

Secretariat Management Response

Prospective Country Evaluation 2021 Synthesis Report

Introduction

The Technical Evaluation Reference Group (TERG) is a critical component of the Global Partnership, providing independent evaluations of the Global Fund's business model, investments and impact to the Global Fund Board through its Strategy Committee. The Global Fund values transparency and publishes TERG reports according to the TERG Documents Procedure approved by the Strategy Committee.

In order to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, equity and impact of the Global Fund's investments and progress on implementation of the Global Fund Strategy 2017-2022, the TERG developed a 6-year evaluation plan. One of the components of this multi-year plan was to establish Prospective Country Evaluation (PCE) platforms in up to eight countries. The aims of the PCEs were "to independently assess ongoing program implementation and impact to generate evidence to inform stakeholders and accelerate progress towards the Strategic Objectives of the Global Fund by, (i) Examining and analyzing the pathways between Global Fund investment and impacts at country level in the context of country and other development partner investments; (ii) Facilitating continuous improvement of program implementation and quality and testing innovative solutions; and (iii) Learning lessons that can improve the Global Fund model".¹ The PCEs followed the 2017-19 grant cycle and examined the pathways between Global Fund investment and impact in Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Mozambique, Myanmar, Senegal, Sudan and Uganda. The PCEs also sought to generate evidence to inform ongoing program implementation in these countries in order to accelerate the progress towards the 2017-2022 Global Fund Strategy and to facilitate timely and continuous improvement of program implementation and quality and drawing out lessons learned to inform improvements in the Global Fund model.

¹ [GF/B36/04 – Revision 2](#), page 55

A total of four PCE Synthesis Reports have been produced by the TERG since 2018 and the Secretariat has been engaged throughout the process of the PCEs and has considered the country-specific recommendations, findings and conclusions as part of its overall portfolio management approaches, as well as the higher-level conclusions, findings and recommendations for consideration across the wider portfolio. The Secretariat welcomed the findings and recommendations from these reports. The recommendations from the 2018 and 2019 reports have been acted upon, and many of the recommendations from the 2020 report were considered as part of the roll-out of the 2020-2022 allocation cycle.

This management response responds to the specific findings, conclusions and recommendations from the 2021 Synthesis Report which looked at how Global Fund processes and the overall funding model either 'facilitated or hindered the achievement of objectives' during the implementation of 2017-2019 allocation grants in the eight countries, and whether lessons learned informed the development of grants from the 2020-2022 allocation cycle. The Global Fund Secretariat appreciates this review and broadly agrees with the report's key finding and recommendations and the TERG's position. We note that several of the findings and recommendations are being actioned upon as part of on-going oversight and improvement initiatives and we appreciate the TERG's recognition that these are underway.

Areas of agreement

The Secretariat is in broad agreement with the four main recommendations and the thirteen sub-recommendations. With respect to recommendation 1² and its four sub-recommendations, these are already being actioned upon as part of an on-going process improvement exercise on implementation oversight which aims to drive impact through quality and timely service delivery and Principal Recipient (PR) operational management. Current actions underway include developing guidance, including for in-country program reviews and evaluations, optimizing reporting requirements with a view to ensuring essential, timely and accurate grant performance information, and providing support through CCM Evolution. Options currently being considered by the Secretariat include regular 'pulse checks', PR qualitative self-assessments and quarterly implementation spot checks by Local Fund Agents (LFAs). The Secretariat anticipates that these actions will be implemented during 2022 through a phased approach. While these actions aim to improve grant-specific monitoring to better inform grant implementation (R.1.1), the Secretariat notes that program review processes at the country-level are not within the direct span of control of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat independently identified that the current grant performance rating requires revision (R.1.2) and had started development of an enhanced performance rating system to address the limitations of the current approach before the TERG PCE recommendation. The enhanced approach will monitor and rate performance in three areas: (i) programmatic (based on the programmatic progress towards targets agreed in the performance framework), (ii) financial (based on in-country absorption and budget utilization against the agreed grant budget), and (iii) PR performance (how well the grant is being managed, focusing

² Recommendation 1: Improve grant-specific performance monitoring to inform implementation decisions.

on implementation management, financial management, procurement and supply management and risk management). This revised approach will be piloted and is anticipated to be phased into implementation during 2022-2023. Linked to this a framework is under development to help guide PRs and Country Teams on potential pathways to respond to performance rating trends (R.1.3), however the application of the framework (anticipated timeframe 2022-2023) will need to be contextualized by grant (including by PR type) and flexibility will be needed as responses will be highly dependent on the country context.

Sub-recommendation 1.4 (R.1.4) recommends strengthening the use of revised Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH) indicators to address implementation delays and potential deprioritization. The Secretariat notes that, in line with feedback from the TERG, Technical Review Panel (TRP) and technical partners, RSSH indicators have been substantively revised for the 2020-2022 allocation period. The Secretariat agrees with TERG's conclusion that the new RSSH indicators are still not used effectively. However, it should be also mentioned that the Global Fund relies on national indicators and does not force countries to use Global Fund-specific indicators or targets. In many countries RSSH indicators that would be linked with the interventions supported by the Global Fund are not routinely measured. Improving measurement of RSSH requires a broader approach that includes partners and in-country stakeholders. The Secretariat has deepened collaboration with partners to re-think RSSH measurement and to develop common tools which can be used by countries and partners, in addition to indicators the focus will be placed on survey data and on evaluations. This work is on-going and will continue in the next strategy period.

The Secretariat agrees that there is a need to build more flexibility and responsiveness during implementation (Recommendation 2³) and work is underway to understand the existing challenges related to grant revisions and will build on experiences from the revisions emerging from C19RM⁴. Regarding the recommendation to consider flexibility in PR and Sub-Recipient (SR) contractual arrangements (R.2.2), we note that there already exists a number of flexibilities in contractual arrangements with PRs (in particular for existing and well performing PRs), however this is not the case at the SR-level, as in most cases, the terms are dictated by PRs regulations/ national procurement regulations and laws about contracting personnel. A grant revision diagnostic is anticipated beginning 2022, pending resource availability, and the TERG findings and recommendations, as well as the lessons learned from the grant revision approaches for C19RM, will be critical inputs for the exercise. This diagnostic will examine the root causes of grant revision challenges and findings will be used to drive process, operational policy, system and data improvements accordingly. The Secretariat, in collaboration with the TRP, will also assess opportunities to streamline Global Fund material program revision process (R.2.1).

³ Recommendation 2: Build in more flexibility and responsiveness in implementation by simplifying grant revision processes to encourage their use throughout the grant cycle.

⁴ The COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) supports countries to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on programs to fight HIV, TB and malaria, and undertake urgent improvements in health and community systems through the provision of additional funding to existing Global Fund programs.

The Secretariat agrees that with the TERG recommendation that there is a need to examine how countries could strengthen data-driven decision-making during implementation to inform grant revisions (R.2.3) and notes this is linked to several on-going initiatives, including CCM Evolution Strategic Initiative and Implementation Oversight process improvements. As part of CCM Evolution, work has been undertaken to strengthen oversight functions by introducing oversight officers into CCM Secretariat and also encouraging CCMs to link to national efforts. It is also anticipated that Operational Policy Notes will be updated to recommend more rigorous and ongoing program reviews and that changes in PR reporting and the roll-out of an enhanced performance rating will provide more insights to support and drive revision decisions.

With respect to Recommendation 3⁵, the Secretariat acknowledges that additional efforts are needed to enable and support countries to invest more strategically in RSSH, including Community-systems Strengthening (CSS). Through the Service Delivery Innovations (SDI) and Community-led Monitoring (CLM) Strategic Initiatives (SIs) actions are being undertaken to build capacity around RSSH to better support the inclusion of high impact RSSH interventions in funding requests and to strengthen and scale-up CLM across the three diseases. In this cycle, various efforts have been utilized to help reduce the gap between policy guidance and grant design⁶. In collaboration with partners, the Secretariat has initiated RSSH capacity building in over 15 countries to date. During 2021-2023, a RSSH capacity building mechanism with two RSSH sub-regional hubs in Africa (Anglo/Francophone) will be developed to further support countries to improve programmatic quality of RSSH investments. Regarding CSS, the Secretariat will launch a CSS e-learning module in 2021 to increase knowledge and understanding among Country Teams and CCMs to facilitate the comprehensive design of community health system strengthening program and the CSS Technical Brief will be revised to include guidance on community-based platforms for service delivery. To support the optimization of current CSS investments, a robust framework and roadmap to inform the Global Fund's approach on community systems and responses in the current funding cycle is underway.

The Secretariat agrees that there is a need clarify whether the primary objective of RSSH is to support the three disease programs or to invest more holistically in health systems strengthening (R.3.1). Given the size and scope of Global Fund investments, there is significant potential to benefit broader national health systems by supporting countries efforts to achieve universal health coverage and to scale-up high quality, integrated people-centered primary care services. Guided by future Board discussions and decisions with respect to the post-2022 Strategy, the Secretariat aims to articulate clearer guidance and prioritization for the next strategy cycle and articulate the areas of RSSH where the Global Fund has a comparative advantage (R.3.2). While some aspects of RSSH investments can be shaped at the Secretariat-level⁷, RSSH

⁵ Recommendation 3: In order to reduce gaps between policy guidance and grant design, improve communication around how to invest more strategically in RSSH, including CSS.

⁶ For example, multiple technical guidance documents have been made available, including a revised RSSH Information Note, as well as a checklist for RSSH applications which was developed in collaboration with TRP, and the funding request template was revised to include a section on integration.

⁷ For example, moving away from supporting low-impact/high-cost trainings.

investments will continue to remain demand-driven, country-specific and informed by partner input and TRP review.

Additional partner engagement is needed to better balance investments in health systems support versus strengthening, noting the challenge in distinguishing and tracking investments in the two. Some countries, driven by needs, continue requesting investments for systems' support and the trade-offs of not providing such investments should be carefully assessed. The Secretariat notes that up until 2017, health system strengthening investments were structured around the World Health Organization (WHO) health systems 'building blocks' and while these provide a useful frame for understanding the scope of the health system, from the perspective of RSSH investments it neglects the complex range of interactions that exist among the various 'blocks' and also omits the areas that are not necessarily aligned with specific 'blocks', for example – community systems, sustainability, equity, quality, efficiency, private sector engagement, etc. Through the SDI SI some of these areas have been already addressed, and the Secretariat will elaborate more on these for the next strategy period, in parallel to better identifying comparative advantages of the Global Fund to more streamline RSSH investments through grants. Finally ensuring adequate engagement and ownership from health system planning experts and leaders (R.3.3) is critical to strengthening RSSH capacity and voice during country dialogue for grant design and during implementation. As part of CCM Evolution, the Secretariat is considering potential revisions to the CCM Policy to help facilitate the increased engagement of health systems planning experts and leaders with CCMs.

The Secretariat welcomes the TERG recommendation regarding the need to explicitly promote grant investment in equity and Strategic Objective 3⁸, including through more direct measurement of the drivers of inequity and outcomes of human rights and gender investments (Recommendation 4). In the last cycle (2017-19) and this current cycle, matching funds and SI's have and will continue to increase investments in these areas. We acknowledge that the impact of investments under Strategic Objective 3 take time to show result and cannot be fully measured through quantitative data. The Secretariat has undertaken⁹ and continues to undertake several actions to promote investments in equity and Strategic Objective 3, including supporting communities and civil society to build capacity to better measure impact of these investments and use data to drive program implementation and through the Breaking Down Barriers (BDB) Initiative, the Community Rights and Gender (CRG) SI, the Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) SI and the CLM SI. Increased investment in country data collection in these areas and data use is essential to ensuring effective and impactful programming (R.4.1). For the 2020-22 allocation cycle, clear guidance for Monitoring and Evaluation investments was provided and disaggregated options in the Performance Framework were provided. As part of its review of funding requests and grant documents budgets were systematically reviewed to see if activities to support key populations (KP) data collection (e.g. integrated biological and behavioral surveillance (IBBS) and size estimation and programmatic monitoring) are being prioritized. The Secretariat is refining the KPI 6e methodology to track the ability of countries to use disaggregated data to drive decision making. A KP data collection pilot is underway to

⁸ Promote and protect human rights and gender equality

⁹ As part of the 2020-2022 allocation cycle technical briefs were developed and capacity building workshops were delivered.

increase the frequency of data availability. The Secretariat is also encouraging disaggregated data on HIV, TB and malaria to be analyzed and used regularly in-country and even sub-nationally as part of program monitoring and oversight.¹⁰ The Secretariat has supported the development and use of qualitative tools to generate evidence for programs to address human rights, gender and equity barriers¹¹ The WHO Equity Assessment, commissioned by the Global Fund, is an assessment of HIV, TB and malaria indicators which will have an open-source database. The findings of these qualitative assessments will help guide the development of the next strategy and its implementation.

The Secretariat agrees that there is a need to effectively use data to monitor how Global Fund grants are contributing to Strategic Objectives (R.4.2) as well as to inform potential grant revisions mid-cycle (R.4.3). While new human rights, CSS and AGYW indicators were included in the modular framework, there has been limited uptake in grant performance frameworks with exception of the BDB cohort of countries¹². There is a need for more systematic integration of qualitative assessments in these areas as a part of in-country and grant processes, as well as ensuring independent qualitative assessments for human rights. The Secretariat is strengthening its capacity to support country partners in High Impact Africa portfolios to identify and analyze data on size, location, transmission dynamics to improved tailored HIV prevention delivery approaches for key populations (e.g. through hiring of KP advisors). Mainstreaming lessons learned from the BDB Initiative in 10 additional countries, through support to programmatic mappings and technical assistance for implementation support, will generate valuable lessons on what works to incentivize human rights investments and improve quality of Global Fund supported human rights programs.

Finally, the Secretariat has been highly engaged in process for the development of the next strategy and has worked closely with communities and civil society to ensure the next Global Fund strategy has a stronger focus on equity and Strategic Objective 3 and these investments are measured and implemented in the most effective way.

As noted above, the Secretariat is in broad agreement with the majority of the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the TERG PCE Synthesis Report and the TERG's Position Paper. However, the Secretariat has concerns around the framing of the key message that "*Overall grant designs and budgets did not change significantly during the 2017-2019 grant making process (NFM2). More substantial changes were made to investments supporting the achievement of Strategic Objective 2 (RSSH) and Strategic Objective 3 (HRG), although not necessarily to prioritize these areas.*". We are concerned that the finding that human rights, gender, and equity budgets decreased during grant-making does not represent the full picture. First, during grant making, efficiencies are often found in budget amounts which led to reductions and reallocations while maintaining targets. Second, in NFM2, matching funds could

¹⁰ The CLM SI will support the uptake and use of community-led mechanisms in order to inform and catalyze problem solving at the local level including corrective actions to improve access to, and quality of, HIV, TB and malaria services and program performance and support innovative use of data

¹¹ Malaria Matchbox, human rights baseline and mid-term assessments, human rights rapid programmatic mapping tool, safety and security assessments.

¹² Of the 11 BDB countries with Board approved grants by end December 2020, only 1 did not have human rights indicators in its performance frameworks.

be awarded through separate applications and grant making and so there were cases where the budget was removed after the funding request and combined into the human rights matching funds request that was later added to the grant, therefore the comparison of the funding request and the first board approved budget does not provide a picture of true change in funding level for these critical areas. Third, the Global Fund has actively worked to increase investment to human rights, gender, and equity during implementation through portfolio optimization and revisions. These higher investments in NFM 2 set the groundwork for the increased NFM 3 budgets as noted by the TERG.

Conclusion

The Secretariat thanks the TERG for our continued partnership to strengthen the impact of the Global Fund. The PCEs have provided a unique opportunity to undertake in-depth and real-time evaluation in eight Global Fund supported countries since 2017 and through the grant cycle (from funding request to grant making to grant implementation to transition to the next funding cycle). These reflections are timely as the Global Fund is developing its next strategy and will begin preparations for the next cycle of grants (2023-2025 allocation cycle) in 2021. Many of the recommendations as noted above are already being implemented and the Secretariat will continue to look at ways to improve operationalization both within the current strategy period and the next.

Recommendation	Level of Agreement	Level of Control
Rec 1: Improve grant-specific performance monitoring to inform implementation decisions		
Rec 1.1: Establish routine grant review processes at the country level		
Rec 1.2: Implement proposed reforms of the grant rating system		
Rec 1.3: Develop a set of indicative options to demonstrate how good and poor performance could be responded to		
Rec 1.4: Strengthen the use of revised RSSH indicators to address delayed implementation and potential deprioritization		
Rec 2: Build in more flexibility and responsiveness in implementation by simplifying grant revision processes to encourage their use throughout the grant cycle		
Rec 2.1: Consider flexibilities and streamlining of material program revision process		
Rec 2.2: Introduce flexibilities to PR and SR contractual arrangements and PF		
Rec 2.3: Examine how countries could strengthen data driven revision decisions		
Rec 3: In order to reduce gaps between policy guidance and grant design, improve communication around how to invest more strategically in RSSH, including CSS		
Rec 3.1: Clarify whether the primary objective of RSSH is to support the three disease programs or to invest more holistically in health systems strengthening		
Rec 3.2: Clarify specific Global Fund RSSH priority areas		
Rec 3.3: Ensure proper engagement and ownership from health system planning experts and leaders		
Rec 4: In order to improve grant contribution to equity and SO3, explicitly promote grant investments in these areas, including through more direct measurement of the drivers of inequity and of outcomes of human rights and gender investments		
Rec 4.1: Invest more in data and data use, to shed light on social determinants of disease burden and access to services		
Rec 4.2: Use this data effectively to monitor grant contribution to SOs		
Rec 4.3: Prioritize scaling up and incentivizing investments in HRG-related barriers to accessing services, including through timely revisions (Matching Funds/SIs)		