Ninth Meeting of the Independent Evaluation Panel
Summary Notes

3-5 December 2024

Geneva, Switzerland

Purpose

This document presents the Report of the Ninth Meeting of the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP), held in Geneva, Switzerland from 3 to 5 December 2024.

Agenda items. The meeting comprised 15 agenda items.

Documents. A document list is attached to this report (Annex 1).

Participants. The participant list is attached to this report (Annex 2).

Action items

- The Secretariat will share Global Fund strategic updates as part of each IEP meeting to provide context on the broader strategic landscape. ELO will share the approach to the in-country evaluation supervision visits and present to the IEP for discussion in the context of risks to independence at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.
- ELO will share the approach to evaluation in-country supervision visits. The IEP will review and discuss in the context of risks to independence at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.
- ELO and LGD to consider how to create more transparency around evaluation function budgeting ahead of 2026 Evaluation Workplan and Budget proposal in September 2025.
- ELO will ensure that the vaccine link is well-addressed in the Malaria Sub-National Tailoring Evaluation report.
- ELO will refine the guidance to evaluators on the inception report, final report and recommendations based on IEP input, feedback from users and experiences during the ongoing evaluations by the end of Q2 2025.
- ELO to explore with Sourcing if adding a question to disclose whether artificial intelligence had been used in bid development will be possible by end of Q2 2025.
- ELO will prepare an analysis for IEP discussion on TOR development and resulting evaluation types by the 12th IEP meeting in September 2025.
- ELO to integrate a theory of change approach into 2025 planning for expanding the pool of independent evaluators.
- ELO will continue monitoring the reported indicators and add an indicator to count repeat bidders to better track efforts to expand the evaluator pool and to report on indicators again at end of 2025.
- ELO will share updated draft gender guidance for discussion at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.
- ELO to develop specific guidance for Phase 8 of SOP2 in order to support the learning and influence elements of evaluations. A draft will be available by the 12th IEP Meeting.
- LGD will confirm with SC leadership the timeline for SC discussion of the 2024 IEP Governance Performance Assessment by March 2025.
- LGD will share the meeting report of the previous IEP meeting as part of the preparation package of materials for each IEP meeting and include action points as part of the IEP meeting report. The ELO will review the action points from previous meeting(s) that yet have not been completed at each IEP meeting.
- The IEP Vice Chair will draft the 2025 IEP Annual Report and share it with the IEP members for input in January 2025 for submission to the Strategy Committee through LGD by 17 February 2025.
- The IEP will review the TOR Checklist and Quality Assessment Framework at the September 2025 IEP meeting with ELO input on their application and utility.

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Report

Opening

The IEP Interim Chair and Vice Chair opened the meeting by welcoming IEP Members, staff of the Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO), and Secretariat staff working on IEP and ELO matters. The IEP Interim Chair summarized the agenda of the Ninth IEP Meeting and welcomed new ex-officio Members Harley Feldbaum, Head of the Strategy and Policy Hub (SPH), and Massimo Ghidinelli, Member of the Strategy Committee (SC).

The IEP Interim Chair requested disclosures of perceived, potential and actual conflicts of interest from IEP Members. Several disclosures were made, none of which required IEP Members to recuse themselves from discussions except for the IEP Vice Chair to recuse from participating in discussions related to the HIV evaluation.

Update on the 52nd Board Meeting

The Head of SPH provided an update on the key discussions at the 52nd Board meeting in November 2024, specifically the Eligibility Policy; Allocation Methodology; Sustainability, Co-Financing and Transition Policy; and the Catalytic Investments. A challenging global context was highlighted as the backdrop for these conversations. The Head of SPH noted that, in this context, it was difficult for evaluations to keep pace with organizational shifts, but the cyclical nature of Global Fund work provided an important opportunity for a proactive evaluation strategy. The SC Representative underscored the transformative nature of the present moment, the prevailing sentiment of unity across Board Constituencies, and the importance of the evaluation function to assess the effectiveness of policy changes.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- The IEP thanked the Head of SPH for providing the helpful and comprehensive update and asked a number of clarifying questions related to cross-organizational collaboration with other organizations, the perceived utility of the evaluation function, and sustainability.
- The Head of SPH agreed with IEP Members on the need to improve the implementer country experience, pointing to a range of mechanisms underway – including on malaria – to enhance collaboration between the Global Fund, Gavi, and the Global Financing Facility (GFF).
- The Head of SPH flagged the evaluation function's ability to support the Board to make good decisions through a strong evidence base, suggesting that a proactive evaluation plan be put forward considering the organization's cyclical nature. He shared that the Resource Allocation Methodology Evaluation had been valuable, although it could not respond to politicized questions on divisive issues.

Action items:

- The Secretariat will share Global Fund strategic updates as part of each IEP meeting to provide context on the broader strategic landscape.

Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer Operational Update

The Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer (CELO) provided the IEP with an update on the annual CELO self-scorecard reflecting performance against 2024 priorities, the CELO learning report and progress on evaluations. The CELO flagged that the ELO was on track in producing and stabilizing evaluation and learning processes and products, as well as advancing emerging partnerships and expanding the pool of evaluators. Increasing use and influence of findings and increasing Global

Fund visibility in the global health evaluation space were characterized as advancing but not on track. The CELO also noted that, due to resource constraints, the learning function was not advancing at the pace originally expected. He provided updates on 2024 evaluations, including the Funding Request and Grant-Making (FRGM), Malaria Sub-National Tailoring (MSNT), Community Engagement (CE), Community Responses and Systems Strengthening (CRSS), Imbizo, HIV Prevention, and Gender Evaluations.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Standard operating procedures (SOPs)**: Following an IEP Member prompt to reflect on challenges in maintaining the quality and relevance of evaluation processes, the CELO highlighted the importance of SOPs in guiding work, including detailed SOPs for day-to-day processes and flagged the opportunity for an SOP update to push further improvements. The IEP requested ELO to share the purpose and SOPs for in-country evaluation supervision visits that are being conducted by ELO staff along with Evaluators to ensure that the processes used by ELO are not adversely affecting evaluation or evaluator independence.
- **Challenging findings**: One IEP member asked about the extent to which results and recommendations that challenge the status quo were feasible. The CELO reinforced ELO attention to context and level of constructiveness of evaluation results as well as monitoring of evaluator safety in potentially threatening contexts.
- **Learning:** In response to an IEP member's question on the need for further development of the learning function, the CELO explained a plan to use briefs and multimedia formats to disseminate evaluation results and create political and technical dialogue. The CELO noted the open-door policy for Board Constituencies to give feedback on evaluations and the use of Secretariat-wide "Brownbag" talks to promote the integration and the use of evaluation evidence.
- **Other evaluation activities:** On the relationship between evaluations carried out by the evaluation function and other Secretariat teams, the CELO flagged close work with the Monitoring Evaluation & Country Analysis Team.
- **Evaluation budgets and calendar**: The IEP Interim Chair requested greater transparency and clarity on the evaluation function budget, which the Legal and Governance Department (LGD) and CELO agreed to consider while taking into account potential conflicts of interest and the lack of a clear standard. In response to an IEP Member query about budgeting individual evaluations, the CELO highlighted evaluation budget differentiation based on complexity and flexible application of savings between evaluations. The IEP Vice Chair advocated for the ELO, in preparing the next evaluation calendar, to consider links between the volatile external context, shrinking budgets and evaluation function work based on ongoing and upcoming policy discussions within the Secretariat and Board.
- **Country voice**: In response to an IEP Member's question on engaging country voices in the design of evaluations, the IEP Interim Chair echoed the SC Member's response that implementer country representation in governance bodies constitutes inclusion of country voices. The CELO noted these Constituencies also play a key role in referring the ELO to in-country collaborators for scoping and creating feedback loops on emerging themes.
- **MSNT Evaluation**: In response to a question from the IEP Interim Chair, the CELO shared that the MSNT Evaluation incorporates questions on malaria vaccines and collaboration with Gavi. ELO affirmed the importance of exploring the linkage between vaccines and malaria treatment and prevention, as well as holistic malaria planning as part of the evaluation.

Action items:

- ELO will share the approach to evaluation in-country supervision visits. The IEP will review and discuss in the context of risks to independence at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.
- ELO and LGD to consider how to create more transparency around evaluation function budgeting ahead of the 2026 Evaluation Workplan and Budget proposal in September 2025.
- ELO will ensure that the vaccine link is well addressed in the MSNT evaluation report.

Imbizo Updates

This session included a presentation by ELO on Imbizo, the independent country stakeholder feedback mechanism of the Global Fund. ELO highlighted that Imbizo included virtual consultations with country stakeholders through interviews, a survey, and existing dataset analysis. The CELO added that a full year was needed to reach the Request for Proposal (RFP) stage of this evaluation because of the need to dialogue with other Secretariat initiatives and to gather input from stakeholders before developing Imbizo as a single platform. IEP Members were asked to provide input and reflect on the insights arising from Imbizo as a cyclical flow of intelligence rather than a static report and the implications of Imbizo's cyclical nature.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Feedback from Focal Point**: The Quality Assurance Focal Point flagged Imbizo as an opportunity to bridge gaps in stakeholder feedback and address structural difficulties. The Quality Assurance Focal Point emphasized that Imbizo is not a typical evaluation but rather a tool to gather views from different groups on issues and perceptions of the Global Fund operations. The CELO added that Imbizo was requested by the SC to collect implementer country-level stakeholder independent feedback to guide SC decision-making, with the Secretariat as a secondary user.
- **Clarity on defining Imbizo and its components**: One IEP Member questioned whether Imbizo falls into the category of "evaluation" to which ELO invited IEP inputs on the implications for the Quality Assurance Framework. Another IEP Member asked about how scaling Imbizo in subsequent years is being considered. ELO responded that a project review on the utility, strength of evidence and the level of effort of Imbizo's 2024 activities was underway to inform decisions on how to adapt Imbizo for subsequent years.
- **Role of ELO**: One IEP member asked for clarity on the intended audience and/or users of Imbizo results, as well as ELO's role in developing evaluation questions and recommendations. The CELO responded that Imbizo's evaluation questions were designed with significant input from the User Group, while also focusing on operational priorities.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**: The IEP and ELO discussed how to approach quality assurance for NLP. The ELO agreed with the IEP on the need to mature its use of NLP, underscoring that it has consulted the Secretariat's Data and Analytics team and is establishing validation criteria for NLP in evaluations.
- **Managing stakeholder engagement and expectations**: IEP Members queried how country stakeholder expectations would be managed, with one Member asking about mitigation actions envisioned to prevent waning country stakeholder engagement over time. The ELO commented that the aim was to foster trust over time by providing formal responses and acting on options and/or recommendations.

Expanding the Pool of Independent Evaluators

The ELO presented an update on expanding the pool of independent evaluators, including through a joint initiative with Gavi and GFF, as well as detailed analytics on RFP applicants against a set of

defined indicators for monitoring progress in this area. The IEP was requested to provide input on further actions.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Improvement**: The IEP welcomed the improved diversity and increased number of bidders responding to RFPs. They noted some concerns around the level of effort required for ELO, Secretariat and IEP for proposal reviews given the large quantity of proposals. One suggestion included a prescreening by the ELO to eliminate low-quality submissions.
- **Building independent evaluator capacity**: The CELO reinforced that the ELO would continue to be proactive in reducing barriers to entry for low- and middle-income country (LMIC)-based evaluation service providers. The IEP Interim Chair suggested directing ELO time toward applicants who had been close to securing a bid. The ELO flagged that it provides feedback to unsuccessful RFP applicants when requested, which the IEP Interim Chair encouraged be tracked as part of the indicator framework, including whether these bidders applied again and were successful in future bids.
- **Indicator framework**: The IEP Vice Chair highlighted that requesting independent evaluators to create partnerships and consortiums with evaluators in different regions could help advance progress. Indicators could place greater emphasis on bid success and contract engagement versus counting only the number of bids. It was suggested that ELO sharpen how the expansion of the evaluator pool is being defined and develop corresponding targets, indicators and timelines.
- **Theory of change (TOC)**: Some IEP Members encouraged the ELO to develop a TOC for this effort, to clarify the purpose (e.g. diversification or quantity). The ELO responded that its goal is to deliver quality evaluations and noted the complexity of finding independent evaluators with knowledge of the Global Fund's context, governance structures and decision-making.
- **Weighting proposal elements**: IEP Members questioned the possible influence in assessing proposals of some bidders using high quality visuals and asked how linguistic, gender and geographic diversity were considered to determine whether there was any inherent bias in the current process that would discriminate against diversity. The ELO assured the IEP that proposal content is carefully reviewed, with attention to visuals playing little role in final scoring of the bids.
- **Adequately monitoring the expanding pool of independent evaluators**: The IEP asked ELO to clearly define what was considered an LMIC-based applicant, noting that some applicants categorized as such had company headquarters in high-income countries and/or were listed on western stock exchanges. IEP Members also encouraged ELO to select bidders with diverse team composition and where LMIC partners retain substantive engagement in implementation, appropriate credit in evaluator products, and compensation. ELO explained sourcing requirements such as that contracts must go to a single entity and can then be sub-contracted by that agency. ELO agreed to monitor the budget split between lead and sub-contracted entities. ELO noted the complexities with defining what is considered an LMIC applicant.

Action items:

- ELO to continue monitoring the reported indicators and add an indicator to count repeat bidders to better track efforts to expand the evaluator pool and to report on indicators again at the end of 2025.
- ELO to integrate a theory of change approach into 2025 planning or expanding the pool of independent evaluators.

Guidance to evaluators

The IEP Vice Chair framed the session by sharing that this dialogue was part of process efficiency enhancement arising from discussions between the IEP and ELO, and the guidance aims to support independent evaluators in developing quality deliverables.

The ELO presented an overview of guidance to evaluators in various areas. A summary of the main discussion points and actions is captured below.

Inception report

- **Development**: An IEP Member asked what past inception reports lacked that prompted the ELO to develop this guidance. The CELO shared that the length of materials received in previous years exceeded a manageable amount. The ELO highlighted the importance of setting a minimum standard for inception reports to improve quality and enable a comparison between the TOR and the final evaluation design.

Final report

- **Refining guidance**: The IEP emphasized the importance of balancing evaluation recommendation requirements with flexibility and stressed the needs for an executive summary and sections on the strength of evidence and evaluation limitations. The IEP also suggested that TOCs be included in the final reports. The IEP supported the idea that the report guidance should aim for word count rather than page length. They requested adequate information be provided in the final report on the analysis and validation of findings so that the connection between methods, findings, and recommendations could be better understood and validated or replicated.
- **Final report formats and accessibility**: In response to a discussion on the desired length, the Head of SPH and SC Representative noted that LGD recommends papers to governance bodies be a maximum of six to eight pages to highlight the most salient points, necessitating synthesized, concise reports with annexes containing further detail. The CELO highlighted that the process of reduced evaluation report lengths was underway.
- **Confidentiality**: One IEP Member cautioned that evaluators providing a list of individuals consulted to the ELO could pose a risk to confidentiality; the ELO affirmed that this data is held as confidential as it is required for evaluation validation.

Formulation of Recommendations

- **Weaknesses and ways to improve**: The IEP Vice Chair and Head of SPH applauded the accuracy of the presented list of weaknesses and ways to improve to help recommendations better serve as decision-making tools.
- **Categorization**: IEP Members commended the categorization of recommendations and queried what distinguished the categories of critical, important, and potential considerations. Suggestions for alternative wording included immediate, short-term, and long-term or stop, start and do differently.
- **Co-creation**: The IEP Interim Chair asked if the co-creation of recommendations was considered during the set-up of the evaluation function. The ELO responded that the SC Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group established during the function's set-up had expressed concern that co-creation would create a conflict of interest; however, the SOPs include touchpoints for the independent evaluators, ELO, and Secretariat users to discuss findings and recommendations, respectively, before report finalization.

- **Mitigating the risk to independence from Secretariat engagement**: The IEP Vice Chair queried how User Group composition could mitigate the risk or perception of undue influence. The Head of SPH cited how the recommendations arising from the FRGM Evaluation surprised some Secretariat staff when they received the final report and created the perception that the Secretariat's primary stakeholder may have had undue influence on the recommendations. The Quality Assurance Focal Point shared his view that the evaluation represented an independent view. The CELO added that the FRGM Evaluation yielded lessons on how to better engage Secretariat management in the future, including expanding the number of staff members involved in Secretariat review. The IEP suggested further work on "lines of defense" to mitigate risks to independence and potential business owner capture. Both the IEP Vice Chair and ELO noted that the recommendation workshop, co-chaired by CELO and IEP, should be a tool to help mitigate this risk.
- **Language and tone**: The IEP noted that evaluations can be used to encourage the continuation of good practices and framing recommendations using positive language to facilitate acceptance and adaptation.

Action items:

- ELO will refine the guidance to evaluators on the inception report, final report, and recommendations based on IEP input, feedback from users, and experiences during the ongoing evaluations by the end of Q2 2025.

HIV Thematic Update

The IEP viewed a recording of the HIV Thematic Update presentation provided to the SC at its 26th meeting in October 2024, as reflected in the Report of the 26th Strategy Committee Meeting (GF/SC26/12). The IEP expressed its gratitude for the presentation.

Executive Session

The IEP met in executive session on Day 2 of the meeting. Records are deposited with the General Counsel in line with provisions of the Board and Committee Operating Procedures.

IEP Governance Performance Assessment

LGD presented the 2024 IEP Governance Performance Assessment, which focused on mandate and composition, execution of core responsibilities, quality of outputs, independence, ways of working, and one area that remained confidential. LGD noted that many of the report's findings had been mitigated by the update of the IEP TORs approved by the Strategy Committee in July 2024. LGD clarified that the assessment was scheduled cyclically at the halfway point in IEP Member terms so that stakeholders would have enough time to action recommendations. LGD also noted that the SC discussion of the report had not yet taken place due to competing priorities.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Findings and timing**: Some IEP members questioned the report's utility, noting the small number of evaluations carried out during the period being assessed. One member also commented that some of the findings were out of IEP scope (e.g. alignment of evaluation findings to organizational priorities). Reflecting on the critical view of the Secretariat towards the IEP, the CELO expressed optimism that future assessments will reflect the new norms and expectations established during start-up.

Action item:

- LGD will confirm with SC leadership the timeline for SC discussion of the 2024 IEP Governance Performance Assessment by March 2025.

IEP Annual Report

This session provided an opportunity for the IEP to discuss the content and development of the 2024 IEP Annual Report, to be presented to the SC in March 2025. The Report will also be shared with the Board and posted on the Global Fund website.

The IEP Vice Chair reminded the IEP of the 2023 IEP Annual Report, including its structure and recommendations. The CELO provided a brief update on progress against the recommendations from the 2023 IEP Annual Report, including expanding the evaluator pool, using an evaluation reference group for the MSNT Evaluation, and the ongoing development of gender guidance.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Response to 2023 report:** The IEP requested clarification on who uses and responds to report recommendations. LGD responded that the report is submitted to the Board and SC and the IEP Vice Chair added that it goes on the public website. The IEP Vice Chair noted that the 2023 report and the IEP's feedback were well-received.
- **Content:** IEP Members suggested adding reflections on progress against the IEP's 2023 recommendations; contextualizing the IEP governance performance assessment findings; assessing commonalities found across evaluations; reflecting the evaluation functions of quality, independence and learning; and reflecting on the utility of the evaluation function's SOPs and their implementation to date. They agreed that the report should also include strategic recommendations for the evaluation function in a resource-constrained environment.
- **Presentation to governance bodies:** The IEP Interim Chair and SC Representative discussed the importance of governance body agendas, balancing time allotted for decisions with time for functions such as evaluations. The SC Representative reinforced that the SC and Board had to consider several intense policy decisions in 2024, which affected the time available to discuss other topics.
- **Gender guidance:** In response to questions on gender guidance, CELO clarified that the IEP had discussed a draft at its meeting in May 2024 and that ELO will share a revised draft document for input at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.

Action items:

- The IEP Vice Chair will draft the 2024 IEP Annual Report and share it with the IEP Members for input in January 2025 for submission to the Strategy Committee through LGD by 17 February 2025.
- ELO will share the updated draft gender guidance for discussion at the IEP's next meeting in February 2025.

Influence and Learning

ELO presented on the approach to tracking and strengthening the influence of and learning from independent evaluations at the Global Fund. IEP input was requested on the proposed approach to tracking influence.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Stakeholder engagement**: One IEP Member queried the role of primary stakeholders in developing evaluation questions, prompting discussion on who holds the status of primary stakeholder. ELO clarified that the User Group and other Secretariat Members are consulted in the scoping phase, feeding into TOR and question development. While the SC and Board can be considered the primary stakeholders, the party responsible for operationalizing results is the Secretariat business owner.
- **Audiences and terminology**: IEP Members queried ELO about the differences between contributing to a learning organization versus disseminating and communicating evaluation results. One IEP Member also pointed to the need for evaluation outputs to be tailored to different audiences to enhance learning and influence. The CELO responded that ELO is considering different evaluation dissemination formats to address different learning needs.
- **Influence story and the relationship between evidence and decision-making**: One IEP Member suggested that the handling of "disconfirming evidence" be built into the influence story and referenced USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting practices. Another Member suggested that the influencing strategy be made explicit as part of a learning TOC to identify which of the assumptions included in the presentation posed the greatest risk to successful learning. The CELO responded that the greatest risk for supporting a learning culture is whether it can deal with or act upon difficult information. ELO agreed on the importance of developing forward-looking learning products that prompt its audiences to address potential changes. IEP Members encouraged ELO to take advantage of learnings from behavioral economics and health policy research to evaluate influence further. The CELO emphasized the importance of relationship building and management, as well as of accommodating the organizational rhythm of business to the learning and influence agenda. The CELO assured the IEP that more specific guidance would be developed to support the learning and influence element.
- **Learning theory**: In response to IEP queries on learning theories being used by ELO, ELO referenced its consideration of experiential learning and knowledge management theory.
- **Examples from practice**: The CELO informed the IEP that the FRGM learning and dissemination plan would include an evaluation brief, a presentation to and discussion with the SC, and dialogue with the Grant Management Division and User Group about evaluation recommendations. For the MSNT evaluation, the CELO emphasized that the learning and influence strategy would focus on technical partners. The IEP Interim Chair suggested that learning products be developed as soon as evaluations were finalized to support relevant decision-making.
- **Resourcing and planned actions**: The IEP Vice Chair asked whether resources were available to fulfill the learning agenda. The CELO affirmed there were, and there was a discussion on the balance of resources across learning vs. evaluation, noting this agenda would be kept to a manageable scope and leverage support from other Secretariat departments.

Action item:

- ELO to develop specific guidance for Phase 8 of SOP2 to support the learning and influence elements of evaluations. A draft will be available by 12th IEP meeting in September 2025.

IEP Ways of Working

The IEP Interim Chair framed the IEP's discussion on ways of working by reminding the IEP of their purpose and mandate, encouraging IEP Members to speak freely.

Timelines and Processes

The IEP Interim Chair requested IEP Members to discuss the level of effort required for the role, Focal Point assignments, and other areas for potential efficiencies.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Number and distribution of Focal Point roles:** IEP Members strongly supported the need for two Focal Points for each evaluation. The SC Representative cautioned against deviation in practice, which might raise questions about the relative priority of those evaluations. IEP Members called for recruiting one to two additional members to address the current workload. LGD responded that IEP recruitment will begin in early 2025.
- **Enhancing efficiency**: The IEP discussed the level of effort required for various tasks and where efficiencies could be gained given the current work plan and SOPs; the total number of days required is closer to 25 to 26 (vs. 22 outlined in the TOR). The IEP suggested using a standardized, systematic format for commenting on documents, and ELO requested consolidated comments, a cover note or summary highlighting key concerns, and clustering comments into categories such as critical and preferable. The IEP discussed limiting comments to big picture issues rather than detailed track changes. The IEP recommended that the inception and final reports be shared only in PDF form to encourage this behavior.

Use of External Reference Groups

The IEP Interim Chair introduced this topic by asking the IEP how and when external reference groups are helpful and if such bodies might pose a risk to independence. The CELO added that these groups serve multiple purposes: making a broader technical community aware of a given evaluation to share with their institutions and providing them with an opportunity to give feedback.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Utility:** The IEP affirmed the utility of these external reference groups to provide independent evaluators with context and for the technical community to learn about the evaluation.
- **Independence:** The IEP Interim Chair observed that the IEP did not express any perceived risks to its independence by these groups.

Tender Evaluation Committee Participation

The IEP Interim Chair asked for IEP reflections on tender evaluation committee (TEC) participation and whether any changes to Quality Assurance Focal Point duty were required. The CELO provided additional context that the request to the Sourcing Department for IEP Members to observe TEC panels was exceptional and the first time in the Global Fund that TEC observers were systematically included.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **IEP input to TEC:** The IEP and ELO dialogued on the appropriate way for Quality Assurance Focal Points to provide input. The consensus was that, even if invited to do otherwise, the Quality Assurance Focal Points should follow IEP TOR guidance, which is to provide written comments to the TEC Chair. The IEP Interim Chair reminded Quality Assessment Focal Points that should they have any concerns about bidder selection or the quality of a bidder's methodological expertise they may raise the issue directly with the CELO or IEP leadership.

They should also disclose any potential conflict of interest that may arise to the IEP Chair and the Ethics Office.

- **Liability coverage:** A question was raised by the IEP Vice Chair on liability coverage for the IEP vis-a-vis engagement in the TEC. LGD noted the Global Fund maintains insurance coverage for risks linked to the activities of its directors and officers. This includes IEP members when acting within the scope of the activities mandated in the IEP TORs.
- **Quality assurance and independence**: IEP Members expressed confidence in the independence of the TEC process. One IEP Member shared their practice of reading all proposals and creating a shadow score to compare with the TEC score as a quality assurance check.
- **Bidder interviews**: The IEP agreed that interviews are valuable to see how the bidder approached the evaluation and to get to know key team members. They recommended allocating additional time if needed for interviews, noting that 30 minutes was often too short. The ELO replied that these interviews are conducted in addition to other sourcing requirements.

Terms of Reference Checklist

The IEP Interim Chair asked the IEP for their input about the TORs Checklist and whether it required an update.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Utility:** The IEP affirmed the utility of the TORs Checklist.
- **Impact on supplier bids:** The IEP asked if the application of the TORs Checklist impacted the quality of supplier bids or if suppliers replicated the TORs; the ELO responded that the bids were a mix of replication with innovative approaches and methodologies.
- **Updates:** The IEP agreed to review the TOR Checklist alongside the Quality Assessment Framework at the September 2025 IEP meeting.

Action Points

- The IEP will review the TOR Checklist and Quality Assessment Framework at the September 2025 IEP meeting with ELO input on their application and utility.

Independence

The IEP Interim Chair requested the IEP to discuss whether the approach to independence has been right and whether risks, if any, to independence are posed by the current processes and procedures, and corresponding mitigation mechanisms. The IEP Interim Chair suggested four core areas of independence as a rubric: technical, operational and organizational, political, and financial.

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **Operational independence:** The IEP asked if action items reflected in IEP meeting notes and annual reports were tracked by ELO. The IEP agreed for all future IEP meetings the first agenda item should include an update on action items from the previous meeting(s).
- **Financial independence**: One IEP Member flagged a lack of budget transparency of the evaluation function. The CELO noted the evaluation function budget is nested within the budget of Office of the Executive Director, and benefits from the planning and budgeting processes and controls of the Secretariat.

- **Political independence:** The IEP acknowledged User Groups as a form of mitigating political risks.
- **FRGM Evaluation:** The IEP Vice Chair referenced earlier comments about perceived bias in the recommendations arising from the FRGM Evaluation, asking if adjustments should be added to the process to mitigate the potential risk to independence. ELO acknowledged this concern, proposing to distinguish between influence and undue influence, noting that stakeholder influence can retain value in some stages – such as in question development – without posing a risk to independence. ELO flagged that only one out of six FRGM recommendations was perceived to reflect bias within the Secretariat, but that earlier engagement of management could have improved understanding of the evaluation's evidence base across all six. The IEP Interim Chair affirmed the full IEP agreement that there was no undue influence in the FRGM Evaluation.

Action Points

- LGD will share the meeting report of the previous IEP meeting as part of the preparation package of materials for each IEP meeting and include action points as part of the IEP meeting report. The ELO will review the action points from previous meeting(s) that have not yet been completed at each IEP meeting.

Evaluation Praxis

The IEP Interim Chair facilitated discussion, engaging the Members and ELO staff on issues that surfaced as action items in previous meetings where the IEP had requested further discussion. These included theory of change, strength of evidence, machine learning and NLP in evaluation practice, country selection and generalizability, and evaluation types and methods.

Theories of Change

The discussion centered around why theory-based evaluations were difficult for public health organizations to execute. Two IEP Members presented how TOCs were used in two non-Global Fund evaluations. The presenters reinforced the centrality of TOCs in articulating assumptions that could be assessed for validity through the evaluation. ELO questioned the need for TOC as a "must-have" for evaluations. The IEP advised that in the absence of TOCs, it is still important for evaluators to be explicit about assumptions and mechanisms of action.

Strength of Evidence

The discussion focused on the importance of assessing the strength of evidence to assess if independent evaluators reach conclusions in an understandable and replicable way. The discussion highlighted how the strength of evidence is an important aspect of every evaluation, including as a risk mitigation feature of future evaluations. The IEP agreed it should be assessed in every evaluation. The IEP also encouraged creative evaluation methods that go beyond key informant interviews and being open to innovative approaches.

Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing

The discussion focused on the systematic use of machine learning and NLP in evaluations and how to ensure transparency, appropriate use, and replicability. The IEP questioned whether there should be potential guardrails in using AI for bid development and suggested that bidders disclose when they have used AI in their bid. The IEP and ELO confirmed the importance of human validation of NLP outputs, especially those arising from Imbizo.

Action item:

- ELO to explore with Sourcing if adding a question to disclose whether AI had been used in bid development will be possible by the end of Q2 2025.

Country Selection Criteria and Generalizability

The IEP and ELO discussed a range of difficulties in selecting countries and trade-offs between making the selection relevant, representative, and actionable. They noted the influence of language and culture and potential limitations around the generalizability and applicability of findings for challenging operating environments. The discussion highlighted limitations in the generalizability of country selection within regions and even within countries. There was also discussion on the optimal stage in an evaluation to select countries, whether as part of the bid or as part of the inception report, and the importance for evaluators to transparently share their rationale for country selection.

Types of Evaluations and Methods

The IEP and ELO discussed whether evaluators are using the full range of evaluation types and methods available, asking how the evaluation function can encourage a broader range of methods.

Action item:

- ELO will prepare an analysis for IEP discussion on TOR development and resulting evaluation types by the 12th IEP meeting in September 2025.

Any Other Business

Summary of the main discussion points:

- **IEP meeting dates**: In response to questions raised by the IEP on setting the 2025 IEP meeting dates, LGD shared that it aims to set IEP meetings on a regular cadence mindful of sequencing IEP meetings with SC and Board meetings, and to the extent possible, avoid the need for intersessional calls, while noting that IEP meeting dates should not conflict with the meetings of other Global Fund governance bodies. LGD reminded the IEP that quorum is defined in the IEP TORs as a simple majority of voting members which is a determining factor to confirm meeting times.

Closing

The IEP Interim Chair, IEP Vice Chair, CELO and SC Representative thanked the IEP, one another, the ELO and other IEP meeting contributors, noting that it was the IEP Interim Chair's last meeting in this role. The IEP Interim Chair expressed appreciation for the onboarding and ongoing support by LGD, ELO and the IEP Vice Chair. The IEP Vice Chair encouraged future IEP meetings to maintain the level of open dialogue demonstrated in this meeting, and the SC Representative shared the view that an independent evaluation function is key for implementation of the Global Fund's strategy and fulfillment of its mandate.

Annex 1: Document List

Reference	Document Title
GF/IEP9/01	Agenda
GF/IEP9/02	Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer Operational Update
GF/IEP9/03	Expanding the Pool of Independent Evaluators
GF/IEP9/04	IEP Governance Performance Assessment
GF/IEP9/05	Imbizo Updates
GF/IEP9/06	Influence and Learning
GF/IEP9/07A	Guidance to evaluators: Inception Report
GF/IEP9/07B	Guidance to evaluators: Final Report
GF/IEP9/07C	Guidance to evaluators: Formulation of Recommendations

Ninth Meeting of the Independent Evaluation Panel

Annex 2: Participant List

Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP)
Nina Schwalbe, Interim Chair
George Gotsadze, Vice Chair
Abdallah Bchir
Evelyn Ansah
Fred Carden
Florencia Guerzovich
Caroline Lynch
Dede Watchiba
Josephine Watera
Massimo Ghidinelli, Strategy Committee
Evaluation Focal Point, Ex-officio, non-voting
John Grove, Global Fund Chief Evaluation and
Learning Officer, Ex-officio, non-voting
Harley Feldbaum, Global Fund Head of
Strategy and Policy Hub, Ex-officio, non-voting

Evaluation & Learning Office (ELO)
Rita Benitez, Specialist, Learning &
Dissemination
Yana Daneva, Consultant
Jutta Hornig, Team Coordinator
Rhiannon James, Senior Specialist, Evaluation
Partnerships
Roy Mutandwa, Evaluation Specialist, C19RM
John Puvimanasinghe, Senior Specialist,
Evaluation & Learning
Michael Schroll, Senior Specialist, Evaluation &
Learning
Marc Theuss, Specialist, Evaluation
Olga Varetska, Specialist, Evaluation

Global Fund Secretariat
Arielle Weinstein-Godin, Support Officer,
Legal and Governance Department
Stephanie Martone, Specialist, Legal and
Governance Department
Etienne Michaud, Chief Counsel, Legal and
Governance Department

External participants
Julia Bürgi, report writer