IMPACT CLIMATE ANALYTICS

Small Island Development States access to the Green Climate Fund

An assessment of Small Island Development States' Green Climate Fund proposals

June, 2022

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We regret any errors or omissions that may have been unwittingly made.

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Key findings

- SIDS GCF proposals are of higher quality than approved proposals from non-SIDS countries for several of the GCF investment criteria.

- Proposals from Direct Access Entities (DAEs) in SIDS slightly out-perform those from international access entities with regard to quality.

- SIDS are able to meet and fulfil the very stringent GCF requirements. However, it is extremely difficult to scale-up the necessary access to the climate funds given the significant time, effort and resources that need to be directed towards meeting these very stringent requirements.

- SIDS may benefit from lessons-learned/knowledge exchange workshops among each other, given their success with the GCF thus far. Such exchanges might allow SIDS to identify common/unique challenges faced by SIDS in the GCF process as well as potential solutions. SIDS representatives to the GCF can then raise these challenges and solutions at the level of the GCF Board.

This briefing is the second briefing of a two-part Climate Analytics series that examines historical access to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) by Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The first briefing in the series **analysed approved GCF projects from November 2015 to October 2021, with a view to understanding how Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have accessed the GCF to date**.[1]

The first briefing provides detailed information on the number, types and sizes of GCF projects in SIDS, the amount of GCF financing received by and disbursed to SIDS, and the challenges faced by SIDS in accessing the GCF, and proposes some recommendations to enhance SIDS' access to the GCF.

This additional briefing builds on the previous analysis, but focuses **on the quality of SIDS proposals submitted to the GCF based on the feedback given to proposals by the independent Technical Advisory Panel (iTAP).** The aim is to provide stakeholders in SIDS with an understanding of the quality of proposals across SIDS and also to highlight some recommendations to improve SIDS' access the GCF.[2]

[1] In this briefing, SIDS countries are classified using the UN-ORHLLS listing.
[2] In this briefing, SIDS countries are classified using the UN-ORHLLS listing.

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The Green Climate Fund and SIDS – background

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is now the largest global climate fund. The main goal of the GCF is to help developing countries limit or reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to climate change and to promote a paradigm shift to low-emission and climate-resilient development.

As of the 31st GCF Board meeting (March 2022), SIDS have the lowest number of approved projects when compared to other regions, with just **45 approved GCF projects**.

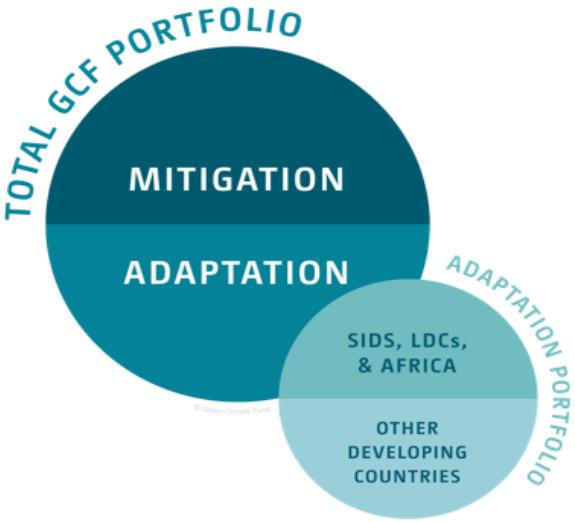


Figure 1 Distribution of GCF Portfolio
Source: Green Climate Fund

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have 58 approved GCF projects and other countries make up 88 GCF approved projects. A main conclusion from the initial briefing on SIDS access to the GCF was that SIDS face significant challenges with accessing the GCF, despite the GCF's commitment to mobilising climate finance for SIDS and LDCs and the GCF's mandate to: **invest 50% of its resources to mitigation and 50% to adaptation in grant equivalent, and to invest at least half of its adaptation resources in the most climate vulnerable countries (SIDS, LDCs, and African States).**[3]

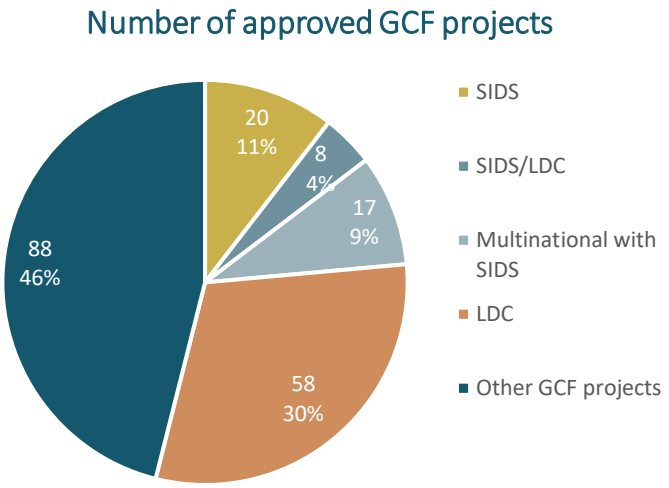


Figure 2 Number of approved GCF projects by regional grouping (up to B.30)

[3] About the Green Climate Fund

At the 24th GCF Board meeting in November 2019, the difficulty SIDS have with accessing the GCF was brought to the attention of the Board. As a result, the Board asked the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the GCF's investments in SIDS.[4] **The IEU found that SIDS face serious capacity constraints, high transaction or operational costs and that the GCF policies lack flexibility for implementation and application to address the needs of SIDS.** More information from the IEU's evaluation can be found in the first part of this briefing series.

In this second part of the briefing series, experts focus on the scores given to proposals by the iTAP. The GCF Board, through its decision B.07/03, agreed to establish a **Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) composed of experts in order to provide an independent technical assessment of, and advice on, funding proposals**. T

he iTAP, as per its terms of reference established by decision B.09/10, reviews and assesses funding proposals against the six investment criteria adopted in decision B.07/06 and its sub-criteria and indicative assessment factors adopted in decision B.09/05. Upon its review of funding proposals, the iTAP provides qualitative scores to each proposal based on how the proposal addresses each investment criteria. The investment criteria are as follows:[5]

Figure 3 GCF investment criteria

[4] Independent Evaluation of the Relevance and Effectiveness of the GCFs Investments in SIDS, 2020

[5] Adopted in decision B.07/06 and its sub-criteria and indicative assessment factors adopted in decision B.09/05.

More information on the investment criteria and indicative factors can be found in the Annex to this document. The iTAP scores assist the GCF Board in making the final decision on whether or not to approve a project at the time of the applicable GCF Board meeting.

Methodology for collating and analysing data

To prepare this briefing, Climate Analytics developed a comprehensive database of GCF activities under its IMPACT project. Climate Analytics experts extracted all public information available on the GCF website including projects and Board meetings documentation. We placed special emphasis on categorising[6] the projects into clusters that could yield valuable information to inform efforts to strengthen SIDS' project proposals and improve their financial access to the GCF.

The database comprises over 50 variables for each of the 178 approved projects[7] (from the 11th Board meeting in November 2015, up until October 2021, at the 30th Board meeting) and presents information according to a host of factors, inter alia:

- Project characteristics (e.g., country, region, size, beneficiaries, GHG avoided)
- Access modality and accredited entities
- GCF's thematic and result areas
- Financial variables (e.g., funding and co-financing, instruments, risk category, etc..), and
- Status of project (e.g., current disbursement, under implementation, expected completed date)
- ITAP and GCF Secretariat scores for each investment criteria.

The information contained in this database was then used to provide a synthesis of GCF activities within and among SIDS' projects. In line with the first briefing in this series, we classified countries in the database into five categories for ease of comparison and presentation of data, as shown in Table 1 below.

[6] We classified countries in line with the GCF country grouping (SIDS, LDC and African States) that uses the categorisation for developing countries that was first established in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.
[7] GCF official information depicts 177 projects, however, we considered 178 projects including FP104 Nigeria Solar IPP Support Program from the Africa Finance Corporation approved at the 22th Board meeting.

Country category	Description
SIDS	Projects originating from only SIDS countries
SIDS/LDC	Projects that include countries classified as both SIDS and LDC
Multinational with SIDS	Multinational projects that include at least one SIDS
LDC	Projects originating from only LDC countries
Other GCF projects	Rest of the projects that did not fall in the 4 previous categories, including African states that are not defined as SIDS nor LDC

Table 1 Country categorisation

The database also includes collated information on the iTAP scores given to the approved GCF proposals for each GCF's investment criteria. These scores are categorical variables ranging from uncertain, low, medium-to-low, medium, medium-to-high, and high. Projects that scored uncertain in some investment criteria were approved under the condition of upgrading some of the project's elements. Projects that scored high, fully comply with the GCF's investment criteria.

In order to develop graphical representation of the scores given by the iTAP, the qualitative scores were translated into equivalent quantitative variables. It is important to mention that iTAP's scale score has six categories that are not evenly distributed as there are three categories under the medium score and two categories above the medium score. For that reason, we assigned a numerical value in the same scale for each investment criteria. We then aggregated the quantitative variables that correspond to the qualitative iTAP scores for each investment criteria to obtain an overall score for each of the funding proposals, as described in Table 2 below.

iTAP score categories	Assigned Numerical value	Aggregated scores for all six investment criteria
High	1	6
Medium to high	0.8	4.8
Medium	0.6	3.6
Medium to low	0.4	2.4
Low	0.2	1.2
Uncertain	0	0

Table 2 Conversion of qualitative iTAP's scores into quantitative variables

The aggregated scores are based on the overall sum of each numerical value assigned to each investment criterion. For example, projects that scored "High" in all six investment criteria, received a general aggregated result of "6". The aggregated results allowed us to establish certain thresholds for projects.

For example, projects that scored higher than 3.6 in the general score, are projects above the "medium" score given by the iTAP. The numerical conversion of scores does not represent a new interpretation of scores, but instead intends to provide a visual representation that preserves the weight and scale of the original iTAP's scores and under the assumption that there is the same distance between each of the categories.

Summary of findings

Scored projects vs. unscored projects

While all funding proposals are evaluated, not all proposals are scored by the iTAP. Micro and small projects, defined as funding proposals receiving less than US$ 10 million in GCF funding, are not necessarily scored. For SAP proposals, ten out of 23 proposals were given a score by the iTAP. Figure 4 below shows that, to date, the iTAP **scored 37 out of 45 projects that include at least one SIDS**.

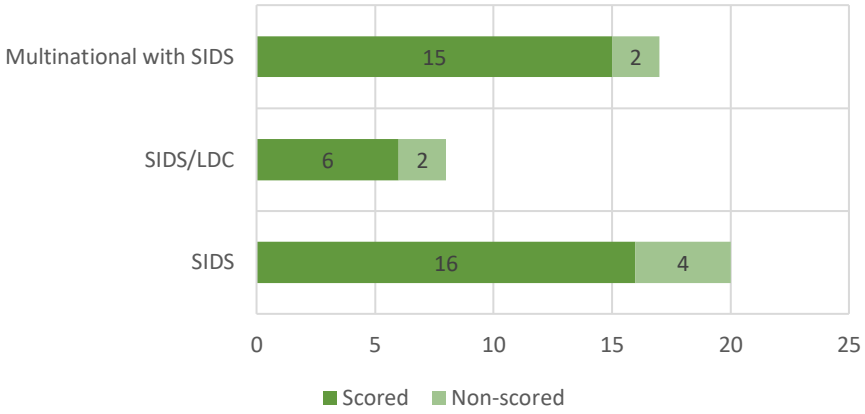


Figure 3 Number of proposals scored by iTAP

Overall iTAP scores

Figure 5 below shows the average scores given by the iTAP to proposals from all countries for each investment criterion. Overall, **SIDS proposals received scores in the medium-high to high range for each of the investment criteria**. A high score from the iTAP means that the proposal adequately addresses the GCF investment criteria and that the project is likely to be approved by the GCF Board as it is in line with the GCF's requirements.

Projects with at least one SIDS received the highest iTAP scores for each investment criterion. Projects from countries that classify as a SIDS and an LDC received the highest scores from the iTAP in three out of the six investment criteria, i.e., impact potential, needs of the recipient, efficiency and effectiveness. Proposals from countries that only classify as a SIDS received the highest iTAP scores for paradigm shift potential, sustainable development potential and country ownership, and also received medium to high scores for impact potential and needs of the recipient.

Project proposals from multinational projects that include at least one SIDS received the lowest scores for some investment criteria, particularly country ownership, impact potential and effectiveness and efficiency. **However, these scores remained above the "medium" category.**

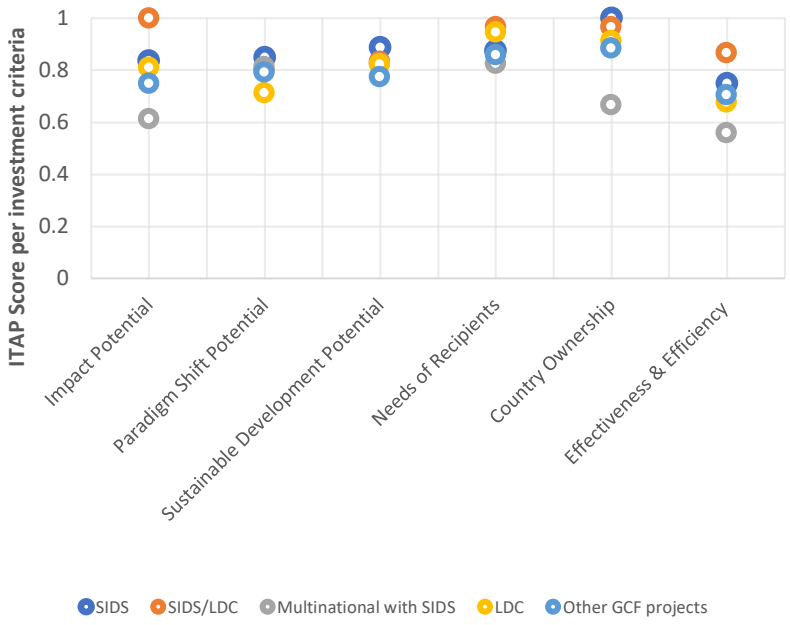


Figure 4 Average iTAP scores by investment criterion

iTAP scores by project theme

Figure 6 shows the aggregated iTAP's scores by project theme. The first three sets of bars show the aggregate iTAP scores given to proposals from SIDS countries, including multinational projects with at least one SIDS. The chart below suggests that **project theme does not affect the quality of proposals, as mitigation, cross-cutting and adaptation proposals from SIDS countries received scores in the medium to high range**. Again, multinational projects with at least one SIDS received the lowest average scores for all project types, but were scored in the medium range or higher.

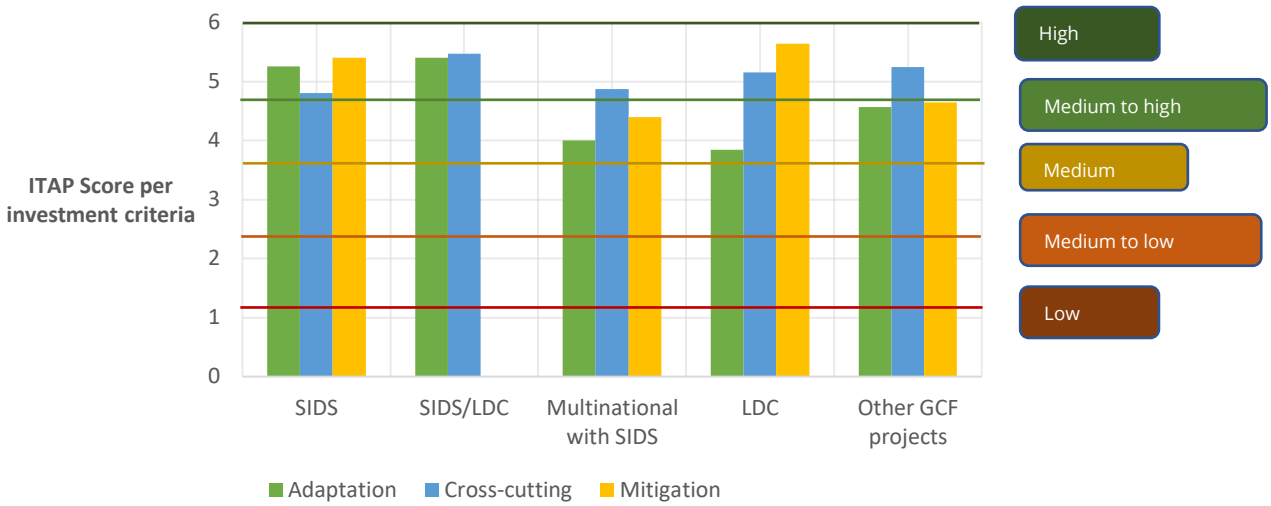


Figure 5 iTAP scores by project theme and country grouping

Figure 7 below shows the aggregated iTAP scores by country grouping and type of accredited entity. **SIDS proposals submitted by Direct Access Entities (DAEs) received the highest iTAP scores**. Figure 7 also shows that the proposal submitted under the Enhanced Direct Access pilot programme received a medium to high score, which is on par with those proposals submitted by DAEs. DAEs have not submitted any projects from countries that classify as a SIDS and an LDC. Projects from countries that classify as a SIDS and an LDC have only been submitted by international access entities.

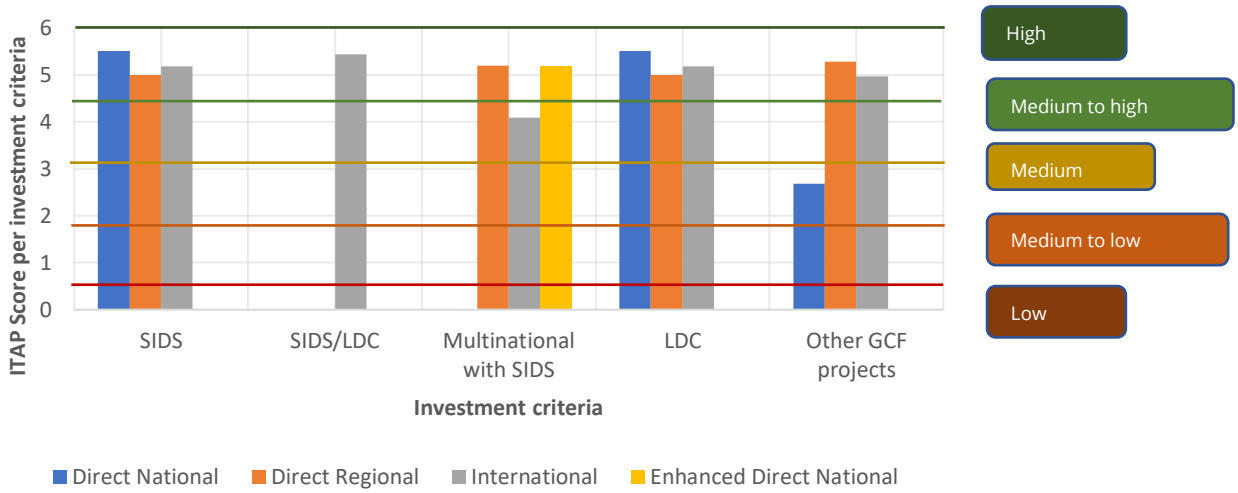
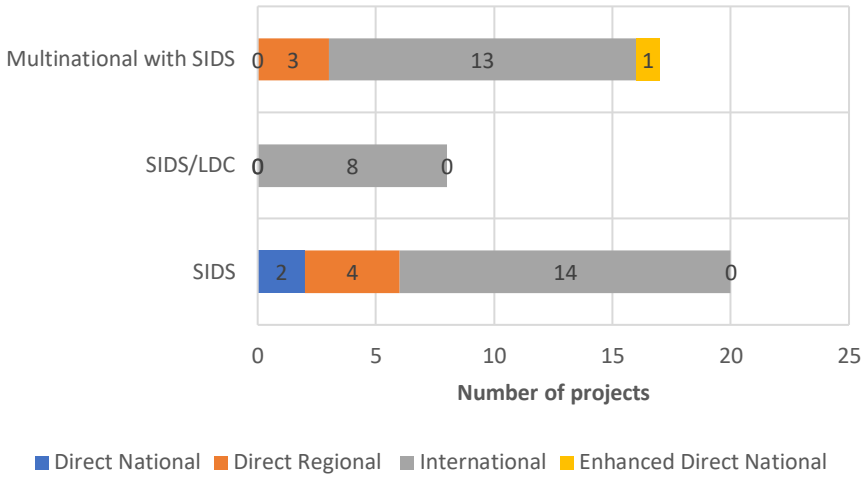


Figure 6 iTAP scores by type of access entity

To put the above chart in context, Figure 8 below shows the number of proposals submitted by DAEs in SIDS to date. For SIDS countries, two proposals were submitted by national DAEs and four proposals by regional DAEs. One regional DAE, the Department of Environment in Antigua and Barbuda submitted two of the four approved proposals from regional DAEs. There was one Enhanced Direct Access proposal submitted for a multinational project with at least one SIDS. There is still a significant reliance on international access entities due to their experience and capacity.



Length of pipeline and approval processes

Another important variable in getting higher iTAP's score is the level of effort in developing a funding proposal and the time it takes for such a proposal to be approved by the GCF Board. The GCF's funding proposals go through 4 main stages:

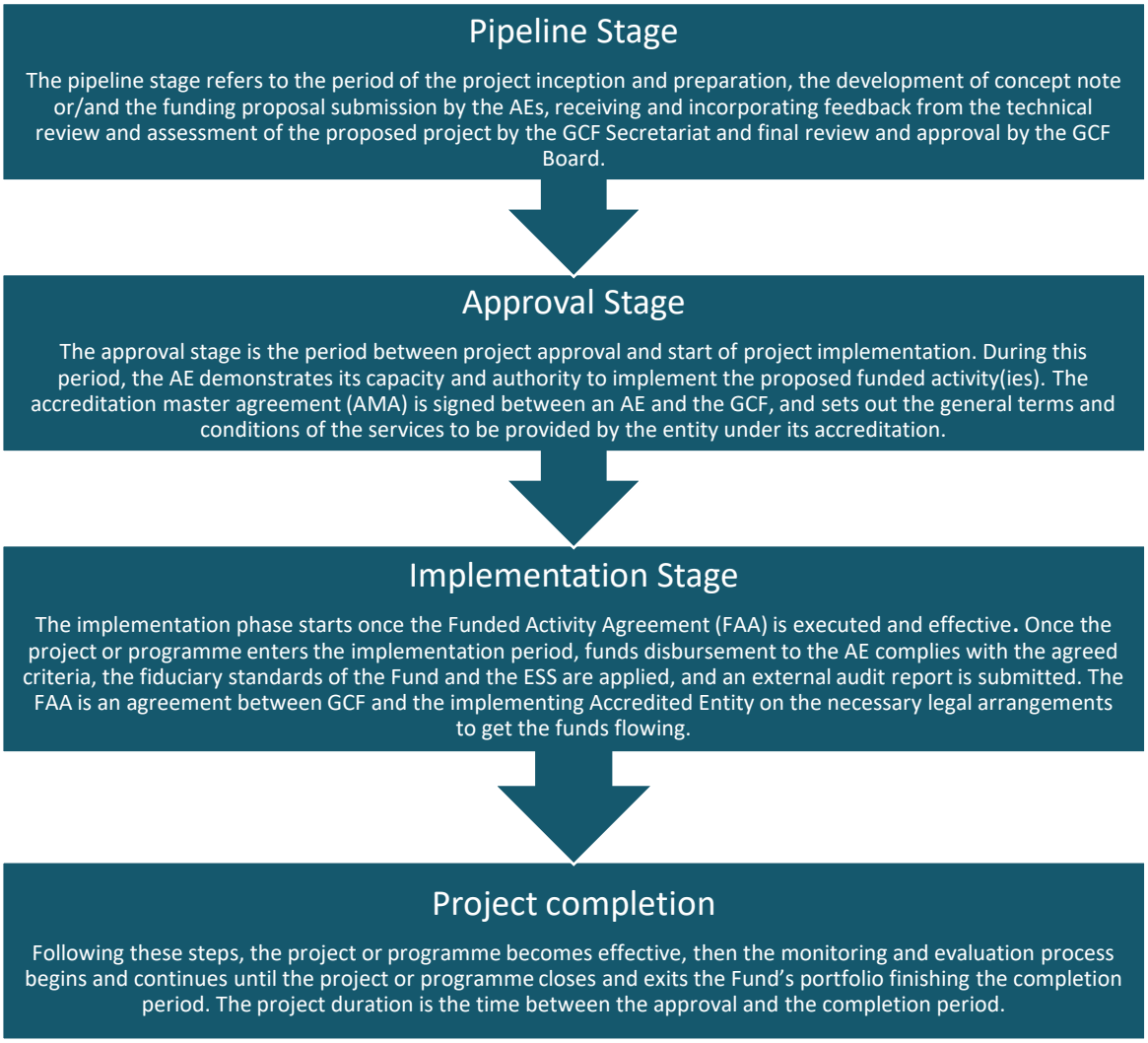


Figure 7 Stages of a GCF Funding Proposal

Figure 10 below shows the average number of days for projects to complete the pipeline stage, approval stage and for the entire project duration by regional grouping. The timelines might be considered as a proxy for the level of effort it takes to develop a GCF funding proposal.

In general, there is a similar pipeline period duration among projects from the various regions. The results are as follows:

- Projects that originated in SIDS spend an average of 547 days in the pipeline stage.
- Projects originating in countries that classify as a SIDS/LDC have an average pipeline stage of 595 days.
- Multinational projects involving least one SIDS spend an average of 619 days in the pipeline stage.
- Projects originating in LDCs last an average of 586 days in the pipeline stage.
- Other GCF projects, from countries not classified as SIDS or LDCs have an average pipeline stage of 586 days.

Despite the similar length of time for projects to proceed through the pipeline and approval stages and for overall project duration across the regional groupings, SIDS and SIDS/LDC projects are much smaller in terms of GCF financing. **This means that SIDS and SIDS/LDC projects take on average a similar amount of time to develop and complete as compared to projects which are 4 times larger in financial terms.**

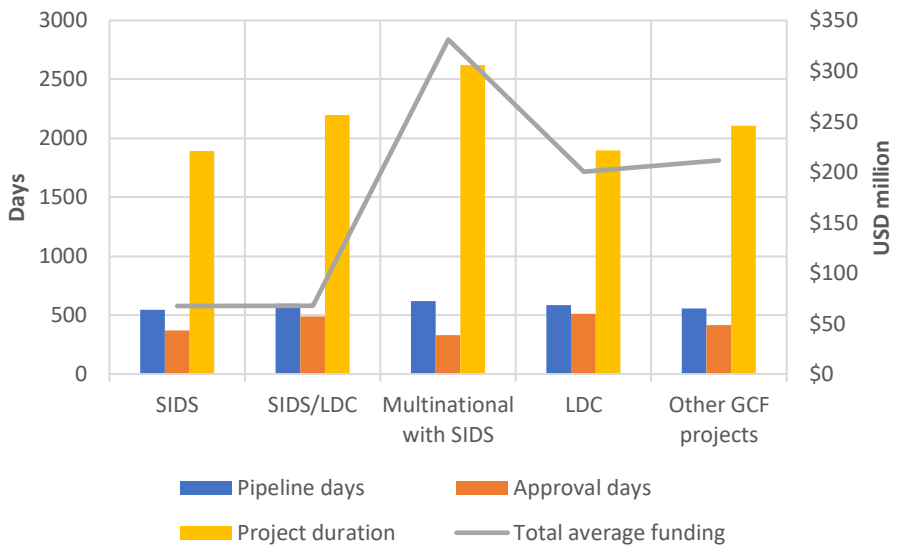


Figure 8 Pipeline and approval days vs project duration and average funding

Interpretation of results

It is necessary to reemphasise some of the findings from the first briefing on the overall GCF portfolio in SIDS in order to put the findings of this briefing on the quality of SIDS proposals into context. The initial analysis highlighted that SIDS continue to face significant challenges with accessing funds from the GCF. In particular, the analysis showed that SIDS have accessed the **least amount of GCF funding** when compared to other regions and the accessed funding has mainly been approved for **small sized projects**, with some medium sized projects.

The initial analysis also highlighted that most projects in SIDS are accessed through **international access entities**, are **adaptation projects** and are **public sector projects**. Overall, our initial analysis of GCF projects in SIDS suggests that **additional efforts need to be undertaken to enhance SIDS' access to the GCF**.

The results of this briefing suggest that based on the iTAP scores, **SIDS are able to produce high-quality GCF proposals in spite of the challenges they encounter when accessing the GCF** (see previous briefing for more information on challenges). This is quite positive but before discussing the results further, it is important to include some context as it relates to the review processes of the iTAP and GCF. Box. 2 below provides more detail on the review sequencing of the review processes.

The GCF review process often requires significant interaction with Accredited Entities and the National Designated Authority (NDA)/relevant government ministries to ensure that projects are indeed country-owned, meet the needs of each individual country and are in line with the GCF investment criteria.

After the first round of an iTAP review, some project proposals may receive low scores along with significant suggestions to improve the proposal. The proposal is then reverted to the Accredited Entity and the NDA for revision. There may be multiple exchanges of this nature between the iTAP and the NDA/Accredited Entity before a proposal is able to receive scores in the medium – high range. While this process can be helpful in terms of enhancing proposals, it can be very burdensome for capacity-constrained ministries and entities. Such a rigorous process could be a hinderance to undertaking multiple GCF project proposals at the same time and to undertaking larger proposals that require even more detail.

With regard to types of accredited entities, the results show that **proposals submitted by direct national and direct regional entities in SIDS countries received slightly higher iTAP scores than those submitted by international access entities**. In context, this makes sense given that direct access entities located in-country will have a better understanding of the national circumstances and climate change mitigation and adaptation needs of their respective countries.

Box 1. GCF Proposal Review Processes

The GCF Board meets approximately three times a year to approve funding proposals. In order for a funding proposal to be considered at a specific Board meeting, the completed funding proposal, along with the necessary annexes, should be submitted to the Secretariat at least 190 days prior to the Board meeting to allow sufficient time to complete the Secretariat review and independent appraisal and ensure that the proposal is ready for submission to TAP.

The Secretariat funding proposal review includes the following three steps:

1. Initial review/assessment of the concept/project idea/draft funding proposal against the GCF investment criteria and applicable Board decisions followed by clearance to proceed to technical review
2. Detailed technical assessment of the full funding proposal package through an interdivisional review
3. 3. Independent appraisal of the funding proposal (second-level due diligence) and clearance for the funding proposal to proceed to the independent TAP review.

The ITAP then conducts technical assessments of funding proposals, separately and independently from the Secretariat. Upon completion of the independent TAP assessment, the Secretariat compiles the funding proposal package, shares it with the Board and publishes it on the GCF website. It is then up to the Board to consider the proposal and make a decision to approve the project proposal.

The results of the first briefing showed that the majority of SIDS projects are developed through international access entities. However, given the limited capacity in SIDS, it is often difficult for SIDS governments to engage with multiple international access entities at the same time in order to develop multiple GCF proposals simultaneously.

In addition, SIDS face difficulties with absorbing higher amounts of funding due to their small size. The low number of GCF projects in SIDS coupled with the high-quality of SIDS proposals could reflect the significant amount of time and effort required to ensure the necessary interaction between the accredited entity and the NDA to develop a GCF proposal that is well received by the iTAP and the GCF Board.

Another interesting finding was that multinational projects with at least one SIDS seemed to receive lower scores for some of the investment criteria, such as country ownership, impact potential, needs of the recipient and efficiency and effectiveness. With regard to demonstrating country ownership and needs of the recipient, multinational projects may experience higher levels of difficulty due to the varying national contexts and circumstances, which could explain the lower scores in these two categories.

However, lower scores for multinational projects for the impact potential and efficiency and effectiveness investment criteria are surprising. One might expect that multinational projects should have greater impact, as they involve implementation in multiple countries and will bring about transformational change in more than one country. It is possible that overall, it is harder to clearly demonstrate the achievement of the investment criteria under varying national circumstances, especially among capacity constrained countries like SIDS and LDCs.

With regard to the length of time to completion for SIDS projects, the results show that while SIDS and SIDS/LDC proposals are much smaller in terms of financing, such projects take just as much time to complete as projects that are four times larger in financial terms. GCF projects need to be implemented urgently if we are to be successful in addressing the climate crisis and its impacts.

However, the results show that the length of time to project completion is approximately five years for SIDS and LDCs, and larger projects in other countries are being completed in approximately the same amount of time. This might suggest that while SIDS are capable of accessing GCF funding, implementation may prove to be more challenging.

Conclusion and recommendations

The recommendations proposed in the first briefing in this series remain relevant. Those recommendations included hosting of exchange workshops or dialogues among SIDS countries to share experiences, gaps, lessons learned, pursuing capacity building efforts, and undertaking further work to understand how to increase the attractiveness of adaptation projects for the private sector.

The briefing shows the high-quality of SIDS proposals overall, which provides opportunities for lessons learned and capacity building among SIDS. In addition, we see that DAEs in SIDS, though few, are producing high-quality proposals alongside international access entities. As more DAEs in SIDS become accredited, **they would benefit from exchanges with existing DAEs to understand lessons learned with respect to proposal development**.

These workshops/exchanges could help expedite the learning process for newly accredited DAEs, and thus might increase the quality and number of proposals submitted by new DAEs in SIDS and could possibly speed up their approval process.

Overall, SIDS could benefit from knowledge sharing among themselves as it relates to project and proposal development, given the success of their GCF proposals. Such exchanges may also allow **SIDS to identify common/unique challenges faced by SIDS in the GCF process as well as potential solutions**. SIDS representatives to the GCF could then raise these challenges and solutions at the level of the GCF Board.

Another recommendation that could be made to the GCF Board is to continue to improve the process for approving proposals. This means **moving towards a more streamlined review process and reducing the length of time it takes for proposals to be approved and implemented**. This will help to ensure that there are clear and time-restricted steps as they relate to matters on, inter alia, information requests, and other review and approval functions of the GCF Secretariat & the iTAP.

Such improvements will also benefit proposal development in SIDS by reducing the amount of time needed for each proposal to be approved, as well as on burden-reducing for AEs and NDAs. The recent update of the Simplified Approval Process (SAP) policy is a step in the right direction but further simplifications within GCF processes should continue to be explored/assessed and promptly implemented.

Finally, the recommendations proposed in the IEU report - mentioned at the start of this briefing and in the first briefing with regard to adjusting GCF processes and requirements to make them less onerous on capacity-constrained organisations - are still relevant. The IEU's recommendations included:

- Improve the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme to enhance the SIDS' direct access to the GCF and address their capacity constraints
- Accelerate and simplify the project cycle
- Consider finalising the policy on the programmatic approach, with due consideration for SIDS.
- Consider adopting a private sector approach that reflects the characteristics of local private sector entities in SIDS; and clearly defines the aim for private sector engagement, such as leveraging private sector investment to scale-up climate ambitions or improving local private sector resilience.

The findings of both CA briefings show that SIDS are very capable of rising to the challenge of meeting very stringent GCF requirements. However, it is extremely difficult to scale-up access to the necessary climate funds if time, effort and resources are all directed towards meeting these very stringent requirements.

While it is important for the GCF to ensure that projects meet certain standards, it is also necessary for the GCF to ensure that those countries that are most vulnerable to

climate change are able to access international climate funds at the required scale and within reasonable timeframes.

Annex

Current operational procedure of the independent Technical Advisory Panel (taken from GCF/B.25/10)

According to B.25/10, the iTAP, as per its terms of reference established by decision B.09/10, reviews and assesses funding proposals against the six investment criteria adopted in decision B.07/06 and its sub-criteria and indicative assessment factors adopted in decision B.09/05.

The review of funding proposals takes place over approximately four weeks. A two-person team, composed of a lead and secondary reviewer, is provided with the final draft of the funding proposal, which results in comments for the AE to address.

While the reviewers assess the funding proposals, the Secretariat assessment findings are provided to the iTAP approximately one week prior to the TAP decision meeting at the GCF Headquarters. Following its discussion with the Secretariat and AEs at the GCF Headquarters, the TAP members jointly discuss and reach consensus on each of the funding proposals. Each of the two-person teams then prepares the TAP assessment findings and recommendations for the Board.[8]

GCF investment criteria and indicators

At its seventh meeting, the GCF established six criteria in its Investment Framework to guide its decisions on investments and for assessing funding proposals.[9] Subsequently, the Board adopted more detailed elements of the criteria at its ninth meeting.[10] At its twenty-second meeting in February 2019, the GCF Board adopted the investment criteria which strengthen the implementation of the investment framework and aim to help all stakeholders to better understand the criteria used within the framework.[11] The criteria and indicators are in table 3 below, taken from the GCF programming manual.

[8] Taken from GCF B.25/10

[9] Annex XIV to decision B.07/06. Available at https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/24943/GCF_B.07_11_-_Decisions_of_the_Board_-_Seventh_Meeting_of_the_Board__18-21_May_2014.pdf/73c63432-2cb1-4210-9bdd-454b52b2846bm

[10] GCF/B.09/23: Initial investment framework: activity-specific sub-criteria and indicative assessment factors

[11] Annex VII to decision B.22/15. Available at: https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b22-24

GCF Investment criterion	Indicator	Explanation
Impact potential	Mitigation impact	Describe the expected reductions in emissions from the GCF intervention (in tCO_2eq)
	Adaptation impact	Describe the expected change in loss of lives, value of physical assets, livelihoods, and/or environmental or social losses due to the impact of extreme climate-related disasters and climate change in the geographical area of the GCF intervention. Proposals should also refer to the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project
Paradigm shift potential	Necessary conditions	Outline how the proposed project can catalyse impact beyond one-off investment, accompanied by a robust and convincing theory of change for replication and/or scaling up the project results
Sustainable development potential	Co-benefits	Identify at least one positive co-benefit in at least two of the four coverage areas: economic, social, environmental, and gender empowerment. The proposal should provide an associated indicator, as well as baseline and target values for the co-benefits. Where appropriate, proposals should reference the achievement of one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
Needs of the recipient	Barriers to climate-related finance	Describe the country's financial, economic, social and institutional needs and the barriers to accessing climate finance and how the proposed intervention will address the identified needs and barriers
Country ownership	Alignment with NDCs, relevant national plan indicators, and/or enabling policy and institutional frameworks	Describe how the proposed activities are aligned with the country's NDC and other national plans, and how the funding proposal will help to achieve the NDC or those plans. Also reference the degree to which the project is supported by a country's enabling environment

Efficiency and effectiveness	Explanation of engagement with relevant stakeholders	Outline how proposals were developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Engagement with national designated authorities is required
	Mitigation: cost per tCO_2eq	Provide the cost per tCO2eq of the GCF intervention
	Mitigation: ratio of co-financing	Indicate the ratio of co-financing mobilised relative to the GCF contribution to the total project, as appropriate
	Mitigation: expected rate of return	Provide an estimate of the expected economic internal rate of return and/ or financial internal rate of return, depending on the needs of the project
	Mitigation and adaptation: application of best practices	Describe how the proposal applies and builds on the best practices in the sector

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