

A call for action: Connect civil society organisations to international funds to battle the climate crisis

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Access to large international climate funds can be a game changer for civil society organisations to scale up their endeavours and increase vulnerable countries' resilience.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a vital role to play in combatting climate change in vulnerable communities around the world, including Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS). Beyond their detailed knowledge of the national context and vulnerabilities, CSOs are aware of the locally relevant solutions that can increase their communities' resilience and how to implement them.

Such organisations, however, generally have limited financial and human resources. To pursue their mission, support from international climate finance from large funds, such as the [Adaptation Fund](#) (AF), [Global Environment Facility](#) (GEF) and [Green Climate Fund](#) (GCF), can be a game changer.

To this effect, since 2021 Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and [WTW](#) joined forces to help Caribbean-based CSOs in seven countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Suriname) more effectively access climate finance for adaptation and mitigation actions on the ground. This work was managed by CANARI under a broader GCF readiness project, "[Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society's Access and Readiness for Climate Finance](#)".

CANARI and WTW facilitated a series of national workshops across the seven Caribbean countries to help CSOs understand the international funds' requirements, draft strong concept notes, and position themselves strategically to work with the funds' accredited entities and national focal points. Up to 40 CSOs per country registered and participated in the events, which have yielded useful insights for both sides.

Lessons learned

For international funds

- **Large climate funds' requirements are frequently disconnected from CSOs and beneficiary communities.** Small organisations can be deterred by onerous application processes, technical jargon, unrealistic data requirements to support climate rationales and lengthy approval timelines.
- **Enhanced direct access (EDA), which can support on-granting or on-lending of small amounts from GCF or AF directly to organisations via regional or national partners, is essential for small CSOs, which alone don't meet the requirements to access larger funds.** Ensuring that there are effective intermediaries to connect CSOs to EDA opportunities is key to effectively deliver funds to CSOs and beneficiary communities.
- **Project preparation can be an issue for CSOs, which typically lack the funding to absorb the costs of developing concept notes and full proposals and must wait over a year or more for funding to be approved and received.** While project preparation grants are available, such

as the GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme, only accredited entities (AEs) can access funding for full proposal preparation.

- **Readiness support programmes are essential to improve CSOs' and other stakeholders' capacity and readiness to access and deliver climate finance.** These programmes could further focus on programmatic approaches, rather than one-off training, to provide CSOs with the opportunity to build technical and organisational capacity through coaching, mentoring, learning exchanges and technical assistance.

For CSOs

- **First and foremost, accessing climate finance means designing robust climate-focused projects, to support adaptation and increase climate resilience and/or reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.** For CSOs more acquainted with traditional development projects, focusing on achieving climate-related outcomes can be new, although it is essential to access international climate funds.
- **Accessing large-scale climate finance requires CSOs to take a more systemic and collaborative approach.** The majority of small Caribbean CSOs typically submit small grant applications (e.g. \$50,000 or less), while AF, GEF and GCF provide funding over at least \$1 million. This highlights the importance of cross-CSO collaboration to put together project concepts that cover different CSOs' expertise areas and support the design of larger projects. A CSO with sufficient understanding of climate finance requirements could take the lead of project design (e.g., concept note drafting), while ensuring smaller CSOs are given adequate space to contribute and be involved. These leading CSOs could become executing entities (EEs) when projects become implemented.
- **CSOs need to position themselves strategically to work with funds' country focal points (such as the National Designated Authorities (NDAs) in the case of GCF) and entities with direct access to the funds (accredited entities or AEs for GCF).** No single CSO is expected to access multilateral funds on its own. Early engagement with NDAs can support project design, alignment with national priorities and ensure the project concept does not duplicate existing initiatives. AE engagement is also essential, as AEs can undertake the entire project preparation and submit full proposals to the funds. Such engagement at concept stage will help CSOs find the entity that can design the full project and submit it on their behalf to climate funds.
- Overall, **CSOs need to be formally registered organisations**, to access both large and smaller scale climate finance sources.

The way forward

CSOs have substantial strengths to spearhead community climate action based on their in-depth knowledge of their country's context, populations and natural assets' vulnerabilities. Their wider involvement and understanding of climate finance requirements would constitute an important step in enhancing ownership by civil society of important national issues and ensuring climate finance actually reaches those who need it most. CSOs can also organise themselves to better access climate finance, and in this regard, the CSO Climate Action Teams, set up with CANARI's support in the Caribbean countries discussed here, could be a useful model elsewhere in the world.

In parallel, multilateral climate funds that re-think their approach to CSOs and enhance their understanding of their role, needs and priorities in tackling the climate crisis in the Caribbean and other regions can ensure they deliver more effective action on the ground.