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THE REALITIES OF COUNTRY PLATFORMS FOR LDCS AND SIDS: TEN KEY LESSONS

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INTRODUCTION

Climate-vulnerable countries and communities face a persistent and growing challenge: mobilising and co-ordinating finance at the scale and speed required to meet their self-determined development and climate goals. These countries have done the least to cause the climate crisis, yet suffer the most, and continue to struggle to access adequate and effective climate finance to address this. Traditional project-based aid models remain fragmented, short-term, difficult to access, transaction-heavy and slow to deliver results — especially with regard to adaptation finance. The available finance often comes with conditions and priorities that are set by those well outside the countries and communities seeking to use it. In response, a growing number of countries and funders are turning to country platforms (CPs) as a mechanism to streamline finance flows and ensure national ownership. While there is no agreed-upon definition, CPs are generally accepted to be multi-stakeholder and multi-sector mechanisms which are nationally led, aligned with local priorities, and designed to bring together diverse finance sources behind programmatic and unified investment approaches rooted in national strategies.[1, 6]

While the idea behind CPs is not new — many least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have long advocated for better co-ordination among funders to align finance with their nationally determined priorities — the recent surge in momentum behind them is notable. CPs are increasingly being positioned as central delivery vehicles for country ownership in climate and development finance. However, most CPs to date have been focused on energy transitions and climate mitigation in emerging economies. At the 2023 Climate and Development Ministerial (C&DM), they were identified as a core element of Goal 1 — programmatic approaches for adaptation finance in LDCs and SIDS. The Champions Group on Adaptation Finance have also highlighted the need for more programmatic approaches to delivering adaptation finance. At COP29 (2024), ten multilateral development banks (MDBs) released a joint statement signalling their intention to focus more attention on CPs. High-level policy forums such as the G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group, the UN Financing for Development process, and the Finance in Common Summit have similarly endorsed CPs as a pathway toward a more coherent, inclusive and scalable climate finance architecture.[1, 9, 7]

While these developments are promising, progress towards CPs must be focused on prioritising the needs and priorities of LDCs and SIDS and not be driven from the donor or intermediary side. CPs offer significant benefits but require careful nuancing according to the context of each country — one size definitely does not fit all. Amid a fracturing geopolitical landscape, shrinking aid budgets and mounting domestic pressures in donor countries, the promise of co-ordinated climate and development finance is at risk of being constrained by short-termism. We are operating in a tough political moment — globalisation is in retreat, and cross-border co-operation is increasingly difficult. This context makes it harder to be bold or creative in imagining

what CPs could achieve for LDCs and SIDS. Rather than simply adapting to today's limitations, we must begin by asking: *What would an ideal global co-operation framework for climate finance look like? How would it function if equity, ambition, country-ownership and long-term resilience were truly at the centre?* Framing CPs through this aspirational lens helps guard against constrained thinking and keeps the focus on building the architecture needed — not just the architecture currently possible. In this light, CPs offer a real opportunity: they can maximise the impact of limited resources through improved co-ordination, alignment with national systems and sustained investment in institutional capacity. But without structural reform and political courage, their transformative potential will remain unrealised.

Fortunately, emerging and existing CPs offer clear lessons that can inform the current interest in these mechanisms to provide the best chance of transformational 1.5°C-aligned outcomes that are driven by LDCs and SIDS. These include the importance of anchoring platforms in high-level political leadership, ensuring adaptation and locally led priorities are central from the start, and investing early in project pipelines and institutional capacity.

This briefing examines the core functions of CPs, systemic implementation challenges and emerging lessons from early movers. It outlines actionable recommendations for national governments, donors, MDBs, PDBs, the private sector, philanthropic actors and technical partners to ensure CPs are truly country-led, inclusive, aligned with local priorities and equipped to deliver long-term transformation.[2, 4, 6]

WHAT ARE COUNTRY PLATFORMS? DEFINITION AND EVOLUTION

While there is no universally agreed-upon definition, in broad terms, a CP is a suite of nationally led mechanisms that are aligned with local priorities. They are multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral, designed to bring together diverse finance sources and instruments behind programmatic and unified investment approaches rooted in national strategies.[1, 6]

Put simply, they are structured mechanisms by which a national government, its development partners, the private sector and civil society align resources behind shared priorities and a common investment plan or agenda.

Crucially, a robust CP is country-owned, locally aligned — led by the national government (typically at a high political level) with very strong vertical connections to support local priorities — and inclusive, engaging all key stakeholders in planning and decision making.[6] The purpose of CPs is to move away from fragmented sector-specific, donor-driven projects toward programmatic financing that harmonises access and reporting processes and supports national and local strategies over the long term. For example, a CP might co-ordinate climate funds, MDB loans, private investments and philanthropic grants under one national programme or investment pipeline, rather than through disparate channels. This has benefits for both the country and the funders. Figure 1, on the next page, shows vertical and horizontal configurations of governance structures for CPs and offers a way of visualising how they function.

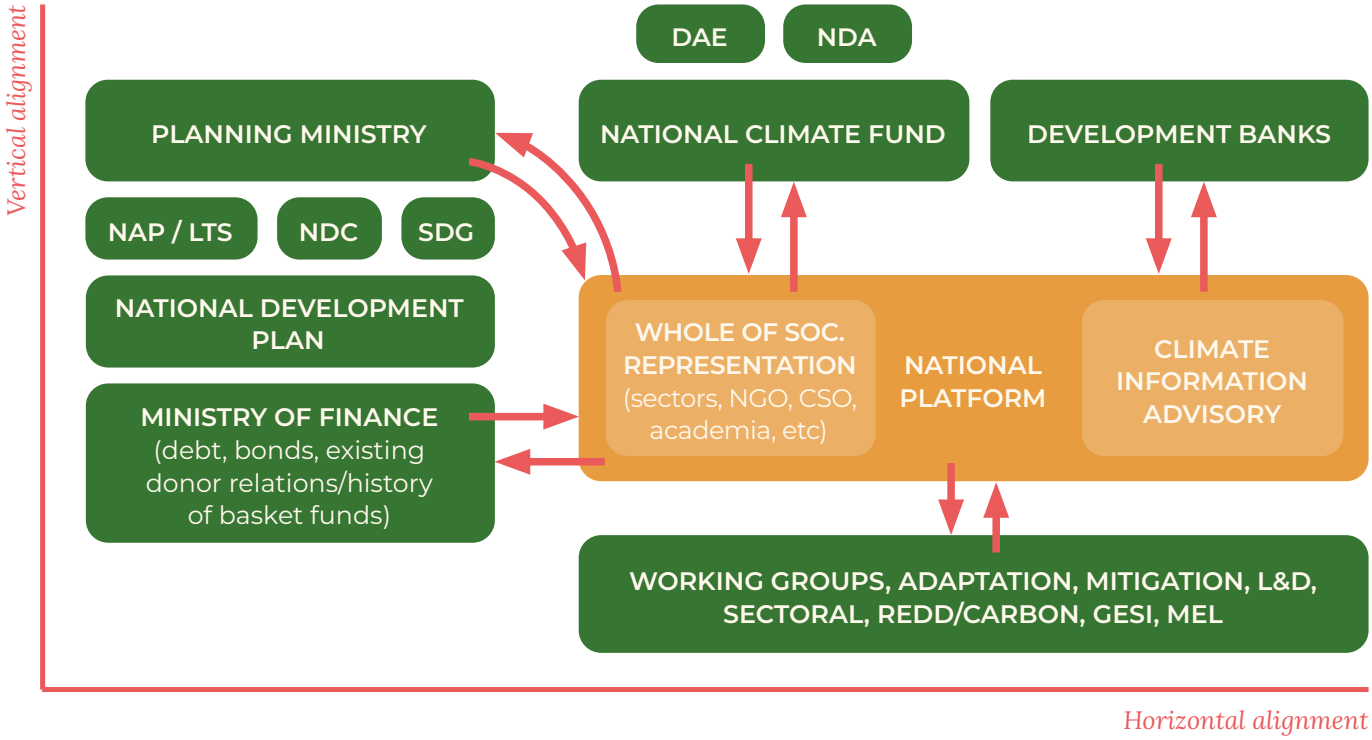

Figure 1. Ten governance structures for CPs

The CP concept builds on lessons from past co-ordination efforts in development finance. Earlier strategies, such as sector-wide approaches (SWAps) in health or education, or the multi-partner Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative two decades ago, similarly sought to improve aid alignment with country plans. Those experiences underscored that international finance works best when reinforcing country leadership and local systems, rather than creating parallel structures. However, past efforts were often beset with issues such as donor fragmentation, sectoral prioritisation and conditionalities; external partners have struggled to buy reforms that don't align with local political priorities.

The idea of CPs has gained renewed momentum in the context of climate action. A landmark example was South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), announced at COP26 (2021), where US$8.5 billion was committed by G7 nations to support South Africa's coal transition under a country-led framework.[5, 15] The JETP became a prototype for climate-oriented CPs, spurring interest in similar models in Indonesia, India, Senegal and beyond. Since then, a new generation of CPs has been emerging, including in LDCs and SIDS, tailored to their national contexts. Bangladesh and Madagascar have launched climate and development platforms to mobilise finance programmatically for their ambitious climate agendas, while others (for example Rwanda, Fiji, Jamaica and Uganda) are piloting CP approaches through global initiatives like the Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance and LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR).[6, 17] Vanuatu has launched a policy-based budget support programme with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union that is aligned to the climate priorities in the country's nationally determined contribution (NDC).

While many early CPs focused heavily on energy transitions, the current generation reflects a broader climate-development vision, integrating priorities across adaptation, resilience and systemic reform. However, the balance still leans toward mitigation, and greater focus on adaptation — including locally led action — is needed. Importantly, under the Alliance for Locally Led Approaches for Transformative Action on Loss and Damage (ALL ACT), national facilities or platforms have already been developed in eight early mover countries over the past three years. In parallel, the SIDS Debt Sustainability Support Service — part of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) — is now operational, applying a platform-like model to climate-aligned debt management.

What differentiates these modern CPs is a dual focus: attracting large-scale investments (public and private) and driving policy and institutional reforms needed for sustainable development. In effect, CPs serve as a bridge between national plans and the international financial system, helping countries address barriers such as high capital costs and the need to strengthen institutions and capabilities by bringing partners around one framework. Over 40 countries are exploring CP-like arrangements, with varying levels of maturity, sectoral scopes and types of leadership model.

Table 1 below provides a simplified typology of CPs by focus and maturity, showing that they can vary from broad national programmes to narrower sector-specific partnerships. All types, however, emphasise country ownership and co-ordinated finance.

CP TYPE	FOCUS AND SCOPE	EXAMPLES	MATURITY LEVEL AND DEFINITION
Comprehensive climate and development platforms	Multi-sector platforms aligning mitigation and adaptation pipelines with development goals	• Bangladesh Climate and Development Platform (BCDP) • Madagascar's Climate Finance Mobilization Platform • Ghana's Climate Prosperity Plan (CPP) • Vanuatu's Adaptation and Loss and Damage Country Platform • Nepal's Climate Change Support Programme	**Emerging to mid-stage:** • Emerging: platforms in initial phases, establishing frameworks and partnerships • Mid-stage: platforms with defined structures, actively implementing strategies and engaging stakeholders
Thematic or sectoral platforms	Sector-focused (eg nature, energy, water, agriculture) with potential for scaling	• Egypt's Nexus of Water, Food, and Energy (NWFE) • South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) • Vietnam's Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) • Zambia's Food Security Platform • South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission: Towards a Just Transition • Guyana's REDD+ Investment Fund • Brazil's Amazon Fund • Vanuatu's Joint Policy Reform Matrix (JPRM) for climate policy-linked budget support	**Mid-stage to mature:** • Mid-stage: platforms with established sectoral focus, implementing projects with measurable outcomes • Mature: platforms with extensive experience, scaling successful initiatives and influencing policy
Climate funds as platforms	Domestic funds co-ordinating donor and national resources	• Rwanda's Green Fund (FONERWA) • Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) • Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) • Benin's National Fund for the Environment and Climate (FNEC) • Brazil's National Fund on Climate Change (FNMC) • Cambodia Climate Change Alliance (CCCA) Trust Fund • Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) Facility • Indonesia Climate Change Trust Fund (ICCTF) • Vanuatu Climate Impacts Fund: capital investment from New Zealand in 2025	**Varies (from emerging to mature):** • Emerging: newly established funds developing operational procedures • Mature: well-functioning funds with transparent governance, effectively disbursing resources and achieving objectives

CP TYPE	FOCUS AND SCOPE	EXAMPLES	MATURITY LEVEL AND DEFINITION
Global and regional programme-anchored country platforms	Country platform principles embedded in international and regional initiatives	• Zambia's Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR) • Uganda and Fiji's Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance • Local Climate Adaptive Living (LoCAL) Facility (international) • Least Developed Countries Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR) (international)	**Varies:** • Maturity depends on the integration depth with international programmes and the extent of local implementation

Table 1. Typology of CPs by focus and maturity

TEN KEY LESSONS

This section presents ten key lessons (Figure 2) for building effective, inclusive and durable CPs to support adaptation in LDCs and SIDS. Each lesson is further explained using challenges and practical examples from early mover countries, offering insights for governments, funders and development partners seeking to operationalise programmatic, country-owned finance.

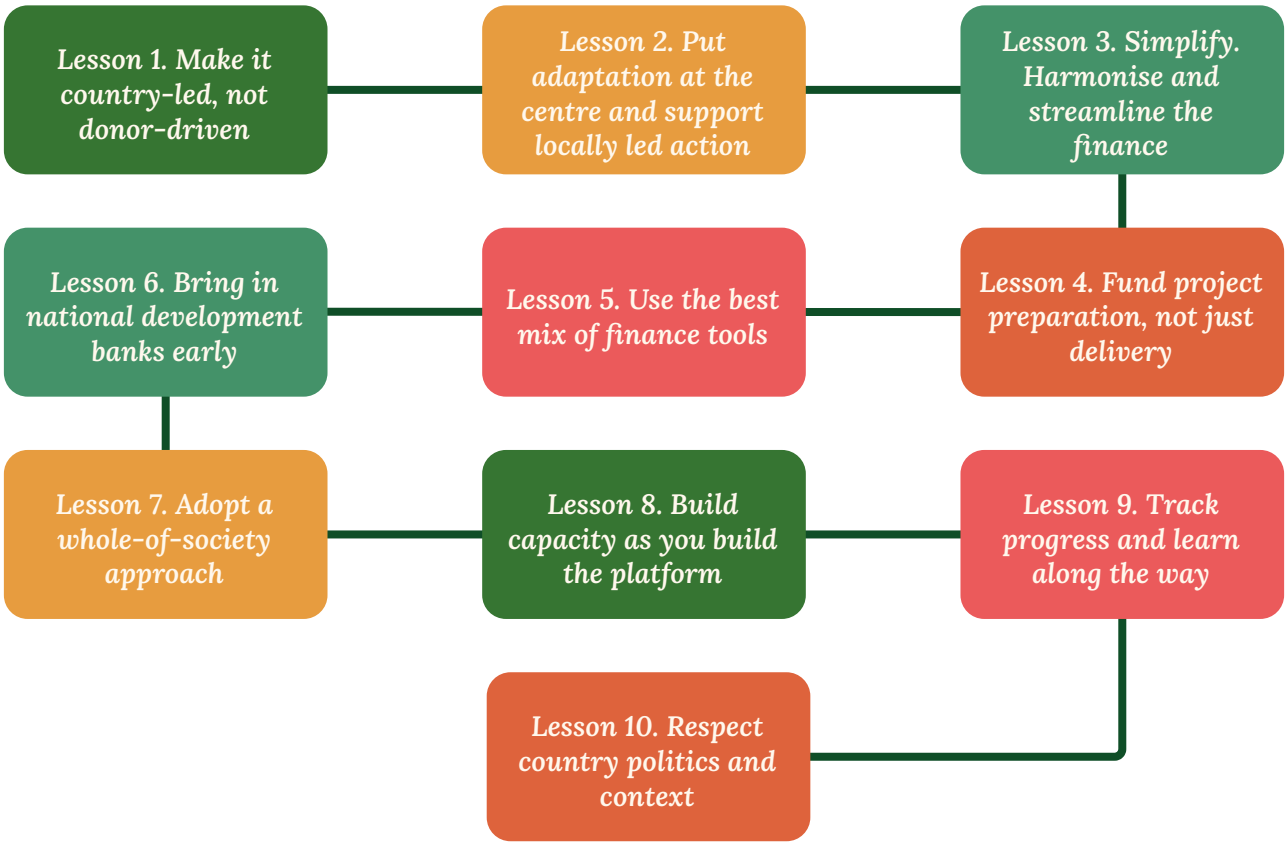

Figure 2. Ten key lessons for building CPs in SIDS and LDCs

Lesson 1. Make it country-led, not donor-driven

THE CHALLENGE: While CPs are intended to be nationally owned and cross-sectoral, many remain fragmented and donor-led. JETPs in Vietnam and Indonesia illustrate how platforms negotiated largely by external actors have bypassed core national systems. In contrast, LIFE-AR and Ghana's Climate Prosperity Plan (CPP) have demonstrated how country-led platforms rooted in finance ministries or central government planning can promote long-term coherence.

Moreover, the aspiration for 'whole-of-government' approaches often stalls due to siloed planning structures and weak interministerial co-ordination. In LIFE-AR countries, although secretariats are often hosted by environment ministries, inclusive task forces involving finance and planning ministries enable whole-of-government and whole-of-society co-ordination. Without structurally embedded delivery mechanisms, like those piloted in Uganda, Bhutan, Malawi, Ethiopia, The Gambia and Burkina Faso, platforms risk replicating the very fragmentation they aim to overcome.

Case box: Ghana — Climate Prosperity Plan (CPP) leadership from the Ministry of Finance

Ghana's CPP, led by the Ministry of Finance, provides a strong convening mechanism for donor co-ordination, policy coherence and pipeline development. It exemplifies how CPs can achieve credibility through fiscal ownership and integration into national development frameworks.

RECOMMENDATION: CPs must be country-led, politically anchored and structurally embedded in core government institutions (for example ministries of finance and prime minister's offices). This is essential for ensuring cross-sectoral co-ordination, alignment with fiscal cycles and the legitimacy needed to negotiate with donors and MDBs. LDC and SIDS governments should ensure CPs co-ordinate action on national climate strategies like NDCs, national adaptation plans (NAPs), and development plans, while donors must align and simplify their support for these through the CP. Platforms should institutionalise inclusive structures that enable interministerial, multistakeholder engagement across national and local government, civil society and local actors.

Lesson 2. Put adaptation at the centre and support locally led action

THE CHALLENGE: CPs overwhelmingly prioritise mitigation — especially energy transitions — often reflecting donor preferences and MDB financing mandates. However, for LDCs and SIDS, climate resilience, adaptation and addressing impacts are existential imperatives. As discussed previously, South Africa's JETP secured US$8.5 billion largely for energy transition, but little attention was given to adaptation. Without explicit prioritisation and structural design features, adaptation finance is consistently marginalised.

Countries such as Uganda, The Gambia, Vanuatu and Nepal have begun to address this gap through dedicated adaptation and loss-and-damage-oriented CPs. LIFE-AR and LoCAL provide scalable models for embedding locally led adaptation within national systems and enabling direct access to sub-national actors.

Case box: Egypt — Nexus of Water, Food and Energy (NWFE) programme

Egypt's NWFE platform combines water, energy and food investments under a unified umbrella. Its design links adaptation co-benefits with development and mitigation outcomes, offering a model for cross-sectoral coherence.

RECOMMENDATION: Adaptation must be intentionally embedded in the CP from the outset. Frameworks like LIFE-AR, LoCAL, and NAPs show that it is possible to structure CPs around resilience and locally led priorities. To achieve this, donors must adhere to the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation, while MDBs and public banks must increase the share of direct-access grant financing that reaches local levels and adaptation-focused initiatives. This requires political will, dedicated finance windows, a sustainable flow of funds in terms of quality and quantity, and integration into planning ministries — not just environment portfolios. Justice-centred approaches should be embedded through participatory governance, intersectional analysis and recognition of differentiated climate impacts.

Lesson 3. Simplify. Harmonise and streamline the finance

THE CHALLENGE: MDBs and donor institutional silos — across fiduciary, environmental/social safeguards and monitoring frameworks — create administrative burdens that undermine CP coherence. Each financier brings their own procedures, leading to parallel approval processes, redundant safeguards and overlapping reporting demands. These challenges are particularly acute for LDCs with limited administrative capacity, further delaying disbursement and raising costs. These external systems often duplicate and undermine the fully functional sovereign accountability systems already in place at the national level. In some cases, for example within the LIFE-AR programme in Uganda, donor conditionalities (with regard to the use of fund managers which attract both monetary and opportunity costs) not only contradict LIFE-AR principles of minimising the use of intermediaries, but also make it difficult to communicate programme goals to stakeholders, including the community.

Case box: Colombia — institutional coherence for low transaction costs

Colombia's cross-ministerial governance structure ensures alignment across climate, energy and finance portfolios. This co-ordination streamlines funder engagement and reduces transaction duplication, particularly for nature-based investments.

RECOMMENDATION: Donors and MDBs must adapt their systems to acknowledge the functional equivalency of and support national CPs, instead of expecting countries to navigate external and incompatible procedures. This requires harmonising application processes, timelines, safeguards, reporting and fiduciary systems to lower transaction costs for LDCs and SIDS. Pooled funds, joint appraisal processes, mutual recognition of safeguards and co-financing frameworks are vital for reducing friction and accelerating delivery. Clearer, co-ordinated data systems — enabled by CPs — can also improve risk understanding and transparency, helping to unlock diverse sources of investment.

Lesson 4. Fund project preparation, not just delivery

THE CHALLENGE: Many CPs face a bottleneck in transitioning from plans to investment. However, LDCs and SIDS have expressed frustration with repeated calls to produce 'bankable pipelines' without upfront support for project preparation and capability building. The issue is not the absence of ambition, but the lack of early-stage funding, capacity building and design support, including overstretched planning units and thin engineering capacity.

Case box: Madagascar — lemur bonds and pipeline innovation

Madagascar's CP is leveraging thematic instruments such as biodiversity-linked bonds and results-based finance facilities to stimulate pipeline development. These are backed by early-stage technical support through the World Bank and the Global Centre for Adaptation (GCA).

RECOMMENDATION: CPs need dedicated, fast-disbursing project preparation facilities ('sparkplug funds') integrated into their governance. Donors and MDBs must be patient and provide predictable financing to invest in upstream preparation through grants, technical assistance, and feasibility studies to enable strong pipelines, not just cursory concept note compilation. These must be structured with grants, local expertise and flexible design support to enable local ownership of the investment process. The African Adaptation Acceleration Programme (AAAP) by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) and the GCA provides upstream support, including feasibility, structuring and de-risking tools tailored to CPs, offering a replicable preparation model for other regions.

Lesson 5. Use the best mix of finance tools

THE CHALLENGE: Standard MDB debt instruments, particularly sovereign loans, are often poorly suited to CPs. These instruments are typically rigid, slow to approve, tied to sector-specific envelopes, and encumbered with safeguards and repayment conditions that don't align with the programmatic, multi-sector and adaptive nature of CPs. SIDS and LDCs already suffer from crippling debt burdens, and have put in place fiscal policies that do not allow further debt unless it directly yields economic outcomes. Furthermore, MDB incentives often reinforce competition rather than co-ordination. As a result, blended finance is underused, and private investment remains largely untapped — particularly for adaptation.

Case box: Bangladesh — de-risking adaptation with blended instruments

Bangladesh Climate and Development Platform (BCDP) deploys concessional capital and upstream grants to make community-based adaptation portfolios investable. The platform integrates risk-sharing mechanisms and is aligned with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) and World Bank instruments.

RECOMMENDATION: CPs must integrate layered financial instruments — primarily grants, but also guarantees, insurance, equity and local currency tools — within a blended architecture. This requires MDBs and national public banks to structure de-risking tools, first-loss guarantees, and concessional co-financing tailored to adaptation. Financial innovation must match country-led priorities, not just market-readiness criteria. Long-term concessional financing must be a core element, not a temporary feature, especially for adaptation. Debt-Sustainability Support Structures (DSSS), disaster clauses or similar instruments can be integrated to manage fiscal risks and avoid worsening debt distress.

Lesson 6. Bring in national development banks early

THE CHALLENGE: Despite their local presence, capacity to on-lend in local currency, and ability to bridge public and private finance, national development banks (NDBs) are often left out of CP design or only engaged at late stages. Despite there being a critical role for NDBs in implementing national development plans, many lack clear mandates, sufficient capitalisation or access to concessional finance streams, constraining their potential.

Case box: Rwanda Green Fund as a platform backbone

Rwanda Green Fund has evolved into a core CP, blending domestic, bilateral and multilateral finance. It supports decentralised project delivery, enabling scale while maintaining alignment with national strategy.

RECOMMENDATION: NDBs and public finance institutions should be treated as strategic actors from the outset, with clearly defined roles in CP governance, disbursement and project structuring. MDBs must mainstream CPs into their operations and enable NDBs to access concessional and risk-tolerant capital from the start. Philanthropic actors can pilot de-risking mechanisms and catalyse innovation, helping build credibility around these institutions.

Lesson 7. Adopt a whole-of-society approach

THE CHALLENGE: Many CPs remain elite-led and capital-centric. Local authorities, civil society organisations, and marginalised groups often have no formal role in platform governance, which undermines effectiveness and legitimacy, especially in fragile or decentralised states. Without decentralised engagement, finance flows are often not directly accessible by those most impacted by climate change, who are shouldering the highest burdens and costs of adaptation. In Uganda, the Devolved Climate Finance (DCF) mechanism, currently being piloted under the LIFE-AR programme, demonstrates how inclusive design can foster both ownership and accountability. At the national level, civil society and academia have worked closely with the government to co-design a delivery mechanism tailored to the country's context, ensuring it is both technically sound and socially responsive. At the grassroots level, the active involvement of communities, particularly marginalised groups, has strengthened local ownership while mitigating elite capture. This has been achieved through robust transparency and accountability systems that are embedded within the mechanism's design and implementation processes.

Case box: Vanuatu's National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

The advisory board includes representatives from the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (VANGO) and the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC), and links to the national network of community disaster and climate change committees.

RECOMMENDATION: To ensure long-term success, CPs must embed inclusive governance structures from the outset, integrating locally led adaptation (LLA) principles into their core design and decision-making processes. This includes creating space for local governments, youth, Indigenous peoples and civil society in oversight and priority setting. Philanthropies can play a catalytic role by resourcing grassroots organisations and building community-level capacity.

Lesson 8. Build capacity as you build the platform

THE CHALLENGE: CPs are complex and require a strong national institutional capacity to manage. Planning, financial management and interministerial co-ordination systems are essential for the effective design, development and delivery of CPs. CPs without dedicated secretariats or delivery mechanisms quickly become stuck in the planning stages.

Case box: Ethiopia and Senegal – delivery bottlenecks and LIFE-AR support

Both countries faced delays in CP implementation due to administrative fragmentation. LIFE-AR helped establish delivery mechanisms and institutionalised cross-sectoral planning support.

RECOMMENDATION: CPs must be accompanied by long-term investments in institutional strengthening, including digital tracking systems, staff retention and inter-agency co-ordination units. This requires allocating part of CP budgets to capacity building and system upgrades. Technical partners can assist with project preparation tools, MRV systems and knowledge exchange.

Lesson 9. Track progress and learn along the way

THE CHALLENGE: Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems are often an afterthought. Few CPs include real-time data systems, adaptive management protocols or clear metrics of success. This impedes learning and accountability.

Case box: LIFE-AR's MEL integration

LIFE-AR includes robust, real-time MEL systems that track financial flows and local outcomes, built with local stakeholders, and providing actionable feedback for scaling and course correction.

RECOMMENDATION: CPs should embed MEL frameworks at the design stage, drawing on tools such as climate budget tagging, impact dashboards and peer learning forums like the CP Exchange. Philanthropies can fund participatory MEL and grassroots tracking, while technical agencies can support real-time feedback systems and South-South knowledge exchange. MEL is not a reporting tool — it is a governance function.

Lesson 10. Respect country politics and context

THE CHALLENGE: CPs will be most effective when they reflect political contexts and build on what is already established. Misalignment with national priorities, political cycles or institutional incentives can result in stalled reforms or donor fatigue.

Case box: Zambia — programmatic entry through nature and people

Zambia's Nature, People, and Climate Investment Plan, supported by the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), builds on previous programmatic experiences and aligns with national development goals. It reflects the importance of political buy-in and locally grounded priorities.

RECOMMENDATION: CPs must be politically embedded, not just technically sound. They must navigate domestic reforms, elections, and institutional rivalries, and evolve with them. All stakeholders — donors, banks and technical partners — must tailor support to the national political economy, avoid copy-paste templates, and enable domestic leadership to shape the platform's evolution.

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Disclaimer

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