

Independent Evaluation Panel Commentary

Strategic Review 2023 (SR2023)

51st Board Meeting

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Board Information

Purpose of the paper: this paper provides the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) Commentary to the independent evaluation of the 2017-2022 Strategy (SR2023). This document should be read in conjunction with the final evaluation report and the Secretariat Management Response.

Background

SR2023 had as its objectives to

- Assess the extent to which the Strategic Objectives of the 2017-22 Strategy have been achieved,
- Assess the degree to which Global Fund initiatives, policies, systems and processes played a role in ensuring the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the Global Fund Strategy, and
- Make actionable recommendations for the implementation of the 2023-28 Strategy and planning process for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8, 2026-28).

This is the first assessment carried out in TGF's new evaluation function. It should be noted that not all processes and systems were in place when this evaluation was initiated and implemented; therefore some expectations built into the SOPs and the quality assessment tool were not in place in the design and implementation of SR2023.

This document reports on the Independent Evaluation Panel's assessment of the quality and independence of the evaluation, SR2023, and provides a brief implications analysis of the results of the evaluation. Independence refers to the independence of the evaluators in the whole evaluation process.¹ Quality considers the appropriateness of the methodology, (follows or adapts the methodology as appropriate), rigour of analysis, as well as alignment of data, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Main IEP Conclusion

The IEP endorses SR2023. The evaluation has demonstrated satisfactory quality; however, the independence could not be fairly and objectively assessed. The evaluation is acceptable to conclude on the achievements of Strategy 2017-2022, to comment on relevance, coherence and effectiveness, and to contribute to Strategy 2023-2028 as well as GC8.

The Panel provides specific comments on SR2023, as well as recommendations for improving the quality of evaluations in future.

1.0 Introduction

This report provides an assessment of the Strategic Review 2023 (SR2023) by the Independent Evaluation Panel of The Global Fund. Strategic Review is carried out at the end of each Global Fund strategy, in this case Strategy 2017-2022.

SR2023 had as its objectives to:

- Assess the extent to which the Strategic Objectives of the 2017-22 Strategy have been achieved.

¹ Independence includes, *inter alia*, unfettered access to data and to relevant respondents both inside the Global Fund and amongst relevant partner organizations and countries, as well as non-interference in analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

- Assess the degree to which Global Fund initiatives, policies, systems and processes played a role in ensuring the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the Global Fund Strategy
- Make actionable recommendations for the implementation of the 2023-28 Strategy and planning process for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8, 2026-28).

Two members of the IEP served as Quality Assurance Focal Points. Their role was to accompany the evaluation from beginning to end in order to both contribute to quality improvement of the various reports and ensure independence through the observation of key activities.

Using a common tool for quality assessment (QA), two other members of the IEP independently assessed the final evaluation report. The assessment includes both numerical and qualitative assessment. With 55 sub questions, the QA assesses the key elements of the evaluation - Executive Summary, Purpose, Objectives, Logic Model or Theory of Change, Methodology, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations. The findings presented here consider performance in each of these areas, comment on the Recommendations, and highlight issues that could be considered to improve evaluation quality in future.

The IEP held a discussion at its February 2024 meeting, led by the four Focal Points involved in the evaluation, to reach consensus on the quality and independence of the evaluation.

2.0 Assessment of the quality and independent conduct of the evaluation

2.1 IEP position on the quality of the evaluation

The quality of the evaluation is considered satisfactory with some weaknesses noted in the quality of the evaluation report.

2.2 IEP position on the independence of the evaluation

For the reasons outlined below, while the IEP endorses this evaluation it cannot fairly and objectively comment on independence. Observations of independence have not been optimal. We have observed a lack of involvement of the IEP focal points in the contracting phase, and the Focal Points only received a redacted proposal. For these reasons, it is difficult to assess the degree of independence of the evaluation process in these phases. A Reflections meeting was held with IEP, ELO, and the evaluators at the conclusion of the evaluation. As noted above, these were processes not fully in place at the start of the evaluation of SR2023 and processes have since been clarified.

3.0 Findings

3.1 The **purpose of the evaluation** is exceptionally well-defined. It clearly states why the evaluation was needed at this point in time, which is to assess the Global Fund's 2017-22 Strategy.

3.2 The evaluation outlines the **intended use and users** of the evaluation, which is to provide actionable recommendations for the implementation of the 2023-28 Strategy and planning for Grant Cycle 8. Additionally, the key intended users, such as the Global Fund Board, Strategy Committee, and wider stakeholders, are explicitly mentioned.

3.3 The description of **evaluation questions** and sub questions is clear, complete, and well-structured.

3.4 The report provides a clear and comprehensive justification and description of the choice of **methods and analysis** for all types of data.

1. It explains the rationale behind using various methods, such as document review, interviews, case studies, and quantitative analysis. It also outlines the analysis techniques employed, including statistical and regression analysis.
2. The description is thorough and leaves no ambiguity about the chosen methods and their suitability for the evaluation.

3.5 The **Strength of Evidence** assessment included throughout the evaluation report increases confidence in the findings.

3.6 The report describes the **process for developing the recommendations**, including engagement with key stakeholders.

3.7 The evaluation is **forward looking** and demonstrates a good understanding of the new strategy and contributions SR2023 can make.

3.8 The evaluation is extensive and **responds well to most questions**. However, the regression analysis raises some questions. The evaluators concluded that the lack of association for some analyses was a result of the time lag effect. This may be the case for HIV and TB with relatively long incubation and incident periods but is not the case for malaria.

3.9 The report could usefully have provided an **overall comment** on the achievements of Strategy 2017-2022.

3.10 The report poses **significant accessibility challenges** for its intended users. With a main report at 120 pages and over 400 pages of annexes, it is not easily read. A certain amount of redundancy remains, and the evaluators have not refined the report and

annexes to the key points. Findings could be streamlined without losing depth and meaning. For example, the extensive budget analysis presentation in response to the question of how well the GF investments address key epidemiological needs is largely (and correctly) ignored in the findings they present, which rely primarily on the qualitative analysis.

3.11 The evaluation does a good job of answering the key evaluation questions that are posed but without clarity on the assumptions behind the evaluators' choices, it does not present an overview of the achievements of Strategy 2017-2022.

None of points 3.1-3.11 disqualify the evaluation from endorsement by the IEP. They are raised to express areas where the Panel thinks the Global Fund could improve the utility of its evaluations.

4.0 Implication analysis on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the evaluation

4.1 The recommendations are useful and actionable, providing guidance on priority areas for the Global Fund.

4.2 The recommendations are relevant to the primary intended users (Global Fund Secretariat, Strategy Committee, Board) and offer guidance on how to implement them.

4.3 The report includes a description of the foreseeable implications of the findings for the future of the Global Fund's intervention, as it pertains to the 2023-28 Strategy. It provides insights into how the recommendations can shape the future direction of the Global Fund.

4.4 The Panel notes that a key finding of the evaluation concerning the increasingly proactive approach of the Global Fund was not followed up with a recommendation.

5.0 Strengthening future evaluation processes

5.1 The experience of having a reflections meeting together with ELO and the evaluators was valuable to assess independence and for continuous improvement of the evaluation function. We recommend that it be considered for use with all evaluations as a "good practice", and for inclusion in the SOPs when they are next revised.

5.3 The Secretariat Users Group is a great asset to ensure that the evaluation is informed and anchored in the Global Fund's realities. However, it also comes with some challenges, including giving proportionally greater space to the Secretariat's viewpoints.

Adding outside voices could provide a more robust triangulation of the findings and recommendations of an evaluation.

5.4 As recommended in the IEP annual report 2024, the Panel recommends involving an external reference group that includes the IEP.

5.5 The presence of the IEP in the reflections meeting or workshop was noted by the evaluators as a positive to strengthen independence.