



## SEEKING ENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF ONE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION WITH THE GCF PROCESS

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*The Mongolian Women's Fund (MONES) is the only women's fund in Mongolia, and a well-established organization among Mongolian NGOs. MONES began discovering the intersections between women's rights and climate justice as the demand for environmental work in their country expanded due to exacerbated degradation. The organization recognized access to substantive climate finance was a key opportunity for serving the needs of the communities with which it works to address both climate injustice and women's rights.*

*MONES has an admirable approach to the unfamiliar: "we'll learn by doing." This is their story of jumping in and learning about climate finance through engagement with Green Climate Fund (GCF), as shared by Program Director Bolor Legjeem.*

*They hope their experience can be instructive for other women's organizations seeking accreditation, or in choosing alternative options to access GCF funding and guide climate action.*

### Getting Started: Seizing Opportunity

A straightforward pathway to accessing the funds of the GCF is accreditation. Once an organization is an accredited entity it can submit a proposal, get a proposal approved, receive funds, and implement the project. Though this process can be lengthy, it is the primary way of directly accessing GCF funds. When MONES learned about the GCF and possible opportunities accreditation could provide for developing and implementing climate

initiatives, they decided the potentially arduous accreditation process was indeed worth pursuing to support their community and stakeholders.

MONES' process with accreditation started out promising. Through their engagement with Prospera—the International Network of Women's Funds, and filia Die Frauenstiftung (filia), the German women's fund, MONES was able to respond successfully to a call for proposals from filia to support women's funds' ability to access climate change financing. In addition to providing financial resources, filia also connected MONES with consultants well-versed in climate finance.

This financial and technical support was crucial in facilitating MONES' engagement with the GCF. With strengthened capacity and knowledge of the GCF and its structure, at both international and national levels, MONES staff were able to begin untangling the often-perceived complexity of the financial mechanism. This understanding made the GCF more accessible to them as an organization, and MONES was eager to learn more. This interest stemmed from their recent organizational work to integrate environmental issues into their women's rights framework and activities; therefore, they made the decision to use the funding provided by filia to continue to explore GCF entry points and accreditation.

Mama Cash, a key founder in the space of environment and gender, as well as a member of Global Alliance for

Green and Gender Action (GAGGA), soon contributed to MONES' continuing engagement with the GCF. The financial and technical support from, as well as flexibility of, both filia and Mama Cash was key to opening the door for MONES to pursue engagement with the GCF. With this support, MONES was able to hire a consultant to lead a period of study and exploration into the accreditation process, as well as an environmental expert to help the organization gain familiarity with national environmental laws, policies and procedures, as well as key stakeholders. This mapping and contextual capacity building contributed to their increased organizational knowledge on climate priorities and specific processes for accreditation.

### WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES...

Despite this significant capacity building, the recommendation from the consultant was for MONES not to seek accreditation due to the laborious process and lack of structural/organizational capacity nor capability to achieve accreditation under the GCF. Ms. Legjeem admits this was a considerable disappointment, and now recognizes it as the first warning of the challenges that were to come. Nevertheless, recognizing that the GCF was contributing substantial investment into Mongolia, MONES continued to want to seize the opportunity to unlock financing to support their efforts to advance the perspective and action on women's rights and gender equality in climate change programming. MONES moved forward and hired a gender expert to support the team and review the accreditation materials.

This work was arduous and frustrating. Many of the barriers MONES encountered echoed the challenges articulated by others familiar with this process: the difficulty of understanding the highly technical language of the documents; the inability of MONES to absorb large amounts of money, despite being one of the largest NGOs in Mongolia; and the general lack of in-house capacity. After the fact, Legjeem lamented the burden was such that a separate department could have been formed to address the complexities of accreditation; for larger organizations, creating a team for accreditation can certainly be standard. The difficulty of crafting a proposal within the GCF was also likened to the complexity of completing an EU proposal. The vast gap between available and necessary capacity led the MONES team to believe that regardless of issue area—women's rights, environmental justice, etc.—accreditation simply was not



possible for national NGOs. One year from that first foray with filia into learning about the GCF, MONES decided no longer to pursue accreditation as a GCF entity.

As Legjeem considered what lessons to take away from the difficult pursuit of accreditation, she reflected most on the dynamics of working with other individuals and organizations. First, one clear course of action would have been to work with one or two internationally recognized experts working at the intersection of environmental justice and women's rights to better guide MONES' pathway to engage in this work. Physically bringing in these advisors would have been best, as there is a different quality to interactions on-site rather than through online platforms. Secondly, directly reaching out to environmental organizations, rejecting the mistaken perception of them as doing "other," different, inapplicable work, would have enabled the sharing of knowledge and insights much sooner, with Both ENDS as a key example. Considering her most recent interactions with environmental organizations, Legjeem stated simply: "There is a lot of information, knowledge and experiences out there, and when we ask, people share."

### FINDING A FIT

While choosing to forego accreditation with the GCF by the end of 2017, MONES did not abandon the GCF process altogether. They still recognized the valuable



opportunity engaging with the GCF could create for their organization's mission and country's climate agenda. In 2018, MONES built off their experience to develop a different strategy, one focused on ensuring their voice—the voice of a women's organization advocating for feminist, climate-just perspective and action—was influencing GCF operationalization and implementation. MONES asserts, “we are the stakeholder, and we need to be included in the discussions. We need to be included in the funding decision-making, even if we do not get funding ourselves.” Ultimately, MONES wants to ensure that the organizations receiving GCF funding and implementing projects effectively consider gender in their project and sustainably carry out actions to promote gender equality.

By mid-2018, MONES' continued engagement, combined with their robust knowledge of the financial mechanism, contributed to their position and status as a key stakeholder in Mongolia's national climate agenda, planning and decision-making. Both ENDS sought their support to review a GCF proposal for Mongolia, led by the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Tourism—the National Designated Authority (NDA), and the multilateral Asian Development Bank. This review was part of a new phase of engagement, whereby the NDA consults with MONES, recognizing its vital contributions to the success of climate action in Mongolia. In July 2018, MONES signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry to continue contributing and engaging with the NDA's work.

MONES learned that interactions based on mutually beneficial relationship-building were the most effective, characterizing the best approach as one in which an organization reaches out with a pitch for what they can provide in an offer of collaboration. As the NDA, the Ministry was a key contact and facilitator for engagement with the GCF for MONES. Legjeem's shared, “when the Ministry finally understood what we could contribute and why we were trying to engage, they said: why didn't you come earlier?” Since then, MONES has been able to interact constructively with the NDA as well as the accredited entity in Mongolia, XacBank, and thus contribute their gender expertise to the advancement of the GCF in Mongolia toward achieving gender-responsive participation and outcomes.

Without over-idealizing this result, as Legjeem is clear that these conversations and this journey were not without challenges, recognizing that women's organizations do have valuable expertise to contribute is a touchstone of MONES' current success in engaging with climate finance at the national level. MONES is now a recognized partner in developing and contributing to climate solutions that work for Mongolian communities, especially women.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### Build organizational capacity

- Select consultants who are knowledgeable and understand the national/organizational context
- Contract on-site rather than remote consultants whenever possible
- Strengthen capacity of staff with trainings to understand structures and engagement pathways in processes
- Develop methods and materials to translate/ share the value of the organizational work from grassroots level with financing entities at national/international level

### Build a relationship and engage with the NDA

- Provide niche support and stakeholder intervention as a women's organization/CSO with feminist perspectives and gender-responsive contributions
- Codify or formalize this collaboration whenever possible

### Build a relationship with an AE

- Provide expertise for project planning and development
- Once projects are approved, support implementation



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