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Civil Society Partnership: Integrity in Climate Action

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) employs a multi-stakeholder approach to promoting integrity and ensuring accountability across its portfolio of projects and programmes. The active engagement of diverse stakeholders is at the core of GCF as it works with a wide range of partners in the national, regional, and international levels. Effective participation by civil society in integrity advocacy and initiatives is critical for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

The Independent Integrity Unit (IIU) works with different stakeholders and recognises the strategic role of CSOs as important actors on the ground in monitoring and addressing integrity challenges in climate-financed projects.

Overarching Objectives of the Thematic Brief

- To enhance GCF collaboration with CSOs and strengthen the mechanisms for their active participation and coordination on the ground for effective and efficient project outcomes;
- To encourage a framework of sustained engagement and coalition-building with civil society on integrity matters in climate-financed projects;
- To foster further discourse on and increased understanding of the role of civil society in advancing the agenda of anti-corruption and good governance in international climate finance; and
- To develop a strategic roadmap for IIU/civil society engagement in the long term by addressing key challenges and building on their strengths.

“Civil society organisations link governments and people. They are a vital voice for human rights. When civil society is muzzled, we lose an essential forum for dialogue—and we lose the lifblood of democracy.”

-UN Secretary-General António Guterres¹

Addressing the Climate Emergency: A Multi-Stakeholder Approach

Climate change is a crisis that transcends international borders and adversely affects many aspects of people's lives. This calls for a synergy between state and non-state actors in responding to climate change risks. State actors include government organisations, while non-state actors comprise the business and industry sector, international institutions, and civil society organisations. This multiplicity of actors is central to climate change governance or the process of formulating and implementing policies, regulations, and development priorities that contribute to the goals of sustainable development. Studies have shown the importance of CSOs in addressing the adverse consequences of climate change through their functions of independent monitoring, conservation, advocacy of effective public policies, community empowerment, and conflict resolution.

Civil Society and International Climate Finance: Perspectives of Integrity

The fight against corruption is a complex and lengthy process, often requiring deep structural changes to national institutions, legal frameworks, and cultures. Thus, actors outside governments, especially in civil society, are an essential component of anti-corruption success. The *United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)*² recognises the role of civil society in combatting corruption under Article 13 by calling on governments to increase transparency, improve public access to information, and promote public contributions to the government decision-making process.

The contributions of CSOs range from awareness-raising and prevention campaigns to participation in policy formation and monitoring of anti-corruption strategies and legislation. CSOs are especially engaged in empowering citizens, promoting inclusivity in decision-making and institutional reform, and exerting pressure on governments to deliver on respective international commitments.

Civil society as a key actor in international climate finance plays a crucial role in ensuring integrity at all levels of decision-making. This recognition is enshrined in the *Governing Instrument for the GCF* by including CSOs in the consultative process of stakeholder input and participation:

"The Board will develop mechanisms to promote the input and participation of stakeholders, including private-sector actors, civil society organisations, vulnerable groups, women, and indigenous peoples, in the design, development and implementation of the strategies and activities to be financed by the Fund³."

The GCF's Board is mandated to grant Accredited Observers access to its meetings, with two representatives from accredited CSOs (one each from developed and developing country constituencies) able to participate in formal Board sessions. To date, GCF has accredited a total of 310 CSOs with observer status⁴.

In the context of the international climate change regime, CSOs also play a significant role in implementing the *Paris Agreement* and in driving the momentum towards achieving its targets⁵. Moreover, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁶ recognises that progress in promoting sustainable



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development requires strong partnerships across society. It is no coincidence that the reduction of corruption and bribery (Goal 16.5) and the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (Goal 16.6) have been bundled with ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making (Goal 16.7). This reinforces the observation that anti-corruption efforts cannot be successful without meaningful participation.

Indeed, the movement for global climate action is progressing at a steady pace, but we can only push it further if there are effective accountability mechanisms

With an increasing influx of investment and diversifying project portfolio in climate action, climate initiatives, however, will fail if the monitoring, evaluation, and accountability structures are weak. Even more so, international agreements on climate will also fail if safeguards for communities are not strongly adhered to. If saving everyone in this planet is the end goal of climate action, then haven't we already failed if we harm people in the process of implementing climate projects? Beyond the Paris Agreement and succeeding milestones, governments and international bodies should rethink current strategies towards civil society and work on how to better engage CSOs for a more inclusive and participatory collective climate action.

“The Board will develop mechanisms to promote the input and participation of stakeholders, including private-sector actors, civil society organisations, vulnerable groups, women, and indigenous peoples, in the design, development and implementation of the strategies and activities to be financed by the Fund.”

in place. One way to strengthen these mechanisms is by enabling increased participation of CSOs in institutional processes, ensuring they have a say in decision making and take an active part in consultative exercises. The Paris Agreement has yet to prove that its accountability mechanism is effective as it ultimately rests on goodwill among the Parties and the shared belief in the benefits of collective climate action (while intended Nationally Determined Contributions are not legally binding per se).

Benefits of Civil Society Engagement

- An empowered civil society will help achieve the Paris Agreement targets through a more effective accountability mechanism and a more inclusive consultative process.
- CSOs are advocates of integrity and are key players in ensuring transparency and accountability in climate-financed projects through extensive networks of monitoring and conservation efforts at the community level.
- CSOs' presence in remote communities otherwise not reached by national governments and organisations provides a better understanding of local conditions on the ground.
- CSOs amplify the collective call to action and accountability, monitor implementation of projects and agreements, and empower local communities as watchdogs of integrity risks and failures.
- Broad-based engagement with CSOs is an essential element of sustainable development and can enhance the climate impact of GCF-financed interventions.

Way Forward

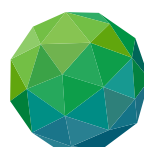
The IIU is committed to strengthen its partnership with civil society to further promote the agenda of integrity in climate-financed projects. Working closely with CSOs presents an opportunity to build a coalition of “force multipliers” advocating for transparency and accountability to ensure that intended outcomes of climate projects are enjoyed by beneficiaries. IIU recognises the wealth of on-the-ground experiences and knowledge of CSOs that may potentially unlock more dynamic and creative synergies between stakeholders to safeguard climate finance and achieve climate action at the grassroots, community level. IIU aims to design and implement a framework of capacity-building, awareness-raising, and peer-learning initiatives to enhance this partnership.

The IIU side event at COP27 is a hallmark event that will kickstart a series of initiatives charting out a roadmap of sustained engagement with civil society on the agenda of integrity in climate action. Key milestones include:

- Setting up a sustainable strategy for CSO engagement by developing a “CSO Engagement Framework” in line with GCF’s vision. This will bolster a strong and effective accountability mechanism that will benefit all stakeholders in the long run and provide enhanced access to institutional support to CSOs. The Framework will structure IIU’s broader engagement with CSOs focusing on three complementing pillars: dialogue, outreach, and partnership.
- Promoting and facilitating a three-way dialogue on the agenda of integrity between National Designated Authorities (NDAs), CSOs, and the IIU at the regional and national levels.
- Building a network of CSOs specifically advocating for and addressing issues of integrity in international climate finance. IIU will establish a registry of CSOs to facilitate communication, capacity building, and expanded presence.

Endnotes:

- 1 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Civil society plays critical role to deliver on the SDGs”. Available at <https://www.un.org/en/desa/civil-society-plays-critical-role-deliver-sdgs>
- 2 Available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corrupton/uncac.html>
- 3 Governing Instrument for the Green Climate Fund, para. 71. Available at <https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/document/governing-instrument.pdf>
- 4 As of 09 November 2022. More information available at <https://www.greenclimate.fund/about/partners/observers>
- 5 UN News Centre. (2016, November 09). “Civil society vital to drive momentum on Paris Agreement targets”. Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/11/civil-society-vital-to-drive-momentum-on-paris-agreement-targets/>
- 6 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>



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