

SAP069: Strengthening Community Resilience to the Adverse Effects of Climate Change with an Emphasis on Food Security and Gender Considerations in Priority Areas of Ecuador - FORECCSA+

Access the document: <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b44-02-add04>

While we appreciate the GCF's particular ability to scale up successful Adaptation Fund projects, leveraging these micro and small-sized project learnings and institutional arrangements for broader geographical reach and more substantive impact, and call on the GCF to pursue these opportunities more, we remain somewhat hesitant about certain elements of this project related to changes instituted in this scale-up.

We do want to acknowledge, especially among a portfolio of funding proposals at this Board meeting marked by programmatic and PSAA approaches that are often top-down, this project's unmistakable country ownership. From its origin story as brought forth by the NDA in response to an ask for Adaptation Fund projects to scale to alignment with the Ecuadorian NAP to the in-kind contributions of the public institutions, the engagement of the country in rejuvenating and expanding this project is clear and commendable. The starting template of identifying a successful smaller-scale project and scaling up while ensuring public coordination and alignment with climate planning is one that should be replicated.

Yet, the alteration of this effective original project to include a parallel partnership with BanEcuador raises some questions that we do not think have been fully considered. This partnership and offering of financial services exists outside the project outcomes, with no GCF funding or institutional arrangements to bring these activities into the project itself, raising fundamental design concerns if activities do not materialize, do not materialize as envisioned, or create harm for which redress is inaccessible. The Secretariat's assessment acknowledges that this parallel financing could affect the paradigm shift potential, as well as highlighting the risk its withdrawal could pose to the project sustainability. The premise of women and youth focused financial products is used to bolster the idea of the project's impact and paradigm shift potential, with unclear mechanisms for accountability. In general, we are also concerned with the risks posed to project beneficiaries, who are being directed to these financial services as part of a project, while those services remain outside the project's responsibility and oversight.

44th Board Meeting of the Green Climate Fund

March 25-28, 2026, Songdo, Incheon, Republic of Korea

Indeed, the Secretariat assessment states, “The pre-feasibility study clarifies that this financing would not follow BanEcuador’s business as usual lending practices. In particular, key constraints associated with conventional credit – such as high interest rates, stringent collateral requirements and short tenors – are expected to be alleviated under the proposed parallel financing structure.” ITAP states, “It is hoped that parallel co-finance worth USD 5 million will materialize during project implementation in the form of concessional loans with long tenors and flexible collateral.” Expectations and hopes, unfortunately, are not enough. Expectations create no pathways for accountability. What we see is a project design founded on serving under-served populations, with a so-called focus on women and youth, that merely redirects these populations back into the same financial systems that have discriminated against, exploited, and marginalized them.

The persistent characterization of the field school curriculum as including and even focusing on education about financial services was striking. Financial literacy is a very specific pathway to adaptation and resilience in an agricultural setting, assuming that access to credit will lead to productivity and not cycles of indebtedness, whereas this project has the potential to focus on more direct pathways through the cultivation of food sovereignty and other adaptation measures for the land (which could be disseminated through field schools).

Finally, this project is described as having a particular focus on gender, as in the title, but as we examine the actual measures within the project documentation, we are concerned that such supposed priority is merely generic rhetoric for the sake of project promotion. Only 30% of the direct project beneficiaries are anticipated to be women, with the acknowledgement that beneficiaries must have land ownership or secure tenure, a recognized barrier for many women. The project data shows that women are 40% of the population involved in agricultural activities, noting structural barriers for gender equality in participation, yet the Gender Action Plan fails to engage with these gaps. There are no progressive targets - women represent only 30% of the total beneficiaries for several activities, with no increase as the project progresses. Women are not differentiated by age or other characteristics. Youth are mentioned in activities but not integrated into any indicators.

The activity, for example, to “encourage and involve women, especially female heads of household, and young people in the implementation of adaptation measures to protect water sources and water for consumption in priority areas” will be achieved if 30% of those benefiting from adaptation measures are women, in Year 2 as well as Year 6. This 30% target remains unchanged for several other activities, such as the activity to “Involve women and young people in activities to strengthen hydrometeorological observation networks in priority areas”. Despite the mention of youth, it is unclear how girls’ engagement will be captured, if at all. Thirty percent of civil servants participating should be women.

What ITAP deems the target of 30% “realistic,” we find it uninspiring in its uniform and undifferentiated application across so many GAP activities, and certainly lacking the



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substantive indication of gender considerations that merits mention in the project title. These targets are perhaps all too realistic in that they are reflecting a reality where the consideration of gender indicates merely the observation that gender gaps will persist and progress cannot be achieved much less strived for across multi-year projects, even by projects that specifically target the inclusion of women and youth.

We remind all project designers: the tokenization of gender considerations is as problematic, offensive, and harmful as failing to acknowledge the gendered realities of our world.