DASHBOARD FEASIBILITY STUDY

Executive Summary

Background

Since its creation in 2002, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund) has committed US$ 15.6 billion in 140 countries to support large-scale programs against the three diseases. The Global Fund is a performance-based funding model to which countries must report and prove results against time-bound targets throughout the lifetime of Global Fund grants. Principal Recipients (PRs) of the grants are directly responsible for grant monitoring and reporting, while Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) are expected to support the PRs and ensure that grant activities are implemented as planned, and that issues and bottlenecks, hindering implementation, are identified and resolved. This coordinated set of activities is referred to as “oversight” and it represents one of the key functions of a CCM.

However, the oversight role can pose many challenges for CCMs. PR reports can often overwhelm CCMs with details and/or fail to provide sufficiently useful grant information in a timely manner. As a result, CCMs find themselves hampered in their ability to fulfill their oversight responsibilities appropriately. In response, the Global Fund Board decided to make strengthening of CCM oversight a priority in its guidance paper issued in 2007.

Since 2006, the USAID-funded Leadership Management and Sustainability program has developed and introduced grant report summary tools (dashboards) in several countries to help CCMs fulfill their oversight responsibilities. Initial testing showed that the development of the dashboards had to be embedded in a broader effort to strengthen CCM capacity for oversight (e.g. establishment of formal oversight bodies, development of oversight plans and other governance documents). The Grant Management Solutions project1 (a partnership project led by Management Sciences for Health (MSH)) and the Global Fund CCM team decided in August 2007 to engage in a seven-country pilot to formalize the methodology and tools.

Objectives

The primary objective of this feasibility study was to validate the integrated technical support approach developed by the Grant Management Solutions project to improve CCM oversight. The secondary objective was to identify countries for which the intervention is most appropriate.

The three research questions to be answered at the end of the active phase of the pilot project were:
1. Did CCMs establish an oversight process or strengthen existing ones?
2. What institutions were designated as responsible for dashboard management?
3. Did CCM members feel more informed about grant performance and problems through the use of a dashboard?

The two final questions to be answered six months later were:
4. Did CCMs identify problems and implement corrective actions?
5. What is the minimum level of technical support needed to successfully introduce and maintain the dashboard?

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1This report was prepared by Marc Pechevis, Catherine Severo and Saba Waseem with inputs from GMS teams.
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Methods

This was a pre and post evaluation of an integrated intervention for strengthening CCM oversight capacity conducted in seven countries, each with different levels of oversight capacity and who were invited to apply for technical support through the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator/United States Agency for International Development (OGAC/USAID) technical support mechanism at the end of 2008.

The target group included all countries receiving Global Fund support; the accessible group comprised countries volunteering to participate in the pilot, being granted to receive support from OGAC. Countries that had previously received technical support for dashboards, had no Progress Update and Disbursement Request (PU/DR) scheduled in Quarter 2 of 2009 or were part of multi-country CCMs were not included.

The intervention included an integrated package of CCM structural and procedural reform, capacity building for CCM members and secretariat staff, and the introduction of grant dashboards. Grant dashboards are MS Excel® workbook summary reports displaying key financial, management, and performance indicators for Global Fund grants in a concise and graphic way. The intervention comprised two phases: i) an active phase which includes three in-country visits led by a team of three international and one national consultants; and ii) a 6-month follow up phase, which included an in-country visit by the consultant team leader.

Data was collected throughout the active phase, i.e. from the start of visit 1 (i.e. baseline) until end of visit 3 using standardized methods, structured questionnaires, checklists, and semi-structured interviews. Consultant teams were mainly responsible for data collection, but also received support from their supervisory teams. Final data collection will be organized at the end of the follow up phase by the consultant team leaders during their fourth and final in-country visit.

Main outcome measures at the end of visit 3 were oversight body establishment or strengthening, designated institutions for dashboard management, perception of grant information by CCM members, and number of grant dashboards introduced.

Results

Seven countries were included in the pilot: Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, and Peru; the pilot however, had to be stopped in Madagascar during visit 1 due to the evolution of the political situation. In the remaining six countries, the first three in-country visits took place between January and June 2009. The follow up phase is scheduled to end in December 2009; follow-up visits were completed by October.

At the start of the pilot, only one country had an established oversight body, though it lacked clear oversight procedures and plans. By the end of visit 3, oversight committees were established in five countries and strengthened in the first one. The intervention resulted in the production of many key CCM governance documents and/or activities (e.g. Constitutions, Governance Manuals, Conflict of Interest Policies, work plans and budgets, membership renewal elections) and of oversight plans in all 6 countries. At the end of visit 3, CCM members and oversight bodies in all six countries had a greater understanding of the CCM’s role in providing oversight.

A total of 18 grant dashboards (7 HIV/AIDS, 8 tuberculosis, and 3 malaria grants), were introduced after the following process: review of grants, initial customization, and selection of key programmatic indicators. In Mongolia and Morocco, the Project Coordinating (or Program Management) Units were
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designated as the responsible institution for grant dashboard management; in the remaining countries, CCM Secretariats – often after strengthening and/or recruitment of new staff – were given the responsibility of dashboard management. In all cases, PRs remained the primary data providers.

All grant dashboards developed were reviewed by the CCM oversight committees and/or presented to the full CCMs during visit 2 and/or 3. Most CCMs decided to start using the grant dashboard as the primary oversight report and communication tool with the PRs. Most CCM members felt that the grant dashboard had provided a user-friendly format for the grant reviews.

Final results including answers to the remaining 3 research questions – will be presented after completion of the follow up phase in December 2009.

Discussion

Preliminary results suggest that CCM ability to oversee Global Fund grants has significantly improved in most participating countries after initiation of structural and procedural reforms, implementation of capacity building activities, and introduction of grant dashboards. The grant dashboard generated interest and enthusiasm among many CCM members. In Morocco, the first round of grant reviews even allowed the newly established CCM oversight committee to identify several critical issues requiring urgent CCM intervention, and to take steps to resolve them. In Mali, Mongolia and Peru, the first round of dashboards enabled the CCM to identify procurement and supply management issues and address them with the PRs. In addition, some PRs have decided to use the dashboards themselves for implementation tracking and grants management.

Several challenges were identified during the pilot. In a few instances, the consultant teams had to spend significant amounts of time with the PRs to explain the utility and advantages of the CCM grant dashboards and how to populate them. If most indicators are already documented in existing reports, a few indicators are often not collected routinely (e.g. in the area of Procurement and Management Supply); though, this was rather seen as a sign of poor M&E systems than a dashboard issue. Another serious challenge was the sustainability of the institutionalization of the oversight process in a context of scarce resources and the frequent turnover of CCM members, CCM secretariat and PR staff. These findings point to the necessity for identifying innovative ways to mobilize resources and long term support, and to build institutional memory at the CCM and the PR level.

In conclusion, this integrated approach has helped improve CCM capacity to fulfill its oversight function by providing appropriate, timely information in a highly visual format easy to use by busy decision makers; the challenges and issues identified during the pilot are currently being addressed and an enhanced package (including grant dashboard) is being developed. The final outcome of the intervention and lessons will not be known until the end of the follow up phase when the final research questions and assessments of whether the CCMs are effectively using the dashboards will be addressed.