

Findings from the 2020-2022 Applicant Survey

TRP Review Windows 1-6 (2020-2021)

Executive Summary

1182 individuals responded to the Global Fund Country Dialogue and Funding Request Development Survey in 2020-2021. An overwhelming majority of respondents (over 94%) were positive about their overall experience applying for Global Fund financing.

The majority of respondents who had participated in previous funding cycles agreed that the application approach they used in 2020-2021 was simpler to fill in and took less time to develop than the one they used for the 2017-2019 funding cycle.

Nearly all respondents assessed their overall experience in country dialogue positively—with most responding positively to questions on inclusivity and almost half of them sharing that the country dialogue was their favorite part of the entire application process.

The proportion of comments related to Covid-19 halved from 2020 to 2021 and many respondents indicated that their country dialogue was more inclusive because of virtual participation. Several comments indicated that communities may need support in accessing internet data packages in order for them to fully participate in virtual dialogue.

When asked about different qualities of their Funding Requests (FRs), 96% of respondents thought that their Funding Requests were based on a National Strategic Plan. When asked whether human rights barriers, gender barriers, or health systems challenges had been well discussed and addressed in the development of their Funding Request, responses were slightly less positive, with averages between 87% and 89%.

Lastly, applicants were very positive about the support received from their respective Country Teams, deeming the contributions of the Country Team to be essential to a smooth and inclusive process.

This report starts with an [overview](#) of how the survey was conducted and who responded to it. Following are analyses of the [funding application process](#) through different lenses, such as component or region. Next, the report provides a focus on the experience of respondents in [country dialogue](#) and the [perceptions of the Funding Request](#) that was submitted. The report includes specific questions for those who used the [Tailored for National Strategic Plans](#) approach. Finally the report provides the perceptions of respondents of [Global Fund resources](#), [barriers](#) they experienced, of the [best part](#) of applying and of [priorities for improvement](#).

Overview of Dataset

The following is an analysis of responses to the Country Dialogue and Funding Request Development Survey (hereafter the “Applicant survey”) across the six 2020-2021 TRP Review Windows. Following submission of a Funding Request, each Country Coordinating Mechanism and Country Team were provided with a survey invitation which they were asked to forward to anyone who had participated in country dialogue or in the development of the Funding Request. A total of 1182 participants responded to the survey.

Quantitative questions used a 4-point Likert Scale, with 1 being low and 4 being high. The wording of the scale was tailored to the question (e.g., a scale of very poor to very good or from disagree strongly to agree strongly). Responses of either a 3 or a 4 are aggregated to indicate “positivity” to the question. Responses to each question were not required. Open-ended questions were included for respondents to provide additional context.

As seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents had helped develop a Funding Request using the Full Review application approach.

Table 1. Respondents across Application Approaches

Application Approach	Total Respondents (n)
Full Review	644
Tailored for Focused Portfolios	253
Tailored for National Strategic Plans	193
Tailored for Transition	54
Program Continuation	38
TOTAL	1182

Table 2 shows that there were notably more respondents from Core countries than from Focused or High-Impact countries.

Table 2. Respondents across Portfolio Type

Portfolio Type	Total Respondents (n)
Core	513
Focused	316
High-Impact	353
TOTAL	1182

The distribution of constituencies skewed towards greater representation of governments and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society groups, while there were fewer individuals from the private sector, academia, or faith-based organizations, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Respondents across Constituency Groups

Constituency Group	Total Respondents (n)
Academia	17
CCM Secretariat	73
Consultant/Technical Assistance Provider	45
Faith-Based Organization	15
Government program, ministry or agency	317
International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)	79
Key Population organization	213
Multi-lateral or bi-lateral agency	150
National NGO or civil society group	203
Other	15
Private Sector	34
Unclear	21
TOTAL	1182

A regional distribution of respondents is shown in Table 4, indicating a fairly equal representation across geographies with the exception of applicants from the Middle East & North Africa region and the High-Impact Africa 1 region. However, these two regions, along with Eastern Europe & Central Asia, also submitted fewer Funding Requests than many of the other regions.

Table 4. Respondents across Global Fund Regions

Global Fund Region	Total Respondents (n)
Central Africa	132
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	101
Latin America & the Caribbean	156
High-Impact Africa 1	63
High-Impact Africa 2	156
High-Impact Asia	125
Middle East & North Africa	79
South East Asia	105
Southern & Eastern Africa	117
Western Africa	148
TOTAL	1182

For sake of simplicity, all survey respondents are referred to as applicants for the remainder of this report. This report also rounds percentages to whole numbers, which may not add to 100%.

Funding Application Process

Applicants were overwhelmingly positive about their overall experience applying for Global Fund financing, with 94.4% of respondents stating that their experience was good or very good. This positive sentiment was slightly stronger among **returning applicants** (96% positive) than among **applicants applying for the first time** (92%).

Across the different application types, respondents were very positive about their overall experience, with all application approaches receiving averages above 90%. **Program Continuation** applicants were unanimously positive about their overall experience.

Returning applicants were largely positive about their 2020-2022 application being simpler to fill in than the one submitted for the last funding cycle (84%). At the same time, returning applicants were not equally in agreement when asked if the Funding Request submitted this cycle took less time to develop than the one for the last cycle (63%). This is likely driven by the higher percentage of Full Review requests submitted in this cycle compared to streamlined requests, such as a Program Continuation or Tailored approach (with Full Review requests rising from 24% of all requests in 2017-2019 to 46% in 2020-2022).

Although largely positive in responses to questions about their experience in applying, **Full Review** applicants were the least positive among the five application approaches, scoring lowest in all but one question, as shown in Table 6. Applicants were critical of the time taken to develop their application, noting that more work was required to fill in the forms:

“The detailed requirements and justifications and supporting documents have actually increased.”

While Full Review applicants noted the impact of Covid-19 on Funding Request development, these impacts would likely have been worse had the approach not already been so familiar to CCMs, to civil society, and to writing teams:

“The previous application process seem to have assisted our team to apply smart principles when responding to request.”

“Most of the civil society understands the process of the application and the hiring of the consultant made it easy to follow the process.”

Table 6. Experience Applying by Application Approach

Application Approach	Overall Experience	Returning: Simple to Fill In	Returning: Took Less Time	First-time: Straight-forward	Effort to Funding Appropriate	CT Provided Good Support
Full Review	91% (N=537)	80% (N=345)	56% (N=349)	70% (N=159)	73% (N=530)	91% (N=529)
Program Continuation	100% (N=33)	94% (N=17)	75% (N=16)	64% (N=14)	73% (N=30)	100% (N=31)
Tailored for Focused Portfolios	96% (N=211)	83% (N=129)	67% (N=129)	82% (N=51)	78% (N=192)	95% (N=149)
Tailored for National Strategic Plans	91% (N=150)	90% (N=104)	76% (N=103)	79% (N=48)	84% (N=148)	89% (N=149)
Tailored for Transition	95% (N=40)	100% (N=26)	78% (N=27)	86% (N=7)	84% (N=32)	94% (N=34)
Overall	93% (N=971)	84% (N=621)	63% (N=624)	74% (N=279)	76% (N=932)	92% (N=944)

Applicants using the **Program Continuation** approach had a very different perception of the approach, depending on whether they had participated in Funding Request development before. Returning applicants were 10 points above average in their perception of the simplicity of the form, whereas first-time applicants were 10 points below average in their perception of how straightforward the process was.

While first-time applicants generally spoke to country-specific frustrations, returning applicants shared that the process to develop a Program Continuation request still required a lot of effort:

“As far as completing the request is concerned, the level of complexity is the same as for the previous request.”

Though still largely positive, applicants who used the **Tailored for Focused Portfolios** approach identified further room for differentiation in the application approaches:

“Finally, given that [Focused Country’s] allocation is rather small comparing to other countries, I think that there needs to be in place a simpler and less demanding process of submission and finalization of the FR in such cases.”

Focused Portfolio applicants also shared encouraging signs that their countries were able to have inclusive country dialogue and productive Funding Request development despite challenges presented by Covid-19:

“[Having country dialogue] done virtually due to the pandemic meant that it was not particularly easy because of Internet connectivity issues, but it did also enable more participation of civil society.”

“Online work strategies were developed that sped up the work.”

Applicants using the **Tailored for National Strategic Plans (NSP)** application approach were more positive than the average for all applications in almost all questions asked. They were especially positive about the amount of work required for the level of funding provided. Returning applicants sometimes noted how much less time it took to develop a Tailored for NSPs Funding Request than the Full Review approach they had used in 2017-2019, though

they also noted that a well-developed NSP was crucial:

“I’m very positive about the tailored NSP funding request (provided that a robust NSP is available or developed), as it avoids repetition in providing data and info incorporated in the NSP. However, for countries that do not have robust NSPs, it would be difficult to use the new funding request template.”

“It did not take less time to fill in the funding request as the [National Malaria Control Program] had to develop the new NSP in parallel.”

While there were relatively fewer respondents who used the **Tailored for Transition** application approach, they had a very high percentage of positive responses for each question asked in this category. Notably, 100% of returning applicants found the approach simpler to fill in than what they had used in 2017-2019. In their written responses, they referred to the benefits of being able to rely on learnings from their previous experiences in applying for funding. Others praised the strong communication and support received from the Global Fund Secretariat, which helped to make the process less complicated:

“The funding process is clear and more efficient now that we have been involved in another grant, as we know more about it, which has made it easier to prepare.”

“The members of the country team gave us a lot of support; through our discussions we were able to pin down ideas together and define very specific targets on the path to achieving our goal.”

Table 7: Experience Applying by Global Fund Region

Region	Returning: Simple to Fill Out	Returning: Took Less Time	First-time: Straightforward	Effort to Funding Appropriate
Central Africa	85% (N=79)	60% (N=78)	53% (N=32)	74% (N=111)
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	89% (N=47)	64% (N=47)	82% (N=17)	88% (N=69)
High-Impact Africa 1	68% (N=31)	40% (N=30)	63% (N=24)	73% (N=56)
High-Impact Africa 2	88% (N=75)	64% (N=75)	82% (N=34)	86% (N=118)
High-Impact Asia	77% (N=65)	69% (N=65)	93% (N=30)	82% (N=97)
Latin America & Caribbean	88% (N=85)	65% (N=84)	71% (N=34)	80% (N=123)
Middle East and North Africa	79% (N=47)	57% (N=47)	75% (N=20)	67% (N=69)
South East Asia	86% (N=50)	70% (N=53)	79% (N=28)	71% (N=84)
Southern and Eastern Africa	89% (N=59)	71% (N=63)	61% (N=23)	70% (N=84)
Western Africa	80% (N=83)	59% (N=82)	79% (N=37)	67% (N=121)
Average	84% (N=621)	63% (N=624)	74% (N=279)	76% (N=932)

Differing opinions were also evident across the different Global Fund regions. As shown in Table 7, returning applicants from Southern and Eastern Africa or Eastern Europe and Central Asia found the form simpler to full-out than what they had used in 2017-2019, with both averaging 89% positive. While also majority-positive, applicants from High-Impact Africa 1 had an average of 68% percent positive, a spread of more than 20 points.

In open-ended responses, applicants generally identified problems in the process of filling out the form rather than with the form itself, with most either identifying Covid-related barriers or mentioning the additional work required to have a more inclusive country dialogue process:

“The formats for filling in the modules were the same. Civil society was more involved in the process this year.”

“Coordination was limited due to COVID hence most of the time we had to re do the activities.”

When returning applicants were asked whether the 2020-2022 form took less time to fill in than the 2017-2019 form, only 40% of applicants from the High-Impact Africa 1 region agreed. This is the only instance among this group of questions where a majority of applicants responded negatively. In contrast, 71% of applicants from Southern and Eastern Africa responded positively to this question, a 31-point spread. In open-ended responses, applicants from the Southern and Eastern Africa region spoke to the role of their Country Teams in ensuring that the Funding Request development process went smoothly:

“While guidance and forms need some time to understand how to fill, the Global Fund Country management was instrumental and helpful in supporting the country to meet address question and challenges and to make the process very smooth.”

“We were informed in good time prior to submission and received continuous support and guidance from the GFCT preparations.”

For first-time applicants, the spread was even larger when they were asked whether filling in the forms was straightforward, with a 40-point difference between applicants from Central Africa (53%) and High-Impact Asia (93%). Among those who disagreed, many shared that they had felt unequipped for meaningful participation:

“It was more about those already involved to complete the process. There was no support to new members to appreciate the process.”

“As first time participant with application i needed training on proposal development.”

When asked whether the amount of funding available was appropriate to the amount of work and time involved in developing a Funding Request, the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region was the most positive (88%) despite having the highest concentration of Focused Portfolio countries among regions. In contrast, regions with a majority of Core Portfolio countries (Central Africa, Southern and Eastern Africa, and Western Africa) all scored below the average of 76%. Comments from these respective regions did not provide common themes that would explain these differences.

Broadly, applicants were very positive about the support received from their Country Teams, with **92% of applicants agreeing or strongly agreeing that Country Teams provided good support to country dialogue and the Funding Request development process.**

Through their written responses, applicants consistently demonstrated the value of the Global Fund Country Teams’ involvement in the Funding Request development process. However, while most applicants appreciated the feedback from Country Teams, others felt coerced by them. Several applicants also felt that they could have been better equipped by their Country Team to participate in the development of their Funding Requests:

“Support from the Global Fund and other partners was of crucial importance.”

“They were domineering.”

“I expected the Country Team to do a detail country dialogue and training/sensitization on the funding application guidelines, materials, and other processes.”

“GF country team took part in majority of the events related to the development of country proposal.”

Table 8: Experience Applying by Component

Component	Returning: Simple to Fill Out	Returning: Took Less Time	First-time: Straightforward	Effort to Funding Appropriate
HIV/AIDS	87% (N=167)	69% (N=170)	77% (N=70)	74% (N=249)
TB	88% (N=57)	76% (N=59)	75% (N=28)	75% (N=91)
Malaria	84% (N=135)	64% (N=134)	78% (N=67)	76% (N=203)
RSSH	83% (N=23)	54% (N=24)	50% (N=18)	54% (N=41)
TB/HIV	82% (N=172)	59% (N=170)	72% (N=64)	82% (N=248)
Integrated	78% (N=67)	49% (N=67)	78% (N=32)	76% (N=100)
Average	84% (N=621)	63% (N=624)	74% (N=279)	76% (N=932)

Most returning applicants thought the forms for the 2020-2022 cycle were simpler to fill out than those in the 2017-2019 cycle, with an average of 84%. As seen in Table 8, applicants who had submitted integrated requests were less positive than average (78%), noting in their comments that integrated submissions were an additional challenge:

“The three programs conducted a single application, which is a bit complex.”

Integrated requests and Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH) standalone requests were significantly below average in whether they were assessed to have taken less time to develop than those used in the 2017-2019 funding cycle, with 49% and 54% positivity respectively. RSSH standalone requests were also scored significantly below average in how straightforward they were for first-time applicants (50%) and the appropriateness of the level of work and time needed to finish a request (54%). Applicants for standalone RSSH requests noted that a successful RSSH Funding Request process required strong country ownership throughout country dialogue, prioritization, and Funding Request development:

“It feels like a game to ensure the right interventions are included and who can be engaged in implementing them.”

“Country ownership and leadership is required to save time... This is particularly so for RSSH. There is need for strong leadership and capability for RSSH programming. The ease of applying for Global Fund funding depends on the country leadership and capability.”

When comparing responses from 2020 to those received in 2021, applicants in 2021 were much more positive in thinking that their Funding Request had taken less time to develop than it had in previous cycles, rising from an average of 62% in 2020 to 69% of responses in 2021.

By region, the largest changes were seen in Central Africa (from 59% to 69%), High-Impact Africa 2 (from 61% to 77%), and in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (from 58% to 82%). By component, the biggest change was seen in TB applications (from 72% to 88%). High-Impact Portfolios saw the biggest change by portfolio type (from 61% to 73%). These changes seem largely driven by Covid-19.

Table 9: Percentage of Comments Referring to Covid by Year and Perception of Funding Request Taking Less Time by Year

Category	2020	2021	Average
% Overall Experience Comments referring to Covid	9% (N=405)	4% (N=82)	8% (N=487)
% Country Dialogue Comments referring to Covid	9% (N=349)	5% (N=77)	8% (N=426)
Returning Applicants: Took Less Time	62% (N=515)	69% (N=109)	63% (N=624)

As shown in Table 9, 9% of open-ended responses from 2020 mentioned Covid-19 or Covid-19 challenges such as travel restrictions or virtual ways of working. In comparison, only 4% of responses from 2021 mentioned these challenges and many of these were written in a

positive light, mentioning greater inclusivity. While difficult to tell whether applicants had adjusted to working with Covid-19 or whether Covid-19 was having less of an impact in their countries, it does appear that Covid-19 was perceived as less of a barrier by 2021. This might explain part of the increase in positive perceptions on the amount of time that Funding Requests took to develop compared to the previous cycle. This might also indicate that a higher average for this question would have been expected had Covid-19 not interrupted ways of working.

Country Dialogue

As a whole, 93% of respondents rated their experience in country dialogue as positive overall. In fact, when asked about the best part of applying for Global Fund financing, the top response—representing 50% of respondents’ preferences—was participating in country dialogue.

Almost all constituencies responded with 90% positivity or higher about their overall experience participating in country dialogue. The greatest proportion of positive responses was among the **Country Coordinating Mechanism secretariats** (100%) and **government programs, ministries or agencies** (95%). At 64% positivity, **faith-based organizations** were significantly below average, with open-ended responses indicating a perception that not all participants were well-prepared to meaningfully contribute to the dialogue:

“An effort was made to call all health actors involved in the fight against tuberculosis but the discussions showed that only a small minority actively participated in the discussions perhaps due to a lack of information or interest?”

“The key populations and CSOs are consulted but they do not meaningfully engage and contribute. They are interested in receiving money to do advocacy but they are ill capacitated to craft interventions that can be put in the request.”

Table 10: Experience Applying by Component

Constituency, Group or Organization	Felt Free to Express Views	Felt Prepared to Participate	Active inclusion of CSOs and Key Populations
Private Sector	100% (N=27)	93% (N=29)	100% (N=28)
Academia	100% (N=15)	100% (N=15)	100% (N=15)
Multi- or Bi-Lateral Organization	95% (N=123)	98% (N=122)	89% (N=117)
Faith Based Organization	87% (N=15)	87% (N=15)	86% (N=14)
Organization of Key Populations	94% (N=168)	93% (N=166)	87% (N=164)
International NGO	96% (N=68)	93% (N=68)	91% (N=67)
National NGO or Civil Society Group	96% (N=161)	96% (N=161)	91% (N=162)
Government Program, Ministry or Agency	92% (N=261)	95% (N=261)	91% (N=253)
Consultant/TA Provider	88% (N=34)	94% (N=36)	91% (N=34)
CCM Secretariat	100% (N=60)	98% (N=62)	94% (N=64)
Overall¹	95% (N=960)	95% (N=961)	90% (N=943)

While 95% of all respondents stated that they felt free to express their views during country dialogue, all (100%) of 2020-2021 survey participants belonging to a **CCM secretariat**, the **private sector**, and **academia** responded positively. Of those that felt they were unable to express their views, many identified challenges with the roles of the Government and the Principal Recipient in the dialogue:

¹ Includes the responses for 36 applicants whose constituency was unclear or whose response to this question was blank

"I am not sure why Govt people and PR was there...Govt people were so dominating they didn't allowed or they have no patience to listen KP and on the other hand existing PR is sitting there and there was concern to speak certain areas about them!"

"The 'community' dialogue events were dominated by government officials and the PR; none of the presentations were delivered by community leaders."

At 95%, most applicants stated that they felt prepared to participate in country dialogue and add value to the development of the Funding Request. Many applicants identified challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic as being a barrier to participation, with data costs being a common theme:

"The Virtual consultations disadvantaged many Communities as data bundles was a challenge resulting in a Gov skewed process."

"Virtual meeting due to COVID-19 restrictions affected participation. Consultants had to work virtually with the groups and many community participants could not afford data costs."

Ninety percent (90%) of all applicants responded positively when asked if those coordinating country dialogue actively reached out to civil society. Faith-based organizations and organizations of Key Populations were slightly below this figure, with averages of 86% and 87% respectively.

Applicant satisfaction with their overall experience in country dialogue varies slightly across portfolio type, with applicants from **Focused Portfolio** countries responding the most positively (95%) and Core Portfolios the least positively (91%). Applicants from Focused Portfolio countries had the highest percentage of positive responses to each of the questions related to their experiences, with 97% feeling that they could express their views, 97% feeling that they were prepared to participate in country dialogue, and 94% feeling that organizers had actively reached out to civil society. Responses from Focus Portfolio countries reinforce these high ratings, with most applicants sharing that the process in their country was inclusive and transparent:

"Sub-recipients and people from key populations not benefiting from grants were convened, and there was broad consultation with those without a grant."

"The country dialogue was built on the basis of trust and respect for each organization and proposals."

Applicants from High-Impact Africa 2 had the least positive experience in country dialogue, with the lowest average among Global Fund regions for feeling free to express their views (87%), feeling prepared to participate (88%), and for feeling that civil society had been engaged (85%). In comparison, 98% of applicants from High-Impact Africa 1 felt free to express their views, 92% felt prepared to participate, and 96% felt that civil society had been engaged.

In open-ended responses, many applicants from High-Impact Africa 2 shared that they felt they had been consulted too late in the process to meaningfully inform the request:

"State actors and consultants did not involved non state actors until the document was ready for endorsement."

Applicants who used the Program Continuation approach were universally positive in their assessments of country dialogue, with 100% positive responses to each of the three questions. With a slightly lower rate of positivity, 93% of Full Review applicants felt free to express their views, 94% felt prepared to participate, and 89% felt that civil society had been engaged. Responses from Tailored for NSP applicants were similar to those from Full Review applicants, with scores of 94%, 95%, and 89% respectively.

Open-ended responses corresponded with the overall positivity towards country dialogue, with many more speaking to an inclusive process than to dissatisfaction. Among negative responses, several were from former Principal Recipients:

“Our only involvement was limited...as we are no longer deemed a Principal Recipient. Those responsible for coordination did not make use of our experience during the management of previous grants...”

“...The CCM did not allow previous PRs of relevant CSOs involved in the writing team once developing of the funding request strategies...”

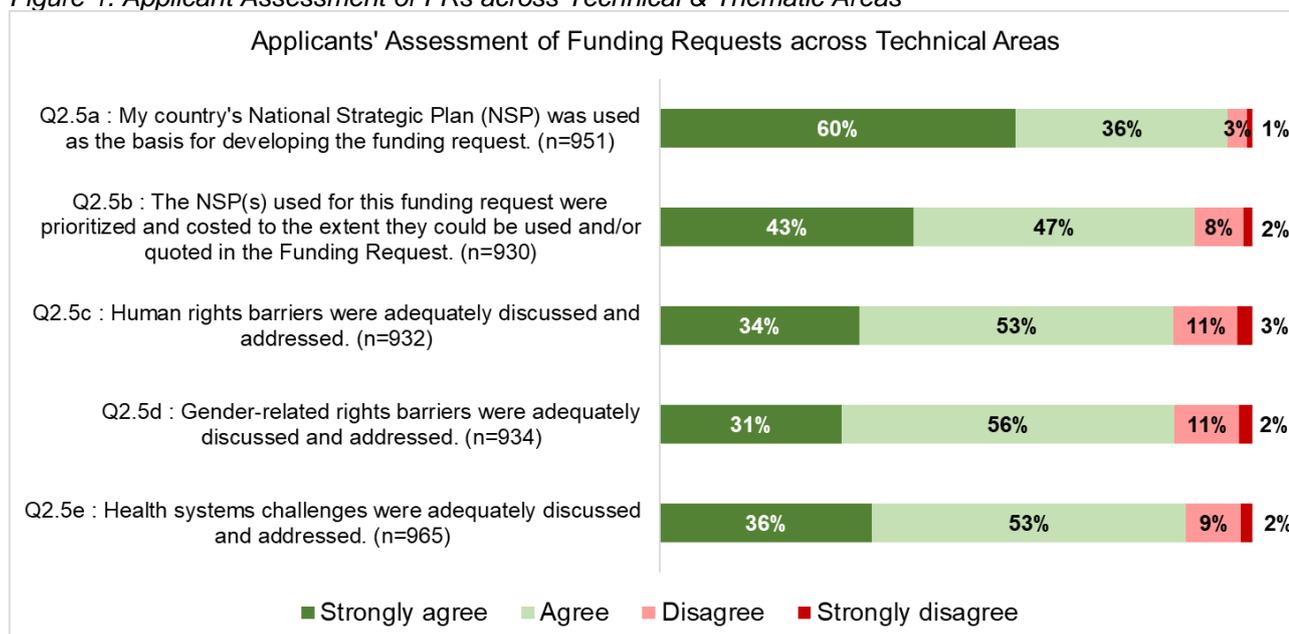
Comparing applicant experiences in 2020 to those in 2021, most trends identified in 2020 remained consistent in 2021. The only significant differences were that some applicants were even more positive that they felt prepared to participate and add value to the development of the Funding Request, with responses from organizations of Key Populations rising from 92% to 97% and from governments, ministries, or agencies rising from 95% to 100%. Open-ended responses indicated that these applicants did not feel supported in the initial transition to virtual dialogue, but that many now felt that they could participate more fully:

“As members of the key population we are part of the proposal committee, both virtually and in-person.”

“I worked in a country dialogue with a mixed methodology, that is to say with an in-person presence of few participants but a virtual presence which extended the participation to those in other places who could not meet because of Covid. Nevertheless, we had better information management and more opportunities to participate.”

Perceptions of the Funding Request

Figure 1. Applicant Assessment of FRs across Technical & Thematic Areas



Applicants were exceedingly positive about the use of the country’s NSP as the basis for developing the Funding Request (96% positive), as shown in Figure 1. In their comments, those who expressed disagreement raised concerns relating to using drafts of the NSP (because the document itself was still being developed), while others mentioned that additional inputs had to be coordinated to fill gender- and human rights-related gaps:

“It took quite a bit of engagement by the technical assistance team to embed human rights related barriers into the main applications [...] but overall consensus was reached, and human rights barriers appreciated and addressed.”

“The funding application was developed at the same time as the national plans. The drafts of some plans were used in order to meet the Global Fund deadlines.”

When applicants were asked about the NSP being prioritized and costed so that that this information could be used and/or quoted in the Funding Request itself, 90% of applicants responded positively. However, responses vary widely by portfolio, with 98% of Focused Portfolio countries saying the NSP was prioritized and costed compared to 87% of Core Portfolio countries.

Within Core Portfolios, lower scores were primarily from Full Review applicants, with an average of 86% compared to 93% for Tailored for NSP and 96% for Program Continuation. In their remarks, Core Portfolio applicants who submitted a **Full Review** application cited challenges relating to a lack of costing in the NSP or to the fact that the NSP was still in its development stages—and therefore missing some information.

In some cases, applicants mentioned that budgeting information was not shared in a timely fashion, or that political barriers obstructed some stakeholders’ access to the draft:

“Due to political instability in my country, it is very impossible to have access to NSP and if there is any in [Country] but we never refer to it or even have an idea if it is there.”

While applicants were overwhelmingly positive about the use of NSPs in Funding Requests, they generally noted more room for improvement when reflecting on whether health systems challenges (87%), gender (87%) and human rights (89%) were adequately discussed and addressed.

Though still largely positive, applicants from **Key Population Organizations** provided the lowest proportion of positive responses about human rights barriers being adequately discussed and addressed during the Funding Request development (78%). This contrasts with a 100% positive response among private sector applicants and 95% positivity amongst those on a CCM secretariat. Applicants from Key Population Organizations frequently shared that their needs were not being met in Funding Requests, with many highlighting that their needs were either not considered at all or were considered in a way that was not comprehensive or holistic:

“As mentioned previously KPs representative was not involved in writing team even our priority were put at PAAR. The country dialogue was not a process just a one day show.”

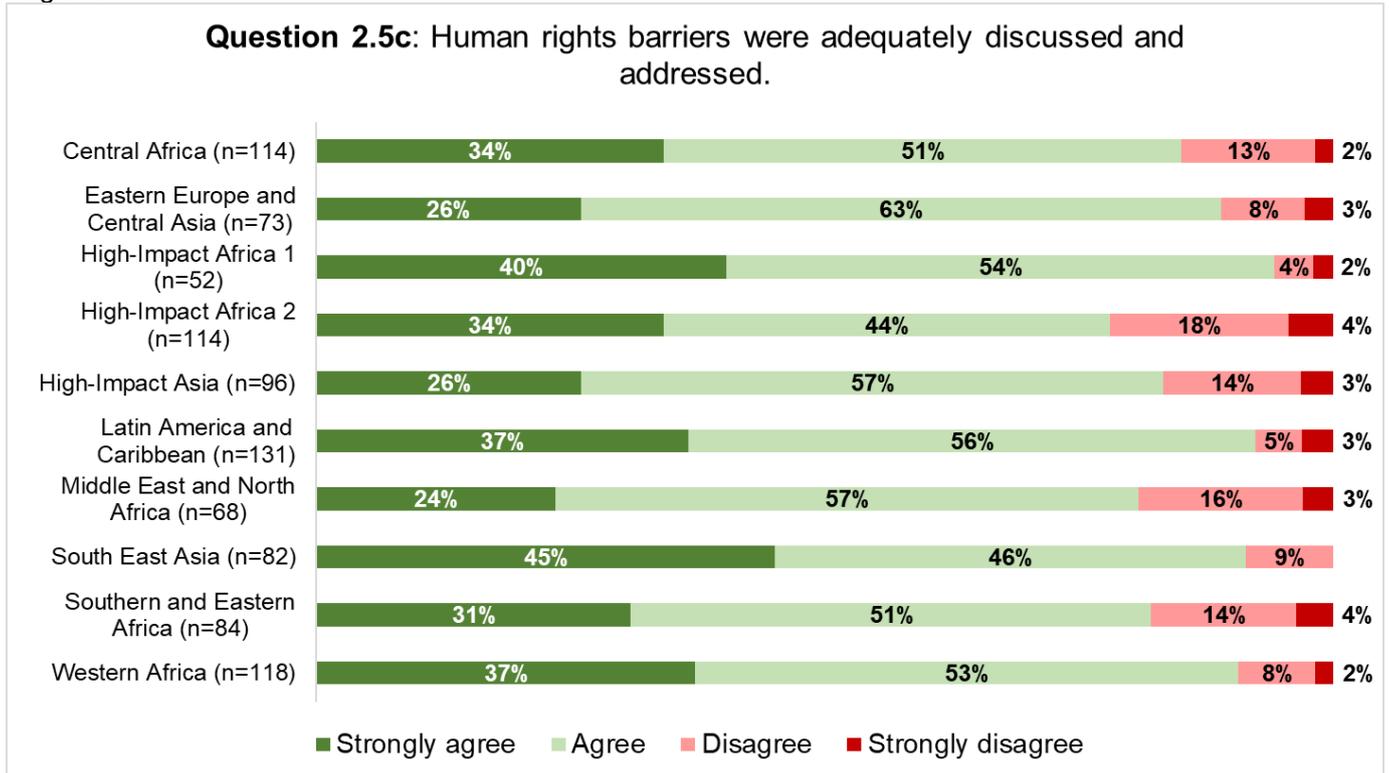
“Civil society in general does not see the proposal as being guided by a rights-based approach but rather as a list of needs that must be covered to avoid malaria. Basically, the issue is to incorporate a rights, equity, gender and generational approach into community strengthening.”

As seen in Figure 2, applicant opinion on whether human rights barriers were adequately discussed and addressed varied widely by region, with 94% of applicants from High-Impact Africa 1 responding positively, compared to 78% of applicants from High-Impact Africa 2. Though still largely positive, this is a gap of 16 points. Applicants from High-Impact Africa 1 noted that the voices of key and vulnerable populations had been involved in the development of NSPs:

“Representatives of the key areas and population groups concerned took part in developing the NSPs.”

“The country's strategic plan has, in my opinion, taken on board all the communities’ concerns.”

Figure 2. Applicant Assessment of Human Rights Barriers Being Discussed & Addressed across Global Fund Regions



In contrast, applicants from High-Impact Africa 2 shared that their NSPs did not adequately address human-rights barriers and that they were unable to access technical assistance to improve human-rights approaches in their Funding Requests:

“NSP was used as a guide though issues around gender and human right were not adequately captured in the document.”

“TA was unavailable to assist with the development of a robust approach to address human rights and gender barriers with the funding request.”

When asked whether their Funding Requests had adequately discussed and addressed gender-related barriers, most constituencies had positive responses at a rate close to the average of 87%, with the greatest outlier being applicants from the private sector who had an average of 96%.

With an average of 91% positivity, applicants from **Focused Portfolio** countries were the most positive in their assessments of whether their Funding Requests addressed gender barriers, compared to 87% among High-Impact countries and 84% among Core countries. Respondents from Focused Portfolio countries shared that they benefitted from the discussion and subsequent inclusion of gender-related barriers in the Funding Requests. Some respondents mentioned that, in certain cases, gender barriers were already included in NSPs. Other respondents expressed that the inclusion of gender-related barriers was facilitated by strong health sector governance in their country:

“Human rights barriers, gender-related rights barriers and Health systems challenges were adequately discussed and addressed and proposed and agreed interventions for implementation that are part of NSP and FR.”

“Round tables were held among the populations and a consensus was reached that we have made good progress [...]”

Applicants from **Focused Portfolio** countries also responded most positively when asked whether their Funding Requests adequately discussed and addressed health system

challenges (94%). While most constituencies had positive response rates close to the overall average of 89%, consultants and TA providers had a rate of 82%. However, among consultants and TA providers, 100% of those supporting High-Impact Portfolio countries thought that health systems challenges were addressed, compared to 70% supporting Core Portfolio countries.

In open-ended responses, consultants to Core Portfolio countries spoke to recurring system challenges that were discussed but that needed additional support to be overcome:

“The enabling environment in the [region] for HIV is very poor but little or no activities to address this were included. This is because it requires a lot more time and thought as to how to address CRG issues, and with money being tight the actual commodities etc. were deemed to be more important.”

“There is still a need for a stronger coordination between vertically organized TB and HIV systems in [Country] and for the overall integration of TB- and HIV-related services into the primary health care system. The country is yet to go a long way in operationalizing the Universal Health Coverage agenda and developing people-centred models of TB care.”

Perceptions of how health system challenges were addressed varied by component, with applicants assessing TB/HIV (90%), HIV (90%), and Malaria (90%) Funding Requests significantly higher than RSSH (81%), TB (84%) or Multicomponent (84%) Funding Requests. In open-ended responses, applicants noted that there were barriers to their full participation in developing RSSH programs:

“Because Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH) is not disease-specific, our Country Coordinating Mechanism does not support our full and meaningful participation in understanding and setting priorities.”

“Our health system is very complex, which makes maintaining an ongoing dialogue impossible. Having a multisectoral strategic plan was difficult at that time.”

“As mentioned we were not given much opportunity to understand nor question the decisions made. Even if platform given it was intimidating to want explanation of what others were conversant of.”

When comparing responses from 2021 to 2020, perceptions of applicants from Core Portfolio countries about their Funding Requests dropped significantly. While the majority of applicants still responded good or very good, responses were still lower for every question: prioritized and costs NSP (87% to 79%), human rights (87% to 72%), gender (85% to 70%) and health systems (88% to 75%). While there was no clear trend among open-ended responses as to why NSPs were less well-costed and prioritized than in 2020, less positive responses to the other questions were driven primarily by a single Funding Request. This request was for a country classified as a Challenging Operating Environment and applicants were discouraged by the challenges they were unable to address within the request:

“CRG has always be a challenge in a grant that is about essential services.”

“NSPs were used to inform the request...While human rights and gender issues were discussed in great detail, they are inadequately addressed in the FR mainly due to the limitations in funding and the geopolitical context. This applies also to health systems challenges.”

Questions for Tailored for NSPs Applicants

Collectively, applicants were overwhelmingly supportive of the **Tailored for NSPs** application approach, with 95% of respondents agreeing that they would recommend the application to other countries. Applicants also thought that using the approach saved time (92%) and resulted in a better-quality Funding Request (95%).

Nonetheless, some respondents did identify areas for improvement and further consideration. In their remarks, some applicants commented that the maturity of the NSP

posed a challenge, and that extra work was required during Funding Request development to overcome the weaknesses of these NSPs. More broadly, many applicants praised the Tailored for NSPs approach, stating that it resulted in a Funding Request that was responsive to the countries' needs:

“The approach of adapting to the national strategic plans provides an opportunity to update or fully develop in advance robust national strategic plans. [...] However, this approach required a lot more work for the national strategic plans which needed more in-depth work or underwent a major overhaul.”

When asked if they would recommend the Tailored for NSPs approach to other applicants, respondents from **Core** (97%) and **High-Impact** (93%) portfolios were exceedingly positive. In their remarks, applicants mentioned that the Tailored for NSPs approach facilitated strategic discussion around Funding Request priorities and target setting. They mentioned that this application approach ‘put people on the same page’ and saved time by framing the discussion, keeping it focused on the NSP. Lastly, some shared that the approach contributes to achieving the NSP:

“When the application is based on the national strategic plans it works better because it’s made on a factual basis and everyone is on the same page so we are sure that the country will provide leadership to assume its responsibilities.”

“This type of funding request contributes to achievement of NSP.”

While still agreeing that the NSP approach saved time, that it resulted in a higher-quality request, and that they would recommend the approach, many applicants highlighted the importance of inclusive engagement during NSP design in addition to during the Funding Request development process:

“Before using the NSP for a funding application it was necessary for all component stakeholders to be invited to participate in developing it.”

“If civil society actors, PLHIV and key population groups had participated in the development of the strategic plans the application process would be easier and more targeted.”

Taking all inputs into account, some areas to continue monitoring moving forward include:

- **NSP Maturity:** Where the preceding NSP was strong, drafting the Funding Request while the successor NSP was in development was a positive experience. However, where the preceding NSP was weak, drafting the Funding Request and the NSP simultaneously resulted in more work and challenges.
- **Inclusive NSP Development:** The Tailored for NSP approach works better when stakeholders, including Key Populations, are involved in the development of the initial NSP as well as the Funding Request.

Perceptions of Applicant Materials and of Global Fund Resources

Overall, applicants responded overwhelmingly positively to survey questions gauging their perceptions of the application materials—all receiving 90% positive responses or higher. The Applicant Handbook was the most well-perceived resource offered, with 99% of applicants who used the handbook rating it highly. This was closely followed by the application forms, the Modular Framework Handbook, and the Global Fund website, each with 98% positive ratings.

It is worthwhile to note that 18% of respondents did not know that the Global Fund e-learning courses were available, while another 17% of applicants reported that they did not use this

resource. Similarly, 16% of applicants did not know that the Global Fund had offered webinars and in-person meetings, while a further 13% of respondents shared that they did not use these resources despite knowing about them. Finally, 16% of applicants did not know about the FAQs and 14% didn't use them.

Barriers to Resources

Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, 36% of applicants responded that they faced no barriers in applying for Global Fund financing.

Among those who did face barriers, however, the most common setback was the lack of connection to the Internet or a telephone, with 17% of applicants responding that this was a challenge. Members of Academia and Consultants most frequently encountered the obstacle of finding the right resource among resources available (18% each). Many members of Key Population Organizations and members of civil society were either unaware of the resources available to them or could not find the resources in their language (14% and 11% respectively).

Best Part of Applying

When asked about the best part of applying for funding, the greatest proportion of applicants indicated participating in the country dialogue (with 48% responding in favor).

The second most popular choice was being a part of or supporting the CCM (with 41% of applicants marking this as one of their favorite parts of applying for funding).

Lastly, 36% of applicants stated that one of their favorite aspects of applying for Global Fund financing in 2020 was being able to access the information they needed.

Priorities for Improvement

When asked to prioritize areas of improvement for the Global Fund, the top priority identified by applicants was to provide clearer instructions and materials. The second-highest priority for applicants was for the Global Fund to provide more webinars and other opportunities to interact with and seek clarification from the Global Fund Secretariat. In third place, the Global Fund was asked to make it easier to find needed resources on the Global Fund website. Providing a broader availability of topics as eLearnings on the Global Fund's iLearn platform was the least desired area of improvement.