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# Gender

**Executive Summary**

**June 2026**

Independent  
Evaluation of the  
GCF's Gender  
Approach





GREEN CLIMATE FUND  
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION UNIT

# Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Approach to Gender

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The Independent Evaluation of the Green Climate Fund's Approach to Gender (2026) examines the Fund's overall approach to gender mainstreaming across its institutional architecture, operations and portfolio of funded activities. It assesses the extent to which the updated Gender Policy (2019) and its accompanying institutional Gender Action Plan (GAP) have been implemented, and whether the Fund has set up the organizational, procedural and system level conditions necessary to deliver gender responsive climate results.

The evaluation draws on a mixed methods approach, including a desk review of institutional documents, a portfolio review of 20 projects, six country deep dives, an online questionnaire, and consultations with 246 stakeholders across the Fund's ecosystem, including national designated authorities (NDAs), focal points, accredited entities (AEs), executing entities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and gender experts.

The evaluation is strategically timed to inform the update of the institutional GAP and the development of the GCF's third Updated Strategic Plan for 2028–2031. It also builds on the IEU's 2025 Independent Synthesis of the GCF's Gender Approach, which included a literature review and a benchmarking study comparing the GCF's institutional approach to gender with approaches implemented by the Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds, Global Environment Facility and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

The following presents a summary of the evaluation's findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## FINDINGS

### Relevance

The GCF's gender approach is strongly aligned with international frameworks, including the Belém Gender Action Plan of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5. The updated Gender Policy reflects global shifts towards gender-responsive climate action and positions the GCF as a leader among climate funds in requiring mandatory Gender Assessments and Gender Action Plans at the project level.

However, the evaluation finds that gender is not consistently integrated into the Fund's strategic planning processes. While the Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund 2024–2027 references gender, it does not articulate a clear results pathway or institutional commitments for gender mainstreaming. Gender is also weakly embedded in the Investment Framework, where gender considerations are present but not systematically applied in scoring or decision-making. As a result, gender-responsiveness is largely compliance-oriented rather than a strategic driver of climate impact.

### Coherence

The evaluation finds partial coherence across the GCF's gender-related policies, tools and systems. The updated Gender Policy establishes strong procedural requirements. However, these are not fully aligned with other institutional frameworks, including the Integrated Results Management Framework (IRMF), the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS), and the coherence and complementarity framework of multiple climate funds.

Accreditation processes assess AEs' gender policies and capacities, but the depth and consistency of these assessments vary. While international AEs generally demonstrate stronger gender systems, a subset of direct access entities (DAEs) face capacity gaps that limit their ability to meet GCF requirements.

At the project level, Gender Assessments and Gender Action Plans are mandatory, but their quality is uneven, with many plans lacking clear indicators, budgets, or links to project logframes. Safeguards provide an added entry point for gender, but the integration of gender into ESS processes is inconsistent, and the relationship between gender requirements and safeguards is not always clear to AEs and Secretariat staff.

### **Efficiency**

The GCF has made progress in institutionalizing gender, but organizational arrangements and resources remain insufficient to fully operationalize the updated Gender Policy. The Secretariat's recent restructuring divided the gender team between two units: one under the Office of the Chief Strategy and Impact Officer, which is responsible for policy-related matters, and the other under the Investment Office which oversees the Fund's investments and operations.

The GCF Secretariat's ongoing reorganization and regionalization processes have yet to show clear efficiency gains for gender mainstreaming, with current arrangements characterized by unclear and evolving gender roles and responsibilities, and unrealized potential for more context-responsive delivery.

Ambiguity in gender responsibilities is leading to bottlenecks and over-reliance on a small number of specialists. Capacity constraints are particularly acute in regional desks, portfolio management teams, and programming departments, where staff often lack gender expertise and rely heavily on the Office of the Chief Strategy and Impact Officer for guidance.

Training on gender is not mandatory, and the uptake of existing training is low. Operational procedures, including standard operating procedures and the Operational Manual, do not clearly articulate gender-related roles and responsibilities across units. Budgeting for gender is also weak. Project-level Gender Action Plans rarely include dedicated budgets, and the Secretariat does not systematically track gender-related expenditures. Together, these gaps weaken accountability and make it difficult to assess whether resources are aligned with the Fund's gender ambitions.

Support from the Secretariat's Operational Safeguards team, the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP) and the Project Preparation Facility, has strengthened the integration of gender-responsive approaches across the project cycle. However, demand exceeds available resources, and gender-related support is uneven across regions and AEs.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

The GCF's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) architecture for gender is underdeveloped and fragmented. The updated Gender Policy (2019) and institutional GAP are not yet fully embedded in the GCF's overall results architecture. The IRMF provides limited operational guidance on gender. Gender-related co-benefits have not been standardized, limiting the possibility of consistent measurement and aggregation of gender-related outcomes.

Systems are not yet in place to ensure that projects consistently provide rigorous quantitative and qualitative insights on gender and other dimensions of intersectionality through their reporting and evaluations.

The GCF's M&E systems are not yet equipped to track gender-responsive results. While approximately 80 per cent of projects report sex-disaggregated data, monitoring remains largely activity-focused, with annual performance reports functioning primarily as compliance tools rather

than mechanisms for assessing outcomes. Reporting on Gender Action Plan implementation is inconsistent, and many annual performance reports do not include meaningful analysis of gender results.

The Readiness Strategy (2024–2027) and its Revised Readiness Results Management Framework, as well as efforts of the Department of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, all point to a growing institutional commitment to elevating gender-related M&E requirements and practices.

### **Country ownership**

The GCF's approach to country ownership is grounded in Board decisions that emphasize NDA leadership, country-driven programming and multi-stakeholder engagement. However, gender is not explicitly embedded in country ownership guidance, and NDAs do not have to engage gender ministries, women's organizations, or gender-focused CSOs in coordination mechanisms or no-objection letter procedures. As a result, gender-focused institutions are often consulted during project design but rarely engaged in decision-making or implementation oversight. This limits the institutionalization of gender capacities and leadership at country level.

The RPSP is a notable exception. The Revised Readiness Strategy and Revised Readiness Results Management Framework include strong gender provisions, supporting the development of gender-balanced stakeholder engagement, gender-responsive national adaptation plans and other long-term strategies and gender mainstreaming into national systems. However, the extent to which NDAs and AEs use the RPSP to strengthen gender capacity varies.

### **Effectiveness and impact**

The GCF portfolio is generating gender-responsive outcomes, particularly in areas such as women's participation in training, access to climate-resilient technologies and involvement in community-level decision-making. However, these outcomes are uneven across projects and regions, and many remain at the level of participation rather than deeper shifts in agency, leadership or structural change.

A key gap is the limited follow-through from design to implementation. While most projects include gender-responsive activities in their project level Gender Action Plans, implementation is often partial, delayed or insufficiently monitored. Factors contributing to these gaps include limited AE capacity, weak oversight of executing entities, and insufficient gender expertise during implementation.

Unintended outcomes, both positive and negative occur but are not systematically tracked. Some projects have strengthened women's leadership or created new economic opportunities, while others have faced challenges related to cultural norms, land tenure patterns or gender-based violence risks.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability of gender outcomes depends heavily on the institutionalization of gender capacities within AEs, NDAs, and national systems. While some countries have strong gender institutions and policies, others face significant capacity constraints, reducing the likelihood that gender-responsive practices will be sustained beyond GCF support.

Partnerships with women's organizations and gender-focused CSOs are often limited to consultation roles, reducing opportunities for long-term capacity strengthening. RPSP support can help address these gaps, but its reach is uneven and it does not always prioritize gender-related components.

Sustainability is also affected by the lack of dedicated budgets for gender activities and the absence of mechanisms to ensure continuity of gender expertise during implementation.

## Replication and scalability

The evaluation finds that the GCF lacks a systematic approach to capturing, disseminating and scaling gender-responsive innovations. While strong practices exist across the portfolio, they remain isolated within individual projects or AEs.

Knowledge-sharing mechanisms are ad hoc, and cross-portfolio uptake of gender lessons is limited. Institutional enabling conditions for replication, such as communities of practice, repositories of innovations and structured learning products, are underdeveloped. Coordination with other climate funds on gender indicators and reporting remains at an early stage.

## Innovation

The portfolio includes promising gender-responsive innovations, such as participatory approaches, women-led climate enterprises and gender-responsive climate information services. However, these innovations are not systematically identified, supported or scaled. The GCF lacks mechanisms to track gender-related innovation or to incentivize AEs to adopt transformative approaches.

## CONCLUSIONS

The GCF has established a strong policy foundation for gender equality, but this ambition is not yet reflected in its strategic direction or operational practice. Gender remains insufficiently embedded in the Fund's planning and investment architecture, resulting in a persistent gap between policy intent and implementation. Institutional restructuring has further fragmented roles and weakened coherence, reinforcing a centralized, compliance-driven model that ensures procedural adherence but does not consistently support quality implementation. Limited gender capacity across the Secretariat, AEs, DAEs, and NDAs, combined with heavy reliance on consultants, constrains sustained learning and ownership. While the RPSP has supported some progress, its broader potential to build durable gender capacity remains underused.

The Fund's engagement with gender-focused stakeholders also remains shallow. Women's organizations, gender-focused CSOs, and national gender institutions are rarely positioned as partners with decision-making roles, limiting country ownership and the depth of gender integration. Structural barriers in the GCF institutional model continue to restrict access for under-resourced local actors, despite mechanisms intended to broaden participation.

Monitoring and learning systems are not yet equipped to track or aggregate gender-responsive results. Misalignment across the IRMF, the GCF institutional GAP, project-level Gender Action Plans, and annual performance reports produces fragmented data and limits evidence-based course-correction. Knowledge on effective gender-responsive approaches exists but is not systematically captured or shared, and the absence of financial tracking further weakens accountability. Although some projects are beginning to demonstrate gender-responsive outcomes, these remain modest and largely output-level. Without defined results pathways or portfolio-level objectives, the Fund cannot meaningfully assess or communicate its contribution to gender-responsive climate action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation's recommendations respond to a core challenge: the GCF's gender architecture is shaped by a compliance-driven system that ensures procedural adherence but does not consistently translate into meaningful implementation, monitoring or learning. Adding new requirements would only reinforce this pattern. Instead, the recommendations focus on institutional reform, clearer accountability and shifts in incentives and capacities - changes that enable the updated Policy to function as a driver of results rather than a checklist with which to comply.

### **Recommendation 1: Strengthen institutional coherence and accountability**

The GCF Secretariat should reinforce institutional coherence, clarify institutional roles and establish clear institutional accountability for the operationalizing the updated Policy and gender mainstreaming. The GCF Secretariat should consolidate the gender coordination architecture by establishing a mechanism spanning the relevant departments and offices, including the Operational Safeguards team, regional desks, liaison officers, and the monitoring, evaluation and learning function.

This could be achieved by integrating gender-related responsibilities into staff performance frameworks; updating operational manuals and standard operating procedures to clarify responsibilities across the project cycle; defining minimum gender roles and accountability standards ahead of regionalization; and ensuring consistent terminology across policies, including aligning the Investment Framework with the updated Gender Policy's shift to gender-responsiveness.

### **Recommendation 2: Board accountability for the effective implementation of the institutional GAP**

The GCF Board should reinstate its accountability for the implementation of the future institutional GAP and require the Secretariat to report periodically through a dedicated reporting mechanism. The Secretariat should establish a financial visibility mechanism necessary to track gender-related expenditure at the institutional level.

These measures could include mandating a committee or working group to monitor institutional GAP implementation, establishing a gender budget-tracking system that identifies and categorizes gender-related expenditures, and ensuring all future institutional GAPs include measurable indicators aligned with the IRMF and emerging work on gender co-benefits. Embedding gender more explicitly as an institutional objective in the third Updated Strategic Plan would further reinforce its cross-cutting relevance across programming and operations.

### **Recommendation 3: Capacity building for a shared gender responsibility**

To ensure that gender integration further becomes a shared responsibility across the GCF and its ecosystem of funded activities, the Secretariat should strengthen system-wide capacity-building and guidance to support the implementation of the updated Policy. Capacity-building should include all relevant stakeholders.

This institutional strengthening would include conducting a gender capacity assessment to inform staffing and training strategies, introducing mandatory orientation for senior leadership, expanding the network of gender champions, and updating the Gender Guidelines and Toolkit to reflect the updated Policy (2019) and future institutional GAPs. RPS support should be leveraged more strategically to build national and AE and NDA-level gender capacities, while new guidance on intersectionality should help ensure that diverse vulnerabilities are addressed throughout design, implementation and reporting.

#### **Recommendation 4: Effective compliance: from compliance tools to implementation and learning**

The Secretariat should fundamentally redesign the function and use of project-level Gender Assessments, Gender Action Plans and portfolio-level M&E to shift from compliance documentation to active implementation guidance and evidence-based learning. It is important for the Secretariat that these requirements function not only as entry-point compliance tools for FP approval, but also become active instruments for guiding implementation, monitoring, reporting and course correction throughout the project cycle.

Achieving this shift requires integrating gender analysis and action planning into project logic, ensuring that gender indicators and budgets are embedded in project design and key performance indicators. Project level Gender Action Plans should be updated at mid-term to guide course correction. Differentiated guidance is needed for programmatic, multi-country and private-sector modalities, where design-stage specificity is limited. Strengthening expectations for budgeting and expenditure tracking will also help ensure that gender commitments are adequately resourced and visible throughout implementation.

#### **Recommendation 5: Structural pathways for meaningful access and implementation**

The GCF Secretariat should consider strengthening and leveraging the role of gender-focused and local actors through a partnership model that aims to deepen inclusivity, integration of gender-responsive practice and broader transformative outcomes at country level.

This partnership model should define how women's organizations, CSOs and relevant government bodies are identified, engaged and supported across country programming and project cycles. Capacity-building efforts should prioritize developing in-house gender expertise within AEs, particularly DAEs, rather than relying on short-term consultants. Establishing minimum expectations for gender-focused institutional involvement in country programming, clarifying modalities for civil-society engagement in monitoring, and providing clear guidance on the application of the updated Gender Policy in private-sector operations will help ensure more inclusive and transformative outcomes.

#### **Recommendation 6: Monitoring, evaluation and learning for gender-responsive results**

The GCF should strengthen its monitoring, reporting, and learning systems so that gender-responsive results are effectively tracked and aggregated, and used to inform decision-making and adaptive programming. The revision of the institutional GAP presents a critical opportunity for addressing longstanding gaps in results definition, indicator quality and institutional ownership of gender outcomes.

Standardizing gender co-benefit categories, indicators and reporting guidance, and ensuring their alignment with APR revisions and the IRMF, would improve data quality and comparability. Strengthening quality assurance, drawing on cross-institutional learning and anchoring the Fund's knowledge architecture to the Belém Gender Action Plan will help position the GCF as a contributor to global gender-climate knowledge. Greater harmonization with other climate funds and alignment with future revisions to the IRMF and the Harmonized Integrated Results Management Framework will further support interoperability and strengthen the Fund's ability to assess and communicate gender-responsive impact.



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