Evaluation of the Global Fund Funding Request and Grant-making Stages of the Funding Cycle

Final Report

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EURO HEALTH GROUP

Evaluation of the Global Fund Funding Request and Grant-Making Stages of the 2023-2025 Funding Cycle – Grant Cycle 7 (GC7)

Final report

Submitted 23 September 2024

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A2F	Access to Funding
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CRG	Community Rights and Gender
CT	Country Team
CSO	civil society organization
CSS	community system strengthening
EHG	Euro Health Group
ELO	Evaluation and Learning Office of the Global Fund
EQ	evaluation question
FA	funding application
FGD	focus group discussion
FGHI	Future of Global Health Initiatives
FPM	Fund Portfolio Manager
FR	funding request
GAC	Grant Approval Committee
GC7	Grant Cycle 7 (2023-2025 Funding Cycle)
GC8	Grant Cycle 8
GEM	Gender Equality Marker
Global Fund	The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and malaria
GM	Grant-making
GMD	Grants Management Division
GOS	Grant Operating System
GMFRF	Grant-Making Final Review Form
HPMT	Health Product Management Template
KI	key informant
KII	key informant interview
KVP	key and vulnerable population
LFA	Local Fund Agent
LLIN	long-lasting insecticide net
LOE	level of effort
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MSM	men who have sex with men
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSP	national strategic plan
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OPM	Operational Policy Manual
PAAR	Prioritized Above Allocation Request
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis
PR	Principal Recipient
PWUD	people who use drugs
RSSH	Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health

SBN	Secretariat Briefing Note
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SIID	Strategic Investment and Impact Division
SR	sub-recipient
TA	technical assistance
TAP	technical advice and partnerships
TRP	Technical Review Panel
UHC	universal health care
UQD	Unfunded Quality Demand
WS	Workstream

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **evaluation aims** to assess the design, operationalization, and implementation of the Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) Funding Request and Grant-making (FR/GM) processes to determine their effectiveness in producing quality grants aligned with the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028). It also seeks to capture real-time learning to provide recommendations for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8). The evaluation focuses on two main objectives: **Effectiveness,** examining if the FR/GM processes lead to grants aligned with national priorities and support to the delivery of the Global Fund Strategy, and **Efficiency,** evaluating if the related procedures and processes are fit for purpose and identifies opportunities for improvement, rationalization, and simplification.

The **primary audience** for the evaluation includes the Global Fund Secretariat teams responsible for designing the FR/GM processes, as well as governance and review bodies, and technical partners. The **scope** targets the FR/GM continuum of the GC7 grant cycle, examining key process steps, sub-processes, procedures and deliverables to assess overall efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, the evaluation investigates priority 'levers' to determine their value add and the effort required by applicants to complete them. Covering the period from 2023 to April 2024, the evaluation includes all Global Fund-eligible countries that submitted FRs and received grant approvals within this timeframe.

Evaluation methodology and limitations

The evaluation of GC7 Funding Request and Grant-making processes used a **process tracing methodology**, developing hypotheses and 60 tests to assess efficiency and effectiveness of key FR/GM steps. Data collection included 30 key informant interviews, focus group discussions with 54 key informants (KIs), review of 170 GC7-related documents, and analysis of 13 Funding Requests across the nine sampled countries. A '100 pennies' survey in which 73 KIs assessed the effort and value of key FR/GM steps. Quantitative analysis used aggregated budget, internal tracker, and survey data across the portfolio to support the evaluation's aims.

Various analytical approaches, including process step analysis, thematic analysis, and power analysis, were applied to ensure robust findings, assessing the efficiency, effectiveness, and resource intensity of each step, as well as revealing how power dynamics influenced FR/GM processes. Triangulation and a strength of evidence rating ensured confidence in the findings, with most questions receiving a strong rating. **Limitations** included challenges in accessing diverse key informants and data gaps, mitigated through collaboration with the Evaluation and Learning Office and triangulation of primary and secondary data sources.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: GC7 FR/GM processes have been effective in generating high quality, implementation-ready grants that support the implementation of the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028):

- Maturity and established practices of the Allocation-based Funding Model has enabled efficiencies.
- Tailored analyses of epidemiological and programmatic gaps help steer countries' Funding Requests and help prioritization of Focused portfolios.
- Country dialogue is effective in ensuring broad based stakeholder engagement and contributes to strengthening the quality, alignment and relevance of grant design.
- Global Fund Secretariat advisory and country team inputs support grant preparedness, planning, and key FR/GM processes.
- Independent review by TRP enhances the quality and technical soundness of FRs.

However, despite best intentions to differentiate and simplify FR/GM processes the volume of information requirements, guidance, inputs, and approvals that have evolved in relation to the different steps are often perceived by stakeholders interviewed as complex and unwieldy, compromising the effectiveness of FR/GM processes. The following conclusions highlight the weaknesses of FR/GM processes.

Conclusion 2: The 'start from scratch' nature of the FR/GM process every three years has implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant: Applying for funding every three years creates pressure points during grant implementation. Planning for new grants begins midway through the current grant period, intensifying in the final year. This cycle introduces inefficiencies, such as increased workload for implementers and slower startup of new grants. Longer grant cycles could provide stability and continuity, reducing the administrative burden and allowing consistent focus on programmatic goals.

Conclusion 3: Differentiation has not simplified FR/GM processes for either the Secretariat or countries: Differentiation has not significantly reduced administrative loads or enabled faster access to funds. Complex internal reviews and grant-making processes negate benefits from lighter Funding Request approaches. The high volume of required information across all GC7 FR approaches demands similar efforts, diminishing the intended effect of differentiation.

Conclusion 4: Multiple and often unclear technical support and compliance roles of Secretariat teams hinder efficiency of the FR/GM continuum: Notable in GC7 is the significant volume of inputs from different technical and functional teams which are heavily focused on FR/GM processes. Whilst such inputs aim to enhance the quality and compliance of FR/GM processes, the number of different teams involved in reviewing, endorsing or signing off documents, particularly during GM, has inadvertently led to greater complexity and inefficiency. This is exacerbated by unclear technical support and compliance roles and responsibilities at different steps, resulting in excessive and sometimes duplicative inputs.

Conclusion 5: The proliferation of Secretariat-based information needs drives complexity and workload in FR/GM processes: The broad scope of the Strategy, multiple Board/donor interests, and value-for-money/results pressures have increased Secretariat requirements, particularly in GC7. These requirements create operational demands on the Secretariat and country programs with questionable added value in relation to country needs or grant quality. New levers, indicators, and annexes increase complexity, requiring further inputs for monitoring, analysis, compliance, and reporting. There is currently no effective mechanism in place with gatekeeper power and authority to make decisions on the feasibility and utility of additional requirements.

Conclusion 6: The significant investment of Secretariat time and effort on the FR/GM stages of the grant cycle limits the streamlining of grant processes: The current emphasis overshadows the need for investment in grant implementation, which would allow more streamlined and continuous grant monitoring and review processes. This would reduce the pressure on countries from the current tight FR/GM timelines and facilitate smoother transition between grants while supporting a greater focus on program outcomes.

Conclusion 7: TA continues to be a vital component in establishing high-quality FRs due to the complexity and expansion of Global Fund guidance and requirements: TA remains critical in establishing high-quality Funding Requests due to the complexity of Global Fund requirements and in strengthening NSPs as foundational documents for FRs. Increased engagement by TA providers in GC7 highlights their importance in navigating requirements and ensuring effective FR and NSP development. TA will likely continue to be essential in supporting simplified FR implementation and focusing on national health or disease strategic plans.

Conclusion 8: The guidance and assessment on RSSH funding have shown weaknesses that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of RSSH investments: The lack of timely RSSH assessments and specificity in Allocation Letters regarding RSSH funding amounts complicates program split decisions and affects FR approaches. These challenges highlight the need for clearer guidance on RSSH funding from country allocations and more timely assessments which could enhance the efficiency of decision-making processes and support countries in making informed, strategic decisions that align with their broader health priorities and universal health coverage ambitions.

Recommendations

The evaluation generated actionable recommendations for improving the FR/GM processes through three interactive meetings with stakeholders to ensure they were relevant, actionable, and aligned with the needs of process owners and users. The Evaluation team recognizes that to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness of end-to-end FR/GM processes, fundamental changes to the current Global Fund modus operandi are required. A new approach is recommended based on the following recommendations:[1]

Recommendation 1: Introduce an extended (6-year) planning cycle increasingly aligned to NSPs/NHPs and support light-touch review to extension. CRITICAL

Operationalization: All countries develop a 6-year (costed) Funding Application (FA). Only the first 3 years will be funded per replenishment cycle. At the 3-year point a new FA is not required but the existing 6-year FA is updated. Continuous monitoring and review including NSPs should negate the need for NSP update at 3-year extension point.

- **Start of 6-year cycle:** 3-month FA/GM process using simplified and streamlined application materials (FA form and annexes), including streamlined country dialogue, TRP conditions start at this point.
- **3-year extension point:** *Light* review process including updating FA package in line with next 3-year allocation amount.
  - Scope of grant and prioritized interventions right-sized to new allocation.
  - Light country dialogue.
  - Updated detailed budget and Performance Framework targets.
  - TRP review applicable when over US$ 50 million[2], or under US$ 50 million threshold if poorly performing or material change required. Opt-in option for TRP review applicable to all portfolios.

Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach 'Funding Application'. CRITICAL

Operationalization: Introduce a new and simplified FA template/form and reduce the number of required annexes for all portfolio types.

- **Submission documents:** NSP/NHP, FA form, Budget, Performance Framework, and limited number (up to 11) mandatory annexes.

[1] Recommendations have been classified as critical, important and for consideration in accordance with ELO guidance on formulating recommendations. For classification, see footnote 221 page 64.

[2] The $50m threshold was arrived at to enable a significant streamlining of the level of effort required for FR/GM processes. Using TGF publicly available data on 27 June 2024, in GC7 119 finalized grants were below the $50m threshold 58 grants above the threshold. The current TGF threshold for non-material grant revisions is $30 million (per Guidelines for Budgeting 1 Dec 2023). In GC7 by 27 June there were 84 grants signed under $30m and 93 above $30 million. The evaluation team considers the $50 million threshold appropriate when accompanied by the three conditions of performance, materiality and FPM decision to opt-in to a review.

- **TRP:** Strategy Committee to update and resource amended TRP Terms of Reference (to consider)
- TRP review frequency and quantity of materials to be reviewed to decrease.
- TRP review is on the FA package only.
- Review membership – balancing disease and cross cutting; increased country experience.
- Right size TRP LOE for start and 3-year extension (if a TRP review is needed).
- Develop and resource a plan to differentiate TRP review further, enabling greater focus on HI/Core as needed and less on Focused countries.
- Improve ways of working including focused and contextualized issues and actions applied consistently to reviews.
- Reduce length of Secretariat Briefing Notes to provide context and additional information to TRP pre-review and/or have a pre-engagement meeting to provide essential context to TRP members.
- ***Additional consideration:*** Develop a single, lighter, and right-sized country dialogue.

Recommendation 3: Streamline grant-making processes by ensuring the right people provide inputs at the right moments. CRITICAL

Operationalization:

- **Secretariat teams:** Review and better define the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat teams, including strengthening decision-making power of country teams (CTs) and clarifying Strategic Investment and Impact Division Technical teams' support to CTs (e.g. reorient Secretariat Technical teams' roles, establishing clear boundaries for technical inputs, adjust internal processes and guidance to clarify roles, define differentiated levels of inputs, GAC engages GM in strategic advisory role).
- **Pre-GAC and GAC:**
    - Separate GAC strategic advice and compliance functions, ensuring that strategic advisory role takes place during GM and that pre-GAC fills a purely compliance role.
    - Formalize pre-GAC compliance function with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
    - Review purpose of and reduce participants in pre-GAC, Executive Session, and Plenary GAC meetings.
    - Use electronic GAC approval to the Board for grants below US$ 50 million[3] with no strategic/outstanding issues, and alternative GAC review modalities for grants above US$ 50 million or with strategic/outstanding issues.
    - Further systematize format and completion of GMFRF form and reorient key messages to red flags/issues for discussion in plenary GAC. Include more system generated data.
- ***Additional considerations:***
    - Review and reduce 4-week timeline for submission to GAC.
    - Consider specific steer on how iterative/continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM.
    - Explore use of AI in GAC compliance checks.

[3] The $50m threshold was arrived at to enable a significant streamlining of the level of effort required for FR/GM processes. Using TGF publicly available data on 27 June 2024, in GC7 119 finalized grants were below the $50m threshold 58 grants above the threshold. The current TGF threshold for non-material grant revisions is $30 million (per Guidelines for Budgeting 1 Dec 2023). In GC7 by 27 June there were 84 grants signed under $30m and 93 above $30 million. The evaluation team considers the $50 million threshold appropriate when accompanied by the condition of there being no strategic/outstanding issues.

Recommendation 4: Provide targeted support to country NSPs/NHPs during the grant cycle using external TA and Technical Partners. CRITICAL

Operationalization: Intentionally orientate technical partners and external TA inputs to strengthening of the content of, and prioritization of evidence-based interventions in the NSP/NHP. Work with technical partners on synthesizing lessons learned and tools for prioritization.

Recommendation 5: Develop a 'gatekeeper' role with the authority to uphold the internal goal to achieve simplification in GC8. IMPORTANT

Operationalization: Decide and develop terms of reference and set-up for a gatekeeper function (which could be at the level of process owners, or a cross-team governance mechanism) with power and authority to review and decide on additional information needs.

- The gatekeeper role will:
    - Maintain an overview of the new FA/GM continuum and understand the various forces and incentives driving complexity and proliferation of information requirements, processes, systems.
    - Discuss and decide on what information and guidance is essential to implement prioritized indicators to guide implementation and other critical functions.
    - Ensure all information needs, processes and guidance are updated and finalized at least six months before Allocation Letters are sent to countries.

Recommendation 6: Ensure grant priorities, including for RSSH, are identified prior to the start of FA. FOR CONSIDERATION

Operationalization:

- SIID technical teams and CTs undertake priorities for step change analysis pre-Allocation Letter issuance, to inform and steer on strategic prioritization of FAs based on NSPs/NHPs.
- Timely assessment of RSSH using redesigned RSSH priorities and gaps analysis.
- Provide clearer guidance on funding range for RSSH, specifying the percentage range for GC8, to incentivize countries to plan in longer term horizons.

1 Introduction and background

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria has been instrumental in combating HIV, TB, and malaria, providing essential financial and technical support to end these epidemics, strengthen health systems, and more recently respond to COVID-19, and prepare for future pandemics. The Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028), "Fighting Pandemics and Building a Healthier and More Equitable World,"[4] (hereafter referred to as "the Strategy") outlines its vision to achieve universal health coverage and end the three epidemics by 2030. Developed through an extensive consultative process[5] the Strategy reflects a broader and more integrated approach to addressing the diseases and Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH).

Every three years the Global Fund undertakes a replenishment of resources to deliver the Strategy and funds are allocated to eligible countries. For countries to access their Global Fund allocation, two main stages are involved: (1) developing a Funding Request (FR) by the Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) with wider country stakeholders, reviewed by the independent Technical Review Panel (TRP), and (2) creating grants through the Grant-making (GM) process which involves negotiating grant design and budgets and reviewing final grants through Grant Approvals Committee (GAC) processes for Global Fund Board approval. Grants are approved based on implementation-readiness[6] for the start of the grant cycle Implementation Period.

The FR/GM stages of the Global Fund grant lifecycle are critical to ensuring Global Fund investments are aligned with the Strategy and used to accelerate progress toward ambitious national and global goals. The 2023-2025 allocation period - Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) - commenced with the start of the Strategy and allocated US$ 13.128 billion to 126 countries[7] across three portfolio categories[8], operationalized through up to seven application 'Windows'.[9] As of 12 July 2024, 128 FRs were approved by the Board.[10] These FRs spanned 105 countries and included 8 multi-country FRs across East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America, North Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the Western Pacific.[11]

The GC, including FR/GM steps, processes, decisions and deliverables, represents an intensive period for the Global Fund Secretariat and country level stakeholders and requires extensive stakeholder engagement throughout. Recognizing the time and resources required to apply for funding and design quality grants, especially during the final year of implementation for existing grants, the Global Fund has differentiated FR/GM processes. This is done for efficiency purposes including reducing disruption to country programs and enabling more time for ongoing grant implementation.

[4] Fighting pandemics and building a healthier and more equitable world, Global Fund Strategy 2023-2028. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/11612/strategy_globalfund2023-2028_narrative_en.pdf

[5] The open consultation alone involved over 5,500 individuals from over 50 countries, with a wide range of regions and stakeholders represented, over 60 percent of which identified as from civil society or communities. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10263/strategydevelopment_2020openconsultationfirstround_synthesis_en.pdf

[6] Implementation-ready means that on the first day of implementation of the new IP, PRs will have staff in place, with signed contracts; signed contracts with sub-recipients; signed contracts with the suppliers of health products and critical services; and an agreed workplan for the first year of implementation. https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/grant-making/implementation-readiness.

[7] https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/12676/fundingmodel_2023-2025-allocations_overview_en.pdf

[8] The three portfolios include: Focused Portfolios which are generally smaller portfolios, with a lower disease burden, and a lower mission risk; Core Portfolios are generally larger portfolios, with a higher disease burden, and a higher mission risk; High Impact Portfolios are generally very large portfolios with mission-critical disease burdens. Challenging Operating Environments and Transitioning components further differentiate portfolios.

[9] Applicants are required to submit their FRs for the 2023-2025 allocation period during "windows" within the three-year time frame which extend from March 2023 (Window 1) through to Quarter 1 2025 (Window 7). These windows are scheduled to enable the TRP to meet and assess the FRs.

[10] EHG analysis of the Global Fund internal Funding Request Tracker, 12 July 2024. The Global Fund.

[11] What's new and different: Grant-making for GC7. The Global Fund, 14 March 2023.

These approaches have included, for example, fast-tracking well-performing programs (Program Continuation), leveraging existing National Strategic Plans (NSPs) and documentation, and requesting less information from Focused portfolios where the total level of investment is lower compared to Core and High Impact portfolios.

While the basics of the Allocation-Based Funding Model remain largely unchanged from GC6, GC7 introduced a number of changes to FR/GM processes including:

- A strengthened technical focus expected for FRs and grants.[12]
- Updates to Global Fund technical guidance and Information Notes.
- Updates to Global Fund application forms and documents[13] such as the Performance Framework, Detailed Budget, Programmatic Gap tables, Funding Landscape tables and the Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR) which have been aligned with the updated modular framework.
- The introduction of additional annexes and levers to shape investments in support of strategic priorities (see EQ4). The full list of GC7 annexes required is in Annex 2, Section 5.

For GC7, the Global Fund advises applicants to use one of five differentiated FR approaches in the country Allocation Letter: Program Continuation, Full Review, Tailored for NSPs (Tailored for NSP), Tailored for Focused Portfolios, and Tailored for Transition. Each approach is differentiated from each other, requiring different application forms, application questions and annexes with varying levels of detail.[14] GC7 also introduced differentiated grant-making processes for Focused Portfolios, including four GM models featuring lighter processes and fewer detailed GM deliverables, aimed at maximizing the impact of limited allocations to Focused Portfolios.[15] Differentiated FR approaches determine the levels of review by the TRP, which also uses differentiated review methods for GC7.[16] For GM, new areas for GC7 focus on translating the Strategy into grant design including through starting GM processes earlier (advanced GM in the FR stage and upon TRP submission) and 'priorities for step change' i.e. incorporating priorities into grant design and selection of interventions that support program essentials.[17]

The efficiency and effectiveness of the GC7 FR/GM processes are increasingly important in the context of global health developments, including the Future of Global Health Initiatives (FGHI) report and the Lusaka Agenda[8] which explicitly calls for greater alignment and acceleration of GHIs' systems and processes with country systems, such as supporting one national plan. The Lusaka Agenda also emphasizes the need to simplify and align grant application and disbursement processes, reduce the administrative burden on countries, and ensure greater flexibility and responsiveness.[18,19]

[12] The funding model has strengthened its focus on systems for health which are integrated, people-centered and contribute to building pandemic preparedness; the engagement and leadership of communities; health equity, gender equality, the elimination of stigma and discrimination and the removal of other human rights-related barriers to HIV, TB and malaria services; and more comprehensive approaches to domestic resource mobilization. A strengthened focus on Value for Money (VFM) considerations is also evidence and has been integrated across different sections of the GC7 application materials. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/12199/core_2023-2025cycle_faq_en.pdf.

[13] For more details on these documents please visit: https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/applying-for-funding/design-and-submit-funding-requests/funding-request-forms-and-materials/

[14] Noting that the Tailored for Focused Portfolios application form and instructions also cover the Tailored for Transition approach; hence there being four sets of application forms and instructions across five approaches. The only difference in the Tailored for Transition application approach is that an additional Transition Annex is required to be submitted.

[15] Aligned, Targeted, Light, Legacy, source: Grant-making in GC7: Make and sign high quality grant to deliver impact (Part 1 of 2) slide set made available to the team during the inception onboarding sessions.

[16] https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13013/trp_review-approaches_manual_en.pdf.

[17] What's new and different: Grant-making for GC7. The Global Fund, 14 March 2023.

[18] https://futureofghis.org/final-outputs/global-fund/

[19] https://futureofghis.org/final-outputs/lusaka-agenda/

Given the changes introduced in GC7 and the importance of the FR/GM stages of the grant life-cycle, along with the goal of optimizing resources allocated to financial, grant, procurement and supply chain management processes and systems by 20-30 percent,[20] an independent evaluation of these processes was considered essential to capture real time learning and ensure that findings and recommendations are ready for GC8 preparations (from mid-2024 onwards).

2 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Assess the design, operationalization, and implementation of the GC7 FR/GM process and the degree to which this has led to the finalization of quality grants aligned with the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028).
- Capture learning as close to real time as possible and ensure findings and recommendations are available to contribute to preparations for GC8.

The purpose of the evaluation is expected to be met through exploring the following **two objectives**:

- *Effectiveness:* To assess whether the GC7 FR/GM processes lead to quality grants that are aligned with national priorities and support the delivery of the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028).[21]
- *Efficiency:* To assess the extent to which FR/GM procedures and processes are fit for purpose and achieve their intended objectives, and to explore opportunities for improvement, rationalization and simplification of FR and GM processes, for both applicants and the Global Fund Secretariat.[22]

The principal users of the evaluation findings and recommendations will be the Global Fund Secretariat teams that design the different processes involved in FR/GM. In addition, governance and review bodies and Global Fund technical partners are key audiences for this evaluation as implications of the recommendations may go beyond Secretariat accountability and require different ways of working across the Global Fund partnership during the grant cycle. Lessons learned and good practices emanating from the evaluation findings may also apply to country level stakeholders.

2.1 Scope of the evaluation

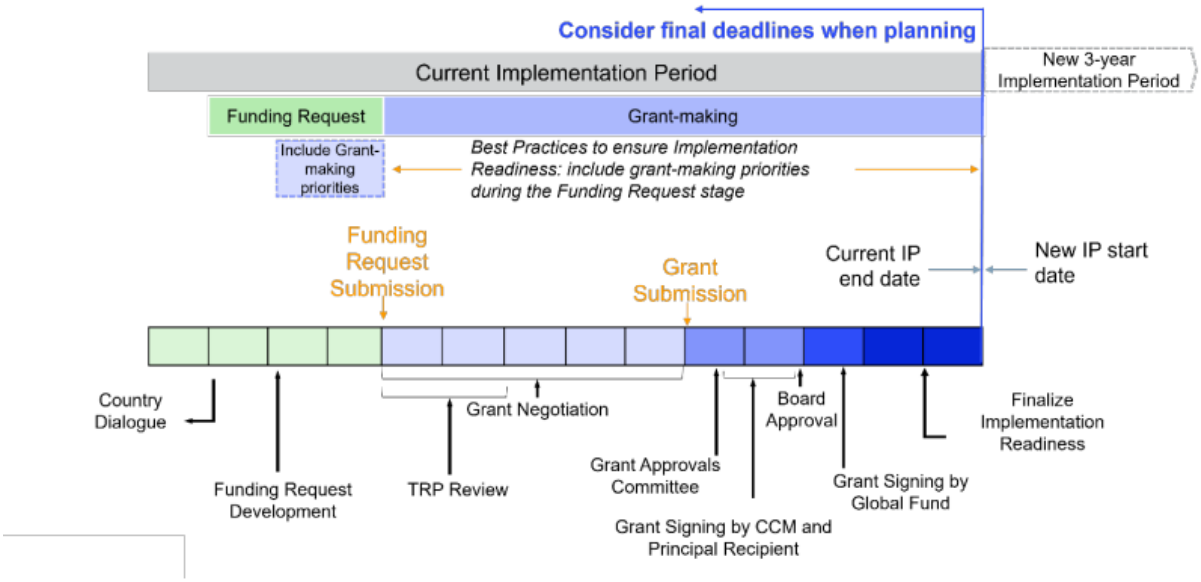
The evaluation timeframe spans the GC7 period from the start in 2023 through to April 2024. The geographic scope encompasses all Global Fund-eligible countries that submitted FRs for GC7 and whose grants were approved as of April 2024.[23]

The scope of the evaluation targets the FR/GM continuum of the GC7 grant cycle, examining the steps, procedures, processes, sub-processes and deliverables within the steps, see the figure below. In relation to Figure 1, the evaluation team mapped and identified a set of priority process steps for analysis in the evaluation. The evaluation explored these aspects *individually*, to understand the purpose, necessity, and added value of each step, and *collectively* to comprehend the flow and coherence of these processes, allowing for an assessment of the overall efficiency and effectiveness

[20] This target referred to in the Secretariat internal memoranda on Organizational Planning.
[21]For the purposes of the evaluation, *effectiveness w*as concerned with how well outputs achieve/deliver desired outcomes. The assessment of effectiveness focused on the extent to which the FR/GM process results in high quality and implementation-ready grants. This included assessment of the added value of each step in the FR/GM process.
[22] For the purposes of the evaluation, *efficiency* was defined as: the relationship between inputs and outputs, usually to maximize outputs for a given level of input. The assessment of efficiency focused on the extent to which the FR/GM process, and the many processes that underpin it, was conducted in an economic and timely way. The term 'economic' refers to resource intensity and the level of effort required to conduct the process(es).
[23] EHG analysis of the Global Fund internal Funding Request Tracker, 4 April 2024. The Global Fund.

of end-to-end FR/GM processes. Implicit in this approach was the need to understand the roles, responsibilities, interests, and incentives of the different stakeholders engaged in these processes.

Figure 1: Key steps, sub-processes and deliverables in the FR/GM stages[24]



In addition, the following priority 'levers' and the extent to which these add value to FR/GM processes including in relation to the level of effort (LOE) required by applicants to complete them was in scope (see further explanation of the levers in EQ4).

Table 1: Priority levers in scope

Funding request stage	Grant-making stage
• Program Essentials • RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex • Funding Priorities from Civil Society and Communities Annex • Gender Equality Marker • Advanced grant-making	• Ongoing country dialogue • Priorities for step change • Implementation Readiness

2.2 Out of scope

The following areas are **out of scope** for the evaluation:

- The implementation of the approved GC7 grants, including the outcomes and impacts.
- An independent assessment of the quality of approved grants.[25]
- A systematic costing exercise of FR/GM process steps.[26]

[24] Source: The Global Fund Applicant Handbook 2023-2025 Allocation Period, October 2022 edition. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4755/fundingmodel_applicanthandbook_guide_en.pdf. Although specific timelines for each step were not specified in the Applicant Handbook, it states that the overall process from FR to grant signing can take 'around 9 months (or longer in some cases, depending on the length of grant-making)'.

[25] The evaluation is concerned with the FR/GM processes that enable quality grants to be developed and approved, rather than the quality of the grant itself.

[26] The evaluation did not conduct a systematic costing exercise of FR/GM process steps but explored the resource intensity and added value of certain process steps.

- A systematic comparison or aggregated analysis of GC7 data with previous grant cycle data.[27]
- A comprehensive review of technical assistance (TA) modalities and their contribution to FR/GM.[28]
- Extensive analysis of areas covered by previous or upcoming evaluations (such as the recent allocation methodology and forthcoming evaluation of community engagement).[29]
- Regional and multi-country grants and Matching Funds have not been included for analysis in the nine sampled countries.

3 Evaluation questions

Based on discussions with the Evaluation and Learning Office of the Global Fund (ELO) and the Secretariat during the inception phase, the following evaluation questions were agreed and are addressed in Section 5.

Table 2: Final evaluation questions

1. Funding request development
Theme 1: Differentiated application approaches • EQ1: Are FR processes sufficiently differentiated to accommodate diverse portfolios and has differentiation led to more streamlined and simplified procedures?
Theme 2: Country dialogue, funding request development, prioritization • EQ2: How effective are country dialogue processes in ensuring prioritization in FRs; supporting national and Global Fund strategic priorities and goals; and responding to the priorities of key stakeholders? • EQ3: How and to what extent do differential power dynamics between key actors (incl, CCM, Govt/ministry of health (MoH) representatives, civil society, PRs, Country Team (CT), other Global Fund actors) during FR and GM processes affect the effectiveness and efficiency of these processes? • EQ4: To what extent has the introduction of new levers[30] designed for GC7 added value to the FR and GM process in relation to the level of effort required by applicants to complete them, and improved the quality of FRs and grants? • EQ5: How effective and efficient are GC7 application and guidance materials from the Secretariat (application forms, annexes, allocation letter, information notes, technical briefs, applicant handbooks, e-learning, webinars) in providing direction and support to intended users? • EQ6: How effective has (external) TA been in FR development and how does it affect country ownership and country capacity to develop funding requests?
2. Grant-making
Theme 3: Review bodies (TRP, GAC) • EQ7: How efficient and effective have TRP review processes been in enhancing the strategic focus, prioritization, and potential impact of grants?

[27] The evaluation team did not conduct a systematic comparison of GC7 with previous Global Fund grant cycles. However, for directly comparable data on some aspects of the evaluation's analysis comparison was made.
[28] The evaluation considered use and effectiveness of TA primarily at the country level through two bilateral 5 percent set-asides.
[29] Aspects of community engagement included the review of continued country dialogue in grant making, and also the utility and added value of the CSC annex.
[30] The question refers to the introduction of the new levers found in Section 2.1.

- EQ8: How efficient and effective is the GAC review process, including engagement with partners, in determining final grants are designed for maximum impact and implementation readiness?

Theme 4: Grant negotiation (during grant-making)

- EQ9: To what extent does the GM process effectively build on the FR, and result in final grants that are consistent with the TRP recommended FR. What explains any variance?
- EQ10: How efficient and effective are GM processes to enable the development of implementation-ready grants? What factors are helping or hindering progress?
- EQ11: How effective are GM processes in ensuring grants support national and the Global Fund strategic priorities and goals; and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders?

4 Methodology

4.1 Process tracing

Process tracing[31] is the core methodological approach used in the evaluation's design, methods, data collection strategy and analysis.[32] This method involved establishing a hypothesis and tracing causal mechanisms between a sequence of steps or processes to assess their effectiveness in achieving the expected outcomes. Sixty tests along the FR/GM continuum were established and evidence generated from multiple sources was triangulated and analyzed to review the contribution of the test to the overall hypothesis.

The review of the tests found 65 percent 'scored' a green or amber, indicating that the test fully held (13 percent) or did not fully hold true or fully false (52 percent) respectively, due to relatively balanced mixed evidence. Twenty-two percent of the tests scored a red, indicating that the test did not hold true to a major extent. Thirteen percent of tests were not assessed due to insufficient data, or the test was deprioritized by the evaluation team as awareness increased on the relative importance of the tests. While the process tracing tests were helpful in understanding each step of the FR/GM grant cycle, a substantial volume of evidence was also generated for the EQs beyond the tests for the review of the process tracing tests against the hypothesis).

Process tracing was applied as follows:

- **Inception Phase:** Process steps across the FR/GM continuum were listed in line with the Global Fund's Operational Policy Manual, mapped to EQs, and prioritized for their importance to overall efficiency and effectiveness. Specific tests were developed for each prioritized step.
- **Data Collection Phase:** Process tests guided data collection and identified gaps. Tools like key informant interview (KII) question banks and the '100 pennies' survey (Section 4.2.4) were developed based on these tests and EQs. Secondary quantitative data from Global Fund databases was mapped to process tests, while qualitative evidence was thematically coded by EQ and process tracing test.
- **Reporting Phase:** Data from process tracing tests were triangulated and organized by EQs for analysis. This ensured a clear connection between evidence, analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

[31] Collier D (2011) identified four tests to judge to analyze processes and infer causality: Straw in the wind; hoop; smoking gun; doubly decisive test.
https://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/Understanding%20Process%20Tracing.pdf

[32] Further information on the methodological approach for this evaluation was provided to the ELO as supplementary background information to this evaluation report.

Process tracing helped answer the EQs by examining evidence generated from the tests, addressing specific steps during the FR/GM stages, and allowing detailed analysis of sub-processes to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the FR/GM continuum.

4.2 Data collection

4.2.1 Global-level key informant interviews and document review

To understand the evolution, roles and responsibilities, and level of effort of key GC7 FR/GM processes from the perspective of the **Secretariat process owners/stewards**, the evaluation team conducted 30 KIIs and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 54 KIs. In addition, the evaluation team conducted individual and group interviews with 17 members of review panels and committees including the TRP, GAC, and Strategy Committee members, and TA providers including the UNAIDS Technical Support Mechanism (TSM) and Expertise France. A summary of key informants consulted is available in Annex 4.

The desk review comprised 170 documents, including: (1) application forms and annexes; (2) guidance materials; (3) evaluation reports from major TA providers; and (4) prior evaluations and reviews of FR/GM processes. See Annex 3 for a list of documents reviewed.

4.2.2 Country grant analysis

The evaluation team conducted a review of 13 FRs and final approved grants across nine sampled countries, with the aim of understanding whether, how, and why the GC7 FR/GM steps and processes were being operationalized as intended including within the expected timelines, from **a country/user's perspective**. The sample of countries and grants reflected a range of portfolio types and differentiated approaches (see Table 3), informed by consultations with the ELO, Access to Funding (A2F), and Grant Management Division teams during the inception phase.

Table 3: Sampled countries

Country	Portfolio	Grant	Application approach
Philippines	High Impact	PHL-T-PBSP	Full Review
		PHL-H-PSFI	Full Review
Tanzania	High Impact	TZA-H-MOF	Tailored for NSP
		TZA-M-MOF	Program Continuation
Vietnam	High Impact	VNM-H-VAAC	Full Review
		VNM-T-NTP	Tailored for NSP
Nigeria	High Impact	NGA-S-NTBLCP	Full Review
Indonesia	High Impact	IDN-H-SPIRITI	Full Review
		IDN-S-SG MoH	Tailored for NSP
Senegal	Core	SEN-Z-MoH	Full Review/Program Continuation
Lesotho	Core	LSO-C-MoF	Program Continuation
Mauritius	Focused – *light*	MUS-H-NAS	Tailored for Transition
Paraguay	Focused - *light*	PRY-H-CIRD	Tailored for Focused

To inform this analysis, the evaluation team reviewed FRs and grant documentation prepared by applicants, Global Fund country teams, TRP and GAC to assess the content and quality of many of the global documents and trace the operationalization of FR/GM processes through to an approved implementation ready grant. The evaluation team also interviewed a total of 104 people in the nine

sampled countries (30 individual KIs and 74 KIs in 23 group interviews), including country teams, CCMs, Principal Recipients (PRs), Technical working groups (TWGs) and writing teams. Quantitative data at the country-level was also used to inform process tests and EQs.

4.2.3 Secondary data analysis

To further the aims of the evaluation, the evaluation team conducted quantitative analysis related to FR/GM processes of GC7 grants to date, using aggregated budget, internal tracker, and survey data across the portfolio. Each dataset received from the Global Fund (listed in Annex 3) was mapped to key process steps and assessed for its utility, relevance, completeness, and quality. Initial descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, median, and interquartile range, were used to summarize numeric and count data by portfolio, region, TRP outcome, and component, if this information was available in the dataset. Depending on data distribution, a Chi Squared analysis[33] was conducted to assess significant differences across portfolios, regions, or TRP outcomes. Data analysis was carried out using Stata 18, R Statistical Software (v4.1.2), and Microsoft Excel. Key limitations are presented in Table 5.

4.2.4 '100 pennies survey'

A '100 pennies survey' was conducted, in which respondents were asked to allocate 100 pennies to key FR/GM steps reflecting the LOE required to complete the steps and the perceived added value to the production of high-quality, implementation-ready grants. The survey was designed to ascertain the level of effort and value added for key FR/GM process steps, and when relevant, FR annexes. Respondents involved in FR development were also asked about the relative LOE and added value of FR annexes. The survey was completed by 73 key Global Fund Secretariat business owners (Access to Funding and country teams) and interviewed country KIs, with a 23.3 percent response rate. See Table 5 for limitations.

4.3 Analytical approaches

The evaluation team applied various analytical approaches to inform the evidence and findings to address the EQs and recommendations. Data and analytical methods were triangulated to ensure a robust base of quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the EQs.

4.3.1 Process step analysis

The process tracing approach enabled systematic analysis of data for each test and EQ to assess if steps and processes were working as intended and their contribution to the overarching hypothesis. This analysis also evaluated the resource intensity of steps which may or may not add value in relation to the quality of the final approved grant and identified areas within the FR/GM process that could be simplified.

4.3.2 Thematic analysis

Documents and KII notes were thematically coded and analyzed against the process tracing tests and EQs. This helped identify and correct areas with less robust evidence and assess the strength of the evaluation findings.

4.3.3 Power analysis

The evaluation team used a modified "3-i" framework (interests, institutions, ideas)[34] to explore power dynamics and stakeholder relations during the FR/GM phases. This analysis identified the

[33] Pearson's chi-square tests were run to test whether the observed frequencies of, e.g., survey responses, were significantly different than frequencies expected if responses were unrelated to respondent categories. Significance was defined as $p < 0.05$.

[34] Understanding Policy Developments and Choices Through the "3-i" Framework: Interests, Ideas and Institutions (ncchpp.ca)

presence of power dynamics along the FR/GM continuum, and the shift in those dynamics between steps and processes.

4.4 Triangulation and strength of evidence

The evaluation relied on the triangulation of evidence – the extent to which the range of evidence points to the same finding – across and within categories of data sources to determine the strength of evidence for findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Collating and coding quantitative and qualitative data in a structured way in line with the evaluation matrix supported the triangulation process and minimized the risk of bias. Triangulation included:

- Data drawing on multiple sources of information from the Global Fund databases, KIIs and document review.
- Data drawn from various respondent types, like Global Fund Secretariat, Board and external stakeholders at global level, CCM and implementing partners, and other country level stakeholder categories.

All data sources were considered alongside strengths and limitations when triangulating to establish findings. Where there was conflicting evidence, this has been noted in the report. A strength of evidence rating has been used to orient the users of the evaluation report to the strength of each EQ *summary finding* (see Table 4). Most EQs had a rating of 1, indicating strong triangulation.

Table 4: Robustness rating for high-level findings

Rating	Assessment of key findings by strength of evidence
Strong (1)	Evidence comprises of multiple data sources (which enables triangulation from at least two different sources) which are of good quality and/or evidence is repeated by multiple KIIs of different stakeholder categories.
Moderate (2)	Evidence comprises of multiple data sources (which enables triangulation from two data sources) of acceptable quality, and/or the finding is supported by fewer data sources of good quality.
Limited (3)	Evidence comprises of few data sources across limited stakeholder groups (limited triangulation), or generally based on data sources that are viewed as being of lower quality.

4.5 Generation of recommendations

Initial findings and draft recommendations were discussed during three interactive meetings, to ensure the recommendations are relevant (including for different portfolios), actionable, and meet the needs of FR/GM process owners and users going forward. The evaluation team developed recommendations in line with guidance from the ELO.

4.6 Limitations and learnings from process tracing

Limitations and mitigation strategies for this evaluation are described in Table 5. The mitigation strategies effectively minimized the potential impact of the study's limitations on the findings.

Table 5: Limitations and mitigation strategies

Limitation	Mitigation strategy

Difficulty accessing a diverse range of key informants through remote interviews, particularly at the country level.	The Evaluation team worked closely with the ELO and country teams to identify and access key informants within the limited time of the evaluation. Interview evidence was triangulated with survey evidence, especially from surveys which were broadly sent to country stakeholders and key populations.
Data gaps impeding the ability to achieve efficiency and effectiveness objectives, such as insufficient information on the Secretariat and country level stakeholders' level of effort and the costing of FR/GM steps and processes.	Available data (e.g., survey, timeline) on efficiency and effectiveness of FR/GM processes was triangulated with key informant perspectives and findings from the '100 pennies' survey.
Challenges in accessing systemic, detailed information on GM negotiations.	Available documents and quantitative evidence (e.g., FR vs. final grant budgets for our sample of 13 grants) were triangulated and contextualized with KIIs. While most information from GMFRFs was unable to be extracted for portfolio-level (e.g., budget variation and reinvestments),[35] this information was analyzed in our sample of 13 grants.
Limited numbers of responses and country representation for the '100 pennies' survey.	The survey's limited responses (73) reduced generalizability, so the data was used mainly for triangulation with other sources. Although only 9 countries were included, they represent diverse portfolios, approaches, components, Windows and regions. To avoid bias, responses were averaged by country. Data was also disaggregated by Secretariat department and respondent type.
Some secondary Global Fund data sets (e.g., the GC7 Applicant and Grant-Making surveys) have small sample sizes when disaggregating by most variables, limiting the power of statistical analyses.	Limitations of each data source were considered when triangulating and determining the strength of evidence for each finding. Specific limitations are also footnoted where presenting data in the report.

In addition, several key learnings arose from the process tracing approach:

1. The evaluation team initially underestimated the complexity of steps, processes, sub-processes, and inputs for the FR/GM continuum, resulting in a large number of process tracing tests. However, the evidence ultimately clustered around certain tests, highlighting the more critical and challenging areas of the FR/GM continuum.
2. Having multiple process tracing tests mapped to multiple EQs made coding and analysis more time-consuming. In the future, it may be beneficial to reduce the number of tests.
3. The process tracing methodology starts with the process to be analyzed rather than the EQ. Thus, ensuring alignment between the process and EQs early on is important.

[35] An aggregated internal dataset was provided to the Evaluation team, but was missing data points/lacking key fields, limiting utility.

4.7 Ethical consideration

The Evaluation team aimed to provide credible and useful evidence, to strengthen accountability for development results and contribute to learning processes in conformity with 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.[36]

The evaluation team ensured confidentiality and anonymity of key informants and avoided referring to individuals and confidential materials. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, with informed consent. The purpose of the evaluation and intended use of information obtained from interviews, including the publication of the final report on the Global Fund website, was explained at the onset of interviewing. Information from stakeholder interviews and submissions was aggregated and anonymized, and it is not possible to link any information in the report to any of the individual stakeholders listed.

5 Findings

5.1 EQ1: Are funding request processes sufficiently differentiated to accommodate diverse portfolios and has differentiation led to more streamlined and simplified procedures?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ1[37]

Summary finding: Differentiation of FR processes is not leading to more streamlined and simplified procedures or enabling countries to spend significantly less time applying for funding and more time implementing grants.

- **Finding 1.1:** Heavy information requirements drive complexity and high level of effort of FR development.
- **Finding 1.2:** For GC7, differentiation is not noticeable when comparing the five different application approaches and does not result in more streamlined or simplified procedures.
- **Finding 1.3:** More rigorous application of selected features of specific FR approaches may help streamline and simplify application processes.

Finding 1.1: Heavy information requirements drive complexity and high level of effort of FR development. One of the main factors that affects adequate differentiation of FR processes is the large amount of information that is required from applicants at the FR stage. GC7 saw a marked increase in information requirements from applicants compared to GC6, undermining efforts to streamline and simplify FR/GM processes. This is evidenced by the increase in the average number of pages per FR, from 57 in GC6 to 79 pages in GC7.[38] Apart from the extensive information required in the GC7 application forms, application materials included up to 21 annexes. The number of requested and/or required annexes increased from 12 in GC5 to 14 in GC6 and 17 in GC7, most of which apply to all the FRs, irrespective of differentiated FR approaches.[39] As described in EQ4,

[36] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866

[37] Triangulated evidence for this summary finding comes from three main sources: (1) a document review of the five application approaches, each with its own application form and annex requirements, (2) EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications; and (3) key informant interviews and focus group discussions with the Global Fund Secretariat and with stakeholders in 9 selected countries, including CCM secretariat and members, PR and SR staff, Global Fund regional management and country teams, consultants involved in FR development, civil society and key population representatives and UN staff.

[38] Secretariat internal notes on GC7 (review).

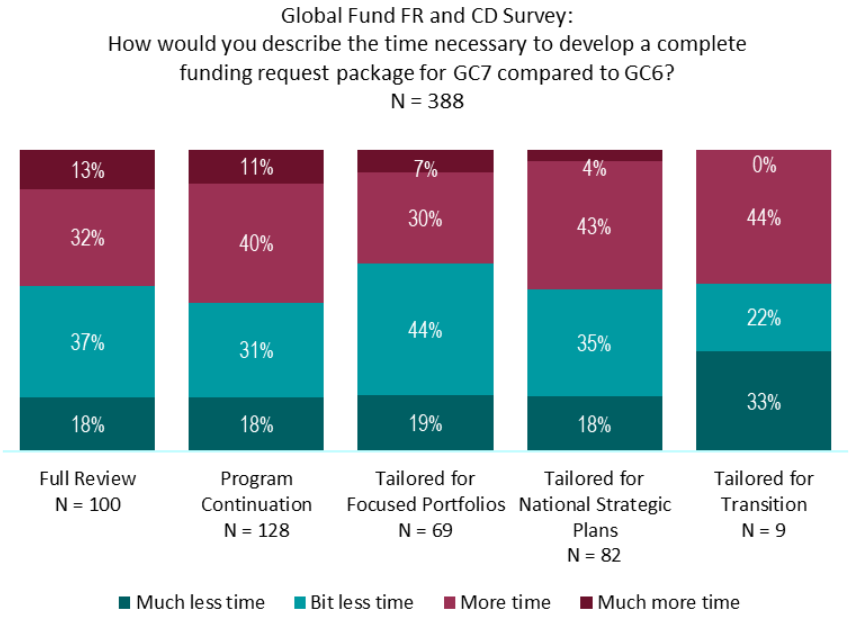
[39] Secretariat internal notes on GC7. EHG analysis of differentiation indicates that of four new annexes e.g. for RSSH, Priorities for civil society and communities annex, country dialogue narrative annex and SEAH, only SEAH was optional across the differentiated FR approaches.

Finding 4.2, many of these annexes – e.g., on RSSH, gender, human rights or Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) – mainly serve the specific information needs of different technical teams within the Secretariat, but do not necessarily reflect country priorities.

The GC7 Applicant Survey, which the Global Fund Secretariat administered to CCM members, country teams, partners, and Community Rights and Gender (CRG) regional platforms after FR submission for Windows 1-3, showed that 90 percent of respondents had an overall positive experience during country dialogue and FR development, the overall score was lower than in GC6.[40] The GC7 Applicant Survey also revealed that returning applicants were less positive about the amount of time it takes to develop an FR (54 percent in GC7 compared to 63 percent in GC6).[41]

Key informants from Secretariat teams revealed strong sentiments that information requirements are heavy for all portfolios and application approaches – even those that were expected to be lighter, such as Program Continuation, Tailored for Focused or Tailored for NSPs (see figure below) – and are driving the burden of work for the FR development.[42] In addition, almost half of the returning respondents (see figure below) felt that completing the GC7 FR package took more, or much more, time than during GC6. For Program Continuation, this was true for over half (51 percent) of the respondents. Applicants also complained that the FR forms were *"always asking for the same information"*, and not focusing enough on what is critical for the TRP.[43] Country KIs also mentioned the need to invest more in NSPs to avoid parallel and unnecessary application documents.

Figure 2: Time necessary to develop a complete funding request[44]



Finding 1.2: For GC7, differentiation is not noticeable when comparing the five different application approaches and does not result in more streamlined or simplified procedures. The

[40] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation, demonstrating a 4pp drop in positive overall experiences from GC6 to GC7.
[41] Secretariat internal notes on GC7.
[42] Secretariat KI
[43] This quote is from one country KII but the point does not reflect only one single KII. Similar statements were made by multiple country key informants – CCM and PR KIs.
[44] EHG analysis using the Global Fund internal documentation on GC7 applications. Country dialogue and FR development survey administered to CCM members, country teams, partners, and CRG regional platforms after FR submission and who participated in GC6 and GC7 (N = 1300). *P*-values should be interpreted with caution, as there was insufficient power for the chi-square analysis due to a limited sample size when disaggregating for most variables.

evaluation team conducted a detailed review and comparison of the five differentiated FR approaches that were used in GC7: Tailored for Focused (30 percent), Program Continuation (26 percent), Full Review (25 percent), Tailored for NSP (14 percent), and Tailored for Transition (7 percent).[45] Differentiation of FR processes is mainly reflected in the different information requirements of the application forms and annexes. Eligibility for use of application approaches varies based on portfolio type (see Table 6). Each application approach has its own form and requirements regarding mandatory annexes**.** Tailored for Focused and for Transition share the same basic form; the difference being Tailored for Transition requires an additional annex on Transition from Global Fund Funding.

Table 6: Eligibility of using application approaches by portfolio type

Application approach	Features	Portfolio type
Full Review	Comprehensive overall review of a country's investment approach and strategic priorities.	High Impact/Core
Program Continuation	Continuing well performing programs access funding through streamlined process, with significantly reduced level of effort required.	High Impact/Core
Tailored for NSP	NSP used as the main information source for accessing funding and is intended to significantly reduce the amount of information in the FR by referring to sections of the NSP and/or other relevant national documents.	All
Tailored for Focused	Approach is aimed at streamlining the information requested, by focusing investments on a few areas to achieve the highest impact and minimize transaction costs.	Focused
Tailored for Transition	A specific application approach for countries receiving transition funding, projected to move to higher income status or have become eligible again for funding, or use a transition plan as the basis for the FR.	All

At first glance, the application forms appear quite different. However, detailed analysis (see Table 7) reveals that the Full Review form, the most comprehensive, shares most required sections with the other three application types. The only exception is Program Continuation, which omits several subsections covered in the previous application.

Table 7: Comparison of the Application forms of the five Funding Request approaches[46]

Sub-sections of funding request application form	1. Full Review	2 / 3. Tailored for Focused / Transition	4. Tailored for NSP	5. Program Continuation
Total Number of FRs for GC7	66 (30.0%)	48 (21.5%) / 7 (3.1%)	38 (17.0%)	64 (28.7%)
Average No. of pages per component	62.0	47.5 / 43.0	45.8	54.3
Prioritized Request Modules	√	√	√	√
Payment for Results	√	√	√	–
Rationale	√	√	√	–
Context	√	√	√	–

[45] EHG analysis using the Global Fund GC7 FR Tracker, 12 July 2024. During GC7, Full Review and Program Continuation were available only to High-Impact and Core countries, while Tailored for Focused was available for Focused countries only. Tailored for NSP and for Transition are available to all countries. Percentages used in text are of 100 percent of all FRs in GC7.

[46] Total number of FRs and average number of pages: Secretariat internal documentation on GC6 and GC7 LOE. The Global Fund (A2F). Iterated and multi-country FRs were excluded.

Sub-sections of funding request application form	1. Full Review	2 / 3. Tailored for Focused / Transition	4. Tailored for NSP	5. Program Continuation
Lessons Learned	√	–	√	–
Focus of Application Requirements	√	√	√	–
Matching Funds	√	√	√	√
Ending AIDS, TB and Malaria	√	√	√	–
Program Essentials	√	–	√	√
RSSH	√	√	√	√
Engagement and Leadership of Most Affected Communities	√	–	√	√
Health Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights	√	√	√	√
Sustainability	√	√	√	√
Co-Financing 2020-2022	√	√	√	√
Co-Financing 2023-2025	√	√	√	√
Innovative Financing Approaches	√	√	√	–
Pandemic Preparedness	√	√	√	√
Implementation Arrangements	√	√	–	√
Role of CBOs and CLOs	√	√	–	–
Key Risks & mitigation Measures	√	–	√	–
Transition from Global Fund Funding	–	√	–	–

Note: √ = subsection

Program Continuation, despite being the simplest FR approach with eight fewer subsections than Full Review, has the second-highest average page count at 54.3.[47] Tailored for Focused FRs have slightly fewer pages (47.5 on average) due to their focus on specific interventions. However, Full Review applications are longer but may involve less original effort, as large sections can be copied from other documents.

All FR approaches require similar numbers of annexes: Full Review, Tailored for NSP, and Program Continuation need 16 for TRP review and six for the Secretariat, while Tailored for Focused/Transition requires two fewer annexes for TRP review but the same for the Secretariat.

As noted in Finding 1.1 , the heavy and insufficiently differentiated information requirements persist across all approaches. Full Review has 20 subsections, with Tailored for Focused/Transition and Tailored for NSP having only slightly fewer. There is also overlap between application sections and Annexes, such as the RSSH section and its corresponding annexes.

Overall, there is strong evidence that differentiation into five FR approaches in GC7 was ineffective, as the information requirements across all approaches are very similar and equally burdensome. The FR processes have been inefficient, requiring considerable effort (LOE). KIs noted that, despite minor differences in FR templates and annexes, core processes like country dialogue, CCM involvement, and consultant interactions remain the same across all application approaches. [48]

[47] EHG analysis using the Global Fund internal documentation on GC6 and GC7 LOE. The Global Fund (Access to Funding). Multi-country and iterated FRs were excluded from this analysis.
[48] Finding is derived from triangulated evidence from different KIIs with Secretariat/CT KIIs, country KIIs and consultants.

FGDs and KIIs confirm this. While some informants see theoretical benefits in differentiation or call for more, many Secretariat members argue it adds complexity. They recommend simplifying the process or redesigning FR/GM altogether. Senior managers stressed that simplification will fail if all applicants must provide the same information, regardless of the Portfolio type or FR approach, and suggested establishing revised minimum requirements first. [49]

Despite some evidence that certain FR approaches are slightly lighter, the level of effort remains high across all five, with similarly heavy information requirements. Many Secretariat KIs noted that differentiation did not achieve its intended purpose, as processes remain overly complex, even for approaches like Tailored for Focused, which is supposed to be lighter. In addition, they noted that despite shorter narratives, the work, time, and cost for Focused portfolios are nearly the same as for a Full Review. Similarly, Program Continuation is not realizing its intended benefits due to excessive information demands.

Several KIs directly involved in FR development, including technical working group members, country teams, and consultants, were often unaware of the supposedly lighter application model. They reported that the FR templates, requirements, and workload were unchanged—or even more complex—compared to GC6, with the process often feeling as involved as a Full Review, requiring detailed consultations.

> *"Regarding GC7, I didn't realize that we had a simplified cycle. For us it was not simplified. Really, there has not been a simplification, on the contrary: some formats have become quite significantly more complex."*
>
> - Country KI

GC7 Applicant Survey participants (N = 1300) were not specifically asked about differentiation but generally reported positive experiences with GC7 compared to GC6, However, disaggregated results showed notable differences between approaches. Applicants using the Program Continuation, Full Review, or Tailored for NSP approaches were significantly less likely to find the work and time required for a FR appropriate for the level of funding compared to those using the Tailored for Focused or Transition approaches ($p = 0.042$).[50] Additionally, applicants using Tailored for NSP were more likely to find the FR form straightforward compared to those using other approaches ($p = 0.009$).[51]

Finding 1.3: More rigorous application of selected features of specific FR approaches may help streamline and simplify application processes. With differentiation not fully achieving the intended streamlining and simplification, some evidence was found that specific FR approaches may have benefits, and that more systematic application of (core aspects of) these approaches across the different portfolios could help streamline and simplify the FR process. In this regard, several respondents emphasized the (potential) benefits of using 'true' versions of Tailored for NSP and Program Continuation, possibly combined.

The Tailored for NSP approach aims to reduce narrative requirements by allowing applicants to reference the country's NSP and other national documents.[52] It is theoretically applicable to all

[49] Secretariat KIs

[50] EHG analysis using the Global Fund internal documentation on GC7 Applications. Country dialogue and FR development survey administered to CCM members, country teams, partners, and CRG regional platforms after FR submission (N = 1300). P-values should be interpreted with caution, as there was insufficient power for the chi-square analysis due to a limited sample size when disaggregating for most variables.

[51] Ibid.

[52] The Global Fund (2022). Funding Request Instructions. Tailored for National Strategic Plans. Allocation Period 2023-2025. Nov 2022.

portfolios (HI, Core, and Focused). Feedback from FGDs and KIs suggested that a 'true' Tailored for NSP approach, which minimizes excessive information requirements, is costed and includes an M&E framework, could lower transaction costs, increase efficiency, and better align with country priorities. Using the NSP was considered *"easier, shorter and straightforward".*[53] The NSP could serve as the funding request itself, eliminating the need for separate narrative sections or grant applications. This approach might also enhance donor coordination for disease program funding.[54]

"*When using the NSP, you are more focused, even in terms of the process of writing the grant itself because you already have everything in the strategic plan. Another advantage of using the NSP approach is that you can't get lost, i.e. proposing something that is not responding to the needs.*"

- Country KI

Country KIs highlighted potential challenges with the Tailored for NSP approach, such as NSPs being too broad and less operational for Global Fund purposes, lacking evidence, excluding key populations, or not being developed inclusively with all stakeholders. Additionally, if an NSP is nearing expiration, the Program Continuation approach might be more appropriate than Tailored for NSP.[55]

The Program Continuation approach allows for the continuation of grants into the next funding cycle with a similar strategic and programmatic focus as the previous grant. Its purpose is to justify the ongoing need for these grants. [56] The Program Continuation application template has fewer subsections compared to other FR templates.

"*If interventions continue as normal and are doing well with no significant changes, there is no reason for the FR/GM phase*"

- Secretariat KI

The GC7 Applicant Survey indicated that experiences with the Program Continuation approach were slightly less positive compared to the Tailored for Focused or Transition approaches, with over half of the Program Continuation applicants reporting increased time requirements compared to GC6. Key informants suggested that streamlining the application process for grants performing well and with minimal changes could be beneficial. This "true" Program Continuation approach would involve fewer information requirements, such as a shorter application form and fewer annexes, and could include more ongoing monitoring or a light review of the previous grant. In some cases, skipping the TRP review for one grant cycle might be considered. However, informants noted that this approach might be less suitable if the funding request includes new components; for example, while Program Continuation was appropriate for an existing malaria component of a joint malaria/RSSH FR, it was not suitable for a new RSSH component.

[53] Country KI
[54] Secretariat and Country KIIs
[55] Global External and Country KIIs
[56] The Global Fund (2022). Funding Request Instructions. Program Continuation. Allocation Period 2023-2025. Nov 2022

5.2 EQ2: How effective are country dialogue processes in ensuring prioritization in FRs; support national and Global Fund strategic priorities and goals; and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ2: [57]

Summary finding: Despite the recognized importance of engagement, country dialogue processes struggle to play a definitive role in prioritization processes to ensure the integration of national and key stakeholder priorities alongside GF strategic priorities

- **Finding 2.1:** Country dialogue processes can contribute to prioritizing national and stakeholder needs in FRs, but this remains a challenging area.
- **Finding 2.2:** Broad-based stakeholder engagement in country dialogue is widely perceived as a critical element for quality FRs. However, country dialogue processes can be overly resource intensive during a pressurized time period and do not necessarily translate into relevant priorities being integrated into final grants.
- **Finding 2.3:** The level of resources invested in country dialogue processes can be substantial compared to the portion of grant allocation truly available for discussion and prioritization.

Finding 2.1: Country dialogue processes can contribute to prioritizing national and stakeholder needs in FRs, but this remains a challenging area. During the document review and discussions with country and global key informants, prioritization challenges emerged as a key theme in country dialogue.

> *"Prioritization has not improved in GC7 – there is scant understanding of the process and that you need to engage in prioritization throughout the cycle. The country dialogue should not be seen as only needing to take place once every three years but should be placed during the grant implementation cycle where we need more national dialogue – e.g. on reprioritization, reprogramming – there is no national dialogue on those types of things.*
>
> - Global KI

The ability to prioritize high quality FRs and eventual grants is influenced by multiple factors. Different countries implement various approaches to country dialogue, influenced by the time, available budget and context-specific power dynamics.[58] Some dialogue processes gather all relevant stakeholders to prioritize interventions over several days while others use multi-stage and parallel dialogues for different groups, with inputs handed over to a smaller working group to prioritize.[59] Challenges affecting the quality of prioritization processes include the lack of standardized definition and methodology for effective prioritization ('how to' prioritize well) and the unclear role of country dialogue inputs within this exercise. This ambiguity makes it challenging for countries to describe their prioritization processes in FR documents.[60] Further, challenges related to data – such as quality, availability and timing and usage – complicate the FR development process.

In addition, as described in EQ4, Finding 4.1, there is a proliferation of mandatory GC7 annexes intended to help countries reflect and inform prioritization processes. However, there is no clear

[57] Triangulated evidence for this finding comes from (1) documentary evidence including the FCDO Review, SR2020, SR 2023, (2) multiple country KIIs across different stakeholder categories (PRs, SRs, Consultants, Technical Partners, CTs, LFA), TRP Observation report windows 1-2, and (3) EHG analysis of the Global Fund internal documentation on GC7 applications, the Secretariat internal documentation on Community Engagement, and the 100 Pennies Survey conducted by the evaluation team.

[58] Country documents review (e.g. Country dialogue Narrative Annexes), Multiple country KIIs across different stakeholder categories (Community, SR, PR, Consultant), Community at the Centre Report, Community Annex analysis report

[59] Country documents review (SBNs, Country Dialogue Annexes) and country KII

[60] Global KII, UNAIDS TSM GC7 learning webinar lessons learned, April 2024

guidance on how to use these collectively for best effect in country dialogue processes, and some countries[61] are struggling to make the most of them (e.g. the Community Annex,[62] RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex, Program Essentials, Funding Landscape Tables and Programmatic Gap Tables).

> *"The TRP acknowledges the tremendous efforts made by applicants to manage trade-offs and the Secretariat and Technical Partners for the many tools that were introduced in GC7 to help countries with prioritization. However, the TRP observed the need to review and streamline some of the tools, provide more clarity to applicants and manage expectations in funding requests since the Global Fund allocations cannot cover all country needs."*
>
> - TRP Observations report Windows 1 and 2 GC7

Finding 2.2: Broad-based stakeholder engagement in country dialogue processes is widely perceived as a critical element for quality FRs but can be resource intensive and does not necessarily translate into relevant priorities being integrated into final grants. Evidence suggests that inclusive and consultative country dialogue involving broad-based stakeholder engagement, is widely desired and perceived as a critical element for contributing to quality FRs. This engagement has improved in GC7[63] though certain groups – such as prisoners, people who use drugs (PWUD), migrants and displaced people, young people, and people with disabilities – continue to be less consulted than others.[64] Helping and hindering factors identified in evidence for improved inclusion of diverse groups is included in

[61] One of the nine sampled countries described this challenge in detail and the TRP noted the same challenge (specifically referring to Program Essentials) in its observation report for W1 and W2 applications.
[62] Community Annex is used as a shorthand referring to the *Funding Priorities of Communities and Civil Societies Annex.*
[63] Communities at the Centre Report, multiple country KIIs (Consultants, PRs, SRs, CTs), Global KIIs (Secretariat and external), Community Annexes: Early Findings from Windows 1-3, June 2024, Lesotho After Action Review Report
[64] EHG analysis using the Secretariat internal documentation on Community Engagement

Table 8.

Table 8Greater inclusion in GC7 has been achieved through more regional (sub-national) consultations (sometimes disease focused, sometimes combining discussion across diseases[65]); more intentional engagement with key and vulnerable populations (KVPs); the use of mixed methods to safely and sensitively gather perspectives from diverse groups providing inputs; and increased engagement from different groups, including non-disease specific teams (Labs, M&E, etc. to cover RSSH/PPR issues) from government PRs.

The '100 pennies survey' demonstrates that country dialogue was the second highest value activity (aggregate), perceived as higher value than the level (LOE) required.[66] However, the cost (time and money) of broad-based country dialogue can still be considerable.[67] Evidence suggests significant periods of time[68] and sums of money are being spent on FR development including country dialogue-related consultation costs.[69]

"FR development process was management-intensive and costly (estimated at US$ 480,000 - US$ 1,800,000 in the countries reviewed)."

- FCDO Review of the GC7 Proposal Development Process, 2024[70]

"The main challenge was the cost of country dialogue consultation (US$ 100-150,000), which was footed by the national PR."

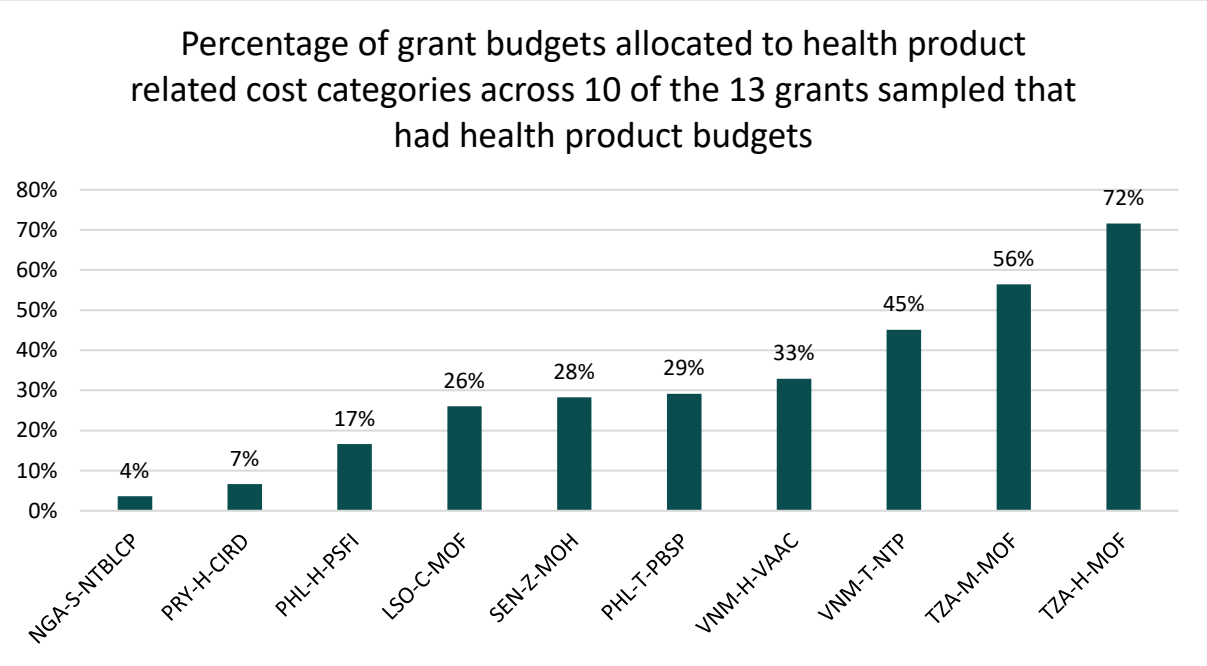
- Country KI

Finding 2.3: The level of resources invested in country dialogue processes can be substantial compared to the portion of grant allocation truly available for discussion and prioritization. Much of this funding is often already allocated for continuing existing interventions and covering treatment or other health product-related costs. For example, 42 percent of GC6 grant budgets and 41 percent of GC7 grant budgets have been allocated to health product related cost categories[71] leaving 58 percent and 59 percent respectively[72] available for other programming during country dialogue. This, combined with the significant emphasis on program and budget continuation from cycle to cycle suggests there may be a strong case for streamlining and targeting country dialogue processes.

As the figure below demonstrates, in some cases, as little as 28 percent of grant budgets are programmable once health products have been accounted for. In such cases, there clearly is a reduced need for significant re-programming cycle to cycle and the associated significant country dialogue.

[65] Sub-regional country dialogues took place in at least two out of the nine sampled countries.
[66] Noting the limitations with the '100 Pennies Survey'.
[67] FCDO Review of the GC7 Proposal Development Process, 2024, Country KIIs, and Global KIIs.
[68] 'Significant' time related to country dialogue was noted by KIIs across multiple countries (Secretariat and PRs, and CCMs) – recognizing both the significant time investment as well as the importance of conducting robust/ meaningful country dialogue.
[69] Multiple country KIs across different stakeholder categories (PR, CCM, SR, CTs, Consultants), Multiple country Dialogue Narrative Annexes and SBNs, FCDO Review Report.
[70] Points For Global Fund Board (dai.com)
[71] EHG analysis of the Global Fund Grant Implementation Budgets, accessed through the Global Fund online data service, 27 June 2024
[72] Ibid

Figure 3: Extent to which Health Product related budgets can vary[73]



"Even when you change the requirements, we are often doing a continuation. However, the expectation from country stakeholders regarding the country dialogue and their involvement is always high. At the end of the day, what actually goes in and becomes actually funded is almost exactly the same as what was funded in the previous grant."

- Secretariat KI

There are tradeoffs to the costs of country dialogue and the need for more efficiency and effectiveness while maintaining country ownership. GC7 Applicant Survey evidence suggests that countries adopting the Tailored FR approaches appear to reduce the time burden of country dialogue processes compared to respondents who adopted a Program Continuation.[74,75] These differences were not evident across the nine sampled countries.[76]

Evidence also reveals that the extent to which inclusive consultation translates into meaningful outcomes in final grants is less clear. For example, the Satisfaction with Community Engagement Survey found that community members' satisfaction with opportunities to share their priorities and

[73] Ibid

[74] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications. 96 percent of tailored to Transition (N=25), 86 percent of Tailored to Focused Portfolios (N=147), and 81 percent of Tailored for NSP (N=207) survey respondents said they felt there was sufficient time to participate in country dialogue and FR development, compared to 78 percent of those that adopted the Program Continuation approach (N = 241 respondents) and 86 percent of Full Review respondents (N=233).

[75] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications. Country dialogue and FR development survey administered to CCM members, country teams, partners, and CRG regional platforms after FR submission (N = 1300). *P*-values should be interpreted with caution, as there was insufficient power for the chi-square analysis due to a limited sample size when disaggregating for most variables.

[76] The '100 pennies survey' data should be interpreted with caution

viewpoints[77] was lower than levels of satisfaction with consultation.[78,79] This suggests that broad-based engagement is necessary but not sufficient for ensuring community identified priorities are translated into grant documents and investments. Despite Global Fund attempts to increase integration of community priorities into grant documents in GC7, including through the establishment of a Civil Society and Community Priorities Annex, tracking translation of priorities into grant documents is still weak (see EQ4, Finding 4.2). Specific factors hindering translation of consultation outputs into tangible outcomes in final grants are included in

[77] A proxy indicator for quality/effectiveness of country dialogue contribution to prioritization.
[78] Only 46.2 percent of those surveyed were satisfied with the opportunities their community had to share their priorities and viewpoints and only 40.5 percent rated the way that decision-makers used their opinions in the development of the FR as 8+ out of 10 (meaning that they were satisfied). Agreement was lower among people with disabilities, transgender and gender diverse people, migrants or displaced people, and people who use drugs.
[79] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on Community Engagement.

Table 8 below.

Evidence[80] indicated some dissatisfaction with the quality of country dialogue processes, and some community members questioning the degree to which the country dialogue is meaningful in FR development. Several groups, including civil society and technical partners noted the lack of clear and transparent opportunities for meaningful country dialogue during grant-making.[81] However, the Global Fund is known and respected for its commitment to inclusive country dialogue, aligning with the Global Fund principle of country ownership.

"My community was invited but there was no meaningful engagement; for example, we were 3 out of 150 Government officials and also the government officials remove our activities without our concerns."

- Country KI

"What is unique about the Global Fund, is that the processes are engaging, more comprehensive. The processes have more country ownership and government leadership, including the communities and all the other implementing partners and communities."

- Secretariat KI

Alongside the argument for streamlining country dialogue, there are also opportunities for leveraging country dialogue processes for benefits beyond the FR/GM cycle. In a recent review, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) recommended, for example, to "*take advantage of the scale of consultations to support other country strategy processes (including national strategies, other funding requests and so on)".*[82]

[80] Communities at the Centre report, After Action Review Report Lesotho, country KIIs across different stakeholder categories (TWG, community representatives, Consultants, PRs, SRs)
[81] Ibid
[82] FCDO Review: GC7 Proposal Development Process in Six Countries. DAI. https://www.dai.com/uploads/FCDO%20review.%20Funding%20request%20process%20for%20GC7%20in%206%20countries.%20March%2024.pdf

Table 8: Helping and hindering factors for country dialogue in supporting FR prioritization[83]

Helping factors for effective country dialogue in supporting prioritization of FRs	Factors that continue to hinder the effectiveness of country dialogue in supporting prioritization of FRs
Starting country dialogue preparation ahead of the FR development phase given challenging (especially Workstream 1) timeframe. The role of Allocation Letters and country teams in steering priorities based on portfolio analysis of national priorities and Global Fund strategic priorities. Having support from consultants to facilitate the country dialogue with community organizations, helping them to develop and shape their priorities in a way that aligns with Global Fund requirements. Having data and analysis available for country dialogue to inform discussion on impactful interventions.	Community based and/ or led organizations not being aware and/ or invited to country dialogue not having the capacity or time to engage in a country dialogue, especially when notified with little lead time.[33] Power dynamics: • Within CCMs, influencing which groups are invited to engage in country dialogue, the availability of data and participation of representatives from health systems and pandemic preparedness.[34] • Communication that is not perceived as transparent by civil society organizations (CSOs) and sub-recipients (SRs), especially around changes made to grants beyond those communicated during CCM meetings. • Power dynamics within CCMs influencing which groups are invited to engage in country dialogue. • The availability of data and participation of representatives from health systems and pandemic preparedness.

Both helping and hindering factors, depending on context:

- Parallel community 'social' dialogues leading to more challenging prioritization processes (see EQ4, Finding 4.4). But also providing useful spaces for KVPs in politically challenging contexts.
- Availability of funding to cover travel costs for diverse groups often required to travel to central locations to join the country dialogue and prioritization workshops. Lack of awareness of CCM budgets for consultation.
- The Community Annex playing a helpful role in supporting the prioritization and inclusion of community priorities in FRs but also perceptions of heightened community expectations around how the annex would be used (see EQ4, Finding 4.4).

[83] Multiple country KIIs across different stakeholder groups (CTs, Consultants. Technical Partners), SR2023, Community at the Centre Report, Community Annex analysis report, Global KIIs across different categories, TRP Observations report across Workstream 1 - 2

5.3 EQ3: How and to what extent do differential power dynamics between key actors (including the CCM, Government/MoH representatives, civil society, PRs, Country Team, and other Global Fund actors) during FR and GM processes affect the effectiveness and efficiency of these processes?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ3: [84]

Summary finding: Power differentials are most evident during country dialogue, grant negotiation, and RSSH program splits, with specific impacts on efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Finding 3.1:** Countries face challenges that exacerbate power differentials during program split discussions on 'housing' and prioritization of RSSH within grants/ programs, with implications for FR/GM efficiency and effectiveness
- **Finding 3.2:** Changes to grant documents made by CTs and technical teams during grant negotiations that are late or insufficiently communicated can create a perception of Secretariat control, undermining PRs and transparency of the process. Despite these dynamics, CT and technical team inputs help improve grant design.
- **Finding 3.3:** Varied power differentials between CSOs and PRs can undermine the efficiency of country dialogue as an FR/GM process.
- **Finding 3.4:** CSOs perceive stronger power differentials during the GM stage than the FR stage, often feeling inadequately engaged beyond specific CCM-organized meetings within 'ongoing country dialogue' during GM.

Power dynamics are evident across all FR/GM processes between different stakeholder groups. The findings in this section focus on the instances where power differentials appear to have had the greatest impact on efficiency and / or effectiveness of FR/GM processes.

Finding 3.1: Countries face challenges that exacerbate power differentials during program split discussions on 'housing' and prioritization of RSSH within grants/ programs, with implications for FR/GM efficiency and effectiveness. The lack of clear Secretariat guidance in Allocation Letters regarding the proportion of funding for RSSH often complicates program split decision making leading to lengthier and less efficient discussions.[85] The lack of guidance is also perceived to exacerbate power differentials between country disease programs and MoH RSSH teams, and between CCMs and country teams. The evaluation also found evidence of inefficiencies due to the late changes made to the RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex and guidance during the open Windows, intended to inform program split discussions (see also EQ4, Finding 4.3).[86] This caused a revisiting of decisions in some grants during GM, reducing efficiencies and reinforcing power differentials through perceived imposition from the Secretariat technical teams during a pressured time period.[87]

[84] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple country KIIs, Country Team FGD, Global KIIs (Secretariat and external), (2) documentary evidence including the FCDO review and SR2023 report, Communities at the Centre Report, CRG Community Annex report, and SR2023, and (3) quantitative data from the Secretariat internal notes on grant-making. We note also that the Secretariat Community engagement survey data would ordinarily have proved useful however, the data in the most relevant questions is not robust enough (e.g., low survey response or likely high level of responder bias.)

[85] Across four of the countries that had RSSH allocations (two of which were designated RSSH countries), across global KIIs (Secretariat and external), and with the FCDO Review 2024 + Multiple country KIIs across different stakeholder categories (CCM, PR, Technical Partner, country teams)

[86] Multiple Secretariat Global KIIs and multiple country KIs (country teams and PR)

[87] Country KIs CT FGD (x1) plus PR in a separate country

"*The whole process involved a lot of lobbying. RSSH is a huge undertaking with the need to manage a vast majority of stakeholders, all with their own interests and power play - MoH departments, communities, implementing agencies, rallying around focal points in Ministry to get what they wanted.*"

- Country KI

"*There was no specific (quantitative) guidance in the Allocation Letter on how much funding should be allocated to RSSH: it just said it "should not be less than in the previous funding cycle". This resulted in long discussions, after Government wanted to change the proposed Program Split in favor of RSSH*."

- Country KI

During program split discussions, country disease programs and RSSH teams are required to jointly decide on the country's RSSH priorities, how much to allocate to RSSH from disease program's funding allocation, which PR will manage the RSSH funds, and which FR approach is appropriate to house the RSSH interventions. In resource constrained environments, evidence suggests it is difficult for countries to allocate meaningful amounts for RSSH in an objective way, as they essentially compete with disease programs.[88] Ambiguity around integrating RSSH in the different FR approaches has led to reduced efficiency and potential effectiveness, with instances of countries opting for potentially more time and resource intensive Full Review approaches instead of the preferred lighter Program Continuation approach.

Country illustration: In two of the nine sampled countries as part of this evaluation applicants felt obliged to select disease specific Full Review approaches when – had they not been required to consider RSSH – they would have undertaken the more streamlined Program Continuation approach, with potentially reduced level of effort. In one of these cases, RSSH consideration meant that the country chose not to complete an integrated TB/HIV funding request despite this being their preferred option, in line with the MoH's universal health care (UHC) ambition. Structural issues related to the maturity of government programs and plans in relation to UHC (including PRs) can be influenced by Global Fund funding. For example, one of the countries was encouraged by the Secretariat to move towards greater integration for efficiency purposes, despite the MoH not being ready, whilst another country reversed its move to restructure towards integrated programs, to continue with vertical programs.

Finding 3.2: Changes to grant documents made by CTs and technical teams during grant negotiations that are late or insufficiently communicated can create a perception of Secretariat control, undermining PRs and transparency of the process. Despite these dynamics, CT and technical team inputs help improve grant design. Despite these power dynamics, evidence suggests that CT and Secretariat technical team inputs help improve grant design. Last-minute and non-transparent changes made to budgets by country teams during grant finalization can be perceived as CT/Secretariat control, potentially undermining PRs' sense of ownership.

"*AT GM stage it feels like just the finance team decide activities. When we got the final version of the grant there were things taken out, we didn't understand*. "

- Country KI

This finding resonates with evidence in the SR 2023 report, which highlights the increased influence and power differential of the Secretariat in GC7 compared to earlier cycles as it pursues strategic alignment with the Strategy.[89]

[88] Multiple country KIs (PR, CT, consultant)
[89] The Global Fund Strategic Review 2023, Final Report, 19 January 2024
https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/14802/iep_gf-elo-2024-01_report_en.pdf

While this power dynamic is evident, most PRs interviewed expressed appreciation and respect for Country Team (and Secretariat technical team) inputs, recognizing their knowledge and skill in developing successful grants. They valued the hands-on support in identifying budget efficiencies and shifts to integrate the unfunded demand into the grant budget. These mixed dynamics suggest that transparency is more problematic than the relationship between country teams and PRs. Respect for country teams' expertise and added value in FR/GM processes was also expressed by CCM representatives and technical partners active in FR development TWGs.

> "*The country team was awesome: they did the calculation part: very participative, engaging, but in discussions between NGOs they didn't get involved*"
> – Country KI
>
> "*Global Fund technical advisers play a role in influencing the grants and the Dept. of Health validates or makes it clear what it can/can't do*"
> – Country KI

Data from the GC7 Grant-Making Survey suggests most PR and CCM respondents feel comfortable with Secretariat relationships during grant-making, but there is still room for improvement through intentionally working on transparency of communication from country teams. Among the CCM and PR Grant-Making Survey respondents, 92 percent felt safe expressing their views during grant-making, but this was significantly different between CCM and PR respondents (p = 0.006).[90] PR respondents were more likely to disagree (9 percent vs. 2 percent) and CCM respondents were more likely to respond, "not applicable" (6 percent vs. 0 percent).

Finding 3.3: Varied power differentials between civil society organizations (CSOs) and PRs can undermine the efficiency of country dialogue as an FR/GM process. Power differentials between PRs and SRs were voiced in different ways across the nine sampled countries during interviews. PRs sometimes feel political pressure to distribute funds across multiple sub-recipients (SRs), reducing efficiency by fragmenting use of funds unnecessarily. For example, in one country reviewed, the PR allocated funding to different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to deliver pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services, to avoid conflict. However, this was perceived to be in direct conflict with the country's desire to operationalize the Payment-for-Results modality to incentivize better results.

In some cases, PRs are noted to explicitly override the interests and priorities of SR stakeholder groups. One former HIV Community PR (now SR) expressed concern that losing PR status has made the SR more vulnerable to having their activity areas reduced if not prioritized by the MoH (PR). This example was shared in the context of integration and Global Fund encouraging reductions in numbers of PRs and favoring Ministry of Health PRs. In addition, it reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of the country dialogue as SR inputs are perceived to carry less influence on grant design than if they had maintained PR status. This is relevant in the context of the Global Fund's increasing integration focus, and particularly in the context of HIV, where SRs provide services for politically sensitive and marginalized groups such as men who have sex with men.

Finding 3.4: CSOs perceive stronger power differentials during the GM stage than the FR stage, often feeling inadequately engaged beyond specific CCM-organized meetings within 'ongoing country dialogue' during GM. The Secretariat established new processes (new 'levers' - see EQ4) aiming to improve checks and balances to mitigate power dynamics in GC7, including requirements for the CCM and country teams to organize consultation meetings with CSOs during 'ongoing country dialogue' within the GM phase.

[90] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on Grant-Making.

There is consensus across different data sources that CSOs are increasingly being engaged in FR development processes. However, this sense of inclusion is less apparent during GM. Current efforts by CCMs and PRs to keep community groups and stakeholders engaged and updated through ongoing country dialogue are insufficient (see EQ4, Finding 4.8). CSOs report not being adequately informed about whether and to what extent community interventions prioritized during FR development are included in final grants. Insufficient communication (i.e. outside CCM organized meetings) contributes to this feeling, exemplifying inefficiency. The perception among CSOs of a reduced capacity to influence grant design during GM also has implications for effectiveness of prioritization in grant design.

The following factors appear to either reduce (help) or increase (hinder) the impact of power differentials across FR/GM processes (see Table 9).

Table 9: Factors helping or hindering the impact of power differentials during FR/GM processes

Helping	Hindering
Country teams' ability to provide high quality support during FR development and GM.	• Perceived lack of transparency and communication around last-minute changes made to grant documents between CTs and PRs/CCMs. • Perceived lack of transparency and lack of concrete communication channels between CCM/PRs and CSOs/SRs outside of CCM-organized meetings. • Insufficient controls in place to mitigate PR and SR power differentials at country level during GM especially.

5.4 EQ4: To what extent has the introduction of new levers designed for GC7 added value to the FR and GM process in relation to the level of effort required by applicants to complete them, and improved the quality of FRs and grants?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ4:[91]

Summary finding: There are some examples of new levers having been useful for applicants, but collectively these have contributed to increased complexity and level of effort with limited value added to increasing the quality of final grants.

- **Finding 4.1:** Proliferation of new levers required significant additional efforts to complete, and this is often provided by consultants.
- **Finding 4.2:** Added value and usefulness of data from additional GC7 annexes for strengthening grant quality is unclear.
- **Findings 4.3-4.9:** Individual GC7 FR and GM levers have mixed efficiency and effectiveness.

The GC7 levers that were agreed within the inception phase of this evaluation are the RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex, Civil Society and Community Priorities Annex, Program Essentials, Gender Equality

[91] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple KIIs including the Secretariat, external global, and country-level KIIs, (2) documentary evidence (e.g., the Operational Policy Manual, TRP Review Window Debriefs, Community Annexes: Findings from Windows 1-3, the Communities at the Centre Report), and (3) primary and secondary survey data (Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making, and '100 pennies survey' data).

Marker, Advanced Grant-Making, Ongoing country dialogue, and Priorities for Step Change (see Table 10).

Table 10: Description of GC7 levers[92]

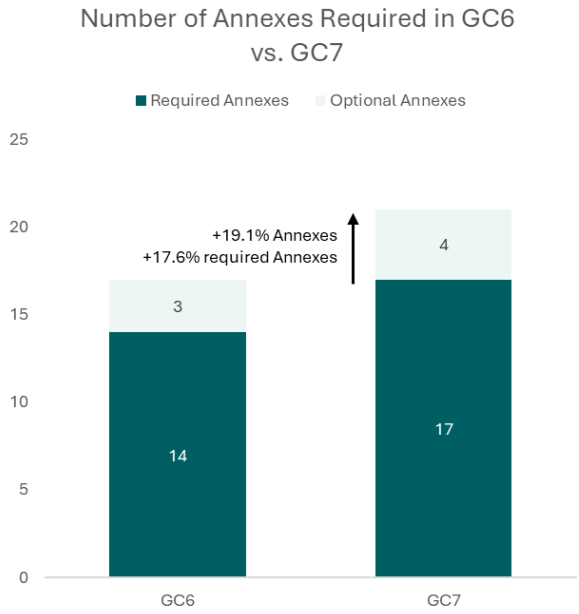
RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex	Intended to help applicants prioritize their RSSH requests according to prioritized needs and funding gaps of the three disease programs.
Civil Society and Community Priorities Annex	Aims to capture a list of maximum 20 highest priority recommended interventions from the perspective of civil society and communities most affected by HIV, TB, and malaria.
Program Essentials	Evidence-based interventions and approaches identified by partners as being necessary to end HIV, TB, and malaria epidemics by 2030. Applicants indicate progress towards meeting them for TB and HIV in tabs in the Essential Data Tables. High Impact and Core countries are required to describe how they plan to address unfulfilled Program Essentials in HIV, TB, and malaria programs.
Gender Equality Marker	Tool introduced in GC7 to support the Global Fund to understand and track how well gender considerations are being mainstreamed across Global Fund investments. It consists of a set of minimum gender equality criteria spanning program design, delivery and evaluation, against which FRs are assessed. The GEM assessment is carried out by the Technical Review Panel (TRP) during each review window
Advanced Grant-Making	Ensuring implementation readiness by (i) engaging the CCM selected PRs early, (ii) developing and submitting key documents (Detailed Budget, Performance Framework, and Health Product Management Template) in the level of detail required for grant-making to the TRP, and (iii) initiating early selection of human resources, Sub-recipient(s), and procurement partners.
Ongoing Country Dialogue	Guidance to continue engagement of communities and civil society through grant-making, including through (i) the CCM convening at least two meetings with the PR, required for High Impact and Core; best-practice for Focused portfolios, (ii) the CT convenes at least one meeting with community and civil society representatives, and (iii) community and civil society representatives participate in grant-making negotiations as best practice.
Priorities for Step Change	Input from specialists at the Global Fund Secretariat teams to increase alignment of final grants with the Global Fund strategy.

Finding 4.1: Proliferation of new levers required significant additional efforts to complete, and this is often provided by consultants. As described in EQ1, Finding 1.1, there are heavy information requirements for the Global Fund applicants. There has been an increase in requirements from GC6 to GC7, with a 17.6 percent increase in required FR annexes (see Figure 4).[93] Multiple Secretariat and country KIs described a general increase in complexity and level of effort in GC7. KIs also noted that while most annexes are not specifically labor-intensive, the culminative impact of having to complete more annexes limits efficiency with questionable value. While additional requirements may not always require additional time to complete for country stakeholders,[94] it is a driver for the upward trend of technical assistance (TA) for FR development noted in EQ6, Finding 6.1.

[92] Applicant Handbook, 2023-2025. October 2022. The Global Fund, https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4755/fundingmodel_applicanthandbook_guide_en.pdf, accessed 11 August 2024. Operational Policy Manual. 15 May 2024. The Global Fund, https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3266/core_operationalpolicy_manual_en.pdf, accessed 11 August 2024.
[93] The Global Fund. Operational Policy Manual. 2024
[94] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications.

Furthermore, some KIs noted the disconnect between annexes and the FR narrative, identifying duplication of some information requirements on one hand and lack of integration of information from annexes into the FR narrative on the other. This exemplifies a need for additional information requirements (if any) to be fulfilled through the main FR documents (including the FR narrative, performance framework, and detailed budget) rather than through separate, and at times redundant, annexes.

Figure 4: Number of annexes in GC6 vs. GC7



Finding 4.2: Added value and usefulness of data from additional GC7 annexes for strengthening FRs and grant quality is unclear. There is a strong perception that information primarily services Secretariat data needs and strategy implementation reporting, rather than being driven by country needs. KIs noted mixed utility of additional annexes, dependent upon the country context, portfolio, and completion of the annex prior to the country dialogue. While there is evidence that some new levers (e.g., Program Essentials and the Priorities of Civil Societies and Communities Annex) have contributed to FR prioritization in certain contexts, there are also instances where they have been used to "tick boxes". In some cases, conflicting information between the FR narrative and annexes also made prioritization challenging. A perceived conflict between prioritization of evidence-based interventions, new priorities, and limited funding was described in five out of nine country case studies (see EQ2, Finding 2.1).

In addition, despite some added value during FR development, effectiveness of new annexes in producing high-quality, implementation-ready grants is unclear due to the lack of systematic reporting on integration of identified priorities and program essentials into the grants and implementation. Secretariat and country-level stakeholders reported a lack of clarity of how additional information requirements are used in the Secretariat – while the RSSH Gaps and Priorities and Essential Data Tables (including Program Essentials) annexes are reviewed by the TRP, these are not required to be reviewed by GAC and are often not used during grant-making.[95] Additionally, integration of priorities and Program Essentials is noted in some Grant-Making Final Review Forms (GMFRF) but not across the portfolio.

[95] Operational Policy Manual. 15 May 2024. The Global Fund, https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3266/core_operationalpolicy_manual_en.pdf, accessed 11 August 2024.

The increase in levers is largely seen as being top-down, driven by donor requirements, the expansion of the Strategy, and Secretariat technical teams rather than by country needs for quality grant design and implementation. Evidence suggests that proliferation of requirements is exacerbated by the lack of a high-level gatekeeper and clear Secretariat business owners. Multiple KIs described this increasing complexity as "*distracting*",[96] limiting the effectiveness and efficiency of FR/GM processes.

Finding 4.3: The RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex had limited utility and added value, in part due to lack of clarity about its purpose and use. Multiple Secretariat and country KIs perceived the template as vague and unclear. One KI close to the process estimated that less than a quarter of applicants[97] completed the RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex correctly in GC7.[98] TRP Window 1 and 2 debriefs echoed this sentiment, noting mixed quality of analyses, including a persisting focus on the vertical disease programs and missed opportunities to address cross-cutting RSSH gaps.[99] While the template was updated in May 2023 to provide additional guidance, some KIs also indicated that this delay limited its utility as a tool to inform country dialogue in GC7.[100] Furthermore, the annex overlaps with RSSH sections in the main application form, e.g., Section 2.2 of the FR form and Section 5.A of the Program Continuation form.

> *"Overall, the RSSH section is commendable in its scope and breadth… However, the required RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex is not well completed in the application..."*
>
> - Country SBN

In general, the RSSH Annex was found by Secretariat and country-level KIs to be high-effort and low-value.[101] In limited cases where countries were able to use the template to inform country dialogue and FR prioritization, some said that it was useful. However, this varied by contextual appropriateness (e.g., "*there is no need for a separate RSSH annex if an RSSH assessment is available"*).[102] This annex is not required for Focused Portfolios, which KIs supported, noting that it is *"not created for those in Focused countries*".[103] In addition, integration of RSSH Gaps and Priorities into final grants is limited and not systematically tracked across the portfolio – the quality and integration of which is only described in 3 out of 11 Secretariat Briefing Notes (SBNs) in the nine sampled countries.[104]

Finding 4.4: There has been some positive feedback reported on the Funding Priorities of Communities and Civil Societies Annex, but some applicants report: (1) considerable resources (time, funds) needed for 'social dialogue' in parallel to country dialogue in some cases; (2) raising expectations among civil society that cannot be met; and (3) limited use for prioritization in final grants. The Funding Priorities of Communities and Civil Societies Annex (Community Annex) received more positive feedback than other new levers, attributed by some KIs to generating more valuable and inclusive community consultations in the country dialogue and FR development stage. Effectiveness was contextually dependent, with enabling factors including availability and use to directly inform the country dialogue (rather than through separate "Social Dialogues"), openness of the civic space, and power dynamics between stakeholders.

[96] Secretariat KIIs
[97] This statistic was unable to be verified by the evaluation team.
[98] Secretariat KI
[99] TRP Debrief and Lessons Learned, Windows 1 - 2
[100] The most recent RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex was published on 12 May 2023 (between Window 1 and 2 deadlines).
[101] '100 Pennies Survey', Secretariat, and Country KIIs
[102] Country KI
[103] Country KIIs
[104] Excluding HI and Core, as it is not required.

In three of the nine sampled countries, the Community Annex generated a set of time and resource-intensive (see EQ2, Finding 2.2) community or 'social' dialogues carried out in parallel to the 'national' country dialogue. In two countries, this led to a sense of siloed community discussion and lack of clarity on how and to what extent ideas captured in the new Community Annex would be fed into subsequent strategic discussions and lead to grants better reflecting stakeholder priorities. However, evidence exists[105] to support the value of holding parallel country dialogues where power dynamics at the national level are perceived too challenging, or where communities and key populations faced stigmatization or safety risks.

> *"The Funding Priorities for Civil Society Annex brought a lot of tension to the process, because it was done in parallel to the Country Dialogue, whereby we had to focus on evidence-based programs. And then the CSO Priorities Annex was requesting, basically, what are the community priorities: this generated a lot of expectations within civil society, which were difficult to manage and align with other dialogue, CSO "priorities" were based on their own interests, not on the actual country priorities."*
>
> - Country KI

In addition, KIs described tensions driven by the Community Annex in five out of nine sampled countries, "*raising expectations*" of civil society through the generation of a "*wish list*" which then had to be prioritized.[106] Prioritization then depended upon the levels of available funding, alignment with evidence-based interventions, and power dynamics between CSOs and other stakeholders in FR development and grant-making.

Despite perceived added value for prioritization in some cases, the effectiveness of the Community Annex in increasing integration of community priorities into final grants is not consistently monitored and reported to community stakeholders. Some key informants felt that it was a "tick box" activity, that community priorities *"stayed in the annex"*[107] and were not integrated into FR and/or final grant documents. A recent Secretariat-led review of ten Community Annexes submitted in Windows 1-3 revealed that "*the inclusion of each intervention in the Funding request was inconsistently reported; where reported, 60 percent of requests were included in the Funding Request and 17 percent were included in the PAAR."* Out of our sample of 13 grants, 8 reported integration of Community Annex priorities (with varying level of detail) in Grant-making Final Review Forms (GMFRFs).

Finding 4.5: There is some evidence of usefulness of Program Essentials for initial prioritization, but there is limited added value overall. Many country KIs described a lack of clarity about the purpose of Program Essentials in relation to other tools and annexes. Some country KIs found it useful as a tool to guide applications and double-check that they have included all essentials, while others did not find it valuable and did not understand its utility above other tools. The TRP Windows 1-2 Observations Report similarly noted challenges in using the Program Essentials for prioritization due to unclear guidance, recommending that the Secretariat *"review the intended vs. actual role of Program Essentials in country dialogues on funding requests and provide guidance to applicants on how Program Essentials should be used within country contexts."*[108, 109] Others felt that that Program Essentials "*didn't include the right things*"[110] and were inflexible to country contexts due to the rigid focus on WHO guidance.

[105] Community Annexes: Early Findings from Windows 1-3, Global Fund, 5 June 2024, and Country KIIs.
[106] Country KIIs
[107] Country KI
[108] TRP Debrief and Lessons Learned, Windows 1 - 2
[109] The recent FCDO Review of the GC7 Proposal Development Process, 2024 also recommends the Global Fund providing guidance on prioritization considering challenges that surfaced during exploration of six review countries.
[110] Country KII

Despite mixed initial utility in FR prioritization and development, there is limited evidence that the Program Essentials increases the quality of final grants. However, there is evidence that they are used by some Secretariat departments (e.g., select CT and Technical teams) and the TRP to facilitate review and quality assessment. In addition, the extent to which FRs and final grants meet Program Essentials is reported on in some SBNs and GMFRFs (out of our sample of 13 grants, the extent to which FRs address Program Essentials are described in 6 out of 13 SBNs and 1 out of 13 GMFRFs), but this is not done systematically across the portfolio.

Finding 4.6: Gender Equality Marker (GEM)[111] is promising as a tool to track and strengthen the gender equality focus within grants; however, it is too soon to determine value added. The purpose of GEM is to track and report on gender-equality focus within FRs and to influence grants to strengthen gender considerations. Early GEM results from Windows 1-4 reveal that only 47 percent of the GC7 allocation is gender equality-focused.[112] While these results have been reported to the Strategy Committee and the Board,[113] it is still unclear how they will influence TRP reviews and Secretariat comments.[114] Despite the lack of evidence in the early stages of implementation, GEM is a tool that does not require significant additional effort from applicants and may be useful to prioritize gender equality-focused activities in grants.

Finding 4.7: Advanced grant-making for implementation was seen as highly useful for strengthening implementation readiness when possible. Most GC7 Grant-Making Survey respondents reported that they were able to advance grant-making during FR development, including 65 percent of implementation readiness[115] activities reported as partially or fully completed at the time of GAC review (see EQ10, Finding 10.1).[116] Where possible, early engagement of PRs in the FR process was seen as highly useful to advancing grant-making and ensuring implementation readiness.[117] However, the operationalization of other advanced grant-making activities was limited; for example, early contracting of SRs was seen as *"a dream"*[118] in some settings.

In addition, early production of a detailed budget, performance framework, and health product management tool was seen as duplicative in countries, requiring extensive changes following Secretariat and TRP review processes. Country teams and country-level respondents in three out of nine sampled countries described an extensive process of having to re-do documents such as the detailed budget and performance framework during grant-making, questioning the efficiency of producing documents with that level of detail before multiple rounds of reviews.

Finding 4.8: Ongoing country dialogue during GM has value in increasing transparency but is limited to CCM members, remaining largely unclear to civil society and community groups for whom it is intended. Evidence shows that most countries are adhering to the new requirement that the CCMs of Core and Focused countries hold two meetings during grant-making and that the CT meets with civil society representatives at least once. All nine sampled countries held the required

[111] Gender Equality Marker (GEM) is a three-point scoring system used by the TRP to identify whether gender equality is: (0) not targeted, (1) a significant focus, or (2) a principle focus of the FR.
[112] Gender Equality Marker (GEM): TRP Review Window 5 Opening Plenary, 3 June 2024. The Global Fund.
[113] Gender Equality Marker (GEM): TRP Review Window 5 Opening Plenary, 3 June 2024. The Global Fund.
[114] The Applicant Handbook states that GEM assessments will not impact whether FRs are approved, but that applicants may utilize the criteria to improve gender equality.
[115] Operational Policy Manual: Implementation readiness is achieved when a disbursement-ready grant has been approved and signed at least one month, and ideally two months before the IP start date, and the PR can begin implementing grant activities immediately on the IP start date.
[116] Completion of PR human resource and SR selection and contracting was more advanced than selection and contracting of supplier contracts and finalization of an implementation workplan.
[117] Evidenced by examples in five out of nine sampled countries.
[118] Country KI

meetings,[119] and the GC7 Grant-Making Survey feedback on ongoing country dialogue is largely positive.[120] There is early evidence that this may increase transparency of grant-making, although some KIs still perceive GM to be a "black box", with key decision-making limited to the PR and CT and with limited visibility for the CCM and other stakeholders. Where this does effectively operationalize, it is limited to CCM members, and thus does not generally engage broader community members to the same extent that they are consulted during FR development.[121]

Tracking ongoing country dialogue contributions through to final grant prioritization has not been possible to determine at the portfolio level, but triangulating evidence from our sample of 13 grants, confirms that most or all the priorities identified by communities and included in FRs were also included in final grants. The extent to which these priorities were fully integrated[122] cannot be determined without an in-depth analysis of budgets, but in at least three grants, funding for CSOs increased at the final grant stage, due to efficiency-finding exercises.[123]

Despite this, key informants reported a persisting lack of transparency between CCMs, PRs, CSOs, and community groups about what gets included and budgeted in final grants, especially after TRP and efficiency- exercises, fosters perceptions of power differentials and mistrust. Evidence suggests that these meetings alone are insufficient in ensuring that all relevant stakeholder groups are clear on what is included in final grants and budgets.

Finding 4.9: There is limited evidence of the effectiveness or efficiency of priorities for step change vis-a-vis other review processes. Secretariat technical team inputs during grant-making through priorities for step change was seen as a valuable input due to their strong working relationship with country teams and contextual understanding of country priorities throughout close involvement during FR and GM processes. However, there were concerns that some inputs come too late in the process, and the efficiency and value added in relation to other review functions (e.g., TRP and GAC) is questionable. Some stakeholders also raised concerns that there are numerous "signing off" points from many Secretariat business owners prior to grant approval, thus overcomplicating GM processes (see EQ8, EQ10, and EQ11).

5.5 EQ5: How effective and efficient are GC7 application and guidance materials from the Secretariat (application forms, annexes, allocation letter, information notes, technical briefs, applicant handbooks, e-learning, webinars) in providing direction and support to intended users?

[119] Internal Secretariat notes on GMFRF in nine sampled countries
[120] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications.
[121] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making found that 85 percent of respondents agreed that the PR actively reached out to communities and civil society during grant-making, but the difference between CCM and PR responses was statistically significant (p = 0.013) – only 77 percent of CCMs vs. 91 percent of PRs were in agreement. This survey did not include community members, who will be surveyed through an extension of the FR Community Engagement survey at a later date.
[122] i.e. with budget assigned to cover the full extent of activity intended by communities
[123] Confirmed by triangulating GMFRFs, country KIIs and correspondence with CTs

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ5[124]

Summary finding: The large volume and complexity of GC7 Application and Guidance materials hamper their effectiveness and efficiency in providing direction and support to intended users.

- **Finding 5.1:** The excessive volume and complexity of the GC7 application materials (main form and annexes) have resulted in overly heavy processes for completing the FR and have negatively impacted the efficiency of the FR process.
- **Finding 5.2:** Excessive guidance materials have defeated the purpose of providing direction and support to applicants and are reportedly poorly used and often untimely.

Finding 5.1: The excessive volume and complexity of the GC7 application materials (main form and annexes) have resulted in overly heavy processes for completing the FR and have negatively impacted the efficiency of the FR process. As described in EQ1, Finding 1.1, information requirements of Global Fund applicants are heavy. Despite this, evidence from the GC7 Applicant Survey shows that overall, a majority of applicants were positive about the application and guidance materials.[125] More than three-quarters (78 percent) agreed that completing the FR was straightforward, while 71 percent agreed that completing the required templates and annexes was straightforward. Nevertheless, approximately a fifth of applicants disagreed with either or both statements. A large majority of survey respondents agreed that the available guidance, tools and templates helped to prioritize and focus the FR on the highest quality programming, and that expectations were clear about what materials were required for FR submission. Among those who participated in both GC6 and GC7, a majority found that the forms and annexes were (much) easier to fill in than those in GC6. However, almost half of respondents said it took (much) more time to develop a funding request in GC7 than in GC6.

While the GC7 Applicant Survey found *overall* positive experiences with the new application materials (e.g. straightforward, helped prioritize, clear expectations and easier than GC6), evidence from FGDs and KIIs revealed a range of issues and challenges.

Funding request application form

In GC7, there are four different application forms, 21 annexes and more than 1,750 pages of guidance – e.g. 35 Core Information Notes, Technical Briefs and Guidance Notes. EQ1, Findings 1.1 and 1.2, noted limited differentiation of application forms and required annexes between portfolio types and across the five application approaches.

KIs and FGDs expressed strongly that there are too many application requirements and that the materials for all types of applications are too complex and need simplification. In concrete terms, this means a **shorter application form and fewer annexes.** Informants felt that the FR application form should remain a **high-level synthesis** of the most important information, while referring to relevant annexes (especially the Detailed Budget and Performance Framework) for detailed information for more in-depth analysis.[126]

KIs also noted the application materials **needed more coherence**, starting from the Portfolio Analysis and Allocation letter, so that applicants can go through the FR process more smoothly. Reportedly, the vast amount of information requested and the large number of annexes sometimes led to

[124] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple KIIs including the Secretariat, external global, and country-level KIIs (see Annex 4), (2) a review of internal and external application and guidance materials (see Annex 3), and (3) secondary data (Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications) and GC7 LOE Data.

[125] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on GC7 applications. Country dialogue and FR development survey of CCM members, country teams, partners, and CRG regional platforms after FR submission (N = 1300).

[126] Global External KII

applicants simply "ticking boxes", i.e. focusing on completing the many required documents, rather than critically discussing country needs and priorities (see EQ2, Finding 2.1 and EQ4, Finding 4.2).

Apart from these more structural issues regarding the application forms, respondents mentioned a **wide range of specific issues**, including the illogical order of the GC7 application form, where applicants need to present their proposed interventions first and provide a rationale and context later. KIs also complained about poor translation (Spanish), which sometimes forced them to consult the original materials in English.[127]

Annexes and templates

Those involved in completing the large number of annexes – consultants, technical working group members, country teams, PRs, CCMs – are more critical and propose removing some annexes, reducing the level of effort they take to complete, or using them in a different way (e.g. optional or outside the FR/GM process). There is wide consensus among country teams that the current list of annexes should be reduced and (some) annexes simplified. It was expressed that a distinction should be made between **key annexes** and those that are **good to have** with the latter reduced or removed.[128]

KIs also expressed specific ideas about the usefulness of some annexes. In an FGD with High-Impact and Core Country Team members, they advocated for a fundamental redesign of the FR stage to focus on the main Application Form and a limited number of key annexes, most importantly the detailed budget and performance framework. It was expressed that many of the current sections of the main Application Form could be removed or considerably streamlined to reduce excess information and duplication with annexes.[129] Another proposal was to use some of the annexes after the FR/GM stage, rather than during FR/GM (e.g., the Funding Landscape Table, the RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex, and the Human Rights and Gender Assessments).[130]

As described in EQ4, new levers reported by KIs as limited in their use or to be revised include the Program Essentials, the Funding Priorities from Civil Society and Communities Annex, the RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex, and the Gender Equality Marker.

Finding 5.2: Excessive guidance materials have defeated the purpose of providing direction and support to applicants and are reportedly poorly used and often untimely. The Global Fund has developed extensive guidance materials, including documents and webinars covering all aspects of the FR/GM stages which are tailored to specific users. A review of the Global Fund website revealed 48 guidance documents for the FR stage alone, including 31 Technical Briefs and Guidance Notes. Additionally, there are four Core Information Notes on the three diseases and RSSH, and four documents with essential funding model information (including the Modular Framework Handbook) and separate instructions for each application form. The total volume of all these documents exceeds 1,750 pages.

For the GM stage, specific guidance for both internal and external use, includes the Operational Policy Notes and Procedures on Make, Approve and Sign Grants; the CT Handbook for Grant-making; CT Checklists & Tips and Best Practices for Grant-making in GC7; GMFRF Instructions, as well as a range of webinars for CTs and other users.

[127] Country Team KII
[128] Multiple Secretariat KIIs/FGDs
[129] Secretariat FGD
[130] Secretariat KII

While EHG's analysis of the Global Fund GC7 Applicant Survey found that 86 percent of respondents positively assessed the guidance materials as helpful for prioritizing and focusing the FR, KIIs and FGDs presented mixed opinions. Some found the guidance very useful and straightforward, particularly beneficial for newcomers to the FR/GM process, and CCM members in one country *"heavily relying on information in the Allocation Letter for guiding early discussions, especially around RSSH allocations"*[131] for initial discussions. Others, however, felt the guidance was either not used, too much, unclear, or provided too late.[132] Despite these varied views, several informants highlighted the high quality of the guidance materials, noting the specific utility of community system strengthening (CSS) guidance[133] and the value of online grant-making sessions.[134]

Despite the generally positive feedback on guidance materials in the GC7 Applicant Survey, interviews and FGDs revealed concerns about the overwhelming volume of guidance materials. Many attributed this to numerous information requirements from the Board, leading to complex application and guidance materials[135] in addition to existing ones from technical partners like WHO and UNAIDS. The Strategic Review 2023 also highlighted difficulties in locating necessary information amid the numerous resources available. CCM Secretariat staff and a PR in one country noted that the sheer volume of written documents and online sessions was excessive[136] exacerbated by the difficulty of digesting all the guidance in a short time period.[137] The Secretariat is aware of these challenges and is working with partners to streamline and condense guidance materials, though past experiences have sometimes led to even more guidance being produced.

The Strategic Review 2023 and KIs revealed that some documents are primarily used by donors rather than in applicant countries. Secretariat staff in Geneva also downloaded guidance materials extensively.[138], while country-level respondents often consulted them only when needed or skipped them due to their experience.[139] Additionally, interviews with country KIs, including CCM members and PR staff, revealed issues with clarity and relevance of guidance materials, which were often seen as generic, contradictory, or difficult to follow. Similar concerns were noted in other evaluations and reviews, including the Strategic Review 2023.[140]

> *"As grant-making started, there was a lot of information available for CTs, but it was difficult to understand what was actually relevant"*
>
> - Country Team

Focus group discussions with Secretariat CTs mentioned **timing of guidance** documents being an issue, with new guidance being rolled out in the middle of the FR/GM process with no official communication about dates of applicability. Guidance was also reported to be published often at last minute and sometimes revised between windows.[141] Informants expressed that for a guidance to be useful it should be available six months before the Allocation Letters are sent.

Country KIs mentioned the key role of country teams to provide guidance and clarification. Country Team support was seen as "part and parcel" of the FR process. Overall, they were seen as very

[131] Country KII
[132] Country KIIs
[133] Country KIIs
[134] Country KII
[135] Secretariat KIIs
[136] Country KII
[137] Country KIIs
[138] Secretariat KII
[139] Country KIIs
[140] CEPA. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria: Strategic Review, 2017-2022 (SR2023), 4 July 2024. The Global Fund: Geneva. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/14802/iep_gf-elo-2024-01_report_en.pdf
[141] Country KIIs

supportive, playing a key role in providing face-to-face guidance that is tailored to the specific context of a country or grant, including through country missions.

5.6 EQ6: How effective has (external) TA been in FR development and how does it affect country ownership and country capacity to develop funding requests?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ6:[142]

Summary finding: External TA has largely been effective in supporting countries to develop FRs during what is perceived as very short and pressurized FR/GM period, it is not undermining country ownership and is filling clear capacity gaps among applicants during FR development.

- **Finding 6.1:** Overall, external technical assistance providers have seen a notable increase in both the number and diversity of experts engaged in GC7 assignments, without compromising country ownership.
- **Finding 6.2:** The increase in technical assistance is partly attributed to the complexity of the GC7 guidance and requirements, which include more than 1,750 pages of instructions.
- **Finding 6.3:** However, the efficient delivery of TA has been hindered by insufficient advanced planning and coordination, potentially jeopardizing the production of high-quality and timely NSPs and FRs.

Finding 6.1: Overall, external technical assistance providers have seen a notable increase in both the number and diversity of experts engaged in GC7 assignments, without compromising country ownership. Two major external TA providers, UNAIDS Technical Support Mechanism (TSM) and Expertise France L'Initiative, reported increases in TA engagement: by 4 percent for TSM and 8 percent for Expertise France compared to GC6. Both providers also reported a significant rise in the number of experts: TSM up by 30 percent and L'Initiative up by 37 percent, with L'Initiative increasing team size by 25 percent and the median number of days per assignment by 14 percent. TSM also noted a shift in the profile of TA providers, with increased focus on RSSH, human rights and gender, and costing, and around 45 percent of TA being provided by national consultants. In addition, TA has been crucial in supporting NSP development/review in nearly 30 percent of TSM assignments (N = 64) and over 30 percent of L'Initiative assignments (N = 66) under GC7.[143]

Table 11: External TA profile from GC6 to GC7

	Expertise France (L'Initiative)	TSM
No. TA assignments	+8%	+4%
Median budget	+9%	*No comparable data*
No. experts engaged in total	+ 37%	+30%
Average no. experts per team	+ 25%	*No comparable data*
Median no. days per assignment	+14%	*No comparable data*

[142] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple KIIs including TA providers, Secretariat, and country-level KIIs, (2) documentary evidence including the USAID-UNAIDS Technical Coordination Meeting: GC7 Lessons Learned, and (3) data from major TA providers (Expertise France and TSM internal GC7 Trackers).

[143] EHG analysis of the Expertise France internal GC7 Tracker, 24 May 2024 and TSM internal GC7 Tracker, 15 May 2024.

Despite the growing trends in and reliance on TA, informants largely reported that country ownership has not been compromised. The engagement of consultants was sighted by KIs as enhancing country ownership, as they can "coordinate across different ministries, across the Ministry of Health across different departments, and they often also provide useful neutrality in countries where difficult decisions need to be made to prioritize"[144] without assuming a decision-making role. Some KIs view TA as a means to achieving specific outputs (e.g., quality NSPs and FRs) rather than as an "end in itself". They see the TA as *"there to support us, to accompany us, and then, really, to give us guidance and to help us respect the Global Fund guidelines"*[145] rather than playing a decision-making role which would compromise country ownership. This approach has benefited from the increased use of national consultants, including those from the Ministry of Health, to ensure contextual relevance and further country ownership.[146] Overall, TA is seen as critical by KIs to ensuring the short-term capacity to develop NSPs and FRs, with little evidence of TA undermining country ownership.

Finding 6.2: The increase in technical assistance is partly attributed to the complexity of the GC7 guidance and requirements. TA providers noted that some new annexes are reported to generate good dialogue (see EQ4) but ultimately create more work for the countries, which *"can't do it on their own."*[147] Consequently, the complexity has necessitated a broader range of expertise from TA providers (see Finding 6.1). This technical assistance has been crucial in developing NSPs and FRs. However, the complexity has posed challenges for both countries and TA providers, who required additional training—much of which came late in the cycle[148]— to thoroughly understand the templates and requirements, which remains a work in progress.

Finding 6.3: However, the efficient delivery of TA has been hindered by insufficient advanced planning and coordination, potentially jeopardizing the production of high-quality and timely NSPs and FRs. KIs and key documents unanimously agree that the timely and coordinated provision of TA is essential and that continued support is necessary to encourage the use of various TA mechanisms. However, according to a recent report commissioned by FCDO, *"overall, country-led but TA process timelines and inputs were poorly coordinated and inefficient*."[149] This includes concerted efforts to ensure that the overlap in support reported by some KIs is curtailed and that TA needs are better anticipated and planned for including provision of training earlier in the FR/GM cycle.

Under GC7, TA ramped up in 2023 after Window 1 had already begun, which many reported as late in the process, leading to inefficient and poorly timed coordination of TA. Both the literature and KIs expressed the need to plan for the funding cycle early, "at least a year before" ensuring that all the building blocks needed prior to receipt of the allocation letter (e.g. funding landscape, programmatic gap tables, national targets for the performance framework) are in place – something that was not possible during GC7.

This early and continuous planning, including for the provision of TA throughout the grant cycle, according to KIs would help prevent *"weak coordination among technical and financial partners on TA mobilization, resulting in consultants being recruited for multiple and simultaneous windows*

[144] Key informant from the Secretariat
[145] Key informant country level PR
[146] Informants from external TA providers and country KI (noting the benefits of using national TA consultants); however, data from the TSM and Expertise France internal dashboards did not include information on GC6 figures for triangulation purposes.
[147] External KII
[148] Various informants at country level
[149] FCDO Global Fund process review in six HI countries in SSA, slide deck, 2024

applications".[150] This approach is a means of alleviating the pressure from short FR/GM cycles where *"time pressure affected the quality of the proposal"*[151] and where *"it was only possible to do the FR/GM phases fast as we had very professional TA"*[152] while enhancing the overall coordination of the TA response.

Box 1: Lessons learned from TA provision under GC7

Although still challenging, coordination efforts are improving under GC7, including the production of lessons learned from TA provision gathered during a USAID/UNAIDS sponsored coordination meeting in April 2024. These lessons, currently being compiled and to be published imminently, can help shape further TA provision and Global Fund processes under GC8. Highlights from a survey conducted among virtual participants (over 300 attended, including consultants, country stakeholders, UNAIDS, USAID, UNDP, WHO, TSM, L'Initiative, and other TA providers) include:

- Coordination is key.
- Anticipation is crucial, including planning for and gaining access to TA.
- Prioritization is critical yet remains poor, and the timing is off.
- There is an overload of requirements with too many additional annexes/guidance and cumbersome templates, making alignment difficult and causing struggles with frameworks and understanding of annexes (see EQ1, EQ4, and EQ5).
- Sustainability is not well articulated, and there is a lack of sustainable solutions.
- There is a persistent lack of evidence and quality data for decision-making (see EQ2, Finding 2.1).

[150] USAID-UNAIDS Technical Coordination Meeting/Strategic Learning Meeting: GC7 Lessons Learned and Way Forward; Lessons learned and recommendations - UNDP; 09 April 2024

[151] Respondent to 'mentimeter' online survey administered to attendees of the 09 April 2024 "USAID-UNAIDS Technical Coordination/Strategic Learning Meeting: Leveraging Lessons Learned from the 2023-2025 Global Fund Application Cycle: What Next?"

[152] KII country level CCM representative

5.7 EQ7: How efficient and effective have TRP review processes been in enhancing the strategic focus, prioritization and potential impact of grants?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ7:[153]

Summary finding: The TRP's independent function is valued but there is room for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of review processes.

- **Finding 7.1:** The independent review function of the TRP remains an important and valued element of the FR/GM process.
- **Finding 7.2:** TRP review processes have been effective in assessing the quality, technical soundness, and strategic focus of GC7 grants.
- **Finding 7.3:** TRP reviews can enhance the strategic focus and impact of grants, but their relevance and effectiveness vary in some contexts.
- **Finding 7.4:** The extent to which TRP recommendations cleared by the Secretariat are being implemented during grant implementation is difficult to determine due to nascent tracking systems.
- **Finding 7.5:** Differentiated TRP reviews have enabled more efficiency, but these processes could go further based on grant allocation size or country/portfolio specifics.
- **Finding 7.6:** The Secretariat Briefing Note has mixed added value for TRP audiences and the timing and volume of required documentation for TRP review has implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of these processes.

Finding 7.1: The TRP's independent review function remains an important and valued element of the FR/GM process. Established in 2002, the TRP ensures that proposals are technically sound and unbiased, enabling the Board to make well-informed investment decisions. Since the adoption of the Allocation-based model in 2014, the TRP now makes recommendations to the Secretariat, which negotiates grant agreements with countries, pending Board approval. KII data from Secretariat staff and external partners for this evaluation confirms that the Secretariat has since taken on an increasingly engaged and technical role in FR development, grant design, and implementation, to ensure funds achieve value for money and deliver results including through the expansion of its technical teams, focusing on FR/GM processes.

The increased involvement of Secretariat teams in developing and reviewing FRs and shaping grant design has raised internal questions about the necessity of an independent TRP. While opinions vary, overall, the evidence from KIs at Secretariat and country level including with external partners indicate that the TRP continues to offer relevant benefits to FR/GM. These benefits include independent assessments free of political and institutional interests, quality assurance for the Board regarding the soundness and potential impact of investments, credible expertise and rigor in FR development processes, valuable political support and leverage to CTs in matters of national ownership, or prioritization, and a comprehensive overview of grant design issues, aligned with the Global Fund's strategic goals.

> "*The TRP still plays a critical role: when dealing with global issues and when lots of funding is involved, balance is important.*"
>
> - Country KI

[153] Triangulated evidence for this finding is derived principally from (1) KIIs with multiple different stakeholder groups at global and country level, both internal and external to the Secretariat, (2) document review including TRP and GAC debriefs, and (3) survey data (Country Team Survey, TRP tracking and quality surveys).

"TRP is the only review of the grant. A Country Team led by an FPM cannot do an objective review. It will not be seen as objective. Technical focal points in the Global Fund are also involved in development so cannot be objective either"

- Global External KI

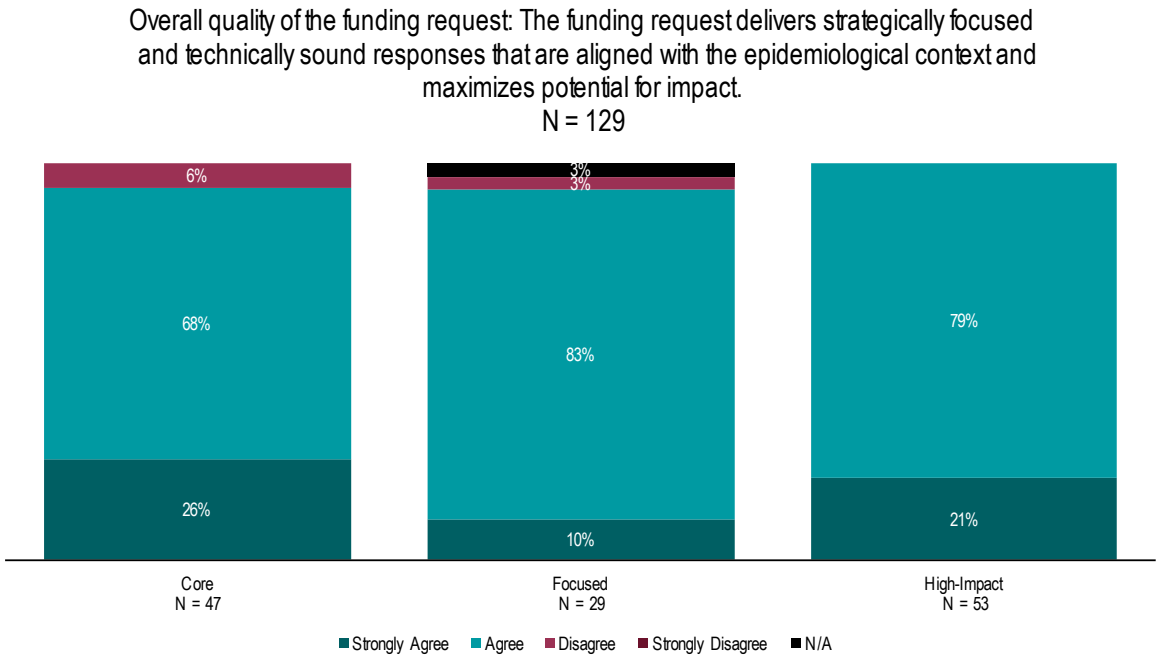
"By the time the FR gets to the TRP these days, it has already been through a rigorous process. This and the last cycle, GC6, saw very small percentages of iteration" - Secretariat KI

"The idea is not to remove the TRP but rather how we can optimize the added value of the TRP. Right now, it is a very heavy system"

- Secretariat KI

Finding 7.2: The TRP is effective in assessing the quality, technical soundness, and strategic focus of Funding Requests. During GC7, the TRP reviewed 105 FRs in Windows 1 and 2, recommending a total of US$ 9.68 billion for grant-making, which represented 73.8 percent of GC7 allocated funds. The TRP recommended 93 percent and 97 percent of FRs for grant-making in Windows 1 and 2 respectively, with TRP assessing them based on their strategic focus and technical soundness, aligned with the epidemiological context and potential for impact.[154] EHG's analysis of survey data from the TRP FR Quality Assessment database presented in Figure 5 provides evidence for the quality of FRs, with a 96 percent of TRP respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that FRs are delivering strategically focused and technically sound responses across the three portfolios.[155]

Figure 5: TRP assessment of overall quality of the FR[156]



[154] TRP Observations Report, Grant Cycle 7 Windows 1 and 2, October 2023. The Global Fund, https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13448/trp_2023-observations_report_en.pdf.
[155] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on quality assessment. There were 129 responses to this survey; therefore, statistical power may be lacking. This survey was sent to the TRP Primary Reviewer to respond on behalf of each FR Review Group to assess the TRP perception of the FR. Iterated and multi-country FRs were excluded.
[156] Ibid.

Results from the survey have also shown quality improvements across FRs, with the average overall quality rating rising from 95 percent in GC6 to 96 percent in GC7.[157, 158] Additionally, the number of FRs returned for iteration in Windows 1-5 was low, with only 5 in total,[159] potentially lower than the 12 iterated in GC6.[160] The evaluation identified multiple factors that are contributing to the improved quality of FRs in GC7, which are highlighted in Box 2.[161]

Box 2: Factors identified in the evaluation as contributing to the improved quality of FRs

- Cumulative experience of CCMs, PRs and TA/consultants with substantial knowledge of FR development processes, application forms and information needs (see also EQ6).
- Inclusive country dialogue and FR development processes (see also EQ2).
- Country and regional peer review processes and mock TRPs supported by technical partners such as WHO and UNAIDS.
- TRP recommendations and strategic steer.
- Ongoing Country Team and Global Fund technical adviser engagement and feedback during country dialogue and review of FRs prior to TRP review (see also EQ2).

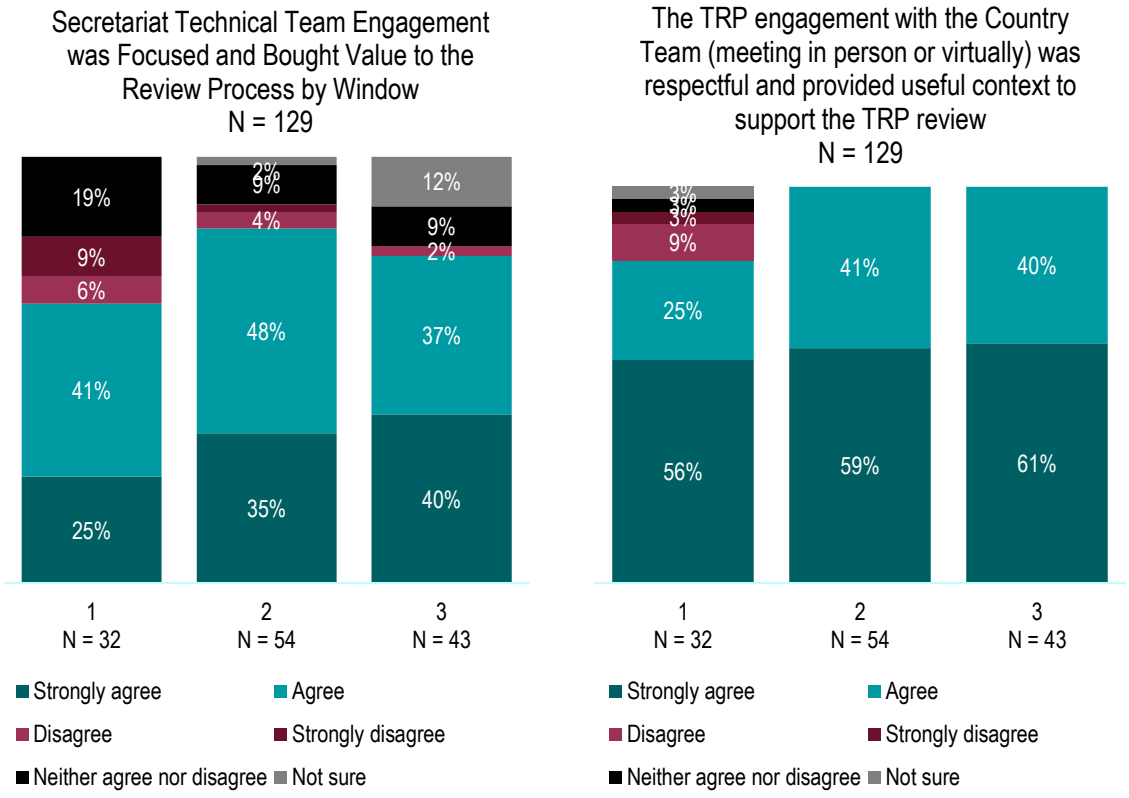
Finding 7.3: TRP reviews have contributed to enhancing the strategic focus, prioritization and potential impact of grants. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of TRP comments vary across different contexts. TRP reviews, and the issues and actions these generate, prompt countries to review FRs, with the strong expectation that adjustments will be made to grant designs accordingly. While not entirely reliable due to a limited response rate, data from the Country Team Survey for Windows 1-3 on the TRP Review reveals support for the independent TRP function, with 90.3 percent and 93.6 percent of survey participants indicating that the TRP's recommendations increased strategic focus and technical soundness, respectively.[162] FR and grant reviews in the nine sampled countries provide evidence of the effectiveness of the TRP in influencing grant design through issues raised and subsequent country responses. Many of these focus on increasing coverage targets, proposing strategic implementation plans to address gaps, or strengthening the focus on prioritized themes and interventions. For example, country KIs and TRP and grant-related documentation from the Philippines and Vietnam, indicate that TRP issues and actions have led to the scale up of coverage targets in service delivery sites for key populations, and PrEP respectively with subsequent revisions to budgets and performance frameworks.

Country and technical teams are proactive in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of TRP reviews by preparing and engaging with the TRP to ensure text is understood and the most strategic issues are included in the TRP review form. In the case of Nigeria – the recipient of the highest Global Fund support in GC7 – a pre-engagement meeting with the TRP helped review preparation and reduced TRP questions and comments. Analysis of the TRP Review Survey data suggests the TRP appreciates the engagement with country teams, with a minimum of 80 percent of TRP respondents in Workstream 1, rising to 100 percent by Workstream 3, finding Country Team engagement provided useful context to support the TRP (p = 0.031) (see Figure 6).[163] Data on TRP engagement

[157] Initial Findings from Secretariat internal notes on GC7
[158] Additional evidence from the FCDO Review of GC7 Proposal Development in Six Countries (https://www.dai.com/uploads/FCDO%20review.%20Funding%20request%20process%20for%20GC7%20in%206%20countries.%20March%2024.pdf) also finds the quality of FRs to be improved compared to previous years.
[159] EHG analysis of the Global Fund internal documentation on Quality Assessment.
[160] 2020-2022 TRP Observations Report, July 2022. https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/updates/2022/2022-07-20-technical-review-panel-observations-report/
[161] Sources of evidence for these findings include triangulated KII data from global and country levels, both internal and external to the Secretariat, documentary evidence.
[162] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on the TRP.
[163] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on the TRP.

with Secretariat technical teams suggests technical teams' engagement in review processes is also valued, but less so.[164]

Figure 6: TRP perspectives of Secretariat engagement[165]



p = 0.074 *p* = 0.031

Despite this evidence, country KI data provides a mixed picture regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of TRP review processes, including the utility of issues, actions and recommendations raised. While TRP issues are often well received and valid, in five of the nine sampled countries, a prevailing perception was that the issues raised were inappropriate to the country context. There are a number of important factors that are contributing to this perception:

- The sensitive and potentially unpopular nature of TRP's issues which may require shifts in resource allocations and which countries may see as a threat.
- The need for country teams to act as intermediaries between the TRP and the country is seen as inefficient and can diminish the utility of the TRP feedback.
- The lack of direct dialogue between countries and the TRP prevents debate and defense of country positions and creates a distance from country realities, with implications for the contextualization and effectiveness of the issues raised.
- The composition and variability in TRP members' technical knowledge and contextual understanding can affect the relevance and applicability of issues and actions raised. Notable in feedback is the perceived heavier input and influence of cross cutting members and thematic topics, with feedback calling for a rebalancing of composition towards more programmatic and country experience.

[164] 49 percent of TRP respondents for Windows 1 and 3 agreed or strongly agreed that Secretariat technical team engagement brought focus and value to the review process. Window 2 data was unavailable.
[165] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on the TRP.

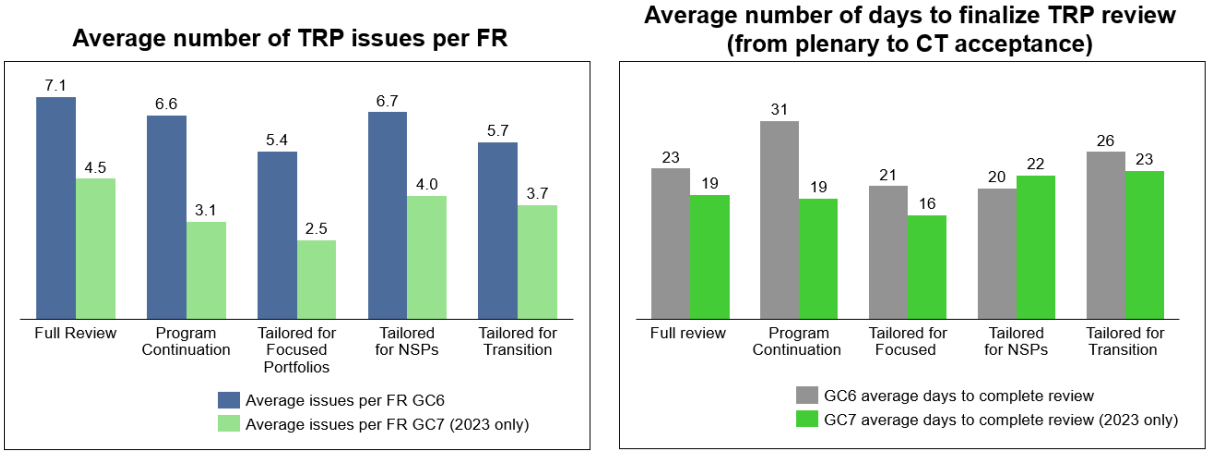
Finding 7.4: The extent to which TRP recommendations cleared by the Secretariat are being implemented as intended is unclear due to nascent tracking systems.[166] Issues and actions raised through TRP reviews are a key mechanism for ensuring strategic priorities are embedded in grants and that grant funding translates into high-quality grants positioned for impact. TRP review feedback serves as an indicator of the overall quality and reflects emerging issues with implementing aspects of the Strategy. For GC7, data analysis of TRP Issues Reporting database notes the number of TRP issues raised to be addressed across the portfolios was 869. TRP review feedback serves as an indicator of the overall quality and reflects emerging issues with implementing aspects of the Strategy.

Timely resolution of TRP issues is crucial for enhancing grant relevance and quality. Analysis in nine sampled countries shows many issues and actions are cleared at the Secretariat level during grant-making or early in grant implementation. Despite tracking systems introduced in GC7 to monitor TRP actions and flag deadlines, there are concerns about the quality of implementation. Previous evaluations[167] and KI feedback[168] highlight limited progress in tracking TRP recommendations post-grant start. Whilst GC7 has introduced a tracking system which monitors and flags upcoming deadlines for TRP actions to country teams and has put in place mechanisms for GAC involvement in cases where actions have missed deadlines, these systems appear to track timelines rather than the quality of the TRP actions being implemented, which remains unclear. Some KIs question whether TRP recommendations are implemented as intended, noting recurring issues across grant cycles. For example, an April 2024 TRP analysis of GC6 issues shows 1,031 of 1,276 issues have been resolved, with 175 ongoing or overdue.[169]

Finding 7.5: Differentiated TRP reviews have enabled more efficiency, but these processes could go further based on grant allocation size or country/portfolio specifics. The TRP has evolved and differentiated its review processes to align with the Strategy.[170] Data for GC7 provides evidence for some improvement in TRP efficiency markers in relation to differentiated review processes and compared to GC6. For example, the average number of TRP questions for country teams per component decreased from 13 in GC6 to 11 in GC7 and the average number of TRP issues and actions per component has reduced from 5/10 in GC6 to 2/4 in GC7.[171] Figure 7 indicates positive progress on differentiated TRP review particularly in terms of shortened TRP finalization timelines and decreased number of issues raised for all portfolios in 2023.[172]

[166] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on the TRP
[167] Such as the SR2020
[168] Triangulated evidence from TRP, external and Secretariat key informants
[169] TRP GAC debrief post Workstream 4, April 2023. The Global Fund. Slide set shared by the GAC Secretariat.
[170] TRP review and approaches manual, how the TRP differentiates FR reviews, March 2023. The Global Fund, https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13013/trp_review-approaches_manual_en.pdf
[171] Initial findings from Secretariat internal notes on GC7.
[172] TRP GAC debrief post Workstream 4, April 2023. The Global Fund. Slide set shared by the GAC Secretariat.

Figure 7: Progress on differentiated TRP review[173]



Whilst progress has been made with differentiating review processes, KIs, particularly from the Secretariat, but also from external and TRP members, suggest differentiation needs to go further, including ensuring TRP reviews are more aligned to FR approaches and portfolio needs. For example, of the 869 issues raised by the TRP (as referred to Finding 7.4) some of the more streamlined FR approaches such as Program Continuation and Tailored for NSP still generated a significant number of issues raised i.e. 297 TRP issues were for Full Review, 239 for Program Continuation, 194 for Tailored for NSP, 118 for Tailored for Focused and 21 for Tailored for Transition.

To date, TRP discussions on differentiation have largely concentrated on Focused portfolios, and areas such as reducing the number of TRP issues raised, number of members in review groups, and number of minutes spent discussing FRs based on review approach. However, these are relatively trivial forms of differentiation, and substantive discussions to develop a TRP review strategy which enables high impact 'mission critical' countries to receive more TRP attention, and Focused, 'tail end ' countries (which only make up 5 percent of the total allocation) to receive much less, has yet to be developed and resourced.

> "*The discussion often doesn't get to the distinction between the "big beasts" (in terms of grant size) and the tiny ones. But this would have huge strategic impact*"
>
> – TRP member KI

Finding 7.6: The Secretariat Briefing Note has mixed added value for TRP audiences, and the timing and volume of documentation required for review has implications for efficiency and effectiveness. The SBN is the Country Team's assessment of the FR and draws attention to issues not explicitly stated in the FR. This provides the Country Team and technical advisers who input into it an opportunity to advocate for or disagree with areas of the FR. In this sense the SBN is potentially influential in steering the TRP towards Global Fund priorities they would like the country to follow. However, opinions vary on the usefulness of this document. For example, the '100 pennies survey' indicates high level of effort and low added value of the SBN for country teams. Additional KI evidence from TRP members, Secretariat staff and TRP Review Survey data reflect the mixed opinions on the utility of the SBN. For example, the TRP Review Survey indicated that for Windows 1 and 2, 66 percent and 69 percent respectively agreed that the SBN added to the quality of the review. SBNs for larger countries are often very lengthy documents (average of 11.5 pages per FR component, ranging from 5.8 in Focused countries to 15.4 in High Impact countries),[174] duplicative of

[173] Ibid

[174] EHG analysis of the Global Fund internal GC6 and GC7 LOE Data.

the FR and less useful for TRP audiences who already have significant volumes of documents to review and who need valuable contextual and 'soft' info not included in the template.

> *"The largest countries have the most extensive SBNs, really, really extensive. These contain a lot of information that is not useful to the TRP, instead of something brief, really focusing on key issues, not duplicating what is already in the FR."*
>
> – TRP member KI

The timing of review processes, including the need for pre-engagement knowledge, timely receipt of documents (including PAAR), and the high volume of documentation reviewed in a short period, affects the efficiency and effectiveness of TRP reviews. The TRP evaluates approximately sixteen documents/annexes per portfolio without significant differentiation. Some country KI data indicates that the anticipation of TRP reviews leads to overproduction of materials, adding complexity and burden to both application and review processes. This reflects previous findings from GC6, where excessive documentation, long narratives, and redundant information were noted, increasing workload without improving FR quality or clarity.[175]

5.8 EQ8: How efficient and effective is the GAC review process, including engagement with partners, in determining final grants are designed for maximum impact and implementation readiness?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ8:[176]

Summary finding: While there is evidence that pre-GAC and differentiated review modalities enable smoother GAC review processes, challenges remain with timing, efficiency, and purpose of pre-GAC and GAC review steps.

- **Finding 8.1:** The pre-GAC stage is effective in enabling smoother GAC review and approval but faces challenges regarding purpose, processes and systems.
- **Finding 8.2:** Differentiation in the GAC stage has focused mainly on GAC review modalities, rather than GAC preparation. Review modalities have been effective in streamlining review and approval processes, but with implications for meaningful discussion on strategic issues in GAC meetings.
- **Finding 8.3:** External partners engage in GAC review processes, but it is unclear how influential these inputs are at this stage of the FR/GM continuum.
- **Finding 8.4:** The GMFRF is considered to have limited value in GAC review and approval processes.

The Grant Approval Committee is the Global Fund's senior management body that reviews FRs and oversees the grant-making process. It evaluates proposed grants using the expertise of technical partners and in-house teams and provides managerial and strategic advice to applicants based on TRP reviews and recommends grants to the Board. In the grant lifecycle, GAC is involved in the GAC steer, pre-GAC Review, GAC Review and Recommendation, Board Approval, and Grant Signing. Evidence generated for this evaluation question focuses primarily on pre-GAC review and GAC review and recommendation stages.

Finding 8.1: The pre-GAC stage is effective in enabling smoother GAC review and approval processes but faces challenges regarding purpose, processes and systems. The pre-GAC stage of the

[175] TRP Lessons Learned from Review Window 1 2020-2022 Funding Cycle https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9811/trp_2020-2022lessonslearnedwindow1_report_en.pdf; 2020-2022 TRP Observations Report, July 2022 https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/12137/trp_2020-2022observations_report_en.pdf

[176] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple KIIs of different stakeholder categories including Secretariat and external global KIIs and (2) documentary evidence including GAC-related slide sets.

FR/GM continuum is the point where legal, financial and technical checks of final grant documents take place. In addition, the pre-GAC stage also provides an opportunity for outstanding issues to be resolved in preparation for the GAC review and/or meeting. There is evidence that the pre-GAC stage is effective in enabling more efficient and timely GAC reviews and approvals, for example, by resolving most strategic or outstanding issues before reaching the GAC review, albeit with implications for GAC meetings themselves (see Finding 8.2). There is also some evidence that the pre-GAC stage is useful in providing peer group discussion, relationship building and alignment of discussions with different Secretariat actors/inputs in preparation for the GAC review meeting.[177]

However, the pre-GAC stage is widely acknowledged to be problematic for all portfolios and faces challenges regarding its purpose, processes and systems. These challenges were highlighted extensively by Secretariat KIs,[178] the '100 pennies survey',[179] and the GAC Secretariat's 2023 review,[180] which noted high levels of effort relative to the added value provided by the pre-GAC stage.[181] The main issues identified include:

- Unclear purpose of the pre-GAC stage as it involves compliance as well as strategic or policy issues which could be addressed earlier in the grant-making process.
- Tight deadlines for the finalization of documents required for pre-GAC compliance purposes with potential trade-offs with grant negotiations - 'process over substance' - with some documents required 4-6 weeks in advance of the GAC meeting.
- The volume of inputs required at pre-GAC stage and lack of documented guidance on who is responsible for reviewing what and why, particularly as many of the same inputs/people have been closely involved in recent processes such as GM.
- The multiple and sometimes late changes made to grant documents made by different Secretariat teams and/or late validations at two or more stages required by functional managers and technical teams can cause bottlenecks.
- The overall large level of effort for certain processes and unclear added value. For example, pre-GAC meetings can typically involve upwards of twenty people (country teams, extended country teams including specialists, disease advisors, CRG, and support functions (A2F, etc.).
- Grant Operating System (GOS) issues that hinder the easy uploading of revised documents (the validation of documents in GOS must be repeated if there is a change to the document).

"The pre-GAC has too many stakeholders with different responsibilities to only review a Performance Framework and budget and give the GAC assurances, plus they may focus on their part only while missing the whole. There is also the existential question of the role of Risk, Health Finance, CRG teams etc. – where is their signature going?"

- Secretariat KI

"When in GAC, one change triggers everything: you have to start from scratch"

- Secretariat KI

"We ask too much detailed information – leave more time for the key steps (negotiations in-country) rather than for internal process steps: in our case, we had approx. 5 weeks between TRP Form and Quality Assurance (few days before pre-submission) and there are 9 weeks between pre-submission and Board approval – carefully consider the submission windows to ensure there is

[177] Triangulated data with different Secretariat stakeholder groups obtained through individual KIIs, focus group discussions, external partners; GAC-related slide sets (GAC dashboard etc.) and documents such as Board reports.
[178] Triangulated data with different Secretariat stakeholder groups obtained through individual KIIs and FGDs.
[179] Caution should be taken with this data source due to the limited number of observations in this data set (N = 34).
[180] Secretariat internal documentation on GAC.
[181] Secretariat internal documentation on GAC.

sufficient time to sign the grants and anticipate better the peak in workload, every 3 years it is the same"

- GC7 Grant-Making Survey respondent, open text

Finding 8.2: Differentiation at the GAC stage has focused mainly on GAC review modalities, rather than preparation for GAC submission. GAC modalities have been effective in streamlining review and approval processes, but with implications for meaningful discussion on strategic issues in GAC meetings. There is evidence of GAC review processes having been differentiated with three modalities (Electronic, Executive, and Plenary) in place.[182] The use of these different modalities is determined by criteria in a Secretariat prioritization tool and aim to align the level of strategic discussion with the risk, challenges and size of grants. This light differentiation, in theory, ensures that Plenary GAC meetings focus on the highest value investments with greater strategic risk.

There is less evidence of differentiation by portfolio in terms of pre-GAC and GAC preparation stages. For example, high volumes of documents are requested for pre-GAC and GAC submission across the portfolios (16 required documents for High Impact/Core and between 9 and 12 for Focused countries).[183] Secretariat KI data endorses this point indicating that the differentiation at this stage is less evident because the underlying document for every single grant is fundamentally the same, requiring similar amounts of work.

There is evidence that differentiated review modalities are efficient in enabling timely recommendations for grant approval to the Board[184] but are less effective in supporting strategic discussions at portfolio level, as this function has largely been taken care of, during pre-GAC.[185] KI data from Secretariat and GAC members highlight that the timing of final GAC meetings is not suitable for addressing significant strategic issues which require attention earlier in the FR/GM continuum and that by the time grants reach the final GAC review stage, very few are turned back.[186]

Evidence from the Secretariat's internal assessment of how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the GAC conducted in 2023, and endorsed by this evaluation's evidence,[187] indicates the need to review and rethink the purpose of GAC meetings to determine whether and how to reorientate these platforms towards more meaningful strategic, thematic and solution-oriented portfolio-wide discussions. *"We have simplified a lot, for example, electronic decision making has made processes much lighter than they used to be. The process has been so streamlined with pre-GAC solving issues before the GAC that the GAC is just rubber stamping and boring"*

– Secretariat KI

"The timing of the GAC is the main issue. It's not set to give enough upfront guidance or steer. Exec GAC is so late we just pull the grant or let it go through."

– Secretariat KI

[182] Evidence indicates that differentiation is principally at review modality stage with a data driven tool determining which grants go to Plenary. There is some light differentiation with certain documents not being expected from focused portfolios but for the most part, the documentation submitted for pre-GAC and GAC review is considerable and GAC members rarely have time to review the large volume of documentation.

[183] Global Fund Operational Policy Manual, 15 May 2024.
/https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3266/core_operationalpolicy_manual_en.pdf

[184] Evidence provided through Grant Recommendation dashboard, GAC meeting schedules during the peak period (often weekly), GAC reports to the Board.

[185] Document review and triangulated internal and external KI evidence at global, and to a lesser extent, country level.

[186] The percentage of grants not approved by the GAC is close to zero (source: GAC Secretariat email).

[187] Document review and triangulated internal and external KI evidence at global, and to a lesser extent, country level.

> "*The GAC review was electronic so an online meeting, and they have a long list of countries to go through. So, they have x country, and you know they talk about it for about an hour. And then they mentioned our country (one of the nine sampled countries for the evaluation) in one sentence, and if you are not listening closely, you will miss it.* – Country KI

Finding 8.3: External partners are able to engage in GAC review processes, but it is unclear how influential these inputs are at this stage of the FR/GM continuum. External partner engagement takes places largely at the GAC review stage (external partners are not involved in the pre-GAC stage) through electronic platforms (for Executive and Electronic GAC review modalities) and in-person for the Plenary GAC.[188] The role of external partners is recognized as beneficial in terms of shared ownership and accountability of GAC review decisions and external partners can play important roles in coordinating technical support at global level e.g. through Situation Rooms, in relation to issues arising (e.g. considering technical support to countries for grants that have gone to iteration or been turned back at pre-GAC stage, although this discussion tends to happen earlier in the FR/GM continuum). External partners also engage country-based colleagues for feedback on grants to be approved, to ensure there are no issues arising from the external partners' perspective. However, the evaluation has not been able to determine the value of external partner engagement at GAC stage and whether engagement has influenced strategic, or design considerations of final grants reviewed and recommended for Board approval.

Finding 8.4: The GMFRF is considered to have limited value in GAC review processes. The GMFRF captures the outcomes of grant-making (including TRP issues status, strategic investments, grant budget variance) and is a key reference document that supports decision making by the GAC and the Board.[189] However, the evaluation found limited evidence for the use of the GMFRF – either to inform the GAC presentation slides, the final grant document, or that GAC members use the GMFRF to inform their review decision. Instead, the GMFRF is primarily used for internal due diligence purposes, as an audit trail and source document reviewed by Secretariat teams who 'sign off' on the grant in GOS (see also findings in EQ10/10.2). In addition, the *overall volume* of documentation for GAC review is significant and challenging to read and digest in advance of the meetings.[190] Primary material guiding GAC review and approval processes tends to be the GAC presentation slides (which the GAC Secretariat assessment indicates could be more focused and strategic) and core documents relevant to GAC members' expertise. This calls into question the purpose and utility of the GMFRF as a key source document for GAC review and Board approval, as well as the need to submit such a large package of documents for GAC review purposes.

[188] As evidenced by GAC discussion data which shows external partner inputs and thoughts on grants and key informant interviews with Secretariat staff and external partners.
[189] The Global Fund Grant-Making Final Review Form Instructions GC7, updated 31 October 2023.
[190] Evidence is derived from KII data with Secretariat staff and selective GAC members; guidance including Grant-Making in GC7: Make and sign high quality grants to deliver impact (Part 1 and 2) and Global Fund Operational Procedure guidance on Make, approve and sign grants (13 March 2023).

5.9 EQ9: To what extent does the GM process effectively build on the FR, and result in final grants that are consistent with the TRP recommended FR. What explains any variance?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 2

Key findings for EQ9: [191]
Summary finding: GM processes largely build on FRs and final grants are consistent with TRP-recommended FRs.

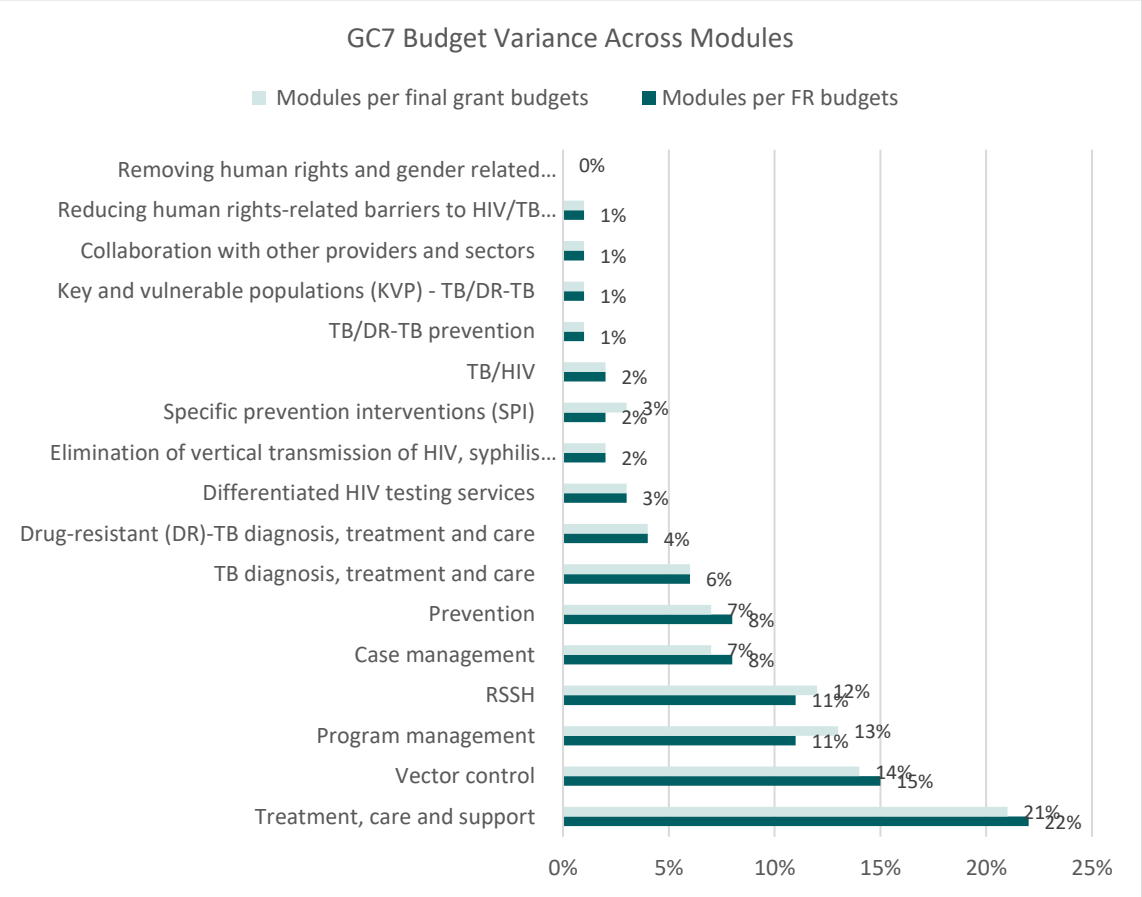
- **Finding 9.1:** Evidence suggests that GM processes build on FRs with legitimate changes to grant design, performance frameworks and detailed budgets.
- **Finding 9.2:** Considerable pressure may be used by different stakeholders (in country or in the Global Fund Secretariat) to change priorities and allocations post-TRP review and the role of country teams in moderating these changes during GM is significant.

The main source of evidence for this EQ regarding the rationale for budget variance is documentation and KIIs from our sample of 13 grants. Variance between final FR budgets and final grant budgets across modules at the portfolio level are shown in Figure 8 below. However, it has not been possible to triangulate this data with other data sources to understand the rationale behind these variances and the degree to which they align with TRP recommended FRs.

Finding 9.1: Evidence suggests that GM processes build on FRs with legitimate changes to grant design, performance frameworks and detailed budgets in line with: 1) TRP recommendations, 2) efficiencies identified during GM and reinvestments in PAAR/Unfunded Quality Demand (UQD), and 3) community priorities included in FRs.

[191] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) primary data sources including GMFRFs for our sample of 13 grants, (2) mixed stakeholder group country KIIs (CTs, PRs, CCMs, TWGs), and (3) global Secretariat KIIs.

Figure 8: Portfolio-wide budget variance across modules between GC7 funding request budgets and final grant budgets[192]



Key budget increases +	Key budget decreases -
Program management costs + 2%	**Treatment care and support - 1%** **Case management – 1%** **Vector control – 1%**
RSSH budgets combined + 1%	**Prevention – 1% overall** but increases seen in specific prevention lines for AGYW, SPI, OVPs, people in prisons and transgender people (with decreases in prevention for MSM, sex workers, transgender people)

Portfolio level variance: Analysis of the specific reasons for budget variance across the portfolio was not possible in this evaluation. However, global level interviews and discussion with country teams confirmed scrutiny of detailed budgets during the GM stage relates largely to correcting misclassifications and shifting funds between budget lines – in line with but not limited to TRP recommendations – to achieve maximum grant impact.

"Significant variance occurs in terms of final grant compared to an FR because the FR is not scrutinized. GM is where things are pressure tested and there is lots of movement of Dollars with inefficiencies needing reinvesting."

– Secretariat KI

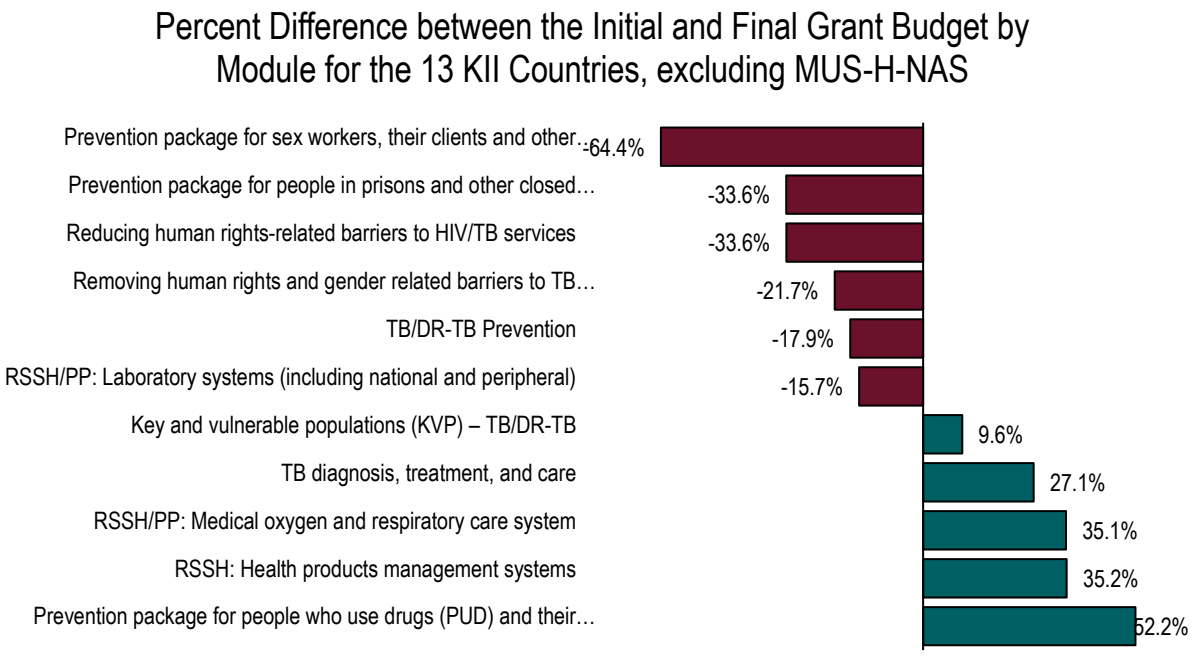
[192] We compared the FR Budget Breakdown (from the Global Fund internal FR Budgets by Module Intervention dataset, 26 February 2024, the Global Fund) to the Final Budget Amount outlined in the Global Fund internal Grant-Making Final Review Forms.

> *"There are efforts made to try and reinvest in the same modules, but there are times when you see that there is something else that has a bigger priority that needs to be funded from the TRP recommendation, and savings are put together to meet those priorities, not by module."*
>
> – Secretariat KI

Country level variance: Across our sample of 13 grants, no evidence was found of any activity/budget changes having been made that were inconsistent with TRP recommendations.[193] Evidence in GMFRFs also suggests that efficiencies and reinvestments are being used in line with needs identified in PAAR/UQD. Further, evidence suggests that most or all priorities identified by communities and included in FRs were also included in final grants.

Figure 9 demonstrates some variance between final FR stage and final grant budgets ranging from the greatest reduction for *Prevention package for sex workers, their clients and other sexual partners (64.4 percent reduction from US$ 3 million to US$ 1 million)* to the greatest increase in *Prevention package for people who use drugs and their sexual partners* budgets (52.2 percent increase from *US$ 8.9 million to US$ 13.5 million).*

Figure 9: Comparison of initial and final grant budgets across 12 of our sample of 13 grants (including the 5 areas with the greatest reduction and 5 areas with the greatest increase)[194]



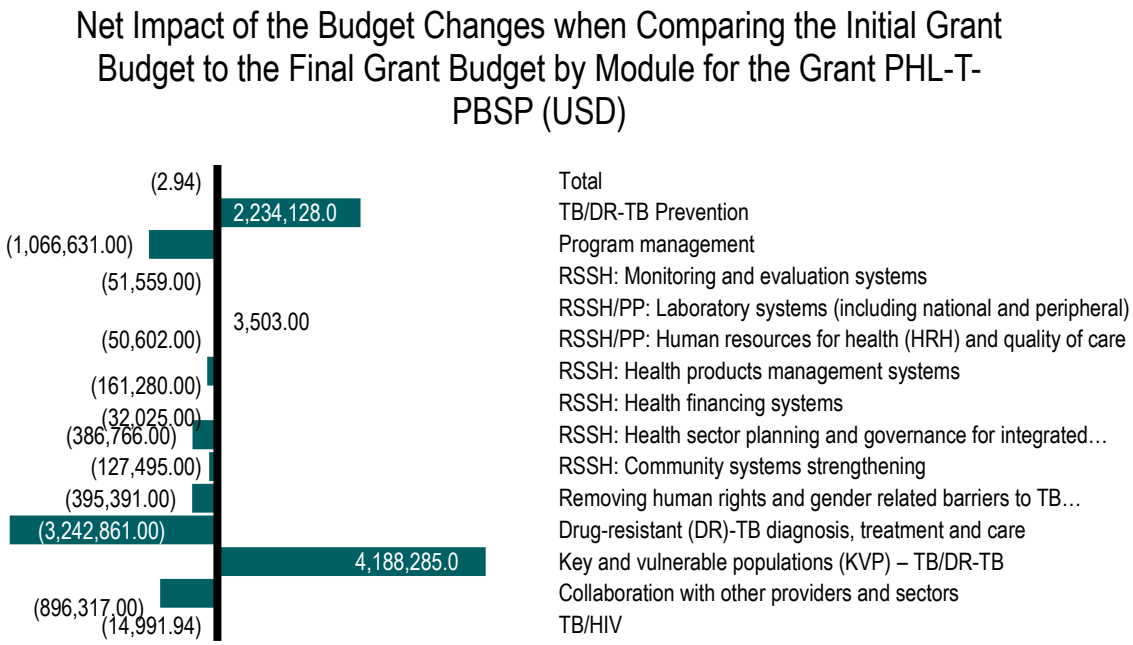
A detailed exploration of the different reasons for budget variance across our sample of 13 grants found that variance can be categorized broadly as either efficiency-related or errors/misclassifications.[195] Efficiencies account for 82 percent of variance[196] including savings made largely on travel related costs, training costs (rationalizing participant numbers, locations, etc.), and Health Product Management Template (HPMT) savings related to changes in unit costs. Errors in calculations or misclassifications of items account for 18 percent of variance.

[193] GMFRFs, country KIIs, and follow-up emails
[194] GMFRFs in our sample of 13 grants (see Section 4.2.2), received 26 April 2024. The Global Fund.
[195] Ibid
[196] Equivalent to changes made in 126 modules across our sample of 13 grants spanning 154 modules with variance

Efficiency savings are being reinvested to cover a range of items from relatively modest activities written in narrative FRs but omitted in budgets (such as surveys and Procurement and Supply Agent fees), through to additional TA, and multi-million-dollar activities allowing the scale up of long-lasting insecticide net (LLIN) mass campaigns in additional regions, directly impacting performance framework targets.

Figure 10 demonstrates an example of budget changes in alignment with TRP comments in the Philippines, resulting in budget increases for KVP TB/ drug resistant TB and lab facilities. The changes to the targets are primarily to increase ambition in areas of TB control which need further enhancement. Particularly, the strengthening of TB notification in private sector and KVP (through Active Case Finding), enhance molecular diagnosis capacity, and improved TB treatment quality in private sector. However, reductions across RSSH categories are observed, despite being an RSSH priority country.

Figure 10: Budget variance chart for Philippines PHL-T-PBSP[197]



Finding 9.2: There are instances of considerable pressure being used by different stakeholders (in country or in the Global Fund Secretariat) to change priorities and allocations post-TRP review, and the role of country teams in moderating these changes during GM is significant.[198] Evidence from KIs across four countries suggest pressure might be applied, particularly around community allocations and RSSH components from in-country stakeholders and Secretariat technical teams, i.e., beyond TRP recommendations which, by design, do not cover all budget areas but focus on the most salient/ strategic areas for the country to address. Key informants also suggest that country teams and PRs will usually resist such pressure. This finding emphasizes the critical role played by country teams and the significance of their position and role in influencing changes to grants during GM, as noted also in EQ3 and EQ7.

[197] PHL-T-PBSP GMFRF, received 26 April 2024. The Global Fund.

[198] Three of the nine sampled countries across multiple stakeholder groups (PRs, SRs, Technical Partner, Community Representatives), SR2023

"The comments and the conditions etc. from the TRP were respected. But the TRP doesn't comment on every single aspect of an FR. It makes a lot of comments and recommendations, but then it says, we approve this. It's the approved piece that we then use for GM and in that GM process, it felt there was a little bit too much carte blanche to decide what to keep, what to take, what to do, how to do it, and change your mind, and so forth, and drive or force a country towards however we thought it should be."

- Secretariat KI

5.10 EQ10: How efficient and effective are grant-management processes to enable the development of implementation-ready grants? What factors are helping or hindering progress?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ10:[199]

Summary finding: Grant-making processes are effective in supporting the development of implementation-ready grants, but the complexity of the process, heavy involvement of many different Secretariat departments and inadequate Grant Operating Systems modules hamper the efficiency of the process.

- **Finding 10.1:** Overall, GM processes are well understood and clear to key stakeholders and effective in producing implementation-ready grants.
- **Finding 10.2:** The efficiency of the GM process is hampered by an overly complex system of reviews and sign-offs by different Secretariat teams and departments.
- **Finding 10.3:** Technical and human resource challenges and constraints have a major impact on the efficiency of the grant-making process.

Grant-making is a robust, but complex and a time-consuming process that starts after the TRP recommends the FR. Where the FR is developed by the applicant – i.e. the CCM, usually with support from consultants – GM is primarily conducted by the PR and the Country Team. The GM process translates the FR, including any recommendations from the TRP and the GAC, into quality grants that are 1) disbursement-ready for GAC recommendation and Board approval, and 2) implementation-ready at implementation period start date.[200]

Finding 10.1: Overall, GM processes are well understood and clear to key stakeholders and effective in producing implementation-ready grants. In November 2022, following a Seventh Replenishment outcome of US$ 15.7 billion, the Global Fund Board approved US$ 13.5 billion for investments in grants, including US$ 13.128 billion in country allocations to more than 100 countries over the 2024-2026 period.[201] As of June 2024, the Board had approved US$ 11.3 billion for 199 grants starting implementation for the 2024-2026 period in 78 countries and regions. The remaining country allocation funds of up to US$ 1.8 billion are scheduled for later start dates. The successful signing of 199 grants in the first year of the 2024-2026 period, representing 86 percent of the country allocations, is a remarkable achievement that shows the overall effectiveness and robustness of the FR/GM process and procedures.

[199] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from: (1) multiple KIIs of different stakeholder categories including Secretariat and country-level and (2) GC7 Grant-Making Survey results, and (3) documentary evidence including internal operational policy notes and procedures and the OIG Audit of the Global Fund's Grant Operating System.
[200] The Global Fund (2023). Operational Policy Note. 14 June 2023. Geneva: The Global Fund. /https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3266/core_operationalpolicy_manual_en.pdf
[201] The Global Fund (2024): https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/news/2024/2024-01-11-global-fund-approves-usd9-2-billion-new-grants-to-accelerate-fight-against-hiv-tb-and-malaria-more-70-countries/

Where the FR stage is differentiated into five application approaches, the GM stage uses five differentiation categories: one for **High Impact (HI) and Core combined**, and four different **Focused** models: **Aligned, Targeted, Light** and **Legacy.** GM differentiation lies in the number of required documents and/or procedures to be completed.

"While there is limited difference between the core documents, there is also differentiation within the documents. E.g., for the Aligned model, there is only one line in the budget, a far departure from detailed budgets."

– Secretariat KII

Table 12 provides an overview of the number of required documents and/or procedures for the five GM models. GM for HI/Core portfolios involves 35 required (Req.) and five best practice (BP) documents/procedures, while this number ranges from 22 to 25 for the four Focused portfolio models. This suggests a lower level of effort is intended and - in theory - required for the four Focused GM models. However, KIs and the FGDs with Focused Portfolio CTs suggest that both processes and documentation required during GM can still be resource intensive.

Table 12: Number of required documents at grant-making[202]

GM phase	Focused Portfolios									
	HI/Core		Legacy		Light		Targeted		Aligned	
	Req.	BP	Req.	BP	Req.	BP	Req.	BP	Req.	BP
Plan	3	2	2	3	2	3	1	-	1	1
Negotiate	21	1-3	15	4	15	4	13	-	12	-
Approve	6	-	5	5	5	5	5	-	5	-
Sign	3	-	3	0	3	0	3	4	3	-
Get ready	2	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Total	**35**	**3-5**	**25**	**12**	**25**	**12**	**22**	**4**	**21**	**1**

The GC7 Grant-Making Survey[203] results provide strong evidence that key stakeholders generally find the GM process well understood and clear. A large majority (80-94 percent) of respondents felt adequately informed about key GM phases, GC7 process changes, required GAC documents, document completion, and GAC submission timelines. However, only 65 percent felt adequately informed about the GMFRF completion, and there was less positivity about the usefulness of the GM coordination meeting and the GM module in the GOS. This aligns with a 2020 OIG audit of the GOS,[204] which found that while the system was functional, user experience was challenging.

While GM sub-processes are generally well understood, Figure 11 shows significant variation in how easy stakeholders found them. Over half (58 percent) of Core portfolio country teams found GM processes difficult to understand, while most Focused (60 percent) and HI portfolios (75 percent), and PR staff (88 percent) found them easy. Notably, the sample size, especially for Focused portfolios (N = 5), was small.

[202] Secretariat internal operational procedures.
[203] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making.
[204] OIG (2020). Audit Report. Audit of the Global Fund's Grant Operating System. GF-OIG-20-014. 3 June 2020. Geneva, Switzerland: Office of the Inspector General.

Figure 11: Country Team and PR perceptions by Portfolio types of the extent to which GM processes are well understood (percent)[205]

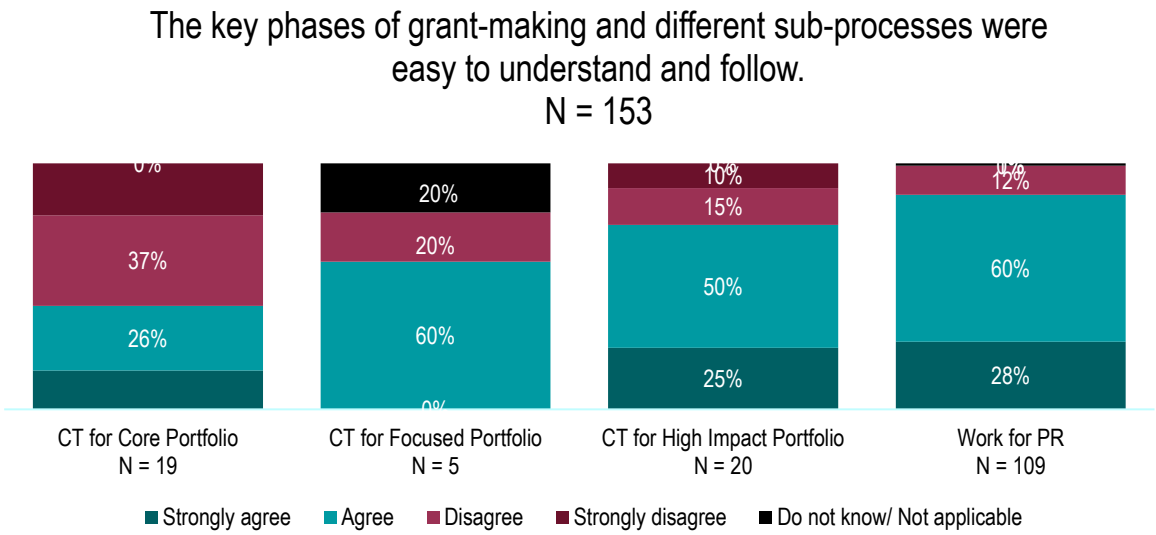


Table 13 provides an overview of the completion status of key GM stage requirements (excluding mandatory grant documents) at the time of GAC submission. It highlights good progress in areas like the selection of SRs (65 percent [partially] completed) and the development of a year-1 workplan (53 percent [partially] completed). However, other areas were lagging, such as the selection of suppliers (only 23 percent [partially] completed) and the application for tax exemption (only 33 percent [partially] completed).[206]

Table 13: Extent to which key GM preparations had been completed at the time of GAC submission (percent)[207]

Survey question:	Completed	Partially completed	Started	Not started	Do not know or N/A
ToR of sub-recipients finalized	36.2	24.5	14.1	6.1	19.0
Sub-recipients selected	44.6	21.0	13.4	4.5	16.6
Sub-recipients contracted	17.5	23.1	18.1	23.1	18.1
Suppliers for health products and critical services for Year 1 selected	9.5	13.3	8.9	25.9	42.4
PPM requisition for Y1 raised	14.4	14.4	11.3	20.6	39.4
Skeleton implementation workplan for Y1 drafted	40.2	19.5	20.7	9.1	10.4
Implementation workplan for Y1 discussed with sub-recipients	22.1	25.8	20.9	17.2	14.1
Implementation workplan for Y1 finalized	27.6	25.8	19.6	14.7	12,3

[205] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making.
[206] It is unclear to the evaluation team why the percentage of Do now know/ NA is so high for Focused Portfolios.
[207] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making.

Tax exemptions applied for	19.8	13.6	16.7	13.0	37.0

Finding 10.2: The efficiency of the GM process is hampered by an overly complex system of reviews and sign-offs by different Secretariat teams and departments. While the GM process is effective in delivering implementation-ready grants, evidence from the GC7 Grant-Making Survey and strong feedback from Secretariat FGDs and KIs indicate that its complexity significantly hampers its efficiency. The primary issue is the multiple layers of review and sign-off required by various Secretariat teams — including financial, legal, M&E, and technical (e.g., three diseases, CRG) compliance checks — at different stages. For more details, see Annex 1 on the FR/GM continuum.

"It would be better if we didn't have to go through FR/GM every three years. An entire process of preparing a new application – FR and GM – should not be required at all."

- Country KI

EHG analysis of the Global Fund GC7 Grant-Making Survey shows that most respondents found it slightly easier to complete key GC7 grant documents compared to GC6. For the Performance Framework, Detailed Budget, and HPMT, about 10 percent found them much easier to complete, 20-30 percent found them easier, 20-30 percent found them the same, and 13-24 percent found them (much) more difficult than in GC6. However, the GMFRF, a crucial document summarizing GM stage results for pre-GAC, received less favorable feedback: only 28 percent found it easier, while two-thirds said it was the same or more difficult (see also finding on GMFRF in EQ8).[208]

The survey results do not directly address the evaluation question, as they compare grant document completion between GC7 and GC6 without focusing on GC7's specific challenges

During the GM phase, developing 35 required documents for HI/Core portfolios involves significant input from PRs, country teams, LFAs, and others, with reviews by multiple specialists including finance, legal, disease, CRG (particularly around the GMFRF), and the Monitoring & Evaluation and Country Analysis team. Many KIs noted that too many teams and specializations are involved in GM, creating complexity.

Country Team KIs reported that ***unclear roles and responsibilities*** in GM Operational Procedures and guidelines lead to last-minute, unexpected reviews. Additionally, independent teams within Secretariat departments conduct their own work often duplicating that of others and at times introducing new requirements even after the pre-GAC stage.

"When you thought something had been decided, there was another review by someone else in the same team. We were working with several teams, we found out there were other layers of review."

- Secretariat KI

"There is very limited value in so many checks of documents along the FR/GM continuum. These are often done as ticking boxes and people don't understand what they're signing off. Pointless. Checklists = power: Everyone measures their worth on whether they have a sign-off pen."

- Senior Secretariat KI (non-Country team)

Amongst the main bottlenecks reported in this process is the fact that there are many sub-processes with legal requirements necessitating approval. In addition, many steps often rely on one person**,** which causes additional delays.

"We have a QA process that needs to give confidence that things are okay. The layers are all there, we have 4-5 levels of review and teams each with a special focus for review."

- Secretariat KI

[208] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making.

"We review FR budgets to see if they are targeting the right areas in x. We have three disease FPs in our own team and a list of prioritized FRs to review. We have one form to complete but our own dept disease FPs provide their inputs. Around 40-50 FRs reviewed and takes 4-5 hours per FR or 1-2 hours per technical area. Proposed changes are communicated to CTs and followed up with PRs."

- Secretariat KI

The multiple review process amounts to, according to many KIs,[209] a GM system whereby the emphasis is on compliance rather than on high technical quality of the grant. Each GM process step is seen as a way to exert control. As one senior Secretariat KI stated: *"any team or department measures its importance by its power to sign off on sub-steps of the GM process"*.

Technical advice versus compliance roles

Key informants highlighted challenges before the pre-GAC stage, noting that technical teams juggle two roles: advisory and compliance/review, which are often imbalanced. The advisory role is valued by country teams, particularly during TRP reviews or grant-making when technical expertise is needed. Secretariat technical team members joining country teams during GM missions was seen as beneficial, but there is a desire for earlier involvement of financial and legal teams, mainly to address compliance.

Country teams expressed a need for technical teams to play a more supportive role during grant implementation and the early stages of the grant application process, while their compliance role in GM should be reduced. They believe this would give them more autonomy and streamline the GM process, allowing greater focus on quality and implementation-readiness rather than compliance.

The heavy focus on compliance by Secretariat technical teams is seen as a major factor in the complexity of the GM stage. Some KIs suggested that technical teams need a better understanding of the full grant cycle and should engage more during grant implementation, not just during GM. It was noted that Technical teams often view the FR/GM stage, which occurs every three years, as their primary opportunity to influence decisions. However, they are perceived as underutilizing their potential to support grant implementation, such as by reviewing PR reports or advising on grant revisions prompted by PR feedback.

"The main challenge during GM are not the negotiations with the country, but the internal processes – and how to comply with all those continuously changing Global Fund guidelines."

- Secretariat KI

Finding 10.3: Technical and human resource challenges and constraints have a major impact on the efficiency of the grant-making process. In addition to the imbalanced emphasis on compliance during GM,[210] technical and human resource constraints at the Secretariat considerably impact the development of the final grant documents. In this regard, there is strong evidence that technical problems with the GOS have considerably hampered GM processes for country teams during GC7. The fact that GOS issues were raised so frequently in KIIs and FGDs suggests that the challenges mentioned in the 2020 OIG Report have not been fully resolved. Many KIs cited GOS as a major problem affecting a smooth GM process as the *"GOS is not user-friendly and creates lots of issues."*[211].

[209] KIIs and FGDs (HIC and FP) with CTs, KIIs with additional Secretariat team members

[210] Perceived through KIIs and FGDs with Regional Managers and CTs, as well as other Secretariat team members

[211] Secretariat FGD

"I have 2,800 tickets open since GOS was introduced in 2017, covering three countries. To me this means the system is not user-friendly. I spend 80-90 percent of my time during GM on resolving tech issues. You can't analyze [GM] docs properly as you're dealing with tech issues." - Country Team KII

An audit report of the GOS by the Office of the OIG[212] in 2020 also reported major challenges that resonate with KIs, including end-users being required to input the same data multiple times, and high instances of system errors rates which took time to resolve. In addition, KIs reported bugs in the GOS which took time to resolve, contributing to user issues during live production.

Evidence also exists however, to suggest that GOS does provide a useful function. Alongside the challenges expressed through KIIs and FGDs with particularly with country teams, the GC7 Grant-Making Survey suggests that over 60.5 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *"The GM module in GOS has all the functions and capabilities that I needed to submit my grant to GAC."* This contrasts with evidence gathered through KIIs and suggests GOS is an area to be explored further. [213]

5.11 EQ11: How effective are GM processes in ensuring grants support national and the Global Fund strategic priorities and goals; and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders?

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE 1

Key findings for EQ11:[214]

Summary finding: Global Fund GM processes are effective in ensuring grants support Global Fund strategic priorities; however, this is weaker for national and local stakeholder priorities.

- **Finding 11.1:** There is strong evidence that GM processes ensure that grants support Global Fund strategic priorities and goals and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders.
- **Finding 11.2:** There is mixed evidence that GM processes ensure that grants support national strategic priorities and goals and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders.

Finding 11.1: There is strong evidence that GM processes ensure that grants support Global Fund strategic priorities and goals and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders. EHG's analysis of the Global Fund's GC7 Grant-Making Survey results reveal that most respondents (80-90 percent) fully or partially integrated core Strategy areas into grant designs, considering available funding. However, only 72 percent managed to fully or partially address SEAH risks. Over half of respondents reported fully embedding areas such as prevention (55 percent), community engagement and leadership (53 percent), strengthening community systems (52 percent), and RSSH (51 percent) into their grant designs.

Additionally, the effectiveness of GM processes in ensuring grants support Global Fund strategic priorities and goals is further enhanced by the strong and consistent guidance and technical support provided by Global Fund Technical teams (e.g. disease teams, CRG) to country teams and country

[212] The Global Fund, OIG (2020). Audit Report. Audit of the Global Fund's Grant Operating System. GF-OIG-20-014. 3 June 2020; page 5. Geneva, Switzerland: Office of the Inspector General.
[213] Secretariat FGD
[214] Triangulated evidence for this finding primarily comes from (1) multiple key informant interviews of different stakeholder categories including the Secretariat and country-level and (2) secondary data including the Secretariat internal documentation on TRP and Secretariat internal notes on Grant-Making.

partners throughout the GM phase. Furthermore, the Global Fund Secretariat, most notably GMD, assists country teams during the GM stage with guidance materials and seminars that support the integration of the Global Fund Strategy in the grant documents.

Aside from Secretariat guidance, the TRP and GAC reviews before and during GM check for technical soundness of FR and grant documents, and only recommend documents for grant-making or signing if investments contribute to the goals and objectives set out in the Global Fund Strategy.

Finding 11.2: There is mixed evidence that GM processes ensure that grants support national strategic priorities and goals and respond to the priorities of key stakeholders. The GC7 Grant-Making Survey does not include questions regarding the extent to which GM processes support the integration of national strategic priorities or those of key stakeholders in grant documents.

However, the GC7 TRP FR Quality Assessment Survey provides indirect evidence regarding the use of national or regional health plans in FR. EHG's analysis of the TRP FR Quality Assessment Aggregator for Windows 1-3 found that over 96 percent of HIV components (N = 73), 96 percent of malaria components (N = 57), and 98 percent of TB components in FRs (N = 65) were assessed by the TRP as using such evidence.[215] For RSSH, this figure was slightly lower at 73 percent (N = 11).

While the findings do not directly confirm that Global Fund processes ensure grants align with national strategic priorities, the heavy reliance on national or regional plans suggests this is likely. EQ9 confirms that GM processes build on FRs, ensuring that evidence from national or regional plans is consistently used throughout the GM stage.

Focus group discussions and KIIs reveal mixed evidence that grants align with national priorities and stakeholder needs. That said the Global Fund's emphasis on building on NSPs and national health plans encourages applicants to prioritize national goals. The Tailored for NSP application approach ensures that FRs and grants reflect these priorities. GM procedures, focused on creating implementation-ready grants based on the FR, help maintain alignment with national and stakeholder priorities.

However, as discussed in EQ2 and EQ3, national and key stakeholder priorities may not always guide FR interventions or the GM stage. Feedback from several country KIs indicates that factors during GM might limit the alignment of FRs and grants with these priorities; factors include:

- Emphasis on global priorities (e.g. as evidenced by the Program Essentials) rather than specific national priorities.
- Global Fund and Secretariat technical teams pushing their organizational or thematic interests and sometimes imposing their views and priorities on applicants (*"There is a lot of meddling from the Technical Teams;" "The Global Fund plays a big role: It is not purely a country's activity that we see."* – Secretariat KI)
- Tensions between country ownership and evidence-based prioritization of interventions, especially regarding key populations that are criminalized.
- Symbolic involvement of, and lack of serious consultations with, community stakeholders and key populations and the inclusion of their priorities in the final grant documents (*"The community dialogue was a "tick box" activity: their proposed activities were dropped from the final grant."* – Country KI).
- Inadequate investments in, or use of government (finance, procurement, management) systems undermining country ownership and capacity (*"If you keep circumventing the problem and creating the incentives for people to exit the health system, it will never improve."* – Country KI).
- Three-year funding cycles limiting long-term investments in RSSH (*"You cannot construct a hospital, a lab or a health facility within three years." "The Global Fund's 3-year cycle changes*

[215] EHG analysis of the Secretariat internal documentation on TRP.

how countries think: they get discouraged from proposing things that are seen to be too ambitious." – Secretariat KI).

6 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: GC7 FR/GM processes have been effective in generating high quality, implementation-ready grants that support the implementation of the Strategy. As of June 2024, the Board had approved US$ 11.3 billion for 199 grants starting implementation for the 2024-2026 period in 78 countries and regions.[216] The successful signing of 199 grants in the first year of the 2024-2026 period, representing 86 percent of the country allocations, is a significant achievement. Strengths of the current FR/GM processes and Global Fund operating model that have supported this achievement include:

1.1. Maturity and established practices of the Allocation-based Funding Model has enabled efficiencies with the Global Fund and recipient countries having over a decade's experience in implementing the Allocation-Based Funding Model. The maturity of this model and its established practices have enabled country stakeholders, technical partners and external TA providers to gain significant experience and knowledge of FR/GM processes, and this has contributed to strong grant designs.

1.2. Pre-allocation letter analysis of epidemiological and programmatic gaps and needs tailored to countries and/or regions has been helpful in providing a steer to countries on FR approach and prioritization in FRs, most notably for Focused portfolios.

1.3. Country dialogue is effective in ensuring broad based stakeholder engagement and contributes to strengthening the quality, alignment and relevance of grant design as seen in GC7, where country dialogue was very extensive, including in some cases, separate community-specific dialogues, demonstrating overall strong commitment by countries and the Global Fund to inclusive, country-owned processes.

1.4. Supportive Secretariat country and technical teams through the FR/GM continuum through the provision of advisory and operational inputs that are valued by country stakeholders. This has included support for preparedness and planning, keeping FR and GM processes on track, and support at key points in the FR/GM continuum, such as reviewing the FR prior to TRP, responding to TRP issues and actions, further prioritization of grant interventions, supporting grant-making and GAC review and approval processes.

1.5. Independent review by TRP contributes to the quality and technical soundness of FRs and is a function that continues to play an important role in reviewing, validating and shaping grants through issues, actions and recommendations. These processes have enabled FRs to be independently assessed for quality and technical soundness with the vast majority recommended for grant-making. Some progress has been made in GC7 with differentiating TRP reviews by FR approach and portfolio which has resulted in faster reviews and fewer issues raised.

However, FR/GM processes are over-engineered and inefficient, and this compromises their overall effectiveness: Despite best intentions to differentiate and simplify FR/GM processes the volume of information requirements, guidance, inputs, and approvals that have evolved in relation to

[216] Financial performance as of 31 December 2023. 51st Board meeting. 23-24 April 2024, Geneva, Switzerland. https://archive.theglobalfund.org/media/14293/archive_bm51-15-financial-performance-31-december-2023_report_en.pd

the different steps are often complex and unwieldy, compromising the effectiveness of FR/GM processes. The following conclusions highlight the weaknesses of FR/GM processes.

Conclusion 2: The 'start from scratch' nature of the FR/GM process every three years has implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant. Planning for a new grant often starts midway through the current grant period and intensifies in the final year after Allocation Letters are issued. This cycle increases workload for implementers and delays the start-up of new grants, affecting effectiveness and progress toward targets. Extending grant cycles could reduce administrative burdens, provide stability, and allow for consistent focus on programmatic goals.

Conclusion 3: Differentiation has not simplified FR/GM processes. The differentiation of FR approaches, intended to simplify and lessen the burden of applying for funding, has not achieved its goals. It has not significantly reduced the administrative load or expedited access to funds. Complex internal review and grant-making processes negate any benefits from lighter approaches like Program Continuation. Furthermore, the high volume of required information for all FR approaches in GC7 has diminished the impact of differentiation, resulting in similar efforts across portfolios

Conclusion 4: Multiple and often unclear technical support and compliance roles of Secretariat teams hinder efficiency of the FR/GM continuum. Notable in GC7 is the significant volume of inputs from different technical and functional teams which are heavily focused on FR/GM processes. Whilst their inputs aim to enhance the quality and compliance of FR/GM processes, the number of different teams involved in reviewing, endorsing or signing off documents, particularly during GM, has inadvertently led to more complicated and inefficient procedures. This is exacerbated by unclear technical support and compliance roles and responsibilities at different steps, resulting in excessive and sometimes duplicative inputs.

Conclusion 5: The proliferation of Secretariat-based information needs is a key driver of complexity and workload for FR/GM processes. The broad scope of the Strategy, multiple Board and donor interests, and the pressure to demonstrate value for money and results have contributed to a growth in Secretariat technical teams and a proliferation of Secretariat-driven requirements, particularly evident in GC7. These requirements create substantial operational demands on the Secretariat and countries, with questionable added value in relation to country needs or improvements to grant design. Additional requirements, such as new levers, indicators or annexes, have increased complexity and have driven the need for further inputs for monitoring, analysis, compliance, and reporting purposes. This proliferation of additional requirements has largely gone ‘unchecked’ in that there is currently no effective mechanism in place with gatekeeper power and authority to make decisions on the feasibility and utility of additional requirements.

Conclusion 6: The significant investment of Secretariat time and effort on the FR/GM stages of the grant cycle limits the streamlining of grant processes. The current emphasis of Secretariat inputs on the FR/GM stages of the grant cycle overshadows the need for investment in grant implementation, which would allow more streamlined and continuous grant monitoring and review processes. This would reduce the pressure on countries from the current tight FR/GM timelines and facilitate smoother transition between grants while supporting a greater focus on program outcomes. Using national plans and greater use of country systems to support grant and programmatic monitoring also aligns with the recent Lusaka Agenda call for accelerated use of national systems, support to one plan and simplified grant application processes.

Conclusion 7: TA continues to be a vital component in establishing high-quality FRs due to the persistent complexity and expansion of Global Fund guidance and requirements. Given the complexities and expanding Global Fund requirements, TA has played a crucial role in developing

quality FRs using NSPs as foundational documents. The increased engagement by major TA providers, as seen in GC7, underscores the critical role TA plays in navigating Global Fund requirements and ensuring the effective development of FRs and NSPs. Looking ahead, TA will likely continue to be essential, particularly in supporting the implementation of a simplified FR and in focusing efforts on national health or disease strategic plans to streamline processes.

Conclusion 8: The guidance and assessment on RSSH funding have shown weaknesses that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of RSSH investments. The lack of timely RSSH assessment and specificity in Allocation Letters regarding RSSH funding complicates program split decision-making and can influence the FR approach adopted. These challenges highlight the need for clearer guidance on RSSH funding from country allocations and timelier RSSH assessments. Improving these aspects could enhance the efficiency of decision-making processes and support countries in making informed, strategic decisions that align with their broader health priorities and universal health coverage ambitions.

7 Recommendations

The Evaluation team recognizes that to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness of end-to-end FR/GM processes, more fundamental changes to the current Global Fund modus operandi are required. This section presents a new approach comprising:

- Core elements of the new approach
- Detailed recommendations (Table 14)
- A graphic to demonstrate the extended grant cycle concept (Figure 13)
- A roadmap for operationalizing of the recommendations (Figure 12)
- Two annexes providing a rationale for and examples of a simplified Funding Application (Annex 1 and Annex 3, respectively).

The evaluation team considers that many of the recommendations are applicable to different replenishment scenarios, although dramatically reduced funding may pose an existential threat to the number of countries eligible for Global Fund support and/or substantially reduce budgets for non-treatment activities and the need, scope and scale for robust FR/GM processes.

Core elements to new approach:

- **Reduced frequency of funding cycles:** Extending grant cycles from three to six years, thus reducing the need to develop a new grant every three years. After the initial three years, grants will go through a 3-year extension process, which involves a light touch update of the prioritized interventions in the current grant, in line with the new allocation (which will depend on replenishment levels) and any changes in terms of programmatic needs.[217]
- **Smooth transition to extension for further 3 years** based on criteria (grant performance, no material change) and under a defined threshold[218] will enable extension without a TRP review. For grants above the threshold and/ or that are performing poorly and/ or that have material changes, a differentiated TRP review will be required. This approach offers significant opportunities to reduce inputs and effort.[219]
- **Simplification of funding application (FA)**: A new Funding Application (FA) approach which significantly reduces application and information requirements and subsequent review processes

[217] Noting the GC8 Allocation Letters would provide a clear steer on 'priorities for step change' for the 3-year period ahead (Recommendation 6). The Allocation Letter provided at the 3-year extension point would provide less 'steer' on strategic priorities and focus mainly on the allocation amounts available - premised on 3-year extension point largely being a continuation of the previous cycle.
[218] Per GF Grant Revisions Policy
[219] Noting the large degree of continuation across grants from cycle to cycle demonstrated in Section 1.2.4

for *all portfolios,* to ease the burden on countries, the Secretariat, TRP, GAC and Board review requirements. While differentiation may still be needed for some areas, e.g. for a verification approach for Results Based Funding or payment for results modality, it will occur within the context of this overall simplified approach.

- **Funding applications based on national plans and documents:** The simplified FA becomes the standard application approach across portfolios. The FA will be a country's proposal to fund a set of prioritized interventions for 6 years, based on national priorities as defined in NSPs and/or national health plans (NHPs).[220] This approach strengthens country ownership, alignment and sustainability. If the NSP/NHP is/becomes slightly outdated, and / or in e.g. Focused countries where priorities may be 'off NSP/NHPs' the simplified FA process will allow updating the prioritization of interventions and the associated performance framework and budget.
- **NSP/NHPs do not need to be 'in sync' with Global Fund grant cycle timelines:** Countries will continue to seek technical assistance to support updating/reviews of NSP/NHPs during the grant cycle and the operational lifetime of these national plans.
- **Not all Global Fund strategic priorities will be funded everywhere:** The FA will support prioritized interventions based on national plans, priorities, targets and goals. In realizing this shift, *not all* Global Fund strategic priorities will be funded *everywhere*. Portfolio and other analysis pre-Allocation Letter will support a clear steer to countries on potential priority areas to be funded with Focused portfolios retaining their current focus on 1-2 priority areas and Core/High impact portfolios likely to include more.
- **Continuous review and assessment process for grants/programs they support:** The approach will maximize existing and regular Global Fund and national monitoring processes—such as PUDRs, grant performance ratings, and national program mid- and end-term strategy reviews—to review, recalibrate, and prioritize grant performance and relevance during implementation. The intention is to support countries in managing their programs and facilitate smoother transitions to grant extensions through regular performance reviews.
- **Streamlining grant-making, GAC and Board review and approvals**: GM and pre-GAC will be streamlined by reducing the current system of excessive reviews and sign-offs by a wide range of technical, financial and legal specialists and managers at the Secretariat level. For example, removing Secretariat SIID teams' approval/endorsement functions that are not required for organization due diligence, and ringfencing technical support to GM stage rather than Pre-GAC stage.
- **Roles, responsibilities and authority**: Clearer roles and responsibilities delineating different Secretariat department inputs at different stages of the FR/GM continuum, and delegation of authority to mechanisms or process owners to avoid proliferation and to support more streamlined processes. To this effect, country teams will receive more decision-making power during FR/GM, while shifting the role of other Secretariat teams, such as the Technical teams from compliance to technical support.

Table 14 below outlines in detail six proposed recommendations: four critical, one important, and one for consideration.[221]

[220] In the absence of an NSP/NHP, the FA country dialogue process (along with grant implementation performance reports, and any other reviews and assessments) would fill this gap and identify a set of prioritized interventions. In Focused countries where priority interventions may not feature prominently in NSPs/NHPs, Allocation Letters would include a steer on areas to be covered, as is the case now, and country dialogue would ensure relevant stakeholders are engaged.

[221] In accordance with the ELO guidance provided to the evaluation team "Formulating Recommendations in Global Fund Independent Evaluations Guidance for Evaluators", recommendations are classified as follows:

- **Critical Recommendations**, address areas that the evaluators feel essential and necessary to implement for the Global Fund to achieve its Strategic Objectives. These recommendations are underpinned and supported by robust evidence and findings in the evaluation report.
- **Important Recommendations**, address areas that evaluators argue are of relevance and significance for the Global Fund to prioritize. Such recommendations highlight changes or emphasize ongoing developments intended to enhance delivery of the Strategy. The evidence for these recommendations is at least moderately robust in the evaluation report.
- **Considerations**, address areas where changes are likely to be required in the future. However, the evaluation findings, whilst informative and useful, are not conclusive and robust enough to qualify as a critical or important recommendation.

Table 14: Recommendations[222]

Recommendation 1: Introduce an extended (6-year) planning cycle increasingly aligned with NSPs/NHPs and support light touch review to extension. *See 6-year cycle graphic for visual demonstration of the extended cycle.*			
Critical	**Strategic**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** Board, Secretariat, technical partners	**Standalone:** Yes, although amplifier effect intended when working in conjunction with Recommendation 2, 3 and 5.
Relates to conclusions 2, 6 and 8	The 'start from scratch' nature of applying for funding and the creation of new grants every three years has implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant. There also continues to be a disproportionate investment in FR/GM over grant implementation. An extended funding cycle would also benefit longer term RSSH investments.		
Rationale (*Findings related to EQ1 and EQ10)*	Applying for funding every three years introduces significant pressure points during grant implementation, particularly in the final year of grant implementation, and slower startup of new grants, potentially affecting progress towards targets. To address this, it is recommended to introduce longer planning cycles to provide more stability, greater focus on programmatic targets through grant continuation and reduced application burden. Operational features integral to this recommendation include streamlined application templates based primarily on (but not limited) to NSPs/NHPs, light touch reviews based on existing procedures, and a rebalancing from FR/GM processes to grant implementation monitoring and review.		
Operationalization:	All countries develop one 6-year (costed) FA. Only the first 3 years will be funded per replenishment cycle. At the 3-year point a new FA is not required but the existing 6-year FA is updated. Continuous monitoring and review including of NSPs should negate need for NSP update at 3-year extension point.		
	Start of 6-year cycle: • 4-month FA/GM process using simplified and streamlined application materials (FA form and annexes). • May include targeted country dialogue (see Recommendation 2 additional considerations) • TRP review conditions to start at this point.	**3-year extension point:** A *light* review process including updating of FA package in line with next 3-year allocation amount: • Scope of grant and prioritized interventions right sized to new allocation. Can include innovations identified in recent reviews. • *Targeted* [223]country dialogue to inform prioritization, limited to areas in scope of grant funding. • Updated Detailed Budget and targets of the Performance Framework.	

[222] Noting the classifications of Critical, Important and Considerations are aligned with the ELO guidance on Recommendations.

[223] The $50m threshold was arrived at to enable a significant streamlining of the level of effort required for FR/GM processes. Using GF publicly available data on 27 June 2024, in GC7 119 finalized grants were below the $50m threshold 58 grants above the threshold. The current GF threshold for non-material grant revisions is $30 million (per Guidelines for Budgeting 1 Dec 2023). In GC7 by 27 June there were 84 grants signed under $30m and 93 above $30 million. The evaluation team considers the $50 million threshold appropriate when accompanied by the three conditions of performance, materiality and FPM decision to opt-in to a review.

	• TRP review applicable when above $50m threshold or when under $50m threshold (for those grants either poorly performing or material change required (per Grant *Revisions Policy criteria)*[224]. Opt-in option for TRP review applicable to all portfolios.
	Integral to this recommendation will be to maximize existing Global Fund grant performance ratings and review processes (PUDR, quarterly and/or annual reviews) and national program and strategy reviews to continuously inform and course correct grant support enabling grant updates and easy transition to the 3-year extension. **Additional operational considerations** (preparations) • Secretariat (A2F and Grant Management Division (GMD)) develops change management narrative to support the fundamental shift this (and all) recommendation/s implies. This narrative is necessary for building trust with the Board, donors, Secretariat staff and country partners. The narrative should focus on 1) the strong case for extending grant cycle timelines without posing risk, 2) the existing and mature performance monitoring systems in place for grants, including for programmatic risk, and 3) the case for improved absorption in year 1 and potential opportunities for more progress against targets, 4) the strong case for simplification including for Board reviews. • Promote use of artificial intelligence (AI) at country level to complete the FA. E.g. using AI to pull out / signpost relevant sections of NSP/NHP as required. Promote Secretariat use of AI in FA form compliance processes. • Review GOS functionality and utility for applicants and secretariat teams aiming to streamline and simplify GOS steps / touchpoints. • Review and rationalize guidance for GC8.
Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency:** improved through reducing frequency of having to create new grants and more streamlined processes along with reduced level of effort. • **Effectiveness:** smoother continuation of grants supports progress toward programmatic targets; improved country ownership and sustainability as new FAs build on longer-term country driven NSPs/NHPs; support sustainability through long term planning horizons including for RSSH or CRG investments. **Trade-offs:** • Risk that tying Global Fund FAs more closely to NSPs could support or undermine country ownership of planning cycles/processes. • Risk associated with NSPs/NHPs considered below 'quality standard' required by Global Fund. Use of FA mitigates this, alongside improved intentional targeted support to country NSPs/NHPs during grant cycle using external TA and Technical Partners. (see Recommendation 4)

[224]The $50m threshold was arrived at to enable a significant streamlining of the level of effort required for FR/GM processes. Using TGF publicly available data on 27 June 2024, in GC7 119 finalized grants were below the $50m threshold 58 grants above the threshold. The current TGF threshold for non-material grant revisions is $30 million (per Guidelines for Budgeting 1 Dec 2023). In GC7 by 27 June there were 84 grants signed under $30m and 93 above $30 million. The evaluation team considers the $50 million threshold appropriate when accompanied by the condition of there being no strategic/outstanding issues.

Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach 'Funding Application'

Critical	**Strategic**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** A2F	**Standalone:** Yes. This can be operationalized as a standalone recommendation, not dependent on others and/or before other recommendations are ready to be operationalized.

Conclusion 3	Differentiation has not simplified FR/GM processes and differentiated approaches.
Rationale *(Findings related to EQ1, EQ4, EQ5, EQ8, and EQ10)*	The evaluation finds that differentiation of FR approaches has not worked as intended i.e. it has not resulted in less time needed for FR and more time being available for grant implementation. From the perspective of end-to-end FR/GM processes, any benefits from differentiated FR approaches are negated by complex internal review and GM processes. Excessive information requirements applied in all five FR approaches have diminished the intention of differentiation and increased complexity for the FR/GM continuum. A simplified Funding Application/FA will reduce information needs for all portfolios and pre-identified priorities will help steer FA content and position the grant for impact. Further, a simplified FA reduces Secretariat and TRP, GAC and Board reviews/LoE.

Operationalization	**Introduce a new and simplified FA template/form and reduce the number of required annexes** for all Portfolio types. Submission documents will include:
	• NSP/NHP document
	• Completed FA form
	• Budget
	• Performance Framework
	• Limited number of mandatory annexes. *See Annex 1 and Annex 2 for the proposed new simplified funding application form and annexes and accompanying rationale.*
	TRP:
	• Strategy Committee to update and resource TRP's amended ToR to address:
	  ○ Focus of TRP review on core FA package *only* recognizing that not all Global Fund strategic priorities will be applied in all contexts.
	  ○ Potential composition changes to membership (balancing disease and cross cutting; increased country experience).
	  ○ Right sizing of LOE for 3-year extension, (if review is needed) informed by Regional Manager/CT analysis on grant performance.
	  ○ Improved ways of working including better focused and contextualized issues and actions applied consistently to all reviews.
	• Develop and resource a plan to meaningfully differentiate the TRP reviews further, enabling much greater focus on High Impact/Core countries as needed and much less on Focused countries (which will come about as a result of continuation threshold in recommendation 1).
	• Reduce the length of SBNs to provide context and additional information to TRP pre-review and/or continue to have a pre-engagement meeting to provide essential context to TRP members where it can improve efficiency.
	
	Additional operational considerations:
	• Consider developing guidance on use of a single, targeted and right sized country dialogue including steer on duration, expected roles and responsibilities during FA development and grant-making, with intention of shifting countries away from highly resource (time and money) intensive prioritization workshops that run over days and weeks. To also include specific steer on how iterative / continual communication channels will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM.

Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency**: improved through simplification and streamlining of entire Funding application package. • **Effectiveness:** enabling more time to implement grants and achieve results. • **Trade off**: Board and Secretariat need to accept different levels of control and reduced information needs. Implications for upward reporting (i.e. to donors on achievement of Global Fund strategy). • **Trade off**: Targeted country dialogue may undermine country ownership; Global Fund may decide that the value of country engagement (despite percentage of grant continuing/remaining the same) outweighs efficiency and effectiveness considerations.

Recommendation 3: Streamline grant-making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.

Critical	**Strategic**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** GMD & A2F	**Standalone:** Yes. This can be operationalized as a standalone recommendation, not dependent on others and/or before other recommendations are ready to be operationalized.

Conclusion 4	Unclear technical support and compliance roles and responsibilities of multiple Secretariat teams involved in different FR/GM processes hinders the efficiency of the FR/GM continuum.
Rationale (*Findings related to EQ 8 and 10)*	Evaluation evidence strongly suggests the need to define a clearer set of expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat team inputs in FR/GM processes, including the responsibility and decision-making powers of CTs and the technical support role played by Strategic investment and Impact Division (SIID) advisers' throughout the FR/GM continuum, but particularly in GM. GC7 has seen a significant volume of input from different technical and operational teams heavily focused on FR/GM. While these inputs aim to improve the quality and compliance of FR/GM processes they inadvertently lead to more complicated and inefficient procedures. Clearly defining technical support and compliance roles at different stages will support overall efficiency and effectiveness.

Operationalization	**Secretariat teams:**
	• Review and better define the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat team inputs including strengthening decision power of CTs and clarifying Secretariat technical teams' support to CTs throughout the new FA/GM continuum but particularly in GM. This may involve:
	  ○ Reorienting Secretariat technical teams' roles towards providing advice at the request of the CT
	  ○ Establishing clear boundaries for technical inputs at specific points in the continuum e.g. pre–Allocation Letter, FA review, GM
	  ○ Adjusting internal processes and guidance to clarify that Secretariat technical teams' function is that of technical advice rather than providing an endorsement function
	  ○ Defining differentiated levels of technical team inputs depending on country portfolio category if not already done
	  ○ GAC engages GM in a strategic advisory role.
	Pre-GAC and GAC:
	• Separating GAC strategic advice and compliance functions through ensuring strategic advisory role/addressing strategic issues takes place during GM stage leaving pre-GAC stage to fulfil a purely compliance role.
	• Formalize pre-GAC compliance function with guidance which clearly defines roles and responsibilities and purpose for reviewing certain parts of grants, and delegates authority to pre-GAC to sign off all compliance issues.
	• Review purpose of pre-GAC meetings, Executive Session, Plenary GAC meetings and review participation/membership with intention of significantly reducing participants to ensure meetings are fit for purpose.
	• Use electronic GAC approval to the Board for grants below $50m[225] where no strategic/ outstanding issues and alternative GAC review modalities for grants above $50m or with strategic/outstanding issues.

[225] The $50m threshold was arrived at to enable a significant streamlining of the level of effort required for FR/GM processes. Using TGF publicly available data on 27 June 2024, in GC7 119 finalized grants were below the $50m threshold 58 grants above the threshold. The current TGF threshold for non-material grant revisions is $30 million (per Guidelines for Budgeting 1 Dec 2023). In GC7 by 27 June there were 84 grants signed under $30m and 93 above $30 million. The evaluation team considers the $50 million threshold appropriate when accompanied by the condition of there being no strategic/outstanding issues.

	• Systematize the type of information provided by different FPMs in GMFRFs. While the GMFRF follows a set format, free text boxes allow FPMs to interpret what kind of information is required (quantitative, qualitative or a mix). This makes reviewing across GMFRFs, including the use of AI at an aggregate level challenging. [226] . Reorient key messages to red flags/issues for discussion in plenary GAC. Include more system generated data. **Additional operational considerations:** • Review and reduce 4-week timeline for submission to GAC (as a result of fewer docs to be uploaded for pre-GAC). • Per Recommendation 2 consider specific steer on how iterative / continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM. • Explore use of AI in GAC compliance checks.
Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency:** streamlined FR/GM continuum processes improve efficiency and reduces LOE burden on countries and Secretariat teams. **Trade-offs:** • Some Secretariat teams need to accept reduced inputs and levels of control. • Changes to systems, roles and responsibilities will take time and cost to embed.

[226] i.e. ensuring all CTs enter the same kind of data in the same fields to allow for aggregate analysis (not currently possible in a robust/ straightforward way)

Recommendation 4: Provide targeted support to country NSPs/NHPs during the grant cycle using external TA and Technical Partners.

Critical	**Operational**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** Technical Partners 'Global Fund Partnership'	**Standalone:** No. Amplifier effect intended when working in conjunction with Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Conclusion 7	TA continues to be a vital component of establishing high quality FRs due to persistent complexity and expansion of Global Fund guidance and requirements.
Rationale *(Findings related to EQ1, EQ4, EQ5, and EQ6)*	Due to the complexity and requirements of Global Fund guidance, TA has been important for developing high quality FRs based on NSPs as foundational documents. TA will still be required but implementing a simplified FA and targeting TA towards national health or disease strategic plans will further streamline efforts.
Operationalization	• Intentionally orientate technical partners and external TA inputs to strengthening of the content and particularly the prioritization of evidence-based interventions in the NSP or NHP. This is likely to include prioritization exercises, costed operational plans and M&E frameworks with clear targets using globally agreed indicators for the three diseases and RSSH. • Work with technical partners on synthesizing lessons learned and tools for prioritization.
Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency:** more targeted and focused TA during grant implementation means less need for intensive TA inputs to be managed during new FA/GM process. • **Effectiveness:** better quality NSP/NHPs, increased country ownership of these, more strategic alignment between FAs and NSP and Global Fund Strategy. • **Trade-off:** Risk that Global Fund Allocation Letters and/or advice on prioritization of NSPs/NHPs may be perceived as over-influential and undermining country ownership.

Recommendation 5: Develop a 'gatekeeper' role with the authority to uphold the internal goal to achieve simplification in GC8.

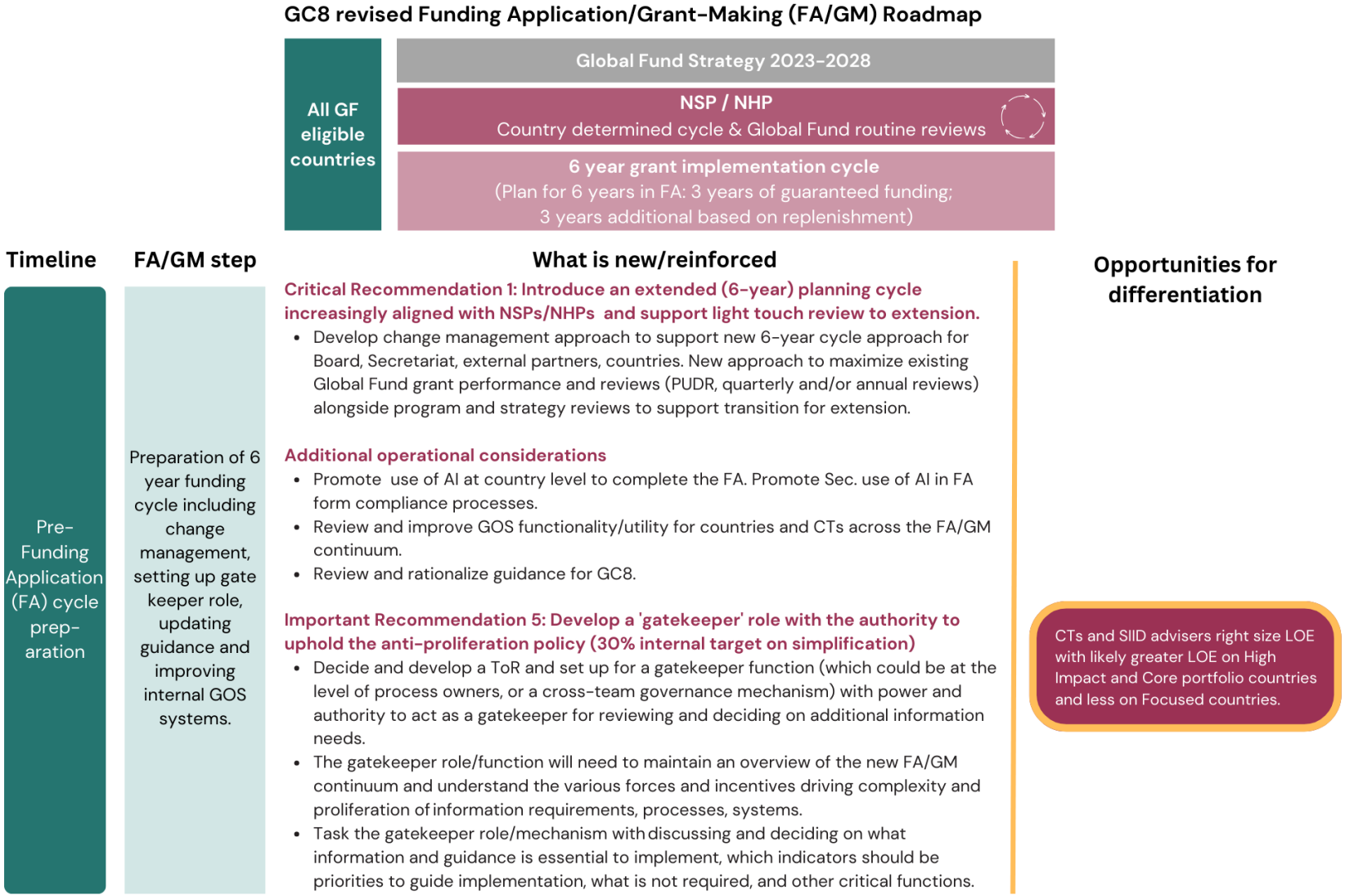
Important	**Operational**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** A2F/GMD	**Standalone:** Yes. This can be operationalized as a standalone recommendation, not dependent on others, and/or before other recommendations are ready to be operationalized.

Conclusion 5:	The proliferation of Secretariat-based information needs is a key driver of complexity and workload for FR/GM processes.
Rationale *(Findings related to EQ1, EQ2, EQ4, EQ5, EQ8 and EQ10)*	The proliferation of additional requirements in GC7 creates demands on countries with questionable added value to country needs or improvements in grant design and have driven complexity and workload for countries and the Secretariat alike. These additional requirements have gone 'unchecked' as there is no governance mechanism with the power or authority to review, streamline, approve or reject additional information requirements.
Operationalization	• Decide and develop a ToR and set-up for a gatekeeper function (which could be at the level of process owners, or a cross-team governance mechanism) with power and authority to act as a gatekeeper for reviewing and deciding on additional information needs. • The gatekeeper role/function will need to maintain an overview of the new FA/GM continuum and understand the various forces and incentives driving complexity and proliferation of information requirements, processes, systems. • Task the gatekeeper role/mechanism with discussing and deciding on what information and guidance is essential to implement, which indicators should be priorities to guide implementation, what is not required, and other critical functions. • The role will ensure all information needs, processes and guidance are updated and finalized at least 6 months before Allocation Letters are sent to countries. The role may delegate authority to process owners to perform this duty either as complementary to the gatekeeper mechanism or in lieu of the mechanism.
Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency:** More streamlined processes, guidance and information needs reduces burden on country and Secretariat teams. • **Trade offs**: • Some Secretariat teams need to accept reduced information needs for their purposes • Potentially less upward reporting to the Board/donors as a trade-off for greater efficiency and lighter burden on countries implementing the grants.

Recommendation 6: Ensure grant priorities including for RSSH are identified prior to start of FA.

Consideration	**Strategic**	**Responsibility for taking forward:** SIID (TAP, RSSH, CRG, HF) and GMD	**Standalone:** Yes. This can be operationalized as a standalone recommendation, not dependent on others, and/or before other recommendations are ready to be operationalized.
Conclusions 1, 2, and 8	Country dialogue is effective in ensuring broad based stakeholder engagement and contributes to strengthening the quality, alignment and relevance of grant design. Timely RSSH assessment and guidance on RSSH funding will improve efficiency and effectiveness of RSSH investments.		
Rationale *(Findings based on EQ2, EQ3, EQ4, and EQ5)*	Country dialogue processes to date are focused on producing a Global Fund FR but should be reoriented to dialogue focused on strengthening and prioritizing the NSPs/NHP as the basis for FAs in countries with NSPs/NHPs. The absence of timely RSSH assessments and specific RSSH funding ranges prior to FR development complicates Program Split negotiations and influences FR approaches, affecting efficiency and effectiveness of FR/GM processes. Introducing the lever priorities for step change and RSSH assessment 'off cycle' with the intention of informing and steering the application focus in Allocation Letters will help drive prioritized FAs. Specifying the percentage range of RSSH funding at this point will also help address efficiency issues at Program Split stage and grant design improvements aligned to broader health priorities including wider UHC goals.		
Operationalization	• SIID technical teams and CTs undertake priorities for step change analysis pre-Allocation Letter issuance, to inform and steer on strategic prioritization of FAs based on NSPs/NHPs. • Timely assessment of redesigned RSSH priorities and gaps analysis. • Provide clearer guidance on funding range for RSSH, specifying the percentage range for GC8, to incentivize countries to plan in longer term horizons.		
Efficiency, Effectiveness and / or trade-offs	• **Efficiency**: Reduced ambiguity regarding RSSH amount. • **Effectiveness**: Improved country ownership and sustainability planning. **Trade-offs**: • Disease/RSSH funding tensions exacerbated if RSSH amounts are specified and/or Global Fund discourages RSSH stand-alone FAs • Investments are not designed in transversal manner to benefit disease and other health programs.		

Figure 12: GC8 revised funding application/grant-making roadmap



Timeline	FA/GM step	What is new/reinforced	Opportunities for differentiation
Pre-Funding Application (FA) cycle prep-aration	Preparation of 6 year funding cycle (continued)	**Important Recommendation 5: Develop a 'gatekeeper' role with the authority to uphold the anti-proliferation policy (30% internal target on simplification)** • The role will ensure all information needs, processes and guidance are updated and finalized at least 6 months before Allocation Letters are sent to countries. The role may delegate authority to process owners to perform this duty either as complementary to the gatekeeper mechanism or in lieu of the mechanisms.	Streamlined, targeted and right sized CD approach at 3 year extension point.
	Country-led NSP reviews/ updates/ prioritization	**Critical Recommendation 4: Provide targeted support to country NSPs/NHPs during the grant cycle using external TA and Technical Partners** • Intentionally orientate technical partners and external TA inputs to strengthening of the content and particularly the priorities in the NSP or NHP. This is likely to include prioritization exercises, costed operational plans and M&E frameworks with clear targets using globally agreed indicators for the three diseases and RSSH. • Work with technical partners on synthesizing lessons learned and tools for prioritization.	
Months 1 and 2 6 weeks FA develop-ment	Allocation Letter (including analysis & prioritisation to inform Letter)	**Consideration 6: Ensure grant priorities including for RSSH are identified prior to start of FA** • SIID technical teams and CTs undertake priorities for step change analysis pre-Allocation Letter issuance, to inform and steer on strategic prioritization of FAs based on NSPs/NHP. • Timely assessment of redesigned RSSH priorities and gaps analysis. • Provide clearer guidance on Program Split funding for RSSH, specifying the percentage range for GC8, and which can be increased over grant cycles to incentivize countries to plan in longer term horizons. • Consider recommending gradual increases to RSSH funding alongside gradual reductions in allocation for the disease components.	CTs and SIID advisers right size LOE with likely greater LOE on High Impact and Core portfolio countries and less on Focused countries.
	Development of Funding Application (FA) package	**Critical Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach, 'Funding Application' (FA)** • Introduce a new and simplified FA template/form and reduce the number of required Annexes for all portfolio types.	

Timeline	FA/GM step	What is new/reinforced	Opportunities for differentiation
Months 1 and 2	Country dialogue (CD) to inform prioritization of FA content	**Critical Recommendation 2: Additional operational considerations:** • Consider developing guidance on use of a single, targeted and right sized country dialogue including steer on duration, expected roles and responsibilities during FA development and grant-making, with intention of shifting countries away from highly resource (time and money) intensive prioritization workshops that run over days and weeks. To also include specific steer on how iterative / continual communication channels will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM.	• TRP recommendation caps and LOE right sized to needs across High Impact, Core and Focused countries. • TRP review only applicable when above $50m threshold or when under $50m threshold and either poorly performing or material change required (per Grant Revisions Policy criteria), or at CT request. • For any grants that require TRP review at 3-year extension point include pre-engagement meetings for efficiency. • Where no TRP review, and if additional oversight is required, use additional levers (LFA, OIG, country visits).
Months 2 and 3 7 weeks: Review & validation of FA & grants	CT internal Review (1 week)	**Critical Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach, 'Funding Application' (FA)** • Reduce the length of SBNs to provide context and additional information to TRP pre-review and/or continue to have a pre-engagement meeting to provide essential context to TRP members where it can improve efficiency	

	Independent TRP Review (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach, 'Funding Application' (FA)**
		• Strategy Committee to update and resource TRP's amended ToR to address:
		  ◦ Focus of TRP review on core FA package only.
		  ◦ Potential composition changes to membership (balancing disease and cross cutting; increased country experience).
		  ◦ Right sizing of LOE for start and 3 year extension, (if review is needed) informed by Regional Manager/CT analysis on grant performance.
		  ◦ Improved ways of working including better focused and contextualized issues and actions applied consistently to reviews.
		• Develop and resource a plan to meaningfully differentiate the TRP reviews further enabling greater focus on High Impact/Core countries as needed and much less on Focused countries.
			• CTs and SIID advisers right size LOE with likely greater LOE for High Impact/Core and like less LOE for Focused countries.
			• Varied grant-making approach depending on CT judgement: E.g. FPM may decide there is need to travel to high impact/ core/ mission critical countries where negotiation is likely more complex and / or challenging.
			• Possibility to retain Focused 4 management models in Focused Portfolios where CT deems they will add value in terms of efficiency and / or effectiveness in generating high quality grants.

	'Grant making (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 3: Streamline grant making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.**
		• Review and better define the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat team inputs including strengthening decision power of CTs and clarifying SIID technical teams' support to CTs throughout the new FA/GM continuum but particularly in GM. This may involve:
		  ◦ reorienting technical teams' roles towards providing advice at the request of the CT.
		  ◦ establishing clear boundaries for technical inputs at specific points in the continuum e.g. pre–Allocation Letter, FA review, GM.	

Timeline	FA/GM step	What is new/reinforced	Opportunities for differentiation

Months 2 and 3
 	
7 weeks: Review & validation of FA & grants
	'Grant making (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 3 (continued): Streamline grant making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.**
		• Review and better define the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat team inputs including strengthening decision power of CTs and clarifying SIID technical teams' support to CTs throughout the new FA/GM continuum but particularly in GM. This may involve:
		  ◦ adjusting processes to no longer require a technical team endorsement function.
		  ◦ defining differentiated levels of technical team inputs depending on country portfolio category if not already done.
		• GAC engages in GM in strategic advisory role.
		• *As noted in CR2: Consider specific steer on how iterative continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM.*	

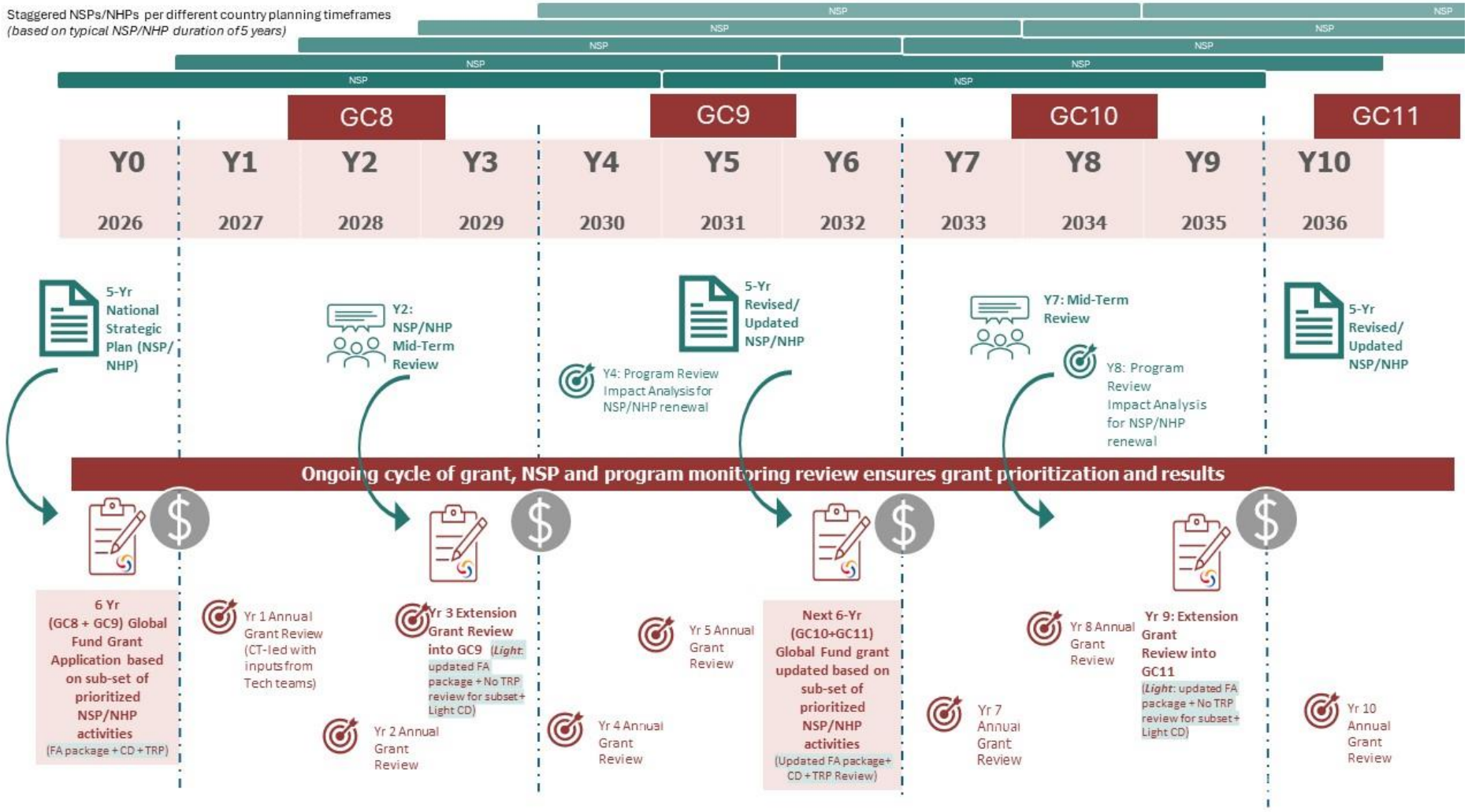
	Pre-GAC (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 3: Streamline grant making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.** • Separate GAC strategic advice and compliance functions through ensuring strategic advisory role/addressing strategic issues takes place during GM stage leaving pre-GAC stage to fulfil a purely compliance role. • Formalize pre-GAC compliance function with guidance which clearly define roles and responsibilities and purpose for reviewing certain parts of grants, and delegate authority to pre-GAC to sign off all compliance issues. • Review purpose of pre-GAC meetings, Executive Session, Plenary GAC meetings and review participation/membership with intention of significantly reducing participants to ensure meetings are fit for purpose. • Use electronic GAC approval to the Board for grants below $50m where no strategic/ outstanding issues and alternative GAC review modalities for grants above $50m. • Systematize format and completion of GMFRF form and reorient key messages to red flags/issues for discussion in plenary GAC. Include more system generated data	Electronic GAC for grants below $50m where no strategic/ outstanding strategic (119 grants in GC7) and use of other GAC modalities recommended for grants above $50m (58 grants in GC7).
Months 4 3 weeks: Approval	GAC	**Additional operational considerations:** • Review and reduce 4-week timeline for submission to pre-GAC (as a result of fewer docs to be uploaded for pre-GAC). • Per Recommendation 2 consider specific steer on how iterative / continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM. • Explore use of AI in GAC compliance checks.	

Timeline	FA/GM step	What is new/reinforced	Opportunities for differentiation

Months 2 and 3
 	
7 weeks: Review & validation of FA & grants
	'Grant making (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 3 (continued): Streamline grant making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.**
		• Review and better define the roles and responsibilities of Secretariat team inputs including strengthening decision power of CTs and clarifying SIID technical teams' support to CTs throughout the new FA/GM continuum but particularly in GM. This may involve:
		  ◦ adjusting processes to no longer require a technical team endorsement function.
		  ◦ defining differentiated levels of technical team inputs depending on country portfolio category if not already done.
		• GAC engages in GM in strategic advisory role.
		• *As noted in CR2: Consider specific steer on how iterative continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM.*	

	Pre-GAC (2 weeks)	**Critical Recommendation 3: Streamline grant making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments.** • Separate GAC strategic advice and compliance functions through ensuring strategic advisory role/addressing strategic issues takes place during GM stage leaving pre-GAC stage to fulfil a purely compliance role. • Formalize pre-GAC compliance function with guidance which clearly define roles and responsibilities and purpose for reviewing certain parts of grants, and delegate authority to pre-GAC to sign off all compliance issues. • Review purpose of pre-GAC meetings, Executive Session, Plenary GAC meetings and review participation/membership with intention of significantly reducing participants to ensure meetings are fit for purpose. • Use electronic GAC approval to the Board for grants below $50m where no strategic/ outstanding issues and alternative GAC review modalities for grants above $50m. • Systematize format and content required in GMFRF form and reorient key messages to red flags/issues for discussion in plenary GAC. Include more system generated data	Electronic GAC for grants below $50m where no strategic/ outstanding strategic (119 grants in GC7) and use of other GAC modalities recommended for grants above $50m (58 grants in GC7).
Months 4 3 weeks: Approval	GAC	**Additional operational considerations:** • Review and reduce 4-week timeline for submission to GAC (as a result of fewer docs to be uploaded for pre-GAC). • Per Recommendation 2 consider specific steer on how iterative / continual communication channel will be maintained with CSOs/SRs on changes to grants during GM. • Explore use of AI in GAC compliance checks.	

Figure 13: Six-year cycle



ANNEXES

Annex 1: GC8 Funding Application (FA) form rationale

The purpose of this Annex is to explain the rationale behind the example provided in Annex 2 of how a new simplified GC8 Funding Application Form might look. It is based on a focused review of the current 5 applications approaches in GC7, including all forms and accompanying Annexes.

LIST OF CONTENTS

1. Proposed simplification of GC8 Funding Application Process, Form and Annexes
2. Comparison of current GC7 FR Forms and Proposed simplification for GC8 (in principle based on NSPs/NHP)
3. Rationale for inclusion or exclusion of specific sub-sections in simplified new Application Form
4. Proposed simplified new GC8 Funding Application Form
5. Proposed reduction of No. of required Annexes
6. Annex 1: Grant Cycle 8 Documents Checklist

1. Proposed simplification of GC8 Funding Application Process, Form and Annexes

1. **The Portfolio Analysis and Allocation Letters should include more information to ensure GF Strategy priorities are adequately taken into account**. Include brief, country-specific guidance (with inputs from Global Fund Technical Teams) on priority areas.

   Allocation Letters should also provide clearer guidance in terms of the kind of interventions the grant will support or not: this will increase clarity for applicants and make it easier to prioritize. Rather than mainly using the TRP Review and inputs from Technical teams during FR and GM stages to ensure the grant will contribute to the GF Strategy, up-front advice in the Portfolio Analysis and Allocation Letter should be given as to specific intervention areas (including Program Essentials) that will be supported. This allows emphasizing investments in all the service areas and cross-cutting issues that are currently addressed in separate sections of the Funding Application form (see Table below), such as Program Essentials, RSSH, Most-affected Communities, Health Equity, Gender Equality, Human Rights, Sustainability: the initial overview of the Modules and prioritized Interventions should include a 'Rationale' section that addresses all these issues, i.e. explains why interventions are proposed, and how they will contribute to all the areas mentioned (see proposed changes below). This will allow leaving out many of the current sub-sections of the Funding Application Form(s).

2. **GC8 will use a standard, simplified GC8 Funding Application Form,** which will in principle be **based on the relevant disease NSPs and/or NHP/NHS.** Since all Funding Applications and Grants will be based on the relevant NSP and/or NHP/NHS, other Forms than the proposed new GC8 Funding Application Form are no longer needed.

   The revised GC8 Funding Application Form will be a considerable simplification of the GC7 Full Review Form. The only exception will be that Transition grants will need to complete an *Annex on Transition from GF Funding* and develop a Transition Plan (as they already need to do). Transition grants should in principle no longer include service delivery or programmatic interventions but focus on financing the Transition Plan.

- **Differentiation at the Funding Application stage** is intrinsically linked to the **scope and scale of the proposed Modules and Interventions,** with HI and Core countries having much more comprehensive and complex Prioritized Requests. TRP Review and support and guidance by GF Technical Teams during Grant-making will be more intensive for HI and Core portfolios.

3. The **Prioritized Request Table** (Section 1.1 in most current FR application forms), which describes the Modules and proposed Interventions, will be the core Section, providing the key information for the Funding Application, including the following:
   - Module(s)
   - Intervention(s)
   - Activities (per Intervention)
   - **[Add] Brief overall rationale** (per Module) for the main interventions, including addressing: Population, geographies, barriers addressed (as in current Prioritized Request Table) – **Or refer to NSP** if rationale is clearly provided there already
   - Amount requested (easy: take from DB)
   - **[Leave out]** "Expected Outcome", because the main outcomes/results will be in the PF.

4. **Allocation Letters should include an RSSH percentage range**, as well as for three diseases (as applicable)

   The allocation for RSSH should be minimum of X percent (TBD) for GC8 and increase each new Grant Cycle by 10-20 percent (and disease allocations should be reduced accordingly): this will ensure: 1) adequate attention for RSSH and integration, with progressively moving more towards (both health and community) systems strengthening; 2) decreasing percent for diseases will reduce donor dependency for disease responses; Strengthening (health and community) systems will also contribute to sustainability.'

5. **The TRP will review a much simpler Funding Application Form, with fewer annexes**, and with clearer guidance from the Portfolio Analysis and Allocation Letter. The TRP will focus its review on the proposed interventions (Section 1.1 of the GC8 Funding Application Form), the Detailed Budget and PF. There will be no need to look at the other different sub-sections and annexes of the current FR form anymore, as many will be removed.

6. **Integrated Funding Applications** (multiple diseases and RSSH) are recommended for GC8. Integrated Funding Applications will be decided based on the country context and the level of integration of the national health system. Using the same, standard Funding Application Form for HI, Core and Focused portfolios is realistic, as the comparison of the four current FR forms (see Table below) shows that there is limited differentiation anyway.

2. Comparison of current GC7 FR Forms and Proposed simplification for GC8 (in principle based on NSPs/NHP)

Sub-sections of Funding Request Application Form	1. Full Review	2/3. Tailored for Focused/ Transition	4. Tailored for NSP	5. Program Contin-uation	Proposed GC8 Funding Application Form
Section 1. Funding Request and Rationale					
Prioritized Request Modules	1.1.A	1.1.A	1.1	1.	✓

Payment for Results	1.1.B	1.1.B	1.2	–	✓
Rationale → Refer to NSP and Prioritized Request 1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	–	✖
Context → Refer to NSP and Prioritized Request 1.1	1.3	1.2	1.3	–	✖
Lessons Learned → Refer to NSP or MTR/ETR	1.4	–	1.4.A.5	–	✖
Focus of Application Requirements → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	1.5	1.3	1.6	–	✖
Matching Funds	1.6	1.4	1.7	2.	✓
Section 2. Maximizing Impact					
Ending AIDS, TB and Malaria → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	2.1.A	2.1.1	(1.4)	–	✖
Program Essentials → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1 or MTR/ETR	2.1.B	–	1.5	5.G	✖
RSSH → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	2.2	2.1.2	1.4.A.1	5.A	✖
Engagement and Leadership of Most Affected Communities → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	2.3	–	1.4.A.2	5.B	✖
Health Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	2.4	2.1.3	1.4.A.3	5.C	✖
Sustainability → Refer to NSP, NHP and/or Prioritized Request 1.1	2.5.A	2.2.A	1.8.A	5.E	✖ or Optional
Co-Financing 2020-2022	2.5.B	2.2.B	1.8.B	5.F.i	✓
Co-Financing 2023-2025	2.5.C	2.2.C	1.8.C	5.F.ii	✓
Innovative Financing Approaches → Optional, as applicable	2.5.D	2.2.D	1.8.D	–	✖
Pandemic Preparedness → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1 (RSSH component)	2.6	2.1.4	1.4.A.5	5.D	✖
Section 3. Implementation					

Implementation Arrangements	3.1.A	3.1	–	6	✓
Role of CBOs and CLOs → Refer to Prioritized Request 1.1	3.1.B	3.2	–	–	✖
Key Risks & mitigation Measures → To be addressed during GM	3.2	–	2.1	–	✖
Transition from GF Funding → Applicable for Transition grants	–	Annex 1 for Tailored for Transition only	–	–	✓
Average No. of pages per component	62.0	47.5 / 43.0	45.8	54.3	40-50

3. Rationale for inclusion or exclusion of specific sub-sections in simplified new Application Form

The proposed sections (see below) to be included or excluded from the GC8 Funding Application Form are based on the current GC7 Full Review Form, which is the most comprehensive FR form. In principle, the information required in the Application forms of the other four application approaches can be directly compared to the Full Review form (see Table above). Therefore, **we propose using the same, simplified application form for High-Impact, Core and Focused countries**, and no longer using the current four application forms, as there is insufficient differentiation between these forms, as evidenced by the Table above that compares them in detail. All four current forms are asking for too much information.

The core information requested in the Application Form should focus on:

1. The requested funding for specific Modules, prioritized Interventions and Activities, based on NSPs/NHP
2. Key information on Implementation arrangements
3. Key financial information (Co-financing, Payment for Results, Matching Funds)

The Application form will be complemented by information from a reduced number of core annexes, focusing on operational details, including the Performance Framework and Detailed Budget.

Sections to be included or removed from the Current (GC7) Full Review Form:

The section below provides a rationale for simplifying the current GC7 Full Review Form, which should result in a highly simplified, standard GC8 Funding Application Form, which will in principle be based on NSPs/NHP:

✓ means the current GC7 (sub) section will be **maintained** in the GC8 Funding Application Form.

✖ means the current GC7 (sub) section will be **removed** from the GC8 Funding Application Form.

Section 1. Funding Request and Rationale

1.1 Prioritized Request

✓ **1.1.A Prioritized Request Modules**

This section is the heart of the FR: it describes the Activities for which funding is requested.
We propose keeping the current Table format per Module, and the information requested for the different sub-sections (see details below). The overview of all the modules, interventions and activities will largely be the same as in the current FR, with additional details on the rationale for specific Interventions, which will replace the need to have a separate Rationale section (currently Section 1.2).
The Module Tables will include the core information to be reviewed by the TRP, in combination with the core annexes (as proposed below).

7. ✓ **Module**: in line with Modular Framework. Modules should be numbered 1, 2, 3 etc.
8. ✓ **Interventions**: these should be in line with the Modular Framework. Interventions should be numbered 1.1, 1.2 etc. 2.1, 2.2 etc.
9. ✓ **Population, geographies and/or barriers**: This information is also important for understanding which populations, where will be reached by the interventions. It may be integrated in the proposed "Rationale" sub-section (see below).
10. ✓ **List of Activities**: this is currently required for Full Review and Program Continuation, but not for Tailored for NSPs or Tailored for Focused/Transition. We propose including this for all applications, as it provides key information about the specific activities that will be funded. The Module cannot be understood properly, without more information on the specific Activities. For clear reference, the Activities should be linked to the Interventions and to the Detailed Budget and should be numbered in line with the Interventions: 1.1.1, 1.1.2 etc. 1.2.1, 1.2.2, etc., 2.1.1, 2.1.2 etc.
11. + [Add] **Rationale**: We propose adding a concise Rationale **for each module**, which explains the reason for including the main Interventions per Module; as well as addressing: Population, geographies, barriers addressed (as in current Prioritized Request Table) – Refer to the NSP or NHP if a rationale is clearly provided there already. This (new) Rationale sub-section will make the current section 1.2 "Rationale" redundant, as it will provide more detailed information per module, rather than the current, very generic section 1.2.
12. ✓ **Amount requested**: this is the amount requested *per Module* and should also stay in, as it can easily be derived from the Detailed Budget.
13. ✗ **Expected Outcome**: This sub-section can be left out, as the PF provides sufficient information on the expected outcomes.

✓ **1.1.B. Payment for Results (PfR)**

This is currently a sub-section of the Prioritized Request that should be maintained by those countries that use a PfR modality only. It provides specific information on performance indicators/milestones, targets and amounts that are proposed.

✗ **1.2 Rationale**

As explained in 1.1.A above, this Section will be replaced by concise descriptions of the rationale for proposed Interventions per Module in Section 1.1. Applicants may also refer to the NSP or NHP, as those national plans typically contain a rationale for prioritization of interventions as well.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Rationale' Section 1.2.

✗ **1.3 Context**

Applicants can refer to the Context information in NSPs and/or the NHP. Key contextual information may also be included in the 'Rationale' subsection in 1.1.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Context' Section 1.3.

✖ **1.4 Lessons Learned**
Applicants can refer to information in NSPs and/or the NHP on the current national response/programs and lessons learned in that context. In addition, applicants may refer to Conclusions and Recommendations sections of any Mid-Term or End-Term Reviews of national or Global Fund programs, if available.
Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Lessons Learned' Section 1.4.

✖ **1.5 Focus of Application Requirements**
The detailed description of proposed Interventions in Section 1.1 provides sufficient information about how the FR complies with the Focus of Application requirements.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Focus of Application Requirements' Section 1.5.

✓ **1.6 Matching Funds**
For those applicants where Matching Funds applies, this brief section should be maintained.
The Section should not exceed half a page.

Section 2. Maximizing Impact

✖ **2.1 Ending AIDS, TB and Malaria**

✖ **A. Ending AIDS, TB and Malaria**: Section 1.1 (Modules, Interventions, Activities, Rationale etc.) provides more than sufficient information on how the GF-supported programs advance the primary goal of ending AIDS, TB and malaria. Describing this in a separate section does not add any value.

✖ **B. Program Essentials:** Currently, this sub-section addresses the extent to which Program Essentials are currently fulfilled. Program Essentials should already be included in the description of prioritized interventions in Section 1.1 and may also be addressed in the relevant NSPs and NPH or in an MTR/ETR.

Hence, there is no need to maintain separate 'Ending AIDS, TB and Malaria' and 'Program Essentials' Sections 2.1 A and B.

✖ **2.2 Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH)**
Prioritized Request Section 1.1 will typically include several of the eight RSSH modules, with adequate description of Intervention, Activity and Rationale details. The information in these RSSH modules will be much more specific and detailed than the information provided in this generic RSSH section.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'RSSH' Section 2.2.

✖ **2.3 Engagement and Leadership of Most Affected Communities**
Prioritized Request Section 1.1 will usually include Modules that include a community component, such as HIV prevention modules for key populations, Interventions under the CSS module, etc.
In addition, the FR may also include Modules such as 'RSSH: Community Systems Strengthening', and Interventions such as 'Community-led monitoring', 'Community-led research and advocacy', 'Community engagement, linkages and coordination', 'Capacity building and leadership development', 'Community mobilization and advocacy for human rights' etc.
In addition, Section 1.1 will include brief Rationale sub-sections for each Module.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate Section 2.3 to describe how GF-supported programs will maximize the 'Engagement and Leadership of Most Affected Communities'.

✖ **2.4 Health Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights**
Prioritized Request Section 1.1 will include a description of prioritized interventions, as well as a rationale for each Module. The details of the proposed interventions and activities will provide sufficient detail on how these interventions will maximize Health Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights. In addition, the FR may also include Modules such as 'RSSH: Community Systems Strengthening', 'Reducing Human Rights-related Barriers to HIV/TB Services', 'Removing Human Rights and Gender-related Barriers to TB Services'. These modules include Interventions such as 'Eliminating stigma and discrimination in all settings', 'Legal literacy ("Know Your Rights")', 'Ensuring nondiscriminatory provision of health care', 'Increasing access to justice', 'Ensuring rights-based law enforcement practices', 'Reducing HIV-related gender discrimination, harmful gender norms and violence against women and girls in all their diversity', 'Community mobilization and advocacy for human rights'.
In addition, Section 1.1 will include brief Rationale sub-sections for each Module.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Health Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights' Section 2.4.

2.5 Sustainability, Domestic Financing and Resource Mobilization

✖ **or Optional A. Sustainability**
The major challenges to sustainability and efforts to address them are likely to be addressed in the various NSPs or NHP, or in the description of the Modules in Section 1.1. If this is the case, there is no need to have a separate 'Sustainability' Sub-section, as the applicant can refer to the NSP, NHP or Section 1.1. A brief 'Sustainability' Sub-section remains optional in case no such information is provided in the NSP or Section 1.1.

Hence, the 'Sustainability, Domestic Financing and Resource Mobilization' Section 2.5 could be left out or made optional.

✓ **B. Co-Financing 2020-2022**

✓ **C. Co-Financing 2023-2025**
These two Co-Financing Sub-sections (B and C) are part of all four application forms. As co-financing requirements are central to the Global Fund funding model, both sub-sections should remain.

✖ **D. Innovative financing approaches**
→ Optional, as applicable.

✖ **2.6 Pandemic Preparedness**
The description of the RSSH and disease-specific modules and Interventions in the Prioritized Request 1.1 will provide a detailed description of the investments that will be made in strengthening health systems and disease programs. This will give a better insight into how GF-supported programs build capacities that are most critical to prevent, control and respond to infectious disease outbreaks. This separate sub-section won't add much, and may be duplicative.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Pandemic Preparedness' Section 2.6.

Section 3. Implementation

3.1 Implementation Arrangements

✓ **A. Implementation Arrangements**
Implementation arrangements are key for understanding how the prioritized Interventions will be implemented, including who will be the PR, SRs, implementing partners. This includes implementation arrangements of the current and new grant. Hence, this Sub-section should be maintained.

✖ **B. Role of CBOs and CLOs**
Prioritized Request Section 1.1 will include Modules and Interventions where CBOs and CLOs will play a key role in implementation, such as for Prevention among key and vulnerable populations, linkage to care and treatment, as well as Modules such as 'RSSH: Community Systems Strengthening' and Interventions such as 'Community-led monitoring', 'Community-led research and advocacy', 'Community engagement, linkages and coordination', 'Capacity building and leadership development', 'Community mobilization and advocacy for human rights' etc.
These Modules and Interventions will include details on the role of civil society organizations in service delivery. Hence it seems duplicative to have a separate 'generic' section on the role of CBOs and CLOs.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Role of CBOs and CLOs' Sub-section 3.1.B.

✖ **3.2 Key Risks & Mitigation Measures**
This section addresses risks and mitigating measures for three areas: 1) Procurement and management of health products and lab-related activities; 2) Flow of data from service-delivery points; 3) Financial and fiduciary concerns. All these issues will be addressed in detail during Grant-making, hence we propose postponing this till GM and leave it out of the Application form.

Hence, there is no need to maintain a separate 'Key Risks & Mitigation Measures' Section 3.2.

✓ **Transition from GF Funding**
This is an annex in the Tailored for Transition application form. As it is central to these types of portfolios, this section should remain for Transition grants.

4. Proposed simplified new GC8 Funding Application Form

The proposed standard GC8 Funding Application Form will be used in conjunction with the relevant disease NSPs and NHP (if available).

Section 1. Funding Application and Rationale

1.1 Prioritized Request
A. Modules
B. Payment for Results

1.2 Matching Funds (if applicable)

1.3 Sustainability, Domestic Financing and Resource Mobilization

1.4 Implementation Arrangements

See Annex 2 for an example of the proposed GC8 Funding Application Form.

5. Proposed reduction of No. of required Annexes

The Table below shows the annexes that are proposed as mandatory/required for GC8. The Comments/ Rationale column provides the justification for leaving out specific annexes: some may be combined with other annexes (e.g. the Funding Landscape Table), others may be developed during GM, or may be developed outside the FR/GM process. E.g. assessments such as the Gender Assessment or the Assessment of Human Rights-Related Barriers may be conducted prior to the FR/GM process. The RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex may be replaced by a proper RSSH Assessment prior to the FR/GM process. The Funding Priorities from Civil Society and Communities Annex is redundant if the Prioritized Request section provides an adequate rationale for the prioritized interventions. A separate country dialogue narrative may be replaced by a statement from the CCM as part of the CCM Endorsement of the funding application that the country dialogue was held in accordance with the GF guidelines.

		Full review	Tailored for Focused/ Transition	Tailored for NSP	Program Continuation	New Grant application Form	Comments/ Rationale
Documents Reviewed by the Technical Review Panel							
1	Funding Request Form	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strongly simplified (see above)
2	Performance Framework	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Detailed Budget	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Programmatic Gap Table(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Funding Landscape Table(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Consider combining with PGT
6	Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Health Product Management Template	✓	X	✓	✓	X	Develop during GM; Optional for FR if CCM/PR want to
8	Implementation Arrangement Map(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	RSSH Gaps and Priorities Annex	✓	X	✓	✓	X	Use RSSH Assessment if available
10	Gender Assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Only if available

	(if available)						
11	Assessment of Human Rights-Related Barriers (if available)	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Only if available
12	Essential Data Table(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	
13	National Strategic Plans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Innovative Financing Documentation (if applicable)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	If applicable
15	Supporting Documentation Related to Sustainability and Transition (if available)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Only if available
16	List of Abbreviations and Annexes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Simplify annexes part (no need for page-specific reference)
Documents Assessed by the Global Fund Secretariat							
17	Funding Priorities from Civil Society and Communities Annex	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Explain in 1.1
18	Country Dialogue Narrative	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Include in CCM Endorsement
19	CCM Endorsement of Funding Request	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	CCM Statement of Compliance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Additional documentation to support co-financing requirements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) Risk Assessment (optional)	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	Only if available
23	Transition from Global Fund Funding	X	✓ (Transition only)	X	X	✓ (Transition only)	

Applying the changes proposed above results in the following simplified List of Annexes:

6. Annex 1: Grant Cycle 8 Documents Checklist

Use the list below to verify the completeness of your application package.
This checklist only applies to applicants requested to apply using the Full Review application approach. Refer to the GC8 Funding Application Instructions[1] for details, applicability and resources.

Documents Reviewed by the Technical Review Panel

☐	Funding Application Form
☐	Performance Framework
☐	Detailed Budget
☐	Programmatic & Financial Gap Table(s)
☐	Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR)
☐	Health Product Management Template (for HI and Core portfolios; Optional for Focused portfolios)
☐	Implementation Arrangement Map(s)
☐	National Strategic Plans
☐	Innovative Financing Documentation (if applicable)
☐	Supporting Documentation Related to Sustainability and Transition (if available)
☐	List of Abbreviations and Annexes

Documents Assessed by the Global Fund Secretariat

☐	CCM Endorsement of Funding Application
☐	CCM Statement of Compliance
☐	Additional documentation to support co-financing requirements
☐	Transition from Global Fund Funding (optional, required for Transition portfolios only)

Annex 2: Proposed GC8 Funding Application (FA) template

The purpose of this Annex is to demonstrate visually the simplified structure and content of a new, simplified GC8 Application Form.

THE GLOBAL FUND

Funding Application Form
Grant Cycle 8

Allocation Period 2026-2028

Summary Information

Country(s)	
Component(s)	
Planned grant start date(s)	
Planned grant end date(s)	
Principal Recipient(s)	
Currency	
Allocation Funding Application Amount	
Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR) Amount	
Matching Funds Application Amount (if applicable)	

Refer to the GC8 Funding Application Instructions for detailed elements related to each question which should be addressed for a response to be considered complete. The Instructions also include information, resources, and a description of necessary documents to be submitted along with this form.

Section 1. Funding Application and Rationale

1.1 Prioritized Application

A. For each module, provide information on the funding being requested from the Global Fund, and what is expected to be achieved as a result of the Global Fund's investment.

Module #<Number>	**<Module Name>**
Intervention(s)	<Intervention Name> - Change in Programming from current grant: ☐ New, ☐ Scale-up, ☐ Continuation, or ☐ Scale-down *Insert new row for each intervention. Number Interventions in line with each Module (e.g. 1.1, 1.2; 2.1, 2.2 etc.)*
List of activities	<Activity Name> *List key Activities for each Intervention. Number Activities in line with each Intervention (e.g. 1.1.1, 1.1.2; 2.1.1, 2.1.2 etc.)*
Rationale	Provide a brief rationale for the prioritization of the main Interventions in this Module.
Population, geographies and/or barriers addressed	
Amount requested	

Add additional tables for each module.

B. If you are using a Payment for Results modality, provide information on the performance indicators / milestones, targets and amounts that are proposed.

Performance indicator or milestone	Target				Rationale for selection of the indicator/milestone	Amount requested	Expected outcome	Specify how the accuracy and reliability of the reported results will be ensured
	Baseline	Y1	Y2	Y3				
Add rows as relevant								

Countries should discuss with their country teams if they are considering the use of a Payment for Results modality as the basis of the funding application.

1.2 Matching Funds (if applicable)

If Matching Funds were designated for the 2026-2028 allocation period:

A. Describe how integrating the Matching Funds will increase the impact and improve the outcome of the allocation for the Matching Funds area.

B. Describe how programmatic and access conditions have been met.

1.3 Sustainability, Domestic Financing and Resource Mobilization

A. Describe the major challenges to the sustainability of the national response and efforts to address these challenges (Optional, if not described in Section 1.1 or in NSP or National Health Plan.

B. Describe how co-financing commitments for the 2023-2025 allocation period have been realized.

C. Describe how co-financing will increase over the 2026-2028 allocation period, how these co-financing commitments will be tracked and reported, and planned actions to address remaining funding gaps.

D. If applicable, describe specific arrangements and modalities related to innovative financing approaches linked to this funding Application and/or the national response.

1.4 Implementation Arrangements

Describe changes to implementation arrangements which will maximize implementation effectiveness and optimize efficiency.

Annex 1: Documents Checklist

Use the list below to verify the completeness of your application package.
This checklist only applies to applicants requested to apply using the Full Review application approach.
Refer to the GC8 Funding Application Instructions[1] for details, applicability and resources.

Documents Reviewed by the Technical Review Panel

☐	Funding Application Form
☐	Performance Framework
☐	Detailed Budget
☐	Programmatic & Financial Gap Table(s)
☐	Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR)
☐	Health Product Management Template (for HI and Core portfolios; Optional for Focused portfolios)
☐	Implementation Arrangement Map(s)
☐	National Strategic Plans
☐	Innovative Financing Documentation (if applicable)
☐	Supporting Documentation Related to Sustainability and Transition (if available)
☐	List of Abbreviations and Annexes

Documents Assessed by the Global Fund Secretariat

☐	CCM Endorsement of Funding Application
☐	CCM Statement of Compliance
☐	Additional documentation to support co-financing requirements
☐	Transition from Global Fund Funding (optional, required for Transition portfolios only)

[1] GC8 Funding Application Instructions - https://www.theglobalfund.org

Annex 3: List of references

From a global list of about 800 documents provided mainly by the ELO, the evaluation team has read, coded and used the below ~170 global documents. In addition, all relevant documents related to 13 grants in the 9 countries reviewed have been used for the country studies.

Table 15: List of documents consulted

Documents reviewed and used in the evaluation	Date of issue/ publishing
Internal Global Fund Secretariat documentation and notes	
The Global Fund internal documentation on the 2023-2028 strategy development	2021
FR/GM documents	
Internal Secretariat documentation on country-facing processes, including LFA manual	2023
Instructions and guidance	
Internal documentation on Global Fund instructions on GC7 applications (tailored for NSP, HI & Core, Full Review, Program Continuation, Matching Funds and Strategic Initiatives), including forms, guidelines and instructions	2022
Internal Secretariat notes on Gender, Sustainability, Protection of vulnerable population groups, Human Rights and other Global Fund key areas of support	2021 - 2023
Policies and procedures (Grant-making)	
Secretariat internal documentation on funding	2015 - 2019
PPT summaries of changes from GC6 to GC7 (GMD)	
Secretariat internal documentation to advise on changes from GC6 to GC7	2022
Training on the Grant Operating System	
Secretariat internal notes on training	2023
Grant-making related documents	
Secretariat internal procedures on grant-making	2022 - 2023
Grant Approvals Committee (GAC) related	
Secretariat internal memoranda and reports related to GAC	2020 - 2023
Implementation Arrangements Mapping	
Secretariat internal documentation on best practice	2023
Technical Review Panel (TRP)	
Secretariat internal documentation related to Technical Review Panel	2022 - 2023
TA-related	
Secretariat internal notes and reports related to Technical Assistance	2024
Evaluations, reviews and assessments published by The Global Fund	
Allocation methodology evaluation Final report	02/2024
Strategic Review 2023 final report incl annexes and country case studies	01/2024
Strategic Review 2020 final report, incl. Management response and TERG position paper	12/2020
Strategic Review 2017 final report, incl. TERG presentation	06/2017
Prospective Country Evaluations Synthesis report	02/2018
Prospective Country Evaluations Synthesis report	02/2021
FCDO Review: GC7 Proposal Development Process in Six Countries	-
OIG: Advisory Review - Evolving the Technical Review Panel model	11/2021
Evaluations, reviews and assessments published by external partners	
FGHI: Reimagining the future	-
UNAIDS 2023 NSP checklist and reference list and Findings from the rapid review of the countries' FRs tailored for NSPs in GC7 Window 1	2023
Communities at the Centre, A report back on the experiences of KPs in GC7 (W1 and 2)	2023
AIDSPAN: GFO issue 430 - The increase in set-aside pledges	05/2023
Relevant Board and SC Papers	

Secretariat internal documentation relating to Board and Steering Committee	2022 - 2024
Grant-making Final Review Forms (GMFRF)	
Secretariat internal documentation related to grant-making and final review	
Country specific documents	
Secretariat internal documentation related to 13 specific grants in 9 countries reviewed	

Table 16 contains a list of the 26 datasets analyzed for this evaluation and a brief description of their contents. As some datasets continued to evolve during the evaluation as GC7 progressed, we have noted the dates of receipt or last update.

Table 16: Datasets analyzed

	Dataset	Contents	Date of last update or receipt
Internal datasets			
1	Register Of Unfunded Quality Demands (2023-2025)	UQD descriptions and amounts	26/01/2024
2	GC7 Funding Request Tracker (2023-2025)	GC7 FR status tracker	12/07/2024 (specific dates of access referenced in-text)
3	GC6 Funding Request Tracker (2020-2022)	GC6 FR status tracker	07/2022
4	TRP Form Tracker Analysis for Windows 1, 2, and 3	TRP review decisions & timeline data	17/05 – 22/10/2023
5	TRP Issues Reporting (GC6 and GC7)	TRP issue database	14/03/2024
6	GC7 Applicant Survey (Windows 1-3) Results + some insights from 2020-2022	Country Dialogue & FR development survey administered to CCM, CTs, partners, and CRG regional platforms after FR submission (N = 1300)	08/03/2024
7	TRP Review Process Survey	TRP review process survey conducted at the end of each review window (N = 129)	15/04/2024
8	Country Team Survey on the TRP Review, Windows 1-3	CT feedback on TRP engagement (N = 31)	15/04/2024
9	TRP FR Quality Assessment Survey for Windows 1-3 (2023-2025)	TRP quality assessment for FRs in W1-3 (N = 129)	08/03/2024
10	GOS Extract	GM timeline data	22/04/2024
11	GC7 Grant-Making Survey Results	GM survey administered to CT, PRs, and CCMs after GAC (N = 402)	19/02/2024
12	GAC Submission Tracker	GAC pre-submission and submission timeline data	17/01/2024
13	Grant-Making Last Mile Tracker	Late-stage GM timeline data	17/01/2024
14	GC7 Grant Mapping	Grant names and source FRs	20/02/2024
15	Satisfaction with Community Engagement Survey	FR community engagement survey administered to a convenience sample of CLOs, CBOs, and CSOs (N = 1194)	01/2024
16	Grant Signing Calculator Tracker	Grant information, budget, and timeline data	02/04/2024
17	GLC Weekly Grant-Making Status Report	GM status and internal action points data	06/12/2023

18	Grant Agreement Implementation Period Tracker [Global Fund Website]	Grant information and timeline data	10/04/2024
19	FR Budgets by Module Intervention	FR budget data	26/02/2024
20	GAC Recommendations Dashboards	GAC and Board-recommended budgets	02/11/ 2023 + 28/03/2024
21	GC6 and GC7 LOE Data	LOE indicators per FR compiled by A2F, including page lengths, SBN length, annexes	13/06/2024
22	Allocation Letters	Dates extracted	15/04/2024
23	GMFRFs *(sample of 13 grants)*	Initial + final grant budget data extracted for comparison	26/04/2024
24	Grant Budgets Implementation Period [Global Fund Website]	Grant budgets by module	27/06/2024
External datasets			
25	Expertise France GC7 Tracker	TA data including budgets, numbers of experts, and expertise deployed in GC7 per FR	24/05/2024
26	TSM GC7 Tracker	TA data including budgets, numbers of experts, and expertise deployed in GC7 per FR	17/05/2024

Annex 4: List of stakeholders consulted

During the inception and data collection period the evaluation team interviewed a total of 175 persons:

Table 17: Stakeholders consulted

Global stakeholders interviewed	Category of stakeholders
Global Fund Secretariat KIs **54 people interviewed:** 27 people in individual interviews 27 people in three focus group discussions	- Access to Funding (A2F) - Community Rights and Gender (CRG) - Finance team - Grant Approval Committee (GAC) - Grant Management Division (GMD) including Operational Efficiency (OE) - Health finance department (HF) - Monitoring and Evaluation and Country Analysis (MECA) - Technical advice and partnerships (TAP) - Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH)
Global KIs outside TGF **17 people interviewed:** 10 people in individual interviews 7 people in one focus group discussion	- UNAIDS Technical Support Mechanism - Expertise France - Strategy Committee (SC) - Technical Review Panel (TRP) - Grant Approval Committee external partners

Country stakeholders interviewed	- Category of stakeholders
Country KIs **104 people interviewed:** 30 people in individual interviews 74 people in 23 FGDs in 9 countries: Indonesia Lesotho Mauritius Nigeria Paraguay Philippines Senegal Tanzania Viet Nam	- Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) members ○ Chair/ Vice Chair ○ Oversight Committee ○ CSO representatives ○ Secretary - Ministry of Health ○ Malaria programs ○ National AIDS programs - FPMs and Country Teams - PMU (Program, Finance, M&E) - Principal Recipients (PRs) - Subrecipients (SRs) - Local Fund Agent (LFA) - M&E Officers - Consultants: RSSH, CSS, FR/GM, healthcare finance, TB/HIV, malaria - Key and Vulnerable populations - PLWD representatives - PLHIV associations - MSM groups - UNAIDS - WHO