A climate justice perspective on Green Climate Fund access modalities

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) plays a crucial part in the international climate finance landscape. It offers various access modalities to countries eligible to receive GCF finance. In International Access (IA), funds are requested and governed by an international organisation. In Direct Access (DA), the governance of the requested funds is with a national- or regional-level institution, such as a government ministry or a (national or local level) private sector or civil society entity. In Enhanced Direct Access (EDA), decision-making regarding project funds is further devolved to the local level. (Enhanced) Direct access is one of the distinctive features of the GCF, designed to support developing countries in setting priorities in the allocation of funds and integrating climate change funding with national climate action plans.

There is little research yet, however, on the impact of these different access modalities on project design and implementation. The study on which this publication is based has made a first attempt in filling this gap. Its focus is on the impact of the access modality on different types of climate justice. 'Climate justice' is defined as consisting of three types of justice. *Distributive justice* denotes the just distribution of the burdens and benefits of a project. *Procedural justice* stands for just access to information, decision-making and monitoring on a project for all stakeholders. *Recognition justice* means acknowledgement of cultural values and local knowledge.

The research project consisted of in-depth case studies of three GCF projects in Zambia and Namibia (one IA, one DA, and one EDA). These case studies comprised desk research and interviews with accredited and executing entities, and CSOs involved in these projects. The results were complemented with interviews with the GCF secretariat and observer representatives, to evaluate the impact of access modalities on project-level justice outcomes. While this is no representative sample, it does allow for qualitative insights on the impacts of the different access modalities on the project level.

RESULTS

This research project has led to the following key conclusions:

ACCESS MODALITY ALONE IS NOT DECISIVE FOR PROJECT-LEVEL JUSTICE OUTCOMES

None of the access modalities can guarantee just outcomes in distributive, procedural or recognition justice. All case studies investigated here performed well in certain aspects of justice, but had shortcomings in others. The study found no direct relationship between access modality and project-level justice outcomes. Much more important for justice outcomes than access modality as such, is the translation of a project's access modality into practice.

It matters, for instance, what type of discourse a project follows, what types of actors are involved in a project and in what way, how a project's rules are set up and what resources are introduced and distributed through the project. Such practical characteristics of a project are more influential than the 'label' of IA, DA, or EDA.

IA PROJECTS SHOULD ENGAGE WITH LOCAL IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES TO ENHANCE JUSTICE

The IA project studied here engaged extensively with a national-level ministry, which acted as an implementing agency. This allowed the project to benefit from the experience of this ministry in project design and implementation in the local context. The main advantage of this was that the project was 'closer' to beneficiaries than it would have been without this national-level actor. Procedural justice was enhanced: beneficiaries could more easily influence project design. A local or national-level implementing agency can thus contribute to just outcomes in IA projects.

WORKING WITH EXISTING NETWORKS IS BENEFICIAL, BUT NOT NEUTRAL

All projects studied here made use of existing government and NGO networks and infrastructure, for example in capacity building activities and communication to beneficiaries. This has the advantage of easily reaching beneficiaries, and is an efficient way of using existing resources. However, existing biases can carry over into a project in this manner: it is possible that the same groups that are not reached by existing networks also miss out on project benefits.

PROJECT-LEVEL GENDER JUSTICE CAN BE SUPERFICIAL

A last key conclusion is that gender justice in projects is mainly interpreted as meaning a 50/50 gender balance in project activities. While this may be a step in the right direction, this interpretation ignores the unequal power positions of men and women in a project's context. Furthermore, there is little attention for the role of men in the projects studied here. The result is that gender justice remains superficial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above results lead to several recommendations.

TO THE GCF BOARD AND THE GCF SECRETARIAT

- Ensure that distributive, procedural, and recognition justice are achieved in approved projects of all access modalities.
- Make sure that there are adequate implementing and monitoring arrangements for each type of justice in all projects.
- Ensure meaningful gender related goals and monitoring beyond quantitative measures, e.g. including an assessment of gender roles and addressing existing unequal power relations.
- Request the evaluation units to use the climate justice perspective in further research on access modalities.
- Ensure and monitor cooperation with local and national-level entities in IA projects – as is already encouraged in GCF guidelines.
- Ensure that gender justice requirements are incorporated in an earlier stage of project design.

TO GCF ACCREDITED AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES AND PROJECT DESIGNERS

- Explicitly target distributive, procedural and recognition justice in project design and implementation.
- When working with existing networks, review biases and adapt project design accordingly to ensure that all stakeholders are involved and reached.
- Ensure cooperation with local and national entities in IA projects.
- Explicitly address unequal gender related roles and positions in an early stage of project design and throughout the whole project cycle.

TO GCF NGO/CSO OBSERVERS:

- Direct more attention to the way projects are designed and implemented, besides addressing the unequal balance in access modality alone.
- In International Access projects, actively promote the cooperation between the IA entity and local and national-level entities.
- In (E)DA projects, be aware of possible biases when working with existing networks, and monitor these in the implementation phase.

COLOPHON

This publication is based on research conducted by Julian van Vugt from February to August 2021. The project was supervised by Daan Robben (Both ENDS) and Maria Kaufmann (Radboud University). The full study is available on request.

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