision-making, and equitable distribution of benefits.

73. At the same time, the analysis reveals important differences in ambition, operationalization, and accountability, particularly along the gender continuum. CIF and IFAD stand out for having explicitly anchored gender-transformative objectives within their policy

frameworks and action plans, with IFAD going further by introducing portfolio-level targets and dedicated mechanisms to advance gender transformation. The Adaptation Fund has similarly elevated gender-transformative ambitions in its 2021 policy update, while deliberately retaining flexibility to accommodate diverse sociocultural contexts and avoid creating access barriers to adaptation finance. Conversely, the GEF's framework remains committed to gender responsiveness; while it addresses structural gender gaps in access, voice, and benefits, it does not explicitly frame its approach as gender-transformative, despite stakeholder demand for greater ambition.

74. Across all funds, intersectionality and social inclusion have gained prominence, albeit through different conceptual and institutional pathways. The Adaptation Fund and CIF have made intersectionality increasingly explicit in their gender frameworks and guidance, requiring or encouraging project-level analysis of intersecting vulnerabilities. IFAD approaches intersectionality primarily through a long-standing focus on targeting and social inclusion, reinforced by complementary policies on Indigenous Peoples, disability inclusion, and poverty targeting, and increasingly reflected in successive GAPs. In the GEF, intersectionality has historically been embedded across safeguards and engagement policies rather than treated as a standalone concept, with recent reforms under GEF-8 seeking to strengthen coherence through a more explicit inclusion agenda. Across the board, however, translating inclusive intent into consistent practice remains uneven.

75. The assessment also shows that gender integration across the project cycle is now the norm, supported by mandatory or systematic requirements for gender analysis at the design stage, gender-responsive measures, and stakeholder consultation. The Adaptation Fund and GEF apply the most prescriptive approaches, linking gender assessments directly to project eligibility and quality assurance. CIF and IFAD similarly emphasize gender-informed design and consultation, but evaluative evidence suggests greater variability in the depth of analysis and in the documentation of how women's inputs shape final design choices. Grievance and accountability mechanisms are in place across all funds through safeguard systems, though their gender sensitivity and accessibility vary depending on implementing arrangements and national contexts.

76. In monitoring and reporting, all four funds have strengthened their ability to track gender integration, particularly at design and output levels. IFAD has the most mature corporate results architecture, embedding gender indicators within its RMF and linking performance to accountability mechanisms. CIF, the Adaptation Fund, and GEF have all introduced portfolio-level tools, such as gender scorecards or corporate indicators, to assess gender integration but continue to face challenges in systematically capturing higher-level outcomes related to empowerment, agency, and social norms change. These limitations have prompted increasing reliance on qualitative evidence and mixed-method approaches.

77. Learning and knowledge management have emerged as critical enablers of progress, though with uneven effectiveness. All four funds recognize learning as central to improving gender outcomes, but evidence suggests variable success in translating lessons into consistently stronger project and programme design and implementation. Notably, the Adaptation Fund's and CIF's use of gender scorecards reflects a deliberate shift towards learning-oriented monitoring, while IFAD has invested heavily in evaluations, analytical work, and communities of practice to refine gender-transformative approaches. The GEF has expanded partnership-based learning platforms, though evaluative evidence points to the need for more targeted, practice-oriented guidance.

78. Overall, the benchmarking study raises multiple considerations for the GCF's Independent Evaluation Unit as it begins framing and preparing to lead an evaluation of the GCF's approach to gender. At a fundamental level, it raises questions about the organization's commitment to gender-responsiveness and how that commitment is institutionalized. Like the GEF, it recognizes the complexity of gender issues globally and across countries and



communities and has adopted a gender-responsive approach. At the same time, it is worth asking if this approach is ideally suited to a climate finance organization that, like the Adaptation Fund, is committed to supporting locally-led adaptation, through half of the resources its commits.

79. Different perspectives exist regarding the level of gender ambition appropriate for the GCF. Some stakeholders call for stronger gender-transformative commitments, while others consider the Fund's current gender-responsive approach appropriate. The experience of IFAD and CIF also shows that gender-transformative ambitions can be implemented in different ways, depending on policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms.

80. As the GCF prepares to evaluate its gender approach, it may wish to consider several key questions. First, to what extent is the GCF committed to a gender-responsive approach? Second, how appropriate is its approach and how well is it institutionally anchored? Third, are the existing mechanisms adequate and functioning effectively? Fourth, how is the GCF's gender approach implemented by its key partners, including countries and their national designated authorities, accredited entities – both international and direct access – as well as civil society and public and private sector actors? Finally, how is this approach experienced by the women and girls, as well as men and boys, Indigenous communities, and other stakeholders who are intended to benefit from climate finance?

Annex I: Comparator Table

This Table presents detailed evidence across the four funds of key thematic issues presented through the Key Insights.

AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
Evolution of gender mainstreaming	<p>The Adaptation Fund's approach to gender mainstreaming has evolved progressively from early policy articulation to a more structured, participatory, and implementation-focused framework. The Fund adopted its first gender policy and GAP in 2016, following which it undertook a systematic assessment of implementation during 2016–2020 that included extensive consultations with stakeholders, IEs, and partners. According to interviewees, this assessment was instrumental in identifying practical capacity-building needs and operational gaps, and directly informed the participatory update of the policy, approved in 2021. The updated gender policy and GAP reaffirm gender mainstreaming as integral to effective adaptation outcomes, strengthen expectations around gender-</p>	<p>In 2010, CIF adopted its initial Strategic Environment, Social and Gender Assessment, which provides a framework for managing the social and gender impacts of its activities. Adopted in 2018, the CIF Gender Policy establishes an organizational framework for integrating gender equality across governance, investment planning, and project implementation. The policy aims to ensure that climate investments benefit women and men equitably through the systematic use of gender-responsive assessment, consultation, design, and implementation processes. Its overarching objective is to improve women's access to assets, services, skills, livelihoods, and leadership opportunities as part of climate-resilient and low-carbon development. Prior to the adoption of the policy, the CIF adopted its first GAP – Phase 1 (FY15-16), which focused on establishing the foundations for gender mainstreaming across CIF</p>	<p>GEF's approach to gender mainstreaming has evolved over time, with a significant strengthening following the adoption of the 'Policy on Gender Equality' in 2017. This policy superseded the earlier 'Policy on Gender Mainstreaming' (2012) in response to findings from a GEF Independent Evaluation Office evaluation that gender was not being sufficiently mainstreamed in GEF operations. According to the 2025 MOPAN assessment, the 2017 policy establishes guiding principles and mandatory requirements for mainstreaming gender across GEF operations, including requirements for GEF agencies to demonstrate institutional capacity to mainstream gender equality. The policy requires that GEF projects are informed by a gender analysis and that gender-responsive measures proposed by projects are accompanied by a project-level GAP. The policy is operationalized through the GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (2018),</p>	<p>IFAD has had a dedicated approach to gender mainstreaming since the adoption of its Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in 2012, which aims to increase impact on gender equality in poor rural areas. The policy is anchored in three strategic objectives: promoting women's and men's economic empowerment; strengthening their voice and influence in rural institutions; and achieving a more equitable balance in workloads and benefits. The policy has guided successive strategic frameworks, with the 2016–2025 Strategic Framework positioning GEWE as both a cross-cutting theme and a core pillar of engagement. To operationalize the policy, IFAD adopted its first GAP (GAP) in 2019 (2019–2025), articulating a theory of change linking institutional processes and project delivery to reductions in gender inequalities and introducing explicit targets for gender-</p>



AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>responsive project design and monitoring, and place greater emphasis on tracking implementation and results across the project cycle, including through the planned development of a fund-wide Gender Scorecard. While gender-responsive action is established as a requirement for projects, the Fund has maintained a flexible, context-sensitive approach that encourages more ambitious practices where feasible, recognizing diverse national and sociocultural contexts. Interviewees also emphasized that the 2021 update explicitly considered evolving UNFCCC gender guidance, confirming alignment with the LWPG and subsequent GAPS, while reinforcing the Fund’s role as an operating entity accountable for translating this guidance into adaptation finance practice.</p>	<p>policies, programming, tools, and monitoring systems. In 2016, the GAP Phase 2 (FY16-20) was approved, with an intent to strengthen systematic integration of gender across the project cycle while also supporting the development and adoption of the CIF Gender Policy. In 2020, the GAP Phase 3 (FY21-24) was adopted to further scaled up ambition by emphasizing upstream integration at the investment-planning stage, stronger institutional and market-level change, and enhanced monitoring and reporting through consolidated gender metrics. A GAP for 2025-2030 is currently under development.</p>	<p>which identifies priority areas for action, including increasing women’s access to and control over resources, improving women’s participation and decision-making in natural resource governance, and targeting socioeconomic benefits and services for women.</p>	<p>transformative programming. According to the 2024 MOPAN assessment, the Policy and GAP have contributed to more systematic integration of gender across IFAD’s operations and corporate results reporting. Building on implementation experience and a 2024 thematic evaluation, IFAD adopted a new GAP for 2026–2030, which strengthens accountability for gender results, prioritizes capacity development of IFAD staff and government partners, and reinforces alignment with emerging priorities such as climate resilience, fragility, and partnerships. KIIs confirm that these areas were identified as critical for strengthening implementation and impact.</p>
<p>Alignment with UNFCCC policies</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund’s Gender Policy (2016; updated 2021) and GAP are explicitly aligned with UNFCCC gender guidance, including the LWPG and subsequent UNFCCC GAPS, as</p>	<p>According to KIIs, the CIFs operate outside the formal UNFCCC governance framework and therefore do not report directly to the UNFCCC or the COP. Nevertheless, the CIF Gender</p>	<p>The GEF Gender Policy (2017) and Gender Implementation Strategy (2018) situate GEWE within the broader framework of international commitments on gender and sustainable</p>	<p>IFAD operates outside of the UNFCCC’s governance structure. Therefore, IFAD’s GAPS (2019–2025; 2026–2031) situate the organization’s GEWE agenda within a broad set of global</p>

AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>well as the Paris Agreement. The policy frames gender equality as integral to effective adaptation and recognizes the Fund’s mandate, as an operating entity of the UNFCCC financial mechanism, to operationalize COP guidance on gender-responsive climate action. The 2021 update reflects evolving UNFCCC expectations by strengthening requirements for gender assessments, participation of women and marginalized groups, and attention to differentiated vulnerabilities, including through an explicit intersectional lens. Progress on gender integration is reported through the Fund’s regular internal and external reporting mechanisms, including APRs, secretariat activity reports, and the Adaptation Fund’s annual report submitted to the CMP/CMA. The documents do not establish a standalone gender report to the COP; rather, gender-related results and progress on implementation of the gender</p>	<p>Policy (2018) and GAP explicitly situate CIF’s gender approach within the broader international climate and gender architecture, including the UNFCCC, the LWPG and subsequent UNFCCC GAPs, as well as related international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. and the SDGs. The policy recognizes gender equality, women’s participation in climate decision-making, and capacity-building as essential to effective climate action, reflecting core principles articulated under the UNFCCC gender agenda. These commitments are operationalized through successive GAPs, with Phase 3 (FY21–24) reinforcing upstream integration of gender in investment planning, institutional change, and women’s leadership in climate governance. While CIF does not have COP-facing gender reporting obligations, the gender policy also encourages dialogue, coordination, and exchange of lessons with other climate finance institutions and with UNFCCC gender focal points, positioning CIF’s approach as complementary to UNFCCC processes rather than</p>	<p>development, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women., the 2030 agenda, and the gender-related decisions of the Conferences of the Parties of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) the GEF serves. The strategy explicitly notes that COPs of the UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD, and other conventions call for strengthened women’s participation and gender equality in achieving environmental objectives and positions the GEF as accountable for supporting implementation of this guidance through its financing. In this context, the GEF adopts a gender-responsive approach aimed at addressing gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources, participation in environmental governance, and access to socioeconomic benefits, while encouraging gender mainstreaming in convention-linked processes such as NDCs, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, and UNCCD National Action Programmes.</p>	<p>normative frameworks rather than aligning exclusively with UNFCCC gender guidance. The GAPs explicitly link IFAD’s gender commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (particularly SDG 5), the Committee on World Food Security’s Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment, and wider United Nations system accountability mechanisms, including United Nations-SWAP. While the GAPs do not reference the LWPG or the UNFCCC’s GAP in a dedicated manner, they integrate climate change as a core priority area for gender mainstreaming, with explicit attention to climate resilience, fragility, and biodiversity as key contexts shaping gender inequality. The GAP 2026–2031 further strengthens this alignment by embedding GEWE objectives within IFAD’s climate, fragility, and private sector strategies and by promoting gender-transformative approaches in climate-related investments.</p>

AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>policy and GAP are communicated to UNFCCC bodies as part of the Fund’s statutory annual reporting.</p>	<p>part of its formal operating and reporting structure.</p>	<p>While the documents do not establish separate reporting streams to the UNFCCC, they emphasize alignment with COP guidance across all MEAs and require the GEF Secretariat to report annually to the GEF Council on progress and results, thereby supporting convention implementation through its internal accountability and results reporting systems.</p>	
<p>Use of gender approaches along the gender continuum</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund’s approach to gender has evolved from early gender-sensitive and gender-responsive practices towards a more explicit engagement with gender-transformative ambitions, while retaining a strong emphasis on contextual feasibility in adaptation settings. The initial gender policy and GAP adopted in 2016 established gender-responsive action as a core requirement for all projects, including mandatory gender assessments and gender-responsive measures embedded in project design. A comprehensive assessment of policy implementation conducted during 2016–2020,</p>	<p>CIF’s approach has evolved over time along the gender continuum. Phase 1 of the GAP focused primarily on strengthening gender-responsive design, improving the ‘quality at entry’ of investment plans and projects, and building tools, learning, and capacity across CIF programmes. Phase 2 introduced a deliberate shift towards gender-transformational objectives, explicitly framing expected outcomes around women’s improved assets, voice, and livelihoods. Similarly, the 2018 CIF Gender Policy commits to a gender-transformative approach by emphasizing women’s voice and agency, including through improved resource governance, access to and ownership of assets,</p>	<p>GEF’s approach to gender has evolved towards a clearly articulated gender-responsive framework, anchored in the 2017 Policy on Gender Equality. According to the MOPAN assessment, the adoption of the policy marked a shift away from earlier, more limited forms of gender mainstreaming towards an approach that explicitly seeks to empower women and girls and promote shared power, control over resources, and participation in decision-making across GEF-financed activities. The policy defines a gender-responsive approach as integral to achieving global environmental benefits and establishes mandatory requirements for gender analysis and gender-responsive measures</p>	<p>IFAD’s approach to gender has evolved progressively from an initial focus on gender mainstreaming towards more explicit and institutionalized gender-transformative programming. The Policy on GEWE (2012) established the foundation for gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches across rural development investments, with attention to economic empowerment, voice and decision-making, and equitable workloads. In 2019, IFAD formally advanced gender-transformative programming through the Mainstreaming Gender-Transformative Approaches Action Plan (2019–2025) and the first GAP under the policy. This</p>



AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>informed by consultations with IEs and other stakeholders, highlighted both progress and practical constraints, particularly in relation to country context, social norms, and implementing capacity.</p> <p>The updated gender policy and GAP approved in 2021 explicitly articulate the gender integration continuum and recognize gender-transformative approaches as an aspirational objective for the Fund. While gender-responsive action remains the minimum requirement for access to funding, the policy encourages IEs to pursue gender-transformative practices where contextually appropriate. According to KIIs, the Fund deliberately avoided making gender-transformative approaches a funding requirement, in recognition of the diverse sociocultural contexts in which adaptation interventions operate and the risk that more stringent requirements could limit countries' access to finance.</p> <p>KIIs further indicate that,</p>	<p>and participation in public decision-making. Phase 3 builds on this shift by further strengthening and scaling these gender-transformational objectives. The Theory of Change for Phase 3 foresees “transformative impact in key areas of asset position, voice, and resilient livelihood status of women through gender-responsive institutions and markets”. It also puts in increased emphasis on women’s climate leadership in country planning systems.</p>	<p>throughout the project cycle. While the policy and accompanying guidance emphasize addressing structural gender gaps—particularly in access to and control over resources, participation in governance, and socioeconomic benefits—they do not explicitly frame GEF’s approach as gender-transformative. At the same time, MOPAN survey results indicate that stakeholders perceive room for further ambition, with respondents expressing a desire for GEF to move beyond gender responsiveness towards more transformative approaches in practice (MOPAN assessment of the GEF).</p>	<p>marked a move beyond addressing gender gaps towards tackling underlying drivers of inequality, including social norms and power relations. The 2019–2025 GAP introduced a corporate target of at least 35 per cent of projects to be gender-transformative, signalling differentiated ambition across the portfolio.</p> <p>The GAP 2026–2030 consolidates this trajectory by reaffirming gender transformation as a core institutional priority and strengthening accountability, resourcing, and capacity to deliver transformative results. According to KIIs, IFAD clearly distinguishes between gender-responsive approaches, expected across all operations, and gender-transformative approaches, which require more intensive, context-specific interventions.</p> <p>To operationalize this shift, IFAD has complemented policy commitments with dedicated mechanisms and partnerships, including the GTM launched in 2022 in the context of climate adaptation, and the Joint Programme on Gender-Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition with</p>

AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>rather than applying project-level gender tagging to count projects that are gender-responsive vs. gender transformative, which was viewed as overly simplistic, the Fund introduced a Gender Scorecard to capture qualitative evidence of gender-responsive and gender-transformative practices across the portfolio.</p>			<p>FAO and WFP (launched in 2019). KIIs confirm that these initiatives have been instrumental in translating gender-transformative ambitions into practice and refining IFAD’s operational understanding of gender transformation.</p>
<p>Approaches to intersectionality</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund has moved from an implicit inclusion lens to an explicit intersectionality requirement in its gender framework. Prior to 2021, the Fund’s Environmental and Social Policy (ESP) already required attention to marginalized and vulnerable groups and engagement with marginalized voices across multiple characteristics (e.g. sex, sexuality, age, income, ethnicity, ability, status, religion), which created an early, “intersectionality-adjacent” foundation in project screening and planning. However, the updated Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan (March 2021) go further by</p>	<p>CIF’s approach to intersectionality has become more explicit over time. Earlier GAP phases addressed gender largely as a standalone category, with limited attention to intersecting forms of exclusion. Under GAP Phase 3 (FY21–24), CIF explicitly recognizes that gender-based exclusion intersects with other vectors of exclusion, including class, ethnicity, age, disability status, religion, Indigenous Peoples status, and sexual orientation. This recognition is reflected in an expanded inclusion lens under Phase 3, including emerging attention to disability inclusion and commitments to improved disaggregation and analysis to better understand how multiple dimensions of</p>	<p>GEF’s approach to intersectionality has historically been embedded within its Policy on Gender Equality and related safeguards and stakeholder engagement frameworks. The 2017 Policy on Gender Equality recognizes that broader social and cultural factors shape gender inequality and explicitly acknowledges that gender intersects with characteristics such as class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other forms of disadvantage. However, the MOPAN assessment finds that while GEF policies include provisions that promote social inclusion, their application has been uneven. Attention to certain marginalized groups—particularly persons with disabilities, sexual</p>	<p>IFAD’s approach to intersectionality is closely linked to its long-standing focus on targeting and social inclusion in rural poverty reduction. While the 2012 Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment acknowledged differentiated constraints faced by rural women and men, intersectionality became more explicit and operationalized under the GAP 2019–2025, which emphasized reaching women and girls facing multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities, including poverty, food insecurity, geographic isolation, and limited access to resources and services. This focus is further strengthened in the GAP 2026–2031, which explicitly commits to “targeting women and girls most at risk”,</p>



AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>explicitly stating that the Fund “acknowledges and integrates the need to apply an intersectional analysis” as a lens for understanding differentiated vulnerability and adaptive capacity, including the systemic barriers and root causes shaping inequalities. The 2021 update also makes this operational at the project level by stating that implementing entities “will be required” to undertake a project/programme gender assessment that identifies opportunities to address gender gaps, “given their intersectionalities.” This shift is reinforced through the Updated Gender Guidance Document for Implementing Entities (2022), which instructs that proposal development should be informed by a comprehensive gender analysis “that takes intersectionality into account”. The document also provides practical direction on applying an intersectional lens, including examples and expectations for addressing</p>	<p>disadvantage shape the impacts of climate investments.</p>	<p>orientation and gender identity, and non-binary notions of gender—has been more limited. In response to these gaps, GEF-8 has placed renewed emphasis on an explicit inclusion agenda. The GEF-8 Policy Directions commit to extending this agenda through a more inclusive and people-centred approach, with increased attention to youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and human rights considerations. This has been accompanied by a 2024 social gap analysis reviewing the Environmental and Social Safeguards, Gender Equality Policy, Stakeholder Engagement Policy, and related frameworks, which concluded that while inclusion provisions exist, clearer non-discrimination measures, stronger guidance, and more coherent communication are needed. The way forward articulated under GEF-8 includes developing an overarching narrative on inclusion across key policies, strengthening engagement with diverse and marginalized groups, and aligning inclusion objectives with ongoing institutional reforms and partnerships.</p>	<p>including those facing intersecting vulnerabilities related to fragility, climate shocks, disability, displacement, Indigenous status, and exposure to violence, in alignment with IFAD’s Poverty Targeting Policy and complementary corporate strategies (e.g. on Indigenous Peoples, disability inclusion, youth, nutrition, and fragility). The new GAP also promotes more integrated mainstreaming approaches, ensuring that gender is addressed alongside other inclusion dimensions from country programme design through implementation. According to KIIs, IFAD’s emphasis on intersectionality is operationalized primarily through project-level targeting strategies and participatory approaches that tailor interventions to different groups of rural women and men.</p>

AREA OF PRACTICE	ADAPTATION FUND	CIF	GEF	IFAD
	<p>barriers faced by specific sub-groups. In interviews, stakeholders similarly noted that the 2021 policy update elevated expectations around intersectional approaches and encouraged implementing entities to integrate intersectionality in gender assessments to better tailor adaptation interventions to different groups' needs and vulnerabilities.</p>			
<p>Integrating gender across the project cycle</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund's Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan (2016; updated 2021) require systematic integration of gender considerations at the project design stage. Implementing entities must undertake a project-specific gender assessment at preparation to analyse gender-differentiated vulnerabilities, risks, and opportunities, and to inform gender-responsive measures, articulated through a project-level GAP that is embedded in overall project design and budgeting. Projects lacking articulated gender considerations are not eligible for approval. The policy and accompanying</p>	<p>The CIF Gender Policy and successive GAPs require the integration of gender considerations across the project cycle, including sector-specific gender analysis at investment plan and project preparation stages, consultation with women and women's organizations to inform design, and the integration of gender-responsive actions within project activities and results frameworks. CIF does not require standalone project-level GAPs but expects gender analysis to directly inform project design and anticipated benefits. Accountability and grievance mechanisms for gender-related issues are addressed through the systems of implementing MDBs</p>	<p>GEF integrates gender across the project cycle through mandatory policy requirements covering project design, stakeholder engagement, and accountability. The 2017 Policy on Gender Equality requires that all GEF projects be informed by a gender analysis and that proposed gender-responsive measures be accompanied by a project-level GAP. Evidence from the MOPAN assessment indicates that these requirements are being applied in practice, with all Full-Sized and Medium-Sized Projects submitted for approval including a gender analysis, and more systematic use of gender analysis and GAPs in project documentation. Gender integration across the project cycle</p>	<p>In terms of integrating gender in design, IFAD requires gender analysis at the design stage for all Country Strategic Opportunities Programmes and investment projects, embedded within project design reports and the requirements of the Social, Environmental, and Climate Assessment Procedures. The 2019–2025 GAP (and this is also reinforced in the 2026–2030 GAP) sets expectations for translating gender analysis into concrete design features, including targeted activities, resources, and implementation arrangements, with a growing emphasis on gender-transformative approaches. The thematic evaluation finds that while gender</p>



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	<p>guidance emphasize a clear link between gender analysis and project design quality, requiring that identified gender gaps and vulnerabilities be translated into concrete actions.</p> <p>Gender-responsive consultation is mandated throughout the project cycle. Implementing entities are required to ensure inclusive, participatory consultation processes that meaningfully engage women and other marginalized groups in project design, decision-making, and benefit-sharing arrangements.</p> <p>In line with the ESP, all projects must establish an accessible grievance mechanism capable of addressing gender-related complaints. Where project-level mechanisms are insufficient, the Adaptation Fund’s Ad Hoc Complaint Handling Mechanism provides a recourse option.</p> <p>KIIs confirm that, in practice, gender assessments and GAPs are generally developed collaboratively, with gender consultants working closely</p>	<p>rather than through CIF-specific mechanisms. Under GAP Phase 3, the results framework tracks, at an aggregated portfolio level, the extent to which CIF investments demonstrate gender integration at the design stage, including the presence of gender analysis and gender-responsive actions aligned with gender-transformative objectives. The Portfolio Review of Gender Integration in the Climate Investment Funds (2022) indicates that while these requirements are generally reflected in project documentation, the quality and depth of gender analysis and the strength of linkages between analysis, design, and implementation vary across sectors and implementing MDBs.</p> <p>During implementation, CIF relies primarily on implementing MDBs to operationalize gender-responsive measures identified at the design stage, drawing on MDB policies, safeguards, and delivery systems. Evidence from the Portfolio Review (2022) shows that, particularly under the Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR) and Forest Investment Program (FIP), projects have</p>	<p>is further supported by the GEF Policy on Stakeholder Engagement (2017), which requires agencies to submit Stakeholder Engagement Plans at CEO Endorsement and promotes inclusive participation of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and the private sector. However, implementation varies across agencies and types of operations. Accountability and grievance mechanisms are addressed through the GEF Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards (2019), which requires agencies to operate grievance and conflict resolution mechanisms accessible to communities and other stakeholders, with oversight by the GEF Secretariat and the Conflict Resolution Commissioner.</p> <p>GEF requires gender-responsive measures identified at the design stage to be actively implemented throughout the project lifecycle. During implementation, projects are expected to ensure meaningful participation of women and men in project activities, decision-making structures, and benefit-sharing arrangements, including through targeted outreach to women’s organizations,</p>	<p>analysis is systematically included, its depth and operational use are uneven, and links between identified gender gaps and planned actions are sometimes insufficiently articulated.</p> <p>IFAD policies and guidance emphasize participatory design and consultation with women and rural communities, including the use of participatory rural appraisal and household-level methodologies. The thematic evaluation confirms that consultations with women are commonly undertaken and have informed project activities, especially where household methodologies (e.g. Gender Action Learning Systems) are used. However, documentation of how women’s inputs directly shape design choices is often limited, and consultation quality varies across regions and implementing partners.</p> <p>IFAD projects are also required to establish grievance mechanisms as part of the Social, Environmental, and Climate Assessment Procedures and broader social and environmental safeguards, including provisions related to gender-based violence and sexual</p>



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	<p>with project teams. Interviewees noted that proposal quality on gender has improved over time and did not identify systematic challenges in linking gender assessments to project actions, with technical review processes expected to flag weak or generic analyses.</p> <p>During implementation, the Adaptation Fund requires IEs to actively operationalize gender-responsive measures identified at the design stage, ensuring that women and men are able to participate equitably in project activities and benefit from adaptation interventions. The gender policy and GAP emphasize meaningful participation of women throughout implementation, including in training, livelihood activities, community-based adaptation actions, and local decision-making structures established or supported by projects. IEs are expected to identify and address practical barriers to women’s participation during implementation, such as time poverty, mobility constraints,</p>	<p>adopted practical measures to enable women’s participation in activities, including accessible meeting arrangements, targeted outreach, and tailored training. Implementation frequently includes capacity-building for women in areas such as climate-resilient livelihoods, natural resource management, and energy access, and, in some cases, measures to facilitate women’s employment and income-generation linked to project investments. Stronger implementation-stage support for women’s leadership and participation in local governance is most evident under FIP’s Dedicated Grant Mechanism. In contrast, in other CIF programmes, women’s participation during implementation has been more uneven and often limited to beneficiary-level engagement rather than sustained decision-making roles.</p>	<p>Indigenous women, and other underrepresented groups. Guidance explicitly encourages addressing barriers to women’s participation, such as time constraints, mobility, literacy, and social norms, through context-appropriate measures (e.g. tailored training approaches, scheduling flexibility, and locally appropriate engagement modalities).</p> <p>Implementation guidance also emphasizes capacity-building for women beneficiaries, including skills development, access to information, and leadership roles in community institutions and resource governance bodies. Projects are encouraged to adopt participatory implementation approaches, engage civil society partners with gender expertise, and ensure that project teams and implementing partners have adequate gender capacity, including through hiring gender specialists or training staff and partners as needed.</p>	<p>exploitation and abuse. The evaluation notes that grievance mechanisms are generally in place at the project level. But gender sensitivity and accessibility for rural women are not always explicit, and uptake depends heavily on national systems and project management capacity.</p>



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	<p>care responsibilities, literacy levels, and social norms. The Gender Guidance (2022) explicitly encourages the use of enabling measures—for example, adjusting meeting times, providing childcare support, using appropriate communication methods, and tailoring capacity-building activities—to ensure women’s effective participation rather than nominal inclusion. The framework also highlights implementation-stage capacity strengthening, both for women beneficiaries (e.g. skills, leadership, access to resources) and for implementing partners, to support sustained gender-responsive adaptation outcomes. Overall, the Fund’s approach frames implementation as an adaptive process, where gender strategies may be adjusted in response to contextual realities encountered during delivery to ensure inclusive and equitable participation.</p>			
<p>Integrating gender in private sector</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund’s Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan do not articulate a dedicated</p>	<p>CIF documentation recognizes the integration of gender considerations in private sector–</p>	<p>The GEF Gender Implementation Strategy recognizes that addressing gender gaps and more</p>	<p>IFAD’s gender action plans frame private sector engagement as an important pathway for advancing</p>



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<p>investment</p>	<p>approach to private sector engagement from a gender perspective. While the policy applies gender requirements across all Fund-supported activities and stakeholders, it does not include specific actions, guidance, or provisions that address the role of private sector actors or gender integration in private sector-led or private sector-financed adaptation activities.</p> <p>A review of the GAP results framework indicates that it does not include dedicated indicators to measure gender integration or gender-specific outcomes in relation to private sector engagement or private sector-related activities.</p>	<p>led investments as a persistent challenge, particularly in large-scale mitigation and energy operations implemented through financial intermediaries and private developers. Earlier phases of the GAP emphasized improving gender-responsive design in private sector investments through sector-specific gender analysis, targeting, and capacity-building measures, while explicitly acknowledging that gender co-benefits do not arise automatically in market-driven and infrastructure-heavy contexts. GAP Phase 3 strengthens this approach by placing greater emphasis on upstream investment planning, institutional and market-level change, and women’s participation and leadership within the systems shaping private sector climate investments, with the stated aim of supporting more gender-transformative outcomes.</p> <p>In interviews, CIF staff highlighted emerging best practices in performance-based finance for gender, including approaches where gender-related key KPIs are integrated into private sector lending arrangements. Examples cited include linking concessional</p>	<p>effectively engaging women can generate transformative environmental results, including through women’s roles in public and private sector governance, productive sectors, consumption choices, and investment decisions. The strategy frames women not only as beneficiaries but also as economic actors whose participation in markets, value chains, and financial decision-making can influence the drivers of environmental degradation and support more sustainable outcomes.</p> <p>In interviews, GEF Secretariat staff explained that the Gender Specialist provided input to the design process of the Private Sector Engagement Strategy to ensure that gender was adequately integrated. The Private Sector Engagement Strategy explicitly recognizes gender equality as a core consideration for effective private sector engagement. It notes that engaging private sector actors who support women as entrepreneurs, employees, consumers, and leaders is essential to closing gender gaps and achieving environmental sustainability. The</p>	<p>women’s economic empowerment, particularly in rural and agricultural contexts. Both the GAP 2019–2025 and the GAP 2026–2031 recognize women as economic actors whose participation in value chains, entrepreneurship, employment, and markets is central to reducing rural poverty and achieving inclusive and sustainable development. The GAPs link gender equality to women’s access to services, finance, technologies, and markets, and highlight the role of partnerships with private sector actors in promoting inclusive business models, decent employment, and women-led enterprises.</p> <p>The GAP 2026–2031 strengthens this focus by explicitly identifying engagement with the private sector as one of IFAD’s institutional priority areas and by aligning gender action with IFAD’s Private Sector Operational Strategy. The action plan includes specific commitments to develop guidance and tools for integrating GEWE into private sector engagement and non-sovereign operations, and to build the capacity of staff, implementing</p>



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		<p>finance terms to the achievement of gender-related KPIs at the company level, such as the introduction of GAPs, workforce training, and internship opportunities for women.</p> <p>According to interviewees, where these KPIs are met, adjustments to concessionality have created incentives that go beyond individual activities and influence broader corporate practices. At the same time, interviews indicated that CIF is still in the process of clarifying how women’s integration into markets and private sector value chains will be addressed more systematically. CIF staff noted ongoing work to develop a private sector strategy with a clearer gender component, including internal collaboration to promote women’s participation as employees, managers, and leaders within private sector entities engaged in CIF-supported investments.</p> <p>Finally, the GAP Phase 3 results framework includes an indicator tracking progress towards the objective to “expand private sector participation in gender-responsive mitigation and adaptation investments,” signalling an explicit</p>	<p>strategy commits to applying the mandatory requirements of the GEF Policy on Gender Equality to all private sector–related activities and to promoting gender-responsive design, implementation, and monitoring when engaging private sector partners. It also emphasizes the business case for gender equality, highlighting the role of private sector investments, policies, and programmes that advance women’s economic participation and leadership as part of transformative environmental action.</p>	<p>partners, and private sector actors to apply gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches. Partnerships with private sector actors are also emphasized under the action area on policy, partnerships, and resource mobilization, with the aim of catalysing investments that support gender equality at scale.</p> <p>A review of the results and monitoring framework in Annex I of the GAP 2026–2031 indicates that, while the framework includes activities and outputs related to private sector engagement (e.g. development of guidance, tools, training, and partnerships), it does not include dedicated indicators to measure gender integration or gender-specific outcomes within private sector engagement or private sector–related operations.</p>

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		intention to monitor gender-related dimensions of private sector engagement at the portfolio level.		
Capacities and resources for gender	<p>According to the GAP, the Adaptation Fund has established dedicated institutional, financial, and technical capacity to support gender mainstreaming. This includes a designated gender focal point within the secretariat, regular staff and Board training, mandatory gender capacity requirements for implementing entities through accreditation and re-accreditation, and access to readiness and technical assistance grants. The gender policy and GAP require adequate administrative and project-level budgeting for gender activities, with projects lacking articulated gender considerations ineligible for approval. Resources are also allocated to monitoring, evaluation, and learning functions, including support to the AF-TERG and implementation of a portfolio-wide Gender Scorecard.</p> <p>According to KIIs, the</p>	<p>As set out in the CIF Gender Policy (2018) and successive CIF-wide GAPs, CIF has established secretariat- and governance-level responsibilities for overseeing implementation of its gender framework, coordinating analytical work and learning, and monitoring gender integration at the portfolio level. Reflecting CIF's operating model, responsibility for operationalizing gender at investment and project levels rests primarily with the implementing MDBs, drawing on their respective gender policies, safeguards, and specialist capacity. CIF does not impose fund-wide requirements for dedicated gender specialists or ring-fenced gender budgets at the project level, nor does it require project-level GAPs; instead, gender expertise and resources are expected to be mobilized through MDB-led project preparation and implementation processes. CIF also does not operate a standalone readiness or project preparation facility focused on gender, unlike some other climate funds; rather,</p>	<p>GEF has strengthened institutional capacity for gender equality at the Secretariat level following the adoption of the Policy on Gender Equality (2017), notably through the appointment of a Senior Gender Specialist. However, the MOPAN assessment finds that there is no dedicated corporate budget line to support implementation of the policy, and that human and financial resource constraints—both at the secretariat level and within GEF agencies—have affected implementation. Within the GEF partnership, responsibility for gender mainstreaming at the project level is supported through a network of Agency-appointed gender focal points, though the Evaluation of Institutional Policies and Engagement of the GEF (2022) identifies concerns regarding the clarity of these roles and the limited availability of focal points to project teams. At the project level, the GEF Guidance on Gender Equality includes provisions for integrating gender responsibilities</p>	<p>According to the 2024 MOPAN assessment, IFAD has established a relatively strong institutional architecture to support GEWE. Gender expertise is housed within the Gender, Targeting and Persons with Disabilities Desk under the Social Inclusion Team in the Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion (ECG) Division. At the time of the MOPAN assessment, this desk comprised four staff and four long-term consultants, supported by outposted social inclusion officers and Investment Centre Officers, who play a role in allocating resources and mobilizing complementary expertise.</p> <p>This core capacity is reinforced by a wider GEWE architecture, including a Senior Management Champion at Assistant Vice-President level, gender focal points in multi-country offices and divisions, and clear terms of reference and annual commitments for these roles. Gender and social inclusion staff participate in project design teams</p>



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	<p>Adaptation Fund’s capacity-building efforts on gender are primarily directed at IEs, rather than national designated authorities. The Fund provides readiness and technical assistance (TA) support to strengthen IEs’ capacity to integrate gender across the project cycle, including targeted support related to gender assessments, reporting, and compliance with the gender policy. Interviewees highlighted that recent readiness activities have focused on strengthening reporting quality and informing development and application of the Gender Scorecard, including training programming teams and staff involved in project appraisal to better identify gender-responsive elements at entry. The Fund also offers dedicated technical assistance grants for gender—notably small grants (approximately USD 15,000–25,000) targeted primarily at national IEs, which are perceived to face greater constraints in gender expertise than international</p>	<p>capacity strengthening is pursued through upstream guidance, targeted analytical work, learning activities, and MDB-supported project preparation, with a stronger emphasis under the GAP Phase 3.</p>	<p>into job descriptions and for allocating resources to gender-related activities; however, evaluative evidence indicates that some projects face constraints in human and financial resources for gender equality, and there is no formal requirement for project GAPs to be budgeted, despite encouragement from the Secretariat.</p> <p>In terms of capacity-building opportunities, the GEF Secretariat supports partners through provisions in the gender policy, the Gender Implementation Strategy (2018), and accompanying guidance, including capacity development activities for agencies, governments, civil society, and the private sector. While MOPAN and GEF-IEO evaluations acknowledge progress—such as increased outreach, use of the GEF Gender Partnership platform, and growing participation in gender-related capacity development—they also conclude that existing efforts are often insufficiently technical to fully support effective implementation of the policy, with variable participation across agencies and countries.</p>	<p>and contribute to technical design, targeting, and compliance with gender requirements, with consultants used where needed.</p> <p>At the same time, MOPAN highlights resource constraints affecting implementation. Project design and supervision budgets declined between 2018 and 2022 before increasing again in 2023, limiting the ability of staff to engage consistently across the project cycle. Although 9.3 per cent of total staff costs were attributed to gender-related activities in 2020, interview and survey evidence indicates that available financial resources remain insufficient for effective mainstreaming, particularly in contexts where government partners are less supportive of gender-related investments.</p>

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	<p>entities. KIIs noted, however, that uptake of these grants has been limited in recent years, possibly due to low awareness or the small grant size. In addition, the Fund has developed an e-learning course on integrating gender into the project cycle, which interviewees reported has been useful in supporting IEs to operationalize gender mainstreaming during implementation.</p>			
<p>Integrating gender in monitoring and Reporting</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund monitors and reports on gender primarily at the project level, embedding gender requirements within its broader project monitoring, evaluation, and reporting architecture. Implementing entities are required to report on gender integration and gender-responsive measures through Project/Programme Performance Reports (PPRs), mid-term reviews, and terminal evaluations, with reporting expectations aligned to the Fund’s gender policy and GAP. Gender monitoring focuses on compliance with gender requirements,</p>	<p>The CIF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan establish requirements for monitoring and reporting on gender integration at both investment plan and project levels, primarily through design-stage documentation and the reporting systems of implementing MDBs. At entry, CIF assesses the quality of gender integration in investment plans and projects using a Gender Scorecard, which reviews the presence of gender analysis, gender-responsive actions, and sex-disaggregated indicators. This allows CIF to track portfolio-level trends in gender integration at the design stage. During implementation, however, gender</p>	<p>GEF integrates gender into monitoring and reporting through corporate and project-level requirements established under the Policy on Gender Equality (2017) and the Gender Implementation Strategy (2018). At the corporate level, GEF has adopted gender equality indicators to track contributions to GEWE, including through a dedicated results framework under the Gender Implementation Strategy; however, this framework does not include explicit targets. MOPAN finds that the introduction of these indicators has strengthened GEF’s ability to report on gender results, while also noting calls from Secretariat</p>	<p>Based on the 2024 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, IFAD has a well-institutionalized system for monitoring and reporting on GEWE, with gender indicators embedded within its corporate results architecture. GEWE indicators and targets are integrated into IFAD’s RMF and tracked through the RIDE on an annual basis. The current GAP includes a dedicated results framework with clear indicators, some of which are embedded directly in the RMF and reported through RIDE, while others are tracked at design, country strategy (COSOP), and portfolio levels through management reporting.</p>



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	<p>implementation of gender-responsive actions, and reporting on outputs such as participation of women and men, often using sex-disaggregated data. Monitoring of gender outcomes beyond outputs is more uneven and largely project-specific, reflecting the diversity of adaptation contexts.</p> <p>At the Adaptation Fund, gender results are tracked and reported as an integral component of the Fund’s overall adaptation results architecture, rather than through a standalone gender indicator framework. Quantitatively, gender is reflected at the impact level of the Fund’s Performance Monitoring and Reporting System, where adaptation results related to reduced vulnerability and increased resilience of communities and ecosystems, and strengthened adaptive capacity of populations, explicitly encompass women and marginalized groups as key beneficiaries. These impact-</p>	<p>monitoring relies largely on MDB reporting systems, with CIF aggregating gender-related information through its broader monitoring and reporting architecture. According to interviews, the most consistently available gender-related data at the portfolio level relate to beneficiary reach, including total beneficiaries and, where required under CIF core indicators, sex-disaggregated beneficiary numbers. Some MDBs also report additional information—such as numbers of women trained or participating in activities—but the scope, definitions, and consistency of such data vary across institutions and projects. Under GAP Phase 3 (FY21–24), CIF introduced a standalone GAP results framework to track progress against its gender commitments, including a set of process indicators and two results-oriented indicators focused on (i) improving women’s tenure security and livelihoods through gender-responsive Dedicated Grant Mechanism investments, and (ii) deepening women’s climate leadership across CIF programmes. While these</p>	<p>staff for more comprehensive indicators beyond sex-disaggregated data to better capture gender equality outcomes across focal areas.</p> <p>At the project level, the gender policy requires that projects with identified gender-responsive measures include logframes and indicators to collect sex-disaggregated or gender-sensitive data. Evaluative evidence shows improvements over time, with increases in the proportion of projects reporting against gender-sensitive indicators following adoption of the policy. At the same time, MOPAN and GEF-IEO evaluations highlight uneven gender data-collection across agencies, which continues to constrain aggregation and analysis of gender equality results at the portfolio level. In interviews, Secretariat staff explained that while projects are encouraged to report on gender-specific results through their M&E components, many gender-related outcomes—particularly those related to implementation challenges, qualitative change, or results not captured in formal indicators—are currently reported mainly in</p>	<p>At the corporate level, IFAD tracks two outcome indicators related to gender equality performance at project completion, namely the percentage of projects rated moderately satisfactory or above (≥ 4) and satisfactory or above (≥ 5) on gender equality. In addition, the RIDE reports on progress against GAP targets, including indicators related to the quality of gender integration at design and implementation stages. While the RMF does not capture all GAP indicators, the RIDE provides expanded reporting on gender performance, including indicators and targets on gender.</p> <p>At the project level, gender monitoring is embedded throughout the project cycle. Projects are required to include gender-related indicators in logframes, and performance is assessed annually through supervision missions and project status reports, as well as at completion. IFAD applies a gender marker system, which rates projects at design and completion stages along a scale that reflects the quality and ambition of gender integration, including identification of gender-</p>



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	<p>level results are operationalized through five core indicators defined in the Fund’s SRF, which require sex-disaggregated reporting and allow aggregation of gender-relevant results across the portfolio. The SRF thus provides the primary mechanism for quantitative tracking of gender-related outcomes at the portfolio level, albeit with a focus on reach, access, and benefits rather than empowerment or social norms change.</p> <p>To complement these quantitative indicators, the Adaptation Fund introduced a Gender Scorecard under the 2021 GAP to capture qualitative evidence on the quality of gender integration and gender-responsive and gender-transformative practices across projects. Reporting against both the SRF core indicators and the Gender Scorecard is consolidated and presented to the Board through the APR, which serves as the Fund’s main corporate reporting instrument. The APR</p>	<p>indicators move beyond purely procedural tracking, interviews confirm that they rely largely on output-level or proxy measures drawn from MDB systems, rather than systematic measurement of outcomes such as empowerment, agency, or structural change. CIF staff also noted that the GAP results framework is not fully integrated into CIF’s core corporate results framework, creating challenges for consistent tracking and aggregation; addressing this disconnect has been identified as a priority for future iterations of the GAP. Overall, CIF’s monitoring architecture is strongest in assessing gender integration at entry and institutional progress, and weaker in systematically capturing gender outcomes and gender-transformative change across the portfolio. In interviews, CIF staff acknowledge this gap, further noting that there are ongoing efforts to improve gender outcome reporting.</p>	<p>narrative form, rather than through standardized outcome indicators.</p> <p>Agencies are required to report on the implementation of gender-responsive measures through project implementation reports, mid-term reviews, and terminal evaluations. Although reporting coverage has increased since the adoption of the policy, evaluative evidence points to ongoing challenges in aggregating gender results from project to portfolio level, which recent reforms under GEF-8 aim to address through fuller integration of gender components into project approval templates. Interviews further indicated that, looking ahead to GEF-9, the Secretariat has proposed the introduction of portfolio-level indicators on socioeconomic co-benefits, including sex-disaggregated livelihood outcomes and women’s economic empowerment linked to natural resource management. While still under negotiation, these proposed indicators are expected to strengthen outcome-level reporting on GEWE at the portfolio level.</p>	<p>transformative elements. These ratings feed into portfolio-level reporting and accountability mechanisms, with implications for management oversight and future programming.</p> <p>The corporate gender evaluation confirms that IFAD has made significant progress in tracking gender integration and results but also highlights remaining challenges in consistently capturing higher-level outcomes, particularly related to empowerment, social norms change, and resilience. The evaluation notes variability in the quality of gender indicators across projects and recommends further strengthening of outcome-oriented measurement, improved consistency across regions and sectors, and continued refinement of tools to better capture gender-transformative results. In interviews, IFAD staff indicated that in response to the evaluation, IFAD has been undertaking ongoing work to improve gender monitoring and reporting, including strengthening the alignment between GAP indicators, RMF, and project-level measurement systems.</p>

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	<p>integrates gender reporting into regular performance and results reporting, rather than through a separate gender report, and includes both aggregated results from the SRF and portfolio-level analysis drawn from the Gender Scorecard. According to KIIs, the scorecard was deliberately adopted as an alternative to project-level gender tagging, which was considered overly simplistic and insufficient to capture context-specific gender-transformative actions. Instead, the scorecard systematically reviews qualitative evidence to identify gender-responsive and gender-transformative results.</p>			
<p>Integrating gender in learning and knowledge management</p>	<p>The Adaptation Fund integrates gender-related learning within its broader project reporting and evaluation systems. Documentary evidence shows that gender lessons are captured through annual PPRs, mid-term reviews, and terminal evaluations, which require IEs to reflect on how</p>	<p>The CIF Gender Policy and successive GAPs position learning and knowledge management as key enablers of gender integration across CIF programmes, supporting improvements in investment planning, project design, and results. Within this broader learning agenda, CIF has placed particular emphasis on targeted analytical work to</p>	<p>GEF’s approach to integrating gender into learning and knowledge management is articulated in its Policy on Gender Equality (2017) and operationalized through the Gender Implementation Strategy (2018), which positions learning, knowledge exchange, and dissemination of good practices as key enablers of GEWE across the</p>	<p>IFAD’s approach to learning and knowledge management on gender is explicitly articulated in its GAPs (2019–2025; 2026–2030) and reinforced through corporate evaluation and reporting systems. The GAP 2019–2025 identifies learning and knowledge generation as a core enabler for improving GEWE outcomes, emphasizing systematic capture of</p>



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	<p>gender considerations were integrated and what lessons emerged during implementation. The Gender Policy (2016; updated 2021) explicitly frames gender mainstreaming as an adaptive process and commits the Fund to periodic review and refinement based on implementation experience. This was operationalized through the 2016–2020 review of Gender Policy and GAP implementation, which directly informed the participatory 2021 policy update.</p> <p>The Adaptation Fund has further strengthened its learning approach through the introduction of a gender scorecard, designed to systematically extract qualitative evidence from project reporting. According to KIIs, the scorecard was intentionally developed not only as a monitoring tool, but as a mechanism to identify good practices and lessons related to gender-responsive and gender-transformative actions across projects as</p>	<p>identify sector-specific gender gaps and design entry points, especially in areas where gender integration has proven more challenging. GAP Phase 3 (FY21–24) reinforces this approach by prioritizing analytical work explicitly intended to inform upstream investment planning and project design, including for private sector-led investments, mitigation, and energy transitions, as well as for institutional and market-level change related to women’s leadership and agency. Knowledge management activities complement this analytical work by synthesizing and disseminating lessons across CIF programmes. The Portfolio Review of Gender Integration in the Climate Investment Funds (2022) notes, however, that the translation of analytical insights and learning into consistently stronger project design and monitoring has been uneven.</p>	<p>partnership. Evidence from the MOPAN assessment indicates that the GEF Secretariat has taken concrete steps to support gender-related learning, notably through the establishment of the GEF Gender Partnership as a platform for knowledge exchange among agencies and gender focal points, and through the development of guidance materials and learning products on the gender–environment nexus. Progress reports confirm that gender has been increasingly featured in partnership-wide events, agency retreats, and global outreach activities, and that the Secretariat has supported the dissemination of lessons learned and emerging practices across focal areas. At the same time, MOPAN finds that these learning and knowledge management efforts remain uneven in depth and reach. While presentations, orientations, and knowledge-sharing forums have raised general awareness of GEF’s gender commitments, they have not consistently translated into sufficient technical or practice-guidance to support effective implementation at the project level. Attendance and uptake of</p>	<p>lessons from project implementation and their use to inform design, supervision, and policy dialogue. This orientation is further strengthened in the GAP 2026–2030, which explicitly commits to improving evidence generation on “what works” for advancing gender equality and gender-transformative approaches, and to using this evidence to refine tools, guidance, and operational practices.</p> <p>At the corporate level, learning about gender is institutionalized through annual reporting via RIDE and periodic thematic evaluations. The 2024 corporate evaluation on GEWE confirms that IFAD has invested substantially in learning-oriented instruments—such as gender markers, portfolio reviews, and thematic studies—to track performance and extract lessons, while also noting the need to strengthen learning on higher-level outcomes (e.g. empowerment, norms change, resilience) and to improve feedback loops from evidence to operational decision-making.</p> <p>Learning on gender is also supported through communities of practice, guidance notes,</p>



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	<p>reported through the APRs. Going forward, the Adaptation Fund intends to share learning extracted from the scorecard with IEs through webinars and other exchange mechanisms.</p>		<p>gender-related learning opportunities across agencies and country partners have also been variable, limiting the systematic diffusion of lessons learned. Overall, documents point to the need for a more structured, targeted, and practice-oriented approach to ensure that gender-related lessons systematically inform programming and decision-making across the GEF partnership.</p>	<p>operational toolkits (e.g. GALS-related tools), and targeted analytical work, often linked to innovative initiatives such as gender-transformative programming and climate adaptation. According to evaluation findings, these learning mechanisms have contributed to improved quality at design and greater consistency in gender integration, though their uptake varies across regions and country contexts.</p>



Annex II: Bibliography

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Annex III: List of Consulted Stakeholders

A list of key stakeholders consulted to inform the preparation of this benchmarking study is provided below.

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	POSITION	AFFILIATION
Collantes	Verona	Senior Gender Specialist	GEF
Hee Lee	Young	Governance Specialist and Gender Lead	Adaptation Fund
Hijar	Graciela	Gender Team	Adaptation Fund
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