

The gender approach of the Green Climate Fund (GCF): leading the way for climate finance

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What distinguishes the GCF's approach to gender issues from gender policies of other financial institutions?

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is one of the most important multilateral implementation instruments for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the new Paris Agreement, and currently the largest multilateral climate fund. The GCF is the first climate fund to have taken gender into account in its operationalization from the outset, even before it adopted a dedicated gender policy and gender action plan in March 2015. The Fund already stated its commitment to a gender-sensitive approach in its Governing Instrument, making it integral to its mission and *raison d'être*. It is therefore clear that gender considerations are equally relevant to the GCF's governance and the full range of its actions, projects and financial support – both for adaptation and mitigation. This is also underscored by the fact that the Fund's Governing Instrument calls for gender parity in

the makeup of the GCF Board and the staff of the GCF Secretariat, even if this is not yet fully implemented.

This is an altogether different quality than the mere acceptance that gender is “also important”, as is the case with other climate funds that have only retroactively integrated gender into their activities, but often understand gender equality issues primarily as a part of environmental and social safeguards for project planning and implementation, or selectively integrate gender issues (e.g. in adaptation projects in particular but not in emissions reduction measures, or in documenting gender equality in consultations of affected parties, but not in budget allocation).

Perhaps the most important aspect is the signal this mandate sends to the international climate community. For example, all GCF partners who wish to propose and implement projects must document their own gender policy and gender expertise to the GCF as a condition of accreditation. This applies equally to public partner organizations such as the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and major commercial banks such as Deutsche Bank. The latter has now been compelled, for the first time in its history, to develop a gender policy in order to cooperate with the GCF in climate finance programs. The same goes for national implementation agencies in developing countries – often environmental, financial or planning agencies that have traditionally shown little interest or willingness to consider the gender dimensions of their activities. In the years since the operationalization of the Fund in 2010, the GCF and its gender approach have thus contributed significantly to lending weight and acceptance to the discussion of the gender dimension of climate finance in the international climate debate.

How have civil society organizations contributed to the development of the GCF’s gender approach?

Civil society and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (hbs) in particular played a huge part in shaping the GCF’s gender-mainstreaming approach . Civil society groups were the first to highlight gender issues in the GCF context and call for the integration and consideration of gender in the GCF Governing Instrument. Ultimately, specific technical inputs and targeted lobbying in the Transitional Committee that was tasked with drafting the GCF Governing Instrument prior to COP17 contributed to this outcome.

Civil society input to the GCF Board in the run-up to Board meetings and close cooperation with Board members ultimately prompted the Board to take key gender decisions long before the actual gender policy had been established. These concerned the development of a dedicated gender policy and action plan while simultaneously integrating gender issues into the development of operational policies related to accreditation, investment criteria and results and performance measurement frameworks. This dual approach was a deliberate strategy of civil society organizations lobbying on

gender integration in the GCF operationalization in which hbs played a leading and coordinating role.

The development of the actual gender policy finally took place with the active involvement of civil society groups – hbs North America, for example, organized several specialized workshops on the GCF's gender approach involving Secretariat staff. This cooperation and involvement of civil society expertise also established new best-practice guidelines for the nascent GCF for developing other GCF policies.

What has to happen for the GCF's gender approach to work in practice?

It is important to see the implementation as a gradual process in which not a single action or a single mandate will lead to success, but rather the interaction and implementation of numerous gender aspects in GCF climate finance as a result of institutional learning.

The approach begins with the appointment of more female Board members by member states. It also relates to the (ideally steadily increasing) gender expertise within the GCF Secretariat and its specialized bodies – for accreditation and the technical review of project and program proposals, for example – as well as the ability of GCF implementation partners to integrate gender into project design and implementation as a constitutive element for the success of GCF-funded projects or programs. The consultation of local women's organizations in the planning and implementation phase is as important as their inclusion and promotion as local implementation partners for specific parts of the projects or tasks. Accommodating necessary gender measures in project budgets, such as targeted efforts to promote women, is a precondition in this regard. It not only calls for a project-specific gender action plan (as required by the GCF Secretariat) with gender equality focused project indicators, but also regular gender-responsive results and performance measurement across the GCF portfolio as well as independent evaluations.

Ultimately, it may mostly require fresh thinking about what constitutes a good gender-responsive climate finance project. Such a project approach does not rely on addressing gender as a subordinate co-benefit, but focuses on generating multiple benefits (climate, non-climate environmental, social, economic) that benefit men and women equally and address underlying inequalities. Such a project does not necessarily need to be gender-specific, but to be sustainable over the long term, it must take fundamental principles into account such as equal participation of interested groups, a focus on the most disadvantaged population segments as the main beneficiaries of GCF projects, and implementation involving the promotion and use of local expertise and the improvement of local structures. That will often not be the project that achieves the greatest and fastest emissions reduction, but one in which emissions reduction is consistent with the protection and improvement of human and women's rights as well as local livelihoods over the long term.

To what extent can the GCF gender approach lead the way for international climate finance and bilateral donors such as Germany?

The GCF approach is groundbreaking for international climate finance and bilateral donors in so far as it mandates the relevance of systematically considering gender issues for both emissions reduction and adaptation in order to initiate an international paradigm shift in favor of low-carbon, climate-resilient development. As the largest international public climate fund with a key role for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the signal being sent by the GCF in this field cannot be underestimated. This is especially true for the private-sector climate finance institutions that the GCF particularly wishes to engage as implementation partners.

For bilateral donors like Germany that are highly engaged in building capacities for climate finance readiness with government partners in developing countries (especially in terms of their readiness for the GCF and other climate funds), this also means integrating a far stronger commitment to gender issues in their bilateral climate finance work than is currently the case. For example, the criteria for evaluating project proposals for the International Climate Initiative (ICI) should specifically call for the analysis and consideration of gender equality aspects in all ICI applications, regardless of whether they are related to emissions reduction or adaptation, and consider them as an important decision-making criterion. That is not (yet) the case.