



Sean Sheridan

# COVAX

## Breaking the cycle: practical solutions to unlock climate finance for fragile states

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### Key Messages

- › COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) was designed specifically to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines for the most vulnerable in every country, and implicitly had to consider the hardest to reach in conflict-affected or fragile situations.
- › The COVAX Readiness Grants had a clear four-phased process designed to identify bottlenecks as they arose, thereby enabling donors to channel their funds specifically to the points where technical or financial resources were needed most and ensure effective vaccine delivery via COVAX.
- › The COVAX 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget' approach sought to build consensus, ensure a country-centric focus, and provide flexibility in funding to address bottlenecks as they arose. Specifically, 'One Team' refers to one government-led country team which works with all in-country partners to ensure

effective and efficient coordination; 'One Plan' convenes stakeholders around one joint operational plan, identifying key areas for support; and 'One Budget' provides countries with one joint view of available funding to support COVID-19 vaccination needs.

- › This approach sped up administrative processes in the target countries, by enhancing coordination and simplifying the complex funding landscape through the provision of a 'menu' of funding availability matched to the specific bottlenecks or challenges each type of funding could address.

The COVAX experience demonstrates the importance of building consensus among actors working in the same country, creating a comprehensive plan that consolidates all funding needs and planned expenditure (within a defined timeframe, and mapped to available funds across partners), and rapid decision-making.

- › **Recommendation 1:** Climate funders should seek to jointly establish country-level harmonised approaches (similar to 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget') with national governments to ensure alignment on country-level funding gaps. Multilateral climate funds, through the National Designated Authorities, and bilateral donors should work more closely together to align on programming and funding decisions.
- › **Recommendation 2:** Climate funders could jointly provide a menu of funding availability to national governments for the different types of bottlenecks or challenges funders may encounter in complex environments.

## Introduction

The more fragile a country is, the less adaptation finance it receives. Previous research into why this is the case strongly suggests that complex operating environments, often characterised by weak governance institutions, higher risks due to rapidly changing situations, fast-evolving conflict dynamics, and security threats, are not aligned with the risk appetite and tolerance of climate funders (Cao et al., 2021). This has created challenges in implementing climate change adaptation efforts in fragile and conflict-affected situations – challenges that have been well documented (Gilder and Rumble, 2020; Cao et al., 2021; ICRC, 2021; Reda and Wong, 2021; CCCPA, 2022). The question, however, remains: what can be done to overcome them?

This is one of four case studies undertaken with the aim of identifying concrete solutions that could be implemented by major climate funders to increase climate adaptation finance delivery to fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS). It draws on examples and learning from a few selected funders and specific mechanisms, both in the climate and non-climate space, which are already working effectively in FCS. The other case studies are:

- › Peace bonds
- › The UN Peacebuilding Fund
- › Crisis modifiers

An overarching analysis, the learning from the case studies, and overall recommendations are drawn together in an umbrella document *Breaking the cycle: practical solutions to unlock climate finance for fragile states* which synthesises overall key messages and learnings. All the case studies, and the umbrella document, can be found at <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/breaking-the-cycle>.

# Understanding climate finance challenges through a life-cycle lens

The journey of climate finance, including barriers in access, disbursement and implementation, is best understood via its life-cycle (see Figure 1). Using a life-cycle framework, it is possible to map the common challenges across donors and recipient countries, and use this as a springboard to identify organisations implementing innovative practices that may offer solutions worth featuring as case studies.

## METHODOLOGY

The case studies highlighted in this research were identified based on their relevance in offering potential solutions to the challenges of accessing and implementing climate finance in FCS. First, the different challenges for accessing and utilising climate finance in FCS were scoped. These challenges were developed into a lifecycle framework. Case studies which offered potential solutions across the whole lifecycle or for specific components of the lifecycle were then identified. Interviews were held with representatives from target organisations to collect further information, and strategic, programme and project level documentation was reviewed to triangulate findings. For each case study, a minimum of one representative and two external experts provided peer review and feedback to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. Whilst these case studies provide some innovative solutions, they are not exhaustive and there are likely to be other solutions, piloted in different contexts from which climate funders could also learn.

## Overview: GAVI and COVAX

GAVI (officially Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance), is an alliance of organisations aimed at increasing equitable and sustainable use of new and under-used vaccines in some of the poorest countries in the world. The core partners are the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. However, the overall alliance also includes research agencies, donor country governments, implementing country governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. It is a public-private global health partnership that uses 5-year funding cycles to negotiate long-term deals with manufacturers and ensure funds are available to cover agreed deals.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and researchers developed effective vaccines against the virus, a specific new alliance – COVAX – was established. COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) is one of the three pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. Led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, and WHO – alongside key delivery partner UNICEF – its aim is ‘to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world’ ([GAVI, n.d](#)). COVAX was designed specifically to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines for the most vulnerable in every country, and implicitly had to consider the hardest to reach in conflict-affected or fragile situations.

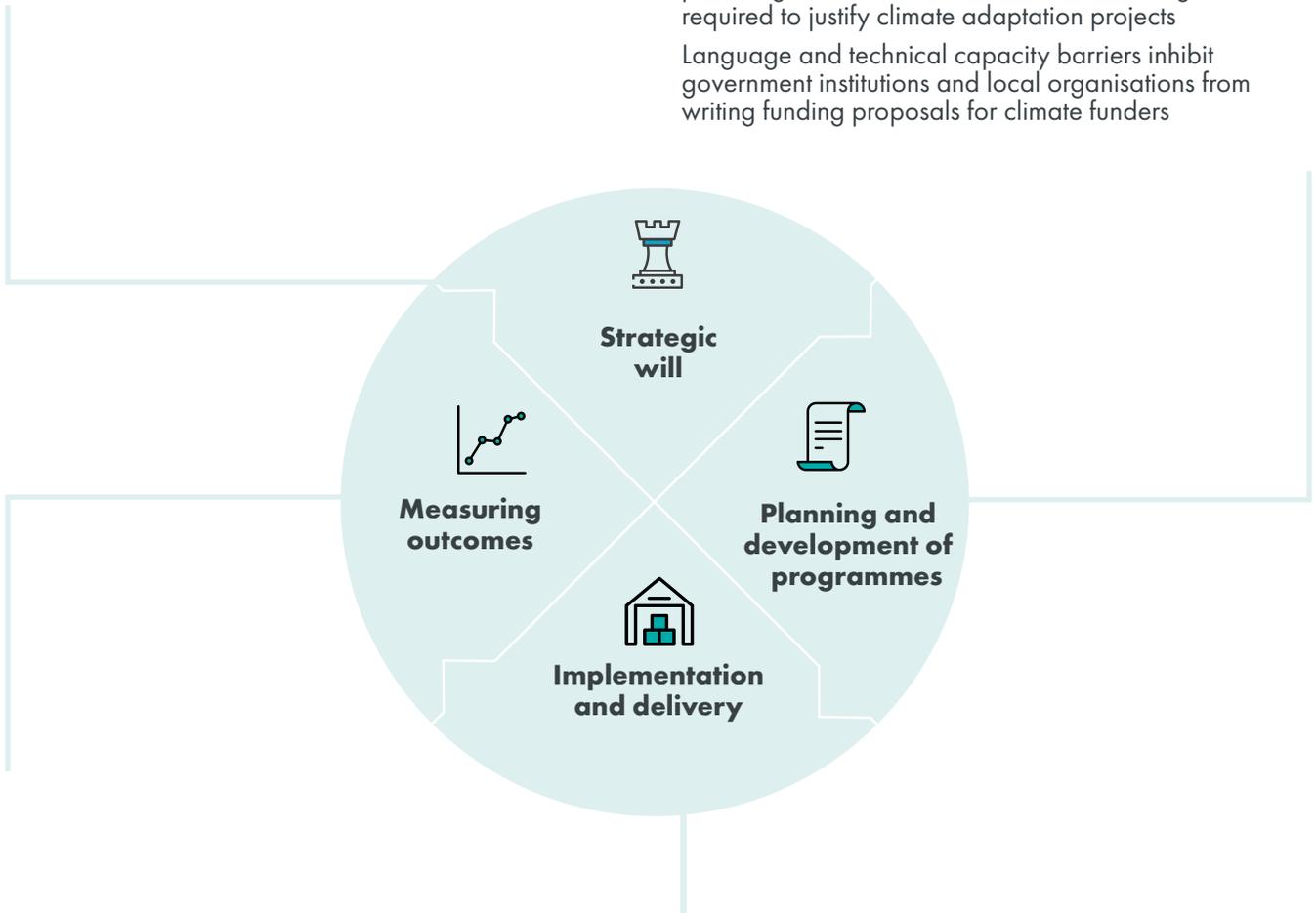
FIGURE 1 – CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING AND UTILISING CLIMATE FINANCE IN FCS

**Strategic will**

Perceived risk in FCS is too high for climate funders  
 Funders’ risk aversion deprioritises vulnerable communities in less-secure areas from support  
 Climate finance is delivered through state authorities, weakening delivery in non-state controlled areas  
 Funders lack long-term strategies and organisational structures to manage compound climate–conflict risks  
 Funders’ climate and conflict teams are siloed, preventing operational collaboration

**Planning and development of programmes**

Multilateral climate funds’ complex/rigid accreditation standards are too much for government institutions and national organisations in FCS  
 Accreditation barriers prevent local communities and CSOs directly accessing climate finance  
 Climate funders’ project approval processes may mean 1–2 years’ unfunded work for applicants, without guarantee of application success  
 Structural damage/access issues in FCS lead to difficulty providing the socio-economic and meteorological data required to justify climate adaptation projects  
 Language and technical capacity barriers inhibit government institutions and local organisations from writing funding proposals for climate funders



**Measuring outcomes**

Standard project M&E processes, where information stays between executing organisations and communities, limit climate funders’ monitoring of fiduciary risks and accountability  
 Project M&E cycles are too short for effective evaluation of integrated climate–conflict programming

**Implementation and delivery**

Inflexibility in pre-planned climate projects prevents adaptation to volatile FCS contexts, leading to delays, closure and waste  
 Conflict-sensitive guidance for climate projects in FCS is inconsistently adopted and adaptation projects lacking conflict sensitivity may exacerbate conflict  
 Funders and multilateral implementers may struggle to find right local organisations to operate in areas of conflict, or with relevant climate expertise

Once access to purchasing and shipping of the vaccines was established, a final major challenge remained: the delivery. This crucial component converts vaccines into vaccinated people. Parallels can be drawn between this and delivering on the NDCs/NAPs, in terms of seeing plans implemented into action on climate change. In January 2021, Gavi, UNICEF and WHO launched the COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership (CoVDP): an interagency initiative to accelerate vaccination coverage in countries that face the biggest challenges to reaching their vaccination targets, such as Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan (WHO, 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

## Challenges being addressed: Strategic will, planning and programming, implementation and delivery

Neither climate finance (mitigation and adaptation) nor programmes implemented via COVAX are mandated to prevent or mitigate violent conflict. However, COVAX’s experience (as well as the wealth of experience of Gavi) of working in complex operating environments to create the enabling environment that is crucial to achieve mass vaccination campaigns provides some potentially interesting solutions to the challenge of utilising adaptation finance in FCS. The experience of rapid decision-making in a new and evolving context provides useful pointers on how to strengthen institutional capacity, coordination, policy and planning, and programming – all crucial steps in building country ‘readiness’ – to ensure programme implementation can be agile and effective. Measuring outcomes of the vaccine coverage and uptake is an equally important aspect of COVAX’s work, but was not a focus of this case study.

FIGURE 2 – 34 COUNTRIES ARE BEING PROVIDED WITH CONCERTED SUPPORT BY THE COVDP (2022). Countries in red have been agreed upon for immediate support. Source: WHO, 2022.

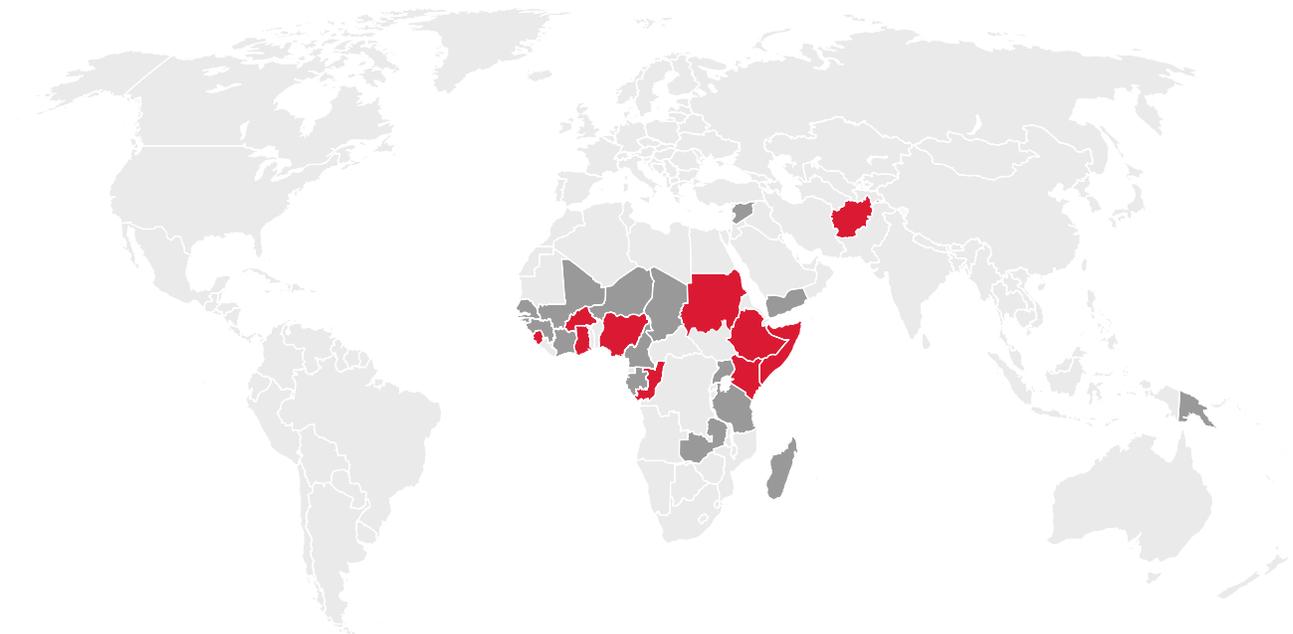
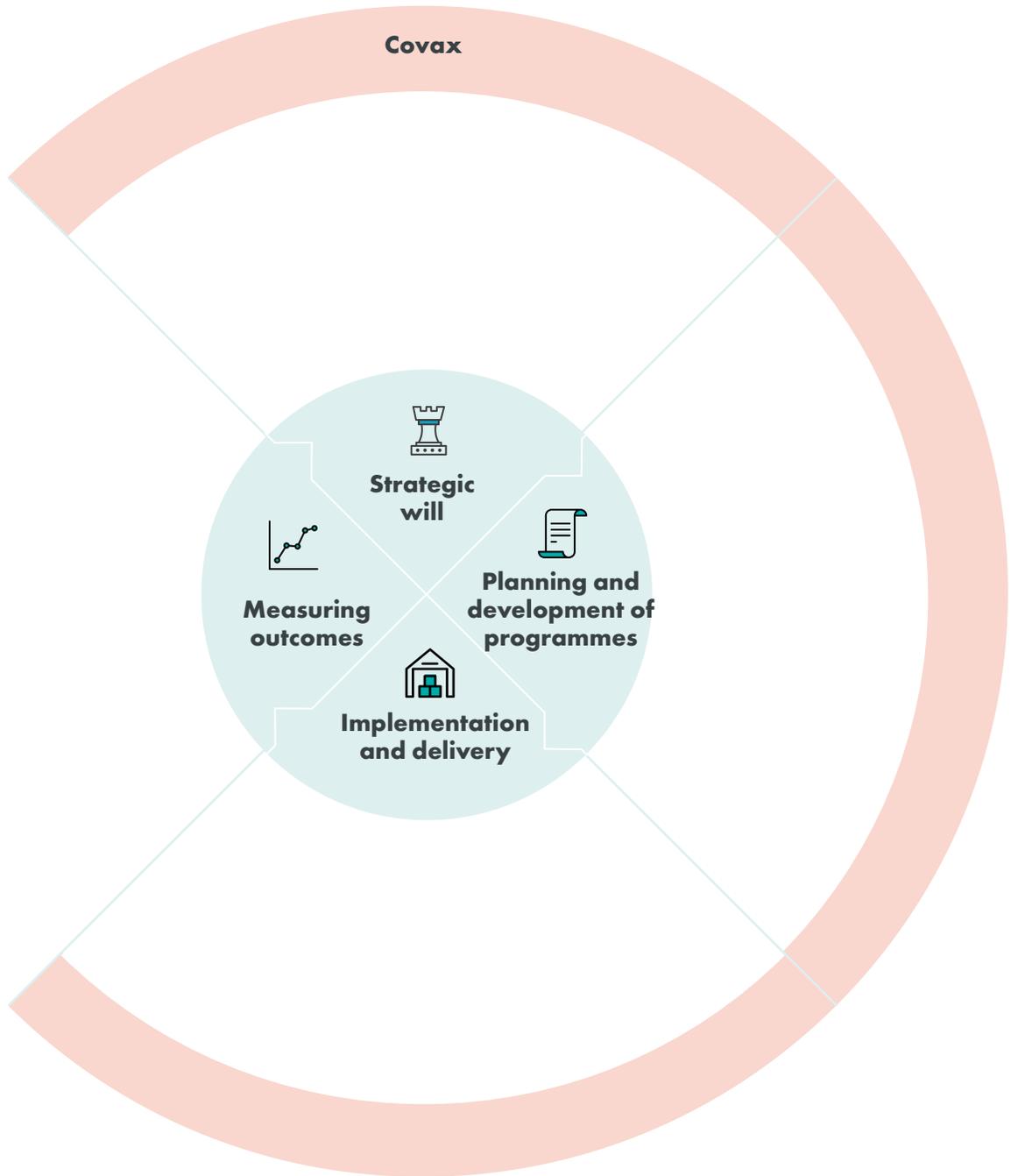


FIGURE 3 – PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS IN THE CLIMATE ADAPTATION PROJECT LIFE-CYCLE: COVAX



# What have been the results

COVAX supported national efforts on a global roll-out of vaccinations and, by 2022, has shipped over 1.74 billion doses to 146 countries ([UNICEF dashboard, n.d.](#)). This has included shipments and roll-out of vaccines in fragile and conflict-affected countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Sudan and Afghanistan, among others. However, whilst the speed and scale of the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out was unprecedented, substantial global inequality exists in vaccination coverage rates and global targets have not been met ([WHO, 2021](#)). For example, only 3.4% of global vaccine doses have been administered in countries with ongoing humanitarian crises, and certain countries (such as Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan, among others) have persistently low (<10%) vaccination coverage rates ([WHO, 2021](#)).

Nevertheless, to achieve an effective roll-out of vaccine doses, the supporting structures (e.g. the cold chain; trained community workers; community engagement) are vital. COVAX leveraged Gavi's knowledge gained through rolling out new vaccines in low- and middle-income countries – such as the inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) since 2014, the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine since 2012, and the rotavirus vaccine since 2011 – to rapidly develop a clear COVAX Readiness Toolbox and associated funding known as COVAX Readiness Grants.

**COVAX Readiness Grants are designed to ensure flexibility, such that the readiness process can be tailored to different countries and can adapt to a rapidly evolving context.** The clear four-phased process helps identify bottlenecks as they arise, thereby enabling donors to channel their funds via COVAX specifically to the points where technical or financial resources are needed the most. The four steps are:

- › **Development of clear guidelines and training courses.** Since the development of the COVAX Readiness Toolbox, several training courses exist to help national and sub-national focal points develop plans ([such as the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, NDVP](#)) or ensure health workers can [safely and efficiently administer COVID-19 vaccines](#).
- › **Development of national plans for roll-out (e.g. the NDVP) in partnership with the countries.** The critical questions determining the enabling environment are posed during this phase. These include: How will vaccines will be stored and distributed? Which are the priority groups for vaccination? The international guidance has helped over 100 countries, with vastly different health system functioning, to develop macro vaccination strategies and detailed microplans to 'ensure the proper prioritisation and distribution of human, financial, and medical resources for effective COVID-19 vaccine delivery' ([WHO, 2021](#)).
- › **Pilot dispatch of first vaccines and identify challenges and successes.** Vaccine delivery has been disrupted by a lack of operational plans; insufficient coordination across regions; lack of training; insufficient, or insufficiently remunerated, personnel; security challenges; shifting priorities exacerbated by the changing economic situations, humanitarian challenges, or forthcoming election cycles; lack of effective risk communication; and adverse weather conditions ([WHO, 2021](#)).
- › **With donors and recipient countries, collectively deal with issues and bottlenecks through support.** The COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership (CoVDP) has a 'One Country Team, One Plan, One Budget' approach which enables countries to access urgent technical assistance or operational funding and support via a streamlined mechanism ([UNICEF, 2022](#)):

- › The 'One Team' is one government-led country team which works with all in-country partners to ensure effective and efficient coordination.
- › The 'One Plan' convenes stakeholders around one joint operational plan, identifying key areas for support.
- › The 'One Budget' provides countries with one joint view of available funding to support COVID-19 vaccination needs.

## Conclusion: What can climate actors learn from this experience?

First, The COVAX Readiness (and specifically CoVDP 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget') approach demonstrates the importance of building consensus amongst actors working in the same country, ensuring that the needs of the countries are the central focus for all engagement. For example, in the Central African Republic the cold chain capacity for the transport of vaccine doses, as well as storage capacity, was extremely constrained outside of the capital. With its in-country partners (such as government and local actors) and international partners (such as UN agencies and the World Bank), CoVDP was able to mobilise \$16 million towards enhancing cold chain capacity. Additionally, a joint decision was taken to strategically bundle COVID-19 vaccinations with other national vaccination campaigns (such as polio, vitamin A and de-worming) to improve coverage and reach ([WHO, 2022](#)).

- › **Recommendation 1:** Multilateral funders (via the National Designated Authorities) and bilateral donors should seek to establish country-level harmonised approaches (similar to 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget') with national governments to ensure alignment on country-level funding gaps.

Second, the CoVDP 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget' approach sped up the administrative processes in the target countries. For example, following the development of a One Plan and One Budget (jointly with the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF) in Somalia, CoVDP was able to mobilise \$5.1 million in one day for Somalia to cover funding gaps in the planned vaccination campaign ([WHO, 2022](#)). CoVDP has shared guidelines with countries which describe how to create a comprehensive plan for the 'One Budget' that consolidates all funding needs and planned expenditure, within a defined timeframe, mapped to available funds across partners ([CoVDP Sit Rep, August 2022](#)).

- › **Recommendation 2:** Climate funders could learn from the 'One Team, One Plan, One Budget' approach on creating comprehensive budget plans and simplifying the complex funding landscape, by providing a 'menu' of funding availability for the different types of bottlenecks or challenges funders may face in complex environments. This process would aim to reduce any duplication of activities, help harmonise resources, and increase the transparency and visibility of needs, gaps, and who is able to fund what.

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# How to cite this work

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## CONTACT

ADRIANNA HARDAWAY

Program and Advocacy Advisor | Policy and Advocacy

[ahardaway@mercycorps.org](mailto:ahardaway@mercycorps.org)

DEBBIE HILLIER

Head of Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance | Policy and Advocacy

[dhillier@mercycorps.org](mailto:dhillier@mercycorps.org)

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45 SW Ankeny Street  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
888.842.0842

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