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FUNDING REQUESTS SUBMITTED TO THE GLOBAL FUND ARE OF GOOD QUALITY, BUT REQUIRE FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

In a report prepared for the Board meeting held on 11 and 12 November 2020, the Technical Review Panel (TRP) noted that the quality of funding requests has improved in the 2020–2022 allocation period. Funding requests reflect a greater focus on human rights and gender and HIV prevention. However, the TRP also called for improvements in key areas. These included the prioritization of interventions and increased focus on results and impact.

The Global Fund's [TRP](#) is an independent group of experts that evaluate the technical merit, soundness, and strategic focus of funding requests. The TRP presented high-level lessons and themes drawn from the review of 120 funding requests from Windows 1 and 2 of the 2020–2022 allocation period.

The Board paper consolidates the findings of the reports for Windows 1 and 2. The [Window 1 report](#) includes the lessons learned from the review of 45 funding requests that account for nearly one third of the allocations for the 2020–2022 cycle. The [Window 2 report](#) accounts for the remaining funding requests. The TRP published the reports for Windows 1 and 2 on 9 June 2020 and 2 October 2020, respectively. During the 43rd Board meeting in May, the TRP presented their [preliminary](#) findings of the review of Window 1 funding requests.

Notable improvements in Window 1 funding requests

When compared to funding requests for the 2017–2019 cycle, the Window 1 funding requests had an increased focus on human rights and gender, HIV prevention, resilient and sustainable systems for health (RSSH), financial sustainability and value for money. The TRP also noted that these funding requests made better use of disaggregated epidemiological data to define the program rationale. The applicants

completed the appropriate applications and submitted the correct documentation required by the Global Fund. The Global Fund has made [five types of funding requests](#) available for the 2020–2022 allocation period. Countries could submit a full review funding request, apply for program continuation, or complete applications that are tailored for national strategic plans, focused portfolios, or transition. The Secretariat communicated which type of funding request countries had to complete for each component in the country's 2020–2022 allocation letter. Lastly, the TRP noted that almost all funding requests were well aligned to their countries' national strategic plans.

However, the TRP identified key overarching concerns and made recommendations to address them. The panel called for better prioritization of interventions and budgets; greater consideration of longer-term sustainability; more ambitious, realistic and comprehensive program targets; higher quality data and evidence; a change in the focus of RSSH investments (from grant support activities to systems strengthening), and containment of program management costs.

Concerning COVID-19, the TRP noted that Window 1 funding requests did not reflect the effects of COVID-19 on the implementation of the programs, as most of them were developed before the pandemic had fully hit most countries. [Window 1](#) closed on 23 March 2020. The TRP released a statement on the impact of COVID-19 during the 43rd Board meeting held in May, which gave general guidance to all applicants, instead of country-specific remarks. The full statement is included as an annex in the Window 1 report.

Window 2 funding requests are of high quality, but fail to demonstrate impact

The TRP had noted, in the Window 2 report, that most funding requests submitted during this window were of high quality and technically sound. However, the TRP drew the Board's attention to two emerging areas of concern in the Window 2 funding requests. The first was that there were minimal efforts by the countries to improve programmatic results and impact over time, despite ongoing Global Fund investments. The TRP has therefore advised the Global Fund to focus more on national program results rather than grant performance driven by absorption, and scale down investment value and disbursement if results are not achieved. However, the Global Fund mid-term strategic review 2020, dated 31 August 2020, found that countries already use indicators and targets that mostly focus on national level results. The review recommended financial rewards for performance that exceeds expectations, and financial penalties for poor performance.

The TRP also noted that the number of civil society Principal Recipients had decreased (although it did not specify the details). The panel called on the Global Fund to examine the implementation arrangements for the 2020–2022 cycle to ensure sufficient funding for civil society implementers to sustain both key programs that are run by civil society and service delivery.

The TRP had detailed other recommendations in the Window 2 report. Those recommendations include increased coordination between the Global Fund and its partners, increased focus on community and health systems strengthening (CSS and HSS, respectively), customizing interventions and programs for the different key populations, improved programming for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), and better use of data to optimize programming. The TRP highlighted that the use of data to better inform programming was almost absent in all funding requests in Window 2.

The TRP had also called on the applicants and technical partners to ensure that basic interventions such as case management and reporting systems are included in the requests. The applicants were encouraged to prioritize simpler and more effective interventions, rather than expensive and complicated ones.

Board constituency inputs

The constituencies welcomed the report by the TRP. The constituencies echoed the TRP's recommendation that countries place greater emphasis and focus on national program results rather than measuring grant performance by absorption. In addition, the constituencies called for more proactive measures to distinguish between those program implementation measures that are effective and those that are not.

The constituencies also expressed concern about the decreasing number of civil society implementers highlighted by the TRP. They underscored the importance of civil society involvement, especially that of local organizations, in delivering services for key populations and ensuring program sustainability. Civil society has a comparative advantage in implementing programs related to human rights, gender equality, equity and key and vulnerable populations. The constituencies proposed that local organizations take precedence over international organizations to promote transition and sustainability.

Finally, the constituencies asked that the TRP ensures that the findings are used to improve the current grants and the development of the next Global Fund strategy.

The Board Document (GF/B44/08, TRP 2020 Lessons learned) will be available shortly at <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/board/meetings/44>

The respective reports can be found in the links below.

Further reading:

- [TRP Lessons learned from Review Window 1 2020-2022 Funding Cycle](#), 9 June 2020
- [TRP Lessons Learned from Review Window 2 2020-2022 Funding Cycle](#), 2 October 2020
- [The Global Fund Technical Review Panel praises innovative funding requests and worries about impact of Covid-19](#)

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