

Access to climate finance by women and marginalised groups in the Global South

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Question

- *What are the lessons learned and best practices from initiatives aimed at engaging or financing local and national women's, Indigenous Peoples, disabled person's organisations/actors within the Global South, or other grassroots civil society organisations, in climate finance initiatives?*
- *Lessons learned around the following are most useful:*
 - *When and how to engage and finance these actors/organisations within climate action most effectively?*
 - *The impact of doing so on climate, environmental, gender equality and inclusion outcomes*
 - *Barriers to accessing climate finance faced by these actors and how to address them.*
 - *Sectors that these actors are most likely to work in.*

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1. Summary

This rapid review explores the lessons learned and best practices from climate finance initiatives aimed at engaging or financing local civil society organisations (CSOs) within the Global South; looking specifically at the benefits of engaging local actors in climate action; the barriers they face in accessing climate finance; and how to engage and finance these actors most effectively. Due to the large scope of this question and variety and complexity of climate finance initiatives, this rapid review is only able to provide a snapshot of the current literature and evidence.

There is a large and growing literature base on accessing climate finance, especially by CSOs and local organisations, and specifically on the devolution of funding. This rapid review mostly draws on literature from non-governmental sources, donors and research institutes, some academic papers are also included. In particular, the majority of literature tends to focus on the Green Climate Fund (GCF), especially CSO access to this – not necessarily because the GCF is the first best option for CSOs to access climate finance but because it is well-known and seen as the flagship fund in delivering the USD100 billion climate finance per year commitment (Hirsch, 2021). Most of the literature discussed community groups and CSOs in general, although there was literature more specific to women’s organisations and indigenous peoples. No papers were identified in the review’s limited timeframe that specifically discussed access of disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) to climate funds and finance.

Key findings:

- According to Oxfam’s Shadow Climate Finance Report 2020 (Carty et al., 2020), in 2017–18 only an estimated 20.5% of bilateral climate finance went to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and 3% to Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Furthermore, although most adaptation efforts are required at the local level, it is estimated that less than 10% of climate finance is reaching the local level (Soanes et al., 2017). The role of local actors (including women’s groups and CSOs) in climate finance decision-making processes is often very limited (Bosma et al., 2018).
- The main barriers to CSO access of multilateral climate funds (specifically the GCF) include: challenges to CSO accreditation (both complexity and costs), limited direct access, complicated project approval processes, lack of local rootedness, weak national consultation processes and lack of all-of-society country ownership (Hirsch, 2021, p. 6). The discourse on gender equality and civil social engagement associated with climate funds’ policies and modalities does not translate into significant engagement of women’s organisations and CSOs (Cooper Hall et al., 2019).
- Key lessons learned around CSO access to climate finance, their engagement, and devolution of financing converge around some key themes (which broadly reflect the principles for locally led adaptation). Namely the importance of:
 - Funding being flexible, long-term and predictable (and more of it)
 - Simple, locally-relevant policies and guidelines in local languages
 - Developing indicators and impact narratives relevant to locally led action
 - Representation of local communities and beneficiaries (especially indigenous people, women and marginalised) in decision-making mechanisms and structures (such as steering groups), avoiding hierarchical decision-making

- Entrusting indigenous (and marginalised) communities with the direct management of resources and funds
- Meaningful participation of marginalised groups (including women, people with disabilities, indigenous people etc.) in decision-making
- Relationship building and trust building between donors/implementers and local communities
- Small grants and small grants funds structures in reaching the most marginalised
- Risk taking, innovative financing and transformative change
- Sustained, early capacity support for local CSOs and community groups, as well as sensitisation to climate finance mechanisms, and information and knowledge sharing

Systemic reforms will need to be taken at various levels of the climate finance system (e.g. the project level, institutional level, national level, and international level) to ensure real, sustainable change and engagement of CSOs (Adams et al., 2014). However, every national and local context is different, therefore how these lessons apply to individual cases or contexts will differ, and advocacy or support may need to be changed accordingly.

Many research organisations and NGOs are exploring the accountability and tracking of adaptation finance, and devolving of climate finance (for example, IIED, Oxfam, WRI). In particular, a recent report by Patel et al. (2020) identifies good practice and lessons from devolving climate finance to the local level – it is highly recommended that this report is consulted for further details and more in-depth discussions of case studies and lessons.

2. Background and the importance of local climate action

Climate finance flows

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are among the World's most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, yet have contributed the least to the problem. Climate finance is delivered by a broad and expanding range of specialised climate funds, multilateral institutions, bilateral governmental donors, and a growing number of non-governmental donors (Hirsch, 2021). According to Oxfam's Shadow Climate Finance Report 2020 (Carty et al., 2020), **in 2017–18 only an estimated 20.5% of bilateral climate finance went to LDCs and 3% to SIDS**. Furthermore, it estimates that only around a third of climate finance projects overall take account of gender equality, and the different needs of men and women (Carty et al., 2020, p. 23). Of reported **public climate finance in 2017–18, an average of 25% was allocated to adaptation, 66% to mitigation and 9% to crosscutting projects** (Carty et al., 2020, p. 17).

Most adaptation efforts are required at the local level, but current climate finance mechanisms are not flowing at the scale and speed necessary to address climate impacts in vulnerable regions (DCF Alliance, 2019, p. 4). The vast majority of climate finance tends to be channelled to large financial institutions focusing on large-scale projects that do not necessarily build upon or support local efforts (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 4). **There is also a paucity of studies and publicly available data on exactly how much climate finance is flowing to the local level** and being spent in partnership with local communities, as most climate finance is not transparent enough to be tracked to its end users (Carty et al., 2020, p. 23). There is also no standard methodology to

track, monitor, and evaluate climate finance flows or decision-making processes (Krishnan, 2020, p. 3). It is also often difficult to differentiate climate finance from development finance, presenting the risk of double counting (Wong, 2016).

Soanes et al. (2017, p. 14) came up with a preliminary estimate that **less than 10% of climate finance between 2003 and 2016 (estimated at USD 17.4 billion in total) was approved for locally focused climate change projects**. The role of local actors in climate finance decision-making processes is often very limited (Bosma et al., 2018). A 2019 evidence review by the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR) highlighted how short-term, projectised, sectoral climate responses have limited impact. Furthermore, as external actors lead and define most initiatives, these fail to build capacity and deliver sustainability at the national and local levels (LIFE-AR, 2019). A similar finding was found by Dobson and Lawrence (2018, p. 12) in their review of the funding landscape for women's environmental organisations, which found that one of the major challenges faced was a lack of funding, especially unrestricted, multi-year support.

Supporting marginalised groups and indigenous peoples

It is estimated that the territories of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples cover 24% of land worldwide, and contain 80% of the world's biodiversity (Sobrevila, 2008; IPS, 2017 *both cited in* Etchart, 2017, p. 2). The Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM) for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) annual report highlights that IPLCs are responding to climate change and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, in innovative and adaptive ways that “are **rooted in community resilience, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems**” (DGM, 2020, p. 2). Until relevantly recently, indigenous peoples were viewed as victims of the effects of climate change, rather than as agents of change in environmental conservation. Representatives of indigenous peoples have been collectively engaged in lobbying for inclusion in intergovernmental climate change negotiations and decision-making since 2008, as well as by means of activism and political engagement at local and national levels (Etchart, 2017). For example, the ILO's 2017 Technical Note *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change: from Victims to Change Agents through Decent Work* identifies indigenous peoples as essential to the success of policies and measures directed towards mitigating, and adapting to, climate change (ILO, 2017).

The disproportional impact of climate change impacts on women are well documented (see Enfield & Price, 2019 for more information); they are also at the forefront of action to protect their environments but their role as agents of change are often overlooked (see Price, 2018; Bosma et al., 2018). Negative impacts of climate change will be further magnified for women who face discrimination due to other aspects of their identities (such as women with disabilities, poor women and indigenous women) (Dobson & Lawrence, 2018). Access to funding, opportunities and decision-making power are key for women to confront the myriad of environmental challenges and barriers that they face (Dobson & Lawrence, 2018). However, if climate finance and aid do not pay sufficient attention to existing gender gaps or are not ready to challenge structural inequalities, they risk reinforcing, rather than challenging, women's discrimination in access to land and public participation (Wong, 2016).

Local actors are seen by many as the ones who **can deliver more targeted, context-relevant and appropriate climate adaptation outcomes** (Smith & Greene, 2020). Action at the local level is hence fundamental to dealing with (or adapting to) climate change; much of this work at

the grassroots level is undertaken by nongovernment, community and faith-based organisations who work directly with those whose lives are affected (Maclellan & Meads, 2016, p. 9). Evidence shows that participation by women's groups and other marginalised groups increases the effectiveness of technical assistance (OECD, 2008), contributes to social justice and change (Okerere & Coventry, 2016; OECD, 2016), poverty reduction and sustainability (Salehi et al., 2015), and improves the impact of climate finance (Adams et al., 2014; Wong, 2016) and climate outcomes (Biegel & Lambin, 2021; Smith et al., 2017; Soanes et al., 2017; CBM International et al., 2019; Atmadja et al., 2020). However, continued marginalisation and gender norms exclude these groups from climate decision-making and accessing climate finance (Smith & Greene, 2020).

Communities have a wealth of lived experience and local understanding, but are excluded from prioritising investment decisions (Soanes et al., 2019, p. 5). Patel et al. (2020) argue that local actors (including local authorities, community organisations, communities, households and individuals) are more directly accountable to the poorest, therefore they should be systematically engaged and enabled to lead a significant share of climate finance investments. Furthermore, "Effectively providing climate finance to these local actors...can help address the marginalisation of the voices that matter most" and tackle interlinking challenges (such as climate change, poverty and inequality) more sustainably and effectively (Patel et al., 2020, p. 8).

According to Soanes et al. (2017, p. 3) "climate finance reaching the local level – as part of a coherent approach to climate action – delivers effective, efficient and sustainable results that enhance the impact of each dollar disbursed." Soanes et al. (2017, p. 8) highlight the following as being key reasons why this is:

- **It is easier to integrate the development and climate agendas at the local level.**
- **Women, the disabled, youth and the socially excluded can have a greater voice by setting priorities locally rather than at higher levels.**
- **Local institutions, by virtue of being closer to the ground, are more transparent and accountable to communities and build trust between government, donors and local communities through effective investment, enhancing the state-citizen contract.**
- **Local institutions can better understand the trade-offs between groups due to being better connected to local realities.**

These arguments tie into the growing movement for locally led adaptation, a new paradigm where decisions over how, when and where to adapt are led by communities and local actors. More than 40 organisations endorsed a set of Principles for Locally Led Adaptation¹, and a number of projects are underway to support these and put these principles into practice – including WRI's community of practice² and IIED's 10-year learning journey.³

¹ See <https://www.wri.org/initiatives/locally-led-adaptation/principles-locally-led-adaptation>

² See <https://www.wri.org/initiatives/locally-led-adaptation>

³ See <https://www.iied.org/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation>

Benefits of including CSOs

A working paper by Krishnan (2020, p. 3) for WRI draws on the experiences from the Adaptation Finance Accountability Initiative Phase II (AFAI II) programme in Ethiopia and Uganda, and shows that with targeted capacity building and training, CSOs can:

- Continually raise awareness and knowledge of climate-related issues within local governments and communities.
- Facilitate community-government dialogues on adaptation and resilience priorities to influence resource allocations.
- Support government efforts to devise climate finance tracking methodologies that enable more consistent resource tracking; monitoring policies and budget allocations; and
- Use this evidence to advocate for inclusion of community priorities.

Furthermore, “These experiences can inform ongoing efforts to devolve and decentralize finance and decision-making to the lowest level of government possible” (Krishnan, 2020, p. 3).

Engagement of CSOs with the large climate funds is also beneficial for accountability and transparency. According to a Toolkit for CSO engagement with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), it has been found that “when CSOs are engaged in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of GCF financed projects it is more likely that expected results, local needs and the fund’s objectives will be met through such an engagement” (Lottje et al., 2019, p. 4). According to Lottje et al. (2019, p. 12) CSO engagement with the GCF is critical as: (1) They can help to hold GCF institutions accountable to their goals and policies, which can help achieving higher credibility of results; (2) They can push for vulnerable communities to be included in the local and international GCF processes so that their interests can be voiced and their needs heard; (3) They can support the development of funding proposals that are adjusted to the local social, cultural and political contexts; (4) They can identify and support synergies with learnings from other climate finance funds due to the large and diverse CSO networks active around the globe; and (6) The involvement of civil society can contribute to the implementation of more legitimate, effective and cost-efficient GCF projects and policies.

The importance of the inclusion of local CSOs, organisations and people to ensure the success of development and climate initiatives was clearly brought home during the **COVID-19** pandemic, where INGOs and donor agencies were separated from the communities they work with (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 26). **Those who had invested in local capacity and local leadership were able to utilise this to continue their work** (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrates how across the world, locally based organisations were often the first responders to the pandemic, they were able to adapt and respond quickly to meet the needs of their communities and nurture community leaders and local networks (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 27).

3. Barriers to accessing climate finance

Despite the evidence of the benefits of channelling climate and development finance directly to the local level, it is not the norm. There are many barriers to CSOs and local actors accessing climate finance or climate finance reaching the local level. These include:

- Requirements and gender considerations:** Women and women's groups often face greater difficulties in accessing climate financing, due to inequities with regard to such eligibility requirements as asset ownership, business skills, access to information and membership in cooperatives (Atmadja et al., 2020). Most international climate funds now have gender policies or gender action plans and are applying a gender lens to climate finance. However, these are seldom enough, and mechanisms have yet to demonstrate significant enhanced engagement and sustainable participation at the grassroots level from women's organisations (Cooper Hall et al., 2019, p. 7). The burden remains on women's organisations to meet the demands and structures of the funding mechanisms. The systematic integration of gender equality in all aspects and levels of a fund is needed. Including in its governance structure, public participation mechanisms (including women's representative groups) for funding priorities and project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation (Schalatek, 2020).
- Fund design and metrics of success:** The investment strategies of many funds prioritise large-scale results, which often deprioritise services to the local level; traditional financing intermediaries (e.g. multilateral development banks) are less able to finance small-scale projects directly, given the higher transaction costs; although a range of innovative financial instruments are available, few of these have been used suggesting a low tolerance to risk in funds; local management capacity is often a barrier to financing, with concerns over financial mismanagement, but few funds provide capacity support or factor enough time for building local capacity (Soanes et al., 2017, p. 4). The complexity of the GCF language and its modalities, limited access to GCF information and knowledge, and the lack of capacity support or resources to engage with the fund can all present challenges to CSO engagement with multilateral climate funds (Lottje et al., 2019, p. 12).
- Complex accreditation processes:** The complex and time-consuming accreditation process for the GCF is a commonly highlighted barrier to CSO access. "CSOs, especially local CSOs in developing countries, are disproportionately disadvantaged in the accreditation process [of the GCF], given the Fund's high fiduciary principles, the environmental and social safeguards that are designed for the private sector, and other legal and formal requirements" (Hirsch, 2021, p. 17). Not only is the GCF accreditation process very complicated for CSOs, but the associated costs to applicants can also be prohibitive, especially to smaller local CSOs (Hirsch, 2021, p. 33).
- Political, technical and financial factors:** As a result of the GCF's country ownership, country "drivenness" and no-objection approaches, "CSOs are dependent on the full support of their national government to apply for funding for a project in their country. This requires a level of trust between CSOs and the government, which is not always a given in many developing countries" (Hirsch, 2021, p. 34). The technical requirements, time horizons and costs of the application process further complicate access to GCF finance. The "lack of clarity with regard to expected co-financing, as well as the assumed preference of the GCF to provide concessional loans instead of grants, combined with a great leverage effect on private finance, disproportionately affects CSOs because of their limited financial resources" (Hirsch, 2021, p. 34).

4. Lessons learned on how to engage and finance local marginalised groups

When reading the following section it is paramount to bear in mind that every national and local context is different. The following are some general lessons learned around engaging civil society in climate finance mechanisms and the devolution of climate financing. However, how these apply to individual cases or contexts will differ, and advocacy or support may need to be changed accordingly. Furthermore, much of the below information is taken from documents aimed at the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and improving access for CSOs to this specifically.

Devolving climate financing

Soanes et al. (2019, p. 5) argue that current climate financing is dominated by donors making decisions in distant headquarters and funders retaining heavy financial controls and reporting requirements, resulting in “low-risk, late-stage climate financing that offers limited support to newly established funds working at the local level.” A recent review by Patel et al. (2020) for IIED highlights lessons for strengthening devolved climate financing. The report draws from wide consultations, expert interviews and desk research to present evidence of how a selection of climate funds are delivering devolved climate finance across six good climate finance principles based upon IIED’s ‘Money Where it Matters’ research.⁴ Patel et al. (2020) highlight that **fully devolved climate financing gives local people agency over decision making**. For example, the GCF and the Adaptation Fund (AF) both have Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) financing windows, the GEF has a more mitigation-focused Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the CIF’s dedicated grant mechanism established under the Forest Investment Programme (FIP) supports forest-use practices led by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. However, from the case studies reviewed, Patel et al. (2020, p. 7) find that **fully devolved climate finance appears limited (both in size and predictability) and short-term, and is mostly aimed towards engagement (rather than seeking higher degrees of localisation by supporting local people’s agency)**. Patel et al. (2020, p. 7) recommend climate funds “review their funding procedures, structures and portfolios against these six climate finance principles, reflecting on how they can better promote an empowerment-based approach by”:

- **Providing simple, locally relevant policies and guidelines in local languages**
- **Accepting video submissions and audio descriptions of project objectives**

⁴ These 6 principles are (Patel et al., 2020, pp. 5-6):

- **Principle 1. Subsidiarity:** Making decisions as close as possible to those most affected enables place-based design, local relevance and greater accountability to the poorest, excluded and marginalised.
- **Robust decision making:** Building local stakeholders’ understanding of climate risk and uncertainty indicators ensures their decisions consider current and future climate risk and generational (local and traditional) knowledge.
- **Principle 3. Patient and predictable:** Climate finance is needed on long-enough timescales to enable risks to be taken, capacities to be built and learning to happen.
- **Principle 4. Flexible:** Because no adaptation intervention is perfect, flexible programming is crucial.
- **Principle 5. Risk taking:** Investing in institutions with little or no climate finance management experience and developing capacity early on is vital.
- **Principle 6. Converged:** No single project, investment or institution can address all climate risks or vulnerabilities, so converging actions and investments across funders and governments is key.

- **Avoiding hierarchical decision making that reinforces two-way (upward and downward) accountability and compliance**
- **Developing guidelines for locally relevant and robust adaptation principles that enable generational knowledge to be integrated with climate science**
- **Providing more patient finance over at least ten years**
- **Investing early in capacity building and learning to build institutional legacies**
- **Favouring learning-by-doing over ambitious resilience results frameworks**
- **Developing indicators that support locally led action**
- **Enabling greater budget flexibility**

Previous research by Soanes et al. (2017, p. 27) around getting international climate finance to the local level identified five enablers to be prioritised in reforming the architecture of funds to promote local level climate finance. Namely: **local priorities reflected within funding results and investment frameworks, the use of small grants and innovative financing, simplified access and project approval procedures, and the use of participatory processes, from project selection through to the evaluation of results.**

Supporting “frontier funds”

Soanes et al. (2019, p. 7) more recently have highlighted evidence on how local, frontier funds have “empower[ed] communities to tackle poverty, improve their resilience, protect carbon sinks and reduce emissions, building an institutional legacy through subsidiarity, community agency and rights.” They refer to frontier funds as local funds that are capable of providing money for community priorities and local action at the frontier of climate change (Soanes et al., 2019, p. 8). Many of these frontier funds emerged from social movements for tackling inequitable access to resources. For example, the local **Dema Fund** supports indigenous peoples, women, Afro-Brazilians and subsistence farmers in the Brazilian Amazon, and the **Tree Bank Foundation** supports smallholder farmers in Thailand. Soanes et al. (2019, p. 7) provide seven good practices for development partners to improve climate finance and nurture young frontier funds:

1. **Providing local finance and aggregation strategies with accountable targets**, improving support and scaling up finance to create a clear roadmap with concrete goals for getting finance to local actors.
2. **Prioritising intermediation through credible and innovative institutions** with a track record of brokering that supports good practice in national funding mechanisms that reach the frontier.
3. **Providing clear rules of engagement**, including stricter time-bound roles requiring partners to support local institutions until they can access finance independently.
4. **Using participatory processes** to identify and develop project indicators and results management frameworks that incentivise outcomes and more strategic investments.
5. **Increasing small, simple and patient funding** to incubate frontier funds and other national institutions with real reach to communities and measuring success in terms of their ability to scale up and access lower-risk funding over time. Grants outside the government system could stimulate innovation to hold government to account.

6. **Supporting national governments to recognise potential and develop platforms** that build bridges between communities, national policymakers and other actors and create an enabling national environment.
7. **Embracing technology to enhance the transparency of financial flows and give communities a voice in** resource allocation; informing local communities of the benefits and risks of emerging digital technologies and empowering them to engage in their design and governance.

The GCF's Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) mechanism

The GCF has an Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) modality that enables national entities to make independent funding decisions and has the potential to devolve funding and decision-making to the local level (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 8). The EDA is aimed at trying to ensure that more multilateral climate finance addresses national, sub-national and local-level priorities through enabling national “direct access” entities (DAEs) to make independent funding decisions. It was approved by the GCF Board in 2015, with an initial five-year EDA Pilot Phase with an original allocation of USD200 million to support at least 10 EDA pilot projects. The objective of the pilot phase is to operationalise EDA modalities. However, according to the EDA section of the GCF website only two projects have been approved so far (as of 13 May 2021)⁵, and there is no indication of whether the pilot will be extended or become a permanent access modality under the GCF. Although the GCF recently released EDA guidelines (in January 2021) indicating that the pilot is continuing. These guidelines aim to clarify the features that distinguish EDA projects and programmes from other ones; they emphasise the main role of local actors (including community-based organisations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), indigenous people’s associations, local governments, women’s unions, etc.) in being active agents of change in EDA proposals and embedding gender considerations in EDA projects (GCF, 2020, pp. 4-6).

Bosma et al. (2018, p. 8) emphasise the need for active promotion and local capacity development support to make EDA a success. However, also highlight that there are still many obstacles for devolution of funding to overcome – including entrenched negative views of local communities by Ministries of Environment (who are often National Designated Authorities (NDAs)); and the (often) lack of capacity at the community level, which needs to be built over time throughout a programme (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 9). Taking inspiration from Nepal’s Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPAs)⁶, Bosma et al. (2018, p. 11) suggest the following lessons for successful devolution of funds:

- **Invest in existing national systems:** EDA modality should emphasise using and strengthening existing institutions within countries, as this is efficient and enlarges the accountability, understanding and appreciation of climate action in local entities. New systems should be created where they are lacking.
- **Make the right choice through participatory processes:** To ensure location- and community-specific designs, participatory processes are key.

⁵ See <https://www.greenclimate.fund/eda> [accessed 13/05/2021]

⁶ Nepal committed to channelling at least 80% of financial resources available for climate change to the local level in its 2011 Climate Change Policy. Around 100 local governments in western Nepal were selected to develop Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPAs) to do this (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 11).

- **Set a gender equality goal and be serious about achieving it.**

Indigenous peoples and local communities

The Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM) for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) was established by the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) in 2010 to enhance the role of IPLCs in protecting the forests they depend on, it is implemented by the World Bank and is investing USD80 million globally to support community-led, context-specific programmes that draw on local expertise. The DGM recognises the key role IPLCs have in protecting and stewarding forests and also aims to elevate their voices in local, national and global climate action. The DGM provides grants to IPLCs to develop and implement subprojects of their choice, and capacity building for IPLC organisations. The DGM includes 12 country projects tailored to specific national contexts and an international Global Learning and Knowledge Exchange Project (DGM, 2020, p. 4).

A 2019 Learning Review found evidence that the DGM is leading to broader and potentially more transformational effects than its initial theory of change had predicted (Douthwaite et al., 2019). The DGM has shown that IPLC organisations can work as direct counterparts with multilateral development agencies, proposing and implementing their own projects.

The learning review highlights the following main lessons learned from implementing the DGM (Douthwaite et al., 2019, pp. xiv-xvii, 73):

- **Catalysts to DGM operationalisation – commitment, time and trust:** A large part of the DGM's formative success is owed to people who recognise the importance of making a commitment to IPLCs and building trust gradually thereafter. This became a self-reinforcing process: trust and social capital have been built as individuals and organizations collaborated to design and implement projects that met the World Bank procedural and fiduciary requirements.
- **Local accountability, ownership and flexibility:** All DGM respondents in the Learning Review valued the core feature of the DGM: that IPLCs, through the National Steering Committee (NSC), act as the principal counterpart to the World Bank. In the countries reviewed, this principle has not been challenged by the inclusion of INGOs acting as the National Executing Agency (NEA), which take fiduciary responsibility for the grants given. However, the DGM's design is also sufficiently robust to allow for adaptations to different country contexts. Certain aspects have slowed the progress of establishing the DGM. At the country level, the necessarily exacting fiduciary requirements of the World Bank caused frustration and delays. However, the procedural requirements ultimately had unexpected value, and IPLC leaders and sub-project implementers mentioned that complying with them gives a 'gold stamp' of approval for the technical quality of the mechanism and/or the sub-projects being delivered through it.
- **Key considerations in design include:**
 - **Finding a size and composition of the National Steering Committee that is manageable, representative and inclusive.**
 - **Determining how the National Executing Agency can contribute and remain interested in the DGM while being subsidiary to the National Steering Committee.**

- **Choosing whether to use an open procurement model for selecting local-level sub-projects, balancing between the potential to achieve greater impact with already technically viable sub-projects or improving the National Steering Committee’s ability to operate a grant mechanism and focusing on areas of greater need.**

Early engagement, sensitisation and building CSOs capacities

CSOs often have less capacity than large international institutions to meet the stringent requirements and criteria of the multilateral climate funds, this is especially the case with many local women’s organisations (Cooper Hall et al., 2019, p. 20). There is need for better sensitisation, information and understanding of the GCF (and climate finance funds in general) among CSOs and better support for CSO participation at the national level (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 18). Lottje et al. (2019) emphasise **the need to scale-up existing CSO capacities and strengthen the engagement of civil society actors in the GCF processes**, using case studies in Kenya, Malawi and Morocco that are part of the project “CSO readiness for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) – Focus Africa.”⁷ The case studies found that “Enhancing meaningful CSO participation in the GCF national processes and engagement with [National Designated Authorities (NDAs)], [Accredited Entities (AEs)] ... is a critical activity in national readiness processes” (Lottje, 2019, p. 16). A study by Atmadja et al. (2020), exploring how climate finance can contribute to gender transformative change and sustainable pro-poor co-benefits over the long term at national and sub-national levels in Indonesia, emphasises the importance of early engagement. If women (and women’s groups) were not engaged from the beginning of climate projects the result was a negative impact for the sustainability of the actions and the climate finance investment.

Capacity building and information sharing in both urban and rural areas is a first step in CSO engagement (Lottje, 2019, p. 16). The toolkit also recommends using different channels (such as workshops and social media) to spread information amongst CSOs at the national and local levels. There are a number of initiatives that have been setup in response to the information gap supported by other donors as GCF readiness funds cannot currently be accessed directly by CSOs. For example, the CSO Readiness to the GCF in Africa project was initiated by the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), Germanwatch, CARE, and others in 2017. The Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) works in Indonesia, Nepal, and Mongolia (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 19). CSOs have tried to fill the information and communication gap by starting their own website, GCF Watch.⁸ The Women Demand Gender-Just Climate Finance initiative was set up by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and Both ENDS (Both ENDS as a member of GAGGA); three women from each Southern region (Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Africa) are serving as “GCF Monitors” (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 25).

⁷ See also for example, the project *Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society’s Access and Readiness for Climate Finance*, implemented by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and supported by IISD and Climate Analytics, running from June 2019 to July 2021. <https://www.iisd.org/projects/enhancing-caribbean-civil-societys-access-and-readiness-climate-finance>

⁸ See <https://www.gcfwatch.org/>

There have been suggestions that the GCF should differentiate its accreditation categories further by providing flexibility and support to smaller entities in the accreditation process (Bosma, 2018, p. 7). At the same time, the GCF can actively stimulate larger international entities to enhance local engagement in their programmes, fulfil their required mentoring role toward potential new direct access entities, and channel smaller amounts of funding to the local level (Bosma, 2018, p. 7).

A joint WRI/Oxfam/ODI report by Terpstra, Carvalho and Wilkinson (2015) looking at tracking adaptation finance, also flags the need for Southern CSOs to be more transparent themselves. Especially in relation to information sharing on their activities at the national and local levels. This would enhance their own transparency with respect to national actors, and facilitate coordination at the local level (Testra et al., 2015, p. 47). In order to do this, **some CSOs will need to build essential capacities in order to be able to process, analyse or use available information.** Partnerships with other CSOs and the media across different sectors and areas of expertise can also strengthen civil society capabilities and strengthen their voice.

Women's organisations are not always in a position to connect their local-level climate issues or work with national and international financing structures (e.g. NDAs) and priorities (Cooper Hall et al., 2019, p. 21). **Clear communication between climate funds and local actors (and national structures) is essential for both local and gender-responsive financing, and to ensure accountability and transparency** (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 7). Bosma et al., (2018) argues that the GCF does not have any official channels or mechanisms to support direct communication between itself and local actors. It fails to communicate in a targeted way with CSOs and local actors. There hence needs to be a better mechanism "to ensure an iterative three-way exchange and comprehensive dialogue between the GCF, its operating entities, and affected communities or their representatives" (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 22). Bosma et al. (2018) also argue that the GCF Board should **provide mandatory guidelines and direct support for NDAs to facilitate comprehensive multi-stakeholder dialogues to assure inclusive, gender-responsive decision-making processes** in national priorities and plans for the GCF. NDAs can act as obstacles to engagement of certain stakeholders and communities with the GCF, especially in less democratic countries with less civic participation. Furthermore, many NDAs sit in ministries of environment or finance, which women's organisations do not always have strong relationships with (Cooper Hall et al., 2019, p. 20). Currently, countries are only bound to "best practice guidance." There needs to be recognition that country ownership goes beyond government ownership, and needs to confront existing power structures in regard to NDAs or focal points for example (Bosma et al., 2018).

Make use of existing small grants funds structures

Bosma et al. (2018, p. 7) suggest that the **GCF make use of the innovative financial infrastructure that already exists in regional and national small grants funds to channel big money in flexible, smaller amounts to local civil society actors.** Arguing that "a solid infrastructure of regional and national small grants funds, particularly women's funds, already exists" providing a bridge between the GCF and the local people and groups directly addressing climate impacts (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 15). These small grants funds (those that provide grants of between USD 1,000 and USD 150,000) are experts in funding grassroots, often women-led, groups, and are better situated than the GCF itself to make this kind of grant-making. These funds also have experience in channelling "vital information and knowledge to local actors and

help build networks between them” (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 15). The small grants funds face obstacles in accessing GCF funds, including the long and complex GCF accreditation process that requires significant investments of time and resources and does not guarantee approval of a project proposal. The need for approval from the national NDA could also be problematic as local grassroots organisations or small grants funds may have strained, adversarial relationships with NDA organisations (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 16).

Kraan and Wensing (2019, p. 10) argue that “**small grants are specifically designed to bring power to the disempowered” and marginalised**. They are part of “a system-shifting paradigm in philanthropy, where more initiatives are starting to work through community-led or participatory grant-making and enhancing community philanthropy” and empowerment (Kraan & Wensing, 2019, p. 10). In a study exploring small grant funds, Kraan and Wensing (2019, p. 15) conclude that, although showing impact can be difficult, there is ample evidence that small grants are able to make an impact, and that **their key added value (compared to other mainstream funding mechanisms) is their ability to reach disempowered and marginalised groups that other funds struggle to reach**. This is mainly because small grants funds are more flexible and less burdensome in terms of due diligence and operational requirements, making them more accessible to these groups (Kraan & Wensing, 2019, p. 56).

Experiences of small grants in building resilience

A discussion paper by PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK and Tewa (2021) explores the building resilience in international development using small grants and local actors through a number of case studies and what were their success factors:

- Tewa is a women's fund in Nepal established in 1995, its programme Hamro Tewa Gaun Ghar (HTG) came into existence immediately after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The programme was initiated to help earthquake survivor families and women to support their lives in the face of trauma and tragedies. Tewa offers discretionary grants giving priority to the women on the ground. Drawing from the experience of this programme, the paper highlights that “the presence of a civil society locally has been crucial to resilience in times of trouble. When the government was nowhere, it was civil society, NGOs and INGOs that acted immediately” (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 14). **Respect for the survivor community** has been a key element to Tewa's resilience building – to consider local people's needs and feelings by approaching them with sensitivity and trust. **Flexibility and responsive programme design** are also key.
- Global Greengrants Fund is a participatory grant-maker (making about 1000 small grants of USD5,000 or less per year), supporting grassroots initiatives working for environmental and social justice through a network of 150 voluntary advisors, who recommend partners for funding, and act as mentors (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 18). Their work demonstrates **the importance of local knowledge in building resilience to climate impacts, and that “cultural knowledge transfer and intergenerational learning are important strategies to build community resilience”** (PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 19). For example, in East Flores, Indonesia, the fund supported a group of women sorghum farmers (YASPENSEL) who had realised that the rice they were planting was vulnerable to climatic changes, needing pesticides to survive. The women collected local knowledge about traditional staples and

ended up reintroducing sorghum (a climate resilient and nutritionally superior plant to rice) into their farming practices.

Global Greengrants Fund UK (2019) compiled findings from a review of 43 grants distributed across Pacific Island communities working on climate and environmental sustainability in the period 2016-2018 into a learning study, asking how small grants help communities build resilience to climate change. Overall, “they found **that a flexible, community-based approach to funding, especially in the aftermath of cyclones, strengthened not only community infrastructure, but also strengthened relationships and processes** – equally necessary foundations for resilience” (Global Greengrants Fund UK, 2019, p. 2). The paper found four reinforcing lessons of grant-making (Global Greengrants Fund UK, 2019, p. 3; PSJP, Global Greengrants Fund UK & Tewa, 2021, p. 20):

1. **Communities know their own needs well, probably better than anyone else, and when there is community ownership and buy-in, change can be long lasting.**
2. **Investing in people and relationships is critical to both the immediate and long-term success of any climate-smart investments.** At its core, resilience building is relationship-building. Relationships are our most important social capital, something which has become abundantly clear again during the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures.
3. **Granting through local advisors⁹ provides immeasurable technical and strategic support to the learning and connectedness of grantee communities.** Community leadership is enhanced through an intermediary expert layer that can help make connections and aggregate learning.
4. **Intentional learning and exchange should be built into projects,** as they contribute to resilience, and benefit both communities and advisors.

Direct vs indirect access¹⁰

A recent academic paper by Manuamorn and Biesbroek (2020, p. 139) applies a new framework to systematically assess the level of community focus in 63 Adaptation Fund projects (approved as of May 2017), comprising 22 direct-access and 41 indirect-access projects. They found that **direct-access projects are more community-focused than indirect-access projects** because they exhibit higher community-oriented financial, participatory, and devolutionary characteristics. **But “they found no difference between the direct-access and indirect-access projects with regard to how they are designed to promote policy adoption and replicability of AF project-financed adaptation actions** through policy and geographical mainstreaming” (Manuamorn & Biesbroek, 2020, p. 139). They emphasise that their findings are based on project documents that provide only partial views. They highlight that the community-focused adaptation projects are present under both access modalities to the AF, and many

⁹ In the Global Greengrants Fund, advisors are well-informed and well-connected environmental and social organising professionals who live and work in the same countries where grantees are confronting their environmental and community challenges (Global Greengrants Fund, 2021, p. 5).

¹⁰ Direct access to climate funds allows national institutions in developing countries to access international climate finance directly without using international intermediaries such as multilateral development banks (Manuamorn & Biesbroek, 2020).

Multilateral Implementing Entities that implement indirect-access projects also engage local stakeholders as actively as, or even more than, some National Implementing Entities. Suggesting that **direct-access modality will not automatically mean community level outcomes**. This emphasises the need for careful project design to ensure engagement and devolvement to the local level. They also emphasise the need for meaningful capacity building for community members and organisations, taking into account differing initial capacities and vulnerabilities, to ensure that they can meaningfully participate in the identification and design of these adaptation projects. Manuamorn and Biesbroek (2020, p. 139) also argue that community actors “need to be empowered to meaningfully participate as decision makers and beneficiaries in both access modalities by more active use of concrete mechanisms such as a small grant facility.”

Funding women’s groups

A report by Dobson and Lawrence (2018) for the Global Greengrants Fund and Prospera, provides insights about the funding landscape for women’s environmental action. From their research they found that a common concern among funders interviewed “was a sense of not knowing how to begin identifying opportunities for supporting women and the environment in ways consistent with their current grant-making priorities” (Dobson & Lawrence, 2018, p. 34). The report identified the following funder lessons:

- **A key first step for donors that want to have better results is to ask grantees and funding applicants about the gender-differentiated impacts of the problems they seek to address** and whether they are involving those most affected in the development of solutions (p. 18).
- **Fund locally led campaigns that address environmental and/or women’s rights issues, and have the flexibility to support efforts that address local needs.** When activists are the targets of spurious lawsuits or unjust detention, provide funding for legal aid, trial observation, and post-imprisonment support, such as when a grant recipient may need medical care or assistance with housing (p. 21).
- **Supporting exchanges between women to share knowledge can be an important strategy** to support improved food security, environmental restoration, biodiversity, girls’ education, and women’s participation and leadership. (p. 23).
- **For funders with a narrow thematic focus, providing flexible funding, which allows for tailoring of support to address community needs, would enable organizations to respond more holistically and ultimately deliver better results** (p. 25).
- **Small grants have big impact.** For example, the Pari Women’s Development Association (PWDA) in Papua New Guinea helped restore entire coastline ecosystems and local livelihoods with less than USD10,000, reducing carbon emissions (mitigation), and protecting coastal communities from rising sea levels (adaptation) (p. 27).
- **Funding training and capacity-building for women regarding disaster risk reduction and adapting to climate change is critical** to developing community resilience to natural disasters. Women who are more marginalized, such as indigenous women living in rural areas, often have even less access to government resources, and need access to training and support to be able to protect their families and communities in future disasters (p. 29).

- **The right amount of money at the right time can mobilize critical action with lasting impact.** Small grants can have outsized impact by supporting local solutions aimed at both protecting the environment and supporting women. For example, the women-led Forum for Community Change and Development used a grant of just USD 5,000 from Global Greengrants to launch a campaign to train women in the Yei region, South Sudan to build and use improved cooking stoves requiring 75% less firewood than traditional stoves. Women and girls in the community now spend less time gathering firewood and inhaling smoke, and have more time for things like attending school (p. 31).
- **It is important for funders to support women to develop their own culturally appropriate solutions to protect their natural resources, which may look quite different than the strategies used by men.** While these approaches may not always be obvious, they can have a greater impact than “traditional” strategies (p. 33).

Empowering marginalised and indigenous peoples’ groups

The Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF)

Some smaller-scale philanthropic initiatives are emerging to try to support those most affected by climate change. For example, the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) was launched by the Oak Foundation with USD 20 million in recognition of the lack of rights-based and community empowerment-focused funding to address climate change (Dobson & Lawrence, 2018, p. 13). It is dedicated to empowering women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples to create and share their own solutions (McGinn et al., 2020). A mid-term review of the CJRF was undertaken by ISET-International and found the following key insights (McGinn et al., 2020, p. 1):

- CJRF is most successful when it **finances community-driven (not just community-based) approaches and advocacy.**
- CJRF is to be especially **commended for bypassing a prosaic path of ‘technical’ solutions in favour of developing leaders, building movements, and pursuing transformational change at the local level.** CJRF is focused on the how (i.e., empowering grassroots action and marginalised constituencies).

Lessons learned from the experiences of partners in the CJRF, gathered from a learning event in January 2021 discussing the mid-term review, include (CJRF, 2021):

- **Empowering those first hit by the climate crisis holds potential for breakthrough change.** CRJF supports partners to create and share their own climate solutions based on first-hand experiences and knowledge; with **flexibility** being key to the success of this strategy – giving partners space and freedom to create and innovate.
- **Joint learning among CJRF partners and the broader global community will strengthen collective understanding, insight, and long-term outcomes.** Experimentation—trial, error, adjustment, and iterative improvement cycles—takes time, often years or sometimes longer, especially when addressing entrenched barriers and inequities. Many CJRF partners at the event felt more (joint) learning from each other’s insights and external actors will strengthen strategies and impact.
- **To realize lasting, long-term change, funders must consider depth versus breadth of funding support, as well as longevity of commitment.** The longevity and depth of

fundings' commitment to strategies, geographies, and constituents were highlighted as critical success factors for supporting meaningful change on equity and resilience. Collaboration among a range of funders represents one way for a small, focused portfolio to inform broader funding decisions. Further, CJRF can emphasize that enabling the change needed requires long-term commitment and stamina, not expecting structural inequalities and norms to change quickly or for transformational change to be realized in a few years or grant cycles.

- **Transformative change requires clarity around the connections between local work and larger-scale systems.** A focus on grassroots, bottom-up approaches would be strengthened with clearer connections to broader systems-level change and global priorities. It is important to ensure that local- and global-level efforts inform and reinforce each other. This poses a challenging balancing act for funders such as CJRF.
- **Meeting the depth and urgency of the challenge requires many hands. The current “perfect storm” of global crises underscores the need for capacity support and solidarity.** This was not only in CJRF, which has a lean, two-person staff, but also of partners.

IFAD experiences engaging with indigenous peoples

The Indigenous Peoples' Assistance Facility (IPAF)¹¹ is an innovative funding instrument established in 2007 and administered by IFAD, that enables indigenous communities to invest in solutions to the challenges they face; with the objective being to strengthen indigenous peoples' communities and their organisations. It finances small projects, designed and implemented by indigenous peoples' communities and their organisations through small grants of up to US\$50,000 (IFAD, 2021). The Facility is co-managed at the regional level by indigenous peoples' organisations and is governed by a board made up of indigenous peoples' representatives. Hence, indigenous peoples assume a key decision-making role in the fund's operations (IFAD, 2021, p. 4). Key lessons that have influenced the design of the IPAF include (IFAD, 2021. P. 4):

- Entrusting indigenous communities with the direct management of resources and funds can **considerably improve capacity-building and self-determined development.**
- **Small amounts for small communities can make a big difference**, particularly in building capacities and strengthening institutions and organisations.
- **Learning is a two-way street**; IPAF–IFAD synergies are created to improve mutual knowledge, ensure the complementarity of different interventions and explore opportunities for collaboration.
- **IPAF project approaches are broad and inclusive, multisectoral and integrated.** Projects are guided by a holistic vision in which approaches encompass, combine and connect various issues and dimensions.

IFAD (2021) recently produced a paper sharing good practices for engagement with indigenous peoples capitalising on IFAD's experience in more than 30 years of engagement with indigenous peoples, investment projects and the IPAF. In particular, the paper highlights that:

¹¹ See <http://www.ifad.org/ipaf>

- IFAD-funded projects that target indigenous peoples do not only enhance their livelihoods, but activities are also designed to: (i) secure ownership of and/or access to ancestral land and territories by indigenous peoples; (ii) strengthen their institutions; (iii) ensure free, prior and informed consent (FPIC); (iv) value indigenous knowledge systems; and (v) document and report the outcomes of the consultations with indigenous peoples.
- The implementation of FPIC is particularly relevant, as it is a specific right that pertains to indigenous peoples recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that brings multiple benefits (e.g. it improves the relevance and quality of investments and minimizes reputational, operational and fiduciary risks). FPIC is not merely the right to say “yes or no” to externally initiated actions, but it is intimately linked to the right of indigenous peoples to determine their own priorities for development, to fully participate in and shape development initiatives, and to avoid adverse impacts.
- Indigenous peoples’ knowledge is key in IFAD projects, as it provides important insights into the processes of observation, adaptation and mitigation of the consequences of climate change. Strengthening indigenous peoples’ knowledge systems and blending them with appropriate modern technology has proven effective.
- Engaging in partnerships with indigenous peoples’ organizations to design and deliver appropriate and tailored interventions is also important.
- In terms of appropriate M&E, in addition to IFAD’s requirement of disaggregating data by indigenous peoples where appropriate, project M&E systems also include indicators relevant to the socio-cultural specificities of indigenous peoples. IFAD has learned that **socially disaggregated data and monitoring on specific indicators relevant to indigenous peoples’ well-being are required to continuously track outreach and outcomes, understand the effectiveness** of project strategies for different social groups and adjust those strategies, as necessary.

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