



Evaluation of the Global Fund Funding Request and Grant Making Stages of the 2023-2025 Funding Cycle

Secretariat Management Response

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Secretariat Management Response

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

Introduction

Independent evaluation is a critical component of the Global Fund Partnership. Independent evaluation provides the opportunity to learn, further strengthen how the Global Fund works, and inform Board and Secretariat deliberations on important topics. In November 2022, the Board established a new independent evaluation and learning function¹ to ensure that evaluations are relevant, timely and of high quality, providing findings and recommendations that drive the Global Fund closer to achieving our goal of ending AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria as epidemics and achieving our Strategy.²

An integral part of these evaluations is the Secretariat Management Response, which affords the Secretariat the opportunity to comment on the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations as well as outline the steps that will be taken forward in response to the evaluation.

The Global Fund highly values transparency and publishes independent evaluation reports, alongside the commentary of the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) and the Management Response, according to the Evaluation Function Documents Procedure approved by the Strategy Committee.

In 2024, an independent evaluation was conducted to provide an assessment of the Global Fund Funding Request and Grant-making (FR/GM) Stages of the 2023-2025 Funding Cycle, Grant Cycle 7 (GC7). The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the design, operationalization, and implementation of the GC7 FR/GM processes to determine their effectiveness in producing quality grants aligned with the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028).

The evaluation also sought to capture real-time learning to provide recommendations for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8). The evaluation was performed by independent evaluators, managed by the Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) under the oversight of the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP). As written in the TORs, the evaluation had the objectives to assess:

1. Effectiveness: Does the GC7 Funding Request and Grant-Making processes lead to quality grants that are aligned with the national priorities and support the delivery of the Global Fund Strategy?
2. Efficiency: To what extent are the procedures of the GC7 Funding Request and Grant-making process fit for purpose and achieve their intended objectives? What are the opportunities for improvement, rationalization and simplification in the process?

¹ GF/B46/DP06. This function includes an Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) situated within the office of the Executive Director, as well as oversight from an Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) which reports to the Global Fund Board through its Strategy Committee.

² Fighting Pandemics and Building a Healthier and More Equitable World: Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028).

Observations on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation

The Secretariat appreciates the acknowledgement by the independent evaluators that the GC7 FR/GM processes have been effective in generating high quality grants that support the implementation of the Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028). The Secretariat welcomes the evaluation's conclusion that the maturity of the Allocation-based Funding Model and the decade's experience amassed by the Global Fund and recipient countries in implementing the model have led to efficiencies and contributed to the development of strong grant designs backed by broad based stakeholder engagement. These conclusions are encouraging, as they demonstrate that the Global Fund's operational model and partnership are producing positive results, adapting based on insights gained from each cycle. The evaluation also highlights several areas for further refinement and provides valuable input for contemplating operational changes ahead of GC8.

The Secretariat agrees with the evaluation's conclusion that further advancing efficiency and effectiveness in FR/GM processes while maximizing impact requires revising certain elements of the Global Fund operations and will require tradeoffs from Secretariat teams and the Global Fund Board in terms of information availability, reporting and levels of assurance. To be more focused on key areas of impact, the Secretariat has committed to simplification of Global Fund end-to-end processes and FR/GM requirements with the aim to reduce by 30% the level of effort involved in applying for Global Fund funding, negotiating, designing and approving grants in GC8³ and beyond. The Secretariat will consider the findings and recommendations of the evaluation as part of the ongoing revision of the FR/GM processes ahead of GC8 and will ensure they inform discussions with key partners.

6-year Planning Cycle

The Secretariat agrees with the evaluation's conclusion that the complexity and level of effort currently required to complete FR/GM steps every 3 years is high and risks diverting capacity from implementation, potentially impeding grant implementation effectiveness. However, the 3-year grant cycle is directly linked to the Global Fund's replenishment cycle and our ability to make financial commitments, and it has also encouraged programmatic agility and delivered measurable impact. While the Secretariat is willing to consider longer-term planning options and approaches where these could incentivize achievement of impact over longer than 3-year time horizons, there are limited circumstances where we believe that the increased workload in developing a 6-year funding request would be likely to lead to reduced effort over time.

To cut down on administrative burdens and increase stability and focus on programmatic goals, the independent evaluators recommend adopting a 6-year "planning cycle" noting that allocations will still be designated for three years at a time (in line with the Global Fund's Comprehensive Funding Policy). Operational features proposed by the evaluation include a 6-year FR based primarily on NSPs/NHPs, with a "light touch" mid-point update at the third year of implementation which may require a TRP review based on budget and performance thresholds. The Secretariat shares the independent evaluators' view that a well-designed 6-

³ The Secretariat's ambition to streamline the FR/GM processes for GC8 to reduce level of effort by at least 20-30% was included in the Executive Director's Report to the Board in April 2024.

year FR in some settings could offer the benefit of shifting investment of time and effort from FR/GM steps towards implementation, could be helpful to support longer-term sustainability and transition planning, and extend the horizon for better implementation of longer-term (e.g., RSSH) investments. Conversely, the Secretariat notes the complexity of developing a 6-year FR and is doubtful this will result in a lower workload later in the cycle, especially as the Global Fund can only commit funding in three-year increments and cannot commit to 6 years of funding upfront. There are likely to be substantial changes from one three-year cycle to the next including changes in funding levels, epidemiology, country political context, climate impact, and the introduction of new, potentially game-changing, innovations that would require significant changes to the initial FR and limit the utility of a 6-year time horizon. On balance, the Secretariat is willing to explore this 6-year FR option for limited contexts (for example, in countries with agreed 6-year transition timings), alongside other options intended to achieve similar benefits.

As part of the cyclical review of FR/GM processes ahead of GC8, the Secretariat is exploring the trade-offs involved in adopting a longer planning cycle in transition contexts, noting that the additional upfront requirements and level of effort to produce the 6-year request must be justified by significantly reduced workload later in the cycle and an efficient process for the mid-point update that supports an uninterrupted focus on implementation. The Secretariat has already attempted to implement a “light-touch” funding request for well-performing programs in the past with the Program Continuation approach, which has had limited success at reducing the size and volume of the funding request submission due to applicants’ concern about preemptively including information they think the TRP might ask for. For that reason, the Secretariat does not share the view that the mid-point update should include an update of the funding request but rather recommends an operational approach that could be inspired by the existing grant revision process to extend existing grants and add funding, to ensure a streamlined review of the updated Performance Framework and Detailed Budget, contextualized by programmatic performance and highlighting any critical changes necessitated by changing contexts. This would include a provision for a TRP review when a material change to the initially TRP reviewed and recommended FR is requested. In all cases the Secretariat notes the need to maintain community and CCM engagement across the grant life cycle.

The Secretariat notes the ongoing challenge of aligning timing with national strategy cycles, which can vary but are often prepared with a 5-year horizon. This timeframe rarely aligns with the Global Fund’s 3-year funding commitment, hence the evaluation’s operational recommendation to shift to 6-year funding requests which form the foundation for two 3-year grants. The Secretariat notes that grants can and should be programmatically revised as needed throughout the grant lifecycle, as national strategies are updated or epidemiological context changes, without the need for an updated funding request.

Simplified Funding Application Process

The evaluation finds that differentiation into five FR approaches has not worked as intended given that it did not result in less time needed for completing FR steps. The evaluation recommends replacing the five application and review tracks by a single, simplified Funding Application applicable to *all portfolios*. Operational features proposed in the report include significantly reduced information requirements for all portfolios, with differentiated TRP reviews to enable investment of time and effort to shift from Focused portfolios to High Impact and Core portfolios, and pre-identified priorities communicated by the GF to steer FR development and position the grant for impact.

The evaluation's conclusion that the information requirements introduced in GC7 were largely driven by priorities of the Secretariat is not entirely consistent with evidence referenced in the report, which demonstrates that the levers introduced in GC7 were grounded in a commitment to support quality grant design and implementation, and operationalize a more ambitious Strategy.⁴ It is also important to note that information requirements in the standard FR narrative and annexes or ad-hoc information requests during FR review are also driven by information needs from the TRP and by information needs for Board reporting. For example, specific strategic priorities and Board requests related to Gender, Human Rights, PSEAH, Community Engagement and RSSH resulted in new funding request requirements in GC7. Despite efforts to keep the FR/GM processes straightforward, the Secretariat agrees with the evaluation finding that the cumulative effect of the levers introduced in GC7 have contributed to increasing the administrative load for many portfolios. There is a difficult trade-off in the value of specific funding request requirements vs. the total funding request workload, balanced against ensuring quality of implementation in a three-year period. The Secretariat sees scope to substantially simplify and streamline FR/GM requirements and will consider the evaluation's recommendations in this regard ahead of GC8, noting that TRP and Board stakeholders will also need to accept reduced availability of information if this is achieved.

Whilst acknowledging that the differentiation for the 5 types of funding request modalities in the GC7 FR/GM processes did not significantly expedite access to funds, the Secretariat will aim to significantly streamline the funding application but does not agree that one Funding Application for all is the right solution. It would be counterproductive to apply the processes we need for the most complicated contexts with the highest levels of investment, to all countries.

Following recommendations from the TERG in 2016⁵, the Global Fund Secretariat deliberately introduced differentiation into funding application processes in recognition that a one size fits all approach does not work for the myriad contexts where the Global Fund invests. In the 2017-2019 allocation period Access to Funding introduced differentiated application modalities (e.g., Program Continuation) to allow for flexible and tailored funding requests, right sized to match a country's needs and context, enabling applicants to develop quality applications more efficiently. The differentiated applications were revised in the 2020-2022 cycle, when the Tailored for Focused Portfolios application was included. However, as the mandate of the TRP was not sufficiently adapted to reflect and support a truly differentiated application model, this

⁴ See "Table 10: Description of GC7 levers", Page 26 of Evaluation.

⁵ TERG Position Paper: Mechanisms for Review and Decision Making of Concept Notes in the Global Fund Funding Model, March 2016.

differentiation has not yet achieved a meaningful reduction of complexity or significantly expedited access of funds. Simplifying and streamlining the applications processes will need to be accompanied by a review of the TRP role and mandate, optimizing the role of TRP on those portfolios with the highest disease burden and/or highest allocations.

Whilst the Secretariat agrees with the proposal for streamlined FR processes for all portfolios, the Secretariat holds the view that ensuring streamlined approaches for Focused portfolios⁶ remains essential: the Global Fund has less investments, less leverage, and a higher risk appetite in these countries. Guidance and funding request requirements should be concentrated on a limited number of strategic actions to drive impact in these portfolios. Significantly reducing the level of effort to complete a FR for Focused portfolios versus what should be required for a High Impact portfolio has the potential to significantly impact the efficiency and efficacy of the Global Fund operational model at the country level and in the Secretariat. Despite comprising only 5.6% of the total Global Fund allocation and average 6% of the global disease burden, Focused portfolios represent 36% of all Global Fund FRs, are 2/3 the size of High Impact FRs (comparing number of pages submitted), and represent 1/3 of TRP review costs.⁷ A CCM developing a Focused funding request can prepare more than 1,000 pages for their funding request submission, to preemptively address anticipated TRP questions, and yet there are still more questions from the TRP to the Country Teams for the Focused portfolios than on the High Impact or Core portfolios. The level of effort to develop and review a Focused funding request should be proportionate to the size of the funding envelope, and potentially the amount of the national program that the funding represents. The Secretariat aims to radically simplify the approach to Focused countries, with guidance focused on key programmatic elements to drive impact and a truly differentiated role for TRP.

Evidence analyzed by the Secretariat as part of the GC7 lessons learned exercise suggests that the differentiation levers applied to GC7 for the Tailored for Focused Portfolios application approach achieved some simplification⁸ and more focused investments compared to other portfolios. However further optimizing investments of effort and time for these portfolios in GC8 and beyond would not be possible through an undifferentiated FR application approach. The Secretariat therefore recommends maintaining differentiation of FR approaches aimed at reducing transaction costs for Focused, or Small Middle-Income Countries (MICs). This should also include changes to the role and mandate of TRP, who should focus time and effort on the portfolios with the highest disease burden and allocations to drive greater impact across the portfolio.

⁶ Focused portfolios are the Global Fund's smallest portfolios in terms of allocation size and burden. According to the Global Fund's portfolio categorization criteria, Focused portfolios must have a total allocation of less than US\$30 million and cannot be among top 30 in disease burden share.

⁷ Internal Global Fund analysis.

⁸ According to evidence collected as part of the GC7 lessons learned exercise conducted by the Secretariat, differentiation in GC7 has resulted in an average of 26% fewer pages in the FR, 66% fewer pages per Secretariat Briefing Note for the TRP, 33% fewer TRP Issues, and 40% fewer TRP Actions (i.e., recommendations of actions to be addressed by Applicants to resolve issues identified by the TRP in the review of the FR) compared to the Full Review.

Other Topics

The Secretariat generally agrees with the recommendation to increase alignment of FRs with NSPs/NHPs, but primarily for High Impact and Core portfolios where we have substantive investment, and the GF investment supports a significant proportion of the national program. This would strengthen country ownership, enhance the integration of Global Fund grants with national strategies, and support the sustainability of Global Fund supported programs. The Secretariat also concurs with the evaluation's conclusion regarding the need to advocate for technical partners' and external TA support to strengthening the quality and prioritization of NSPs/NHPs.

The Secretariat agrees with the evaluation's conclusion that compliance requirements, including complex due-diligence and sign-off processes, have overextended the grant-making process, hindering the efficiency of the FR/GM continuum. At the same time, earlier and better-defined engagement of teams across the Secretariat during grant-making and grant submission review will support proactive identification and resolution of issues earlier in grant-making, leading to more effective grant review and approval processes. To rebalance investment of time and efforts between FR development, grant-making and grant implementation, the Secretariat concurs with the independent evaluators' recommendation to clarify roles and responsibilities of Secretariat teams and simplify sign-off processes. As it explores options to streamline the grant approval process, the Secretariat will assess the trade-offs involved in the evaluation's recommendations to separate due-diligence and engagement functions in the approval of grants.

The Secretariat appreciates the evaluation's recommendation to develop an internal mechanism with power and authority to uphold the Secretariat's commitment to the 30% internal target on simplification of FR/GM processes as this will free up time at country level to focus on implementation and achieve more impact. As part of its efforts to continuously improve its internal operations, the Secretariat has consolidated and formalized the Grant Life Cycle (GLC) governance structure, including the GLC Steering Committee (SteerCo). This governance mechanism is responsible for overseeing the end-to-end Grant Life Cycle, including processes, systems, and additional information requirements. As such, it will be leveraged to drive further simplification for GC8. The Secretariat will additionally take forward the recommendation that an internal body oversee the scope and scale of guidance to be published.

Conclusions

The evaluation provides an independent assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the GC7 FR/GM processes, recommending significant changes to the Global Fund processes and requirements involved in Funding Request application and review as well as grant-making and approval to improve efficiency and maintain effectiveness. This report complements the series of independent evaluations and reviews that have helped the Global Fund to refine its operational model based on insights gained from each cycle.

The Secretariat agrees or partially agrees with many of the evaluation's high-level findings, conclusions and recommendations, with exceptions highlighted in this document. Based on these considerations, the Secretariat will consider and build on the findings and

recommendations of the evaluation as part of the ongoing operational review of the FR/GM processes ahead of GC8. These findings and recommendations will be considered ahead of consultations with technical partners, the TRP, and any discussions with the Strategy Committee and the Board. This assessment supports the Global Fund's broader commitment to maximizing impact and working towards achievement of the Strategy's objectives while ensuring collaboration and alignment with national priorities and processes.

Annex 1: Detailed Secretariat Response to Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Introduce an extended (6-year) planning cycle increasingly aligned with NSPs/NHPs and support light touch review to extension.	Type	Level of acceptance
<p><u>Evaluation Rationale and Operationalization details:</u></p> <p><u>Rationale:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Operationalization:</u> 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.</p>	Critical	Partially Accepted
<p>Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”</p>	<p>The Secretariat agrees that the complexity and level of effort currently required to complete FR/GM processes are significant, presenting a bottleneck to streamlining grant processes. The Secretariat also agrees that the 3-year funding request cycle can divert countries’ constrained capacity from grant implementation, with implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of grants. The Secretariat notes its commitment to significantly simplify FR/GM processes (see recommendation 5) which will address many of the pressure points raised by the evaluators, and if implemented will limit the need and rationale for 6-year funding requests. The Secretariat shares the independent evaluators’ view that in limited contexts (e.g., for designated Transition portfolios), a well-designed process for an extended planning cycle using a 6-year FR⁹ could offer the benefit of shifting investment of time and effort from FR/GM steps towards implementation, in addition to supporting longer-term RSSH planning. It is critical that the additional upfront requirements and level of effort to produce the 6-year request are justified by reduced workload later on and an efficient process for the mid-point update that supports uninterrupted focus on implementation</p> <p>For this reason, while the Secretariat supports exploring the recommendation for a light and differentiated mid-point review process at the third year of implementation of the grant in the case of a 6-year FR, the Secretariat recommends using an operational approach inspired by the existing grant revision process instead of the more complex proposal suggested by the evaluation report that requires an update to the Funding Request. The mid-point review could be led by the Secretariat and validated by the GAC, and consider implementation effectiveness, programmatic/RSSH results against targets, and changing socio-political or epidemiological contexts, along with the new allocation amount. Where implementation and results delivery are on-track then the review should be very light. If this is not the case, the review will be used to make significant changes to get back on track and the TRP engaged in cases of material change.</p>	

⁹ While a FR can be for 6 years, Global Fund allocations can only be committed in three-year periods. Subsequent allocations would be subject to funding availability, allocation methodology and eligibility policies, noting that these could change from cycle to cycle.

	<p>Whilst the Secretariat agrees that FRs should be increasingly aligned with NSPs/NHPs for High-Impact and Core portfolios to encourage integrated thinking and enhance the sustainability of Global Fund investment, the Secretariat does not see the same benefit for Focused countries, and especially in transition portfolios, where Global Fund investments are very targeted. A differentiated and practical approach is needed (see comments to recommendation 2).</p> <p>It is also important to note that there are challenges in operationalizing this recommendation for increasing alignment to NSPs, including the need to accommodate potential shifts in the focus of NSPs and/or overall domestic health spending, which may occur at any point during a 6-year cycle and require grant revisions. In addition, the Global Fund will need to ensure that the FR application addresses gaps where certain priorities of the Global Fund Strategy (e.g., Sustainability or human rights and gender considerations) are not covered or adequately costed in NSPs. In all cases the Secretariat notes the need to maintain community engagement across the grant lifecycle.</p>
Description of intended impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 6-year funding request has the potential to result in time and efforts savings for applicants, partners, Secretariat and TRP. • Re-balancing of the level of effort for FR/GM, with more investment of time and effort into implementation. • Extended planning horizon for longer-term investments, including RSSH investments, to drive more impact. E.g., the longer time horizon for planning favors use of national systems (for training, local tenders, CHW payments etc.) which is often harder in 3-year cycles because using the national systems for training delivery involves long set-up and processing timelines.
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>The cyclical review of FR/GM processes ahead of GC8 has a timeframe of Q1 2025 for changes to FR processes to be approved by management, to be operationalized and translated into systems and procedures by July 2025 in time for the start of the next funding cycle. Timeframe for GM process changes to be approved is July 2025. The Secretariat will engage with the GLC governance mechanism for guidance / decisions on any significant change and update the Strategy Committee as appropriate. Any change that requires a Board policy change would be taken to the Board through the relevant Standing Committee of the Board.</p>

Recommendation 2: Streamline FR stage through one simplified FR approach 'Funding Application'.		Type	Level of acceptance
<p><u>Evaluation Rationale and Operationalization details:</u></p> <p><u>Rationale:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Operationalization:</u> Introduce a new and simplified FA template/form and reduce the number of required annexes for all Portfolio types.</p>		Critical	Partially Accepted
Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”	<p>The Secretariat agrees that the FR stage must be streamlined and simplified for all applicants in order to increase the time and focus available for implementation, to ensure grants deliver on their targets and achieve impact. Whilst acknowledging that the differentiation built into the GC7 FR/GM processes did not fully achieve the intended reduction of complexity or significantly expedite access to funds, the Secretariat does not support reverting to an undifferentiated FR application approach. The Secretariat recommends maintaining targeted differentiation of FR approaches to dramatically reduce transaction costs for Focused, or Small Middle-Income Countries (MICs), as well as a reduced role of TRP in relation to these portfolios, for example allowing CCMs/Secretariat to opt-in for a TRP review.</p> <p>Optimizing the level of effort for Focused portfolios can significantly impact the efficiency and efficacy of the Global Fund operational model; despite comprising only 5.6% of the total Global Fund allocation, Focused portfolios represent 36% of all Global Fund FRs, are 2/3 the size of High Impact FRs (comparing number of pages submitted), and represent 1/3 of TRP review costs. Optimizing investments of effort and time for these portfolios in GC8 and beyond cannot be achieved through undifferentiated FR requirements, or without implementing a truly differentiated role of the TRP in relation to Focused portfolios. Not differentiating carries the risk of applying the justifiably more stringent requirements of the most complex portfolios to the least complex portfolios. 'One size fits all' approaches were experimented with at the beginning of the New Funding Model and demonstrated that this risk does materialize.</p>		
Description of intended impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced level of effort required at the FR stage, shifting investments of time and effort to focus on implementation and programmatic goals. • Enhanced applicant experience with FR processes. • Achieve streamlined FR processes for all portfolios but increase differentiation of application and review approach for Focused portfolios. 		
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including	<p>The cyclical review of FR/GM processes ahead of GC8 has a timeframe of Q1 2025 for changes to FR processes to be approved to be operationalized and translated into systems and procedures by July 2025 in time for the start of the next funding cycle. The Secretariat will engage with the GLC governance mechanism for decisions on any significant change and update the Strategy Committee as appropriate.</p>		

those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>As part of the revisions to the TRP TORs in advance of GC8 we will also explore how to focus TRP time on where it matters most and propose engagement with Focused portfolios that is proportionate to the level of Global Fund investment. This will be discussed within the Strategy Committee Working Group on TRP matters.</p>
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Recommendation 3: Streamline grant-making processes by ensuring the right people provide the right inputs at the right moments	Type	Level of acceptance
<p><u>Evaluation Rationale and Operationalization details:</u></p> <p>Rationale: 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.</p> <p><u>Operationalization:</u></p> <p>Secretariat teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <p>Pre-GAC and GAC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 where no strategic/ outstanding issues and alternative GAC review modalities for grants above \$50m or with 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. Reorient key messages to red flags/issues for discussion in plenary GAC. Include more system generated data. 	Critical	Partially accepted
Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”	The Secretariat agrees that technical teams and technical partners should primarily engage with CTs to identify strategic issues during grant-making and resolve issues throughout grant-making rather than waiting until the grant is submitted to	

	<p>GAC to bring concerns to the attention of country teams or GAC members. This has been the standard approach for most portfolios in GC7. We also agree that there can be a separation between compliance checks before grants are approved, and strategic advice from the GAC which may come at any point in grant-making or implementation. Finally, the Secretariat agrees to revisit GAC timelines and TORs to streamline and optimize the review process.</p> <p>The Secretariat supports the intention to define roles and responsibilities clearly and clarify the ways in which teams engage. However, as the Evaluation does not fully consider the important contribution of the critical inputs of different teams (SIID, Finance, Legal, Programmatic Monitoring and Risk and GMD) as they feed into FR and GM processes, nor the challenge of the different portfolio contexts, reflecting the complexity of what we are trying to achieve as an organization, the operationalization recommendations may be overly prescriptive given this missing context. The Secretariat will work to improve clarity and efficiency regarding roles and responsibilities, as recommended, as part of its review of FR/GM processes prior to GC8.</p> <p>In addition, the Evaluation does not consider the ‘timing challenge’ inherent in the pre-GAC and GAC discussions, which includes GAC partners to ensure synergies with other partners’ support. Without some documentation the GAC cannot provide strategic advice on grants, but any input could require a change to documents. This tension means that there will inevitably been some instances where re-work on a grant is required. If the Evaluation recommendation is followed that the pre-GAC performs purely a compliance function, there would need to be a new process or forum where the representatives of the GAC Exec (the current pre-GAC) could provide input earlier in the grant-making process, before grants are finalized. This may not contribute to the overall objective of process simplification.</p>
Description of intended impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure necessary technical engagements take place early and throughout grant-making, while shortening grant timelines for applicants, CTs, PRs. • Increased time for grant-making and implementation readiness. • Defined participation of technical teams in grant approval procedures. • Rationalized workload for technical teams.
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>The cyclical review of GM processes ahead of GC8 will be operationalized and translated into systems and procedures in time for the start of grant-making in GC8 (early 2026). As part of this review, the Secretariat will continue to explicitly consider ways to streamline grant-making processes, including exploring the recommendations put forth by this evaluation.</p> <p>The SIID “ways of working” project co-created tools to ensure effective and efficient collaboration and partnership within SIID and across the Secretariat, with greatest focus on GMD. These are under final review and will be launched through formal and informal communication channels in 2024. Grant-making engagement with all teams in the Secretariat will be documented in Operational Policy Note Procedures.</p> <p>The GAC Secretariat will refine expectations for pre-GAC and GAC for GC8 with updated TORs in 2025.</p>

Recommendation 4: Provide targeted support to country NSPs/NHPs during the grant cycle using external TA and Technical Partners		Type	Level of acceptance
<p><u>Rationale:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Operationalization:</u> 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.</p>		Critical	Partially accepted
Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”	<p>The Global Fund agrees that high quality NSPs/NHPs are an essential part of a country owned response and provide an important basis on which to develop investment cases (including a Funding Request for the Global Fund, but not limited to that use case as these also provide the basis for domestic resource mobilization or from other external funders). The malaria community, for example, is discussing as part of The Big Push the development of costed operational plans that will be the basis for funding requests for the Global Fund and other malaria donors, as well as for domestic resources. The Global Fund also agrees that it is more valuable for TA to focus on improving the prioritization of evidence-based interventions in the NSP or NHP, rather than limiting its focus to developing a GF application, as an NSP/NHP has value for a country beyond its engagement with the Global Fund.</p> <p>The Secretariat only partially accepts this recommendation as i) the GF is not resourced to deliver on this recommendation without national stakeholders specifically requesting the support and without the commitment of the broader partnership, as the GF does not control the focus of external TA and Technical Partners, and ii) does not fully agree with the emphasis on using “external” TA.</p> <p>In some cases, TA is provided through external expertise and technical partners, while in other cases programs have the internal expertise to develop and vet these strategies across a variety of stakeholders. While grant funding may be utilized for these purposes (dependent on the component, PR and country context), the Global Fund is not in the position to “provide” this level of support across all of the countries in which it invests. Further, the premise that this should be “external” is inconsistent with our partnership approach which would encourage leveraging expertise from a variety of sources should a country deem this is essential in developing a high quality NSP/NHP. The Secretariat is committed to reducing the “complexity and requirements of Global Fund guidance” to reduce reliance on TA to develop FRs going forward.</p>		
Description of intended impact	<p>Quality, data-driven and prioritized NSP/NHP enable the development of quality FRs across GHIs. When NSP/NHP are not of quality, one outcome is that the Global Fund FR process and country dialogue necessarily becomes more complex and difficult with a higher risk of poor-quality FRs. This recommendation is particularly relevant for RSSH as strengthening health and community systems is cross-cutting across HTM to accelerate and sustain outcomes.</p> <p>High quality NSPs/NHPs strengthens country ownership and has benefits for national programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced integration of services and systems financed by the Global Fund. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated alignment of Global Fund investments with national strategies. • Enhanced sustainability of Global Fund investments and the national strategy targets supported through Global Fund investments.
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>Action by the broader Global Fund Partnership, will be key to achieving the intended impact as the Global Fund Secretariat does not have responsibility for providing support for NSP/NHP development.</p> <p>The Secretariat will explore ways to encourage integrated thinking beyond siloed investments to broader impacts on health and community systems. The Secretariat will also continue communicating to country stakeholders the strategic importance of developing quality and costed NSP/NHP with associated operational plan and the data analysis and reviews that inform them.</p>

Recommendation 5: Develop a 'gatekeeper' role with the authority to uphold the internal goal to achieve simplification in GC8.		Type	Level of acceptance
<p><u>Rationale:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Operationalization:</u> 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.</p>		Important	Accepted
Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”	Not applicable.		
Description of intended impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grant Life Cycle (GLC) governance structure will be leveraged to simplify the FR/GM process and requirements in line with the internal target of 30% reduction in level of effort. • The Secretariat also commits to a reduction in Global Fund guidance for GC8, with an internal target of 30% reduction, and will ensure the essential information for Funding Request development is updated and published on the Global Fund website at the end of July 2025. 		
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>30% reduction in LOE has been communicated and accepted as an internal target. This will require TRP and Board stakeholders to accept a reduced level of information available from GC8 funding requests vs. those from GC7 funding requests in order to truly simplify the funding application package.</p> <p>As the current Grant Life Cycle Governance structure has been in place since Q2 2024 and includes oversight, advisory and decision-making functions covering the recommendation's scope, no additional structural changes to the model are required to operationalize this recommendation.</p> <p>The Secretariat will additionally ensure that an internal team take on the responsibility to manage the development of guidance to be published, under the oversight of GLC Governance, with the target to reduce external guidance by 30%.</p>		

Recommendation 6: Ensure grant priorities including for RSSH are identified prior to start of FA.		Type	Level of acceptance
<p>Rationale: 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.</p> <p>Operationalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		Consideration	Partially Accepted
Justification for “partially accepted” and “rejected”	<p>The Secretariat agrees with the evaluation’s conclusion that there is value in the Global Fund providing a prioritization steer to countries earlier in the funding cycle, where relevant based on a country’s NSP/NHP. The Secretariat notes that for Focused portfolios with limited investment these priorities may be focused on interventions (e.g., prevention activities or community system strengthening) that have not been included in a country’s NSP/NHP.</p> <p>The Secretariat also agrees that encouraging applicants to hold discussions on prioritization of RSSH investments prior to the development of the FR can enhance the efficiency of FR/GM processes and support countries in making informed decisions that align with their broader health priorities and universal health coverage ambitions. The Secretariat shares the view that RSSH guidance should be simplified and strengthened.</p> <p>While the evaluators suggest specifying the percentage allocation for GC8, the Secretariat refers to the 2024 “Independent Evaluation of the Global Fund Resource Allocation Methodology”, which reviewed the issue of RSSH investment communication and concluded that a fourth share for RSSH in the upfront disease split is not recommended. Rather, the evaluation recommends dedicating a percentage of each country’s allocation to RSSH, tailored to country context. As noted in the Secretariat Management Response to that evaluation, the Secretariat will further explore the process, benefits and limitations of communicating a percentage (or percentage range) of country allocations for RSSH, tailored to country context, and propose options for discussion at the Strategy Committee in 2025.</p>		
Description of intended impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HTM country dialogue to better speak to pre-existing country priorities. • More straightforward and robust planning and prioritization of RSSH investments, with increased country ownership. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier analysis and dialogue for RSSH investments and closer alignment with national plans when available. Better realization of longer-term RSSH investments.
Activities or initiatives required to achieve the intended impact (including those already planned, under way or completed)	<p>The Secretariat will continue to work with all portfolios on establishing country-specific priorities prior to the start of the next funding cycle.</p> <p>The Secretariat will explore new levers for RSSH ahead of GC8, including i) developing stronger, tailored guidance that leverages country differentiation and ii) generating support for earlier planning, with longer-term horizons, to guide FR RSSH cross-cutting priorities and support partner alignment. The Secretariat also refers to the Secretariat Management Response to SR2023, which outlines efforts to prioritize RSSH investments.</p>