

BRIEFING PAPER

Critical Interventions

Learning from Experiences of the Adaptation Fund NGO Network

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1 Introduction

With a volume of nearly USD 470 million the Adaptation Fund (AF) has significantly shaped and advanced the implementation of climate change adaptation in almost 50 developing countries, particularly as direct access modalities have strengthened ownership and built capacities in those countries.

For a holistic implementation of adaptation actions that serve the needs of the most vulnerable groups and populations to the impacts of climate change, an independent non-governmental accompaniment can be very valuable. It can help to bridge the different interests in the project implementation and bring a reality-check to decision makers in international funding institutions such as the GCF. At the same time it can hold national governments accountable to their adaptation efforts and contribute to shaping the project towards resilience building and transformative outcomes.

This paper has been produced with the intention to illustrate lessons and experiences of such an independent initiative of non-governmental actors that have been following the implementation of adaptation projects financed by the Adaptation Fund in ten countries.¹ In a critical and constructive manner the civil society actors of the Adaptation Fund NGO Network (AFN) have achieved some good results in the past five years.

¹ Partner countries include: Honduras, Jamaica, Senegal, Benin, South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Jordan and Cambodia



Key Achievements of the AFN

- Perception as a constructive, respectable and legitimate actor (from developing countries, AF Board, AF Secretariat, and other CSOs)
- Contribution to strengthening the focus on vulnerable groups and communities in the AFB and to making the engagement of vulnerable groups a requirement for all projects
- Public acknowledgement by the AF Board of AFN's work at CMP9 and CMP10
- Provision of substantial input into AFB discussions
- Institutionalisation of the CSO Dialogue

International Level



National Level

- Strengthening of consultation processes at the national level, e.g. through a number of stakeholder discussions with relevant actors
- Regional awareness raising on the AF and its funding and direct access modalities
- Capacity building of AFN partners (a) to become adaptation experts on the AF as well as on national debates on adaptation and (b) to work on adaptation issues and the AFN beyond the project scope
- Contribution to AF project success (incl. NIE capacity building, project preparation and implementation, etc.) as well as to national adaptation debates

ABOUT THE ADAPTATION FUND NGO NETWORK

A coalition of NGOs and interested stakeholders following the development of the Adaptation Fund and its funded projects

- Established in 2010
- Independent in-country civil society feedback and validation mechanism for the Adaptation Fund
- A critical and constructive accompaniment of adaptation projects
- Strategic objectives: vulnerable people and direct access

STRUCTURE



2 From Challenges to Opportunities

The impact of the AFN depends on many variables. While some of them are subject to specific political or economic conditions in countries, others are determined by the capacities of actors at the national level. At the same time, however, the overall success of an initiative like the AFN also depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of how (financial and time) resources are spent on activities. The following chapter will provide insights in the different challenges that were encountered in the course of building up and working together in the AFN and provide a number of ways and ideas how to overcome them.

Tools for CSO engagement

For an initiative made up of diverse partners who are working on multiple levels of governance, a common understanding and acceptance of their general role but also the various processes and workflows around the different activities is vital. For this it must be acknowledged that there is no single formula how to establish influential and credible interactions with governments. Rather, the different tools and modes of working that exist need to be considered, elicited and then be applied under respective circumstances (Box 1).

Besides defining the broader instruments that lay the foundation of a critical and constructive work, specific activities need to be framed. For instance, it is vital to jointly develop a clear methodology how to detect critical situations in the accompanied project. All critical situations should be taken serious, be assessed and be responded to. Those situations can include unusual project delays, large local resistance against the accompanied project among particular stakeholder groups, or discovered negative side-effects of the project. In order to identify and expose those critical incidents it can help to develop some guiding questions that can be employed in conversations with relevant stakeholders. Developed early on, such measures will help to strengthen the investigative powers of the initiative (Box 2).

It takes time and effort to develop workflows and processes, but they matter and should not be taken too easily. Moreover, it is important to recognize that each partner organisation has a different background and working style from which the initiative can benefit. Each partner thus plays a different role in its respective country. Acknowledging this diversity through jointly agreeing on flexible modes of working can greatly increase commitment of network members, be it in the form of high-quality inputs or contribution to joint papers.



Box 1: The tools and modes of working range from media work, organising stakeholder forums, CSO-Dialogue at UNFCCC events, commenting on publicly available project documents, informal consultations, letter of concerns, etc.

Box 2: A range of response measures should be conceptualized on how the initiative will detect and counteract critical situations.

Network engagement is capacity building

Building up a non-governmental monitoring network is a joint capacity building exercise for everyone. Capacitating each other can take many forms, including workshops, webinars, or face-to-face conversations. The best experiences have been made with workshops in which everyone is physically present. The fundamentals here are that partners jointly develop a common vision and motivation and at the same time understand the background of the processes relevant to their joint work. Moreover, such a session should provide insights and advice how to best engage with governments and implementing entities in a critical and constructive manner (Box 3).

The situation in the countries where the AFN has substantively engaged in has been very different from the outset. Given that investment in capacity building is an investment into people, staff changes at partner organisations pose a challenge to continuous engagement. To counteract, the partnership needs to begin with an organisational buy-in. While this can on the one hand help to safeguard a seamless continuation of all activities, it can on the other hand ensure that aggregated capacities and contacts to relevant stakeholders are not being lost (Box 4).

In this sense, building up a joint understanding among all partner organisations is the first step to ensure a good uptake of the work and for the every partner to obtain credibility among relevant stakeholders. However, it must be acknowledged that even the best partner cannot constructively feed views and ideas into a government or implementing entity whose actors are reluctant to integrate civil society views in their planning and implementation processes.

Generally, all partners should be encouraged to share their experiences from feeding comments and observations into governmental processes back into the initiative. If this takes place on a continuous basis it can be taken up by others and thereby enhance their impact of influence (Box 5).



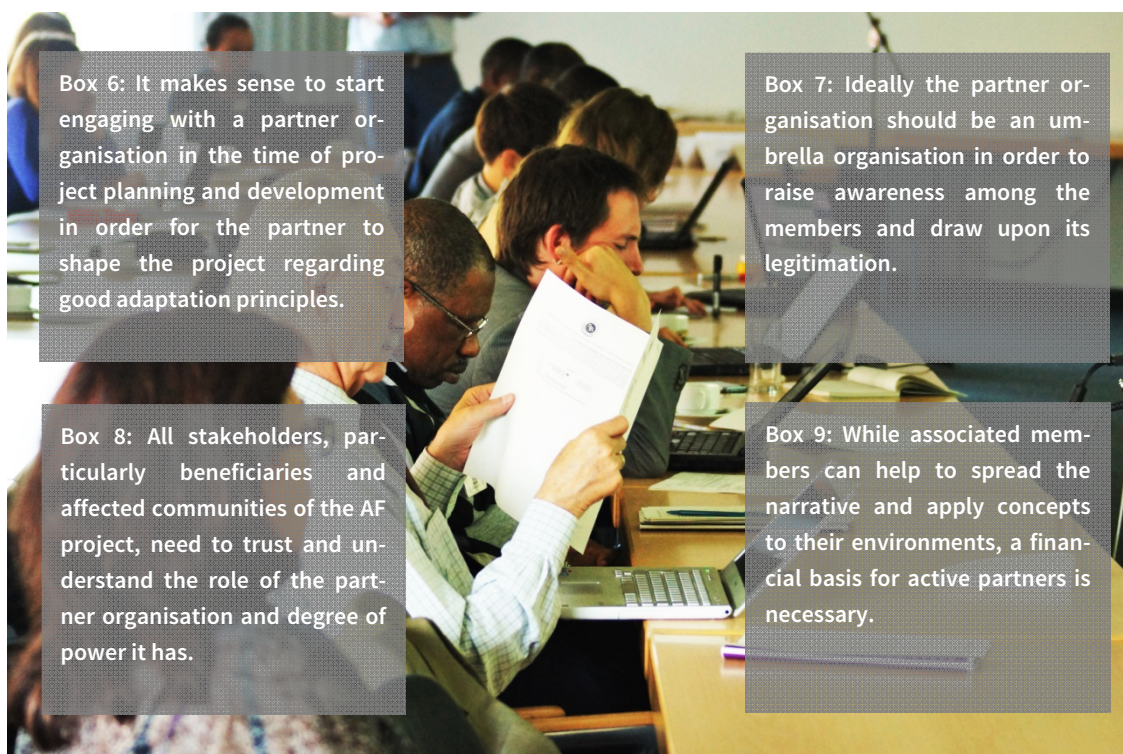
Getting started: Engaging the national level

The engagement of national CSOs took place at different stages of the countries' engagement with the AF. While some partners have been engaging soon after the accreditation of their national implementing entities by the AF, others have become partners subsequent to the approval of the AF projects. In the latter case the late engagement with partners has evidenced some challenges: Some AF project proposals were not well developed by the implementing entities, particularly in terms of participatory project planning and regarding their benefits for most vulnerable groups and communities (Box 6). The space to change this is only limited after the project's approval.

The management of conflicts of interests of partners is an issue that should not go by the board. It is recommended for all partners to jointly agree on a code of action if such a situation arises. Umbrella organisations that do not directly work and implement projects on the local level are particularly suitable for an independent non-governmental monitoring (Box 7).

It is important to have an open and honest communication with relevant stakeholders and the target group of the project, also regarding the own role. Eventually, changes to project implementation are the responsibility of implementing entities and executing entities. In case of major project delays there is furthermore the opportunity of expressing concerns to the relevant entities (Box 8).

A non-governmental monitoring network needs to be built on an independent financial basis. Observing project implementation and follow project implementation in a meaningful manner cannot be done on top of other daily tasks. While there can be associated members who support the overall objective and offer to learn and apply the concepts in their environments and contexts, it is the AFN experience that strong and durable engagement requires proper resourcing (Box 9).



3 Recommendations for Independent Civil Society Monitoring in the Green Climate Fund Context

Global civil society has been passionately contributing to the design of the GCF at Board level, resulting in improvements of several decisions, and providing public accountability to GCF processes. However, shaping policies at Board level alone does not ultimately ensure a successful implementation of projects under the GCF. Rather, an active role of independent civil society actors at country level is necessary to ensure an equitable and effective project implementation for all involved stakeholders.

In this light we highlight some suggestions drawn from the AFN experiences that civil society actors may wish to consider as when organising a non-governmental accompaniment of GCF funded projects at national level. Such an initiative can take many forms such as country networks, a virtual platform or a pool of different actors with different roles but a joint overall objective. While we view our work in the past years as impactful, we do not see this as blue-print for a GCF engagement. Rather, to support the broad mandate of the GCF it will require a multitude of engagement forms and initiation of work by various actors and groups.

A mission statement is helpful to clarify a common understanding and partnership between participating actors. It is also a useful communication instrument.

Participating actors will have different roles, mandates, and pathways of influence. This will enrich the collaborative impacts and shape the work of the GCF on many levels.

All engaged actors could rally behind a common understanding of their engagement. This conception should be framed as critical but constructive.

An independent civil society monitoring should empower all participating actors to raise their voice, incl. national and local NGOs, project beneficiaries, affected groups and communities.

Mutual learning and capacity building of all participating CSO actors is vital. This can also foster a common understanding of collective values and objectives.

The involvement of actors should be organized around participatory decision making processes with broad representation of affected groups.

Environments for influence are different depending on contexts. It is a collective responsibility to make voices heard, but also to protect whistle-blowers and critical opinions.

Meaningful project tracking requires proper long-term resourcing. Following GCF implementation should be viewed as an investment, especially in southern institutions and people.

Conflict of Interest situations arise and need active management. This includes setting-up a code of conduct to not influence for personal or organizational gains. Activities should be financially independent from the GCF.

4 Further reading

Adaptation Fund NGO Network (2015): Civil Society Engagement under the Adaptation Fund. Independent Insights and Country Perspectives (<https://af-network.org/5204>)

Adaptation Fund NGO Network (2012): Independent insights from vulnerable developing countries. Making the Adaptation Fund work for the most vulnerable (<https://af-network.org/4943>)

Junghans, L./ Kreft, S./ Schäfer, L. (2015): Adaptation: Get the connection. A national interplay of adaptation actors is important: How to track its progress? (<http://af-network.org/5194>)

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