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# Review of the structure and effectiveness of the independent Technical Advisory Panel

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## **Summary**

This document includes an executive summary of the Investment Committee report entitled “Review of the structure and effectiveness of the independent Technical Advisory Panel”, as well as a note from the Secretariat on the findings and recommendations of the report. The document also contains observations from the Investment Committee to improve the structure and effectiveness of the Panel, based on the recommendations of the report, that the Board may wish to consider in the context of the review.

## Introduction

1. In decision B.09/10, the Board approved the terms of reference of the independent Technical Advisory Panel (TAP), which define its composition and structure, its operation as an independent body, and its mandate to engage on the review of funding proposals. Three of the six current members of the TAP were appointed at the tenth meeting of the Board (B.10) (July 2015) and the remaining three at the twelfth meeting (March 2016).
2. At B.10, through decision B.10/09, the Board requested the Secretariat to conduct, in consultation with the Investment Committee, a review of the effectiveness of the TAP (the Review), to be provided to the Board for consideration at its fourteenth meeting. At its thirteenth meeting, the Board decided to include the Review in the workplan for 2017, and requested the Investment Committee to provide the draft terms of reference of the Review for the Board's consideration as appropriate. At its fifteenth meeting, in decision B.15/06, the Board approved the terms of reference for the Review, and requested the Secretariat to commission an independent third party to conduct the Review in accordance with such terms. It also requested the Secretariat, in consultation with the Investment Committee, to provide the final report for the consideration of the Board at its seventeenth meeting.
3. Following the tendering process, the Secretariat selected the consulting firm SQ Consult to conduct the Review. The review has been prepared independently by the consulting firm with the Investment Committee's oversight, with the Secretariat providing only logistical support. The firm has reviewed a broad range of documentation relative to the TAP, including the proposal approval process and the terms of reference of the TAP, records of the work conducted by each TAP expert, the TAP assessments of the funding proposals reviewed, and the composition of the pipeline. Furthermore, the reviewers have sought inputs from a variety of stakeholders, including the Board and the Investment Committee, the TAP itself, the Secretariat, accredited entities, national designated authorities and active observers.
4. SQ Consult presented a draft report on 24 August 2017, to which the Investment Committee provided comments. The final report was provided on 12 September. The report's recommendations are presented in several categories, and provide options to improve the TAP's composition, processes, assessments and overall value to the Board and the GCF stakeholders.
5. The Secretariat analysed the content and recommendations set out in the report to determine their implications in terms of applicability and coherence with existing GCF policies and those currently under review. The Secretariat's comments are presented in annex I.
6. Observations from the Investment Committee are presented in annex II.

## **Green Climate Fund: Review of the structure and effectiveness of the independent Technical Advisory Panel**

### **Final Report: Executive Summary**

Contract No. GCF/2017/C/ 016

**SQ Consult B.V.**

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Registered under project number [CC/2017/USE/009](#)



## Executive summary

Established in 2010, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has worked on making a significant and ambitious contribution to the global efforts towards attaining the goals set by the international community to combat climate change. The GCF finances low-emission (mitigation), climate-resilient (adaptation), and cross-cutting projects and programmes through four financial instruments: grants, concessional loans, equity and guarantees.

This report stems from the GCF Board Decision (B.15/06) requesting an independent third-party review of the independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) structure, processes and effectiveness. The objective of this review was to provide a credible, independent evaluation support real-time learning processes that build ownership in a way that supports adaptive management, and:

*"ensure that the composition and capacity of the ITAP allows it to perform the review of funding proposals in a timely way and with high quality delivery."*

The GCF Secretariat contracted SQ Consult to conduct the review, which included over 100 interviews or surveys with all major stakeholder groups: the ITAP, Secretariat, Board, Investment Committee, Accredited Entities, National Designated Authorities and Active Observers. The data collection and analysis were conducted in July and August 2017.

### Overview of the ITAP

ITAP has 6 members that cover a range of specialties related to adaptation, mitigation, the private sector, financing, development and implementation of projects in developing countries. The ITAP reports to the Investment Committee of the Board.

Once a funding proposal is received, the Secretariat performs a completeness check and assesses compliance with environmental and social safeguards; gender, financial, legal, and results monitoring and reporting policies; as well as assessing the project risks and expected performance against the six investment criteria contained in the investment framework.<sup>1</sup> The Secretariat also works with the Accredited Entities (AEs) as necessary to address any gaps.

The ITAP receives the funding proposal and attachments as well as Secretariat's assessment once the senior management at the Secretariat have determined the proposal is ready to be presented to the Board. The ITAP has approximately 2.5 - 3 weeks to develop their assessment based upon the six investment criteria, as well as risks only as they relate specifically to those criteria.

To date, the ITAP have reviewed 55 funding proposals. Each proposal has a lead and alternate reviewer, but is read and discussed by all ITAP members. Both the Secretariat's and the ITAPs assessments are then provided to the GCF Board.

**Note 1 »** <sup>1</sup> The Investment Framework addresses: impact potential, paradigm shift potential, sustainable development potential, responsiveness to recipient's needs, and promoting country ownership. See [http://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/24949/GCF\\_B.09\\_23\\_-\\_Decisions\\_of\\_the\\_Board\\_-\\_Ninth\\_Meeting\\_of\\_the\\_Board\\_24\\_-\\_26\\_March\\_2015.pdf/2f71ce99-7aef-4b04-8799-15975a1f66ef](http://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/24949/GCF_B.09_23_-_Decisions_of_the_Board_-_Ninth_Meeting_of_the_Board_24_-_26_March_2015.pdf/2f71ce99-7aef-4b04-8799-15975a1f66ef)

## Key findings

The highlights of the evaluation findings have been organized into the following categories:

1. ITAP coverage and composition
2. Activities and Processes
3. Content of ITAP assessments
4. Value/role of the ITAP
5. Comparison with other approaches.

### **ITAP coverage and composition**

The evaluators found that the current ITAP is a reasonable cross-section of the regional and technical experience needed, given its Terms of Reference and that it is made up of only six members. However, there are noticeable gaps currently, the current ITAP composition is insufficient to meet anticipated future needs, and the structure is suboptimal as a foundation for expansion. External experts have not been utilized to date for a variety of reasons, most limiting of which is the tightness of the current review schedule. The findings also show that the recruitment process for the ITAP was narrow and this likely affected the applicant pool.

### **Activities and Processes**

The current ITAP assessment process, including details on the content of assessments developed with only high-level guidance from the Board. The Secretariat provides logistical and other support to ITAP as needed. Due to firewall issues, the Secretariat avoids involvement with ITAP assessment processes.

While the current process allows the ITAP to deliver assessments, it is suboptimal and inefficient for most stakeholders, but especially for proposal proponents, including Accredited Entities (AEs). Feedback at an earlier stage is preferred instead of, or in addition to, the current process of receiving ITAP feedback just before being sent to the Board for funding approval.

More clarity on the overall assessment process as well as processes within the ITAP are needed to increase efficiency and value. It is clear that the ITAP needs more time to complete assessments. They also need more guidance from the Board on the eligibility criteria, and potentially also better structured inputs to increase efficiency to optimize their contribution to the assessment process. The process to hire ad hoc external experts also still needs to be established.

The proposals received by the GCF overall are not yet as transformational, as deeply linked to climate change, or demonstrating the long-term sustainability originally assumed when processes were designed. This may well be due in part to confusion on the part of some proposal proponents on what exactly the GCF is seeking, which the GCF is working to address. There is substantial pressure to approve existing projects in the pipeline for all involved, which has contributed to a tight review schedule for the ITAP and tendency to approve with conditions.

## **Content of ITAP assessments**

The evaluators found that, overall, the ITAP have done a reasonable job regarding the content of the ITAP assessments given the dynamics and constraints they faced; however, there is now an opportunity to make adjustments to better utilize the ITAP. The Board finds the assessments useful, but want adjustments to the process, especially to increase consistency and timeliness.

The ITAP assessments do appear to be independent, and within the context of Board guidance. So far, the ITAP assessments have contained feedback that is different than the Secretariat sufficiently often to not duplicate. However, this is expected to diminish as the Board provides more clarity on the assessment criteria and as the Secretariat increases its technical expertise. Yet this difference of opinion can be one of the indicators of independence --- if sufficiently grounded in the relevant local context for the project.

Evaluators note that an ongoing quality assurance review process has not yet been implemented. The assessments would benefit from a more consistent application of the criteria, including stronger consideration of the local context, as well as from a more user-friendly format. To achieve this, the criteria likely need to be adjusted to better highlight the core areas of concern for the Board where input from the ITAP would be particularly valuable, so that the ITAP assessment is more strategically focused. This may include broadening/shifting the criteria they address.

## **Value/role of the ITAP**

At the scale of funding being provided, a transparency mechanism is critical to increase stakeholder buy-in to the GCF and decrease any perception that funding decisions are political. The ITAP is seen as playing an important role in this process and most stakeholders believe it should continue. The ITAP's freedom and ability to highlight issues leading to increased transparency is the most critical and hardest to replace as there are a variety of other potential ways to supply their technical expertise.

The evaluators found that the ITAP is meeting its Terms of Reference by providing funding proposal assessments. However, the ITAP is not fully meeting the needs of the Board and could do more to support the GCF, e.g. providing inputs for policy formation and guidance for proposal proponents.

The costs are reasonable for what the ITAP is currently providing and the early stage of implementation. It is more a question of whether they are performing the most optimal activities efficiently. Also, the ITAP's value in providing independent reviews, which links to increasing transparency is difficult to monetize, especially at this early stage of project implementation. Yet, the evaluators believe that several steps can be taken to increase the cost-efficiency of the ITAP within the same core structure.

The current practice of having the ITAP review all funding proposals will be less necessary as proposal quality increases and processes mature. For example, it may be suboptimal use of limited resources to have them review smaller and/or low risk projects.

It is clear that the ITAP is needed, particularly in the short term. Alternatively, if the Board were to prefer a different approach to facilitating independence, the main added values could be provided in a different way longer term, such as by splitting the functions between a fully-staffed Secretariat and the Independent Evaluation Unit. Ad hoc experts from procurement rosters or from requests-for-proposals could also be used to address Board needs on technical matters that are not directly related to the assessments.

## Comparison with other approaches

The evaluators note that the GCF is experiencing issues also faced by most other large funds in the climate change space. In particular, most funds struggle with similar issues as especially as they ramp up. There is no one clear-cut path for submission review. The GCF is already aware of and/or considering several adjustments that would further optimize the ITAP’s role.<sup>2</sup>

None of the funds has a directly comparable technical review process, and evaluations reported challenges of varying degrees with the technical review functions and perceptions of political decision making.

The comparison showed that most funds deal with issues around country readiness and paradigm shift, therefore approval criteria need to be clearly defined and consistently applied. Proposal proponents prefer early feedback and a thorough approval process is time intensive, needs to be grounded in the local context, and sometimes includes in-country visits. It also indicates that shifting to a different model would not automatically increase overall cost-efficiency.

## Recommendations

The recommendations note the area and the primary actor organized into 3 categories of actions:

- **Immediate** ‘no regret’ changes that could be implemented within the next six months;
- **Connected with ongoing processes**, where the suggestions here will feed into wider reviews or process changes currently being conducted; and
- **Long-term** to be considered for the future. Most also directly relate to ongoing processes.

Composition #1	Secretariat leads, supported by ITAP	Immediate
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**The process to hire ad hoc external experts needs to be operationalized and activated.** The Secretariat should clarify the contracting process, and the ITAP should work with the Secretariat to proactively establish ad hoc contracts with the most needed expertise so that they may be quickly utilized during review periods. The gaps identified in Section 2.1.1 of this report can help the ITAP identify areas for which they would like access to additional expertise now, while the Board is clarifying its priorities (Assessments #1) and overall composition of the ITAP is being reviewed (Composition #2). For example, if it was deemed necessary to prioritize a second review of gender by ITAP, a gender expert with appropriate sectoral and regional expertise could be contracted to only review the gender aspects of the funding proposals or nexus experts could be contracted in the

**Note 2 »** <sup>2</sup> The evaluation team reviewed the technical proposal review functions as well as the recent independent evaluations of several other international climate funds: the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), and the NAMA Facility (NF).



recognition that more of these projects are coming. They could perform topic-specific partial reviews, full reviews, or review draft assessments of the ITAP members. However, until and unless the ITAP is given longer assessment windows, effective utilization will be limited, see Processes #1.

Composition #2	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Connected to ongoing processes
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**Expand the ITAP in a way that broadens the technical and regional expertise.** The number of new members needed depends not only on the volume but also on the structure and overall duties anticipated, and therefore links to the updated priorities of the Board mentioned in Assessments #1. Regardless, the number of ITAP members should expand sufficiently to provide stronger coverage of the frequent combinations of regional and technical experience anticipated going forward and to add more capacity to address the updated priorities of the board. The ad hoc roster is sufficient for less frequent needs and highly specialized topics.

Processes#1	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Immediate and Long-term
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**The ITAP should be given more time to review funding proposals.** Links to Value #3. There have already been discussions on options for doing this, such as providing proposals on a rolling or periodic batch basis or moving the date materials are sent to the ITAP a few weeks earlier. As processes evolve, so will the time the ITAP needs for review. For example, the time they need will vary depending not only on the volume of projects, but on the depth and breadth of review as determined by the updated Board priorities (Assessments #1, Value #2) as well as the extent of material provided at the review stage.

Processes#2	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Connected to ongoing processes
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**The GCF policies and processes at all levels should continue to be updated,** especially relating to the need for additional support and guidance to be provided to proposal proponents, including AEs, as well as more stringent review of investment criteria, particularly as it relates to paradigm shift, country ownership, level of concessionality, and relevance to climate change. The GCF has already directed the Secretariat to take some steps to address these issues at B.18.

Processes #3	ITAP working with the Board and Secretariat	Immediate and Long-term
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**The internal processes of the ITAP will need to evolve as the ITAP expands and the volume increases.** More coherent structure within the ITAP will be especially important for a larger group. This includes more formal processes on who is appropriate to review what in a way that ensures all the updated priorities communicated by the Board receive sufficient attention with use of a combination of ITAP members, supplemented by external expertise as needed. As the ITAP expands, it may be necessary to form subcommittees for longer discussions on proposals, then with a much briefer discussion with the entire ITAP. In the evaluator view is more important going forward that experts with the appropriate expertise are involved in the review and discussion of each proposal than that there is a consensus, of necessity at a higher level, with the entire ITAP. For example, the typical team may need to expand to 3 ITAP reviewers, however, the two secondary reviewers could be significantly more focused on the aspects within their core expertise.

Assessments #1	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Immediate/connected
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**The Board should update, clarify, and prioritize the criteria it wishes the ITAP use.** That is, which are seen as most in need of the ITAP’s unique input. Evaluators suggest prioritizing paradigm shift, country ownership, level of concessionality, and relevance to climate change. For example, where a specialist review has already been conducted for an area not seen as especially sensitive, the Board may decide it is an inefficient use of the ITAP to have them review again. If they should review, then they should have sufficient expertise to do so. The Board should also clarify their expectations regarding the nature and use of conditions recommended by the ITAP. This clarification should happen as soon as feasible as the outcomes influence the path to operationalizing several other recommendations, such as Composition #1 & #2, Processes #1 & #3, and Assessments #2. The GCF is currently working on minimum benchmarks which Further development of results management framework, investment framework and indicative minimum benchmarks will help address this point.

Assessments #2	ITAP working with the Board	Immediate
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**The ITAP should develop a more comprehensive review template** addressing all criteria and subcriteria based upon the feedback from the Board relating to Assessments #1 and adjust to reflect any changes made as per Value #2 & #3. Any quantitative and qualitative metrics should be adjusted as needed for different classes of proposals, including programs/funds. Ensure that all subcriteria are addressed consistently, or noted as not relevant so the reader can be reassured the issue was checked. The outputs should include a clearer system so the Board can better assess the relative significance of the issues raised in the discussion text. Yet, any system needs to be robust enough to be applicable for the wide variety of projects seen by the GCF, especially relating to innovation and nexus issues.

Assessments #3	Board directs Secretariat and ITAP	Immediate
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**Periodic quality assurance reviews should be conducted of ITAP assessments** outside of high-intensity deadlines. These reviews could be conducted by the Independent Evaluation Unit and/or the ITAP, the outputs of which should be discussed with the Investment Committee. The quality assurance would consist of reviews of recent assessments to ensure the criteria definitions and guidelines are sufficiently clear and applied consistently. This ongoing process should also include identifying ways to make the outputs more relevant and user-friendly for the Board.

Value #1	Board directs Secretariat and ITAP	Long-term
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**The ITAP’s role should be expanded.** The Board should clarify the role it wishes ITAP to play. Two of the most obvious synergies are:

- Policy Inputs. The Board should provide requests to the ITAP indicating the policy support most needed. The three potential areas identified are providing technical inputs to support policy formation, feedback on the application of GCF policies, and strategies that could improve the technical quality of funding proposals received. The Secretariat and the ITAP could assess whether the ITAP has the sufficient expertise and availability to address, where it does not involve knowledge unique to the ITAP, a request-for-proposals could be issued, which would help alleviate capacity concerns with the ITAP.

- Submission guidance. The ITAP should provide inputs to the Secretariat to produce general guidance for proposal proponents and producing separate reports regarding trends they are seeing with assessments as well as in the broader climate change space.

Value #2	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Connected/Long-term
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**The Board should review which concepts or funding proposals are most important for the ITAP to review.** Once the Board has confirmed its priorities for the ITAP (Assessment #1) and key concerns relating to the need for independence, the Board should review which funding proposal categories the ITAP should then assess. For example, the Board may wish to limit reviews of Micro projects (up to USD 10M) and those in the lowest risk categories, i.e. Category C. If any limits are imposed, there should be periodic review by the ITAP of a sample of those no longer included to ensure overall consistency with the intent. This links to the existing Simplified Approval Process.<sup>3</sup>

Value #3	Secretariat ensures this feedback is considered	Connected/Long-term
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**The timing of ITAP inputs should be shifted earlier in the proposal process to increase value and overall efficiency.**<sup>4</sup> The ITAP should review at an earlier stage that allows the proposal proponents sufficient time to modify the concepts. This could be as early as the concept note stage or at a new milestone in the full proposal process. The level of review should be tailored to the information and level of detail realistically available at that earlier stage. For example, they could conduct a higher-level review that focuses on all investment criteria or narrow to focus more deeply only on the most sensitive issues e.g. paradigm shift. Relating to Composition #2, a higher-level review of less documentation would increase the number of projects the ITAP could review at current capacity levels if this replaced full proposal review, but not if added to the current process.

If the focus of the ITAP assessments were to be shifted to the concept note stage, rather than a new proposal milestone, then either all projects/programs must submit a concept note stage, or there would still need to be a mechanism for the ITAP to review full proposals had not already been reviewed earlier. If the project is reviewed at multiple stages, the same review team should be used to the extent feasible. This issue links to the ongoing review of the proposal approval process.

## Conclusion

The ITAP performs an important function, yet there are opportunities to do more to support the GCF, especially in the areas of policy formation and general guidance for proposal proponents. The current ITAP assessment process is suboptimal, especially for proposal proponents who prefer feedback earlier. Also, the ITAP size and composition will need to expand to meet future needs. The costs for the ITAP are reasonable, yet several steps can be taken to increase the value and cost-efficiency, including a more focused review process and more strategic timing and scope of proposals reviewed. For example, the assessments would benefit from clarification of the Board's priorities, more consistent application of the criteria, and stronger consideration of the local context. Finally, evaluators note the GCF is experiencing issues faced by most other climate change funds and GCF is already considering several adjustments that would further optimize the ITAP's role.

Note 3 » <sup>3</sup> See for example: [GCF\\_B.12\\_Inf.05 - Review of the initial proposal approval process Progress report .pdf](#)

Note 4 » <sup>4</sup> This suggestion is already being considered, see for example: [GCF\\_B.12\\_Inf.05 - Review of the initial proposal approval process Progress report .pdf](#)

## Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to the preparation of this report, especially the over 100 interviewees and anonymous survey participants that provided feedback in support of this evaluation. We received invaluable insights from members of the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP), staff of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Secretariat, members of the GCF Board and Investment Committee, Accredited Entities (AEs), National Designated Authorities (NDAs), and Active Observers representing both civil society organizations and the private sector. We would especially like to thank members of both the GCF Secretariat and the ITAP for their timely assistance and thorough cooperation throughout the evaluation process.

This project was commissioned by the GCF Investment Committee and overseen by Neil McFarlane, and Adria Llach of the GCF Secretariat. The evaluation team consisted of Julia Larkin as Lead Evaluator and Sergio Ugarte as Quality Manager, both from SQ Consult. The review was conducted with support from the GCF Secretariat and in consultation with the GCF Investment Committee, who provided comments on an earlier draft of this report.

## Disclaimer

The opinions expressed are those of the evaluation team, and do not necessarily reflect those of the GCF Board, the Secretariat or the ITAP. Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the authors. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by the GCF Board of the opinions expressed.



## Annex I: Secretariat's comments on the report

1. The Secretariat has analyzed the content and recommendations in the executive summary of the report "Review of the Structure and Effectiveness of the Technical Advisory Panel", prepared independently of the Secretariat, to understand its implications in terms of applicability and coherence with existing GCF policies and processes, and those currently under review. The Board may wish to consider these views in considering the report's findings and recommendations.
2. The Secretariat finds value in many of the recommendations, which can be implemented within the current frameworks. However, the Secretariat would like to point out several corrections and issues related to some of the report's findings and recommendations, which the Board may wish to consider:
  - (a) Page 8, recommendations - Assessments #1: The benefits of prioritizing criteria for the TAP to review are not clear. Prioritization of certain criteria could have profound implications for the TAP's ability to consider the project as a whole, leading to potentially unbalanced assessments. Further development of the investment framework (e.g. through indicative minimum benchmarks) and the results management framework could be a way to address this issue;
  - (b) Page 8, recommendations - Value #1: The Secretariat considers that the technical expertise of the TAP can play a useful role in providing technical guidance, particularly on the sectoral guidelines. However, the Secretariat would point out that for the TAP to be involved in policy development would be a significant widening of the original TAP mandate, which the Secretariat would not recommend; and
  - (c) Page 9, recommendations - Value #3: The recommendation on the need for earlier timing of TAP inputs is recognized by the Secretariat as useful for accredited entities, when possible. The ideal timing for such involvement needs to be carefully considered. The Secretariat's proposal is for the Secretariat and the TAP to determine together the best timing for earlier TAP inputs.
  - (d) Page 9, recommendations - Value #3: Due to the high number of concept notes received, and the fact that many do not proceed to the funding proposal stage, the Secretariat does not believe it is efficient or effective to have the TAP involved at the concept note review stage at the current time. (This recommendation by the consultant may also imply an amendment of the updated activity cycle approved at B.17.)

## Annex II: Observations from the Investment Committee

1. The Investment Committee has reviewed and discussed the content and recommendations in the report “Review of the Structure and Effectiveness of the Technical Advisory Panel” to understand appropriate next steps.
  2. Based on its discussions, the Investment Committee identified a series of actions that the Board may wish to consider in the context of the review:
    - (a) Draw together the arrangements for a roster of experts, with the necessary sectoral and regional expertise, for use by the TAP and the Secretariat in the review of funding proposals;
    - (b) Improve the internal structures and processes of ITAP to ensure more coherence, establishment of formal procedures, and efficient use of time and resources;
    - (c) Develop a more comprehensive review template, ensuring that investment criteria and subcriteria are addressed consistently, using the appropriate metrics relevant for the sector and the indicative minimum benchmarks, when available;
    - (d) Implement a periodic quality assurance process of the TAP’s assessments;
    - (e) Implement, on a pilot basis, a new review cycle that allows for longer review times by the TAP and the provision of its inputs at an earlier stage in the approval process, consistent with the updated project and programme cycle as set up in annex IV to decision B.17/09;
    - (f) Consultation with the TAP when developing sectoral guidance for projects and programmes; and
    - (g) Review the composition of the TAP, defined in paragraph 11 of the TAP’s terms of reference, upon the finalization of policies related to the proposal approval process, and based on the resource needs arising from the review of funding proposals and the support in the development of sectoral guidance.
-