



BUILDING RIVER DIALOGUE AND GOVERNANCE

BRIDGE Phase 5

Securing sustainable development, livelihoods and peace through water



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Call for Proposals

15 August to 7 September 2025

Grants for strengthening women's leadership in freshwater governance and management

Guidelines for Applicants

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1. Background

A. General information on the Building River Dialogue and Governance (BRIDGE) Programme Grants

With more than a decade of experience implementing BRIDGE in over twenty transboundary river basins worldwide, IUCN has built an approach to water diplomacy premised on the creation of water governance capacities to attain effective water management, security and peace. BRIDGE aims to catalyse sustainable water resources management and development, safeguard water supply and sanitation, biodiversity conservation and transboundary cooperation. Inclusive governance and management are key aspects of BRIDGE's approach due to the recognition that diverse voices and perspectives enrich and ultimately ensure long-term success and sustainability in shared waters.

Without deliberate action to address imbalances in the involvement of women and men within water management institutions and systems there remains a missed opportunity to reap the benefits of inclusive governance for more equitable, as well as technically sound, inclusive engagement for the sharing of water resources amongst all relevant stakeholders. The meaningful participation of women is an essential component of this and will help ensure effective and inclusive management and decision making in transboundary basins. Beyond participation, empowering women to bring their perspectives, knowledge and experiences contributes to diversify and innovate the solutions needed to attain water security goals.

BRIDGE in its fifth phase is piloting a grant-making facility to strengthen women's leadership in freshwater governance and management. This pilot phase will invite rapid action proposals for interventions lasting six to nine months, aimed at shared basins where BRIDGE is active, in Africa, Asia and South America. During this pilot phase, BRIDGE will be providing two types of small grants. These guidelines concern specifically the **Women Leadership Grants**:

- **Women leadership grants (maximum CHF 10,000):** the objective of these grants is to support women-led solutions linked to freshwater ecosystem management and restoration. This component is aimed at individuals, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations or women's groups.

These grants fall under outcomes 1 and 3 of BRIDGE: focusing on women-led initiatives and enterprises to conserve, manage and restore freshwater ecosystems and improve livelihoods.

Eligible countries and basins are outlined in **Annex 1**

B. Thematic focus of the BRIDGE Women call for proposals

Poor governance poses real threats to the sustainability of freshwater resources, the ecosystems that depend on them as well as the political stability in regions where water is scarce. BRIDGE works at the crossroad of the global challenges contributing to freshwater ecosystem degradation and water

insecurity, encouraging multi-level governance and the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders to mobilise and accelerate action through dialogue, consensus building, cooperation and diplomacy. BRIDGE is based on the principle that demonstrations on the ground, combined with capacity and leadership development, are necessary to make this crucial cooperation a reality that catalyses change.

The BRIDGE Women grants are based on the recognition of the important role that women play in water resources management and governance but also of the imbalances that exist between women and men in representation and leadership of water-related institutions at different levels. This call for proposals seeks to on the one hand increase recognition of women's role and on the other help remove barriers to their engagement in water-related institutions.

More information on BRIDGE can be found here: [BRIDGE – Building River Dialogue and Governance – The IUCN Water Knowledge Platform](#)

2. Objective

The objective of this Call for Proposals is to enable and support CSOs, NGOs, Women's Groups and Women Champions engaged in recognising women's important role as stewards of freshwater resources and ecosystems, including in promoting the well-being of communities dependent on freshwater ecosystems.

3. Financial allocation

Indicative TOTAL financial envelope made available for the BRIDGE Women Grants (two grant processes) is CHF 175,000.

The final allocation of funds may differ from the above indicative distribution depending on the quality of the projects submitted for each type of small grants. IUCN Water and Wetlands Team reserve the right to reallocate funds at their sole discretion.

4. Project amount

Women leader grants amount to a **maximum of CHF 10,000**.

There is **no minimum** grant amount

Co-funding is not required.

The proposed project activities should be consistent with the amount requested. It is important to be **realistic** as to what can be achieved with the total amount budgeted for the project and within the implementation period of the project.

5. Project duration

The **maximum duration of the project should be 9 months**. The start date of the project will be determined by the date of the signature of the grant contract.

It is expected that contracts will be signed in the third quarter of 2025 and projects are expected to start no later than October 2025.

The performance of the contract cannot start before its entry into force. No budgeted expenses can be made before the start date of the grant. Project Results and Activities need to be clear and attainable within the timeframe of the grant.

6. Eligibility criteria

a. Eligible entities/ organisations/ participants

In order to be eligible for a **BRIDGE Women's Grant**, the applicant must be:

- i. a legal entity or organisation **and**;
- ii. be non-profit-making or profit-making in the case of women-led enterprises **and**;
- iii. be a local or national civil society organisation (CSOs), a local or an international non-governmental organisation (NGOs); a registered Women's Group or a local cooperative with relevant track record on the topic of the grant;
- iv. have the statutory capacity to manage, prepare and implement grants and this project.
Applications submitted by a body acting as an intermediary for a third party are not eligible;
- i. have a bank account in the name of the applicant or women's group/association (individual);
- v. be authorized under relevant national laws to receive charitable contributions, including from sources outside their respective countries.

In line with the BRIDGE Women Grants' objective, priority is given to applications from Women Groups and Women champions (or CSOs / NGOs representing these legally) in their own country (refer to *Annex 1: Eligible Countries and basins*), whose work aim at recognising women's important role as stewards of freshwater resources and ecosystems.

An applicant can submit a **maximum of one proposal**.

b. Conflict of interest and ineligibility

- i. Applicants cannot have a conflict of interest in applying for this call. A conflict of interest may arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties, or any other relevant connection or shared interest;
- ii. Applicants cannot be current employees of IUCN, or close relatives (i.e. immediate family) of IUCN.

c. Eligible activities

- Eligible location
 - **Projects must be implemented in countries listed in Annex 1**, across Africa, Asia, South America.
 - **Only the countries listed in Annex 1 are eligible under the present Call for Proposals.**
 - A proponent can however be based and registered in an ineligible country, as long as the project is implemented in a country that is eligible.

- Eligible activities
 - i. Projects must implement activities that strengthen recognition of women's role in freshwater resources and ecosystem management (Women Leader Grants).
 - ii. Women-led enterprises and aimed at contributing to freshwater resource and ecosystem conservation, management and restoration as well as improved livelihood opportunities.
 - iii. Research activities can be eligible as long as the proposal supports either removing barriers to women's participation and leadership or actions on-the-ground, using the results of the research within the timeframe of the project (pure research projects are not eligible).

Additional notes:

- Community based conservation projects will be viewed favourably in the selection process;
- Incubator type projects with sustainable outcomes are welcome where the project initiates a concept that is implemented in the long term by the government and/or other partners.
- Proposed activities must observe all relevant environmental and social Principles and Standards. Please refer to the ESMS section in **Annex 2** for further information. Clear information on Indigenous Peoples implication (if applicable) must be provided in the IUCN Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) Questionnaire during the application process.

d. Ineligible activities

- i. The purchase of land and firearms, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities;
- ii. Activities adversely affecting individuals and local communities or where these communities have not provided their broad support to the project activities;
- iii. The removal or altering of any physical cultural property (includes sites having archaeological, paleontological, historical, religious, or unique natural values);
- iv. Financial support to third parties through sub-grants.
- v. Pure research activities. A small proportion of a grant budget can be devoted to monitoring in order to inform the results of the project and provide evidence of the strengthening of women's role. (refer to c.v. Eligible activities)

e. Eligible costs

Only eligible costs will be reimbursed by the grant. Eligible costs must be:

- i. Necessary for the implementation of the project activities;
- ii. Reasonable and justified and consistent with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- iii. Generated during the lifetime of the project (costs incurred before the official starting date of the project or after the official end date of the project are not eligible);
- iv. Actually incurred by the beneficiary and be recorded in their accounts in accordance with the applicable accounting principle;
- vi. Identifiable and verifiable;
- vii. Compliant with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation;
- viii. Incurred in compliance with [IUCN's Procurement Policy and Procedure](#).

- Categories of eligible costs
 - i. Personnel costs (salaries, social charges, employer costs);
 - ii. Subcontracting (external services);
 - iii. Supplies (not office related);
 - iv. Equipment & maintenance;
 - ix. Travel (international travel, local travel, accommodation, subsistence);
 - x. Meetings & workshops (venue costs, catering, speakers' fees);
 - xi. Indirect costs are eligible at the **flat rate of up to 12%** of the estimated total eligible direct costs. Indirect costs may cover local office costs (rent, office supplies, utilities, telecommunication costs, etc.).

f. Ineligible costs

- i. The purchase of land (and land buildings) and firearms, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities;
- ii. Debts and debt service charges (interest);
- iii. Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- iv. Activities adversely affecting individuals and local communities or where these communities have not provided their broad support to the project activities;
- v. The removal or altering of any physical cultural property (includes sites having archaeological, paleontological, historical, religious, or unique natural values);
- vi. Financial support to third parties through sub-grants;
- vii. Pure research activities;
- viii. Reckless and excessive spending.

7. Components of the project proposal

Applications can be submitted through the online form on the call for proposals website only.

Applicants can submit applications in all three official IUCN languages (English, French or Spanish).

Templates and guidelines are available in English, French and Spanish.

Applications steps:

In the online application and the proposal template you will be asked to enter the following information about your project:

Section 1: Project lead information // Applicant information

Section 2: Project partner(s) information (if applicable)

Section 3: Project overview

Section 4: Project description, objectives and outputs as well as connection to BRIDGES objectives

Section 5: Project work plan and timeline

Section 6: Risk Management and paragraph outlining alignment with IUCN Environmental and social management system (ESMS)

Section 7: Budget details

Please note that the following documents are required and necessary for organisational submissions:

- Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, Statutes, Government Decree, as appropriate (certificate of registration or bylaws)

- Organisation in-country registration certificate (if applicable)
- Location map
- CVs of key project staff

Confirmation letters from your partners (if applicable) can be submitted in the "Additional Documents" section. Other documents may be requested at a later date if the project is shortlisted.

8. Deadlines

Clarification questions on the Call for Proposals should be sent by email to the IUCN Water and Wetlands Team (water@iucn.org) no later than 10 days before the deadline for the submission of proposals, indicating clearly the reference of the Call for Proposals. The clarification questions and their answers will be published on the BRIDGE Women Grants webpage in the FAQ document.

The deadline to submit proposals is Sunday 7 September 2025 at 23:59 Central European Summer Time (CEST).

9. Evaluation of proposals and selection criteria

The review process and the final decision on awarding the grant are expected to take approximately 1 month following the deadline of the Call for Proposals. It is therefore expected that the projects cannot be planned with a start date earlier than 15 October 2025.

The evaluation of the proposals consists of the following process:

Step 1: Eligibility check

Done by the IUCN Water and Wetlands Team to ensure that the proposal satisfies all the criteria specified in section 6 of this document. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the proposal will be rejected on that sole basis and will not be evaluated further.

Step 2: Technical review

Projects will be evaluated by a Selection Committee consisting of representatives from IUCN Water Wetlands Team and regional water focal points. The main criteria against which proposals will be evaluated are the following:

- Contribution to women's empowerment
- Contribution to freshwater management and governance
- Feasibility
- Technical coherence
- Budget & cost efficiency
- Applicant background and capacity

Step 3: Contract negotiation

IUCN Water and Wetlands will inform the successful applicant(s) that the project has been selected for funding. The applicant will be asked to address any of the issues raised during the project evaluation and it may be necessary to modify the proposal. Once the key issues have been addressed, IUCN will ask the applicant to sign a grant agreement.

10. Notification of applicants

Applicants will be informed in writing by the IUCN Water and Wetlands Team about the results of the evaluation of their proposal.

IUCN Water and Wetlands will provide an explanation to all applicants whose proposals are unsuccessful as part of its focus on building capacity. Applicants are encouraged to contact the relevant focal person at water@iucn.org if they have additional questions about the decision. If the applicant is not satisfied with the response, a grievance may be submitted to water@iucn.org up to one month after having been informed of the decision.

11. Indicative timetable

Launch of the Call for Proposals	15 August	12:00 CEST
Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the IUCN Water and Wetlands team	28 August 2025	23:59 CEST
Deadline for submission of proposals	7 September 2025	23:59 CEST
Notification of applicants of the review process	Expected by 30 September 2025	
Signature of Grant Agreements	Expected by 1 December 2025	

Annex 1: List of eligible countries and basins

Country
Bangladesh: Meghna and relevant sub-basins
Bolivia: Lake Titicaca and relevant sub-basins
Cambodia: Mekong and relevant sub-basins, particularly within the 3S system
Cameroon: Lake Chad and relevant sub-basins
Chad: Lake Chad and relevant sub-basins
Côte d'Ivoire: Mano and relevant sub-basins
Ecuador: basins shared between Ecuador and Peru
Guinea: Mano and relevant sub-basins
India: Meghna and relevant sub-basins
Kenya: Sio-Malabo-Malakisi, Mara and relevant sub-basins
Lao PDR: Mekong and relevant sub-basins, particularly within the 3S system
Liberia: Mano and relevant sub-basins
Malawi: Ruvuma and relevant sub-basins
Mozambique: Buzi, Pungwe, Save and Ruvuma basins and relevant sub-basins
Myanmar: Salween and relevant sub-basins
Peru: Lake Titicaca and relevant sub-basins / basins shared between Ecuador and Peru
Sierra Leone: Mano and relevant sub-basins
Tanzania: Ruvuma and Mara and relevant sub-basins
Thailand: Mekong and relevant sub-basins, particularly within the 3S system / Salween and relevant sub-basins
Tunisia: Medjerda and relevant sub-basins
Uganda: Sio-Malabo-Malakisi and relevant sub-basins
Viet Nam: Mekong and relevant sub-basins, particularly within the 3S system
Zimbabwe: Buzi, Pungwe, Save basins and relevant sub-basins

Annex 2: Environmental and Social Management System

The main objective of IUCN projects is to realize positive environmental and social impacts, including benefits for women and men from communities that depend on natural resources. However, unwanted negative environmental and social side effects from the projects being implemented may occur. Within the context of its Mission, it is IUCN's policy to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to avoid or minimize these environmental and social impacts. Therefore, the main purpose of this Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) is to provide the governance and policy framework for the managerial and operational measures to avoid or minimize environmental and social impacts of IUCN projects and enhance the positive impacts.

The ESMS is a methodological approach to identifying and managing environmental and social impacts in a structured way. Its application is closely related to the IUCN Project Guidelines and Standards and integrates the nature and scale of the project and the predicted impacts.

IUCN has a number of safeguards in place, structured through the ESMS. This ensures that appropriate measures are taken to avoid or minimize potential environmental and social impacts of projects while at the same time aiming to enhance the positive impacts. The ESMS is consistent with international frameworks such as the World Bank Operational Policies, GEF minimum standards on environmental and social safeguards, and IFC Performance Standards.

The ESMS incorporates the following four stages: (i) screening of impacts; (ii) scoping and assessment of impacts; (iii) development of environmental management plans, and (iv) monitoring and review.

More information on IUCN's ESMS can be found here: <https://iucn.org/about-iucn/accountability-and-reporting/project-accountability/environmental-and-social-management-system>

Awarded projects will be subjected to a full Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) through the use of the ESMS questionnaire which will be provided at a later stage.