

# Green Climate Fund vows to up its game

Fund sets target of approving US\$2.5 billion this year to help developing nations cope with climate change.

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G.M.B Akash/Panos

A couple moves their house, threatened by erosion and flooding, in Bangladesh. The Green Climate Fund said in 2015 that it would channel cash to Bangladesh to increase climate-resilient infrastructure.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has had an inauspicious start to life — but 2016 could be the year it springs into action.

The organization, a flagship funding mechanism for the United Nations, was established in 2010 to channel billions of dollars to help developing nations to cope with climate change. But it hasn't yet handed out any money and has been [widely criticized](#) for its lack of accountability and transparency.

At a [meeting of its governing board](#) earlier this month in Songdo, South Korea, however, the fund resolved to hire more staff, to become significantly more transparent about its operations, and — ambitiously — to approve projects worth US\$2.5 billion this year alone.

“This year will be important for demonstrating that the GCF can fund transformational actions in developing countries,” says Niranjali Amerasinghe, who studies climate finance at the World Resources Institute in Washington DC.

## More money, more staff

By the end of December 2015, governments had pledged \$10.3 billion to the GCF (although exchange-rate fluctuations could cut that down to \$8.7 billion, using December's rates). However, not all of those pledges had been formally agreed before the March meeting, and by the end of 2015, just \$1.6 billion had made its way into the fund's coffers.

At the March board meeting, the United States — the most significant missing donor — agreed to formalize the \$3 billion offer it pledged in 2014, and to send as its first instalment a \$500-million chunk of that commitment.

More cash will also enable the fund to ramp up its personnel. It currently has “a very limited number of staff when compared to other international funds”, a spokesperson told *Nature*: just 56 permanent staff, compared to the 204 staff of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the 650 staff of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria — both initiatives that have funding commitments similar to

the GCF. By the end of 2016, the GCF says that it will have 100 staff, and reach 140 by 2017.

And to address the heavily criticism that the fund has been reluctant to provide public information about its activities, under a new disclosure policy adopted at the March meeting it vows to provide as much information as possible.

“One clear victory for civil society is the board's decision to allow webcasting of its meetings, which we have been pushing for since the first GCF board meeting in 2012,” says Lidy Nacpil, who was at the March meeting and who coordinates a regional alliance of non-governmental and community organizations, called the Asia Pacific Movement on Debt & Development in Manila.

### **Climate aid**

The pledges mean that in 2016 the GCF might finally be able to get down to business: vetting proposals for climate mitigation and adaptation projects in developing nations and sending them money. Before the Paris climate talks in December, the fund had approved \$168 million for eight climate projects, including wetland resilience programmes in Peru and climate-resilient infrastructure in Bangladesh, although it has yet to hand out that cash. Given that sluggish pace, Nacpil calls the aim to approve \$2.5 billion of projects this year "challenging".

Researchers who have been watching the GCF's pipeline of possible projects say that a major issue is that many developing countries lack the capacity to develop sound proposals for projects in the first place. So the GCF has allocated \$1.5 million to Rwanda and \$75,000 to the Cook Islands to help their readiness to make project proposals. At this stage, “disbursal of project funds is less important than disbursing readiness funds”, says Neha Rai, a researcher at the International Institute for Environment and Development in London.

A GCF strategic plan adopted at the meeting suggests that besides capacity building and project funding, the GCF ultimately also intends to transfer “cutting-edge climate technologies” to developing nations. Those might include smart-grid technologies, electric vehicles and components used in solar electricity generation, says Chandra Bhushan, deputy director-general of the Center for Science and Environment, an advocacy group in New Delhi.

The fund is currently also searching for a new director: last month, its incumbent head H ela Cheikhrouhou, announced that she would end her three-year term in September.

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