

## ISSUE BRIEF

# THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND: FINDING A ROLE FOR PEACEBUILDING PRIORITIES

Neil Bhatiya\* | June 22, 2015

In the wake of the September 2014 United Nations climate summit, which brought together representatives from more than one hundred countries to build global ambition to fight climate change, there has been a flurry of diplomatic activity dedicated to that end. One important step taken was that developed nations finally began to make good on their promise to endow the Green Climate Fund (GCF), a multilateral mechanism through which they would aid developing nations in climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>1</sup>

As the main vehicle for developing nations to access financing to meet the multiple challenges of climate change, including transitioning to greener energy systems and building resilience against extreme weather, the GCF is an essential component of the global climate effort. Without it, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will not be able to bear the upfront costs of combating and responding to environmental change and will continue to rely on environmentally

harmful fossil fuels. Critical at this point is not only guaranteeing that the GCF receives adequate funding, but also that it is programmatically aligned to best leverage the use of its resources.

This brief outlines the recent history and intended role of the GCF. It also argues that, as the GCF takes shape, it should not lose sight of the important role to be played in supporting environmental peacebuilding and conflict prevention alongside traditionally conceived mitigation and adaptation projects.<sup>2</sup>

## After a Busy Fall, the Green Climate Fund Gets Off the Ground

The cascade of activity following the September 2014 United Nations climate summit established a high-water mark in global efforts to combat and adapt to climate change. The most important developments include:

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- The United States entered into agreements with China and India, pledging emissions reductions in conjunction with promises by the two biggest developing world greenhouse gas emitters to expand the role of non-fossil-fuel sources in their electricity generation mix. In the case of China, this also included a declaration that it would peak its carbon dioxide emissions in 2030.<sup>3</sup>

- This past December, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) convened its twentieth Conference of Parties (COP) in Lima, Peru. In a positive advance for the United Nations process, the international community agreed that each nation would make public its national plan for emissions reductions (called “intended nationally determined contributions,” or INDCs) prior to the Paris climate talks (COP21) in November 2015.<sup>4</sup>

- The Group of Seven (G7) committed itself at its June summit to complete decarbonization of the global economy by 2100, buttressed by a commitment to expand renewable energy generation and climate financing.<sup>5</sup>

When the GCF was initially announced, following the 2009 Copenhagen COP15, developed nations pledged that it would catalyze \$100 billion in funding, annually, by 2020. This announcement, however, did not indicate amounts pledged by individual developed nations, nor did it identify any schedule for payments. It was not until 2014 that developed nations recognized that a firmer commitment was necessary if it expected developing nations to dedicate themselves significantly to the greenhouse gas emission reduction requirements envisioned in a post-2020 Kyoto Protocol follow-up agreement.<sup>6</sup>

On November 15, 2014, the United States stepped forward with an initial pledge of \$3 billion, to be paid over several years.<sup>7</sup> Japan and members of the European Union also joined with pledges of their own. To date, pledges to the GCF have reached the initial goal of \$10 billion, with commitments from thirty-three countries. This progress included several developing nations coming forward with pledges to help endow the GCF. (This \$10 billion, however, is still far short of the \$100 billion per year promised by 2020).<sup>8</sup>

While only \$5.5 billion in contributions have actually been signed (meaning that the pledged money is being translated into budgetary allocations by the donating nation), this amount is enough to allow initial project planning to commence.<sup>9</sup> This planning stage will be crucial in laying the groundwork for the GCF in setting itself as the premier international vehicle for transferring financial resources from the developed world to the developing world in support of projects that reduce contributions to the greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change (mitigation) and to minimize its effects (adaptation).<sup>10</sup>

Several important questions about the GCF remain, however. One is the extent to which opposition to the GCF within the United States will delay or even outright halt fulfillment of the U.S. pledge and the possibilities that exist for expanding American contributions. Congressional Republicans in early June zeroed out the Obama administration’s budget request for an initial contribution of \$500 million.<sup>11</sup> The GCF’s operations, which are still in preliminary implementation stages, also raise questions as to how they fit into larger debates over what constitutes “climate finance,” including disputes over whether instruments like the GCF should fund fossil fuel projects.<sup>12</sup>

There are concerns about the extent to which the GCF will be able to leverage private finance to the ambitious

levels promised at Copenhagen. While \$10 billion may seem like a significant amount in the context of debates on foreign aid in the United States, it pales in comparison to the anticipated need. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “available global estimates of the costs of adaptation of between US\$70 billion and US\$100 billion *are likely to be a significant underestimate*, particularly in the years 2030 and beyond” [emphasis added].<sup>13</sup>

## The Green Climate Fund’s Operations

At the heart of the rationale behind the GCF is the belief that traditional avenues of financing—government-to-government bilateral assistance or funding from multilateral donor and development institutions like the World Bank—are not enough on their own to meet the vast need for capital both to grow the world economy in a way that does not further imperil the global climate and to insure against the risks of climate change that are already “baked in.”<sup>14</sup> Recognizing this need, the United Nations has already created a constellation of funding mechanisms since the founding of the UNFCCC. The GCF is intended to surpass these, both in scale and in impact.

Two aspects of the GCF in particular are intended to highlight it as an improvement over previous efforts at green financing. The first is its embrace of private sector solutions, which the GCF will generate through its Private Sector Facility. This approach is meant to introduce equity, insurance, and concessional financing mechanisms in a way that is an innovation in the field of climate finance.<sup>15</sup> The second aspect is that the GCF’s representation is split among developed and developing nations, specifically including representatives from small island states and the least developed countries.<sup>16</sup>

A report prepared by the GCF’s Secretariat identifies several priority funding areas.<sup>17</sup> Within the traditional field of mitigation and adaptation priorities, the report

acknowledged the following highest impact investment priorities:

climate-compatible cities in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe; climate-smart agriculture in Africa and Asia; scaling up finance for forests and climate change in Latin America, Asia, and Africa; enhancing resilience in Small Island Developing States (SIDS); and transforming energy generation and access in Africa and Asia.

At its March 2015 board meeting, the GCF accredited its first series of intermediary entities—those organizations credentialed by the board to channel the money pledged by nation-states to specific projects.<sup>18</sup> By November, if all goes according to plan, those organizations will begin to consider individual projects to fund.

## The Climate-Conflict Nexus

Though the GCF is still in its infancy, it has already shown the potential to be a catalyzing platform for directing international financial resources to the highest-impact, most entrepreneurial avenues of climate change mitigation and adaptation. While the GCF rightly focuses on mitigation and adaptation projects, there is also an opportunity for it to be active in the emerging nexus of issues surrounding climate change, political instability, and armed conflict, specifically by contributing dedicated revenue streams to environmental peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

Discussion around climate change’s role in fueling conflict sees explicit reference in U.S. foreign policy planning. The 2015 National Security Strategy addresses climate change, calling it “an urgent and growing threat to our national security, contributing

to increased natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts over basic resources like food and water.”<sup>19</sup> The Department of Defense and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence have frequently cited their concerns about climate change in public strategy documents.<sup>20</sup> The second version of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development’s answer to the Department of Defense’s Quadrennial Defense Review) highlights climate change as one of four strategic priorities, explaining that further integrating it into global diplomatic priorities will “help bolster fragile states, assisting our efforts to counter violent extremism and enhance the stability of critical regions like the Middle East and North Africa.”<sup>21</sup> While the causal connection between climate change and conflict is the subject of serious academic debate, it is clear that there is an emerging consensus that this is a high priority issue.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the United States is far from the only nation concerned. According to the American Security Project’s Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change, 70 percent of nations have formally stated that climate change is a national security concern and that their militaries consider humanitarian assistance and disaster relief among their core responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> France’s environment minister, Ségolène Royal, said in an interview with the Associated Press that “[t]he climate question is also at the heart of the security question.”<sup>24</sup>

The climate-conflict nexus threatens national security at two levels. As indicated by the U.S. government’s discursive treatment of the subject, there is a concern that the effects of climate change itself will exacerbate the underlying dynamics that drive armed conflict (“threat multiplier” rhetoric). On another level, there is a risk that the response to the impacts of climate change may do the same thing. Responding to climate change

involves large-scale interventions within political, economic, and social spheres. Consequently, it can be expected that mitigation and adaptation efforts could—even inadvertently—exacerbate underlying dynamics driving conflict or social unrest.

This latter concern has only recently begun getting the attention it deserves in the public policy community.<sup>25</sup> In a 2013 report, *Backdraft: The Conflict Potential of Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation*, prominent scholar of climate change, conflict, and peacebuilding Geoffrey Dabelko explained how well-meaning mitigation or adaptation projects could undermine the very prosperity and stability they seek to create:

If designed or implemented without consideration for conflict potential, unforeseen negative spillover effects might damage economic development prospects, undermine political stability, or fray the social fabric of communities.<sup>26</sup>

A similar pattern can be seen in how the UN Millennium Development Goals, which have ushered in remarkable advances in poverty reduction globally, have faltered in fragile and conflict-afflicted countries, despite the resources currently at the disposal of the international community.<sup>27</sup> The construction of a hydroelectric dam, for example, raises a complex series of questions, both internally for the country constructing it as well as internationally, given possible impacts on neighbors. Like any large construction project, building a dam involves issues of land tenure and property rights, which can be especially problematic in countries where rule of law is fragile and governments may weigh the benefits of hydropower as more important than the rights of its citizens, who are often displaced by its creation.<sup>28</sup>

While a dam project is one example where a mitigation response may cause conflict or instability, one should

not lose sight of the likelihood that scarcity on its own may also accomplish the same worrisome end-state. For example, water sources that are shared by more than one nation require coordination to ensure resources are available to both. While the rhetoric of “water wars” may be an exaggeration for present circumstances (cooperation, rather than conflict, seems to be the norm, at least based on twentieth century historical record), this is only because of concerted diplomatic action. The future impacts of climate change may be radical enough to render past experience a poor indicator of future results. The gold standard for these efforts is the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), the World Bank-brokered agreement in 1960 between long-standing rivals India and Pakistan governing river tributaries that pass through both nations.<sup>29</sup> While agreements like this have persevered through episodes of geopolitical tension and actual armed conflict, it remains to be seen if, under conditions of accelerating changes to hydrological systems from climate change, that status quo will persist.

## A Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Lens for the GCF

While the GCF is still in the planning stages, now is the time to direct it toward setting important precedents for its future work program. Part of this process should be the inclusion of the GCF’s role in supporting environmental peacebuilding and conflict prevention alongside traditionally conceived mitigation and adaptation projects.

This effort would not need to be a preponderant focus of the GCF’s activities—even just a small allocation could make a large impact, giving the current state of multilateral funding in this space. Supporting these efforts would also protect the totality of GCF’s investments. To the extent that the GCF, as its supporters Matthew Kotchen, Gilbert Metcalf, and William Pizer (all former deputy assistant secretaries

of Environment and Energy at the U.S. Department of the Treasury) note in their *The Hill* op-ed, is “a key safeguard against future instability” from climate change, it should be empowered to ensure a role for programming explicitly designed to prevent future conflict or unrest over environmental, natural resource, natural disaster, and climate change factors.<sup>30</sup>

The current efforts by the United Nations to fund environmental peacebuilding are admirable, but their scale is modest. UNEP and UN’s Peacebuilding Foundation (UNPBF) both do work in this area, and additional initiatives, such as the Adaptation Fund and Least Developed Countries Fund, also exist to fund and implement projects. Despite a recent increase in its budget following the 2012 Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, UNEP still only has \$631 million allocated for its 2014–15 budget, of which peacebuilding activities are not a primary focus.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, UNPBF expenditures totaled \$86 million for 2014, but environmental activities are not a priority.<sup>32</sup>

In harnessing the resources promised to the GCF, however, there exists an opportunity to dramatically raise ambitions for environmental peacebuilding work in the context of advancing climate change. The GCF could marry its focus on engaging local partners with the work already being done by UNEP and UNPBF. Unlike programs that rely on yearly contributions from UN member states and are subject to the vagaries of the UN budgetary process, the GCF could empower its grantees to think of long-term programs, with corresponding multi-year funding allocations and a focus on institution-building. These efforts do not often show results immediately but instead are investments with decade-long time horizons that could benefit from more flexible treatment from funders, which the GCF may be able to supply.

The exact mechanism for incorporating peacebuilding can be flexible, subject to the needs and competencies

of the GCF's Board, Secretariat, and intermediaries. The environmental and social safeguards of existing projects could be strengthened by adding peacebuilding components. Additionally, the GCF can fund discrete projects, either as part of their regular schedule of funding rounds or on an ad hoc basis as needs arise.

Recent research suggests the types of projects that could be pursued immediately. For example, projects with a specific regional focus (rather than ones that only focus on the needs of one specific nation) could be expanded.<sup>33</sup> While there are numerous Track II initiatives organized for bilateral India-Pakistan issues, including a Stimson Center project focused specifically on water issues, there may be space to widen the aperture to look at water dynamics across South Asia. Analyst Saleem Ali has written previously of the opportunities for new cooperative mechanisms to encourage ecological cooperation in South Asia through expanding the writ of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Ali is critical of existing donor priorities in this area, which he says focus on “low-hanging fruit” at the expense of a long-term perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Another area where the GCF could make immediate impact is in National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA), an initiative growing out of COP7 in 2001 and designed to have each LDC submit climate-change adaptation plans to the UNFCCC.<sup>35</sup> To date, all of those countries have submitted one, with the exception of South Sudan. The NAPAs vary in their treatment of climate change, conflict, and peacebuilding issues. Yemen's submitted plan, for example, does not mention conflict at all, despite the country being one of the most water-stressed in the world and currently mired in a civil war.<sup>36</sup> Guinea-Bissau, by contrast, outlines programs specifically designed to reduce

conflict among agriculture and livestock workers, as well as among coastal fisherman.<sup>37</sup> This is not a surprise, given that Guinea-Bissau is a special focus country for UNPBF. However, ensuring that the same focus is given to all countries with significant conflict potential will be a larger project. Financial support for the NAPAs comes from the Least Developed Countries Fund operated by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). In general, however, these efforts are still underfunded, and recipient states often have capacity issues that are difficult to fix in the short-term. Additionally, programs are often “siloes” (placed in discreet categories such as agriculture, water, and so on), with short shrift being given to conflict issues. The GCF may help break through some of these bureaucratic obstacles by building on existing GEF funding and projects to allow for more ambitious, multi-sector, multi-nation projects.

## Conclusion

The GCF represents an essential component of international efforts to fight climate change and is one in a series of policy initiatives that underscores not only the U.S. commitment to combating climate change, but also that of the developed world as a whole. Its brief is a challenging one, directing a significant amount of public resources to diverse projects around the world. It faces a significant test in leveraging those public resources to include private sector funding, a task that is essential if the GCF is to meet its expected funding levels.

Amid all of these priorities, it is essential not to lose sight of the important role the Green Climate Fund could play in buttressing international efforts at environmental peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Global mitigation and adaptation efforts are unlikely to succeed if they are not sensitive to underlying political, economic, and social dynamics in the countries in which those programs operate. Consequently, there is a role in broadening the chronically underfunded

efforts of the international community for the United Nations, multilateral development institutions, national governments, nongovernmental organizations, and local groups, who should use environmental challenges as an opportunity to achieve peacebuilding goals and to ensure that climate change-related projects do not inadvertently act as drivers of conflict.

For the United States, this is a long-term national security concern. Administration policymakers have prioritized the national security implications of climate change. Restoring U.S. contributions to the Green Climate Fund and ensuring those contributions address peacebuilding concerns would help partner nations build capacity to insulate themselves against climate change-induced shocks. Putting this money up now will allow the GCF to help the United States avoid more costly interventions down the road, ensuring the long-term sustainability of a broad spectrum of climate change finance initiatives.

The next decade will likely determine if the response of the global community to climate change, especially that of developed nations, is sufficient to avoid or lessen the effects of the worst predicted impacts of climate change. This year, culminating in November with the Paris climate change treaty talks, will likely set the overall tone going forward. An effective Green Climate Fund is essential to that effort.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> UNFCCC, “Report of the conference of parties on its fifteenth session, held in Copenhagen from 7 to 19 December 2009; Addendum: Part Two: Actions taken by the conference of parties at its fifteenth session,” March 30, 2010, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/11a01.pdf>, accessed April 5, 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> The definition of peacebuilding used by UNEP: “Peacebuilding comprises the identification and support of measures needed for transformation toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships and structures of governance, in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. The four dimensions of peacebuilding are: socio-economic development, good governance, reform of justice and security institutions, and the culture of justice, truth and reconciliation.” “From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment,” UNEP, February 2009, [http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/pcdmb\\_policy\\_01.pdf](http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/pcdmb_policy_01.pdf), accessed June 2, 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> Neil Bhatiya, “Why the surprisingly impressive U.S.-China climate change deal is a triumph for both countries,” *The Week*, November 12, 2014, <http://theweek.com/articles/442250/why-surprisingly-impressive-uschina-climate-change-deal-triumph-both-countries>, accessed June 2, 2015; idem, “The U.S.-India climate change deal: President Obama is on a roll” *The Week*, January 26, 2015, <http://theweek.com/articles/535697/usindia-climate-change-deal-presidentobama-roll>, accessed June 2, 2015.
- <sup>4</sup> This is the first time that the UNFCCC has issued a requirement for a plan to reduce emissions by every country. By the terms of the Kyoto Protocol, which the agreement in Paris is meant to succeed, this was only a requirement of Annex I countries (that is, the developed world, broadly defined). For a list of Annex I countries, see: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, List of Annex I parties to the convention, n.d., [http://unfccc.int/parties\\_and\\_observers/parties/annex\\_i/items/2774.php](http://unfccc.int/parties_and_observers/parties/annex_i/items/2774.php), accessed April 5, 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> “Leaders’ Declaration G7 Summit 7-8 June 2015,” June 8, 2015, [https://www.g7germany.de/Content/DE/\\_Anlagen/G8\\_G20/2015-06-08-g7-abschluss-eng.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](https://www.g7germany.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/G8_G20/2015-06-08-g7-abschluss-eng.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5), accessed June 8, 2015, 12–13.
- <sup>6</sup> “Leaders’ Declaration,” 12–13.
- <sup>7</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, “United States and Japan Announce \$4.5 Billion in Pledges to the Green Climate Fund (GCF),” November 15, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/15/united-states-and-japan-announce-45-billion-pledges-green-climate-fund-g>, accessed April 5, 2014. The pledge was formally submitted to the GCF at its pledge session in Berlin, Germany on November 20, 2014.
- <sup>8</sup> Green Climate Fund, “Status of Pledges and Contributions made to the Green Climate Fund,” March 27, 2015, [http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/GCF\\_pledge\\_tracker\\_27mar15.pdf](http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/GCF_pledge_tracker_27mar15.pdf), accessed April 6, 2015. Thirty-three governments have pledged funding to the GCF, totaling \$10.193 billion in pledges, though only 1 percent of contributions have actually been made (countries are given one calendar year after their pledge to submit the funds). The \$100 billion per year total is meant to encompass both public and private sector contributions.
- <sup>9</sup> “GCF reaches effectiveness, can begin allocating resources ahead of Paris Climate Conference,” Green Climate Fund Press Release, May 21, 2015, [http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GCF\\_press\\_release\\_21\\_may\\_2015.pdf](http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GCF_press_release_21_may_2015.pdf), accessed June 1, 2015.
- <sup>10</sup> To give one example of a project that was funded by one of the GCF’s precursor, the Clean Technology Fund, the U.S. company Ormat Technologies received \$80 million from the CTF to help with the construction of a geothermal power plant in North Sumatra, Indonesia. For further examples of how U.S. business have benefited from multilateral climate finance initiatives, see Ben Bovarnick and Alexander Tankou, “The Business Case for the Green Climate Fund,” Center for American Progress, April 2, 2015, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/news/2015/04/02/110396/the-business-case-for-the-green-climate-fund/>, accessed April 2, 2015.

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- 18 The intermediaries include: Centre de suivi écologue (Senegal); Fondo de Promoción de las Áreas Naturales Protegidas del Perú (Peru); Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (Samoa); Acumen Fund, Inc.; Asian Development Bank (multilateral); Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (multilateral); and the United Nations Development Programme (multilateral). Green Climate Fund, "GCF set to allocated resources before Paris Climate Change Conference," March 26, 2015, [http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GCF\\_press\\_release\\_2015\\_03\\_26.pdf](http://news.gcfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GCF_press_release_2015_03_26.pdf), accessed April 6, 2015.
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