



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

OIG Report Critical of Rounds-Based Proposal Form

The call to submit proposals, as currently formulated – with very specific guidance on how proposals should be presented and the issues they should focus on – is complex; and is also inconsistent with the Global Fund principle of supporting recipient-driven programmes. This indicates a need for a simpler application process, with the emphasis on country-driven proposals.

This is one of the observations in an audit report issued by the Office of the Inspector General, “The OIG Review of the Global Fund Grant Application Process.” The audit examined twenty-five proposals from rounds-based applications in order to assess the effectiveness of the proposal form in eliciting proposals; and to identify strengths and weaknesses in the responses to questions in the form (as distinct from strengths and weaknesses in the technical detail of the proposals themselves).

The proposal form

The OIG said that “while it is self-evident that a good proposal may be fitted into the Global Fund’s proposal form, it is by no means clear that a proposal would be significantly shaped and improved by following the form.”

According to the OIG, the introduction of evolving policy requirements into the proposal form and guidelines in a somewhat patchwork fashion, particularly in the early rounds of funding, has complicated the grant application process. The OIG added that the Global Fund has not evaluated the results adequately to be able to conclude whether evolution in the proposal form has actually led to better proposals.

The OIG said that

“emphasis on specific areas in the proposal form – for example, on community systems strengthening, or dual track implementation by public and private sector entities – has the objective of eliciting better-performing programmes. Yet there is little evidence so far that there has been any impact on either proposal quality or subsequent programme performance. It may be that greater emphasis in proposals on these issues – and on others such as transparency, social equity and the private sector – will indeed produce better results. As evidence for this is gathered, there will be stronger justification for requiring that such issues be addressed in proposals.”

The OIG said that although the Global Fund’s guidelines inform applicants that technical assistance is available to help develop and write proposals, no systematic guidance has been published by the Global Fund itself on how to access this help.

Responses in proposal forms

The OIG said that in the proposals it reviewed, responses from applicants to the questions on the proposal form tended to be weak – i.e., there was either a lack of detail or a lack of relevance – in the following areas: (a) the competence of CCM members in health systems strengthening (“where usually no more than a list of members’ job titles was provided”); (b) the financial and planning cycle; (c) gender and social equity; (d) the potential for co-operation with the private sector; (e) equitable and efficient distribution of national budget resources in-country; (f) explanations of large items in the budget; (g) procurement arrangements; and (h) arrangements for mitigating unintended consequences.

According to the OIG, in most cases the responses “appeared so limited as to call into question the extent of preliminary scrutiny applied to them.” In addition, the OIG said, this indicates the need for improved guidance on the level of detail expected in the responses.

The OIG said that on the important aspect of co-operation with the private sector, which has a strong link to the Global Fund’s corporate objectives, “applicants’ responses were thin and almost none had been costed with any apparent accuracy or conviction.”

Concerning procurement, the OIG noted that the application process does not require much in the way of detail; and that “the response in almost every proposal reviewed was very weak, with answers normally relying on references to unspecified ‘existing national systems’ for procurement, storage and distribution, and relatively little additional detail to support reliable evaluation of the proposal.”

Other comments

The OIG said that it found little evidence to indicate any extensive information exchange among potential recipients, despite the availability of all proposals – whether recommended or rejected – on the Global Fund website. To address this, the OIG said, existing Global Fund road-shows might consider working with real examples; and new Global Fund-led workshops to help with the writing of live proposals should be considered, particularly in countries that have difficulty producing acceptable proposals.

The OIG said that some of the proposals it examined emerged from a process that had started only a month or so before the deadline date for submissions. This suggests that the applicants place emphasis on completing the necessary documentation on time, rather than putting together a programme systematically over a reasonable period of time. The OIG said that “after eight years’ experience, with annual funding rounds being the norm, most applicants could confidently start the process of planning an application well in advance of the formal call for proposals.”

See also the previous article, and article 5, in this issue. “The OIG Review of the Global Fund Grant Application Process,” April 2010, is available at www.theglobalfund.org/en/oig/reports.

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