

Secretariat Management

Response

External Evaluation of the Prospective Country Evaluations (PCEs)

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.

The external evaluation of the Prospective Country Evaluations (PCEs) was conducted at a critical juncture when the Global Fund was in the process of transforming its independent evaluation function to improve and strengthen accountability, evidence-based decision making and learning from evaluation evidence within the organization. At its 46th Board Meeting, the Global Fund approved a new model for independent evaluation. The new model is designed to address "pain points" in the current evaluation approach that were identified through previous independent reviews; several of these "pain points" resonated with findings and recommendations in this evaluation.

The Secretariat broadly endorses the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation and agrees that the original intent of the PCEs was overly ambitious and broad, with diverse audiences, varied needs and expectations, and was therefore unable to meet all its intended objectives.

Areas of agreement

The Secretariat agrees that the PCE annual synthesis reports were an effective medium for collating key learnings from across the individual country evaluations (Recommendation 1¹). Regular and succinct compilation of independent evaluation evidence, that is aligned to key strategy and grant-making decision-making periods or specific aspects of Global Fund operations and policies, is a useful tool for the Secretariat and governance bodies. Within the new evaluation model, the

¹ Annual synthesis reports, which draw on independent country level evaluation reports, to present a more comprehensive assessment of the GF business model, are useful and should continue. This function is not readily available through other GF M&E mechanisms.

responsibility for managing timely compilation of evaluation evidence will fall under the new Secretariat evaluation unit which will be overseen by an Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP).

The Secretariat agrees that PCEs should no longer be the model for country-level evaluation in light of the extensive ‘hindering factors’ identified (Recommendation 2²). However, the Secretariat recognizes that independent country evaluation serves an important purpose in enabling a feedback mechanism between country-level partners and the Secretariat and governance bodies to identify and strengthen aspects of the Global Fund operations and policies to achieve greater impact. At a conceptual level, the Secretariat supports the suggestion in the TERG Position Paper of a rolling program of independent country evaluations but agrees with the evaluation recommendation that considerable design modifications from the PCE approach are warranted to address the design deficiencies. This requires considerable further discussion including with country level stakeholders and the Secretariat recommends that the new approach for country-level independent evaluation should be managed and implemented under the roles and responsibilities of the operation structures of the new independent evaluation function.

The Secretariat agrees that better arrangements for learning from independent country evaluation is required (Recommendation 3³) and that this needs to be supported through approaches tailored at country-level to ensure ownership, utility, and learning (Recommendation 7)⁴. These issues have been some of the main drivers for strengthening the independent evaluation function and have played a pivotal role in the design of the new model approved by the Board. The Secretariat embraces learning from independent evaluation but recognizes that efforts to strengthen learning and accountability are not confined to the last stage of the evaluation process, they need to begin from ensuring relevance of evaluation questions, to ensuring quality of evaluation reports and subsequent recommendations.

Timely dissemination and access to country-level and synthesis reports is critical to ensure that findings are utilized in a timely manner (Recommendation 6⁵). The Secretariat notes that an evaluation policy or standard operating procedures (SOPs) can bring clarity to expected roles, responsibilities as well as timelines for dissemination and publication of reports. SOPs will be developed in 2022 under the new model and relevant policies updated and aligned accordingly.⁶

With respect to Recommendations 9⁷ and 10⁸, the Secretariat concurs with the evaluation findings that M&E capacity building and strengthening national data quality systems should not be the role of independent evaluation. However, these are important areas of focus for the Global Fund and

² PCEs should no longer be the model for country level evaluation based on the extensive ‘hindering factors’

³ Much better arrangements for learning from independent country evaluations are needed and the TERG and Global Fund Senior management should jointly give this attention, working with other stakeholders to understand what will help learning. The issues to address which would help support include greater ownership at country level, country engagement and use, greater receptivity to independent evaluation in the Global Fund Secretariat, utility of findings for programming; accountability for follow up and action; timescales for commenting on reports and follow up and dissemination.

⁴ Greater space should be built into the approach for tailoring at country level to ensure ownership, utility and learning.

⁵ More timely and effective dissemination of the country and synthesis reports is required, including public access so that all stakeholders can access the findings.

⁶ There is a Strategy Committee approved TERG Documents Procedure for publication in place which will be revised and/or superseded with a new procedure after the transition to the new independent evaluation function.

⁷ The objective of capacity building around M&E, while important, cannot be easily delivered directly through PCEs or its success and should be addressed through other routes as it is already the case. To the extend strengthened country level analytical capacity is secondary result of independent evaluation, that capacity is secondary result of independent evaluation, that capacity can be leveraged to support other country or regional monitoring, evaluation and research needs.

⁸ Improving data quality, which is also an important objective also cannot easily be delivered directly by independent evaluation and should be addressed through other routes such as Global Fund grants for HSIS.

the Secretariat will continue to support data systems strengthening and data use by funding analytical capacity strengthening efforts through grants, technical assistance and partnerships, normative guidance provided by the Secretariat and the Strategic Initiative for Data.

Observations on other recommendations

The evaluation highlighted the need for more time for Board-level discussions on annual evaluation synthesis (Recommendation 4⁹), and while the Secretariat partially agrees with this recommendation it is noted that there is a need to ensure a balance between strategic and more operational or managerial agenda items to be considered by governance bodies. In particular the mandate of the Strategy Committee already represents a significant level of effort from members to discharge core duties. However, as the prioritization of agenda items is within the purview of the Strategy Committee and Board Leadership and as such the Secretariat has limited control on this recommendation. It is also observed that the number of evaluations taking place concurrently has impacted the Secretariat and governance bodies to fully review and discuss evaluation findings and that this should be taken into consideration when developing the evaluation calendar and the procedures around dissemination of findings and development of commentaries. For strategic performance reporting for the next Strategy, the Secretariat will strive to better integrate evaluation evidence in these reports.

The Secretariat agrees that more effective accountability mechanisms to ensure action on evaluation recommendations are required (Recommendation 5)¹⁰ and notes this is a challenging and complex issue related to quality and ownership of recommendations and how they formulated. This is a priority area to address in the new evaluation function. However, to have effective accountability mechanisms at country level and with respect to other partners, there needs to be ownership and agreement to evaluation recommendations being taken forward into action plans which may not always be in control of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat acknowledges the important role of operational and implementation research as identified in Recommendation 8¹¹ and agrees that this very distinct from independent evaluation. CCMs are encouraged to include, where relevant and appropriate, operational research studies aimed at addressing implementation challenges and bottlenecks in funding requests and grants as appropriate. The Secretariat recommends investments in M&E systems (including operational research) are based on the gaps and country needs, as well as total available resource envelopes but does not concur with the TERG position that 5% of the total grant be systematically allocated to M&E. The Global Fund has developed a Data Use for Action and Improvement framework that highlights the key principles and requirements of an M&E system and provides guidance to countries on prioritization of investments according to the maturity of the country M&E systems. Countries that are building-up their HMIS, for example, need to invest much more than countries with mature systems.

⁹ There should be sufficient time allotted by the SC for in depth discussion of the synthesis finding at SC and Board level, to ensure ownership and follow through from the highest level.

¹⁰ More effective accountability mechanisms at both an organizational and country levels are required to ensure action on the recommendations.

¹¹ Although the PCEs were unable to often provide real time feedback, continuous program quality improvement and testing of innovations as originally envisioned in the PCE Charter, this evaluation found strong demand for this across country stakeholders and Secretariat. Separating this function from the independent evaluation and financing an operational/implementation research agenda driven by CCM and Fund Portfolio Manager's priorities would be an important contribution to support programmatic learning and improvement. The Global Fund may wish to explore how to best fund this type of research.

Conclusions

Independent country evaluation provides a critical feedback mechanism between country partners, Secretariat and governance bodies and helps to identify areas that require improvement or course correction to achieve greater impact; the Secretariat is committed to ensuring this type of feedback mechanism continues. Based on the ‘hindering factors’ identified and value for money considerations noted in the report, the Secretariat agrees that the PCE approach should be discontinued, and country evaluation should not only be focused in eight countries. The focus of independent evaluations and countries selected need to be based on priority learning and accountability needs that are systematically identified with the Board, Strategy Committee, Secretariat and country partners.

As part of the establishment of the new Global Fund independent evaluation function, an approach for country-level independent evaluation will be articulated and the Secretariat will continue to undertake consultations with the TERG, future IEP and country partners, to make sure the new approach will address tensions around country ownership, dissemination to country and global level audiences and accountability mechanisms.

We thank the TERG for our continued partnership in strengthening the impact of the Global Fund partnership.

Summary of Recommendations

Insert table with summary of recommendations and level of agreement and control

Recommendation	Level of Agreement	Level of Control
1. Annual synthesis reports which draw on independent country level evaluation reports to present a more comprehensive assessment of the Global Fund business model are useful and should continue. This function is not readily available through other Global Fund M&E mechanisms.		
2. The mode of implementation of independent country evaluation and the synthesis which is one of the outcomes of this needs considerable design modifications to address current deficiencies and deliver better value for money.		
3. Much better arrangements for learning from independent country evaluations are needed and the TERG and GF senior management should jointly give this attention, working with other stakeholders to understand what will help learning. The issues to address which would help support include greater ownership at country level, country engagement and use, greater receptivity to independent evaluation in the GF Secretariat, utility of findings for programming; accountability for follow up and action; timescales for commenting on reports and follow up and dissemination.		
4. There should be sufficient time allotted by the SC for in depth discussion of the synthesis finding at SC and Board level, to ensure ownership and follow through from the highest level.		
5. More effective accountability mechanisms at both an organizational and country levels are required to ensure action on the recommendations.		
6. More timely and effective dissemination of the country and synthesis reports is required, including public access, so that all stakeholders can access the findings.		
7. Greater space should be built into the approach for tailoring at country level to ensure ownership, utility and learning.		
8. Although the PCEs were unable often to provide real-time feedback, continuous program quality improvement and testing of innovations as originally envisioned in the PCE Charter, this evaluation found strong demand for this across country stakeholders and the Secretariat. Separating this function from the independent evaluation and financing an operational/implementation research agenda driven by the CCM and FPMs priorities would be an important contribution to support programmatic learning and improvement. The Global Fund may wish to explore how best to fund this type of research.		

9. The objective of capacity building around M&E, while important, cannot easily be delivered directly by the PCE or its successor and should be addressed through other routes as is already the case. To the extent that strengthened country level analytical capacity is secondary result of independent evaluation, that capacity can be leveraged to support other country or regional monitoring, evaluation and research needs.		
10. Improving data quality, which is also an important objective, also cannot easily be delivered directly by independent evaluation and should be addressed through other routes such as the GF's grants for HSIS		