
COVID-19 Response & Business Continuity

44th Board Meeting

GF/B44/06

11-12 November 2020, *Virtual*

Board Information

Purpose of the paper: This paper provides the Board with an informal update, as of 4 November 2020, on the Global Fund response to COVID-19 and ensuring business continuity and delivery of the Global Fund's core mission.

Context

1. COVID-19 continues to rapidly escalate around the world, with over 42 million confirmed cases and over 1.1 million confirmed deaths globally at the time of writing. The Americas and India continue to experience sustained transmission, while many areas in Europe are now facing an exponential increase in daily cases.
2. Global Fund-supported countries also face major challenges from COVID-19 both in terms of direct disease impact and knock-on consequences for HIV, TB and malaria. The Global Fund COVID-19 Country Monitoring Survey suggests service delivery, national stocks and supply chains remain disrupted across geographies. Across the diseases, TB case notifications are declining versus 2019 and access to HIV treatment and prevention is limited due to movement restrictions. Malaria case management efforts have also faced disruption. We could see up to 1.4 million excess deaths on the 3 diseases in the next year due to COVID-19 – derailing years of progress.
3. In Geneva, cases have slowly risen since July and increased dramatically in October. Effective 2 November, the Canton of Geneva has announced a lockdown for a minimum of 4 weeks. The Global Fund is following government instructions to work from home. Swiss government and Geneva cantonal regulations continue to change regularly.
4. The Secretariat maintains its adoption of a four-pronged response to the crisis: (a) keeping our people safe, (b) protecting our core mission, (c) helping Global Fund supported countries respond to the pandemic, and (d) playing our role in the global COVID-19 response.

Where are we now? Progress to date

Keeping our people safe

5. The Secretariat has been consistently complying with all Swiss government and Geneva cantonal guidance, including mandatory working from home from March 16 to June 8, when we also held virtual meetings including with our Board and Committees. We then reopened the GHC with ~20% capacity from June 8, and up to 45% since July 6 – all with mandated physical distancing and hygiene measures in place. Since October 19, staff was again recommended to work from home, which was followed by the Geneva Canton's lockdown announcement effective 2 November after a major spike in cases locally and across the country and Europe. We have cancelled all travel until further notice and are monitoring the situation on a weekly basis. We have also tightened IT security significantly.
6. All these efforts to keep our people safe have been decided and implemented in alignment with the GHC Partners (Gavi, StopTB, RBM, Unitaïd), and are overseen by the MEC on a weekly basis.
7. Despite the challenging situation, high engagement (95% - an all-time high) has been reported across the Secretariat at the September staff survey. Regular MEC-1 and townhall meetings have seen very high Secretariat attendance, with the communication score at 90%. However, the well-being score (45%) is at an all-time low, due to excessive workloads and stress due to increased work, reduced capacity and other COVID-19 constraints relating to health and family.

Protecting our core mission

8. At the start of the new cycle following the 6th Replenishment conference, 2020 represents a critical year for the Global Fund. Despite the hurdles, the Global Fund's core business is continuing ahead at full steam. In Windows 1 and 2, 92% of grants worth USD 9.4 billion were recommended for grant-making with USD 1.9 billion under review in October 2020. USD 379 million in catalytic funds were also recommended for grant-making. USD 1.3 billion worth of Funding Requests will be reviewed in 2021. The Global Fund's strategy development exercises are also simultaneously ongoing as planned.
9. Business Contingency Plans (BCPs) established in the spring remain in place, following extensions granted by the Executive Director until 31 March 2021. This allows for flexibilities for countries, Principal Recipients, health product processes and IT systems while mitigating risks faced by our core programs due to in-country disruptions. The IT team continues to ensure critical business asks are met, while enabling high security standards and supporting teleworking needs for the Secretariat and in-country stakeholders, with a particular focus on civil society.
10. We continue to track risks and disruptions to our operations. Our Performance and Accountability process tracking has been amended to incorporate COVID-19 disruptions. Preliminary results for Q3 show disruption levels lowering versus Q2; however, with cases rising in Switzerland, it is uncertain how this trend may continue. Overarching business risks, including monitoring country disruptions, ensuring high-quality funding requests and grants, securing IT and communication, and delivering sufficient health product supplies, remain on our radar and we continue to mitigate them using a variety of tools at our disposal.

Helping countries we invest in respond to COVID-19

11. In early March, the Secretariat resolved rapidly to make funding available to support three objectives: support country responses to COVID-19, adapt their HIV, TB and malaria programs, and reinforce their health systems. This was made available through two funding channels:
 - Grant flexibilities: The Secretariat has deployed USD 217 million for in-country use, covering all Global Fund regions, funded primarily by savings.
 - COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM): Following rapid Board approval, the Secretariat also set up the C19RM rapid response mechanism. From the total funding of USD 665 million approved as of the date of this paper, the Secretariat achieved the target to award USD 500 million by July 2020, and has awarded USD 594 million thus far, thanks to additional resourcing from donors.
12. These mechanisms have supported countries in a number of ways during the crisis. In Burkina Faso, a 17,000-strong network of community health workers was trained for COVID-19 contact tracing. In Panama, home delivery of antiretrovirals has been supported, allowing lockdowns not to disrupt medical supplies to HIV-positive individuals. In Myanmar, those with suspected COVID-19 infections are also being given chest X-rays to scan for tuberculosis. TB patients are also being frontloaded their medications to reduce the need for frequent hospital visits.
13. Various assurance activities and risk mitigation efforts are taking place to ensure the Global Fund response remains as effective as possible. The Secretariat also continues

to monitor Local Fund Agents' (LFAs) abilities to perform their duties despite lockdowns and logistical challenges. As the Global Fund's key assurance providers, LFAs report only low to moderate disruptions of their in-country work, according to the Global Fund COVID-19 Country Monitoring Survey.

14. Preliminary lessons learnt from C19RM indicate that despite challenges, the mechanism has proven highly useful to countries we support, in particular through providing an additional mechanism for funding complementary to grant flexibilities and by requiring C19RM funding requests to be channeled through CCMs. There remain operational challenges, which we continue to work through internally and with our partners.
15. Wambo has proven helpful to countries and to Principal Recipients to access COVID-19 commodities. To date, 78 countries have procured 3.2 million COVID-19 tests and USD 67 million worth of PPE through Wambo, all using Global Fund grant funds.

Playing our role in the global COVID-19 response

16. The Global Fund has, along with its partners, actively supported countries to procure diagnostics, PPE, therapeutics and oxygen. By doing so, the Global Fund has rapidly learnt the importance of coordinating procurement more closely with partner organizations, allowing for more effective operations when volumes have been constrained.
17. The Global Fund helped found the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) and remains actively engaged, as a co-convenor of the Diagnostics and Health Systems Connector pillars as well as being the procurement and deployment lead for the Therapeutics pillar. ACT-A has been at the forefront of providing countries with the necessary tools to fight the pandemic.
18. The Secretariat developed a plan to continue engaging with communities and civil society despite COVID-19's challenges. Communities have remained engaged in funding requests, grant-making and in Global Fund strategy development, mainly through CCM representatives. Communities have also been provided virtual technical support through the CRG and human rights Strategic Initiatives. The Global Fund also provided funding to help launch the GNP+ (Global Network of People with HIV) digital platform.

Looking ahead:

19. While the Secretariat has played its part with the resources it could mobilize, COVID-19 response funding is running out. A large increase in funding is critical to safeguard the hard-fought gains on HIV, TB and malaria, fight against COVID-19 and to protect the poorest and most vulnerable. As described in the Global Fund's June report on mitigating the impact of COVID-19, we need USD 5 billion in extra resourcing to meet this need. Donors have begun responding to this need, which is much-welcomed in the current scenario. The Secretariat has requested the Board for an extension on the C19RM mandate till 15 April 2021, which was approved by the Board at the end of September.
20. Governments around the globe have been pledging significant funds to mitigate COVID-19's socioeconomic impact. However, investments to address the disease itself remain modest (only ~USD 4 billion of the overall USD 38 billion ACT-A ask is funded). This gap must be bridged so that we can continue working with implementing countries and partners to fight COVID-19 and protect progress on the 3 diseases.

21. COVID-19 remains a crisis, and the Global Fund will continue responding to it as such. We continue to maintain the four-pronged approach mentioned above, and COVID-19 related mitigations are also included in the 2021 OPEX budget. Meanwhile, the Executive Director continues to update the Board across the various pillars of our response through regular calls and reports presented to the Board/Committees in March, July and October. We will return to the Board if over USD 500 million in additional contributions are secured for COVID-19, or if the C19RM decision point requires an update, including an extension beyond 15 April 2021. Despite the disruption in what was already a critical year for the Global Fund at the start of a new cycle, the Global Fund will continue as needed to fight COVID-19 as it represents a grave threat to progress on the 3 diseases.

Annexes: Further information

GF/B44/06- Annex 1 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity

Annex 2: Relevant Past Board and Committee Decisions

Relevant past Decision Point	Summary and Impact
GF/B43/EDP12: Extension of C19RM Timeline and Operational Flexibility for COVID-19 (September 2020) ¹	The Board: (i) extended the time for the Secretariat to approve requests for C19RM funds through 15 April 2021; (ii) affirmed application of all other previously approved principles under GF/B42/EDP11; (iii) requested the Secretariat to return to the Board should further extensions of C19RM be required or if total additional funding for C19RM exceeds USD 500 million; and (iv) extended through 15 April 2021 the operational flexibility under paragraph 3 of GF/B42/EDP10.
GF/AFC13/EDP01: Available Sources of Funds for the C19RM Mechanism (August 2020)	The Audit and Finance Committee approved USD 165 as available sources of funds, and acknowledged that the amount would be applied to C19RM in accordance with GF/B43/EDP11.
GF/B43/EDP07: Extending the wambo.org pilot to include COVID-19 products (July 2020) ²	<u>The Board extended the scope of the pilot approved by GF/B42/DP05 to include COVID-19 products available in wambo.org for procurement by Global Fund Principal Recipients, subject to certain conditions and reporting.</u>
GF/B42/EDP11: Additional Support for Country Responses to COVID-19 (April 2020) ³	The Board approved the creation and initial funding up to USD 500 million of a COVID-19 response mechanism to finance interventions consistent with WHO guidance on COVID-19 in the context of national Strategic Preparedness and Response Plans across the 5 th and 6 th replenishment periods.
GF/B42/EDP10: Operational Flexibilities to Ensure Continued Operations during COVID-19 (April 2020) ⁴	The Board approved certain operational flexibilities: (i) for delivery of goods and services under Global Fund programs to be funded from the 2017-2019 allocation period, up to 180 days after the implementation period end date; (ii) Secretariat approval of increase of grant amounts to integrate awards of portfolio optimization funds approved by the Secretariat in line with the Strategy Committee-approved prioritization framework, where such funds have been approved as available by the AFC; and (iii) Secretariat grant of limited exceptions to the Quality Assurance Policies, to waive the requirement for pre-shipment sampling and testing for Expert Review Panel-approved products, vector control products, and condoms, where such testing may delay the delivery of products to countries.

¹ <https://www.theglobalfund.org/board-decisions/b43-edp12/>

² <https://www.theglobalfund.org/board-decisions/b43-edp07/>

³ <https://www.theglobalfund.org/board-decisions/b42-edp11/>

⁴ <https://www.theglobalfund.org/board-decisions/b42-edp10/>

Annex 3: Reference Materials & Relevant Past Documents:

[GF/B44/03 Report of the Executive Director](#)

[GF/B44/16 Risk Management Report](#)

[GF/B43/Background Document COVID-19 and Business Continuity](#)