
2020 Technical Review Panel Lessons Learned

45th Board Meeting

GF/B45/07

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Board Information

Purpose of the paper: This provides an executive summary of the report presenting thematic, cross-cutting and technical lessons learned from the Technical Review Panel's (TRP) review of Funding Requests and Strategic Initiatives in 2020.

Context

1. The mandate of the Technical Review Panel (TRP) is to review Funding Requests to assure their technical soundness and strategic focus. In the 2020-2022 allocation cycle, the TRP was also asked to provide this review and level of assurance for Strategic Initiatives. In addition to providing recommendations based on its review of applications, the TRP tracks thematic/cross-cutting and technical lessons learned to share with applicants, technical partners, and the Global Fund Secretariat and Board.

Where are we now? Progress to date

2. The *2020 TRP Lessons Learned Report* provides lessons learned from the TRP's virtual reviews of Funding Requests in Windows 1 to 3 of the 2020 – 2022 allocation cycle. The report is based on review of **157 Funding Requests** amounting to **US\$11.34 billion** in allocated funds and representing about **90 percent** of allocated funds for the present allocation cycle. This report also includes lessons learned from the TRP's review of Detailed Investment Plans for **13 Strategic Initiatives (SIs)**, representing **US\$191 million** of catalytic funds.
3. The TRP presented these findings to the Strategy Committee (SC) in March 2020. The SC thanked the TRP for their report and acknowledged the richness of the findings. SC Members noted the consistency between recommendations by the TRP, TERG and Secretariat around the need for further actions to enhance impact of and to incentivize ambition in grants resulting from approved Funding Requests. SC Members also highlighted the importance of strengthening human resources for health, the crucial role of Technical Assistance (TA) and its place within the partnership, and called for greater attention to political leverage in moving toward financial sustainability.
4. In response to the SC, the Secretariat highlighted the ways that TRP feedback on SIs has been incorporated into the business and management processes, and echoed the TRP's call for well-planned, transparent, and performance-based TA. The Secretariat confirmed that TRP recommendations are tracked at both the strategic and country level. The TRP Chair agreed with SC Member concerns about human resource for health and its relationship to RSSH funding; comments on political economy; and call for close examination of TA; and the need to incentivize greater ambition throughout implementation. The TRP chair also underscored the importance of expressing a strong vision for RSSH in RSSH Funding Requests.

Key messages and priorities

5. Lessons Learned from Allocation Funding Requests

The TRP notes the following thematic lessons learned from its review of Funding Requests:

- **The impact of COVID-19 on disease programs has been substantial**, as social distancing and lockdowns have resulted in interrupted service delivery and reduced scope of both health facility and community-based activities. The TRP commends countries for the innovations and the low-cost and low-risk adaptive and patient-centered solutions they have taken to address these challenges. The TRP underscores that sustaining progress towards ending HIV, TB and malaria as epidemics will require that intentional action be taken to mitigate both the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19.
- **Overall, Funding Request submissions have been of high quality.** Of the Funding Requests reviewed in Windows 1 to 3, the TRP rated over 89 percent as good or very good. The TRP found that applicants successfully used differentiated application modalities to succinctly deliver their Funding Requests. Differentiation should continue, including refining the guidelines for some portfolios, such as multicounty applications, to further support quality improvements.
- **Funding Requests evidenced increased attention to areas critical to achieving Global Fund strategic objectives compared to the last cycle.** These areas include human rights,

gender and HIV prevention; resilient and sustainable systems for health (RSSH); financial and systems sustainability; value for money; use of disaggregated epidemiological data to design programs; mobile and migrant populations and cross-border collaboration; and decentralization of systems for health. Progress is still needed in these areas to end the three diseases, and therefore requires their consideration in the development of the next Global Fund Strategy.

- **There is a need to move toward Funding Requests that are strategically focused on results and impact, and demonstrate continuous improvement of program effectiveness and efficiency.** Some countries with significant and ongoing Global Fund investments have not achieved sufficiently impactful programmatic results over time and continued to have a disconnect between planned disease targets and strategic approaches, activities and planned program budgets. Particularly in these instances, but for other countries as well, the TRP recommends more ambitious and practical approaches to target setting, including more focus on national program results over performance of discrete grants. Notably, the TRP finds that increased coordination and synergy across partners in supporting national disease program efforts is critical to address this concern.
- **The TRP calls attention to the need for greater focus on ensuring that core evidence-based interventions are in place to respond to specific epidemiological contexts.** The TRP emphasizes that there remain opportunities for applicants to appropriately prioritize investments, including ensuring that core interventions are budgeted within the allocation rather than in the Prioritized Above Allocation Request (PAAR).

In addition to the above thematic lessons learned, the TRP also presents in the report technical lessons on HIV, TB, malaria, RSSH, human rights and gender, and strategic investments and sustainable financing.

6. Lessons Learned from Strategic Initiatives

The TRP review of Strategic Initiatives (SIs) was based on tailored review criteria, that aimed to assess the technical soundness, strategic focus and potential for the SI to catalyze the impact of Global Fund grants in a particular area. The TRP's review found that:

- **Overall, the SIs are well positioned to deliver against the Global Fund's strategy and are well focused on Board-approved areas of investment.** Of the 13 SI Detailed Investment Plan reviews completed by the TRP to date, the TRP found the majority to be well fit for purpose. Only three were considered to have major concerns to be addressed during grant finalization and implementation. To further improve SIs, the TRP recommends:
 - Streamlining the SIs in order to avoid fragmentation, transaction costs and management issues. This will include systematizing the selection of SIs and grouping SIs in terms of whether their objectives are "long term" or "gap filling."
 - Improved coordination and alignment at the country level where countries are targets or beneficiaries of multiple SIs.
 - Ensuring strategic allocation between and within the SI areas to avoid spreading funds too thin.
- **A clear overall "theory of change" that defines the impact the Global Fund seeks through SIs, and drives the selection and development of individual SIs, would benefit the SI program.** This will facilitate strategic allocation of SI funding to efficiently address key programmatic gaps that have highest potential to catalyze grant impacts. In addition, the theory of change of each individual SI should be based on a clear problem statement, brief delineation of the associated areas to be prioritized for investment, clear indicators for measuring results and how results will be measured with due consideration to program risks and mitigation measures.
- **There is opportunity to improve the approach to TA, which is a key investment area across SIs.** Specifically, the TRP strongly encourages the Global Fund to continue prioritizing country-driven and -owned TA, focusing on building and utilizing local capacity. Additionally, TA should be supported by high-quality terms of reference with time-bound measurable

outcomes to strengthen accountability; and efforts should be strengthened to improve coordination of TA provision across development and technical partners.

- **Upstream engagement of the TRP in the SI review process will enable the Secretariat to better leverage the TRP's inputs** to inform the design of the SI program, strategic selection of SI areas of investments and the review of individual SIs.

What are the next steps for Committees and Board?

7. The TRP looks forward to its continued role in reviewing Funding Requests and offering its expertise in this capacity as part of the Global Fund's ongoing conversations to develop the strategy for 2023 and beyond.

Annex: Further information

- [2020 Technical Review Panel Lessons Learned](#)