



**GREEN
CLIMATE
FUND**

Meeting of the Board
26 - 29 October 2026
Songdo, Incheon, Republic of Korea
Provisional agenda item 11

GCF/B.46/03/Add.15

5 October 2026

Consideration of accreditation proposals and activities – Addendum XV

Accreditation assessment of APL196

Summary

This document contains the recommendation by the Accreditation Panel for accreditation of applicant 196 (APL196), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), based in France, in accordance with the revised accreditation framework adopted in paragraph (a) of decision B.42/13, and includes the screening report confirming the applicant meets the screening requirements contained in part 1 of annex II to document GCF/B.42/04/Add.01.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an international access entity based in France. The applicant is an intergovernmental organization recognized as a United Nations specialized agency. It promotes peace and sustainable development through international cooperation in education, science, culture, communication and information. Its mission is to advance knowledge, strengthen capacities, protect cultural and natural heritage and support its Member States in addressing global challenges, including climate change.

2. The applicant applied and was assessed in accordance with the revised accreditation framework (adopted in decision B.42/13, paragraph (a)). The applicant is eligible for, and applied under, the fast-track accreditation process (adopted in decision B.08/03, paragraphs (c)–(h)), as an Adaptation Fund entity. As per decision B.42/13, paragraph (i), UNESCO's application has been assessed by the Accreditation Panel (AP) against the relevant screening requirements as contained in document GCF/B.42/04/Add.01 titled "Accreditation Framework", annex III, table 1. As part of this assessment, the AP consulted the applicant's website and third-party websites to complement the information provided in the application. The AP's assessment was concluded with the issuance of a screening report to the applicant, as contained in Section III below.

3. The applicant has applied to be accredited for the following parameters under the GCF fit-for-purpose approach:¹

- (a) **Access modality:** international;
- (b) **Track:** fast-track; and
- (c) **Maximum environmental and social risk category:** minimal to no risk (category C/intermediation 3 (C/I-3)).²

II. Contribution to GCF mandate and strategic goals

4. The applicant is found to have the potential to support GCF in implementing its Strategic Plan for 2024–2027 with respect to:

- (a) The indicative projects/programmes that the applicant intends to submit to GCF;
- (b) Alignment of said indicative pipeline with country programming priorities. The applicant states that its approach is country-driven and that it works with the national designated authorities, National Commissions and line ministries to translate national adaptation and mitigation priorities into investment-ready concepts;
- (c) Potential contribution to adaptation and cross-cutting climate action and diversification across the GCF results areas of health, food and water security; livelihoods of people and communities; infrastructure and built environment; ecosystems and ecosystem services; energy generation and access; buildings, cities, industries and appliances; and forests and land use; and
- (d) Mobilization and deployment of climate finance at scale since the applicant has a reported track record of more than 110 climate-related projects implemented from

¹ Refer to section IV below for the recommendations by the Accreditation Panel.

² As per the revised Environmental and Social Policy adopted in decision B.BM-2021/18, category C is defined as "Activities with minimal or no adverse environmental and/or social risks and/or impacts" and intermediation 3 is defined as "When an intermediary's existing or proposed portfolio includes financial exposure to activities that predominantly have minimal or negligible adverse environmental and social impacts."

2022 to 2023, with financing ranging from USD 50,000 to USD 45 million and activities primarily financed through grants and technical assistance.

5. UNESCO has extensive international institutional presence and relevant networks. The applicant is made up of 194 Member States, 53 field offices and National Commissions, with operations in developing countries, the least developed countries and small island developing States. Its area of expertise includes climate education, scientific research, water security, ecosystem restoration, cultural heritage protection and youth engagement. Previous partnerships include collaboration with Save the Children and the United Nations Children's Fund to support a GCF project, "Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities through the Education Sector".
6. UNESCO intends to contribute to the GCF mandate through an institution-wide climate framework and programming in education, science, culture and communication. The Strategy for Action on Climate Change (2018–2021) established its approach on the basis of climate knowledge, stakeholder-oriented climate services and policy advice. This approach is embedded in the applicant's Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029, which recognizes climate change as a major institutional challenge. As outlined under strategic objective 2 of the strategy, UNESCO commits to "work towards sustainable societies and protecting the environment through the promotion of science, technology, innovation and the natural heritage". The strategy is also aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.
7. Intended programming includes climate education, water security, ecosystem resilience, scientific cooperation, cultural heritage protection and inclusive engagement. The applicant states that its approach is country-driven and aligned with nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and long-term strategies, and that it will combine technical assistance, climate risk analysis, stakeholder engagement and project preparation support.
8. UNESCO intends to propose programmes and projects to GCF that are aligned with the national development priorities and climate change strategies of its Member States, including nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans, through inter alia technical assistance, multi-stakeholder design workshops and partnerships with national and international organizations.
9. The applicant has experience implementing climate resilience activities across Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and small island developing States in the range of USD 5 to USD 10 million. Projects include groundwater resilience in Zimbabwe, disaster risk reduction for school facilities in Haiti, glacier -lake -outburst -flood risk reduction in Central Asia, climate-smart education, mangrove restoration, and transboundary water cooperation, for example:
 - (a) USD 10 million (grants) for the Climate Smart Education Systems - Country project;
 - (b) USD 10 million (grants) for the Implementing Measures for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction Mitigation of School Facilities in Haiti project;
 - (c) USD 6.8 million (grants) for the Strengthening the Resilience of Central Asian Countries by Enabling Regional Cooperation to Assess High Altitude Glacio-nival Systems to Develop Integrated Methods for Sustainable Development and Adaptation to Climate Change project; and
 - (d) USD 6.5 million (grants) for the Reducing vulnerabilities of populations in the Central Asia region from glacier lake outburst floods in a changing climate project.

III. Screening report

3.1 Screening requirements assessed by the Secretariat

3.1.1 Legal status

10. The applicant, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is an international organization established by its Constitution adopted on 16 November 1945 by its member states. UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations and is headquartered in the French Republic.

11. The applicant has provided evidence that it has legal personality, the legal capacity and authority to enter into contracts, and can bear financial and legal responsibility for performing those obligations. Based on the evidence submitted, the Secretariat finds that the applicant meets the “legal status” screening requirement.

3.1.2 International access applicant’s support to direct access applicants

12. As an international access applicant, UNESCO intends to strengthen subnational, national and regional entities to programme with GCF, including through providing seed funding and technical assistance to national designated authorities and ministries. UNESCO supports countries in developing and implementing nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and long-term strategies, including through technical assistance to strengthen water-related climate policy, capacity-building for national stakeholders, and support for integrating Indigenous and local knowledge into climate planning. UNESCO also provides support to generate high-quality project concepts, including use of the Climate Risk Informed Decision Analysis methodology and gender-responsive capacity development.

13. Based on the evidence submitted, the Secretariat finds that the applicant meets the “international access applicant’s support to direct access applicants” screening requirement.

3.2 Screening requirements assessed by the Accreditation Panel

14. As per paragraph 2 above, the applicant is eligible for, and applied under, the fast-track accreditation process as an Adaptation Fund entity. The screening requirements for corporate governance and internal control, financial management, procurement, project management and integrity, except for the investigation function, are considered to have been met by way of fast-track accreditation.

3.2.1 Integrity

15. UNESCO’s international legal personality derives from its constituent treaty and the applicable privileges and immunities framework for United Nations specialized agencies. The UNESCO core governing bodies comprise the General Conference, which has representatives from all Member States and determines UNESCO’s main lines of work, and the Executive Board, which monitors the implementation of its programme. The Executive Board consists of representatives of 58 Member States elected by the General Conference and meets in regular session at least four times each biennium. Day-to-day operations are executed under the oversight of the Director-General.

16. UNESCO has established a Whistleblower Protection Policy which is publicly accessible,³ provides safeguards for individuals reporting suspected wrongdoing and accommodates anonymous reporting. The policy is supported by confidential reporting channels accessible to both internal and external parties, including a channel that permits anonymous disclosures.⁴ Responsibility for the implementation of the policy rests with the Ethics Office.

³ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/ios/investigation?hub=67038>

⁴ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/ios/report-wrongdoing?hub=67038>

17. Investigations are undertaken through the UNESCO independent Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS), which provides an integrated oversight function encompassing internal audit, evaluation and investigations. The IOS mandate is established by its Charter,⁵ which is endorsed by the Executive Board and approved by the General Conference. The Charter provides for IOS to operate independently from other parts of the UNESCO Secretariat and grants the Director of IOS direct and unrestricted access to the Executive Board, together with functional reporting arrangements to the Oversight Advisory Committee, a standing committee whose main purpose is to advise the Director-General on the proper functioning of the audit, risk and control functions. The IOS Charter was reviewed in 2024 to incorporate recommendations provided by the Joint Inspection Unit aimed at strengthening it. IOS also reports annually to the Executive Board on its activities, including the work of the investigation function. These reports are publicly available;⁶ they cover investigation activities, case trends and typologies, and case closure status.⁷ The investigation function comprises experienced investigators and operates in accordance with the Uniform Guidelines for Investigations adopted by the Conference of International Investigators, reflecting internationally recognized investigative practice, supplemented by UNESCO's own publicly available IOS Investigation Guidelines.⁸

18. The AP finds that the applicant meets the screening requirement for integrity.

3.2.2 Revised Environmental and Social Policy and ESS standards

A. Revised Environmental and Social Policy

19. The applicant's environmental and social management system (ESMS) (2024) is anchored in the revised Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF), validated by the UNESCO Programme Coordination Group as an internal policy document in 2026. The ESSF is complemented by the Environmental Sustainability and Management Policy (2021), which reflects the organization's broader commitment to environmental sustainability and is currently being revised into an Environmental and Social Sustainability Policy. The ESSF establishes UNESCO's vision, principles and approach to environmental and social (E&S) sustainability and integrates E&S considerations into programme and project design and implementation. It promotes meaningful stakeholder engagement, including access to grievance mechanisms, and seeks to maximize positive outcomes while avoiding adverse impacts. The ESSF establishes four guiding principles and eight E&S standards aligned with International Finance Corporation Performance Standards 1–8, which are implemented through the applicant's Enterprise Risk Management Framework and programme and project cycle procedures. The framework applies across UNESCO programmes, services, operations and management functions and extends to implementing partners and vendors through contractual requirements. It aligns with applicable national laws, donor and host government requirements, and the obligations of implementing partners and vendors, with the more stringent requirement prevailing where differences exist.

20. UNESCO has established institutional measures to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) through its Policy on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (2020) and the ESSF. These instruments adopt a zero-tolerance approach to SEAH and a survivor-centred approach to the handling of complaints involving UNESCO personnel. Equivalent standards apply to implementing partners and vendors through

⁵ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382475?posInSet=1&queryId=> and <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389188>

⁶ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397501.locale=en>

⁷ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397501.locale=en>

⁸ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390900>

contractual arrangements. The PSEA sets out procedures for complaint receipt, reporting, investigation, victim assistance and referral pathways, supported by designated focal points. Programmes and projects are required to identify, assess and manage risks related to gender-based violence, including SEAH, through gender analysis and appropriate mitigation measures. SEAH allegations are submitted directly to the UNESCO Investigation Office through the “Report Wrongdoing” web form⁹ or via email.¹⁰ Reports are handled confidentially to protect complainants’ identities. Non-compliance may result in disciplinary action or termination of contractual arrangements. UNESCO provided evidence demonstrating the tracking and reporting of SEAH-related cases through annual Ethics Office reporting processes.

B. Environmental and social management system

21. The ESMS establishes the UNESCO framework for E&S risk identification, assessment, management and monitoring and defines the responsibilities of risk owners and programme/project managers. The system requires E&S risk screening and classification of activities as high-, medium- or low-risk, which determines the applicable safeguards instruments and management measures. Medium- and high-risk activities require environmental and social management plans (ESMPs) and, where applicable, environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs). These measures are integrated into implementation plans, monitored and evaluated throughout implementation and updated as necessary.
22. UNESCO submitted E&S screening reports for two medium-risk projects in the United Republic of Tanzania and the Central African Republic, and one low-risk project in Madagascar, demonstrating a track record of identifying and assessing E&S risks and impacts in accordance with the ESSF. Screening procedures have also been applied in climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management initiatives, including activities involving Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
23. The ESMS applies to implementing partners and vendors and requires compliance with both UNESCO requirements and applicable national legislation, with the more stringent requirement prevailing. Oversight of implementation is provided through an Advisory Group and Management Board, supported by internal and external audits. Given the recent establishment of the ESMS, an independent review or audit is not required.
24. UNESCO has established a structured approach for assessing, monitoring and evaluating the E&S performance of its operations, including downstream partners through standardized monitoring reports and project-level agreements that require partner reporting, UNESCO review and risk-based follow-up. Monitoring and evaluation reports capture information on stakeholder engagement, complaints and grievances, safeguarding concerns, inclusion and non-discrimination, context-specific issues, incident reporting and required follow-up actions.
25. The applicant’s external accountability framework includes mechanisms for information disclosure, stakeholder engagement and grievance redress. The Stakeholder Response Mechanism (SRM, 2025), which operates at the headquarters and field-office level, serves as the primary entry point for stakeholder complaints and feedback and provides information on UNESCO’s transparency and accountability commitments. UNESCO also maintains publicly accessible information on its E&S policies and accountability mechanisms. The Access to Information Policy establishes mechanisms for requesting information that is not publicly available. The Access to Information Desk supports the implementation of the policy by facilitating information requests and providing guidance on applicable procedures, contact points and indicative response timelines.
26. The Access to Information Policy, together with the ESMS and the SRM, supports the timely disclosure of E&S information, including ESIAs and ESMPs, and promotes stakeholder

⁹ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/ios/report-wrongdoing>

¹⁰ ios.hotline@unesco.org

engagement throughout the project cycle. The ESMS requires stakeholder engagement throughout risk assessment, categorization and management processes; disclosure of relevant E&S information in accessible formats and languages; and publication of substantiated grievances and resolutions in accordance with SRM procedures. Stakeholder engagement is integrated throughout the programme and project lifecycle and includes stakeholder identification and analysis, meaningful consultation, timely disclosure of information, access to grievance mechanisms and stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation. Engagement processes are designed to be gender-responsive, inclusive, culturally appropriate and accessible to vulnerable and marginalized groups. UNESCO provided recent project examples from Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe demonstrating stakeholder mapping, national consultations, baseline surveys, the application of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), gender-inclusive participation, community feedback processes and grievance redress mechanisms with multiple access channels.

27. UNESCO has established an institutional structure for implementing E&S safeguards proportionate to the scale and nature of its activities. Under its enterprise risk management framework, E&S risk management follows a three-lines-of-responsibility model. Senior managers constitute the first line of responsibility and are accountable for implementing risk management processes and maintaining risk registers. The Programme Coordination Group provides second-line oversight through guidance, capacity-building and monitoring of aggregate risks. Independent assurance is provided by IOS as the third line of responsibility. At the project level, UNESCO applies risk-proportionate safeguard measures based on the assigned risk category, including E&S management measures, ESMPs and ESIAs, where required, and periodic updates of risk assessments during implementation.

28. The ESSF establishes documented procedures, roles and responsibilities for implementing E&S requirements and provides for the escalation of potentially high-risk activities as well as independent assurance through internal oversight functions. To support operational environmental sustainability management, UNESCO maintains an Environmental Management Board chaired by the Assistant Director-General for Administration and Management. The Board is supported by an Environmental Management Advisory Group, a headquarters coordination team and field-level focal points. Responsibility for managing organizational and operational E&S risks rests with senior management and is supported by risk registers and reporting processes.

29. Programme and project managers are responsible for integrating E&S requirements into project design, implementation and monitoring, including updating risk assessments and mitigation measures throughout the project cycle. The Environmental and Social Specialist supports implementation through the development of E&S tools, training materials, contractual safeguard requirements and the integration of E&S considerations into enterprise risk management processes. The UNESCO Environmental Sustainability Officer leads the integration of environmental sustainability across operations, facilities, programmes and projects, and provides training, capacity-building and technical advisory support. Additional expertise is available through the Sustainable UNESCO team and a network of specialists across UNESCO Science and Culture Sectors, with expertise in areas such as biodiversity, climate change, Indigenous knowledge systems, community engagement, cultural heritage protection and ecosystem management. Institutional capacity is further strengthened through a structured ESSF training programme for UNESCO personnel and implementing partners involved in programme and project implementation.

C. Grievance redress mechanism

30. UNESCO maintains an institutional SRM, through which individuals or groups may raise concerns regarding alleged non-compliance with the ESSF or adverse environmental and social impacts arising from activities implemented by UNESCO or on its behalf. The SRM is housed within the UNESCO central Administration and Management structure and operates

independently of programme implementation functions. Managed by the Head of Unit, Privacy, Transparency and Stakeholder Accountability, the mechanism is responsible for complaint intake, registration, eligibility assessment, review coordination, resolution support and reporting. Complaints may be submitted by email or post in any language and complainants may request confidentiality. The AP finds that the SRM meets the GCF requirements for accessibility, accountability, effectiveness, transparency, inclusive participation and independence under the revised GCF Environmental and Social Policy.

31. UNESCO requires community-level programmes to establish project-level grievance mechanisms that are child-friendly, gender-responsive, inclusive and proportionate to project risks and impacts. Complaints are acknowledged within 5 days, and admissibility assessments are completed within 20 days. Admissible complaints are subject to a formal review process, which may include document reviews, interviews, site visits and, where required, engagement of independent technical experts subject to conflict-of-interest safeguards. The SRM Desk maintains the corporate complaints registry, manages review processes and monitors follow-up actions. The mechanism operates in coordination with the UNESCO Access to Information Policy, Investigations Office and Ethics Office, as appropriate. UNESCO submitted its register of external E&S inquiries, complaints and responses, which indicates that no environmental or social complaints were received during the past three years. UNESCO also submitted monitoring reports for projects in the Central Asian region and Haiti, as well as evidence of the SRM being operationalized at the country office level in Kathmandu.¹¹ Together, these demonstrate the effective functioning, accessibility and practical implementation of the grievance redress mechanism.

32. The AP finds that the applicant meets the screening requirements for the revised environmental and social policy and the screening requirements for ESS standards for activities of minimal to no E&S risk (category C/I-3), as applied for.

3.2.3 Indigenous Peoples Policy

33. UNESCO's commitment to Indigenous Peoples is implemented through its organization-wide ESSF. ESSF Standard 7: Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities addresses potential risks and impacts affecting Indigenous Peoples and seeks to protect their rights, livelihoods, lands, territories, natural resources and cultural heritage. Standard 7 requires the identification of Indigenous Peoples in project-affected areas, assessment of potential impacts, application of FPIC where required, and measures to avoid forced eviction, displacement and other adverse impacts.

34. Where risks are identified, UNESCO requires risk management measures proportionate to the level of risk, including ESMPs and, where appropriate, ESIAs. The ESSF also requires culturally appropriate consultation and engagement, disclosure of relevant information in accessible formats where feasible, and access to the applicant's SRM, with due consideration given to customary dispute resolution mechanisms. UNESCO submitted examples of projects in the Central African Republic and a regional Global Environment Facility funded initiative covering Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, demonstrating the application of E&S screening, risk assessment, stakeholder consultations, including FPIC, development of mitigation measures and management plans, establishment of stakeholder response mechanisms and E&S monitoring. These examples provide evidence of the applicant's institutional capacity to identify, assess and manage issues affecting Indigenous Peoples, and demonstrate that Indigenous Peoples are appropriately engaged throughout project preparation and implementation.

¹¹ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/stakeholder-response-mechanism>

35. The AP finds that the applicant meets the screening requirements for the Indigenous Peoples Policy.

3.2.4 Updated Gender Policy

36. The Global Priority Gender Equality Framework (2026–2027) provides the framing for the UNESCO gender equality approach across its strategic objectives and operations, with a focus on education, women’s empowerment, inclusion and prevention of gender-based violence and closing the digital gender gap. This framework is underpinned by the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029, which adopts a gender-transformative approach aligned with the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

37. UNESCO has established institutional systems, tools and technical capacity to integrate, monitor and report on gender equality across its operations. Its Results-Based Management approach incorporates gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators throughout project and programme design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. Additionally, institutional Gender Equality Markers are integrated in all workplans, projects, programmes, staffing activities and associated resource allocations.

38. The Division for Gender Equality provides policy guidance, technical support, training and tools to promote gender-responsive approaches across UNESCO operations. It comprises a Director, three Professional staff, and one General Service staff member with expertise in gender equality, social inclusion, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, capacity development and policy advisory services. This capacity is supported by institutional guidance, training and technical assistance to strengthen gender mainstreaming across headquarters and field offices.

39. UNESCO submitted gender assessments and gender action plans for projects in Haiti and Central Asia, demonstrating the application of gender-responsive measures, indicators and stakeholder consultations that promote women’s participation in decision-making. As at January 2026, women represented 58 per cent of the UNESCO workforce, including 38 per cent of positions at the Director level and above. UNESCO was also recognized among the best-performing specialized entities in the 2024 UN-SWAP 2.0 assessment.

40. The AP finds that the applicant meets the screening requirements for the updated gender policy.

3.3 Observations for the applicant

41. The applicant is encouraged to keep the E&S grievance pathway distinguishable from safeguarding case management in its public information and its records.

42. The applicant is encouraged to maintain the E&S content published on its website, including the public complaints registry.

IV. Recommendations

43. Based on the assessment, the applicant is found to have met all applicable screening requirements.

44. Therefore, the AP recommends APL196 for accreditation and that it be accredited for **maximum environmental and social risk category**: minimal to no risk (category C/I-3).
