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GCF Social protection and climate change: A strategic review of the evidence

Portfolio review



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List of abbreviations

AF	Adaptation Fund	IE	Implementing Entity
ANAM	National Meteorological Agency (Burkina Faso)	iTAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel
BAU	Business as Usual	KST	Korea Standard Time
CERC	Contingent Emergency Response Component	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research	NAP	National Adaptation Plan
CIF	Climate Investment Funds	NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
CIO	Chief Investment Officer	NDA	National Designated Authority
CMIP6	Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6	NPC	Nature, People, and Climate (CIF Program)
DAE	Direct Access Entity	OPM	Oxford Policy Management
DMMU	Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit	PMC	Project Management Cost
EWS	Early Warning System	PPCR	Pilot Program for Climate Resilience
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	PWPs	Public Works Programmes
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations	SAP	Simplified Approval Process
FP	Funding Proposal	SCT	Social Cash Transfer
GCF	Green Climate Fund	SP	Social Protection
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	SSP	Shared Socioeconomic Pathway
		TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
		WDC	Ward Development Committee
		WFP	World Food Programme

1 Overview and key findings

This Portfolio Review provides an overview of social protection within the current portfolio of GCF investments. It builds on two previous reviews (GCF and FAO 2025, Aleksandrova et al. 2024), incorporating projects covered in those analyses and extending their work by including projects that have been subsequently approved (Section 2). In addition, this Portfolio Review includes an assessment of the Readiness Programme projects, which were not included in previous reviews of GCF's portfolio (Section 3).

The analysis is framed around the question: *How has the GCF portfolio invested in social protection to-date and where are the major gaps/ missed opportunities?* With the objective of providing an understanding of not just the barriers, but also the opportunities for the GCF to further scale-up its engagement with social protection in the future.

The review explores the GCF's engagement at both the social protection programmatic and systems levels. The latter includes data (for instance as used for targeting), information systems (such as programme MIS) and delivery mechanisms (including for instance outreach and payment mechanisms). This is to reflect the fact that strong foundational social protection systems that include analysis, assessments, data on climate change risks and impacts provide significant support to the goals of climate action (Task Force, 2025).

The full methodological approach is explained in Annex A.

The findings reveal that:

- **41 GCF-funded projects currently incorporate social protection components.** These investments are heavily concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 16 of the identified projects, and are primarily situated within lower-middle-income countries. This geographical and economic distribution reflects a strategic focus on contexts where institutional capacity is emerging but requires further support to manage climate volatility.
- **This portfolio is highly oriented toward adaptation objectives,** with 36 projects utilising social protection as a mechanism to build household and community resilience. These initiatives frequently employ ecosystem-based approaches and seek to integrate early-warning systems directly into social safety nets.
- **Projects incorporating social protection are concentrated in contexts with emerging institutional capacity and expanding social protection systems.** Most projects are located in lower-middle-income countries (20), with a smaller number in low-income countries (8), and 10 projects are implemented in 9 FCAS countries.
- **Many projects that incorporate social protection components reside in the most aspirational category of integration,** where coordination with social protection systems is mentioned but lacks dedicated budget lines or concrete operational activities. While 13 projects have made progress by piggybacking on existing social protection infrastructure, primarily by utilizing established targeting systems to identify climate-vulnerable beneficiaries, there remains a significant untapped opportunity to move further along the continuum toward true system strengthening.
- **Public works programmes are the most common social protection instrument,** followed by cash transfers and vocational training. Meanwhile, GCF projects are supporting Accredited Entities (AEs) to deliver their own cash safety nets but are not funding the actual cash transfers delivered under government-led programmes, instead focusing on the institutional and operational set-up to leverage ongoing programmes.
- **Grants are overwhelmingly the main source of finance.** Just four of the 41 projects were financed through a combination of grants and loans.
- **GCF is leveraging 3 times its own capital from other sources in co-financing for projects with social protection elements.** There is further initial evidence that the stronger the degree of integration of social protection the more co-finance the GCF leverages.
- **The Readiness Programme is already incorporating social protection elements; with this identified in 35 programmes.** Programmes engaged with social protection across a broad spectrum, from governance-level engagement, such as social protection ministries serving as members of Project Steering Committees, and capacity building and technical activities, through to policy and programmatic alignment. This suggests that the

Readiness window can offer an entry point for building the foundational systems and inter-ministerial coordination required to institutionalize the social-protection-climate link at the national level.

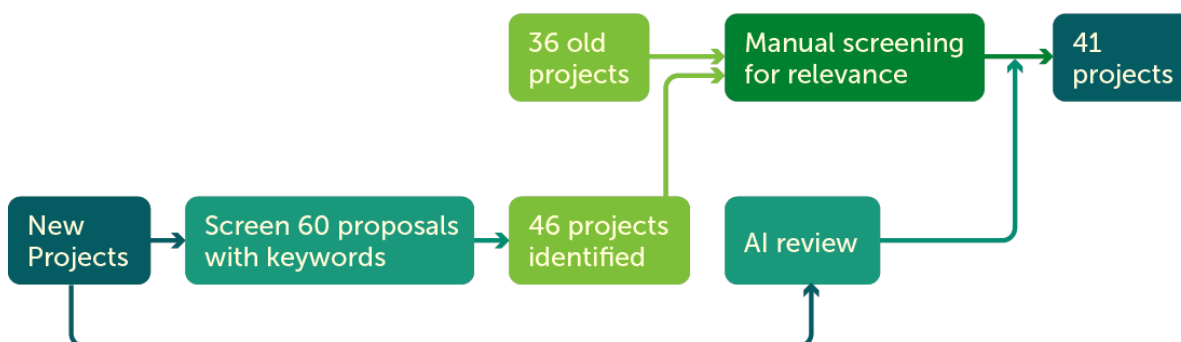
2 Funded projects

This section reviews projects under the two project funding modalities of the GCF – Simplified Approval Process (SAP) projects and full funding proposals.

2.1 Overview of method

This Portfolio Review combined a structured staged manual approach with the innovative use of AI to improve both the quality and efficiency of the process, as outlined in *Figure 1* (also Annex A for full methodological approach).

Figure 1: Screening of Funded Activities



Our staged manual approach involved:

Stage 1: Identifying all projects that were approved since two previous reviews, meaning those approved between August 2024 and October 2025 – ‘New Projects’. This identified 66 funding proposals across both SAP proposals and full funding proposals.

Stage 2: Screening the 60 available funding proposals using a python-based automated keyword screening process to identify potentially relevant proposals. This identified 46 proposals.

Stage 3: Manual screening to assess relevance – in particular we examined whether projects contained clearly identifiable social protection components. From these 10 projects were confirmed to include social protection components. At this stage we also manually screened the 36 projects as identified in the earlier reviews by GCF and FAO and by Alexandranova. Five of these were excluded as they did not meet our definition of social protection, specifically, they were not linked to national social protection systems or aligned with the conceptual framework applied in this review.

Stage 4: For those 41 projects that passed the manual screening we then further assigned them to one of four typologies, as introduced in .

Table 1, and reflecting a continuum of strength of integration of social protection into climate action. These typologies are analysis of the characteristics and financing of projects in each of these four Typologies is.

Table 1: Continuum of GCF engagement with social protection

Typology	Main criteria for typology
A. Projects seek synergies and alignment with social protection	Projects aim to achieve harmonisation and alignment with social protection systems and programmes; however, at the implementation level, no dedicated activities or budget lines are allocated to this objective. As a result, integration remains aspirational, confined to the level of “desired” coordination rather than being operationalised in practice.
B. Piggybacks on social protection instruments and systems	Use of the social protection architecture (policy, administrative systems and programmes) to deliver climate action.
C. Strengthens social protection systems	Projects contribute to strengthening social protection systems so that they proactively embed and advance climate resilience. System strengthening for routine delivery of social protection support is not considered under this category if it does not deliberately aim to support better climate outcomes.
D. Innovates with social protection approaches	Projects that drive innovation by creating new approaches that generate evidence for scaling and replication.

Source: authors based on Solorzano et al forthcoming; Aleksandrova, et al 2024; ASP Task Force, 2025

AI was used in parallel with the manual screening of newly approved proposals, creating a dual-track approach. The first prompt conducted keyword detection to identify proposals with potential relevance to social protection and provided a rationale assessing the strength of the linkage. The second prompt was used to determine the appropriate category of integration with social protection. The analysis also identified the specific action objectives to which the social protection instrument or project component contributed, among other categories (see Annex A).

From the dual tracks a total of 41 projects were found to include social protection components (See Annex B). It is these 41 projects which are further analysed below.

2.2 Key findings

2.2.1 Geographic and income distribution

Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for the largest share, with 16 projects, reflecting both high vulnerability and strong demand for integrated climate–social protection approaches. Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific each hosted 8 projects, indicating a growing regional uptake. In addition, 10 projects were implemented in small island developing states, where climate-related shocks intensify the need for social protection for climate action. Five of these projects are multi-country or regional (see projects listed * on Table 1 below).

The geographic distribution of projects shows a concentration in a small number of countries, with Ethiopia hosting the largest cluster (four projects). A second tier of countries, including Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Pakistan each have three projects that integrate social protection and climate objectives. A broader group of countries appears with two projects each, including Malawi, the Philippines, Vanuatu, Timor-Leste, Senegal, Tajikistan, Burkina Faso, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan.

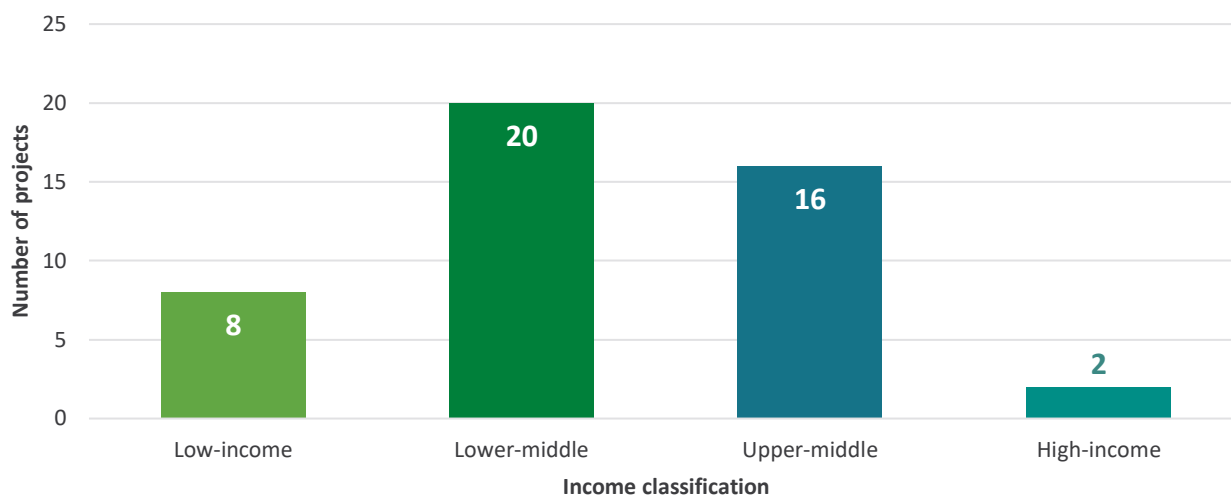
Table 2 Country project summary

Country	No. of projects	Project codes	FCAS
Ethiopia	4	FP257*; FP258*; FP058; FP136	Yes
Armenia	3	FP283*; FP010; SAP014	No
Bangladesh	3	FP069; FP206; SAP026	No
Cambodia	3	FP258*; FP199; FP215*	No
Pakistan	3	FP283*; FP215*; SAP039	No
Azerbaijan	2	FP283; SAP046	No
Brazil	2	FP261; SAP031	No
Burkina Faso	2	FP257*; FP074	Yes
Georgia	2	FP283*; FP068	No
Kyrgyzstan	2	FP283*; SAP002	No
Malawi	2	FP244; FP257*	No
Philippines	2	FP201; SAP010	No
Senegal	2	FP003; FP049	No
Tajikistan	2	FP067; FP283*	No
Timor-Leste	2	FP109; FP215*	Yes
Vanuatu	2	FP184; FP 15*	No
Antigua and Barbuda	1	FP 58*	No
Barbados	1	FP060	No
Bolivia	1	FP261*	No
Botswana	1	FP158	No
Chad	1	FP258*	Yes
Colombia	1	FP261	No
Cook Islands	1	FP 81	No
Cote d'Ivoire	1	SAP028	No
Dominica	1	SAP062	No

Country	No. of projects	Project codes	FCAS
Ecuador	1	FP261	No
Fiji	1	FP258*	No
Gambia	1	FP011	No
Grenada	1	FP059	No
Indonesia	1	FP215*	No
Kenya	1	FP257*	No
Madagascar	1	FP026	No
Mali	1	FP012	Yes
Mozambique	1	SAP042	Yes
Paraguay	1	FP062	No
Papua New Guinea	1	FP215*	Yes
Peru	1	FP261*	No
Somalia	1	FP258*	Yes
South Africa	1	FP267	No
Suriname	1	FP261*	No
Turkmenistan	1	FP283*	No
Uganda	1	FP257*	No
Zambia	1	FP257*	No
Zimbabwe	1	SAP007	Yes

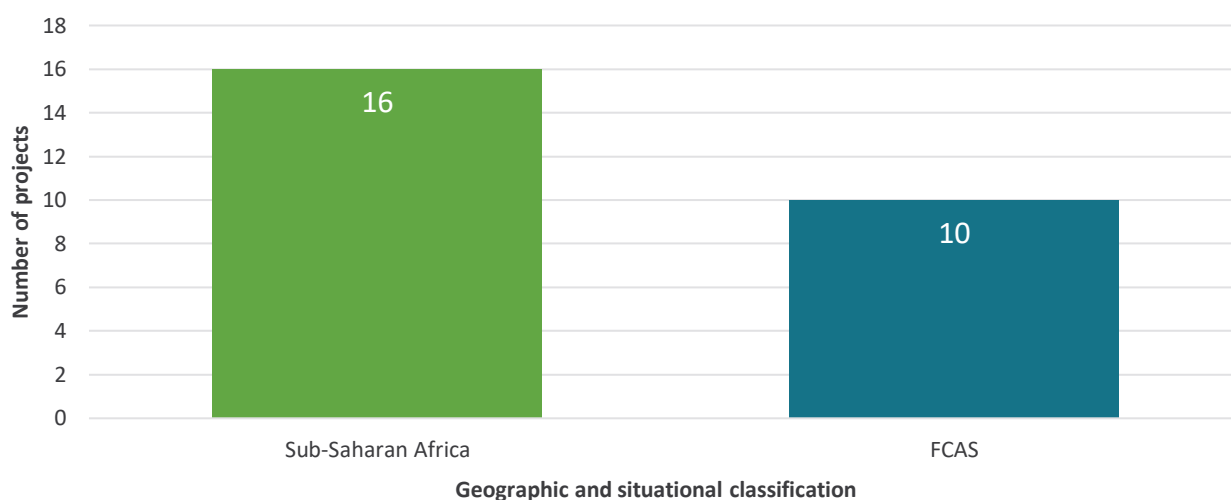
Most projects are located in lower-middle-income countries (20), with a smaller number in low-income countries (8)¹, and 10 projects are implemented in 9 FCAS countries. This suggests that GCF investments in social protection are concentrated in contexts with emerging institutional capacity and expanding social protection systems.

Figure 2: Income classification of project countries



Beyond income levels, there is a significant focus on high-need areas, with 16 projects located in Sub-Saharan Africa and 10 projects implemented across 9 FCAS.

Figure 3: Project distribution by region and context



This distribution indicates that GCF investments are strategically concentrated in environments with emerging institutional capacities. By focusing on these middle- and low-income contexts, the GCF supports the expansion and strengthening of social protection systems where they can most effectively bolster climate resilience.

¹ Note that Ethiopia has been excluded from this figure because it is unclassified under current World Bank ratings (FP058 and FP136).

2.2.2 Climate objectives

The portfolio is highly oriented toward adaptation objectives, with 36 of 41 projects (88%) incorporating an adaptation objective - either alone or in combination with other goals. Of these, 21 projects focus exclusively on adaptation.

A further 9 projects combine adaptation with an objective of "responding to shocks", reflecting a dual focus on structural resilience and acute disaster-risk management; these projects predominantly use shock-responsive social protection mechanisms and adaptive safety nets, signalling an intent to link climate programming to social protection systems capable of scaling up rapidly in crisis. Only 3 projects have specific focus on shock response.

Mitigation objectives appear in only 6 projects (15%), all of which are paired with adaptation, confirming that the portfolio is not designed primarily for emissions reduction. Where mitigation does appear, instruments tend to cluster around policy alignment and social protection targeting, suggesting a pathway approach in which structural incentives and targeted finance are used to shift behaviour rather than direct investment in low-carbon assets.

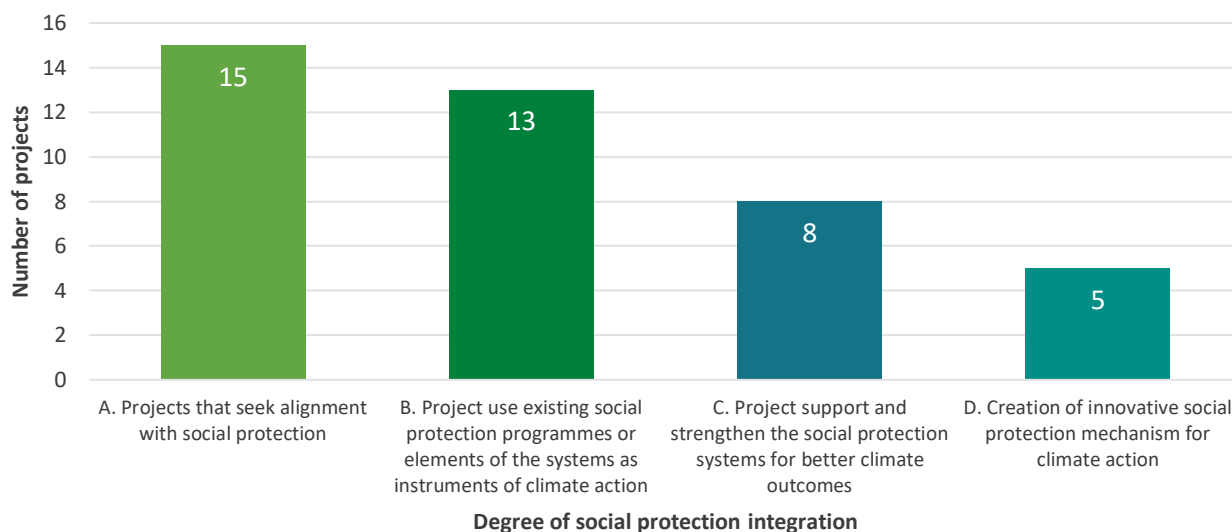
Three projects pursue easing transitions alongside other objectives, including public works and employment guarantee schemes to manage economic disruption in communities undergoing climate-induced structural change. For example, FP010, piggybacks on the existing social support schemes in Armenia to promote energy efficiency in the social housing sector.

2.2.3 Degree of integration with social protection

GCF's current portfolio shows a growing but still limited integration of social protection within climate programming.

As presented in, most projects fall at the left-hand side of the social protection continuum (Typologies A and B), illustrating the weakest level of integration. Fewer projects, meanwhile, lie towards the right-hand side (Typologies C and D), which demonstrate more significant integration of social protection for climate action.

Figure 4: Project continuum classification



Most projects (15) acknowledge social protection as relevant, yet they incorporate it in a light-touch way—referencing it as an area for alignment without assigning concrete activities, budgets or institutional roles. This pattern suggests that social protection is treated as an optional complement rather than an operational element of climate action. Examples of two of these projects are presented in the below box.

Box 1: Snapshot of FP257 RE-GAIN programme and SAP053 FISH-ADAPT

FP257 RE-GAIN programme: works across seven African countries to reduce post-harvest food losses among smallholder farmers by promoting the adoption of Food Loss Reduction Solution through a range of different activities. The project seeks coordination with social protection programmes, specifically supporting the linking of smallholder farmers to institutional markets such as school feeding programmes or social safety programmes.

SAP053 FISH-ADAPT: Transforming climate resilience and sustainability in Saint Lucia's fisheries communities. The project proposal directly states that the project will 'strengthen social protection' and 'improve existing social protection programmes to specifically target fishers...'. However, there is no evidence of project activities or outcomes to reflect this.

13 projects had activities that piggybacked existing social protection programmes or systems as instruments of climate action. The majority of programmes leveraged the social protection social registries and targeting systems to identify beneficiaries for the GCF projects, as described in more detail below.

Box 2: Snapshot of FP244 and FP05

FP244 Climate Resilient Health and Well-Being for Rural Communities in southern Malawi (CHWBRC) aims to build a climate-resilient health system, using district social welfare officers to identify vulnerable groups to be the target of early warning and alert protocol trainings and messaging.

FP05 Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia: the project proposal aims to support households. This sequencing of GCF support aims to protect PSNP's gains in the context of climate risk and to support graduated women to invest in climate-resilient livelihoods. This approach represents an innovative alignment of systems, highlighting the efficiency gains possible when programmes build on each other rather than operating in parallel. However, this approach does not appear to have been implemented. No evidence of follow-through is found in GCF documentation, and the Case Studies Paper confirms that further information on implementation is unavailable.

Eight projects were identified to support and strengthen the social protection systems for better climate outcomes. Activities under this category include linking early warning systems to social protection, embedding climate data to targeting and information systems, supporting links with disaster risk financing.

Box 3: Snapshot of FP258 Multi-country Project Advancing Early Warnings for All (EW4All)

The FP258 Multi-country Project Advancing Early Warnings for All (EW4All) integrates social protection primarily as a mechanism to strengthen anticipatory action and disaster risk reduction, embedding shock-responsive social protection into early warning systems to ensure timely support ahead of climate shocks. The specific country details for Cambodia and Ethiopia are the most explicit in linking early warning triggers to social protection. Both countries make the same reference to social protection regarding the paradigm shift potential: 'In the target provinces, for the first time, the project will operationalise the newly developed government Shock Resilient Social Protection mechanism.' [No further information is provided regarding this statement].

The final category reflects the strongest level of integration; it includes projects that drive innovation by creating new approaches or piloting new mechanisms that generate evidence for scaling and replication. Five projects from the GCF portfolio were identified to be in the furthest category on the continuum: SAP042, FP158, FP184, FP062 and SAP046. As an illustrative example, more information about SAP046 is presented below. This project falls within the furthest category of the continuum given that the range of activities and aims described emphasise structural investment in the social protection system through the creation and coordination of new institutional mechanisms and technical tools, rather than simply coordinating existing components.

Box 4: Snapshot of SAP046, Azerbaijan

SAP046, Strengthening Climate Information and Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems for Increased Resilience in Azerbaijan aims to strengthen the country’s shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) system by building government capacity, with particular reference to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Activities include linking forecast-based financing to existing social protection mechanisms, establishing a virtual national registry for household-level targeting and developing triggers and protocols that enable the automatic scale-up of social support ahead of climate shocks. The project proposal also places significant focus on country ownership supporting long-term sustainability

2.2.4 Social protection instruments and programmes

Across the portfolio, a few projects include a direct mention of social protection programmes to support climate-related activities. These are summarised in *Table 3* below.

Table 3: Social protection instruments for climate action.

SP Instrument	# Entries	Project Codes
Public works / employment guarantee	6	FP068, FP158, FP267, SAP002, SAP026, SAP042
Adaptive social safety nets / cash transfers	4	FP059, FP062, FP215, FP283
Training / vocational livelihoods	3	FP158, FP215, SAP002
School feeding	2	FP257, SAP028
Targeted subsidies / grants	1	FP010

Public works programmes (PWPs) and employment guarantee schemes appear in six projects (FP068, FP158, FP267, SAP002, SAP026, SAP042). These programmes serve a dual function of income smoothing during slow-onset stress and productive asset rehabilitation (reforestation, soil conservation, water harvesting). These projects are planned in contexts of drought or dry spell conditions, with three of these also contending with land degradation or flooding. The role of PWPs varies with some projects focusing on innovation of the programme, while others only aligning the GCF project with current national programmes:

- FP158 in Botswana aims to transform the Ipelegeng programme into a green public works scheme linking social protection with rangeland restoration, climate adaptation, and job creation in the contexts of droughts.
- SAP042 in Mozambique brings innovation by linking local adaptation plans to the public works programmes.
- FP267 in South Africa, will build upon the government’s PWPs (including Working for Water, Working for Ecosystems, and Working for Wetlands programmes) to restore the landscape but it is unclear whether existing PWPs will be used to implement the project activities or if new programmes will be developed.

Other social protection programmes referred to in the GCF projects are adaptive social safety nets and cash transfers, which appear in four projects. For example:

- SAP039 in Pakistan links the EWS to the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) for anticipatory cash transfers.
- FP283 in Central and West Asia establishes the design adaptive social safety nets triggered by EWS in anticipation of extreme weather, floods, or drought.
- FP059 in Grenada includes cash transfers as utility-bill support to cover water connection fees and monthly water bills for the poor.

However, GCF projects are not funding the actual cash transfers delivered under government-led programmes but instead focus on the institutional and operational set-up to leverage ongoing programmes. This finding is worth exploring in more detail, as GCF projects fund non-governmental safety nets, including cash transfers from the Accredited Entities and other non-governmental actors. These safety nets are not very different from nationally led safety nets. It's not clear what underpins the logic behind this selectivity.

When GCF projects fund non-governmental safety nets better guidance could be provided so that these safety nets at least align with the social protection system, and if technically relevant, are handed over, while also investing in system strengthening. This with the purpose of supporting greater country ownership, project sustainability and efficiency by avoiding duplications. Some examples of potential better alignment with social protection that could have been pursued, including in FCAS contexts are explained below.

- FP279 in South Sudan, output 3.1 incorporates WFP safety nets by providing cash transfers and resilience activities to participating households during their first year, helping them transition from humanitarian assistance to climate -resilient livelihoods and avoid food gaps during the lean season. Thereafter, the project aims to apply a shock responsive- safety net approach, including anticipatory action before forecasted shocks. Whilst South Sudan social protection system is emerging with high challenges given the ongoing conflict, efforts to align humanitarian cash transfers and social protection are ongoing via the Inter-agency Cash Working Group, with the purpose of contributing to building the system². In this light, GCF projects in humanitarian contexts should also engage in these coordination mechanisms so that duplication is avoided.
- SAP057 in Zimbabwe incorporates a short-term safety-net mechanism by providing non-transferable e-vouchers for food to community members engaged in labour-intensive nature-based solution (NbS) activities. Although the project implements a food-for-work/public works programme, there is no evidence that this is linked to a national social protection system.
- In Laos the FP283 will provide cash transfers for two consecutive years to implement forest management and alternative livelihoods activities, followed by a performance-based payment in the third year linked to adherence to the Village Forest Management Agreement.
- In FP247 (LoCAL+) in West Africa (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali and Niger) cash-for-work is used under Activity 3.3 to strengthen local governments' capacity to manage adaptation investments, particularly through community-based contracting with women's groups. Despite the ongoing Adaptive Social Protection Programme in the Sahel, the documentation does not indicate any formal connection to national social protection systems or relevant ministries.
- In FP208 Haiti the project promotes climate-resilient agriculture and integrates a social safety-net element through a food voucher for chronically food-insecure households in flood-affected areas. These food coupons are intended to function as a locally managed social protection mechanism, implemented and financed by a non-profit organisation. While the approach provides short-term consumption support alongside flood-management interventions, the proposal does not establish any formal connection to national social protection systems, including the ASPIRE safety programme.

Finally, other social protection programmes that feature in the portfolio review are livelihood and vocational training (3 projects), school feeding (2 projects) and target subsidies (1 project). For instance, FP257 is a multi-country project focusing on Africa and it includes school feeding programmes as one of several institutional buyers to which smallholder farmers could be linked through value-chain engagement activities.

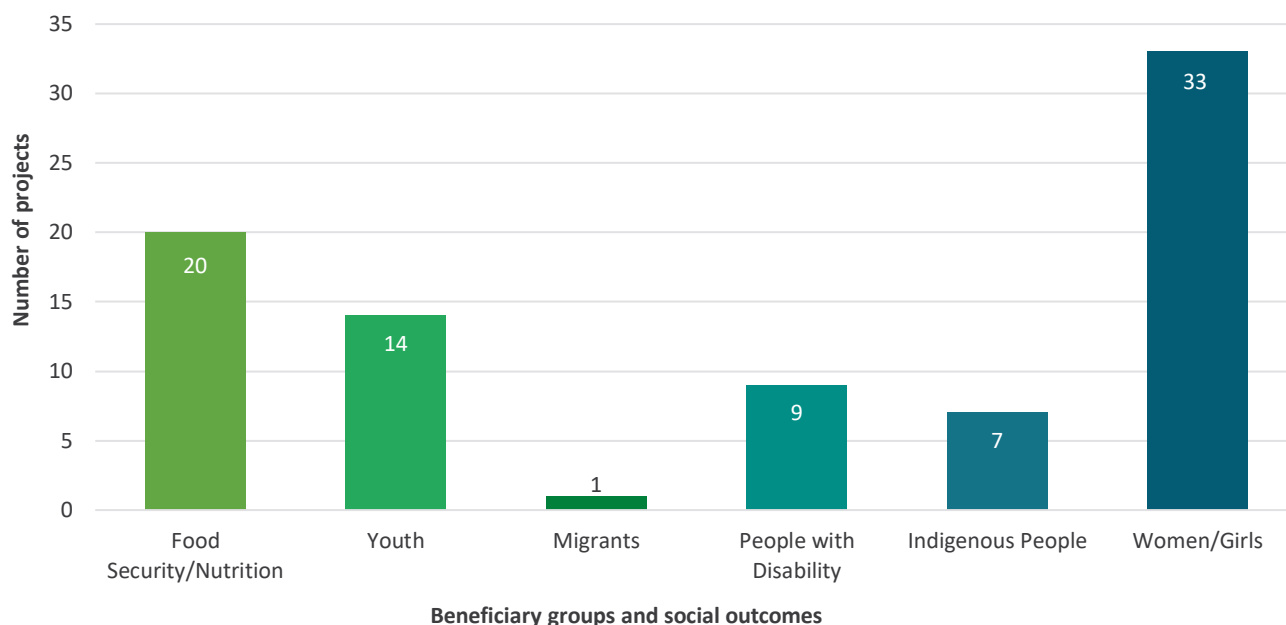
Social co-benefits

The GCF social protection portfolio demonstrates a clear commitment to social inclusion, though the depth of this integration varies across different marginalized groups. By leveraging existing social protection architectures, such as national registries and targeting databases, projects are able to direct climate-resilient interventions toward specifically vulnerable populations.

² <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/social-protection-sub-working-group-27-february-2025>

As shown in Figure 4, the delivery of social co-benefits is currently centred heavily on gender and food security, with emerging but less consistent focus on youth, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities. The data suggests that when projects move beyond simple targeting to active system-strengthening, social outcomes become more concretely embedded in the project design.

Figure 5: Social co-benefits



Across the 41 projects reviewed, women and girls are the most consistently prioritised group, identified as key beneficiaries in 33 projects, nearly all adaptation projects in the portfolio. The pattern is strongest in projects that leverage social protection systems (Typology B), where existing targeting architectures, including social registries, household databases, community-level selection processes already prioritise women and other marginal groups.

In FP201, the project uses the Philippines’ Listahanan National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction to identify beneficiaries, directly leveraging the country’s core social protection targeting system. By aligning with Listahanan, the project ensures inclusive and accurate targeting, enabling climate-resilient agriculture interventions to reach women, Indigenous groups and youth identified as vulnerable within the national social protection registry.

Youth are the second most frequently included group, appearing in 14 projects, predominantly those with livelihoods training, vocational diversification, or income-generation components. This clustering points to an implicit design assumption: that youth-inclusive approaches are most relevant where the intervention is oriented towards future labour market positioning and income resilience rather than immediate consumption smoothing. Public works schemes and vocational training programmes show the strongest linkage to youth inclusion, consistent with their function as entry points to employment and skill-building for young people in climate-vulnerable contexts.

Persons with disabilities are incorporated in 9 projects, indicating growing but uneven attention to disability-inclusive design.

- FP258 (multi-country Early Warnings for All) integrates disability-inclusive shock-responsive SP within early warning systems,
- FP184 in Vanuatu piloted a targeted disability cash grant implemented by Save the Children reaching 215 children with disabilities (43% girls). It is worth noting that FP184’s original design centred on supporting the National Disaster Management Office to develop a government-owned, shock-responsive social protection system, including needs-based targeting criteria, shock triggers, and a rapid cash transfer framework, but in practice the approach shifted to a disability pilot, a deviation that, taken at face value, limits the systemic ambition of the original design.

Indigenous peoples are prioritised in 7 projects, concentrated in Asia and Latin America where climate risks intersect with land tenure, resource use, and cultural identity.

- SAP031 in Brazil uses the CadÚnico national social registry to identify and reach indigenous and traditional communities for agroforestry scaling
- FP062 in Paraguay leverages the Tekoporã conditional cash transfer programme which prioritises indigenous families, including women household heads, to engage in climate-resilient agroforestry activities supported by the project. Both examples, showcase the value of leveraging existing social protection social registries to identify and target marginalised groups for climate programme targeting.

When GCF projects engage on innovation and system strengthening they also have the opportunity to simultaneously advance gender equity and climate outcomes. Project SAP042 in Mozambique embeds a robust GEDSI strategy and Action Plan not only through eligibility and targeting criteria but across all project outcomes and activities.

Migrants appear as an identified group in only one project, DOMCREP in Dominica (SAP062), where targeting via the social protection system aims that climate-resilient agricultural techniques directly reach the most vulnerable populations, including women, youth and migrant workers in the agricultural sector. The absence of migrants across the portfolio underscores that climate-related mobility remains a significant gap. This is an area the GCF could explore more deliberately, particularly in identifying how social protection systems can better anticipate, accommodate and support climate-related mobility and migration dynamics.

Food security and nutrition emerge as an important cross-cutting co-benefit, with 20 of 41 projects explicitly linking their social protection components to food security objectives. FP049 in Senegal directly addresses the lean-season hunger gap that climate-driven crop failures are exacerbating, integrating weather-indexed insurance for smallholder farmers with national social safety net infrastructure. According to the APR, an analysis conducted in 2023 revealed that on average 77 % of households in the project area who are beneficiaries of the National Family Security Subsidy Program (PNBSF) benefited from access to climate risk management tools.

The distribution across typologies shows that all 8 Typology C projects (those that strengthen social protection systems) include food security objectives, 40% of Typology D projects and Typology A projects and 29% of Typology B projects. This concentration suggests that deeper integration tends to co-occur with a more explicit nutrition and food systems orientation. This might be the case because system-strengthening projects operate at a level of institutional design where food security mandates are already embedded in national social protection architecture. SAP002 in the Kyrgyz Republic illustrates this integration: cash transfers, public works, and social protection system strengthening are combined to support climate-resilient agriculture and food systems in an integrated package to empower food insecure and vulnerable communities in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The overall pattern across social co-benefits suggests a portfolio that is broad in its stated inclusion objectives but uneven in how deeply those objectives are operationalised.

Where social protection acts as an active delivery and enabling mechanism, not merely as a targeting entry point, social outcomes tend to be more concretely designed and measurable. The most effective approaches combine three functions: targeting (using registries and eligibility criteria to reach the right groups), transfers (providing direct support that reduces immediate vulnerability), and systems investment (strengthening the delivery architecture so that social outcomes can be sustained and scaled beyond the project). Projects that achieve all three, such as SAP042, FP062, and FP049, potentially demonstrate the strongest integration of climate and social objectives and the highest potential for durable impact.

2.2.5 Financing

Of the 41 projects identified within this review, the total project financing of these was 6330 million USD, 26% of which was GCF funding³. This figure was significantly pushed up by FP283: Glaciers to Farms (G2F) Regional Programme: Advancing Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development in Central and West Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), with a project value of 3500 million USD, of which GCF aimed to contribute 250 million.

GCF's financing of projects with social protection elements represents nearly 9% of GCF's Funded Activities portfolio⁴, suggesting projects with a social protection element remain a relatively small focus within the portfolio. Further important to note is that even in these projects this investment is not necessarily funding social protection systems and programmes.

Table 4: Financing analysis

Strategic category	Observation / data point	Analytical insight
Portfolio weight	Projects with SP elements represent ~9% of the total Funded Activities portfolio.	SP remains a niche sector within the GCF. Despite the Belém Declaration ambition, the financial weight does not yet match the political rhetoric.
Leverage ratio	Total project financing: \$6.33B; GCF contribution: \$1.6B (26%).	GCF is successfully leveraging 3x its own capital from other sources. SP projects are attractive to co-financiers (World Bank, Regional Banks), making them high-leverage investments.
Project skewness	FP283 (Glaciers to Farms) accounts for 55% of the total financing identified (\$3.5B of \$6.33B).	The portfolio's perceived success is heavily dependent on two mega-projects. A single regional programme significantly inflates the average project value.
Financial instruments	Predominantly Grants: only 4 projects utilize a Grant/Loan hybrid.	Grants are the standard for SP because social services often lack immediate commercial ROI. To triple commitments, GCF may need to innovate with outcome-based or results-based financing.

Most projects received funding from GCF via grants, four projects only were financed through a combination of grants and loans.

Table 5: Financing Structure

³ Total financing and GCF financing was taken from the Project Completion Report (Total Financing, GCF Proceeds disbursed to AE) if available, otherwise the figures were taken from the project proposal. The information does not have a specific social protection activity or component and therefore cannot establish the actual financing for these activities given the information gaps.

⁴ Total value of GCF's Funded Activities was taken from column "GCF Financing" from the GCF shared spreadsheet listing all Funded Activities.

Financing instrument	Two mega-projects (FP283 and FP215)	Standard projects	Rationale/implication
Grant only	0	37	High grant reliance for capacity building and safety nets.
Grant + loan combo	2	2	Used for large-scale infrastructure integration.
Pure loan/equity	0	0	Indicates SP is not yet seen as revenue-generating.

Analysis of the GCF portfolio reveals a relationship between the depth of social protection–climate integration and the level of co-financing mobilised, though the pattern is not uniform and warrants careful interpretation:

- Projects classified under seeking synergies with social protection (Typology A) attract the lowest average co-finance ratio (23%), reflecting the limited leverage that comes from alignment alone or where the project benefits from social protection’s reach without committing to or investing in its architecture.
- Projects that are piggybacking on social protection (Typology B) perform marginally better (21% in the document's figures, though project-level data suggests somewhat higher in practice), consistent with their use of existing social protection administrative systems as a cost-effective channel, while still stopping short of structural engagement.
- The strongest co-financing performance comes from projects that strengthen social protection systems for climate outcomes (Typology C, avg 41%) or innovating social protection approaches (Typology D, avg 40%). One interpretation could be that these projects attract higher co-finance proportions because they offer systemic, scalable, and institutionally embedded solutions with longer-term relevance beyond the project lifecycle. However, we cannot establish causality in the current analysis. Other factors including project size, implementing entity, country context, and financing modality could also explain the degree of co-financing instead of the depth of social protection integration alone.

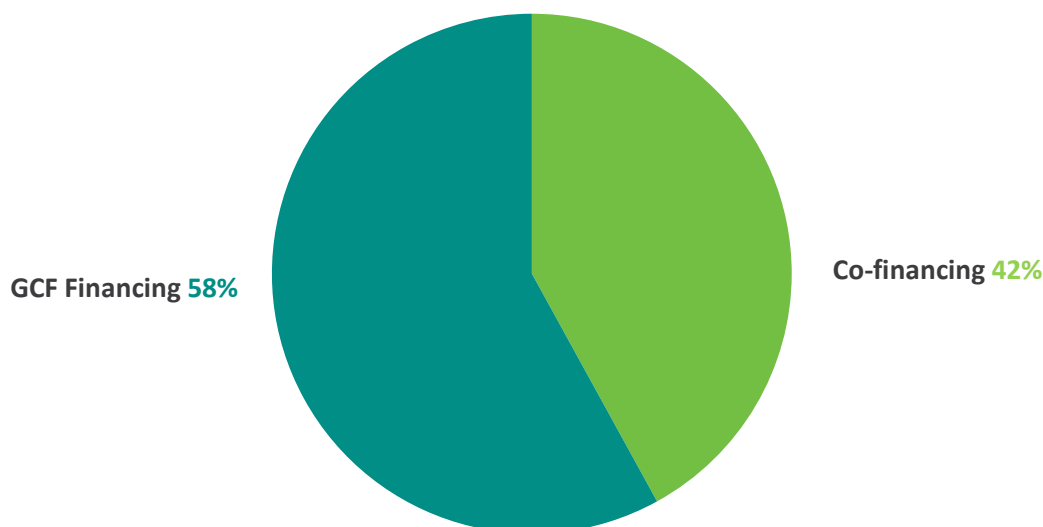
Table 6: Strength of social protection integration and co-financing

Typology	Count of projects	Average co-financing %
A. Seeks synergies and alignment	15	23%
B. Piggybacks on SP systems and instruments	13	21%
C. Strengthens SP systems	8	41%
D. Innovates SP approaches	5	40%

Co-financing is also present in fragile and conflict-affected settings - 13 of the 41 projects include at least one FCAS country. However, there is no clear positive relationship between deeper social protection integration and higher co-financing in FCAS contexts, as national governments - the primary source of co-financing for SP-linked projects - have limited fiscal and institutional capacity in these settings. This suggests that the co-financing leverage argument for

deepening social protection integration, while robust for the portfolio overall, does not translate straightforwardly to FCAS environments.

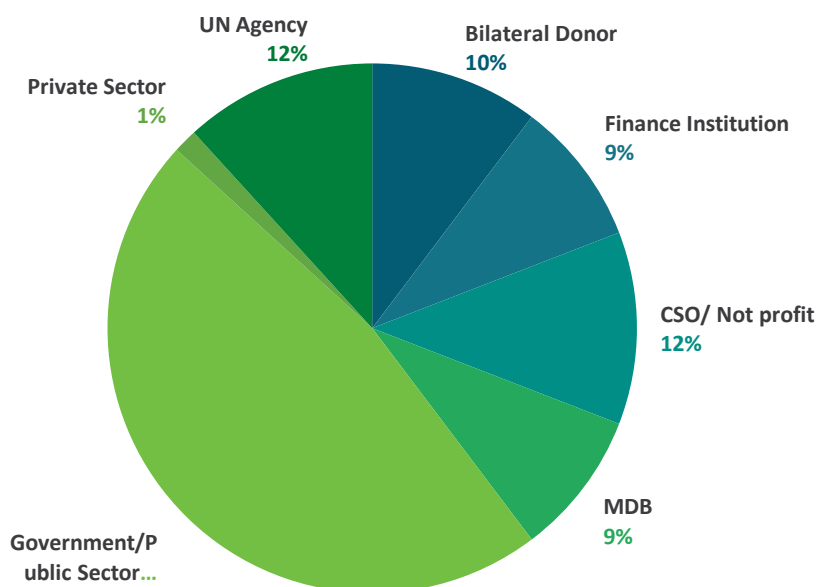
Figure 6: Co-financing of GCF investments with social protection components in FCAS



By frequency, national governments and agencies are the most common co-financing partner, appearing in 29 relationships across the portfolio. MDBs and public development banks appear in 8, matched by UN agencies (8), bilateral donors and finance institutions (7), and NGOs, foundations and philanthropic entities (6). The one instance of private sector co-financing (GSK, \$4m in fp244) confirm that private capital mobilisation remains minimal in this portfolio. However, the frequencies do not reflect the volume of co-financing by entity type.

Project size shows the strongest observable association with co-finance volume. The two projects with the highest co-financing are Glaciers to Farms (FP283, \$3.5bn, 93%) and the Community Resilience Partnership Programme (FP215, \$750m, 84%). This suggests a threshold effect: very large programmes tend to draw in substantial co-financing almost by design, as their scale requires multiple financing partners, but this says little about the role of social protection integration in attracting that finance. This also reflects the structural logic of blended finance, where larger programmes are inherently more likely to require and attract multiple financing sources. The size effect is also partly mechanical: larger projects tend to be implemented by entities with greater co-financing capacity, notably MDBs.

Figure 7: Sources of co-finance (by frequency not volume)



Note: Government label includes (National govt, departments associated, local and sub-national governments that represent the state directly whereas govt agency includes specialised public/national institutions like SANBI, CSE which tend to play a more technical or implementation role in projects.

Multi-country programmes (FP283, FP215, FP257) achieve an average co-financing ratio of 68%, compared to 32% for single-country projects, reflecting both their larger size and the pooling of co-financing contributions across multiple governments and development partners. Country income level, government fiscal capacity to contribute co-financing, and the presence of an active development partner community around the specific sector all plausibly drive variation that the current data does not allow us to isolate.

Financing modality is closely intertwined with entity type. The four grant-and-loan projects (FP283, FP215, FP261, FP136) average 70% co-financing volume. These are MDB-implemented projects, confirming that modality and entity are not independent variables in this portfolio.

3 Readiness Programme

The second part of the Portfolio Review is focused on the Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (Readiness Programme). Previous review studies (GCF and FAO 2025, Aleksandrova et al. 2024) have concentrated on GCF's core project portfolio and not included its Readiness Programme.

The Readiness Programme was established early in the Fund's operationalisation, with readiness support operational from around 2014–2015 as a core mechanism to help developing countries engage with the Fund. Its initial objectives centred on strengthening institutional capacity, country ownership and engagement, and enabling countries to prepare country programmes, national adaptation plans, and pipeline projects that align with GCF priorities. This included building the capacity of National Designated Authorities (NDAs) and Direct Access Entities (DAEs), supporting stakeholder engagement and coordination, and helping candidates meet accreditation standards so they could channel climate finance effectively.

In October 2024, the GCF rolled out a new and improved Readiness Programme under its updated 2024–2027 Readiness Strategy, approved by Board decision (B.37) in October 2023. Under this revised framework, readiness continues to support country-driven capacity building but with expanded and more strategic objectives. It places stronger emphasis on using readiness as a programming tool to develop impactful country climate programmes and unlock financing, dedicating at least 60% of readiness funding to building country-originated investment pipelines for GCF financing. The new approach also prioritises greater coordination support, faster access to expertise through a list of pre-qualified delivery partners, and enhanced knowledge sharing and local capacity development, including the placement of GCF experts within national agencies

Given that the Readiness Programme supports country-driven initiatives to strengthen institutional capacities, governance mechanisms, planning and programming frameworks towards a transformational long-term climate action agenda (GCF 2025), projects supported under the programme may hold important entry points for social protection. For example, Readiness funds could be used to build the capacity of national social protection actors that are relevant for NDCs and NAPs (Task Force on Linking Adaptive Social Protection and Climate Financing 2025).

This section of the Portfolio Review attempts to characterise the types of social protection engagement across the legacy Readiness Programme. Social protection engagement across the portfolio takes a range of forms, from active ministerial involvement in project governance to light-touch or adjacent support. Noting that the new Readiness Programme provides an opportunity to move from ad hoc social protection-type interventions toward embedding climate-responsive social protection within national climate programming and GCF investment pipelines.

3.1 Overview of method

Since May 2015, there have been over 800 GCF Readiness Programme projects. For the purpose of this Portfolio Review, we focused on projects whose status has been identified as completed or disbursed⁴ by GCF, all of which form part of the Legacy Readiness portfolio. We followed a dual-track approach for the screening and analysis of the Readiness Programme projects, using AI both to screen the projects and to support in the analysis of the projects. Using project details shared by GCF that contained Executive Summary and Objectives information from PPMS reports from the Readiness Programme for 682 programmes⁵, we conducted an initial keyword search using social protection terms to identify social protection relevance. This screening identified 113 Readiness Programme projects that contained a keyword within their Executive Summary or Objectives.

⁵ This adjusted approach was taken given the sheer number of projects that were part of the Readiness Programme and the structure of GCF's online database that does not allow for the bulk download of documents. A substantial set of the projects listed within these files did contain missing data (for example, in the Spreadsheet that contained the objectives information there was only information available for 445 projects).

Once, these projects had been identified, we performed a manual screening using the relevant documents from the PPMS (project Completion report - if available, if not, the latest Progress Report) to understand in which context the keyword had been used.

At this point, we also adopted AI screening, using AI to screen the Readiness Programme proposals of these 113 projects. AI provided a ranking of the social protection relevance of the projects (weak, moderate and strong) as well as a rationale for its classification. In total, 35 Readiness Programme projects were identified to have engaged with social protection in some form.

As this represents the first analysis of its kind of the Readiness Programme, the approach was necessarily exploratory, aimed at understanding how legacy Readiness Programme projects have engaged with social protection. As the findings draw on a sample of projects based on the data that was available, they should not be read as a definitive account of all projects that have engaged with social protection, but rather - they are best understood as offering insights into the range of ways in which Readiness Programme projects have engaged with Social Protection to date.

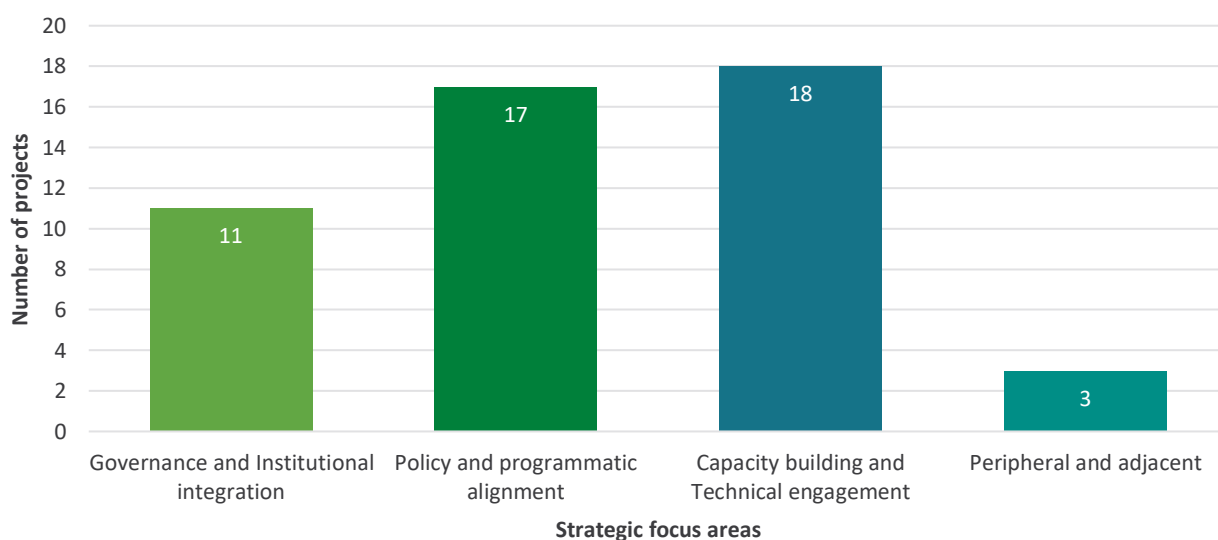
Please find more details on the method in Annex A and full list of readiness projects with social protection components in Annex C.

3.2 Main findings

35 Readiness Programme projects were identified to have engaged with social protection, 17 Standard Readiness and 18 NAP programmes. Four main categories help to show the different scale of social protection engagement (Figure 8), these are:

- **Governance and institutional integration** describe projects where the Ministry linked to social protection is explicitly named as a member of an important body within the Readiness Programme.
- **Policy or programmatic alignment** explicitly name the social protection pillars of policy and align them with the Readiness Programme or include social protection related projects within documentation about the pipeline project ideas.
- **Capacity building and technical engagement** explicitly include the Ministry linked to social protection within either a capacity building exercise or consultative engagement.
- **Adjacent or peripheral**, for instance through ministries engaged in social protection being invited to inception workshops.

Figure 8: Engagement with social protection by Readiness projects



3.2.1 Governance and institutional integration

The governance category describes projects where the Ministry linked to social protection was explicitly named as a member of an important body within the Readiness Programme. This could include within the Project Steering Committee, or a member of a Climate Change Committee this is recognised throughout the Readiness Programme as being actively engaged in the process. For example, in the Readiness Programme, IRQ-RS-003, project documents describe the establishment of a Task Force Working Group as part of the project across several cross-cutting thematic areas including Livelihoods, Poverty and Governance that must include the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, that have a range of responsibilities including mainstream their Working Groups' aims within the NAP process and planning. Similarly, in CHL-RS-008, the Ministry of Social Development is identified both given its role in ETICC⁶ (Inter-Ministerial Technical Team on Climate Change) as well as being named as a supporting Ministry for the approved new NAP Biodiversity.

3.2.2 Policy or programmatic alignment

Several Readiness Programme projects explicitly named the social protection pillars of policy and aligned them with the Readiness Programme. An interesting example is BGD-RS-006 that explicitly recognises the pillars of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) within both its proposal and its updated Country Programme including (i) Food security, social protection and health. Such alignment is then mirrored in the project pipeline development, whereby the project workshops focused on pipeline development included a workshop group on Disaster, Social Safety, and Security with a number of projects being developed within this category. This is also reflected by the inclusion of social protection related projects within documentation on the pipeline project ideas. For instance, MWI-RS-004 (Malawi) The project supports the development of a National Climate Resilience Framework, where social protection is explicitly identified as a strategic pillar. This positions social protection as a core mechanism for delivering climate resilience, signalling intent to integrate climate risk management into national SP systems and policies. Similarly, MKD-RS-003 (North Macedonia) advanced climate integration within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, strengthening the ministry's capacity to embed climate considerations into social protection structures and processes. It represents a meaningful step toward institutionalising climate-responsive social protection within national policy frameworks.

3.2.3 Capacity building or technical engagement

Several of the projects identified as having social protection components were tagged because of the explicit inclusion of the Ministry linked to social protection within either a capacity building exercise or consultative engagement.⁷ Given that capacity building and knowledge sharing were already embedded objectives of the legacy Readiness Programme, engaging social protection ministries through these workstreams offered a ready-made entry point. Ministries linked to social protection were also included in a range of consultative workshops including those related to Readiness Needs Assessments, review of climate policies and the updating of M&E systems.

For instance, CHL-RS-007 in Chile includes the Ministry of Social Development and Family as a member of Climate Change Committee that is central to this programme. The committee was involved in a set of workshops on institutional coordination and on capacity building for different tools created during the Readiness.

There were likely other projects that did include Ministries or stakeholders that were linked to social protection, but they were not explicitly referenced in the project documents that were reviewed and therefore not included here.

⁶ Although, Chile had several Readiness Programmes, projects were only included if ETICC had a clear named responsibility in project documents or had other social protection links.

⁷ Projects were included when workshops were focused on topics such as climate change mainstreaming within development policies, NAP or policy framework reviews or project engagement activities. Projects were excluded if the Ministry was mentioned only in reference to gender aspects.

3.2.4 Adjacent or peripheral

This final category includes three projects, including engagement by the Ministry linked to social protection within an inception workshop, and two cases of Readiness Programmes supporting GCF accreditation. These two cases were included given the explicit references of the organisations seeking accreditation to social protection or the social sector. For example, TCD-RS-005 (Chad), focused on building the institutional capacity of the Economic and Social Development Agency (ADES) to become a Direct Access Entity of the GCF. The proposal highlights that ADES' expertise area under Chad's revised NDC included gender and social protection.

Projects did often have more than one of these components. For example, ETH-RS-003 in Ethiopia included four components: policy alignment, governance participation, capacity building and consultative engagement. The readiness grant was focused on supporting the adoption and implementation of the NAP-ETH across sectors and at regional and woreda levels. NAP-ETH explicitly recognises "building social protection and livelihood options of vulnerable people" as one of its 18 core adaptation options. Social protection was therefore embedded within the grant's scope by virtue of its alignment with the NAP-ETH's adaptation options. In addition, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs was explicitly named as a Ministry involved in a set of capacity building, engagement and familiarisation workshops during the Readiness Programme.

It is worth noting that the review identified nine GCF Readiness projects operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings: Burundi, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kiribati, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Chad and Zimbabwe. These projects provide important entry points for understanding how climate-resilient social protection and risk-informed programming can be adapted to contexts characterised by instability, weak institutions and overlapping vulnerabilities.

Table 7: FCAS Readiness projects grouped by category

Category	FCAS projects
Capacity building and technical engagement	<p>Burundi; Building the capacities of key Sustainable Land Management stakeholders to mainstream climate change in Burundi, and updating the Country Programme;</p> <p>Ethiopia; Building Capacity to Facilitate the Integration of the National Adaptation Planning Process in Ethiopia;</p> <p>Nigeria; Strengthening Nigeria's capacity to advance the National Adaptation Planning process.</p> <p>Niger; Identify adaptation and mitigation interventions and creating partnerships for scaling up the Great Green Wall Initiative in Niger;</p> <p>Somalia; Support for Establishing a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Process for the Federal Republic of Somalia</p> <p>Zimbabwe; Building capacity to advance the National Adaptation Planning process in Zimbabwe.</p>
Governance and institutional integration	<p>Chad; Strengthening the Economic and Social Development Agency ADES institutional capacity to become a Direct Access Accredited Entity and support the implementation of Chads climate change programs and strategies.</p> <p>Iraq; Building capacity to advance the National Adaptation Plan process in Iraq.</p>
Policy and programmatic	<i>None</i>

There appear to be several overlooked opportunities to strengthen the inclusion of social protection within the Readiness Programme. First, several Readiness Programmes include a focus on the health and agricultural sectors. There are clear overlaps with these sectors, particularly in relation to food security and areas of ministerial responsibility, which present natural opportunities to integrate social protection measures. Second, gender is a prominent feature across most readiness programmes, often with the explicit involvement of ministries that may also hold social protection mandates. This provides a strategic opportunity to engage social protection stakeholders who are already part of the process in a more intentional and targeted way to advance social protection objectives. Finally, while poverty reduction is often listed as a core objective in many policy documents, it is often not explicitly linked to social protection frameworks. Strengthening this connection could help ensure that social protection considerations are included within the design and activities of Readiness Programmes.

As climate shocks intensify and transition pressures mount, social protection systems are becoming increasingly important for safeguarding livelihoods but are also affected by the impacts of climate change. In this context, the new Readiness Programme aims to enhance countries' capacity to translate their NDCs, NAPs, and Long-term Climate Strategies (LTS) into concrete climate investments and structured programming.

By reinforcing coordination, financing frameworks, and delivery systems at an early stage, Readiness support provides a practical entry point for embedding climate-responsive social protection within national climate strategies and investment pipelines.

4 Conclusions

The Portfolio Review reveals that social protection is incorporated into GCF investments in both its project funding and Readiness Programme. Under each, the level of engagement varies in both intensity and type; ranging from light-touch incorporation – for instance through seeking alignment with social protection or inviting social protection ministries to inception workshops – through to integration in the form of budget allocations or governance structures. This incorporation of social protection is also taking place across a range of contexts, including in FCAS.

For both project funding and the Readiness Programme, though, the number of investments that incorporate social protection components remain small. For project funding the review identified 41 projects incorporating social protection in total. This included 10 from the most recent 66 projects approved between August 2024 and October 2025 (or 15% of those projects incorporated social protection elements). For Readiness, while the results should be treated as more indicative, of the 682 completed or disbursed programmes screened, 35 incorporated social protection (5%). For all these projects there are idiosyncratic reasons for social protection being included, rather than this being the result of guidance or support from the GCF.

There is further indications of implementation challenges of the social protection elements within some funded projects, with these elements seemingly being dropped or significantly changed during implementation. It is worth understanding further why this may be the case and understanding if the GCF can provide support during implementation to help ensure the social protection elements can be delivered. There may be scope to think through further about how the Readiness Programme could operate alongside, either in sequence or with ongoing coordination, to funded projects so that those projects have stronger systems foundations to build on.

There are missed opportunities to work more strategically with non-governmental safety nets, exploring how these can be better linked to, or used to strengthen nationally-owned safety nets. Currently the GCF supports AEs to deliver their own safety net support (either in cash or in kind), but does not signal that these safety nets should be designed and delivered in a way to strengthen existing or envisaged national social protection programmes, or for recipients to be included in those programmes after GCF programmatic funding ends.

More broadly, this scoping review has raised several initial findings that are worth exploring in more detail. This includes better understanding the social co-benefits of investments, the challenges of implementing social protection components as designed and the association between the degree of integration of social protection components and the level of co-financing.

Annex A Methodological approach

For project selection and review, we built on established methodologies, as well as adapting our approach to reflect the features of the Readiness Programme and data availability and accessibility. We also introduced an innovative element by using AI to conduct a parallel review and conduct pattern analysis.

Funded Activities

Our Portfolio Review builds on and updates two previous reviews: GCF and FAO (2025) and Aleksandrova et al. (2024), by including projects approved after the previous reviews.

First, we identified all projects that were approved between August 2024 and October 2025, including both SAP projects and full funding proposals for a total of 66 projects. We then screened proposals for relevant keywords. The original intention was to use Project Completion Reports to conduct the keyword search, however, these documents were not available for these new projects. As a result, we used project proposals downloaded from the GCF website to conduct the keyword search (60 proposals were available on the GCF website). In order to support comparability with the two previous reviews the keywords were aligned with those used in the two previous reviews (see *Table 8*). A python-based automated keyword screening process was used to systematically identify funded programme documents containing social protection related content. The script scanned all PDF within a designated folder with all the funded activities' proposal PDFs using the fitz library to extract full document text. Text was converted to lowercase to ensure case-insensitive matching to avoid missing keywords due to formatting differences.

For each document, the script counted the frequency of each search term and recorded only those PDFs in which at least one keyword was detected. The output included the PDF file name, the list of search terms identified, the total number of keywords mentioned within the document, and a breakdown of frequency by keyword. The results were exported to an Excel file. This stage of the process was a quantitative screening tool that did not assess substantive relevance.

Table 8: Funded Activities' Keywords

	Keywords
Type of social protection instrument	"social protection" OR "safety net(s)" OR "safety-net(s)" OR "social assistance" OR "social security" OR "social service(s)" OR "social welfare" OR "social support" OR "social transfer(s)" OR "public work(s)" OR "employment guarantee" OR "public employment" OR "labour market" OR "labour policy(ies)" OR "labor market" OR "labor policy(ies)" OR "cash transfer" or "cash-for-work" OR "in-kind transfers" OR "school feeding" OR "vouchers" OR "social insurance" OR "social registry(ies)" OR "food transfer" OR "cash plus" OR "food for work" OR "unemployment insurance" or "unemployment benefit" OR "skill* training" OR "livelihood training" OR "vocational training" OR "graduation program*" OR "economic inclusion program" or "single registry" OR "beneficiary registry" OR "beneficiary database" OR "stipends" OR "cash benefits" OR "cash payment"
Additional terms for Readiness Programme	"social development", "national development", "social protection", "poverty", "sustainable development", "social affairs", "social policy", "local development"
Co-benefits	persons with disability, youth, Indigenous Peoples, gender, women, Ggirls, food security, nutrition, migrants

In total, 46 approved projects contained one or more keywords. The next step involved reviewing proposals, to understand the context in which the keyword had been used. In some cases, this would involve manual screening of whole sections or the full document.

Following Aleksandrova et al. (2024) we used a set of criteria to determine whether a project was substantively relevant (see Table 9). Projects were considered not relevant despite containing a keyword for a range of reasons (see

Table 10). The review was focused on identifying projects that had components related to national social protection systems. In total 10 out of the 46 projects were considered relevant through the manual screening process⁸.

Table 9: Inclusion criteria

Criteria	
Level of integration with social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social registries used to identify project beneficiaries • seek synergies with social protection or supporting better co-ordination with social protection • national social protection policies and strategies or national climate strategies with social protection objectives used to align projects with national priorities • project activities build upon or create synergies with past/present social protection programmes • existing social protection programmes/ schemes used to implement project activities and/or address the risk of maladaptation associated with the project • strengthening early warning systems and climate services provision linked to social protection systems defined as project activity • improved institutional, policy and regulatory environment linked to social protection defined as project activity • enhanced knowledge/ institutional capacities linked to social protection defined as project activity • establishment of a long-term social protection mechanism (beyond the duration of the project) envisioned by the project such as design of a pilot social protection programme/instrument or transforming existing mechanism

⁸ FP279 was excluded following a KII that flagged the project was not linked to national social protection systems.

Table 10: Exclusion Reason Examples

Exclusion Criteria
keywords appear in the background information/situation analysis/references or titles of national policies and names of institutions (e.g., mentioning a national social protection policy or strategy, ministries, or that the project will contribute to reducing reliance on social protection or that the project will improve road access to social services).
there was insufficient information to determine relevance (e.g., vague reference to social protection; social protection-related activities were referred to as 'may', 'could' or 'e.g.,' and not explicitly set as a project objective, activity or outcome)
Keywords used in a way that is not substantively connected to social protection systems or frameworks or did not match the definitions used in this study (e.g. vocational training discussed purely as general skills development or industry-specific capacity building, safety net describing conservation of natural resources, informal safety nets for community savings groups or social protection via income diversification).
Several projects aimed to strengthen the capacities of public works ministries to climate-proof public works projects for green and grey infrastructure, these were considered relevant only when there is explicit link to a social protection programme.
Keywords used when discussing gender to describe the context regarding challenges faced by women.
Keywords appear in proposals with regards to environmental and social safeguards e.g. alignment of project safeguards with national social protection policies and strategies (this was not subject to the review).
Keyword identified inappropriately e.g. social support as part of word psychosocial

Source: Adapted from Aleksandrova et al. 2024

Following the methodology from GCF and FAO (2025), the projects were then assessed in terms of their contribution to climate action:

- **Responding to specific climate-related shocks** through anticipatory or responsive social transfers to cushion households against shocks (Costella and McCord, 2024).
- **Encouraging climate change adaptation** by promoting climate-smart farming practices and diversifying income sources to those less affected by climate (Balha et al 2024).
- **Contributing to reduced greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration** by providing incentives to promote sustainable natural resource management. For instance, PWPs support community-level activities that restore forests and conserve natural resources. Environmentally conditioned cash transfers can encourage households to adopt sustainable practices that reduce deforestation (Costella and McCord, 2024).
- **Easing transitions** through income support addressing the negative social impacts of climate policies and skills development helping people find new jobs in the green economy (Costella and McCord, 2024).

Moreover, projects were also assessed in terms of their level of integration with social protection, considering their relevance to support GCF's strategic objectives.

Table 11: Proposed Continuum of GCF engagement with social protection

Typology	Main criteria for typology	How it may support GCF's Strategic Objectives
A. Projects seek better alignment with social protection	Projects aim to achieve harmonisation and alignment with social protection systems and programmes; however, at the implementation level, no dedicated activities or budget lines are allocated to this objective. As a result, integration remains aspirational, confined to the level of “desired” coordination rather than being operationalised in practice.	Sustainable development potential to contribute to wider social and economic co-benefits
B. Social protection used as instrument for implementation of climate action	Use of the social protection architecture (policy, administrative systems and programmes) to deliver climate action.	Same as above plus: Impact potential to contribute to GCF's objectives and result areas Country ownership
C. Projects that create enabling conditions for strengthening social protection systems for better climate outcomes	Projects contribute to strengthening social protection systems so that they proactively embed and advance climate resilience. System strengthening for routine delivery of social protection support is not considered under this category if it does not deliberately aim to support better climate outcomes.	Same as above plus: Paradigm shift potential
D. Projects that establish innovative social protection and climate action mechanism	Projects that drive innovation by creating new approaches that generate evidence for scaling and replication.	Same as above and Efficiency and effectiveness

Sources: authors based on Solorzano et al forthcoming; Aleksandrova, et al 2024; ASP Task Force, 2025

In addition, to the 10 newly identified projects, we assessed all projects included in both the FAO and GCF (2025) and Aleksandrova et al. (2024) reviews (36 projects). We excluded 5 projects that were included in these previous reviews because they did not align with the definitions of social protection that we were using in this study (for example, the project had a cash-for-work activity but there was no link to national social protection systems). We then assessed which category of the continuum each one of these projects fell into, using project documentation, the details provided within the two reviews and information shared by FAO from their analysis. We adopted the climate objectives that the GCF and FAO (2025) review had identified for each of the projects that had been included in their review.

Readiness Programme

Since May 2015, GCF has had over 800 Readiness Programme projects. For the purpose of this Portfolio Review, we focused on legacy Readiness Programme projects whose status has been identified as completed or disbursed by GCF. Given the number of projects within the Readiness Programme and the structure of the GCF online database (iPMS) we adopted a revised project selection process than that used for the Funded Activities.

GCF provided us with two Excel spreadsheets that contained information extracted from the PPMS on both Executive Summary and Objectives of Project Reports (Annual Progress Reports and Project Completion Reports).⁹ We conducted an initial keyword search of the spreadsheets using the keywords listed in **Error! Reference source not found.**, which resulted in a limited number of identified projects. To broaden our findings, we expanded the search by adding additional keywords. Specifically, we included the following terms to better capture how the Readiness Programme may interact with social protection: “social development”, “national development”, “social protection”, “poverty”, “sustainable development”, “social affairs”, “social policy” and “local development”.

This adapted keyword search identified 113 projects. The second stage of this review required manually reviewing the documents available on the PPMS as well as Readiness Programme proposals that were available on the GCF website. We conducted an additional keyword search on the 113 project proposals. Once keywords were identified, their context was first examined. If deemed relevant, the project document was reviewed in greater detail, and in some cases, additional documents attached to the reports were consulted to further assess their relevance. Documents were screened following an adapted Stage 2 Criteria (*Table 9*). This included adding the following elements: the inclusion of social protection actors within “workshop”, training, capacity building, learning, skills development activities; stakeholder mapping, “consultations” that recognises the Ministries relevant for Social Protection; build multisectoral coordination with the Ministries relevant for Social Protection; social protection sub-national engagement or coordination and Ministry of Social Development or relevant Social Protection Ministry selected to be a stakeholder within the Project Steering Committee and other governance structures. The same exclusion criteria detailed in

⁹ The Objectives Spreadsheet contained 684 projects however, only 445 project contained information. Similarly, the Executive Summary Spreadsheet only had entries with information for 422 projects.

Table 10 was applied. In addition, projects were excluded if the Ministry was only referenced in the context of gender policy or mainstreaming.

AI application

For both the Readiness programme and the Funded Activities portfolio review, Microsoft 365 was used to screen proposal documents, extract relevant information, assess substantive alignment with social protection criteria, and classify projects according to a predefined framework. Microsoft 365 Copilot is an AI-powered assistant that works with the Microsoft 365 ecosystem. It uses large language models with a secure access to organisational data. It enables users to analyse, summarise, extract insights, and generate outputs from their content.

Readiness Programme

To conduct the portfolio review for the Readiness Programme, we designed a structured two-part prompt for Microsoft 365 Copilot that mirrored the manual screening process. The first prompt was organised into three steps. In step 1, Copilot was instructed to perform a keyword detection across the Readiness Programme proposals. Step 2 required Copilot to assess substantive relevance. Clear criteria were provided to guide the judgement. At the same time, we defined exclusions to make the framework robust enough to consider vague references or mentions related solely to safeguards or unrelated ministries (for example, Ministry of Public Works and Transport included in a project linked to the transport sector).

Finally, step 3 required Copilot to generate a structured output with file name, keywords identified, sentence(s) where the keywords were found, a relevance ranking (strong, moderate, weak), and a short rationale. Each relevance classification was tied to textual evidence and a documented justification, making it easier to review and validate.

Following the initial screening for substantive relevance using the first prompt, we designed a second prompt to move from identification to classification. The second prompt was focused on the proposals that had been tagged as substantively relevant to social protection (those ranked moderate to strong). Copilot was instructed to assess the depth and nature of integration between social protection and climate objectives, using a clearly defined four-tier framework (A - D) that matched the continuum typology adopted in this review. The output for this second prompt had a file name, programme title, implementing institutions, requested amount, primary category tag (A - D), secondary category if any, a brief rationale, and a confidence rating.

Comparison between the manual screening method and the AI results was adopted. The AI method only identified 4 projects as strong – all of which were identified as relevant by the manual screening method (out of 35 projects). This large gap between what AI produced and what was manually identified as relevant is likely given the information that was provided to AI (only the proposals) whereas many of the details that were found e.g. regarding the specific engagement of a Ministry linked to social protection with a consultative workshop was only detailed within the Progress or Completion Report available on the PPMS. For those projects where there was misalignment (e.g. AI ranked project as weak and manual screening ranked the project as substantively relevant), an additional check was conducted to understand where the discrepancy arose.

After mapping the components of the Readiness Programme, we applied AI-assisted analysis to detect underlying patterns in the data and to inform a typology of social protection engagement. This approach enabled us to identify relationships that may not have been immediately apparent through manual analysis alone.

Funded Activities

Similar to the Readiness Programme, we used a two-part prompt for the Funded Activities' portfolio review. The first prompt performed the keyword detection to identify proposals with potential social protection relevance. The second prompt was used to determine both the appropriate category of social protection alignment and the specific action objectives to which the social protection instrument or project component was contributing. A similar approach as used in the Readiness Programme was adopted when discrepancies arose between the AI and manual screening results,

prompting an additional review to understand the sources of misalignment and to ensure correct inclusion or exclusion decisions.

Limitations

The results from both the review of the Funded Activities and the Portfolio Review should be interpreted acknowledging the challenges and limitations related to this review. Some of these include:

1. AI screening:
 - a. Document processing limits: The tool could not process more than 20 documents at a time. As a result, proposals had to be reviewed in batches, which introduced an additional step to carefully consolidate the outputs across the runs.
 - b. Inconsistency in tagging: When the same set of documents were processed more than once, some projects were assigned different tag categories. This variability highlights the importance of validation checks and human review.
2. Funded Activities
 - c. For newer projects, only proposal documents were available for screening; the nature of their engagement with social protection may evolve during implementation.
 - d. In some cases, it was challenging to determine the relevance of projects based on the available information.
 - e. Projects may have been missed where social protection terminology was presented in non-English languages.
3. Readiness Programme
 - f. The spreadsheets provided by GCF contained information only from the Objectives and Executive Summary section of reports and included a substantial number of empty entries. As a result, the keyword search was conducted on a subset of projects and may not have identified all projects with links to social protection.
 - g. Where a keyword was identified as potentially relevant, the manual screening involved a further review of the Completion or Progress Report. For example, if a ministry associated with social protection was referenced, in some cases additional documentation attached to the report, linked to the mention, was also examined. Where the keyword usage or project details did not indicate social protection engagement, the project was not reviewed further. As a result, some references to social protection within unscreened project documentation may have been missed. However, it was assumed that where social protection played a substantive role, this would be reflected in the Completion or Progress Report.

Annex B List of GCF projects with social protection components

Project code	Project name	Country	Typology classification	Instrument
FP244	Climate Resilient Health and Well-Being for Rural Communities in southern Malawi (CHWBRC)	Malawi	B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP257	RE-GAIN: Scaling solutions for food loss in Africa	Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia	A	Seeking synergies with SP.
FP258	Multi-country Project Advancing Early Warnings for All (EW4All)	Antigua and Barbuda, Cambodia, Chad, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Somalia	A, B, C	Shock-responsive social protection (integration with EWS)
FP261	Improving Climate Resilience by Increasing Water Security in the Amazon Basin	Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Suriname	A	Seeking synergies with SP.
FP267	Scaling up ecosystem-based approaches to managing climate-intensified disaster risks in vulnerable regions of South Africa ("Eco-DRR")	South Africa	A	Public Works
FP281	Direct Financing for Communities and Businesses to Respond to Climate Change in the Cook Islands	Cook Islands	B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP283	Glaciers to Farms (G2F) Regional Program: Advancing Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development in Central and West Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	B, C	Adaptive social safety nets (cash transfers, food aid)
SAP046	Strengthening Climate Information and Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems for Increased Resilience in Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan	B, C, D	Shock-responsive social protection (integration with EWS)

Project code	Project name	Country	Typology classification	Instrument
SAP053	FISH-ADAPT: Transforming climate resilience and sustainability in Saint Lucia's fisheries communities	Saint Lucia	A	Policy alignment.
SAP062	Dominica Community Resilience Enhancement Project (DOMCREP)	Dominica	B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP003	Increasing the resilience of ecosystems and communities through the restoration of the productive bases of salinized lands	Senegal	A	Alignment with Policy.
FP010	De-Risking and Scaling-up Investment in Energy Efficient Building Retrofits	Armenia	B	Targeted subsidies/grants under existing social support schemes to promote energy efficiency in the social housing sector.
FP011	Large-scale Ecosystem-based Adaptation in The Gambia: developing a climate-resilient, natural resource-based economy	Gambia	A	Alignment with Policy.
FP012	Africa Hydromet Program – Strengthening Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: Mali Country Project	Mali	B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP026	Sustainable Landscapes in Eastern Madagascar	Madagascar	A	Alignment with Policy.
FP049	Building the climate resilience of food insecure smallholder farmers through integrated management of climate risk (R4)	Senegal	A, B, C	System strengthening
FP058	Responding to the increasing risk of drought: building gender-responsive resilience of the most vulnerable communities	Ethiopia	A	Alignment with national productive safety net programmes

Project code	Project name	Country	Typology classification	Instrument
FP059	Climate Resilient Water Sector in Grenada (G-CREWS)	Grenada	B	Social safety net covering water connection fees and monthly water bills for the poor
FP060	Water Sector Resilience Nexus for Sustainability in Barbados (WSRN S-Barbados)	Barbados	B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP062	Poverty, Reforestation, Energy and Climate Change Project (PROEZA)	Paraguay	A, B, C, D	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP067	Building climate resilience of vulnerable and food insecure communities through capacity strengthening and livelihood diversification in mountainous regions of Tajikistan	Tajikistan	A, B	Targeting beneficiaries via SP system.
FP068	Scaling-up Multi-Hazard Early Warning System and the Use of Climate Information in Georgia	Georgia	B	Employment guarantee scheme
FP069	Enhancing adaptive capacities of coastal communities, especially women, to cope with climate change induced salinity	Bangladesh	A	Policy Alignment
FP074	Africa Hydromet Program – Strengthening Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso Country Project	Burkina Faso	A	Build upon previous SP programmes.
FP109	Safeguarding rural communities and their physical and economic assets from climate induced disasters in Timor-Leste	Timor-Leste	A	Policy alignment.
FP136	Resilient Landscapes and Livelihoods Project	Ethiopia	A	Build upon previous SP programmes.

Project code	Project name	Country	Typology classification	Instrument
FP158	Ecosystem-Based Adaptation and Mitigation in Botswana's Communal Rangelands	Botswana	A, B, C, D	Public works programme
FP184	Vanuatu community-based climate resilience project (VCCRP)	Vanuatu	A, C, D	Design of cash transfer system (shock-responsive social protection system)
FP199	Public-Social-Private Partnerships for Ecologically-Sound Agriculture and Resilient Livelihood in Northern Tonle Sap Basin (PEARL)	Cambodia	A	Seeking synergies with SP.
FP201	Adapting Philippine Agriculture to Climate Change (APA)	Philippines (the)	A, B, C	System strengthening
FP206	Resilient Homestead and Livelihood support to the vulnerable coastal people of Bangladesh (RHL)	Bangladesh	A	Policy alignment
FP215	Community Resilience Partnership Program	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the), Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu	A, B, C	System strengthening
SAP002	Climate services and diversification of climate sensitive livelihoods to empower food insecure and vulnerable communities in the Kyrgyz Republic.	Kyrgyzstan	A, B, C	Public works programme
SAP007	Integrated Climate Risk Management for Food Security and Livelihoods in Zimbabwe focusing on Masvingo and Rushinga Districts	Zimbabwe	A, C	Supporting the enabling environment/system strengthening

Project code	Project name	Country	Typology classification	Instrument
SAP010	Multi-Hazard Impact-Based Forecasting and Early Warning System for the Philippines	Philippines (the)	A, C	System strengthening.
SAP014	Forest resilience of Armenia, enhancing adaptation and rural green growth via mitigation	Armenia	B	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries
SAP026	Extended Community Climate Change Project-Drought (ECCCP-Drought)	Bangladesh	B	Public works programme
SAP028	Women-Adapt: Enhancing the climate change adaptive capacity of smallholder farmer communities in the Poro Region, focusing on vulnerable women and youth	Cote d'Ivoire	A	Supplying school feeding
SAP031	Marajó Resiliente: Enhancing the resilience of smallholders to climate change impacts through adapting and scaling up diversified agroforestry systems in the Marajo Archipelago of Brazil	Brazil	B	Targeting of social
SAP039	Integrated climate risk management for strengthened resilience to climate change in Buner and Shangla Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan	Pakistan	A, B	Targeting via SP system.
SAP042	Building climate resilience by linking climate adaptation and social protection through decentralised planning in Mozambique (LINK)	Mozambique	B, C, D	Public works programme

Annex C List of GCF readiness projects with social protection components

Agreement reference	Name	Category
ARG-RS-005	Increasing health sectors capacities and strengthening coordination on climate action in Argentina at national and subnational levels	Capacity and technical engagement
BDI-RS-002	Building the capacities of key Sustainable Land Management stakeholders to mainstream climate change in Burundi, and updating the Country Programme	Capacity and technical engagement
BEN-RS-004	Strengthening access to climate finance and integration of climate change into the local development planning in Benin	Governance; capacity and technical engagement
BGD-RS-006	Strengthening Bangladesh's NDA Secretariat, Enhancing Pipeline Implementation and Private Sector Engagement in Effective Climate Action	Policy and programmatic; Capacity and technical engagement
CHL-RS-007	Update of the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan NAP in Chile	Governance; capacity and technical engagement
CHL-RS-008	Update of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Biodiversity	Governance; capacity and technical engagement
DOM-RS-003	Building Capacity for direct access to Climate Finance	Policy and programmatic
DOM-RS-004	Mobilizing International Climate Finance and Private Investments for Low-Carbon Development in the Dominican Republic	Policy and programmatic
ECU-RS-007	Enhancing the capacities of Banco de Desarrollo de Ecuador B.P. BDE to support its accreditation to the Green Climate Fund	Adjacent
ETH-RS-003	Building Capacity to Facilitate the Integration of the National Adaptation Planning Process in Ethiopia	Governance; policy and programmatic; capacity and technical engagement
GHA-RS-003	Enhancing multi-sector planning and capacity for effective adaptation in Ghana	Governance; capacity and technical engagement

Agreement reference	Name	Category
GRD-RS-005	National adaptation planning for improved food security in Grenada	Policy and programmatic; capacity and technical engagement
IRQ-RS-003	Building capacity to advance the National Adaptation Plan process in Iraq	Governance
KEN-RS-002	Enhancing capacity for planning and effective implementation of climate change adaptation in Kenya	Policy and programmatic; Capacity and technical engagement
KIR-RS-002	Facilitating the Republic of Kiribatis ability to strengthen long-term low emission climate resilient development	Policy and programmatic
LKA-RS-003	Strategic Frameworks, Country Programming, and Pipeline Development in Sri Lankas Lower Watersheds Coastal Regions	Capacity and technical engagement
MDA-RS-003	NAP-2: Advancing Moldova’s National Climate Change Adaptation Planning Process	Governance
MKD-RS-003	Building capacity towards sustainable and climate-resilient human capital development in North Macedonia	Governance; policy and programmatic; capacity and technical engagement
MNG-RS-008	Strengthening Institutional and Technical Capacity to Support NDC Implementation and Mainstreaming Climate Change into Subnational Development Planning in Mongolia	Policy and programmatic
MRT-RS-002	Building capacity to advance National Adaptation Plan Process in Mauritania	Policy and programmatic
MUL-RS-003	Scaling-up public private co-investments for climate action in agrifood systems	Policy and programmatic
MWI-RS-004	Resilient Recovery Rapid Readiness Support in Malawi	Policy and programmatic
NER-RS-003	Identify adaptation and mitigation interventions and creating partnerships for scaling up the Great Green Wall Initiative in Niger	Capacity and technical engagement
NGA-RS-001	Strengthening Nigeria’s capacity to advance the National Adaptation Planning process	Capacity and technical engagement

Agreement reference	Name	Category
NPL-RS-001	Adaptation Planning	Policy and programmatic
SOM-RS-001	Support for Establishing a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Process for the Federal Republic of Somalia	Policy and programmatic; Capacity and technical engagement
TCD-RS-005	Strengthening the Economic and Social Development Agency ADES institutional capacity to become a Direct Access Accredited Entity and support the implementation of Chads climate change programs and strategies.	Adjacent
TGO-RS-004	Strengthening National and Regional Capacities for Effective Climate Risk Management in Togo	Capacity and technical engagement
TJK-RS-003	Support the Republic of Tajikistan to strengthen its capacities for monitoring and evaluation of climate finance, identifying potential Direct Access Entities and engaging the private sector on climate change related investments with the Green Climate Fun	Governance
TKM-RS-003	Improving the capacity of Turkmenistan to access climate finance through capacity building and strategic frameworks	Adjacent
TUN-RS-005	Food Security and Adaptation Priorities in the Agricultural Sector in Tunisia	Policy and programmatic
VCT-RS-005	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: Pursuing Climate Resilient Development by Enhancing the National Adaptation Planning Process [SVG-NAP]	Governance
VNM-RS-002	Viet Nam National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Development and Operationalisation Support Project	Capacity and technical engagement
ZMB-RS-003	National Adaptation Planning for Climate Resilience (NAP4CR)-Zambia	Policy and programmatic
ZWE-RS-002	Building capacity to advance the National Adaptation Planning process in Zimbabwe	Policy and programmatic; Capacity and technical engagement

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