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# INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE GCF'S READINESS AND PREPARATORY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

## Executive summary

September 2023

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GREEN CLIMATE FUND  
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION UNIT

# Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

09/2023

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AE</b>	Accredited Entity
<b>CN</b>	Concept Note
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DAE</b>	Direct Access Entity
<b>DCP</b>	Division of Country Programming
<b>DMA</b>	Division of Mitigation and Adaptation
<b>DP</b>	Delivery Partner
<b>DPM</b>	Division of Portfolio Management
<b>FP</b>	Funding proposal
<b>GCF</b>	Green Climate Fund
<b>IEU</b>	Independent Evaluation Unit
<b>NAP</b>	National Adaptation Plan
<b>NDA</b>	National Designated Authority
<b>PPF</b>	Project Preparation Facility
<b>RKB</b>	Readiness Knowledge Bank
<b>RPSP</b>	Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme
<b>RRMF</b>	Readiness Results Management Framework

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## INTRODUCTION

The Green Climate Fund's (GCF) Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP) aims to provide resources for strengthening the institutional capacities of national designated authorities (NDAs) or focal points and direct access entities (DAEs) to efficiently engage with the Fund. Under its second phase (RPSP 2.0), the Programme was guided by the following objectives: (i) capacity-building for climate finance coordination; (ii) strategies for climate finance implementation; (iii) national adaptation plans and/or adaptation planning processes; (iv) paradigm-shifting pipeline development; and (v) knowledge sharing and learning.

In 2023, the GCF's Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) undertook the "Independent Evaluation of the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme". The evaluation assesses RPSP support to GCF eligible recipient countries delivered under the Readiness Programme Strategy 2019–2021 (hereafter, 'readiness strategy') and the GCF Updated Strategic Plan 2020–2023. It examines progress since the IEU's 2018 RPSP evaluation and looks at the Programme's relevance, coherence and complementarity, effectiveness, as well as its results measurement and oversight mechanisms while feeding lessons into the preparation of new readiness operations. The evaluation was finalized in October 2023 and presented to the last meeting of the Board of 2023.

## METHODOLOGY

The IEU followed a utilization-focused, participatory evaluation methodology framed in a theory-based, systems oriented, mixed methods approach. The mixed methods approach adopted for this evaluation entailed a synthesis of IEU evaluations on readiness, a literature review, document review, portfolio analysis, online stakeholder surveys, key informant semi-structured interviews, as well as country case studies and a low-readiness deep-dive. Country case studies included Armenia, Belize, Bhutan, Côte d'Ivoire, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, Panama, and Tanzania. The low-readiness deep-dive explored RPSP support in countries classified as having low-readiness as per the ND-GAIN and States Resilience Index and drew on data from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Mali and Yemen.

## MAINSTREAMING OF 2018 RPSP EVALUATION

Overall, the GCF has made good progress implementing the recommendations set out for the RPSP towards the end of its initial phase of operation. It has revised or introduced operational and delivery modalities and underpinned them with a much-needed readiness strategy which, among other things, introduces a new focus on partnering, knowledge management, and on the tracking of readiness results.

Regarding the operational and delivery modalities, some variability exists in the extent to which recommendations have been operationalized, and in a few critical areas, most notably the development of the results tracking and knowledge management functions, it is too soon to see added value.

While helpful in describing the RPSP offering, the 2019–2021 readiness strategy has come up short in establishing the Programme's value proposition in the GCF's value chain. This has

simultaneously hampered RPSP performance against its objectives and undermined its “enabling” contribution to the GCF.

## RELEVANCE

The RPSP 2.0’s programme offering aligns well to national circumstances, for the most part. On a global scale, the GCF is targeting vulnerable countries, as intended, though scope for improved access is noted for the most vulnerable in the cohort. At a country level, the RPSP was found to stand out for its size and scope.

Albeit with variances, the distribution of readiness activities identified by NDAs and delivery partners (DPs) indicates comprehensive coverage of RPSP objectives and in similar proportions between RPSP 1.0 and 2.0. There is clearly a continuing concentration of activities in RPSP 2.0 associated with country capacity development (Objective 1).

The evaluation identified several drivers nudging country decision-makers to embark on low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathways, which include the deepening climate change impacts on populations that include their own citizens, and second, country commitments made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other related multilateral agreements. On the other hand, the “business-as-usual” tendencies in government and the private sector have in other instances held the country decision-makers back from embarking on those same pathways. The scope of activities contained under the 2019–2021 readiness strategy positions the GCF to engage with all three drivers in pursuit of its climate ambitions.

## COHERENCE AND COMPLEMENTARITY

### Internal coherence

Although better defined in RPSP 2.0 than in its previous phase, the work on “readiness” at the GCF remains insufficiently anchored to the GCF’s organization and strategy and is under-supported by policy. Its value proposition to the GCF remains divergent, under-recognized and under-explored.

In general, GCF’s organization of RPSP 2.0 and its choice of delivery modalities are consistent with Programme objectives and in keeping with country circumstances and expectations, as divergent as those are country to country. At the same time, a methodology gap around the identification of country readiness needs has hindered NDA potential to assert country leadership on readiness investments. As well, the strategic importance, yet sheer fragility, of the country coordination mechanism beckons closer attention from a programme design perspective.

Moreover, there has been little harmonization between the release of the RPSP strategy and tools for the operationalization and implementation of the Readiness programme. As numerous tools and frameworks have been released over the period of RPSP 2.0 to operationalize the strategy, this has left a perception of constant change in the RPSP among stakeholders and also necessitated ex-post adjustments and retrofitting of operations.

Solid headway has been made putting in place a means to tell the GCF’s readiness results story. Where there was little ability to understand impact beyond that created by single grants, groundwork has been laid to understand the RPSP at a programme level. The presence of a Readiness Results Management Framework (RRMF) moves GCF and RPSP stakeholders one step closer to

understanding readiness contributions and potential at a country level. Tools for periodic measurement of results and quality of grant implementation are, however, yet to be fully developed.

## External coherence

Evidence of external coherence and complementarity between the GCF and other readiness and capacity-building support is variable across comparator organizations and is highly context dependent and specific. At fund level, collaboration is often ad hoc and opportunistic, and fund-level agreements have only limited effects on the GCF's country-level engagements. At national level, mechanisms for country programming and focal point coordination facilitate coherence and complementarity, in some settings.

Several RPSP comparative advantages were identified, namely its focus on capacity and institution-building, its support to climate finance planning and strategies (including the underlying information for these), and its connection to the GCF's role as a convenor. Key limitations are also noted, including a perceived lack of clarity on requirements and the absence of a regional presence.

## EFFECTIVENESS

RPSP grants and technical assistance address RPSP objectives to varying degrees and show variability in effectiveness. Higher effectiveness is noted for objectives 1 and 3, while effectiveness appears more limited for objectives 2, 4 and 5. While capacity-building and national adaptation plan (NAP) support have been highly valued, a need to broaden and increase capacity-building support (e.g. secure accreditation), mitigate impacts of staff turnover, and support NAP and climate finance investment implementation are noted. Challenges related to pipeline developed have hampered the achievement of objectives 2 and 4, while the capturing of lessons learned and provisions for knowledge sharing need to be further systematized.

A range of factors have enabled and hindered the achievement of RPSP results across its portfolio. Above all, political shuffles and changes in government are identified as hindering factors to the success of the RPSP. Additionally, the location of the NDA, the country's socio-political context, and the DAE and DP landscape were also found to have implications for the effectiveness of the RPSP. Challenges with regard to RPSP accessibility and grant implementation timelines are also flagged for the risks they pose to the delivery of RPSP outputs. Country case studies highlight both the merit of having a strong DP with extensive knowledge of GCF processes and the in-country context, and the merits of continuity of support which can be fostered by DPs implementing multiple RPSP grants in a country.

## GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

With regard to advancing the GCF's gender and social inclusion ambitions, GCF policy and strategy level expectations on the RPSP to deliver and demonstrate contribution-to-impact are considerable when considered in relation to available in-house resources. The modestly sized Office of Sustainability and Inclusion has corporate-wide responsibilities and covers the readiness programming terrain selectively, reliant on Division of Country Programming (DCP) regional teams and the Division of Portfolio Management (DPM) to incorporate environmental and social safeguards and inclusion policy requirements into their respective lead roles. It is not clear that this arrangement is sufficient to "mainstream" gender and enhance engagement with indigenous peoples as required by policy.

By virtue of the central role the RPSP plays in preparing countries to accept GCF (and to a lesser extent, international) climate finance, the Fund's championship of gender and social inclusion is strategic. But its approach to the work is not unlike that of analogous organizations (global/regional/national) including those with longer track records and deeper roots at a country level. In view of observed delivery constraints at the Secretariat, country-level communities of practice that in some settings generate local expertise represent a resource to be tapped for greater programming "reach" and "impact" on gender and social dimensions.

At the country level, the ease with which gender and social inclusion dimensions are incorporated in planning processes varies for myriad reasons which are unique to individual countries. This requires a nuanced (localized, culturally attuned) approach from those in facilitation roles (notably DCP, accredited entities (AEs)/DP, and technical assistance consultants). It also poses a challenge when setting global expectations, particularly on indicator and target setting.

## COUNTRY OWNERSHIP

Country ownership over climate action and finance is highly context dependent, and so its prevalence varies considerably across GCF eligible countries. RPSP has supported some factors that contribute to ownership, most notably: institutional capacities, Country Programme development and use, and the accreditation of national entities. GCF requirements and capacities also play a role in the level of country ownership, with a key challenge being how to balance providing sufficient guidance and resources, on the one hand, while leaving space for countries to take the lead on the other.

NDA leadership resulting from capacity-building activities has so far been variable, despite achievements under Objective 1 of the RPSP Strategy. Key limiting factors include high NDA turnover, political complexities, a lack of clear country strategies for readiness, and GCF capacity constraints. RPSP has also had limited results thus far for increasing widespread stakeholder capacity for engagement, and there are differences in how stakeholder engagement is seen across countries and stakeholder groups. Most readiness support has been used for informational or training purposes.

## IMPACT AND PARADIGM SHIFT

There are limited concrete impacts where the RPSP has led to the mobilization of climate finance from the GCF or other resources, although isolated success stories are identified. The persistent barriers to climate financing and the need to shift towards an outcome-oriented approach have limited the extent to which the Programme has led to impacts in this regard.

While transformative change and paradigm shift are critical elements in the architecture that links GCF investment to its goals, at the country level the concepts remain largely abstract to stakeholders. For some GCF staff and country stakeholders, the paradigm shift concept is associated with the later stage results of climate investments to be teased out when developing project theories of change (potentially with readiness support); for others paradigm shift is associated with a mind shift that develops in a population at a country level over time (also potentially with readiness support). Underpinned by such ambiguity and divergence, RPSP's role in fostering paradigm shift remains vastly under-explored.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of RPSP results has been mixed though promising. The RPSP contributed to organizational structures and policies for climate financing that will likely be sustained, although high turnover of government staff represents a continued challenge to sustaining national capacities. This, combined with the lack of knowledge of GCF procedures and “language” among national stakeholders, suggests that the GCF’s “phased-out approach” to capacity-building is inadequate. Furthermore, country programmes developed with RPSP support contribute to a long-term vision for GCF investments, but difficulties in moving from concept note (CN) development to GCF funding proposal (FP) approval pose sustainability concerns.

Moreover, the RPSP is contributing to building an ecosystem for climate financing in countries. However, multisectoral coordination varies across countries. Despite recent improvements, engagement with non-State actors remains a work in progress.

## EFFICIENCY

Overall, communication frequency from the GCF to country partners continues to be perceived as inadequate, with detrimental effects on the implementation of RPSP grant activities. Key contributing factors include the lack of a GCF institutional presence or at least a routine of country visits by GCF staff, the time difference between many stakeholders and GCF headquarters, and persistent language constraints. In addition, GCF communication efforts are insufficient for socializing knowledge, and are inefficient.

Improvements in the different stages of the RPSP grant cycle have nonetheless been noted during consultations with NDAs, DPs, and GCF stakeholders, as well as by survey respondents. The average number of days from proposal submission to approval has decreased, though still it remains too long. The application process is viewed by some as requiring a level of detail and provision of types of information that seem to them irrelevant, time-consuming, costly, and disproportionate to the size of support provided by grants with a duration of one year. Africa remains the region where the average number of days from proposal submission to approval is the highest, which is concerning for a GCF priority country group.

Several challenges impact the implementation of readiness grants. Disbursement is slow, which negatively affects implementation timelines. An over-reliance on consultants for technical assistance is also challenging, with DPs reporting difficulties in their search for suitable consultants, both national and international. NDAs and DPs describe a lack of flexibility in implementation from the GCF, in ways that do not align with adaptive management principles. That said, while the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected RPSP delivery, the GCF is recognized for having pursued a flexible approach for reducing the impact of pandemic-related disruptions on implementation.

Taking a closer look at GCF priority countries (i.e. Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and African States), access to the RPSP remains challenging, particularly for Least Developed Countries and African States, and is further exacerbated in African Least Developed Countries. GCF processes and requirements and low disbursements were considered as particular hindrances to GCF’s readiness ambitions in these countries. Heterogeneity is particularly noted in Small Island Developing States resulting in important variation in accessibility to RPSP resources.

Finally, the GCF has integrated different internal risk management mechanisms into its processes. However, several of these mechanisms embedded in the RPSP grant cycle impact efficiency by creating long delays and burdensome bureaucracy. At the organizational level, the GCF portfolio risk management comprises two distinct levels of due diligence and appraisal, one undertaken by the NDA/DP and the other by the GCF Secretariat, independent units, and panels. At the country level, the GCF accreditation and financial disbursement practices are themselves key components of a risk management and mitigation system. In delivering readiness support, the GCF works with DPs with whom it has framework agreements, or with United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to manage resources with national and regional entities, ensuring that risks are minimized.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 1. The RPSP is the key GCF programme designed to meet the climate finance needs of developing countries, but its value proposition remains insufficiently developed and universally shared within the GCF and by its stakeholders to substantiate its strategic importance.** While the RPSP has undergone significant changes since its inception, it remains a “work in progress” on account of iterations informed by evaluations, reviews and deliberations. GCF has put in place two RPSP strategies and numerous processes, guidelines and frameworks to increase the relevance and effectiveness of the RPSP and provide readiness support in a timely manner. However, the full potential of the RPSP’s value to countries and its contribution to GCF’s overall goals and operations has not been fully understood and elaborated among different stakeholders within and outside the GCF. Being one of the world’s key leading readiness programmes in the climate space, its role in the global climate finance architecture is insufficiently articulated and communicated.

**Conclusion 2. The RPSP’s effectiveness and efficiency are challenged by GCF’s known operational constraints.** These constraints include, inter alia, lack of sufficient staff capacity to meet its institutional ambitions, insufficient appreciation of operating contexts, lack of flexibility in its processes, the long review times of RPSP proposals, and lack of integration between different processes in the GCF (including the discord between RPSP and Project Preparation Facility (PPF) support). These constraints also impact timely access to the RPSP by countries. There have been some improvements since the first RPSP programme, with country stakeholders able to access readiness resources more quickly and transaction times across grant cycles having somewhat improved, albeit with persistent variances associated with levels of country vulnerability.

**Conclusion 3. The fragmentation of GCF’s internal structure affects the level of integrated engagement with country-level stakeholders and the degree of continuity in the transition from RPSP-related offerings to downstream initiatives related to funding activities.** GCF’s ability to provide integrated support to meet country needs is constrained by the lack of internal coherence between GCF’s divisions (i.e. DCP, DMA<sup>1</sup>, PSF<sup>2</sup>, DPM). The Secretariat’s championship of the RPSP is not entirely clear, with RPSP responsibilities spread across numerous divisions. Discrepancies in data information and availability across the Secretariat’s data structure also speaks to this fragmentation. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence that the CNs lead to the project proposals, as well as that the funded activities can be attributed solely to the RPSP. These different

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<sup>1</sup> Division of Mitigation and Adaptation

<sup>2</sup> Private Sector Facility

layers of fragmentation also affect the active integration of gender and indigenous people's issues into the RPSP.

**Conclusion 4. The success of the RPSP at country level is predicated upon contextual factors which are not fully acknowledged and addressed in the delivery of the RPSP. The Programme is delivered as a collection of individual grants; the success of individual grants depends on yet-unaccounted for contextual factors while the grant-specific approach prevents country-level or portfolio results.** GCF as an institution is still in the process of enhancing its accessibility and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including civil society organizations, private sector organizations (PSOs), DPs, and DAEs among others. There is still a nascent but evolving understanding in countries of GCF and its requirements and vice versa. The “different languages” spoken by country stakeholders – including national DPs – and GCF create higher transaction costs for countries in accessing the RPSP. The GCF has attempted to bring down the transaction costs through the release of documented knowledge products, guidelines and modalities. Their reception and success are yet to be assessed.

At country level, factors such as lack of NDA capacity or interest, staff turnover in NDAs, and low understanding of GCF procedures and processes affect the RPSP and thus give rise to ongoing capacity challenges which contradict possible assumptions of capacity-building as a static and largely one-time activity. Capacity needs are neither linear nor definitive as country needs evolve. Both the role of the RPSP in assisting in the preparation of country programmes, and the usage of country programmes for setting national climate priorities remain context specific. The readiness programme does not always account for this country-specificity. It is more prominently directed towards the DPs rather than the countries and, therefore, country readiness needs are still not fully understood. The GCF has been able to achieve an understanding of promoting complementarity with other climate funds at the corporate level but the same has not been uniformly realized at the country level.

**Conclusion 5. Lack of clarity around key concepts in its theory of change is an impediment for the RPSP.** This is especially true for paradigm shift and country ownership. The RPSP has demonstrated the potential of achieving a paradigm shift in countries that have a developed understanding of paradigm shift. Building clarity on the concept of paradigm shift within the Secretariat and elaborating a country-specific view of the concept are requirements that remain to be achieved for GCF to realize the full potential of the RPSP's key goal. Similarly, the RPSP has enabled GCF to set up policies and processes and to invest in building capacities at the country level. Some essential dimensions of country ownership however are still missing. Country ownership is deemed solely to be government ownership. However, technical capacity, leadership, strategic stakeholder engagement, and a strong climate movement are also elements of country ownership. To this extent, conceptual clarity is missing vis-a-vis the RPSP's role in promoting paradigm shift and country ownership.

**Conclusion 6. The RRMF provides a framework for measuring results. The fund has no means to periodically assess the quality of implementation and the final results of the RPSP.** The RRMF was introduced in the middle of the implementation of the 2019 RPSP strategy and provides a framework for measuring the past and current results of the RPSP. The current data available to the Secretariat and the IEU is insufficient for assessing the outcomes, impacts and risk pertaining to the RPSP at portfolio level. GCF also lacks mechanisms for measuring the quality of implementation.

**Conclusion 7. There is little harmonization and coherence between the RPSP strategy and the tools for its operationalization.** There has been a time lag between the release of the RPSP strategy

and various tools such as the RRMF, readiness handbooks, and the Standard Operating Procedures. The time lag has extended nearly to the end of the current cycle of the RPSP strategy with the release of a revised handbook and Readiness Knowledge Bank (RKB) in 2023. The extended operationalization of the RPSP strategy creates an impression of constant change during the RPSP programme and also requires a retrofitting of RPSP grants. This imposes transaction costs upon countries and DPs.

### **Progress on RPSP objectives**

Given the time that has elapsed since the start of the RPSP there is an expectation for the Programme to demonstrate results, and such results are variable across objectives. Results are more prominent in the domain of institutional capacity-building and NAP support while they remain less prominent in supporting the preparation of strategic frameworks and policies at the country level, and in pipeline development and knowledge management. Conclusions by objectives are as follows:

#### **Objective 1. Country capacity**

The RPSP has been successful in supporting the development of country NDAs/focal points and in aiding their related national systems to integrate climate finance (e.g. their coordination mechanisms). Establishing this country capacity is a foundational achievement, though it requires continued attention in the face of complex national dynamics and contexts. While country ownership over climate action and finance is sought, NDAs/focal points often have been less stable than anticipated, subject as they are to internal political divisions, idiosyncratic institutional arrangements, frequent changes in leadership and staff, heavy workloads and competing demands, any of which can undermine the delivery and sustainability of results.

Overall, RPSP engagement for capacity strengthening at a country level has remained concentrated around NDAs/focal points and DPs. Relatively little has been offered to the private sector, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic and other national actors, though this varies with the NDAs/focal points of some countries taking very deliberate actions to expand their stakeholder reach. Also, while the RPSP is meant to advance GCF's gender and social inclusion ambitions, it has only partially been able to do so, given the substantial needs when considered against available in-house resources.

The successes and shortcomings in the sustainability of the RPSP's results substantially draw upon the institutional capacity-building undertaken with NDAs, DAEs and other institutions in a country. The high level of focus on institutional capacity development is a recognized comparative advantage of GCF's readiness operations.

#### **Objective 2. Strategies**

The Programme's second objective has focused on the implementation of ambitious strategies to guide GCF investments, done in a manner that is complementary to the methods of other climate financiers. Important progress has been made in this respect, as evidenced by the increasing presence of country programmes in GCF eligible countries along with the elaboration of strategic frameworks, policies, regulations and plans. Determining the best use of readiness resources in a country context remains a "work in progress", however. The needs are great, the resources are finite, and the clamour for readiness support from many quarters is fuelled by a range of motives.

The development of strategies for integrating international climate finance and attracting country-level private sector investment remains formative. RPSP successes with the private sector largely have been confined to early-stage exposure and engagement. GCF – and particularly RPSP – processes are widely perceived to be ill-suited to the private sector, and also to intermediary organizations.

### **Objective 3. Adaptation planning**

Adaptation planning over the evaluation period has seen much success that can be attributed to a matching of country government motivation, on the one hand, and the presence in the RPSP of an adequately sized resource envelope, on the other. The Programme has produced a strengthening in adaptation planning, governance and institutional coordination, though some challenges are still noted among the more vulnerable countries. As with the RPSP under objective 1, however, the complexity of operating contexts warrants an iterative programming approach that in at least some countries would benefit from more extensive and protracted support than one NAP funding cycle could provide to establish a skills base, embedded practice and results.

While adaptation planning has advanced significantly, there is no evidence as yet that readiness activities have led to increases in adaptation financing. The Programme appears short on the mechanisms and means to significantly catalyse private sector participation and meaningful civil society engagement in adaptation.

### **Objective 4. Pipeline development**

The Readiness programme has been least effective in realizing its pipeline development objectives, based on current, quite limited available evidence. RPSP grant closure has often preceded the submission of CNs where they have indeed materialized, so tracking this indicator is particularly challenging. The extent of handoff from RPSP-supported CNs to PPF-supported FPs cannot be ascertained with any measure of certainty. Significant barriers persist in tracking the achievement of such outcomes across the portfolio.

NDAs/focal points and steering committees have had relatively little oversight in the development of CNs by DPs or DAEs, which has seen heavy reliance on the use of consultants.

Challenges in the development of CNs, particularly in meeting quality standards are also noted. The length of RPSP support is perceived as inadequate to span from ideation to approval. Larger GCF processes are also observed to impede the extent to which CNs are approved in a timely manner and moved through the subsequent phase until they reach approval as a funded project. These include an adjudication approach centred on climate rationale, a finite institutional capacity at GCF to process projects for Board approval, and the presence within GCF of drivers that favour the deployment of international AEs, impact investment funds and the packaging of multi-country financing initiatives.

### **Objective 5. Knowledge sharing and learning**

The most recent objective of the Programme has focused on knowledge sharing and learning. Even before this objective was formulated, the Programme was supporting knowledge sharing and learning activities through such events as regional and structured dialogues. These have been widely appreciated by a broad range of stakeholders when they take place (noting that the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily curtailed in-person participation). Knowledge sharing is widely perceived as valuable and needed, both by the GCF and a broader range of stakeholders. While there has been very good participation in the range of dialogues organized by the GCF, with RPSP support, the Readiness Guidebook has seen only variable use – despite it providing highly pertinent information – for want of targeted outreach and training on its use.

GCF's commitment to knowledge sharing and learning has thus far only modestly translated into practice. The extent to which partnerships have been established and operationalized to foster the development and dissemination of methods, frameworks, and information systems for enhanced climate finance programming has also been limited to date, and more ad hoc than planned. This now appears to be changing with systemic investments being made using readiness resources (e.g. by DPs). Increased attention to this objective is reflected in the recent development of the RKB, which

has started to document approaches, successes, and lessons learned across the Programme. The socialization of the RKB however remains a work in progress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation proposes a set of seven high-level recommendations and associated explanatory details for each. Taken as a whole, these recommendations speak to the strategic and operational issues discussed, intent on informing the next phase of the RPSP of the GCF. Implementing these recommendations would result in a more strategic, impactful, larger and more streamlined Programme, adapted to the challenges, priorities and capacities of GCF-eligible countries, stakeholders and recipients. These recommendations acknowledge and build upon a Programme that has improved over the past 5 years. They do not aim to bring only minor adjustments to the Programme, but to build ambitiously on its increasingly solid foundations, to recognize and catalyse its greater potential.

**Recommendation 1. The GCF should sharpen its strategic intent and orientation for the RPSP at corporate level. The GCF should rationalize its capacity to resource the Readiness programme.**

**1.1. The GCF should clarify the value proposition and business case of its Readiness Programme as one of its central offerings. Its role needs to be anchored within the strategic directions and modalities of the Fund overall (including the PPF, PSF, accreditation and others).** GCF needs to be much clearer on what the Programme is trying to achieve for the Fund, for climate finance and for countries needing climate finance to address urgent climate change circumstances. It bears revisiting the following questions in planning forward: “Readiness for what? Readiness for whom? Readiness by when?”. The new strategy should clarify the value proposition and business case of the RPSP. Greater strategic clarity will help focus the actions of actors both internal and external to the GCF, ensuring that knowledge is purposefully shared across divisions and readily available to those who need it.

**1.2. To effectively mobilize its strategic intent for the Readiness programme, the GCF should provide for formal, “strategic” programme leadership.** Within the GCF, the fact that the Programme straddles multiple divisions – and particularly the DCP and DPM that are themselves responsive to two distinct stakeholder groups (i.e. countries and their country programmes on the one hand, and DPs on the other) – has contributed to the ambiguity regarding programme purpose and priorities; an ambiguity which demands attention. The RPSP needs championship at a senior management level to make the most of its cross-cutting service orientation, and to provide a strategic perspective on the various divisional inputs.

**1.3. While clarifying its value proposition in the new RPSP strategy, the GCF should rationalize its capacity to resource the Readiness programme.** The experience of country stakeholders and GCF Secretariat staff engaged with the RPSP is that demands on the Programme exceed the resources available at the Secretariat to address them in a timely way. This manifests most obviously in delays across the grant cycle including for co-development, revision and approval, legal agreement, disbursement, and grant closure.

Layered on this experience, felt at an administrative level, is the experience of indeterminacy in addressing the larger GCF decision-making processes associated with the accreditation and project development pipelines. This manifests for country stakeholders in long waits, multiple iterations and requests that, from a country standpoint, often seem unreasonable.

Underpinning this picture of a programme hampered by resource constraints is a deeper calibration issue. In the absence of a strong, unified strategic vision for readiness, on the one hand, and the relative paucity of data to show outcome-based value-for-money for readiness investments to date, on the other, there is an insufficient basis to match the Programme's purpose, demand, programming and results with required resources and capacities. Taking on the task of rationalizing resources to programming, requires first and foremost attention to sharpening the strategic intent of the Readiness programme. It also requires that GCF utilize its RRMF and any future mechanisms to understand how best to match resources for the readiness impacts sought.

**Recommendation 2. The RPSP should adopt a country-centred approach to its operations.**

With the RPSP, as with all GCF programmatic offerings, continued tension persists between the needs of countries, the project modality of DPs (and AEs), and the aspirations for the impact of the GCF itself. Situated amidst the tensions of this tripartite relationship, country needs and thus country readiness have remained an underdeveloped aspect of the Programme. This has been detrimental to country ownership.

**2.1. The GCF should adopt a country-centred approach, to:**

- Develop a country-specific approach to understanding the paradigm shift to be facilitated by the RPSP.
- Integrate country context into RPSP operations.
- Move away from a grant-by-grant and DP-centric view of readiness to a country-level view of readiness.
- Get a better understanding of country-level climate finance needs and readiness needs.

The GCF should consider using existing forums (such as regional structural dialogues) to deliver this for the short and medium term, and where not possible, develop alternative modes of developing these approaches.

**2.2. The GCF should update the guidance and reinforce support to countries on key considerations for the set-up and operation of country coordination mechanisms.** While some countries have managed to do very well in this respect, others would welcome additional guidance and soft parameters for doing so. Given the historical role of the RPSP in establishing country coordination mechanisms and NDAs, GCF should support and enable lesson learning for: considerations for location within government administrations; NDA leadership, composition, and capacity requirements; mechanisms for stakeholder participation; and more. Guidance could further be complemented by peer-to-peer, South-South learning processes, and through structured or regional dialogue processes. Doing so would address some of the challenges, costs and investments involved in the current approach, bringing greater efficiencies for those who seek them.

**2.3. In re-orienting the RPSP, GCF should consider the interplay of objectives and the differentiated country needs.** The complexities inherent in managing multiple stakeholder groups with distinct and often competing interests are enormous. Overall, the RPSP must be understood as a strategic “enabler” that does not operate in a linear fashion (i.e. sequencing from an original focus on objectives 1 towards 2 and then later on objectives 3 and 4, with 5 at the end). It should be re-imagined as a strategic, flexible and dynamic instrument that is responsive to country needs. Indeed, in an enabling role, it may be more effective in certain instances to move beyond its traditional pipeline development role, to direct readiness resources towards funded projects (e.g. as a way to prepare the terrain for scaling up components of funded projects) and, in so doing, be drawn back into new institutional capacity-building roles to manage forward movement in the country programme.

**Recommendation 3. In socializing the RPSP, the GCF should be more intentional and targeted in communicating programmatic offerings and enabling learning.**

Country-level stakeholders do not share an adequate baseline understanding of readiness and its programmatic offerings. The addition of objective 5 on knowledge and learning has been welcome and is expected to generate much-valued information that can be acted upon. Nevertheless, this evaluation period found that this objective has received the least attention among all readiness objectives, and the uptake of tools has been limited.

The RPSP Guidebook, while replete with very valuable information (and now available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic) needs to be complemented with learning-oriented sessions about how to use it effectively. And, while the multi-year grant modality has been available for many years, additional efforts need to be made to ensure widespread NDA and DAE awareness of its existence, its merits, and the means to use it. The GCF should ensure that accredited DAEs and DAEs at stage I or II of accreditation are aware of the RPSP support for which they are eligible. Further, it is not widely known that RPSP-funded capacity support from consultants could be offered for CNs destined for other climate financiers. Private sector actors at the country level have widely indicated they lack information and awareness on how to engage with and benefit from the Readiness Programme, and by extension the GCF more broadly.

**3.1. The GCF should curate the value proposition of the RPSP to different categories of stakeholders and consider tailoring the communication of such offerings through dedicated channels and forums.** The GCF should better communicate the RPSP's specialized offerings for different types of stakeholders. To that end, the GCF needs to increase the effectiveness of current communication and make efforts to find more effective means. Increasing effectiveness may require adapting and tailoring current practices (including frequency and sequence of webinars, visits, and structured dialogues), while the latter may require finding newer means of communication.

**3.2. The GCF should continue integrating and operationalizing tools for knowledge management such as the RKB, to link knowledge to investment opportunities in locally relevant ways.** The newly created RKB should contribute to the extent that the GCF is successful in mobilizing NDA, DP and GCF Secretariat utilization.

**Recommendation 4. The GCF should invest in solidifying the newly created RRMF as a learning and accountability tool.**

The newly established RRMF fills a large void in establishing a basis to understand the RPSP's contribution to GCF's mandate. For the first time, a complete theory of change – linking actions to results with a disciplined referencing to results nomenclature – serves as a singular point of reference for all Readiness grants. Its accompanying measurement framework makes possible the aggregation of individual project achievements. However, certain improvements are required to build upon the RRMF and close the results measurement loop.

**4.1. The GCF should develop additional mechanisms to enable periodic elaboration and measurement of outcome and impact-level results of the RPSP at the portfolio level.** Such mechanisms should have special considerations for data quality and credibility. These mechanisms should faithfully represent GCF's strategic intent for the RPSP and provide useful data externally and internally to support communications and learning, and service programme accountability needs.

**4.2 The GCF should also develop mechanisms to enable rigorous, periodic assessment of the quality of RPSP grant implementation.** Such mechanisms will also enable GCF to better identify and manage emerging RPSP portfolio risks. This would also address the serious challenge of lack of

data for the accountability mechanisms of the GCF, to assure against the risks pertaining to RPSP grants.

**Recommendation 5. GCF should operationalize the new RPSP strategy in a time-bound and timely manner.**

Under the current RPSP strategy, the GCF did not have the benefit of referring to an overarching strategic plan. Similarly, GCF did not have the suite of tools, frameworks and mechanisms to fully operationalize the strategy in a time-bound and timely manner. With the prospective introduction of the new RPSP strategy, GCF has the opportunity to sequence and align tools, modalities and mechanisms.

**5.1. The GCF should introduce the tools, frameworks, and Standard Operating Procedures for operationalizing the new RPSP strategy in a time-bound and timely manner.** This will ensure internal and external stakeholders are able to understand, internalize and operationalize the priorities and modalities set by the strategy and integrate the same into individual RPSP proposals and the portfolio at large. It will also minimize the perception held by numerous stakeholders of constant change in the Readiness programme and minimize the need to retrofit existing grants.

**Recommendation 6. With a view to enhance the sustainability of RPSP results, the GCF should reach diverse actors and cultivate national climate finance ecosystems.**

**6.1 To favour an optimized and sustained impact of the Programme, particularly at country level, the RPSP should continue to invest in strengthening the capacities of NDAs and (aspiring/nominated) DAEs.** This will include yet greater attention paid to contextual challenges, notably for the most vulnerable among GCF eligible countries. To assist this, support should be encouraged for the development of national policies, strategies, plans and programmes to guide GCF investments, and in complementarity with other climate finance sources.

**6.2 The Programme should be understood as playing an enabling role in building national climate finance ecosystems.** The RPSP should further its orientation towards medium-term outcomes over short-term gains. In addition to supporting NDAs and DAEs, the Programme should more intentionally support the private sector, civil society and academia in particular, intent on harnessing their localized insight and expertise for climate action. Further, GCF should provide guidance on climate finance partnerships across the ecosystem and provide accessible financing through the Readiness programme for such partnership development and consolidation. Coordination at national level through multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approaches may enhance the sustainability of RPSP results.

**Recommendation 7. The GCF should increase the overall accessibility and cost-effectiveness of the RPSP, particularly for vulnerable countries, by adjusting its strategic orientation, processes and mechanisms.**

Engaging in the RPSP has been a challenging prospect for some vulnerable countries. Adjustments to some RPSP processes and mechanisms would greatly facilitate improved accessibility and cost-effectiveness.

**7.1. The GCF should orient the new RPSP strategy to the needs of vulnerable countries.** This would allow the GCF to promote greater coverage and access for these countries. It will also provide for strategic guidance from which RPSP processes and mechanisms suited to vulnerable countries can be developed.

**7.2. The GCF should explore the possibility of creating RPSP requirements and processes that are adapted to vulnerable countries, where capacity challenges in developing Readiness proposals and implementing grants hinder the GCF's readiness ambitions in these countries.**

These adaptations could be in the processes pertaining to RPSP grant review and approval as well as greater flexibility in implementation depending on the conditions on the ground (e.g. no-cost extensions and cost reallocations).





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