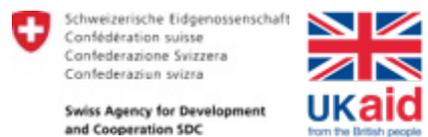


SACFP Regional Learning Forum 1

Workshop Report

22 November 2018





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1 Introduction

1.1 About the SACFP

The Southern Africa Climate Finance Partnership (SACFP)¹ seeks to support the development of a regional partnership between six countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) to enable country-owned and managed climate finance portfolios that can access funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other climate finance sources.

The project thus focuses on:

- Supporting relevant stakeholders to understand GCF policies and procedures, with a particular focus on the Gender Policy and Action Plan and the Environmental and Social Policy, and
- Supporting National Designated Authorities (NDAs) to the GCF to engage with domestic private sector actors.

In response to the challenges faced by countries in seeking to access finance from the GCF, the SACFP project seeks to promote learning and sharing across the six countries by – amongst other activities – convening two Regional Learning Forums over the project duration. There is recognition that countries in southern Africa are at various stages of accessing finance from the GCF, thus the Learning Forums are designed in a way that adds value to all countries regardless of whether they have accessed finance from the GCF, but also enables those that have been successful to guide other countries through the sharing of their experiences.



1.2 The First SACFP Regional Learning Forum

The first SACFP Regional Learning Forum was held following the 22nd Meeting of the GCF Board meeting, which saw a total of about USD1 billion in GCF investments approved. Learning Forum was held on the 25th and 26th of October 2018 in Swakopmund, Namibia. It was co-convened by SouthSouthNorth, and the Namibian Ministry of Environment and

¹ https://southsouthnorth.org/portfolio_page/southern-africa-climate-finance-partnership-sacfp/

Tourism in its capacity as Namibia's National Designated Authority to the GCF. The Learning Forum had the following objectives:

- To provide a platform for peer-to-peer sharing of experiences regarding the GCF; and
- To provide an avenue for feedback to the GCF on current realities and emerging needs of countries in southern Africa.

The Learning Forum brought together 43 participants from NDAs, Accredited Entities (AEs), and a selection of nominated AEs to the GCF. The Learning Forum focused on key issues that countries have been grappling with including accreditation, institutional arrangements, funding modalities of the GCF, and key GCF policies. The Learning Forum agenda is attached in Annex 1. The Learning Forum was hosted under Chatham House rules,² which allowed participants to share their experiences openly. This Learning Forum report therefore focuses on the key takeaways without attribution.

1.3 Structure and purpose of this report

This report contains learning regarding: NDAs in Southern Africa; developing project proposals; entities seeking to become accredited to the GCF; the experiences of AEs; and the GCF Readiness Programme. The report concludes with thoughts on next steps for the SACFP, and contains the Learning Forum agenda as an annex.

This report has been prepared as a resource to allow delegates to refer back to the Learning Forum and points that were discussed. Some delegates may find it useful as a tool to aid communication within their organisations and with related stakeholders. The report may also be used by SACFP and its partners to inform future discussions with GCF NDAs, current and potential AEs, and other interested parties working to access climate finance and to engage with the GCF.

² When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identify nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

2 Lessons from NDAs in Southern Africa

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue, and should be considered as part of the broader development agenda. It should not matter where the NDA is positioned – this decision would depend on the country context. This was reflected in the experience of a country delegate in passing a national budget line for their NDA, rather than waiting for the GCF, so they would be ready and ensure ownership of the NDA's mandate.



2.1 Key questions that a current or aspiring NDA should consider

Why are you the NDA?

A large number are located within Ministries of Environment, and these are typically not seen as being the core of coordinating a country's development agenda. However, through attracting investment from the GCF they can be used to leverage additional resources that drive the development agenda and builds on different sectors.

2.1.1 Why do you want to be the NDA?

To be a champion to catalyse development.

2.1.2 Why become accredited to the GCF?

GCF accreditation allows AEs to improve their fiduciary standards. It is advantageous for a country to have institutions with the same standards as UN agencies, and accreditation pushes institutions to build their capacity and improve themselves.

Currently, the GCF has a constrained commitment authority and requires replenishment. However the large proportion of the GCF's current funds have been allocated, thus there could be a limit to how many more institutions could become accredited without further replenishment of the GCF. The consequences of this include: increased demands and delays from the GCF Secretariat; and a perception by some GCF Board Members that there are too many Direct Access AEs.

Countries thus need to consider different strategies, including the use of regional accredited entities and which executing entities are selected to implement GCF funded projects. A nuanced understanding of the respective roles of Accredited Entities versus those of an Executing Entity is key for both NDA and AE staff.

2.1.3 Why are you doing what you do every day?

Because the NDA's primary role as a government department is to contribute to the country's development agenda.

It is not only about signing no-objection letters, however it was about setting the agenda for how climate finance should be spent within a specific country. Delegates noted that international AEs should not drive the agenda, but rather serve to implement the government's strategies that respond to climate change. One of the reasons for the need to champion Direct Access is taking charge of the country's decision making in relation to how climate finance influences the country's development agenda. To this end, strong national institutions are required (both inside and outside government) to provide opportunities to channel climate finance through local bodies that have a vested national interest in the effective implementation of a climate change project.

Accreditation and no-objection processes are not just for individual projects: consider how a project contributes to economic opportunity and creates social benefit (e.g. empowerment of youth), and then consider how to blend with other finance available (e.g. MDBs, philanthropy).

2.2 Experiences with engaging stakeholders in-country

In terms of project proposal development, projects must fit into a country's climate change priorities. When these are multi-country in nature, stakeholder relationships become critical to account for the possibility that not all countries involved may be at the same level. In addition, it is important to consult different sectors on a proposal. One delegate highlighted the critical need to keep the country's Treasury in close consultation on proposals, especially if financial instruments such as loans, sovereign guarantee, and/or government co-financing are proposed. The relevant departments and finance ministry should be consulted, to ensure the proposal aligns with national strategy, and the Chief Financial Officer of any organisations named in the proposal for co-finance should be consulted.

There are reputational risks if a project representing a country is cancelled or delayed, even if it is led by the private sector.

NDAs need to strengthen their competence to efficiently and effectively manage the no-objection process and procedure. The Secretariat has standard operating timelines for NDA responses to final project documents ahead of Board meetings. A well-prepared and capacitated process to handle the non-objection procedure mitigates that risk of proposals that are misaligned to national priorities being sent through to the Board for approval. This is particularly important for multi-country proposals where the implementations are complex and the AEs need to balance the priorities of more than one NDA. Ensuring that a country's national climate change priorities are served by each proposal is core to the principle of country ownership espoused by the GCF.

2.3 Operationalising the NDA

The no-objection process is critical to ensuring country-ownership. The experiences from the NDAs indicated that the processes they undertook included consultation with various parties, including – amongst others – the NDA; relevant government line ministries, departments, and units; treasury; private sector representatives and NGOs prior to issuing a no-objection letter.

Development partners may also be necessary to consult with to ensure there is limited risk of duplication. Some countries had national climate change committees, which had representatives from government ministries, civil society organisations and private sector representatives used to ensure the project aligned with country priorities and make recommendations on the project. The exact process is determined by the specific country context.

A delegate summarised the no-objection process in their country as follows: The NDA receives proposals for no-objection, and is responsible for assessing what is submitted, followed by consultation with the relevant government ministry; if the ministry has no objection, the project goes ahead, otherwise a reason is indicated for objection.

2.4 Key challenges and country experiences

The income status of countries is becoming a bigger issue: classification as a middle-income country affects the ability to access funding – especially with adaptation proposals – and can lead to countries being forced to take loans instead of grants. Debt sustainability is not considered in this context.

Several delegates have supported the suggestion to establish a GCF regional hub in Africa, which could assist with some of the communication blockages, and allow for more tailored and timely advice to African project proponents and NDAs. GCF guidance is required on the official process to achieve this. A delegate also suggested thinking beyond the GCF and considering the big picture: there are opportunities right now for greater engagement among NDAs, and for transcending the original role of NDAs, noting that leadership and visionary thinking attract investment.



3 Lessons learned from developing project proposals

A key element of developing project proposals for climate finance includes the clear articulation of the climate rationale. Currently this is seen as a gap, both for financiers and project developers. The GCFs understanding and articulation of the climate rationale is still maturing, with different units of the GCF such as the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) and the Board having different perspectives.

The GCF appreciates a science-based approach; which requires legitimate data on climate extremes, frequencies, vulnerabilities and the spatial extent of these. The science can be complex and often requires multiple countries' cooperation on data sharing: for example, in the Kunene Region of Namibia, the mean temperature influences wind, and therefore the Benguela Current and cloud formation, increasing vulnerabilities in one of the driest parts of Namibia. In turn, making the climate rationale for a climate intervention in the Kunene Region requires data from both Namibian and South African institutions.

There are many potential data sources, which include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). In addition some research institutions in countries in the sub-region have good data relevant for other countries. At a national level, there is data that exists, for example vulnerability assessments

The climate rationale is more challenging to demonstrate for adaptation than for mitigation. Academic research often assists in making the adaptation case where it can be well connected to the intervention being proposed. However, it is often the case where insufficient research academic literature exists which requires the project proponents to undertake primary research to make the climate rationale.

It can be difficult to differentiate a climate change project from a development project. In addition, delegates expressed the concerns of the occasional request to provide an additional rationale to demonstrate that the climate risk is human-induced. Making this attribution, especially for adaptation projects, can be extremely complex especially where baseline data is not readily available. According to a delegate, the GCF has no specific requirements for this, and it can depend on the specific GCF Secretariat staff member one is dealing with at a point in time.

There is a need to increase the capacity of local institutions to understand the climate rationale, when seeking to build resilience of communities. Local institutions may also need support in order to better define activities in response to the climate risks and vulnerabilities identified. The GCF Project Preparation Facility can be used to further scope the climate rationale of projects where there is clear potential for a GCF project proposal to be generated.

Often the AEs receive solicited or unsolicited concepts from local stakeholders looking to pursue GCF proposals in an Executing Entity capacity. Some solicited or unsolicited concepts received by AEs have a weak climate change rationale. It was noted that there could be significant impact possible by working with organisations that do not typically implement climate change projects but here the ability to make the climate rationale require capacity building *ex-ante*.

Existing climate information is useful to inform the climate rationale of project proposals. There are many potential data sources, including the IPCC, and meteorological services. There is some disparity of climate information (e.g. South Africa have good availability of climate information, while Namibia's data is not centralised to easily inform the climate rationale, although the University of Cape Town has published some research that helps with this).

While existing climate information may be available, including at the national level, very few potential applicants make use of it, and there is a lack of capacity on how to frame activities. Climate information at a national level may be used for vulnerability assessments to inform responses, and this process may be eligible for GCF PPF funding.

Delegates suggested the following, as potential elements of the approach to address the climate rationale:

- The NDA applying an internal grading scale to understand whether the climate change rationale has been addressed in concept notes;
- Arranging workshops for developers, where they are guided through proposals to help them meet requirements;
- Seeking representation from all sectors on an expert committee or bilateral consultation with an ad hoc expert grouping from a focal line ministry; and
- Seeking experts to build capacity in each sector.



4 Lessons from entities seeking to become accredited to the GCF

4.1 NDAs' perspective

Delegates discussed the strategies that countries had taken for selecting entities to become accredited to the GCF. It was suggested that the strategic essence of having multiple AEs in the country is to allow different scales and areas of investment and the type of finance sought (loans versus grant). No one institution can work effectively at each of the GCF investment scales, thus it is important for NDA's to be clear about the priorities for GCF investment. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Delegates believe there are presently too few AEs from Africa.

The process of selecting AEs can be wide ranging, gathering wide initial interest. For NDAs at a relatively early stage in GCF access, it can be useful to identify potential entities for accreditation, as this will make it easier to engage with potential AEs through their readiness programme, based on information they have already gathered.

4.2 AEs' perspective

The accreditation process can be cumbersome, taking 18 months or longer. Entities need to have a track record of at least three years to apply for accreditation. The accreditation process costs money, and need to be budgeted for in advance. Accreditation may require investment in time and resources, along with external facilitation, but a delegate recommended that effort to complete the process of accreditation comes from internal staff where possible, with the use of external consultants with a limited role, this would ensure that the institution is well-placed to operationalize the GCF policies and procedures. Notwithstanding the time, resources and expertise needed, there was the view that there is no shortcut to accreditation requirements. The entity can grow substantially during the accreditation process, and emerge as a stronger and more robust institution. International institutions sometimes see GCF accreditation as a positive indicator, and approach Direct Access AEs to partner with them.

Delegates were also concerned that GCF policies may be adding too many obstacles to the application process, and may sometimes amount to a box-ticking exercise (e.g. gender policies may be determined by a national constitution, but the GCF still demands this at institutional level). Delegates noted that new and revised policies need to be applied institution-wide, and not just a climate finance unit within the AE; and their experience has shown that such an approach is beneficial, as it makes for more coordinated, institution-wide responses to the GCF.

The GCF offers fast-track accreditation to select entities, such as those already accredited to the Adaptation Fund (AF). According to a delegate, this fast-track process may not be so fast, and still requires substantial work, although prior experience with an organisation like the AF does help. Three years down the line, the accreditation process is apparently not getting any easier, but rather becoming more arduous. At the same time, systems within the GCF are maturing, and institutional memory is becoming embedded. Based on this, entities can consider whether they need to become accredited, as they could partner with existing Accredited Entities as executing entities who implement projects.

There are already examples of potential AEs reaching out to more established ones within Southern Africa, in order to learn and inform the accreditation process. Delegates from Accredited Entities also suggested meeting face-to-face with the GCF Secretariat on the side lines of Board meetings, which they recommended to nominated entities. This allowed them to clarify issues or concerns but most importantly allowed the entities to build a relationship

with the Secretariat. A potential AE has also obtained accreditation as an observer to the GCF Board, and committed internal resources to attend some GCF Board Meetings in order to meet with Secretariat staff to discuss accreditation issues and to network with international AEs.



5 Lessons from AEs

5.1 Monitoring and evaluation

AEs must consider how to implement and deliver what they commit to, which requires a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, including monitoring of environmental and social safeguards and gender mainstreamed indicators. For each project, milestones must be agreed upon, with technical progress and financial reports agreed in the contract. As with project management generally, AEs have to complete deliverables – including reporting – before receiving the next disbursement. M&E at project level requires a lot from an AE, including a compliance analyst to make sure they do not miss deadlines, and other accountability measures.

5.2 Gender social inclusion, and Environmental and Social Safeguards

Some delegates found accreditation requirements surprisingly arduous: even where an entity has all standard organisational policies in place, these may not meet GCF standards, thus requiring: updates to existing policies; completely new policies; or new functions, like internal audit, which may require sourcing additional budget and service providers. Most delegates had to put significant work into their gender and ESS policies when applying for accreditation.

Preparing for accreditation may require entities to grow their human resources, put new structures in place, and aligning their institution with GCF requirements. Practical examples of such activities include: creating a new climate finance office within the relevant department; hiring a climate finance manager; and hiring experts in areas such as gender and ESS. Delegates noted that it can be challenging to bring issues like ESS into an organisation, and bring everyone on board, when some consider them unimportant.



6 The GCF Readiness Programme

The GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Guidebook³ is a useful resource for stakeholders considering the processes in place to assist with the Readiness Programme, along with the GCF101 online resource⁴.

Readiness funding has been used for a range of activities across the SACFP target countries:

- Upgrading the status of an AE, in line with the GCF's fit-for-purpose accreditation.
- Conducting gender analysis and the creation of a gender action plan on a proposed project. An NDA was able to create a template that could be used for future proposals – and to the country's first national workshop on gender and climate change.
- Development of a computerised ESS monitoring system, helping to integrate ESS with the M&E framework.
- Improving fiduciary standards.
- Funding interns and youth development opportunities around climate change interventions is being spurred on by GCF investments in countries.
- Scaling up adaptation: has provided scope in preparation for National Adaptation Plan (NAP) development, coming up with a stocktaking report for a NAP, along with manuals for integrating the NAP in budgeting and development planning. Developing this process further, into a full NAP, requires increased human capacity and support, and therefore readiness.
- Institutional strengthening, and building in-house capacity.

An open expression of interest call can help develop an AE's proposal pipeline, with Readiness assistance ensuring that relevant sectors are engaged throughout the process. This process can attract many expressions of interest, and yet very few may become concept notes, so it is important to ask whether or not these potential concept notes align with national priorities. While a concept note may be strong, there may be areas to improve on through conversation. Sectors appreciate being included in this open consultative process. During this process, the AE should bear in mind that their concept notes must address national priorities. This process leading up to, and through, proposal development may be helped by consultants, and by employing internal staff committed to the GCF.

A Direct Access AE may serve as a delivery partner for a readiness grant received by an NDA. While these in-country parties may be able to carry out processes to access readiness, experienced external advisors and the GCF Secretariat (including Regional Advisors) can be useful as a sounding board in the early stages – a process that was encouraged by a delegate.

A strategic framework, or country strategy for engaging the GCF was identified by delegates as a valuable tool for NDAs and other stakeholders to agree in-country. The process of preparing such a strategy document may involve developing detailed analysis of existing policies, plans and projects so working with various local stakeholder may be required to gather all the necessary data. Countries have used readiness funding for this process.

³ [https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/574766/Guidelines - Readiness and Preparatory Support Guidebook.pdf/9eea580f-a109-4d90-b281-c54695114772](https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/574766/Guidelines_-_Readiness_and_Preparatory_Support_Guidebook.pdf/9eea580f-a109-4d90-b281-c54695114772)

⁴ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/gcf101/empowering-countries/readiness-support>

Some NDAs and AEs had accessed GCF Readiness at an early stage, prior to the GCF launching the Project Preparation Facility (PPF); in some cases, the readiness work carried out at an early stage may later be better suited to the PPF.

The NDA exists to serve many sectors, but there can be a lack of understanding from some. GCF Readiness has been used to draw attention to the cross-sectoral nature of NDA work. This can include workshops to engage subnational regions according to their climate change profile, or clustering regions according to the common and shared challenges they face, then building on what the country is doing to address these challenges, through practical sessions where participants are asked to provide input to the country development strategy. This may mean reaching out to a diverse group, with different informational needs and different interests. A stakeholder engagement strategy may initially be designed for a proposal, and if successful be expanded to an institutional approach.

A delegate highlighted that Readiness was originally intended for countries to build robust and complete portfolios for the GCF, but now it is used for capacity building (e.g. workshops and seminars that do not necessarily generate portfolios), and this may lead to countries losing their readiness funding. There is also concern that GCF Structured Dialogues are not leading to enough portfolios for the GCF's pipeline.



7 Next steps for the SACFP

7.1 Setting expectations

At the start of the first Regional Learning Forum, delegates were asked to consider the goals and priorities of their countries, with regards to the GCF and other climate finance. Their responses included:

- Establishing the organisational structure of the NDA, in a capacitated and well-coordinated manner, including structures for the no-objection process;
- Getting Readiness Programmes approved, followed by strategic implementation of these Programmes;
- Better understanding of GCF processes, including GCF Investment Criteria, and GCF operational modalities;
- Commit to observing the GCF Board, to get more exposure to GCF processes;
- Continue learning from other countries
- Initiating accreditation processes in countries currently lacking AEs, including the policies required for accreditation;
- Accrediting additional entities fitting a range of categories, improving the accreditation categories of current AEs, and setting up GCF teams within current AEs;
- Ensuring that nominated AEs are accredited, and finalising outstanding accreditation processes;
- Developing concept notes and project proposals for the GCF, with an aim to increase national pipelines in coming years;
- Unblock projects and finalise arrangements for projects already stuck in the pipeline;
- Finalising country climate finance programme strategies, and national GCF strategies, with support from executive government;
- Improving climate change resilience, particularly in rural areas;
- Institutional involvement of key sectors, with a particular focus on water, and including other sectors such as energy and agriculture;
- Private sector awareness and involvement in GCF projects;
- Establishing a common strategy to scale up climate finance at a regional level; and
- Support SSN in collaborating with all target countries.

Delegates were also asked to consider burning issues with regards to gender, accreditation, environmental and social safeguards, institutional arrangements, and the climate rationale and how the GCF engages with these issues. Issues raised included the following:

- What does fit-for-purpose gender mainstreaming look like?
- Can the gender action plan be developed in-house, or is expert consultant support needed? Where can funding be sourced for this?
- What are the main challenges faced by an NDA, and nominated AEs, with regards to implementing the GCF safeguards policies?
- How can you best design integrated climate change projects for livelihoods?

At the end of the Learning Forum, delegates revisited these expectations, considering how the issues were addressed and what can be done to take them forward. Many of the issues were address during the Learning Forum, but they also represent opportunities and potential directions for the SACFP and related initiatives to take, going forward.

7.2 Coverage of SACFP Regional Learning Forum 2

The world will continue to change; this will require fast learners who can capture lessons, understand them, and implement what is required. The first Regional Learning Forum was important to NDAs, as they have knowledge to share and cannot grow in isolation; but the process must be organic, continuous, and institutionalised rather than being dependent on future events similar to the Learning Forum. Delegates found the Learning Forum useful in addressing bottlenecks and picking up tips on various GCF matters, but there is a danger of not institutionalising the knowledge and lessons shared. If dealt with correctly, such lessons can be held and replicated in other countries.

There is opportunity for harnessing and institutionalising the knowledge, expertise, and experience that was present at the Learning Forum. Delegates were encouraged to institutionalise this through a central source, which is driven by Africans, noting that there is strength in numbers and unity in diversity when working together.

Delegates called for a credible regional multi-sectoral road map to be produced eventually, including NDAs and AEs, and informing who will play what role. The Learning Forum can contribute to such a detailed road map. The SACFP's next Learning Forum will explore how this can be further supported.

7.3 Country action plans

The SACFP has previously supported the production of country strategy drafts, and this process has been built further and improved upon. The SACFP also offers support in engaging with stakeholders. In 2019, the SACFP will further help NDAs to interact more deliberately with the private sector, to increase the number of transformative projects they can bring to the GCF.



8 Annex 1: SACFP Regional Learning Forum agenda

Time	Agenda item
DAY 1	
08.30 - 09.00	Participant registration
09.00 - 09.10	Welcome
09.10 - 09.20	Introductions
09.20 - 09.30	Opening address
09.30 - 10.00	Setting expectations for the Learning Forum
10.00 - 10.15	Tea break & group photo
10.15 - 11.30	Sharing and learning from experiences of NDAs
13.00 - 14.00	Lunch
14.00 - 15.00	Management of national institutions for effective engagement with the GCF (including accreditation)
15.00	Tea break
15.00 - 16.00	Strategic considerations for accessing and utilising GCF readiness resources
16.00 - 17.00	Climate rationale
17.00 - 17.15	Wrap up
18.00 - 21.00	Dinner served
DAY 2	
06.30 - 08.30	Breakfast served
09.00 - 09.15	Reflections and outline of day 2 activities
09.15 - 10.45	Funding modalities of the GCF
10.45 - 11.00	Tea break
11.00 - 12.00	Lessons from the application of the GCF gender policy and action plan
12.00 - 13.00	Integrating environmental and social safeguards
13.00 - 14.00	Lunch
14.00 - 14.30	Mapping opportunities and next steps under SACFP
14.30 - 14.45	Wrap up and closure
15.00 - 17.00	Opportunities for bilaterals

