AF-GCF Scaling-Up Framework: Operational Guidance

Introduction and background

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF) have established a strong and strategic collaboration, in line with their respective mandates to support climate action in developing countries, and to promote complementarity and coherence among climate finance entities.

The AF has a proven track record of delivering country-led and highly impactful adaptation projects. These projects align closely with country strategies and GCF priorities. In line with this shared mandate, GCF and AF have collaborated on several initiatives aimed at scaling up successful AF-funded projects through GCF financing. These experiences have demonstrated strong technical and operational synergies between them, as well as their alignment with country-driven priorities.

At the same time, the experience of both the AF and GCF has demonstrated a clear opportunity for a more structured scale-up approach that ensures timely support to developing countries to develop high quality proposals with a line of sight to scale from the project development phase, and a clear criterion for scale-up. The development of this Operational Guidance responds to this need.

Purpose and scope

This Operational Guidance sets out a structured process for considering the scaling up of completed or advanced-stage AF-funded projects through GCF financing. It is intended to formalize the collaboration between the GCF and AF regarding scaling, and to provide the respective operational guidance.

It aims to:

- **Clarify the process** — outlining the sequential steps from early pipeline identification to GCF Board consideration.
- **Define institutional roles and responsibilities** — specifying the functions of GCF, AF, National Designated Authorities (NDAs/DAs), and Accredited Entities (AEs/IEs).
- **Ensure consistency and quality** — providing a structured framework to improve efficiency, predictability, and alignment with country-driven priorities, AF and GCF strategic objectives.
- **Facilitate participation of DAEs and first-time AEs** — by leveraging the technical knowledge, data, and evidence generated through AF-funded projects.

The Guidance applies exclusively to the scaling-up of AF-funded projects and complements, but does not replace or modify, existing AF or GCF policies and project cycle procedures. Based on emerging opportunities as the implementation of this framework advances, the AF may also take on scaling-up opportunities from the GCF projects as well.

Next steps

GCF and AF will pilot this Operational Guidance through selected AF-to-GCF projects to validate its feasibility. Orientation materials and targeted outreach will also be developed to support NDAs/DAs, GCF and AF staff, AEs/IEs, and other stakeholders in applying this Guidance effectively.

Applying the Scaling-Up Framework

Overview and objectives

This Operational Guidance defines the intended process for the origination, preparation, and appraisal of Funding Proposals (FPs) submitted to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) under the scaling-up approach in collaboration with the Adaptation Fund (AF).

It builds on a previous framework between GCF and the AF and aims to operationalize this collaboration through a standardized procedure.

The Operational Guidance consolidates lessons learned from past and ongoing initiatives and establishes, subject to the respective frameworks of AF and GCF, clear roles and responsibilities for all relevant stakeholders — including GCF, AF, National Designated Authorities (NDAs/DAs), and Accredited Entities (AEs/IEs) — to improve efficiency, transparency, and coordination.

Applicability and process boundaries

This Operational Guidance applies to the preparation of Funding Proposals aiming at scaling up completed or advanced Adaptation Fund projects through financing from the Green Climate Fund. Projects under the Framework would be submitted in alignment with, and subject to, the general Proposal Approval Process or the Simplified Approval Process funding modalities of GCF.

It covers the activities from initial pipeline identification through GCF Board consideration, corresponding to Stages 1–4 of the GCF Project Cycle.

Specifically, this Operational Guidance:

- Defines the sequential steps, deliverables, and specific process details for the scaling-up approach as applicable to complement, without modifying, the standard GCF funding modalities.
- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders (GCF, AF, NDAs/DAs, and AEs/IEs) throughout the process.
- Serves as a complementary operational guide, aligning with the AF and GCF's standard project review and approval processes while not replacing or modifying them.

Acronyms

AE	Accredited Entity (GCF)
AMA	Accreditation Master Agreement
APR	Annual Performance Report
DA	Designated Authority (AF)
ESS	Environmental and Social Safeguards
FAA	Funded Activity Agreement
FP	Funding Proposal
IE	Implementing Entity (AF)
iTAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel
NDA	National Designated Authority (GCF)
iTAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel
NDA	National Designated Authority (GCF)
NOL	No Objection Letter
SAP	Simplified Approval Process

I. Roles and responsibilities

Table 1. RASCI matrix

Process step	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Preparatory work: Support countries to plan for scale	AF GCF		DA/IE		
Step 1. Identification of initial scaling up pipeline	AF GCF		DA/IE		GCF
Step 2. NDA proposal selection	NDA		GCF AF		
Step 3. Submission of project information packages to GCF of the shortlisted projects	AF		DA/IE		GCF
Step 4. Identification and engagement with the AE	NDA		GCF	AE	AF
Step 5. Technical Workshop (kickoff of FP development, optional)	AE		AF GCF DA/IE NDA		
Step 6. Funding Proposal submission and review	AE GCF		GCF AF	NDA	AF
Step 7. Joint learning and adaptive management	AF GCF				

Table 2. Definitions for the RASCI matrix:

Responsible	Assigned to complete a task within the process
Accountable	Has control of the task and related resources and ultimately answerable for the correct and thorough completion of a task within the process. Only one person can be accountable for each step.
Supported	Provide assistance to responsible team members in the completion of a task within the process.
Consulted	Provide advice on how to best complete a task within the process. Responsible team members are expected to actively solicit inputs from Consulted team members and take them into consideration before proceeding to the next step.
Informed	Receive updates on the progress of a task within a process. Responsible team members are expected to provide these updates at minimum upon completion of a task within the process but may proceed to the next step without feedback from Informed team members.

II. Procedures and steps

Preparatory work: Support countries to plan for scale

To make scaling a country driven process, it will be important to set up countries for success. The Adaptation Fund and GCF will collaborate in providing continuous and coordinated support to countries to plan for scale. Capacity-building efforts will help ensure that country stakeholders understand how to prepare projects at design stage for potential scale-up.

At pre-design stage, countries (in coordination with the AF DAs and GCF NDAs) and AEs and IEs will be sensitized to the opportunities, process, criteria etc. for scale-up. At the project technical review stage, projects will be assessed more specifically for scale-up potential and pathways.

At project implementation stage, countries will be asked to provide information on potential for scale of different project components.

This preparatory and continuous work will generate a set of enabling outcomes, including strengthened communication and outreach efforts, regular training and technical workshops under the Adaptation Fund and GCF, and enhanced guidance for proposal design and review. Criteria for the technical assessment of proposals and monitoring frameworks will be progressively refined to incorporate a stronger focus on sustainability and scalability, ensuring that scaling considerations are embedded throughout the project cycle.

Portfolio level steps

Step 1. Identification of initial scaling up pipeline

Objective
The purpose of this step is to identify AF-funded projects with strong potential to be scaled up through GCF financing.

Process description
Every 4–6 months, as part of the regular AF–GCF pipeline exchanges, the exchange aims to define a preliminary list of potential projects that could be scaled up by GCF. Selection will be guided by the joint criteria set out in Annex I, aligned with both AF and the GCF investment criteria, including:

- Interest and rationale expressed by country to scale at design or through annual monitoring and other AF monitoring processes.
- Evidence of successful implementation in the form of satisfactory project results, as determined through monitoring reports, mid-term reports, completion reports and/or final evaluations. Projects selected should be at least at mid-point of project implementation and have a minimum 'satisfactory' rating in the latest project performance report (PPR) or mid-term report (MTR), as available.
- Strong integration of gender and social considerations.
- Evidence that scaling will contribute to long-term sustainability and potential for maximizing climate impact, as described by the IE in the PPRs.

The AF may also consult national stakeholders, including DAs or NDAs, to validate country needs and confirm preliminary interest in a scale-up phase. In addition, a DA or NDA may request consideration of an advanced-stage AF-funded project for inclusion in the preliminary list where the project was not identified through the regular AF-GCF pipeline review process. Such a request shall be considered against the criteria set out in Annex I and shall not imply inclusion in the preliminary list, prioritization, approval, scale-up support, or funding by the GCF. Moreover, consulting the DA cannot be considered a guarantee that the GCF will scale-up the project as the project will need to be selected by the NDA and appraised by the GCF as part of its regular review process.

The list shall contain the following information: Name of project, objectives, short description, location, DA and IE information, latest available summary results, total budget and short justification taking into account the criteria set out in Annex I.

GCF will review and confirm that the suggested list of potential scaling up projects is also aligned with GCF strategic priorities and targets. GCF prioritization may include, but not limited to, alignment with the Updated Strategic Plan, sectoral objectives, and result areas. GCF regional teams will also participate in the review for country prioritization considerations and strategic alignment.

Project-specific level steps

Step 2. NDA proposal selection

Objective
NDA to review and select the relevant proposal(s) for preliminary support under this scaling up approach, in alignment with GCF's country ownership criteria.

Process description
The NDA reviews the identified proposals for alignment with their own strategic pipeline vis-à-vis GCF. These meetings are organized by GCF, in coordination with the relevant Regional Desks, to ensure that the proposed project aligns with the country's priorities and can be included in its GCF pipeline.

During these discussions, GCF presents the Scaling-Up Framework, outlines the procedural steps ahead, and explains how the project would progress through the GCF project cycle. The AF is invited to present the results, lessons, and country context of the earlier intervention to be scaled up. This exchange allows the NDA to assess how the proposed project fits within its national priorities and programming with the GCF.

Should the NDA confirm its preliminary support to the proposal and its development, the NDA informs the GCF regional team (via their regional or country counterparts) of the project's prioritization[1].

Expected outputs
- Written confirmation of NDA support for the project.
- Agreement to proceed to the next step: identification and engagement of a suitable AE.

End of step
NDA confirmation is shared with AF, the GCF Regional Desk and focal points.

Step 3. Submission of project information packages to GCF of the shortlisted projects

Objective
The purpose of this step is to provide more detailed information on projects preliminarily selected by the NDA for potential scale-up.

Process description
AF will provide to GCF a full package of information for the initial shortlist of projects. The package will contain the following information:
- The project summary previously shared (with relevant updates, if any)
- Links to the project documents including most recent monitoring, closing and/or evaluations, or related documents.
- Results framework/ logical framework of the project and any related documents and information.
- Any change requests, implementation challenges faced, gaps or opportunities, as shared by the DA/IE. Planned versus actual disbursements.
- An overview of any overlaps or complementarities with other ongoing or planned projects by the AF.

[1] NDA Country Pipeline considerations: The NDA prioritization and engagement with the GCF regional team feeds into the programming discussion between GCF and the relevant NDA on their larger country pipeline, strategy and key priorities.

Expected outputs
For each shortlisted project, the AF prepares a detailed information package containing the above information.

Step 4. Identification and engagement with the AE

Objective
NDA to select an Accredited Entity (AE) to lead the preparation and submission of the Funding Proposal (FP) or Concept Note (CN) to GCF.

Process description
Following the NDA's confirmation of support, the NDA — supported by GCF and AF, if and as requested by the NDA — initiates the process of identifying and engaging a suitable AE. The selection of the AE may consider, but is not limited to, entities jointly accredited with both GCF and AF (an indicative list of jointly accredited entities is included in Annex II).

Upon identification of the AE, the NDA formally communicates the selection of the AE to GCF and AF.

The engagement with the AE may involve identifying preliminary information or data requirements for the GCF Funding Proposal package, reflecting on lessons learned and relevant implementation experience from AF projects, considering any capacity or technical support needs for proposal development, and outlining a preliminary project workplan with indicative preparation milestones and submission timelines. If useful, an introductory call with the AE, NDA, AF, and GCF may be convened to present the Scaling-Up Framework, clarify procedures, and align expectations before formalizing the AE's role. If no suitable AE is identified, the project may be temporarily placed on hold until an appropriate entity is found.

Expected outputs
- Written communication from the NDA to GCF and AF confirming the selected AE.
- A documented Project Workplan endorsed by the NDA and AE, outlining the timeline, milestones, and parties responsible for supporting the FP preparation.

End of step
The AE is formally designated to lead the FP preparation process, and a Project Workplan is established as the reference framework for subsequent activities.

Step 5. Technical workshop (kick-off of FP development, optional)

Objective
Launch the development of the GCF Funding Proposal (FP) or Concept Note (CN) through a structured technical workshop aimed at consolidating available information, addressing identified information gaps, and producing an initial draft of the FP and its core annexes.

Process description

Once the AE has been designated, it convenes a technical workshop, typically lasting two to three days, with the participation of the NDA, AF, GCF, and relevant national (including sub-national, where appropriate) and/or regional stakeholders where appropriate (for regional projects, for instance). The workshop is preferably conducted in person to facilitate intensive and collaborative work sessions; however, virtual modalities may be used where in-person participation is not feasible. The primary objective is to enable all technical teams to dedicate focused time to the preparation of the FP draft.

The workshop marks the formal start of the FP preparation process and serves to align all stakeholders on the scope, technical content, and timeline for the proposal. If better suited for the AE and NDA, an alternative to the workshop can be considered and agreed with the AE.

The following is a set of key elements recommended to be included in the workshop agenda to ensure coverage of the areas required for the development of the Funding Proposal:

- Review the background, objectives, and results achieved under the previous AF-funded project (Phase I) and identify the elements to be scaled up under the GCF proposal (Phase 2).
- Review stakeholder consultations undertaken to date and identify additional stakeholders to be engaged during the scale-up phase.
- Conduct technical sessions to develop the structure and content of the FP (e.g. theory of change, budget, logical framework, ESS, gender, term sheet, implementation arrangements).
- Map the existing information package against GCF FP requirements, including the core sections and mandatory annexes.
- Present and discuss the information gaps, if any, identified during Step 3, and agree on responsibilities and timelines to fill these gaps during the preparation process.
- Update the Project Workplan to reflect agreed actions, responsibilities, and milestones leading to submission.
- Relevant stakeholders will be invited.

Table 3. Roles of participating entities

Entity	Deliverables
Adaptation Fund (AF)	• Support workshop by providing technical background on the previously implemented intervention and technical expertise, if and as required by the NDA/DA and/or GCF. • Invite and respond as needed to inquiries from the AE and NDA/DA; • Share additional technical information available or as required from the AE, including completion or evaluation reports confirming successful implementation.
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	• Provide guidance on standard FP structure and information requirements in the GCF documentation, clarify information requirements as per the GCF policies and frameworks; • Provide clarifications as needed on the GCF project cycle and review timeline; respond to technical queries on the GCF review criteria and Board meeting planning.
Accredited Entity (AE)	• Lead and coordinate the workshop; • Guide the technical discussions on FP requirements; • Develop the initial draft of the FP and annexes based on available information;

	• Compile outstanding information gaps and assign responsibilities and deadlines for addressing them.
Expected Outputs	• A preliminary draft of the Funding Proposal (or Concept Note) and key annexes. • An updated Project Workplan reflecting agreed tasks, timelines, and responsibilities for completing the FP package.

Step 6. Funding Proposal submission and review

Objective
Formally submit the Funding Proposal document (or Concept Note) document to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), thereby initiating the GCF review process in accordance with the agreed preparation schedule.

Process description
Following the completion of the drafting phase and in line with the agreed Project Workplan, the AE proceeds with the submission of the Funding Proposal (or Concept Note) document to the GCF through the established submission channels.

The AE may, where applicable, seek prior written clearance from the NDA before submission, particularly if this requirement was agreed during earlier steps.

Upon submission, the project is formally registered within the GCF's internal systems, and the review process is initiated by the GCF Secretariat in line with its applicable framework.

In line with the standard review process of the GCF, upon submission of the proposal, the GCF Secretariat initiates the formal review process in line with the GCF project cycle and applicable operational policies[2]. Throughout the review process, and in coordination by the AE, support from AF is expected to address technical queries from GCF's independent Technical Advisory Panel (iTAP) and the Board.

Expected outputs
- Official submission of the project document to the GCF Secretariat.
- Completed FP package, including the core document and all mandatory annexes, cleared by the GCF Secretariat for submission to the iTAP and subsequently to the Board.

End of step
The Funding Proposal is officially considered under review by GCF and enters the appraisal phase within the GCF project cycle.

[2] The GCF Project Activity Cycle is available here: https://www.greenclimate.fund/project-cycle

Step 7. Joint learning, outcome tracking, and adaptive management of the framework

Objective
The purpose of this step is to ensure that there is joint learning and lessons learned with the purpose of undertaking adaptative management throughout the implementation of this framework. In addition, lessons learned can be showcased and communicated to the broader climate and adaptation community.

Process description
The AF and GCF will work on joint tracking of outcomes under this framework. After a year or two of piloting the framework, AF and GCF will develop a learning document and reflect on ways to improve the process. This will be done with the intention of continuously improving the process and tracking the outcomes.

Expected outputs
A learning document after each scale-up project approved by the GCF Board. The document will contain lessons learned from the implementation of the framework.

After a sample of 2–3 scale-up projects approved by the GCF Board under this framework or a period of up to two years, this operational guidance will be updated. Based on these experiences and documented lessons learned, GCF and AF will develop knowledge products for the broader climate and adaptation community on this framework.

Annex

Annex I: Principles and criteria of projects under the scale-up process

Selection Criteria	Description
1. Interest and rationale expressed by country	The country has expressed interest in scaling up the project either during the original project design phase or through ongoing monitoring and reporting processes, or both. The country has included a rationale for why scale up is needed and desirable and why the suggested approach to scaling up is the most appropriate. Example, in the annual AF PPRs under the section on scaling, the project has explicitly stated scaling intention and described the components that could be scaled to maximize impacts. It has also presented a rationale for the preferred method/approach/Fund for scaling.
2. Evidence of successful implementation	The project demonstrates strong implementation progress and tangible results, supported by quality evidence such as monitoring reports, mid-term reviews (MTRs), completion reports, or independent evaluations. Eligible projects should be at least halfway through implementation and show a minimum rating of "satisfactory" or higher in the latest Project Performance Report (PPR) **or** MTR**,** confirming effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptive management.
3. Evidence of long-term sustainability and potential for maximizing climate impact	The project shows clear potential for long-term sustainability and scaling, including institutional capacity, policy integration, and resource mobilization strategies. It demonstrates that scaling up will maximize climate impact, for example, by enhancing resilience or reducing vulnerabilities, as reflected in assessments by the Implementing Entity (IE) in PPRs or related documentation.
4. Strong integration of gender and social considerations	The project incorporates gender equality and social inclusion principles, ensuring benefits reach vulnerable and marginalized groups. The annual PPRs and MTR if available reports on gender outcomes and the projects includes participatory approaches and gender-responsive design.

Annex II: Common accredited entities between GCF and the AF (for reference only)

Common Accredited Entities	Accreditation Type (GCF)	Accreditation Type (AF)
African Development Bank (AfDB)	International	Multilateral
Agence pour le Développement Agricole, Royaume du Maroc (ADA)	National	National
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	International	Multilateral
Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement (BOAD)	Regional	Regional
Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BTFEC)	National	National
Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)	Regional	Regional
Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)	Regional	Regional
Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI)	Regional	Regional

Centre de Suivi Ecologique, Senegal (CSE)	National	National
Corporación Nacional para el Desarrollo (Uruguay) (CND)	National	National
Development Bank of Latin America (CAF)	Regional	Regional
Department of Environment Ministry of Health and the Environment, Government of Antigua and Barbuda (DoE)	National	National
Environmental Investment Fund, Namibia (EIF)	National	National
Environmental Project Implementation Unit, State Agency of the Ministry of Nature Protection, Armenia (EPIU)	National	National
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	International	Multilateral
National Fund for Environment and Climate, Benin (FNEC)	National	National
National Trust for Nature Conservation of Nepal (NTNC)	National	National
Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez, Colombia (Fondo Acción)	National	National
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	International	Multilateral
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association (World Bank)	International	Multilateral
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	International	Multilateral
Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)	International	Multilateral
Partnership for Governance Reform (Indonesia) (Kemitraan)	National	National
La Banque Agricole, Senegal (LBA)	National	National
Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT)	Regional	National
Ministry of Environment, Rwanda (MOE)	National	National
Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (MOFEC)	National	National
Ministry of Finance and Economic Management of the Cook Islands (MFEM)	National	National
Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda (MWE)	National	National
National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, India (NABARD)	National	National
National Environment Management Authority of Kenya (NEMA)	National	National
The Pacific Community (SPC)	Regional	Regional
Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (Bangladesh) (PKSF)	National	National
Peruvian Trust Fund for National Parks and Protected Areas (PROFONANPE)	National	National
Protected Areas Conservation Trust, Belize (PACT)	National	National
Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)	Regional	Regional

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Samoa (SPREP)	Regional	Regional
South Africa National Biodiversity Institution (SANBI)	National	National
The Interprofessional Fund for Agricultural Research (Côte d'Ivoire) (FIRCA)	National	National
Unidad Para Cambio Rural Argentina (UCAR)	National	National
UN Development Programme (UNDP)	International	Multilateral
UN Environment Programme (UNEP)	International	Multilateral
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	**International**	**Multilateral**
UN World Food Programme (WFP)	**International**	**Multilateral**