

Key points

Although often consulted on indicator and metric design, local partners rarely have the final decision on which metrics are selected for a project.

Results and monitoring systems remain overly focused on indicators and metrics, with little room to capture qualitative impact.

Climate funds' reporting systems are burdensome and complex; national entities need simpler formats and more capacity building.

Monitoring and reporting should not only measure progress; it should also provide feedback and lessons and offer opportunities to adapt programmes flexibly and easily.

Measuring what matters: climate funds' results and monitoring systems

Results and monitoring systems for climate adaptation projects are often developed around success indicators defined by funders and intermediaries. These tools operate in one direction only, holding local communities accountable to funders. As a result, funders and intermediaries often overlook local perceptions of success and impact among the communities that are most affected by climate change. This briefing explores the perspectives of entities that are accredited to multilateral climate funds and considers how results and monitoring systems can be designed to be more locally led.

Results and monitoring systems are a critical part in the project cycle, collecting results to measure progress and the extent to which the project is on track to achieve its objectives. For climate adaptation projects, results and monitoring systems are essential to understanding whether interventions are meeting the needs of the communities that are most vulnerable to climate change, especially in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

But climate adaptation is notoriously difficult to measure, as it often relies on the subjective perspectives of those experiencing the impacts of climate change.¹ Successful adaptation cannot be effectively determined by funders or the intermediary organisations providing funding, since the adaptation action is not part of their lived experience. This calls for a fundamental change in the way we monitor and evaluate progress on climate adaptation projects, including by centring the knowledge and perspectives of local communities, especially from LDCs and SIDS.²

Current debates on results and monitoring

Traditional results and monitoring practices emphasise upward results-based management systems,³ which provide funders, governments and the public with evidence that resources are translating into genuine outcomes. But such systems and frameworks often fail to capture the perceptions of the local communities that are most affected by climate change, focusing instead on technocratic, top-down outcomes and indicators.⁴ Assuming a linear cause-and-effect relationship between an intervention and an outcome, this approach can be reductive, does not adequately capture the complexity of knowledge and variables that contribute to impact in a person's life, and undervalues the contribution of local communities.⁵

Locally led adaptation

The eight principles for locally led adaptation (LLA) provide a framework for centring local community voices in adaptation project design

and implementation.⁶ They call for flexibility in programming and learning, more transparency and downward accountability to local stakeholders across all stages of a project.

Project design stages must ensure local actors can make the final decisions over indicators

To move from principles to practice, IIED has called for a fundamental shift in the way funders define, measure and value impact, emphasising aspirational results and monitoring actions, centring the definitions of

success held by frontline communities, accepting flexible and narrative forms of evidence and building the capacity of national and local entities to contribute to results and monitoring processes.⁷ These ambitions sit in tension with the highly standardised, indicator-driven reporting architectures that govern multilateral climate funds' project portfolios.

Results and monitoring in the multilateral climate funds

The Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund (AF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) operate through distinct results architectures:

- The **GCF's Integrated Results Management Framework** requires accredited entities to report against a set of core indicators at output, outcome and impact levels.⁸
- The **AF's Strategic Results Framework** uses five core indicators, including beneficiary numbers and area under improved natural resource management, aggregated across its portfolio.⁹
- The **GEF's Results Measurement Framework** also uses standardised core indicators within its focal area strategies.¹⁰

Across all three funds, the primary accountability flow runs from implementing entities to the fund secretariat, with limited scope for qualitative and/or community-level evidence to shape reporting.

Exploring the perspectives of accredited entities

To gather perspectives on results and monitoring, IIED designed an online survey for accredited entities to the multilateral climate funds, covering key thematic areas on indicator and metric design, technical and financial reporting, reporting tools and formats, and feedback on reporting systems. We shared the survey with all of the entities accredited to the GCF, AF and GEF as of 1 March 2026. The response rate was only 6.45%, which is a key limitation of the study,

as the survey insights represent the views of only a small sample of accredited entities.

Main survey insights

Indicators and metrics design: although the process is collaborative, decisions are still taken too far away from the local level. Survey responses reveal that developing indicators for a project is often a collaborative and participatory process, using stakeholder engagement, consultations and other participatory methods to identify potential indicators. But more than half of all respondents indicated that the climate fund or accredited entity takes the final decision on which indicators to develop and include in project reporting. Less than half reported that this is a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders, and no respondents said that local implementing partners take this final decision.

“Local implementing partners usually provide information only, but they do not take decisions or influence in the project’s outcomes.”

— survey respondent

The survey responses point to a structural gap, where communities and local partners are consulted during indicator development but rarely empowered to determine what counts as success, implying that indicators are likely to reflect funder priorities rather than local definitions of success. This gap between consultation and genuine co-design is something that funds need to address.

Reporting systems: tools are improving but the reporting burden remains heavy. The majority (85%) of respondents said they have to report against indicators in project reports, and only 15% indicated a flexible format or no set requirements. This suggests an overreliance on indicators as a method of capturing impact, and less emphasis on collecting qualitative data. Half (50%) said they could use some form of flexible reporting tool, such as video, reporting in local languages or investing in training local actors but others said that the only option was a mandatory template on the funder's platform, which had to be completed in English.

“While technical reporting is not difficult per se, it is extremely detailed and requires a large amount of time of the project team, as well as a quality assurance function in HQ.”

— survey respondent

Respondents indicated that technical and financial reporting were both difficult due to constant changes in reporting platforms and the need for knowledge and training to be able to report effectively. They also said that reporting is extremely time-consuming, requiring a high level of detail and quality assurance.

“...constant changes in the online reporting platforms, especially with the GCF, makes it [reporting] difficult.”

— survey respondent

Some noted that reporting is easier when funders' online portals are easy to navigate and well aligned to donor needs, and when they have more experience in reporting. This indicates that national entities need to receive more guidance and capacity building to enable them to meet donor reporting requirements.

Quality or quantity: funders still rely too heavily on quantitative metrics designed by the funds, rather than qualitative aspects, which would more effectively capture local perceptions of project success. The survey reveals a significant overreliance on quantitative indicators as the primary instrument for capturing impact, with only 42% of respondents stating that reporting systems allow for qualitative aspects, such as reflecting local narratives of how change has happened. Some noted that the reporting system has enough flexibility to include qualitative aspects — through project-specific indicators, additional text, annexes and so on — but others said that reporting mainly involves numbers, and while there is space for qualitative aspects, this is not prioritised.

Recommendations for responsive systems and practices

Grounded in the survey responses, the recommendations outlined here build on existing strengths and offer practical opportunities to deepen local ownership, enrich the evidence base and reduce the reporting burden.

Enhance decision-making power for local implementing partners: building on the strong foundation of consulting local partners and communities on indicator design, climate funds can establish a system where local communities can take the final decisions on which indicators to include.

Some respondents indicated that, although local implementing partners often provide information for monitoring and measuring results, the findings and learnings from these exercises

rarely influence a project's direction. Others indicated that local partners have genuine influence over a project's direction, but not as a result of findings from monitoring.

Move beyond indicators to capture true impact by allowing for qualitative assessments and reflections on process:

rather than rely on quantitative indicators to capture impact, monitoring and reporting systems should allow for flexible reporting options, such as narratives and stories, and provide space for qualitative assessments.

“Reports alone are insufficient; a variety of communication channels is essential to ensure all parties remain informed and have full clarity on processes and results.”

— survey respondent

Although respondents generally agreed that reporting systems are effective at capturing project impact, they noted issues with systems not allowing for changes during project implementation and that effectiveness ultimately relies on the quality of indicators selected. So, while reporting systems may be easy to use, they do not necessarily capture the full breadth of impacts at local level. Effectiveness ultimately depends on the indicators used as the basis for reporting and the scope for flexible reporting formats to complement indicator-based assessments and allow for more qualitative and process-based evaluations.

“Reporting systems are overall effective at capturing project impacts. However, [their] effectiveness depends very much on the quality of the indicators selected.”

— survey respondent

Offer capacity building and written guidance to national entities to help them meet reporting requirements:

the survey responses indicated that entities with more reporting experience found the process easier than those who are new to a fund's reporting processes, indicating a need for training and capacity building to meet funder reporting requirements. Respondents also pointed to a need for more guidance on how to use reporting systems, such as a user manual to help navigate the online interface. Others suggested that introducing multiple profiles in the reporting interface would be helpful to allow inputs from multiple units.

Simplify, streamline and allow more flexibility in reporting formats to reduce the reporting burden and risk of errors:

respondents called for simpler, more streamlined reporting so teams can focus on implementation rather than administration. Suggestions included digitising the reporting process to make it more efficient and reflect results in real time, having simpler and more streamlined reports, and having a flexible financial reporting format so organisations can use their own systems, reducing both the manual work involved in compiling reports and the risk of error.

Integrate feedback and allow for adaptive management: as well as measuring project progress, monitoring and reporting should provide space for feedback and drawing lessons. It should also offer opportunities for flexible and adaptive programme management and enable local implementing partners to influence a project's direction and make decisions. Respondents acknowledged that several funders have mechanisms for collecting feedback on their reporting systems from accredited entities and local implementing partners, including surveys and other feedback forums. However, the extent to which they consider and adopt such feedback into their results and monitoring systems remains unclear.

“The funds allow very little adaptive management. Lengthy processes for approval of changes, even if not major, tend to discourage the implementation of any change to the project after approval.”

— survey respondent

Conclusion

Our survey reveals that climate funds are already implementing important tools and processes into their monitoring and reporting systems. For example, the process to design indicators and metrics is often collaborative, involving multiple stakeholders, including those at local level. Reporting tools are also improving, online reporting environments are mostly easy to use, and reporting formats allow space for qualitative inputs to report on the lived experience of project beneficiaries.

But while these are positive advancements, climate funds can and should go further. To put local actors firmly in the driving seat of results and monitoring processes, project design stages must move beyond consultation and collaboration to ensure local actors can make the final decisions over indicators and defining success. It is also important to streamline and simplify tools to reduce the reporting burden, ensure reporting formats always centre insights on the lived experiences of local actors and communities, and ensure systems and practices provide space to integrate feedback for adaptive management. Together, these steps can enable the funds to measure the success of projects more effectively and build trust with local actors by recognising their priorities and promoting mutual accountability.

Several climate funds have dedicated workstreams focusing on LLA, such as the AF's LLA Single Country Grants and Regional Projects/Programmes and the GCF's Locally Led Climate Action framework. The next step is to design their reporting and monitoring processes accordingly. We urge the funds to consider the recommendations outlined as they overhaul their funding streams to enable a truly locally led approach to measuring success for climate adaptation.

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Notes

¹ Dilling, L., Prakash, A., Zommers, Z., Ahmad, F., Singh, N., de Wit, S., Nalau, J., Daly, M and Bowman, K (2019) Is adaptation success a flawed concept?, *Nature Climate Change*, 9, pp.572–574. doi:10.1038/s41558-019-0539-0. / ² Global Center on Adaptation (2024) Stories of resilience: lessons from local adaptation practice. Rotterdam. / ³ Hatton, MJ and Schroeder, K (2007) Results-based management: friend or foe?, *Development in Practice*, 17(3), pp.426–432. doi:10.1080/09614520701337160. / ⁴ Urwin, E., Botoeva, A., Arias, R., Vargas, O and Firchow, P (2023) Flipping the power dynamics in measurement and evaluation: international aid and the potential for a grounded accountability model, *Negotiation Journal*, 39(4), pp.401–426. doi:10.1111/nej.12448. / ⁵ Lowe, T (2013) New development: the paradox of outcomes—the more we measure, the less we understand, *Public Money and Management*, 33(3), pp.213–216. doi:10.1080/09540962.2013.785707. / ⁶ IIED, Principles for locally led adaptation, www.iied.org/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation / ⁷ Pichon, F., Joshi, R., Aung, MT and Setaro, L (2025) Practical guidance for aligning operations with the LLA principles. IIED, London. www.iied.org/22667iied / ⁸ GCF, Results-based management: IRMF for projects starting at B.32, www.greenclimate.fund/projects/results-based-management#irmf-for-projects-starting-at-b32 / ⁹ Adaptation Fund (2019) Strategic results framework. / ¹⁰ GEF (2022) Guidelines on the implementation of the GEF-8 results measurement framework.

FIND OUT MORE

This briefing is part of our work to ensure multilateral climate funds reach people that need it most. Find out more about some of the trends and gaps in the climate finance landscape at www.iied.org/multilateral-climate-funds-for-climate-adaptation

