

*GCF insight #22*

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THINKING

# The importance of gender in Green Climate Fund project development



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## *GCF insight #22*

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*GCF insight* seeks to understand what's working - and what's not working - in Green Climate Fund (GCF) project development. These surveys and reports spotlight the most topical GCF issues. This twenty-second edition discusses the need to effectively incorporate gender issues in climate change project design.

### **About E Co.**

We specialise in designing low-carbon, climate-resilient projects and programmes. For over 23 years, we've been providing technical expertise to help our clients solve climate adaptation and mitigation challenges and access project funding. We assess markets, develop strategies and formulate projects to provide long-lasting solutions for vulnerable populations worldwide.

# Gender, climate change, and climate finance projects



The majority of communications and media pieces regarding climate tend to focus on the impacts on biodiversity, land, and energy use, amongst several other key talking points for a variety of organisations, from media companies to development agencies. One topic less focused on is gender. So, why are gender considerations important?

## Gender and climate change: The context

The past several years have seen increased numbers of uneven climate shocks experienced by already climate-vulnerable communities, such as those in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and economically developing nations. Within those communities, women and girls are the demographics disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, with current trends and statistics painting a bleak picture:



From the years 2008 to 2021, 30.5 million people have been displaced by weather-related disasters. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that of these displaced peoples, 80% are women.



In analysis by Carbon Brief, almost 70% of studies on climate change and health found that women are more affected by 'health impacts associated with climate change than men'.



It is generally accepted that the most acute risks will be faced by indigenous and Afro-descendant women, elderly women, those in the LGBTQIA+ community, and those living in rural areas, especially ones prone to weather-related risks.



Research from the National Institutes of Health states that 'the death rates of women and children are 14 times higher than men' during a natural disaster, and that 'women are more prone to intimate partner violence and sexual abuse/harassment' in the same circumstances.



While responsible for up to 80% of food production in economically-developing countries, women rarely own, have tenure security, or have a say over the land they are working. This can be attributed to customary systems of property tenure, which tend to not grant gender equality within access to land.



According to Action Aid, women perform 75% of unpaid work globally, with 16.4 billion hours spent on unpaid care work daily. Unpaid care and domestic work is valued between 10 and 39% of global Gross Domestic Product.

## Gender in governing climate bodies

Gender is also a key point for analysis within international decision-making. The Women's Environment & Development Organisation's (WEDO) Gender Climate Tracker states that:



Robust gender-sensitive language has been integrated most within adaptation projects.



UNFCCC decisions utilise a gender mainstreaming approach, with many explicitly referring to gender balance and enhancing women's participation in boards and bodies.



At COP27, women delegates accounted for 35.6% of all national Party delegates, a proportion lower than pre-pandemic COPs. The lowest participation by region was found in delegations from Asia and Africa, at 32.14% and 32.24% respectively.

Additionally, gender inclusions and integrations within Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) setting are as follows:



Of the original 2016 NDCs submitted, only 64 out of 190 included references to women or gender. 2020's updated NDCs saw an added seven bring in these inclusions.



'Non-annex I' countries lead in incorporating gender inclusions in their NDCs. As Annex-I countries traditionally focus on mitigation efforts, it shows that gender is 'rarely perceived as a relevant consideration in the context of mitigation strategies'.



Only 15 NDCs refer to 'the role of women as important decision-makers'.



Only six NDCs refer to women as 'agents or drivers of change'.

Taking into account these statistics (which only represent small realities of gender-specific experiences), climate finance adaptation and mitigation projects provide a useful resource for addressing many of these problems. While these projects should not be seen as a panacea, they do offer us the chance to remedy or ease the problems experienced by women across the globe, and also create avenues for better understanding how gender can be analysed as a cross-cutting issue.

## The Green Climate Fund

The Green Climate Fund (GCF), in relation to gender, operates with a Gender Policy and an Action Plan that work to maximise the utilisation of gender-sensitive approaches, and provides multiple resources to help stakeholders include gender analysis/assessments within project development.

The GCF is in a unique position to further influence the promotion of gender as a unique and important cross-cutting issue to take into consideration, now and in the future.



## GCF insight

### What we found

In brief, here's what we found from our study:

- Accessing accurate and reliable data and the lack of funds to collect primary data are key barriers to understanding the current context of a target area and undertaking gender assessments.
- Respondents highlighted a lack of perceived importance of gender as a major challenge in designing impactful projects with positive gender benefits.
- Limited gender expertise combined with a difficulty in encouraging participation hinders gender action plan development.



## Methodology

This study was conducted in February 2023 and consisted of survey questions and semi-structured interviews. The survey received 78 responses and we conducted 5 interviews - 3 with external stakeholders and 2 with E Co. consultants and gender experts, Debasmita Boral Rolland and Roberta Piacchi.

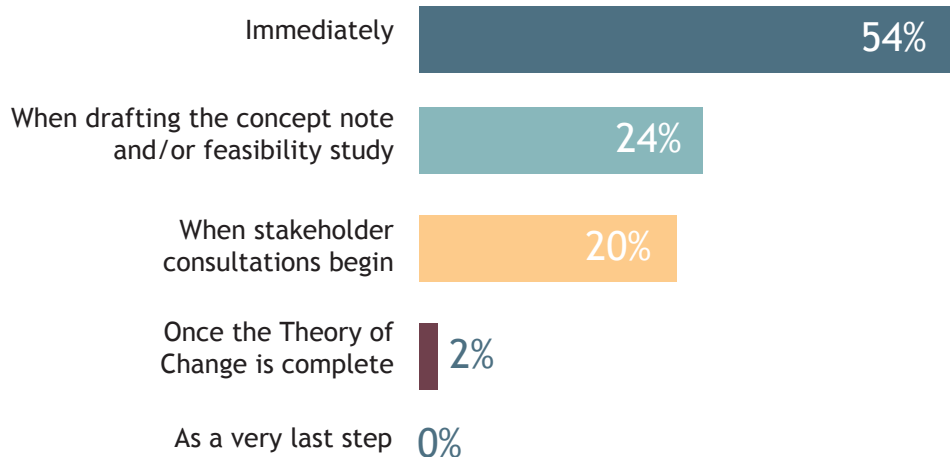
The goal of this study is to identify the challenges and barriers to successfully designing climate projects for the GCF that yield gender benefits. This edition explores the need to ensure gender is a core focus when tackling climate change as well as the processes relating to developing gender assessments and gender action plans for the GCF. By understanding where project developers struggle to integrate gender, we can then begin to pinpoint potential solutions - some of which have been highlighted by E Co's experts.

The need to integrate gender considerations in tackling climate change is obvious - you cannot exclude the needs, rights and vulnerabilities of half of the world's population if you're aiming for a just transition for the future. Ensuring equal and meaningful participation allows more voices to be heard, promotes equitable decision-making and identifies potential solutions that benefit broader society.

In the context of climate change project development, the question then is when to start considering gender during the design phase? We asked this in our survey and the results are encouraging.

Over half, 54%, said gender considerations occur immediately. 24% said when drafting the concept note and/or feasibility study, 20% said when the stakeholder consultations begin. Just 2% said when the theory of change is completed, and no one answered that they consider gender as a last step when the Funding Proposal is nearly complete.

### When does your organisation normally start considering gender during the project design phase?



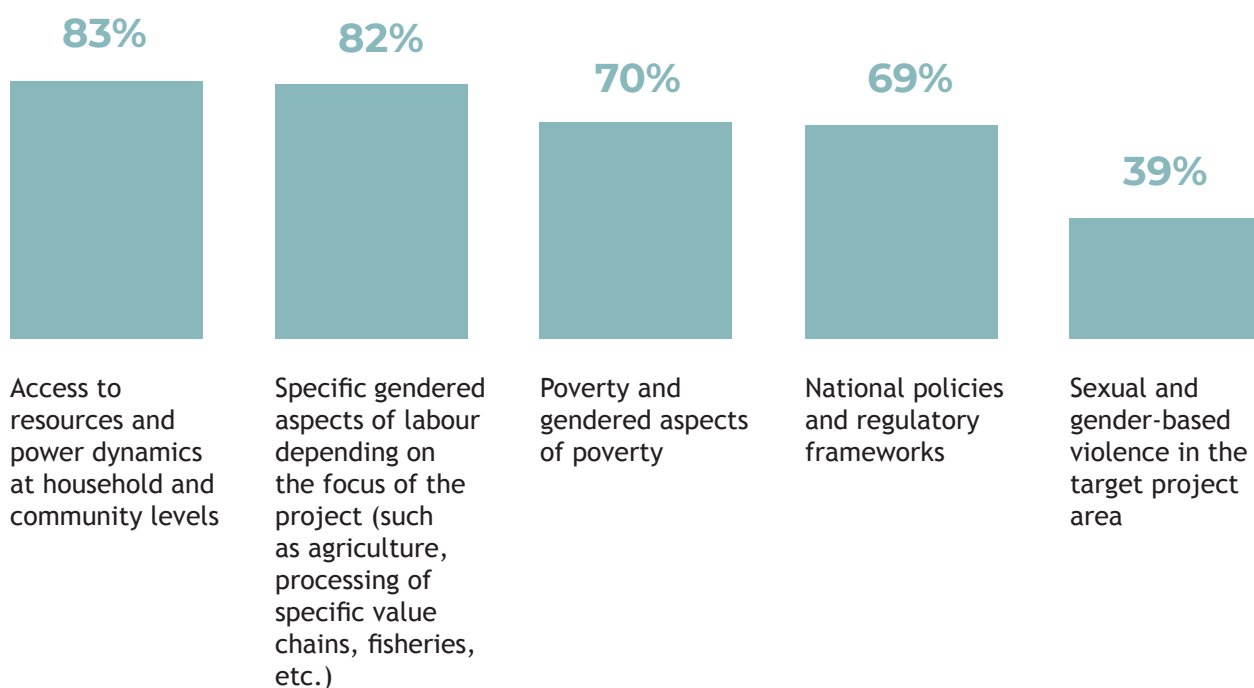
## Gender assessments

Being able to design effective and impactful interventions requires an understanding of the existing gender context - the factors of inequality, overlapping vulnerabilities as well as the opportunities - in the target project area. The gender assessment is the tool that provides this background and is typically the first step in the GCF gender consideration process.

It can be challenging to know what information should be collected during the assessment to provide the necessary information to build on. We asked respondents 'what are the key issues they consider for the gender assessment?'

The vast majority highlighted two issues - access to resources and power dynamics at household and community levels (83%) and specific gendered aspects of labour depending on the focus of the project (such as agriculture, processing of specific value chains, fisheries, etc.) (82%). Poverty and gendered aspects of poverty was chosen by 70% of respondents, national policies and regulatory frameworks by 69% and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the target project area by 39%.

### What are the key issues your organisation considers for the gender assessment?



These results largely reflect the responses by E Co. experts. When asked the same question, both E Co. experts highlighted four essential questions that must be answered:

- 1 What is the gender and socioeconomic context for the proposed project intervention?
- 2 Who has what in the project area - land, resources, income, assets?
- 3 Who does what in the project area - gendered responsibilities?
- 4 Who decides what - at the household level, in the community as well as through broader policy frameworks?

Providing answers to these questions ensures a thorough understanding of the current context in the target area relating to existing roles and responsibilities at the community and household level as well as the decision-making power structure. From this, you can begin to understand the dynamics and can design project interventions accordingly.

However, answering these questions is easier said than done. Many respondents highlighted data as a key constraint in developing an accurate gender assessment.



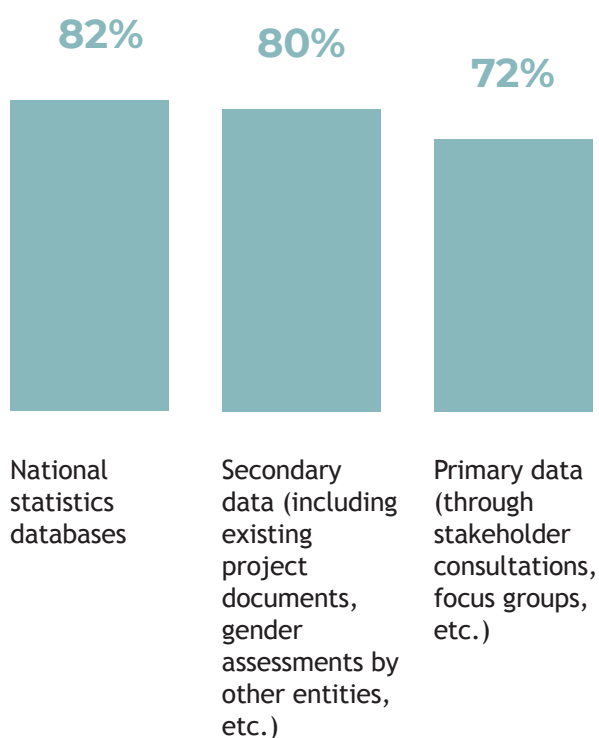
## Data access challenges

Ideally, primary data would be collected through consultations and focus groups with key community stakeholders. But there is often limited opportunity to do this. Luckily there is a wealth of secondary data to help triangulate findings, although it may not always be clear which sources to use.

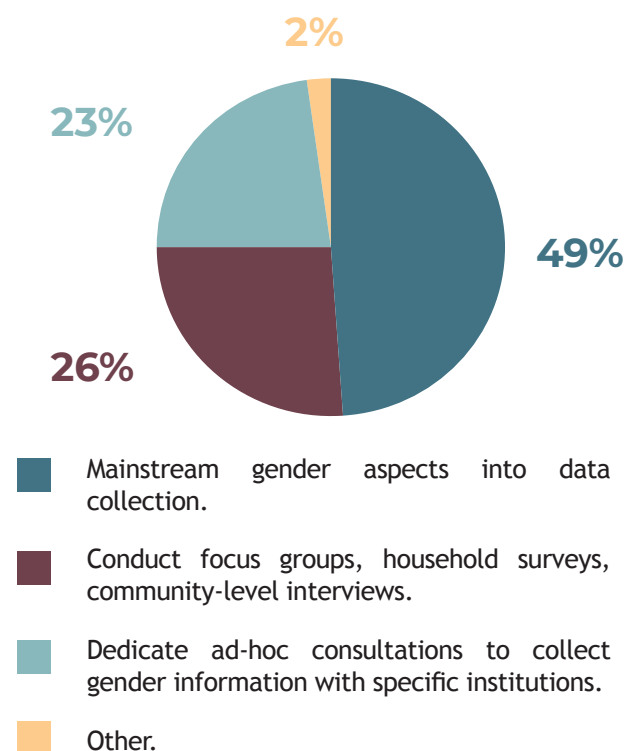
E Co. gender experts said that national statistics databases may not always be up to

date or contain ideal data but are typically the first port of call when looking for the necessary information. This is reflected in the survey answers. We asked respondents to choose the main sources of information they use when conducting the gender assessment. 82% cited national statistics databases, followed by secondary data (80%), and as expected, primary data was lowest at 72%.

**What are the main sources of information your organisation normally uses for the gender assessment?**



**Where respondents answered that they conduct primary data collection, we asked 'what do you do during stakeholder consultations?'**



Both Debasmita and Roberta noted that it would be better if more ad-hoc consultations could take place. They also suggested that, where possible, a combination of primary and secondary data should be used for the assessment, with a focus on being as site-specific as possible. Nonetheless, data access, especially primary data collection, is often tied to limited funding for gender-focused activities.



## Lack of funding to conduct assessments

Several respondents and interviewees cited a lack of funds as a key constraint in developing a gender assessment. When designing a project there may be limited funding available for the entire proposal, meaning a much lower likelihood that a gender expert can travel to the target region to undertake primary research, or a local gender expert can be hired. Conducting a thorough gender assessment can be resource-heavy, including high time and financial costs and without a suitable dedicated budget for gender-focused project development activities, the scope and accuracy of the assessment decreases.

*“Assessments are done to the best possible ability within budget but they are often not ideal. It’s really hard to design a project that will be able to appropriately and effectively address the challenges you have identified if you don’t speak with the communities that will benefit from it.”*



Roberta Piaci  
Consultant

It is important to include a budget that accounts for community stakeholder consultations, focus groups and household surveys and/or questionnaires, preferably conducted by gender experts, at the start of the design phase to increase the chances of the project being most impactful. One survey respondent suggests the need for “dedicated funding for a) gender b) GESI actions c) intentionality by all stakeholders.”

## Tips for conducting a gender assessment

We asked our gender experts for advice on conducting the ideal gender assessment, here are their tips:



Primary data collection - travel to the target area prepared with trained and qualified gender experts where possible. Use a range of methods, such as inclusive stakeholder consultations that ensure there is free and prior informed consent, **they do no harm** and a combination of key informant interviews versus informal, unstructured (sometimes segregated) discussions.



Make sure you plan ahead for key informant interviews and focus groups because there are many considerations that must be taken into account. For example, women often have double workdays, including many hours of unpaid household and/or childcare responsibilities, meaning there is limited scope to attend. Attention must be given to the times and locations of meetings and discussions to limit the risk of gender-based violence. Sessions late at night, or too far from home may expose women to increased levels of gender-based violence.



In communities where gender-based violence is prevalent, it may be necessary to speak with influential (often, male) members of the community to get their buy-in. Presenting the business case for gender inclusion may be more likely to yield benefits rather than the moral argument.



If possible, provide compensation and ensure health and sanitation facilities are available, such as toilets and nursing rooms.



Use the sessions to try to answer the four essential questions highlighted above.



Use secondary data resources to support findings. Or, where primary data collection is not feasible, use secondary data as the basis for your assessment. Our experts suggest resources such as:

- UN Agencies - UNWOMEN; WMO; UNDP; UNFPA; UNICEF; SDG Tracker
- Human Development Index
- Poverty Index
- World Bank database
- National Statistics bureaus
- INGOs - CARE International, Save the Children

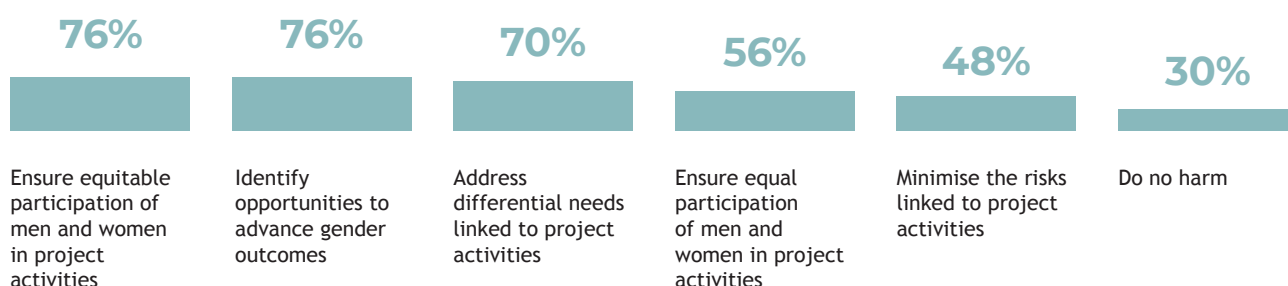
## Developing the Gender Action Plan (GAP)

When the assessment is complete it is essential to begin designing the GAP. We asked survey respondents what their main considerations are for the GAP. The GAP is a tool used to ensure gender mainstreaming is embedded into project design and implementation. The project GAP mirrors the logical framework of the project and is an integral part of project design. GAPs include clear targets, gender design features and measurable performance indicators to ensure equitable participation and benefits, for men, women, girls and boys - depending on the context. Often, it may be a tool to encourage women's empowerment through the project design.

### Terminology:

- Gender Equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys.
- Gender Equity refers to the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men, and girls and boys.

Have a look at this useful diagram from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [here](#) which illustrates the difference well.



While the most popular answers were predictable, our gender experts were surprised by how few people chose do no harm. They noted that this is typically their number one consideration when developing the GAP because all proposed interventions should focus on preventing the exacerbation of existing factors of inequality.

Our experts noted that the GAP should include vulnerability assessments to help identify vulnerable groups and ensure equal access for them, as well as potential risks of project activities with the intention of minimising the threat of increased gender inequality, gender-based violence or other risks that may have been identified. One of the best ways to mitigate this is by following the findings of the gender assessment - the logic should be:

**My assessment tells me the threats are ABC [risks], therefore I have done XYZ [actions] to limit them.**

By embedding gender considerations from the very beginning of project design, it may be easier to identify - and therefore, mitigate, these potential risks. It is important to understand that not every action may have a gender angle but by viewing the proposed interventions through a gender lens promotes a different perspective. However, perspectives relating to gender and its importance in climate change project design were identified by respondents and interviewees as major barriers to developing a GAP.

<sup>1</sup> Definitions from the European Institute of Gender Equality.

## Perceived importance of gender

Respondents were asked ‘What is your greatest challenge when developing a GAP?’ Many highlighted a perceived lack of importance of gender equality and ‘traditional’ gender roles in some geographies leading to weak policies as a major barrier.

One interviewee said:



*“The greatest challenge we find is the gender stereotypes and strong cultural beliefs combined with weaker gender policies and, therefore, inadequate funding to support gender activities.”*

This sentiment is echoed by survey responses including one that noted:



*“The fact that economic criteria are often given more importance than gender. Poorer women are typically left behind and wealthier middle-class women overrepresented. Many gender-based studies materially worsen inequality.”*

Equally, many suggested that gender may be viewed by some, including Accredited and Executing entities, as an add-on or tick box to the Funding Proposal rather than being viewed seriously as a key consideration. Survey respondents and E Co. experts noted that the design of some projects clearly shows an approach that has not focused on gender initially but rather has tried to retroactively integrate and align gender with the Theory of Change and logframe, often done poorly.

A respondent told us that “During design: there needs to be more women involved to design initiatives important to ensure equal



participation of gender ministries, NGOs, communities, buy-in from national decision makers who might disregard the importance of addressing gender and seeing this more as a box to tick, ensuring capacities are built and resources are provided to assure effective participation of women in consultations during the design of the activities.” Others said, “The relevance of the gender action plan is low for some participant stakeholders” and “It is difficult to manage stakeholder expectations. The assumption of support from policymakers is not always accurate.”



## Technical expertise and participation challenges

The final issues survey respondents and interviewees highlighted were limited understanding of gender in the context of project design and a difficulty in active participation of key groups. Our survey asked, ‘in your experience, what are the main challenges relating to gender in GCF project design?’ One respondent noted *“Non-existent technical capacity and lack of logistical means”* while another said that there is *“Often a lack of gender expertise meaning those who design projects, conduct assessments and development project documents fail to wear the gender lens, mainly due to a lack of gender-related sensitisation and awareness.”* It is apparent that understanding the requirements for an effective and accurate gender assessment and gender action plan that adheres to the GCF process is a barrier for respondents. Many said that they would like to hire gender experts to deliver, or, at least, supervise, the key assessments and plans but may not have the necessary budget.

*Our experts regularly work on GAPs and gender assessments for GCF projects. Most recently, Debasmita conducted the gender action plan for the approved project FP 191 - Enhancing Adaptation and Community Resilience by Improving Water Security in Vanuatu. To see the approach taken and final plan, download the documents [here](#).*

*The E Co. team also recently delivered a training session on ‘Gender in climate finance: what you need to know’. To watch the training, download the replay kit [here](#).*



Debasmita Borall  
Rolland  
Consultant

Interestingly, some of the points made by respondents blend several of the challenges highlighted in this report. For example, one noted that “The lack of technical expertise is linked to the low interest of some stakeholders to take gender considerations seriously.” Another said a major challenge for them was the lack of “In-depth knowledge of the local situation, sustainable and equitable governance, participation and inclusiveness” in the project design. This may be partially linked to the budgetary constraints previously noted which hinder the ability to conduct highly detailed primary research in the target area. However, limited or untargeted participation is a recurring theme within the responses received.

Designing a project intended to provide gender benefits becomes incredibly challenging if you cannot reach the expected beneficiaries. Ensuring active participation is therefore critical. Yet, an interviewee noted that *“ensuring comprehensive participation of all stakeholders, especially women in the community”* was their biggest challenge. A survey respondent told us that *“setting a target for women’s participation”* is a major issue as is *“the limited participation of women in decision-making bodies”* mentioned by another. Active participation of specific, often hard to reach, groups is difficult - *“in indigenous people and local communities making connections with women and girls for doing interviews is the most difficult. Identifying women and their abilities for being a part of project implementation, in some local and indigenous communities is one of the serious challenges”* - as one respondent told us.

## Looking forward

This report highlights the main problems relating to gender in GCF project design that our study found. However, it is important to also look for potential solutions. Many of the challenges are large and interlinked and therefore should not be viewed separately. For example, changing the perception of the importance of gender in tackling climate change must occur if we are to achieve impact at the required scale. This will be achieved by acknowledging the link between both rather than seeing climate change and gender as different challenges in these contexts. When perceptions change, expertise will likely follow as greater emphasis will be placed upon developing the necessary skills. Therefore, the gap in gender awareness and knowledge relating to climate change falls.

We asked, ‘what can the GCF do to ensure projects yield positive gender benefits?’ As expected, many responses discussed the need to enhance understanding and capacity. One said, “capacity building in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in all activities and budget” while another mentioned that “project developers should be educated on the need to consider gender issues when designing budgets.”

This message was repeated many times with others saying:

 *“Build capacities at national level, engage more women to design proposals, include specific outcomes to assess transformational benefits for women and men”*

 *“Have more interactive workshops for clarification and the importance of mainstreaming gender related issues in the context of the proposal and presenting successful examples”*

 *“Develop a shared vision and explicit consensus on gender equality objectives relevant to the country strategy or development activity. Make long-term commitments to partners and activities. Assess and strengthen partner capacity for gender responsive and participatory analysis, planning and implementation.”*

On the issue of funding, some urged the GCF to “provide means to facilitate dedicated resources to drive the gender agenda throughout the whole life cycle of the project” and “consider the country context, ensure engagement with investees on the practicality of achieving GAP tasks, and provide funds for technical assistance/advisory support and monitoring.”

E Co. experts stressed the importance of gender being included in readiness and for entities to have existing experience in gender transformative work. They also mentioned the need to move from just gender mainstreaming to a gender continuum and get accredited entities to commit to gender ambition - gender sensitive but not transformative.

### Terminology:

- Gender sensitivity refers to understanding and taking account of the societal and cultural factors involved in gender-based exclusion and discrimination in the most diverse spheres of public and private life.<sup>2</sup>
- Gender transformative refers to approaches that aim at addressing imbalanced power dynamics and relations, rigid gender norms and roles, harmful practices, unequal formal and informal rules as well as gender-blind or discriminatory legislative and policy frameworks that create and perpetuate gender inequality.<sup>3</sup>

They also pointed to knowledge and learning resources to help build understanding. Updating the gender mainstreaming toolkit, which is five years old, would be helpful, especially to include guidance on issues such as gender-based violence as this has become a recurring question in proposal reviews. Equally, publishing sectoral guides with potential gender responsive interventions would give project developers greater insight into how proposed interventions can be tailored to sector specific challenges.

Finally, ensure entities have policies in place (which the GCF does) but that the accreditation process reviews their engagement and implementation of these policies to determine their suitability for developing projects benefiting gender.

While recent years have shown a significant increase in the focus on gender within the context of climate change, there is still a long way to go to overcome the challenges this report highlights. The GCF, as the flagship climate fund globally, has the unique opportunity to play a vital role in accelerating gender within the climate agenda.

<sup>2</sup> Definition from European Institute for Gender Equality.

<sup>3</sup> Definition from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



This report was independently developed by E Co. consultants

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### About GCF insight

This survey and report is an initiative of E Co., emerging from work we are doing to develop low-carbon, climate resilient projects. E Co.'s team of consultants designed and administered the survey and prepared this report. E Co. has conducted this research independently and is not affiliated with the GCF, the GCF Secretariat or donors. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent those of the GCF. Nothing in the interviews or any information or material relating thereto shall be construed as implying any official endorsement of or responsibility on the part of the Green Climate Fund.

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### PUBLISHING TEAM

Marcus Arcanjo  
Grant Ballard-Tremeer  
Mariella de Souza-Baker  
Jack Cribb

### With thanks to:

Debasmita Boral  
Rolland and Roberta  
Piacchi

Cover illustration:  
Cindy Kang

Designed by:  
Anatoliy Mazarchuk

### CONNECT WITH US

[ecoltdgroup.com](http://ecoltdgroup.com)

[amy@ecoltdgroup.com](mailto:amy@ecoltdgroup.com)

 [E Co.](#)

 [@ecoltdnews](#)

Cindy Kang is a New York-based illustrator from Seoul, South Korea. Her colorful works combine organic textures with vibrant palettes, conveying warmth and reverie. She has received awards and recognitions from American Illustration, 3x3 Magazine, The Society of Illustrators, and Communication Arts, among others. [cindysykang.com](http://cindysykang.com)

## About E Co.

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**Our 99% success rate** in unlocking climate finance has led to the mobilisation of over USD \$3 billion of climate finance from global climate funds, including: GCF, GEF, Adaptation Fund and NAMA Facility. We are proud members of the [GCF Communities of Practice network](#).

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Clients include: AfDB, BOAD, Carbon Trust, EBRD, FAO, GCF, GEF, GIZ, NAMA Facility, UNDP, UNHCR, UNIDO, World Bank, WRI and WWF.

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[amy@ecoltdgroup.com](mailto:amy@ecoltdgroup.com)

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