



ADAPTATION FUND

AFB/PPRC.31/60  
13 March 2023

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Adaptation Fund Board  
Project and Programme Review Committee  
Thirty-first Meeting  
Bonn, Germany, 21-22 March 2023

Agenda item 17.

**OPTIONS FOR FURTHER SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE  
PROJECT AND PROGRAMME REVIEW COMMITTEE:  
LESSONS FROM THE PILOT ROLLING BASIS SUBMISSION  
PROCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## I. Introduction

1. At the thirty-fourth meeting of the Adaptation Fund Board (the Board), having considered document AFB/B.34/10, the Board decided to:

- (a) *Request the Project and Programme Review Committee (PPRC) to pilot discussing technically-recommended pre-concepts, concepts and fully-developed project proposals for concrete adaptation projects only, with the understanding that the Board members may request discussion at the PPRC meeting on any proposal that has not been technically recommended;*
- (b) *Request the PPRC to continue discussing innovation grants, project scale-up grants and learning grants, and other proposals from any new funding windows; and*
- (c) *Request the secretariat to prepare a document which contains options for further supporting the work of the PPRC and present it to the twenty-seventh meeting of the PPRC for consideration.*

**(Decision B.34/50)**

2. At the thirty-eighth meeting of the Board, having considered the recommendation of the Project and Programme Review Committee, the Adaptation Fund Board decided:

- (a) *To defer consideration of document AFB/PPRC.29/48 by the Project and Programme Review Committee until after further discussion of staffing of the secretariat project review team by the Board;*
- (b) *To request the secretariat to prepare an updated document, to be considered intersessionally, as needed, taking into account the outcome of the discussion in the subparagraph (a), above.*

**(Decision B.38/44)**

3. At the thirty-ninth meeting of the Board, having considered the recommendations of the Project and Programme Review Committee, the Adaptation Fund Board decided:

- (a) *To invite the implementing entities of the Adaptation Fund to submit, on a rolling basis as described under option 3 in document AFB/PPRC.30/55, proposals for projects or programmes under the innovation, enhanced direct access, learning and scale-up grants funding windows, on a pilot basis;*
- (b) *To request the secretariat to prepare a report on the pilot phase to-date, with a view to considering potential changes to the Operational Policies and Guidelines (OPG), as appropriate, and taking into consideration the developments related to the new Medium-Term Strategy (2023-2027), as well as any other relevant developments;*
- (c) *To request the secretariat to present the report at the thirty-first meeting of the PPRC with a recommendation concerning the next decision regarding the pilot phase.*

**(Decision B.39/53)**

4. This document presents the lessons learned from the rolling basis pilot and presents recommendations for further supporting the work of the PPRC pursuant to Decision B.39/53, subparagraph (c) above.

## **II. Overview of the rolling submission process for Medium-term Strategy Grants**

### *Piloting rolling-basis submissions process for specific funding windows*

5. As outlined in document AFB/PPRC.30/55<sup>1</sup>, the rationale for the Option 3 presented in that document i.e., limiting the pilot to specific windows, namely to the ones launched under the Fund's first Medium-term Strategy (hereafter "MTS grants"), was to test and reveal potential unforeseen issues and help manage any potential implications arising from such risks. The risk of running two different submission processes was also acknowledged based on the probability that this could be confusing to the implementing entities (IEs) and could create extra strain on the secretariat during the trial period, if the number of submissions continued to rise, and if the trial period was too long.

6. As mandated by the pilot rolling submission process described in Option 3 in document AFB/PPRC.30/55, IEs were provided with up to three (3) weeks to resubmit a revised proposal after having received a technical review (with the possibility to request an extension if needed). The period of three (3) weeks was proposed to maintain a short review cycle and encourage a swift treatment of proposals. The period of three (3) was selected following consultation with the Fund's accredited IEs that confirmed that three (3) weeks is a suitable period. Additionally, first submissions that have gone through a minimum of 2 rounds of technical review (in keeping with the current practice) in time for the PPRC meeting would be presented to the PPRC, even if they would not be recommended for endorsement or approval based on the technical review.

7. The Secretariat initiated the pilot of rolling basis submission process following the thirty-ninth Board meeting, and communicated the details on the submission process in courtesy notices sent to the IEs in November 2022. In these communications, the Secretariat invited IEs to submit proposals for innovation, learning, scale up, and enhanced direct access projects with valid letters of endorsement to undergo technical reviews and communicated a "cutoff date" of 20 January 2023 (i.e., the date when the secretariat would temporarily freeze processing additional submissions to allow the Secretariat to process the proposals already received in time for the PPRC meeting).

8. To maintain the current levels of transparency, the Secretariat posted each received proposal on the Fund's website. The Adaption Fund CSO network was alerted, as per normal practice, about where proposals under review can be found and by which deadline should any comments be sent to the secretariat. Similarly, a notification was sent to the Board members as well.

9. The pilot option of document AFB/PPRC/30/55 indicates that depending on the outcome of this option after a trial period, the appropriate process could be adopted more broadly, such as uniformly across all the funding windows. The current paper presents observations and lessons from the pilot rolling submission process with a recommendation concerning the next decision regarding the pilot phase as mandated by subparagraph c) of Decision B.39/53.

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<sup>1</sup> AFB/PPRC.30/55: Options for further supporting the work of the PPRC. Available at <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/document/options-for-further-supporting-the-work-of-the-pprc-2/>

### III. Observations from the pilot rolling submission process

#### Number of submissions received

10. Under the rolling submission process that was launched in November 2022, the secretariat received 13 proposals, including four (4) innovation small grant proposals, six (6) large innovation project proposals, two (2) enhanced direct access process and one (1) learning grant proposal. Six (6) proposals were submitted for the first time. Noting that under the rolling submission process IEs are allowed a maximum of three weeks to resubmit proposals following a technical review, 10 proposals were submitted with a sufficient buffer between the submission date and the cutoff date to undergo at least two (2) technical reviews.

#### Compliance with minimum two reviews prior to the cutoff date

Four proposals were received for the first time on the stated cutoff date of January 20, 2023. This may well be due to some IEs misinterpreting the “cutoff date” as a “submission deadline”. Three of these proposals could not undergo a required second technical review in time for the Board Meeting due to the date at which a revised submission of the proposals would be expected, being considerably late<sup>2</sup> and an exception was made for one innovation concept note proposal, despite having been submitted on the cutoff date, as the proposal was a resubmission from a previous review cycle with only a few minor clarification requests (CRs) remaining from the previous review<sup>3</sup>.

#### Quality of proposals during the second submission of the proposal

11. A general observation across all proposals is that the duration of at least three weeks for resubmission following a technical review markedly enhanced the technical quality of the proposals. This could be attributed to the additional time that the IE had available to comprehensively address clarification requests, compared to the normal tight deadline of approximately one week, and additional opportunities to seek clarifications from the secretariat between submissions. The secretariat was able to technically recommend for endorsement or approval the largest number of MTS grant proposals ever during the current review cycle<sup>4</sup>.

#### Internal workflow enhancement

12. The secretariat normally conducts several important checks prior to considering the proposal ready for technical review. These include recording submissions received by the submission deadline, confirmation of receipt, checking the validity of the Letter of Endorsement (LOE), checking the eligibility of the country (including resource availability), checking the eligibility of IE (including accreditation status of the implementing entity), assessment of the type and stage of submission, document compilation, upload in the internal data management system, subsequent website upload, assigning lead technical reviewers and co-reviewers, informing the CSO network and Board members of the onset and duration of the public review and commenting period, quality checks of reviews, and others. These procedures are time sensitive and resource

<sup>2</sup> [Proposal for Enhanced Direct Access Grant for Belize](#), [Proposal for Large Innovation Project for Burundi](#) and [Proposal for Innovation Small Grant for Chile](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Proposal for Large Innovation Project for Belize](#).

<sup>4</sup> 2 Innovation Smalls Grants, 1 fully developed large innovation proposal, 1 regional large innovation concept proposal, 1 single country large innovation concept proposal and 1 learning grant are technically cleared.

intensive requiring the technical team to process and manage a large volume of proposals. The early experience with the rolling submission indicates that not receiving a large volume of proposals within a narrow submission window has alleviated some of the time and resource pressures.

### **Process for receiving comments from the civil society and other stakeholders**

13. A longer review period between the Board meetings combined with the fact that new proposals or resubmissions will be added to the projects-under-review pipeline at any time during that period will require adjustments in the way that the Fund will solicit comments from the civil society and other stakeholders, and the Board, during the public commenting period. One advantage expected under the rolling-basis submission process is that the commenting period will be open for longer than it commonly has been before. The secretariat will modify and adapt the current approach to better suit the rolling-basis submission process in consultation with the CSO network.

### **Implications for extending the rolling submission process to regular proposals**

14. During this review cycle, the Secretariat has received and processed 36 eligible regular project proposals (single-country and regional). This high number of proposals further confirms the previous (and expected) trend of steady increase in the number of proposals. As previously highlighted in document AFB/PPRC/30/55, a high (and growing) number of proposals would potentially impact the quality of the reviews as the internal process is under a growing strain. Additional reviewers and co-reviewers would be increasingly needed but that would not address the issue of bottlenecks and logjams during the quality control and clearance of reviews and document preparation by the Secretariat, therefore increasing the risk of errors. Most importantly, the IEs have an increased number of opportunities for technical review and feedback, as well as a better chance of adequately addressing comments made.

15. The secretariat has not perceived major unforeseen challenges during the pilot period of the rolling submission for MTS grants. A number of positive effects were observed, especially an enhanced quality of the resubmitted proposals given the longer period that the IE had available to address the review comments. On the other hand, the challenges and potential limitations of a rolling-basis submission process may not be entirely obvious given the relatively lower volume of the MTS grants received by the Secretariat. At this stage, the secretariat therefore recommends to apply the rolling-basis submission process with the higher proposal volumes of regular projects, and to monitor its success.

16. Based on the initial evidence from MTS grants, there is reason to expect that there will be benefits to the rolling-basis submission process overall, namely that proposals will likely more quickly reach the stage of being technically recommended for endorsement or approval, speeding up their approval and enhancing the effectiveness of the Fund in serving the most vulnerable countries in their adaptation efforts to climate change.

## **IV. Proposal for extending the rolling submission pilot to regular projects**

17. Considering the positive results emerging from the pilot launched through decision B.39/53, the secretariat proposes to extend the pilot. The extended pilot is proposed to retain the following elements of the existing process:

- a) Maintain the Adaptation Fund's business standard of delivering a first technical review within three (3) weeks of receiving a proposal, except during the "review intermission" period. The review intermission period refers to the weeks before the Board meeting, the week of the Board meeting itself, and the week after, during which the Board activities, including preparations and follow-up, would lead to a temporary pause on the review process, to be resumed normally afterwards. The review intermission period start and end would be periodically communicated to the IEs at the beginning of each submissions cycle.
- b) Provide up to three (3) weeks to the IEs to resubmit a revised proposal after having received a technical review (with the possibility to request an extension if needed). The period of three (3) weeks is proposed to maintain a short review cycle and encourage a swift treatment of proposals.
- c) Provide PPRC members with three (3) weeks to review the proposals ahead of the Board meeting.
- d) Present to the PPRC only those proposals that are technically recommended for endorsement/approval or otherwise requested to be presented by Board members in accordance with Decision B.34/50, by which the Board decided to:
  - a) Request the Project and Programme Review Committee (PPRC) to pilot discussing technically-recommended pre-concepts, concepts and fully-developed project proposals for concrete adaptation projects only, with the understanding that the Board members may request discussion at the PPRC meeting on any proposal that has not been technically recommended.
- e) In line with the Board decision B.34/50, and specifically "the understanding that the Board members may request discussion at the PPRC meeting on any proposal that has not been technically recommended", the Secretariat will present to the Board a list of the proposals that are not technically recommended along with how many rounds of reviews they have undergone. Consistent with the above-mentioned decision, the PPRC and Board members will retain the option to request adding any such proposal on the agenda for discussion.

18. In the proposed extended pilot phase, the rolling basis submission process to regular projects and programmes would benefit from the following modifications:

- a) The previously adopted requirement that submissions would have to go through minimum of two (2) rounds of technical reviews before they could be considered by the PPRC may be eliminated.
- b) Following Decision B.34/50, the practice has been to add first time single-country and regional proposal submissions on the PPRC agenda for discussion, primarily to ensure that such proposals would not be excluded from consideration in an intersessional review cycle. Given that the intersessional review cycle is removed from the rolling basis submission cycle as adopted the Board through Decision B.39/53, it would not be required to include new submissions that are not ready to be recommended for the purpose of making them eligible for future consideration at an intersessional review cycle. Therefore, the secretariat proposes that the new submissions that are not

ready to be recommended are not added on the agenda. It would still be possible, though, for Board members to request the addition of any proposal on the agenda, as outlined above.

- c) Given the continuing trend of increasing volume of proposals and with a view towards increased efficiency of the PPRC work, the secretariat proposes that the PPRC no longer presents recommendations to the Board for proposals that are not discussed at the PPRC meeting. The documents for such proposals will be prepared and posted (as informational documents) for information and transparency purposes, but no Board decision would be sought.
- d) The secretariat proposes that proposals that are recommended to be rejected are included on the PPRC agenda for discussion and subsequent PPRC recommendation to the Board.

19. Additional adjustments may be needed, building on the experience of the Secretariat in the extension of the rolling-basis submission to the regular projects and the anticipated increase in the volume of the proposals.

## **V. Recommendation**

20. The PPRC may wish, having considered document AFB/PPRC.31/60, to recommend to the Board to:

- (a) Extend the piloting of the rolling-basis submissions in line with the elements described and improvements suggested under paragraph 18 of document AFB/PPRC.31/60, to concrete adaptation projects under the Action pillar of the Fund's Medium-term Strategy (single country and regional projects);
- (b) Invite the implementing entities of the Adaptation Fund to submit, on a rolling basis, proposals for projects or programmes under all funding windows;
- (c) Request the Secretariat to:
  - i. Prepare a progress report on the implementation of the pilot with further recommendations for improvement, as appropriate, and taking into consideration the developments related to the new Medium-Term Strategy (2023-2027), as well as any other relevant developments;
  - ii. Develop proposals for updating the Fund's operational policies and guidelines, and other policy or guidance updates that may be affected by the new review process;
  - iii. Present to the PPRC at its thirty-second meeting the documents referred to under sub-paragraphs (c) (i) and (ii), above.