Green Climate Fund (GCF)
Concept Note Development Guidebook
for Asia-Pacific Region 2025

Summary

AP-PLAT
Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Information Platform

Produced by
Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Platform (AP-PLAT) and Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

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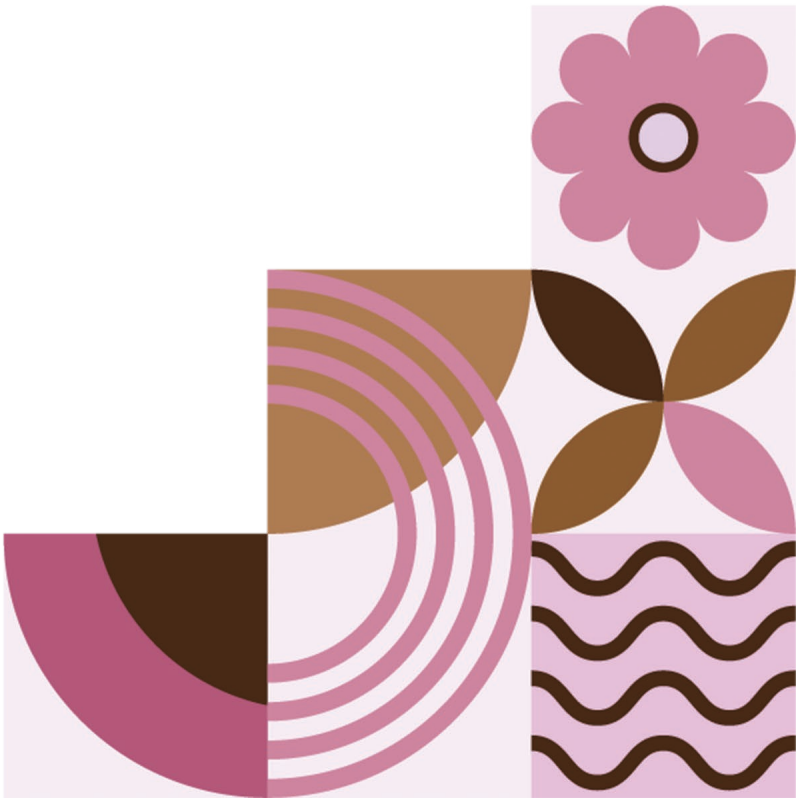

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1 Purpose, Audience, and Scope of the Guide

This guidebook is designed to support government officials, administrators, and project coordinators across the Asia-Pacific region in preparing and developing the Concept Note (CN) for the Green Climate Fund (GCF). It specifically targets stakeholders in developing countries, with a focus on Small Island Developing States (SIDs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which are highly vulnerable to climate change and often face significant capacity gaps in accessing climate finance. While the content is tailored for GCF adaptation projects, the fundamental principles of project design, stakeholder engagement, and risk assessment are broadly applicable to various other climate adaptation initiatives. This guide complements the web-based content provided by the AP-PLAT by offering more detailed and practical information.

2 The Strategic Importance of the Concept Note

The CN is a critical, though optional, first step in the GCF application process. Submitting a CN is highly recommended as it functions as a concise summary that allows project proponents to test the feasibility of their ideas and receive early, strategic feedback from the GCF Secretariat. This proactive approach helps ensure alignment with GCF's investment criteria, reduces the risk of rejection at a later stage, and streamlines the development of the FFP. A high-quality CN clarifies the project's objectives and climate rationale, which is often a major bottleneck for developing countries (Table 1.1). It facilitates efficient communication among stakeholders, including the AE and the NDA, laying the groundwork for a successful funding application.

Table 1.1 Comparison of project development outcomes with and without a high-quality CN

Aspect	With High-Quality CN	Without High-Quality CN
Clarify Project Idea	Clear articulation of objectives, rationale, and alignment with national adaptation strategies and GCF criteria	Vague or incomplete project ideas, alignment unclear
Feasibility Check	Early testing of project feasibility and alignment with GCF priorities	Feasibility and alignment issues may surface late, causing delays
Feedback from GCF	Timely, constructive feedback guides the smooth development of an FFP	Limited or late feedback, resulting in major revisions during FFP
Resource Efficiency	Saves time and resources by preventing time spent engaged in the development or major rework of a full proposal	Resources wasted on developing proposals unlikely to be approved
Stakeholder Communication	Facilitates shared understanding among country, AE, EEs, NDA, and GCF Secretariat	Poor communication, misunderstandings, and inefficient coordination
Progression to FFP and Implementation	Smoother transition with greater confidence and clearer guidance	Delays or difficulties progressing due to unclear project concept
Alignment with National Priorities	Ensures early alignment with NDCs, NAPs, and other requirements	Misalignment discovered late, requiring project redesign
Risk of Rejection	Lower risk of rejection due to early correction of potential issues	Higher risk of rejection due to fundamental issues unnoticed at a late stage

Chapter 2 Aligning with Country Priorities

1 The Principle of Country Ownership

A fundamental requirement for any GCF project is country ownership. This means that proposed projects must be driven by the recipient country and clearly aligned with its national climate change strategies and development priorities. The GCF places strong emphasis on ensuring that its investments support a country's self-defined goals for low-emission, climate-resilient development. Projects that are not demonstrably country-driven or that lack strategic relevance face a high risk of rejection. Therefore, project developers must ground their CN in the country's established climate policy documents, such as its NDCs and NAPs.

The GCF Country Programme is a key strategic document that serves as the primary tool for communicating a nation's climate finance priorities to the GCF. Developed by the country's National Designated Authority (NDA) through a consultative process, it outlines a pipeline of priority projects that are aligned with national plans like NDCs and NAPs. The Country Programme represents the first stage of the GCF project cycle and provides a strategic foundation for developing Concept Notes. Aligning a project with the Country Programme is crucial, as it signals that the intervention is nationally endorsed, rooted in local priorities, and has the backing of the NDA. This alignment is essential for obtaining the mandatory "no-objection letter" from the NDA, which is required for a proposal to advance.

2 Demonstrating Alignment in the Concept Note

To effectively demonstrate alignment, project developers should integrate direct and specific references to national policy documents throughout the CN (Table 2.1). This goes beyond a simple mention and requires clearly articulating how the project addresses nationally defined priorities.

Table 2.1 Summary of content as reference for relevant Concept Note sections

CN Section	Reference Content	Relevance
Executive Summary	Country priorities, transformational goals	High-level strategic alignment
A.16	Date, links, specific alignment with Country Programme, NDCs details	Section A.16 asks for a mandatory citation of NDC/NAP
C.1	Climate policy context	National goals, sector targets
C.2	Investment pipeline, barriers, sector strategies	Rationales and design
C.3	NDA involvement, consultation process	Country ownership
C.4	Barriers identified in Country Programme	Financial justification

In the Original PDF Guide, a summary of each country's key climate priorities are listed based on the most recent national documents, including GCF Country Programmes, NDCs, and NAPs. Considering that not every country has the same combination of available documents. However, this list only contains available documents at the time of writing this guide. Where relevant, the year of publications are indicated as well. Please note that these documents are periodically updated.

Chapter 3 Navigating GCF Investment Criteria

1 Overview of the Investment Criteria

To secure funding, every GCF project proposal is rigorously evaluated against a set of six core investment criteria. These 6 criteria are: Impact Potential, Paradigm Shift Potential, Sustainable Development, Needs of the Recipient, Country Ownership, Efficiency & Effectiveness. These criteria also serve as the benchmarks for assessing the quality, strategic fit, and potential effectiveness of a proposed intervention. While the GCF does not assign a specific weight to each criterion, a CN must convincingly address all six to demonstrate its value and alignment with the GCF's mandate. A clear understanding of these criteria is essential for designing a project that meets the GCF's expectations.

2 The Six Criteria Explained

Impact Potential

This criterion measures the project's potential to contribute directly to the GCF's primary objectives of climate mitigation and adaptation. For mitigation, this is often quantified as the total expected reduction in GHG emissions. For adaptation, it is measured by the expected increase in resilience, such as the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries protected from climate impacts or the value of assets made more resilient.

Paradigm Shift Potential

The GCF seeks to fund projects that catalyze impact beyond a one-off investment, leading to broader, systemic change. This criterion assesses the project's potential for being scaled up or replicated, its contribution to creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment, and its ability to foster knowledge and learning that can inform future climate action.

Sustainable Development Potential

This criterion evaluates the project's broader benefits and co-benefits beyond its core climate objectives. This includes positive environmental impacts (e.g., improved biodiversity, air, and water quality), social impacts (e.g., improved health, education, and social inclusion), economic impacts (e.g., job creation, poverty reduction), and gender-sensitive development impacts that promote gender equality.

Needs of the Recipient

This criterion considers the vulnerability of the host country and the financing needs of the targeted population. It assesses the country's exposure to climate change, its economic and social development level, and the specific needs of vulnerable groups. It also evaluates whether there is an absence of alternative, viable sources of financing for the proposed activities.

Country Ownership

This criterion measures the extent to which the project is aligned with the recipient country's national climate strategies, such as its NDCs and NAPs. It also assesses the level of stakeholder engagement in the project's design and the capacity of national entities to implement it, ensuring the project is genuinely country-driven.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

This criterion evaluates the economic and financial soundness of the project. It assesses the project's cost-effectiveness, comparing the financial inputs to the expected climate benefits (e.g., cost per tonne of CO_2 reduced or cost per beneficiary). It also considers the amount of co-financing mobilized and the overall financial viability of the project.

Chapter 4 Using Scientific Evidence Effectively

A core requirement of any GCF proposal is a clear and compelling "climate rationale." This involves using robust scientific evidence to demonstrate that the problem your project addresses is a direct result of climate change, rather than a general development challenge. A strong climate rationale is the foundation of your project's legitimacy; it proves that the proposed interventions are necessary, urgent, and specifically tailored to address climate-induced impacts. Without sufficient scientific backing, it is difficult to justify the need for climate finance, and the proposal is unlikely to succeed.

1 Types of Scientific Data Required

To build a convincing climate rationale, you must integrate various types of data into the CN. The GCF increasingly expects quantitative, evidence-based justifications (Figure 4.3). Key data types include:

Climate Data: This is essential for establishing the climate context. It includes:

- Historical Data: Localized trends in temperature, changes in precipitation patterns (e.g., increased frequency of dry spells), and the historical intensity of extreme weather events.
- Climate Projections: Future climate scenarios (e.g., from IPCC models) that project future risks like temperature increases, changes in rainfall, or sea-level rise for the target region.

Vulnerability Data: Data should be broken down into the three core components of vulnerability:

- Exposure: People, assets, and ecosystems located in areas subject to climate hazards.
- Sensitivity: The degree to which a system will be affected by climate impacts (e.g., reliance on rain-fed agriculture).
- Adaptive Capacity: The ability of a system to adjust to climate change, including access to technology, financial resources, and strong institutions.

Socio-economic Data: This data links climate impacts directly to human systems. It includes demographic information (especially on vulnerable groups like women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples), poverty rates, and details on livelihoods to show how climate change affects food security, income, and well-being.

2 Presenting Evidence Persuasively

Simply collecting the data is not enough; it must be presented effectively. Your CN should present scientific evidence in a way that is clear, concise, and persuasive. Use well-labelled graphs, maps, and tables to visualize trends and vulnerabilities. Make direct, quantitative statements that cite the source of your data (e.g., "Recent climate model projections (CMIP6, RCP8.5) indicate that the frequency of severe droughts in Northern Kenya is expected to increase by 40% by 2050 (IPCC, 2021)"). This approach adds significant weight and credibility to your proposal.

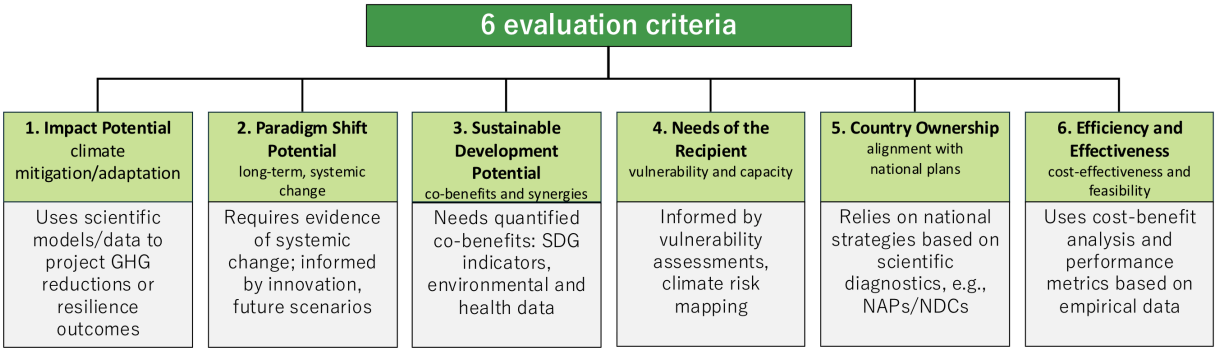

Figure 4.1 Six evaluation criteria and scientific evidence

3 Key Platforms and Tools for Data

Developing a scientifically robust CN is made easier by leveraging a wide range of available data platforms and analysis tools. These resources provide access to the climate projections, vulnerability indices, and sector-specific information needed to build a compelling climate rationale and meet the GCF evidence-based requirements. In the complete guide, there is an expanded list of platforms and tools for data available. We will present key tools and resources available in this summary.

Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Information Platform (AP-PLAT)

As the developer of this guidebook, AP-PLAT offers a suite of tools specifically designed to support adaptation planning in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a critical first stop for regional stakeholders. Key resources include:

- **ClimoKit**: A comprehensive database of scientific data and tools tailored for climate adaptation practitioners.
- **ClimoCast**: A user-friendly climate projection tool that displays future scenarios for temperature, rainfall, and other variables up to the year 2100, allowing for comparisons across different models and emission pathways.
- **Climate Impact Viewer**: A tool that visualizes the projected impacts of climate change across various sectors, including water, agriculture, and ecosystems, helping to identify key vulnerabilities.

Global Databases and Portals

In addition to regional platforms, project developers should consult internationally recognized global databases for consistent and authoritative data. These are essential for ensuring your proposal aligns with global scientific consensus.

- **IPCC WGI Interactive Atlas**: An indispensable tool for exploring and visualizing the climate data and projections that form the basis of the IPCC Assessment Reports.
- **World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal (CCKP)**: Offers comprehensive climate and climate-related data, risk profiles, and vulnerability information for most countries in the world.
- **Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas (WRI)**: A global water-risk mapping tool developed by the World Resources Institute that helps assess and plan for water-related risks, including baseline water stress and future projections.

Sector-Specific and Hazard-Specific Tools

For more targeted analysis, numerous tools focus on specific sectors or climate hazards. These can provide the granular data needed for detailed project design. Examples include:

- **FAO Data Lab & PyAEZ**: Tools from the Food and Agriculture Organization for agricultural data analysis and crop-yield estimates.
- **Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS)**: A global initiative that aggregates near-real-time and historical data on wildfires, including active fire alerts and fire-danger forecasts.
- **EMDAT**: The International Disaster Database containing data on over 22,000 mass disasters, useful for understanding historical hazard frequency and impact.

Chapter 5 Project Design and Planning

1 Using the Problem Tree and Objective Tree

A logical and well-structured project design is the heart of a successful GCF Concept Note. Problem Tree and Objective Tree Analysis are essential starting tools that provide a structured, visual way to understand the core climate issue and formulate a coherent solution. These methods help clarify complex problems, prioritize interventions, and build a strong foundation for the project's Theory of Change (ToC).

Table 5.1 Summary of Problem Tree and Objective Tree tools

Tool	Main Role	Relevance to GCF Concept Note
Problem Tree	Diagnoses the core problem and its causes/ effects.	Ensures the project is grounded[1] in a real climate relevant issue linked to sectoral pathways that contribute to NDCs and the GCF Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027.[2]
Objective Tree	Converts problems into objectives and solutions.	Helps define the Theory of Change (ToC) and build a logical fundable climate project that contributes to NDCs and the GCF Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027.

The Problem Tree is a diagnostic tool used to identify and analyze a central climate-related problem, its underlying causes, and its consequences. It helps ensure the project is grounded in a real, evidence-based issue that is relevant to the GCF's strategic goals.

- The Trunk: Represents the core problem (e.g., "Increased crop failure and food insecurity in semi-arid regions").
- The Roots: Represent the root causes of the problem. These are the underlying factors contributing to the issue (e.g., "Irregular rainfall due to climate change," "Poor irrigation infrastructure," "Lack of access to climate-resilient seeds").
- The Branches: Represent the effects or consequences that result from the core problem (e.g., "Loss of farmer income," "Increased rural poverty," "Migration to urban areas").

Once the Problem Tree is complete, the Objective Tree is created by converting the negative statements of the problems into positive, achievable goals. It serves as a "positive mirror image" of the Problem Tree and forms the basis of the project's design by outlining the pathway to a desired future state. Each component of the Problem Tree can be described as follows:

- The core problem becomes the main project objective or outcome (e.g., "Increased resilience of smallholder farming").
- The causes (roots) become the means or solutions, which translate into project inputs and activities (e.g., "Install climate-smart irrigation," "Train farmers on resilient crops").
- The effects (branches) become the expected results, which translate into project outcomes and long-term impacts (e.g., "Improved crop yields," "Enhanced food security," "Poverty reduction").

1 GCF. (2022). Sectoral Guides Summaries. Sectoral Guide Series. Yeonsu: Green Climate Fund.

2 GCF. (2023). Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund 2024 – 2027. *Decisions of the Board – thirty sixth meeting of the board, 10 – 13 July 2023*. Yeonsu: Green Climate Fund.

Together, these two tools provide the logical backbone for the project, making it easier to develop a compelling Logical Framework and Theory of Change. The complete guide contains templates and case studies on the use of the Problem Tree and Objective Tree.

2 Developing the Logical Framework (LogFrame)

The Logical Framework is a central planning tool that translates conceptual goals from the Objective Tree into a structured, measurable, and results-oriented action plan. While not mandatory at the CN stage, developing a LogFrame is highly recommended as it provides a clear, systematic overview of the project's logic. It serves as the bridge between problem analysis and project strategy, ensuring coherence, transparency, and accountability.

The LogFrame is typically presented as a matrix and hierarchy of objectives. It creates a clear causal chain showing how project activities will lead to the desired long-term impact. Here we present the summary of the matrix and hierarchy of objectives. The format, template, and example of how to use and create a LogFrame can be found in the complete guide.

Hierarchy of Objectives: This forms the vertical logic of the project.

- Impact: The long-term, high-level goal the project contributes to (e.g., "Increased climate resilience and food security for smallholder farmers").
- Outcomes: The medium-term behavioral or systemic changes resulting from the project's outputs (e.g., "Improved water availability for climate-resilient agriculture").
- Outputs: The tangible, direct deliverables or results of the project's activities (e.g., "Water harvesting infrastructure developed").
- Activities: The specific tasks undertaken to produce the outputs (e.g., "Construct small-scale irrigation systems").

Indicators: These are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) targets used to track progress and success at each level of the hierarchy. An example of an output indicator might be: "20 rainwater harvesting systems constructed by Year 2."

Means of Verification (MoV): This column specifies how and from where the data for each indicator will be collected (e.g., "Project monitoring reports," "household surveys," "engineering reports").

Assumptions and Risks: This column lists the critical external factors that are beyond the project's direct control but are necessary for its success. An example of an assumption might be: "Government remains committed to supporting adaptation programs." Identifying assumptions and risks helps in the implementation of proactive risk management.

For the GCF, a LogFrame must do more than simply list activities and outputs. It must clearly demonstrate how the project contributes to a paradigm shift. This means the project's design, as reflected in the LogFrame, should show how the intervention will lead to lasting, systemic change. The LogFrame should illustrate the potential for:

- **Scale**: The ability to expand the project's impact to a larger area or population.
- **Sustainability**: Lasting results that continue beyond the project's funding period.
- **Innovation**: The introduction of new approaches, technologies, or models.
- **Systemic Change**: The ability to influence policies, markets, or behaviors in a way that promotes low-emission, climate-resilient development.

3 Developing the Theory of Change (ToC)

While the LogFrame answers the "what" of a project, the ToC explains the "how" and "why." A ToC is a comprehensive yet clear narrative, often accompanied by a visual diagram, that maps out the complete pathway from project activities to long-term impact. It serves as the project's strategic foundation, articulating the underlying logic and assumptions about how change is expected to occur. . A helpful way to distinguish between the project's core planning documents is to view the Logframe as a structured management tool and the ToC as a strategic map of change.

For the GCF, a well-crafted ToC is vital for demonstrating strategic clarity and ensuring the proposal is aligned with its investment criteria, particularly the potential for a paradigm shift. The following Kesalahan! Sumber referensi tidak ditemukan. summarizes the key differences between Theory of Change and Logical Framework.

Table 5.2 key differences between Theory of Change (ToC) and Logical Framework

Aspect	Theory of Change (ToC)	Logical Framework (LogFrame)
Purpose	Explains the why and how of change; a narrative and visual roadmap of impact	Details the what of a project; a structured matrix for planning and M&E
Structure	Flexible, often visual diagram and narrative	Rigid matrix with rows (Impact → Outputs) and columns (Indicators, etc.)
Level of Detail	High-level causal reasoning; shows assumptions, pathways, and context	Operational and implementation-focused, with measurable targets
Focus	Understanding of change processes, assumptions, and pathways	Monitoring and evaluation of specific results and activities
Usefulness	Good for stakeholder alignment and strategic thinking	Good for donor reporting, accountability, and performance tracking
Assumptions	Central to the model; explicitly mapped in pathways of change	Included in a separate column, often less detailed
Time Horizon	Long-term change over time	Project-specific timeframe

Creating a ToC involves a "backwards mapping" or "backwards reasoning" approach, starting from the desired impact and working your way back to the required interventions. The following are

important points to consider when developing the ToC. Here we present the summary of the matrix and hierarchy of objectives. The format, template, and example of how to use and create a LogFrame can be found in the complete guide.

- **Define the Long-Term Impact**: Start by clearly articulating the ultimate goal or long-term change the project aims to achieve (e.g., "Enhanced climate resilience of vulnerable farming communities").
- **Identify Preconditions (Outcomes)**: Identify the necessary intermediate outcomes or preconditions that must be in place for the long-term impact to occur (e.g., "Widespread adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices").
- **Map Interventions (Outputs & Activities)**: Determine the specific outputs (deliverables) and activities (interventions) the project must undertake to achieve those outcomes (e.g., "Training programs delivered," "Irrigation infrastructure built").
- **State Assumptions**: For each link in the causal chain, explicitly state the assumptions that connect one step to the next (e.g., "We assume that farmers who receive training will have the resources to apply the new techniques").
- **Visualize**: Create a diagram that visually represents these pathways, feedback loops, and assumptions, making the project's logic easy to understand at a glance.

4 Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and Economic Justification

CBA is a systematic process used to evaluate the economic viability and efficiency of a proposed climate project. It serves as a critical tool for justifying a funding request to the GCF by demonstrating that the project's expected benefits outweigh its costs. While a full, detailed CBA is mandatory at the Full Funding Proposal stage, including a preliminary analysis in the CN significantly strengthens the proposal by highlighting its value for money and alignment with GCF's Efficiency and Effectiveness investment criteria.

A CBA quantifies and compares all the negative and positive effects of a project over its lifecycle. The main components include:

Project Costs: This includes all financial outflows required for the project.

- **Capital Costs (CAPEX)**: Initial investments in infrastructure, equipment, and installation.
- **Operational Costs (OPEX)**: Recurring costs for maintenance, operations, and administration.

Project Benefits: This includes all the positive outcomes, which should be quantified and, where possible, monetized.

- **Climate Benefits**: For mitigation projects, this is the value of **reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**. For adaptation projects, it is the value of **avoided losses and damages** from climate impacts (e.g., avoided crop loss or flood damage).

- **Socio-economic Co-benefits**: These include positive impacts such as job creation, improved public health, enhanced food security, and increased household income.

Economic Viability Metrics: To compare costs and benefits that occur at different times, a discount rate is used to calculate their present value. The key metrics to determine viability include:

- **Net Present Value (NPV)**: The total present value of benefits minus the total present value of costs. A positive NPV indicates the project is economically sound.
- **Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR)**: The ratio of the total present value of benefits to the total present value of costs. A BCR greater than 1 means the benefits outweigh the costs, demonstrating strong economic viability.

A concise CBA summary in the CN provides decision-makers with a clear, data-driven justification for the project, enhancing its credibility and increasing its chances of being considered for funding.

Table 5.3 Main components of a typical CBA

Component	Description
Project Costs	Capital costs, operating and maintenance costs, administrative costs.
Project Benefits	Quantifiable outcomes like emissions reductions, avoided losses and damages from climate events, increased productivity, improved health, etc.
Time Horizon	Usually includes a long-term view (e.g., 20–30 years) to capture all lifecycle impacts
Discount Rate	Future costs and benefits are adjusted to present values to compare accurately
Sensitivity Analysis	Evaluates how results change under different assumptions

Chapter 6 Stakeholder Considerations, Safeguards, and Risk Management

1 Participatory and Inclusive Design Approaches

A core principle of the GCF is that climate projects must be developed with and for the people they intend to serve, not imposed in a top-down manner. Participatory and inclusive design refers to the intentional and meaningful involvement of all relevant stakeholders from the earliest stages of project planning (Figure 6.1). This approach is not just a procedural step; it is fundamental to ensuring a project's effectiveness, equity, and long-term sustainability, and it is a requirement for aligning with GCF's core values of country ownership and inclusivity.

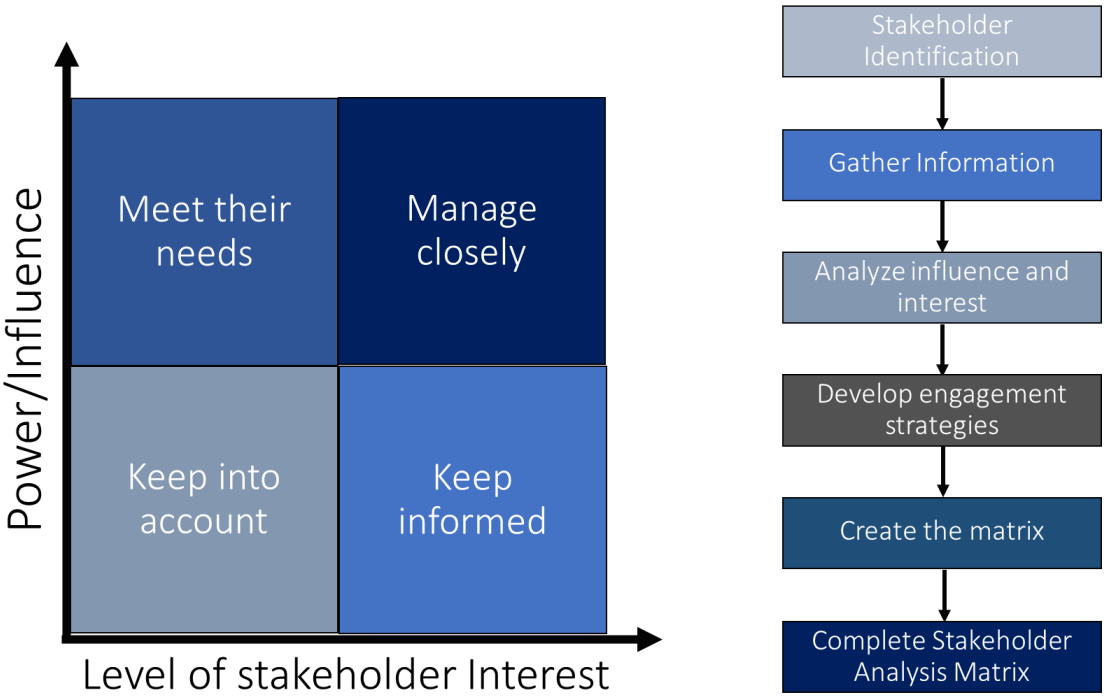

Figure 6.1 Creating the Stakeholder Analysis Matrix and Power/Interest Grid

The first step in engaging stakeholders is to identify all relevant actors and analyze their interests, influence, and vulnerabilities. It is critical to look beyond government bodies and include local communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and private sector entities. Special effort must be made to identify and prioritize engagement with marginalized groups who are often most affected by climate change. These includes women's groups and gender experts, Indigenous Peoples, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Once stakeholders are identified, inclusive consultations must be organized to gather input and concerns from these groups. These consultations should use culturally appropriate methods, be held in accessible locations and formats, and apply the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles whenever a project may affect Indigenous Peoples, their lands, or their resources. Stakeholder engagement should not be a one-time event. The feedback, concerns, and priorities raised during consultations must be documented and used to shape the project's design.

2 Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI)

GSI is the deliberate and systematic integration of gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized or vulnerable groups into the design, implementation, and monitoring of climate projects. Climate change does not affect everyone equally; women, Indigenous Peoples, youth, persons with disabilities, and the poor often face greater risks and have fewer resources to adapt. The GCF requires that projects are equitable and effective, ensuring that climate finance protects vulnerable populations and empowers them as active agents of change.

Integrating GSI is a strategic and moral imperative that strengthens the quality and impact of a GCF proposal. The process involves several key actions (Table 6.1). The first key step is to conduct a preliminary gender and social analysis to understand the specific context of the project area, including collecting data, identifying how climate change disproportionately affects different social groups, and analyzing barriers that limit participation and access to resources.

The findings from the GSI analysis must directly inform the project's design. Interventions should be tailored to address identified inequalities and promote inclusive benefits. This includes designing targeted activities, ensuring equitable access to climate technologies, financing, jobs, and decision-making roles, and including gender-responsive indicators in the project's results framework to measure and track progress on social outcomes.

An additional recommendation is the development of a Gender Action Plan (GAP), a roadmap that outlines concrete actions for implementing GSI measures. While formally required at the Full Proposal stage, developing a preliminary GAP for the Concept Note is strongly encouraged by the GCF. A GAP typically includes a list of key gender-responsive activities, clear timelines and responsibilities for implementation, and specific, measurable indicators to track progress toward gender equality.

Table 6.1 Overview of a basic Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) Action Plan

Key Activity	PIC (Responsibilities)	Timeline	Indicator
Conduct gender and social inclusion assessment, including analysis of climate vulnerability and access to resources	Accredited Entity (AE) with Gender Specialist	Project Preparation (Months 1–2)	GSI assessment report completed and submitted
Ensure inclusive stakeholder consultation, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable groups	NDA / AE / Local Partner	Project Design Phase	Number of consultations held; % of participants disaggregated by sex and group
Integrate GSI findings into project design and Theory of Change	AE technical team	Concept Note Finalization	GSI considerations reflected in LogFrame and activities
Develop and approve project-level GSI Action Plan	AE + Gender Specialist + National Partners	By submission of Funding Proposal	Action Plan attached; roles and budgets clearly allocated
Provide gender and inclusion training to project staff and implementing partners	AE / Local Executing Entities	Pre-implementation phase	Number of staff trained; pre/post-training feedback collected

Key Activity	PIC (Responsibilities)	Timeline	Indicator
Establish feedback and grievance redress mechanisms accessible to all groups	Executing Entity	Early implementation	GSI-sensitive mechanism operational; records of usage disaggregated
Monitor implementation of GSI activities and update action plan as needed	AE M&E Team	Throughout implementation	Progress reports submitted; indicators tracked (sex- and group-disaggregated)

Source: Adapted from GCF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2020–2023.

3 Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)

ESS are the policies, standards, and procedures designed to ensure that GCF financed projects do not cause harm to people or the environment. The core principle of ESS ("do no harm") can be achieved by identifying, avoiding, and mitigating potential adverse impacts during project planning and implementation. Integrating ESS from the earliest stages is a mandatory part of the GCF process and demonstrates a commitment to responsible and sustainable climate action.

A key step in the ESS process is screening the project to determine its potential environmental and social risk level. The GCF classifies projects into one of three categories, which dictates the extent of assessment and management required.

- Category A (High Risk): Projects with potentially significant adverse environmental and/or social impacts that are irreversible, unprecedented, or affect a large area or diverse group of people. These projects require a comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA).
- Category B (Medium Risk): Projects with potential adverse impacts that are limited in scope, site-specific, largely reversible, and readily addressed through mitigation measures. These projects typically require an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP).
- Category C (Low/No Risk): Projects with minimal or no adverse environmental or social impacts. These require a simpler assessment to confirm the low-risk classification.

Table 6.2: How ESS and GSI are linked in GCF CN development

Aspect	Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)	Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI)	How They Link
Objective	Prevent, minimize, or mitigate harm to people and the environment.	Ensure equitable access, participation, and benefit-sharing, especially for women and vulnerable groups.	Both seek to protect rights and promote fair outcomes.
Approach	Risk-based (assess impacts and manage risks).	Equity-based (identify inequalities and address them).	Together they guide safeguard planning and inclusive design.

Aspect	Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)	Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI)	How They Link
Tools Used	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP), Stakeholder Engagement Plan.	Gender Analysis, Gender Action Plan, Social Inclusion Analysis.	GSI tools inform ESS tools, especially in identifying social risks and exclusion.
Stakeholder Engagement	Focuses on affected communities, Indigenous Peoples, labor rights.	Focuses on inclusive engagement of women, youth, elderly, persons with disabilities, poor, marginalized groups.	Shared process of meaningful, inclusive, and participatory engagement.
Risk and Opportunity	Identifies risks to vulnerable ecosystems and people.	Highlights social vulnerability and risks of exclusion.	GSI is integral to identifying and mitigating social risks under ESS.
Policy Mandate	GCF Interim ESS Standards (IFC-based).[3]	GCF Gender Policy and Action Plan.[4]	Both are required components of CNs and Full Funding Proposals.

4 Risk Assessment and Management

Risk assessment and management is a comprehensive process used to identify, analyze, and control potential risks that could prevent a project from achieving its objectives. While related to ESS, this process is much broader (Table 6.3). ESS focuses specifically on preventing harm to people and the environment, whereas risk assessment covers all types of risks, including financial, technical, institutional, and political, that could threaten a project's overall success and sustainability. A robust risk management plan demonstrates project feasibility and credibility, which is essential for aligning with the GCF investment criteria. In managing risk, there is a three-step process, including identifying risks, analyzing and prioritizing risks, and developing risks mitigation measures. The complete guide contains a complete guide and template on how to conduct risk assessment.

Table 6.3 Summary of differences between ESS and risk assessment and management

Aspect	Risk Assessment and Management	Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)
Primary Focus	All types of risks (climate, technical, financial, institutional)	Identifying and mitigating adverse environmental and social impacts
Purpose	To assess uncertainties that may affect project success and sustainability	To prevent, minimize, or manage harm to people and the environment
Scope	Broad – includes internal and external project risks	Narrower – focuses on social, environmental, and human rights issues
Aspect	Risk Assessment and Management	Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)

3 IFC. (2012). Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability. Retrieved from the website: https://www.ifc.org/en/insights-reports/2012/ifc-performance-standards

4 GCF. (2019). Gender Policy. Retrieved from the website: https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gender-policy

Aspect	Risk Assessment and Management	Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)
Location in Concept Note	Section D.2 (Risk and Mitigation Measures)	Section C.3 (Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts)
Examples of Concerns	- Droughts affecting project outcomes - Political instability - Budget overrun	- Resettlement - Biodiversity loss - Impacts on Indigenous Peoples
Tools Used	- Risk inventory - Risk matrix - Mitigation plan	- ESS screening - Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)
Framework Reference	Project Risk Management frameworks. Example: ISO 31000	GCF's Environmental and Social Safeguards Standards (based on IFC Performance Standards).

Chapter 7 Practical Tools, Platforms, and Support

1 Early-Stage Support from the GCF

The GCF recognizes that developing countries often face significant capacity constraints that hinder their ability to develop high-quality, fundable project proposals. To address this, the GCF offers two key early-stage support mechanisms designed to help countries bridge the gap between initial project ideas and fully developed proposals. These instruments are crucial for enhancing access to climate finance and strengthening institutional capacity.

First, PPF provides direct financial and technical assistance to Accredited Entities (AEs) to support the preparation of specific, high-quality funding proposals. It is designed to help AEs overcome technical and financial hurdles during the complex project design phase. The application process usually starts with the submission of a PPF concept note or application form and proceeds through a GCF review and approval process. Once approved for further processing, the AE must submit a full PPF Application Package. Critically, this package must include a mandatory no-objection letter from the host country's National Designated Authority (NDA), as this is required for all GCF proposals to ensure alignment with national priorities.

The Readiness Programme, or RPSP, is a broader mechanism that supports countries in building their foundational institutional and strategic frameworks for engaging with the GCF. This support is delivered through the country's National Designated Authority (NDA) or focal point. Together, these two mechanisms provide a comprehensive support system that empowers developing countries to effectively access GCF resources and advance their climate ambitions. For a comprehensive explanation of these instruments, please consult the complete guide document.

2 Asia-Pacific Tips and Considerations

To create a robust CN, it is vital to understand the unique climate risks and contexts of the Asia-Pacific region. Project developers should incorporate an understanding of regional trends and transboundary climate risks to perform accurate risk assessments.

- The IPCC assessments include chapters on specific regions.
  - Chapter 10: Asia: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-10/
  - Chapter 11: Australasia: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-11/
  - Chapter 15: Small Islands: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-15/
- The AP-PLAT website, where this Navigator Tool is located, provides various other tools to support each country's efforts.
  - Representative tools: https://ap-plat.nies.go.jp/data_tools/index.html
  - For best practices, see the Adaptation Database: https://ap-plat-ccca.nies.go.jp/adaptation-database/list/
  - For the adaptation policy cycle, see the Adaptation Planning page: https://ap-plat.nies.go.jp/adaptation_plan/index.html
- In addition, the following is a list of resources that may be useful in understanding the climate risk situations in the region.
  - UNESCAP's Asia-Pacific Risk & Resilience Portal 2.0: https://rrp.unescap.org/
  - Asian Development Bank's Asia-Pacific Climate Report 2024: https://www.adb.org/publications/asia-pacific-climate-report-2024
  - The World Bank's Climate Risk Country Profiles (not limited to Asia-Pacific): https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country-profiles
- Regarding transboundary climate risks in general, users may refer to The Global Transboundary Climate Risk Report in 2023: https://www.sei.org/publications/transboundary-climate-risk-report-2023/