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of the Global Fund

The Pandemic Fund allocates \$338 million in resilience grants to 37 countries across six regions

On 19 July 2023, the Pandemic Fund's Governing Board approved grants totaling \$338 million for its first round of funding. While this amount is relatively small compared to the \$2 billion raised from various contributors, it will support projects to enhance pandemic resilience in 37 countries across six regions. The grants will specifically focus on strengthening disease surveillance, early warning systems, laboratory facilities, and healthcare workforce. The Fund intends to release another Call for Proposals by the end of 2023, using the lessons learned from the initial round to benefit future applicants.

The information presented in this article is sourced from publicly available documents from the Pandemic Fund website and the Global Fund Committee documents. However, accessing non-public documents from the Pandemic Fund is extremely challenging due to their insistence on strict confidentiality. We call for the Pandemic Fund to adopt a more transparent approach by granting access to more information, even pertaining to non-approved proposals.

The Pandemic Fund's collaborative approach and first round of funding

The [Pandemic Fund](#) is a collaborative partnership established in September 2022 and launched during the Group of Twenty (G20) annual summit of its leaders in Bali, Indonesia. Its main goal is to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response capacities in developing countries. The Fund's operating structure encourages funding from different external sources, including public, private, and

domestic resources, while coordinating efforts among global health entities to address country needs and priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the inadequacy of funding for pandemic prevention and response, highlighting the urgent need to increase investments in a coordinated manner. Read more about the Pandemic Fund in our earlier article in GFO issue 431 ([Board controversy over the Global Fund's continued engagement with the World Bank's Pandemic Fund resulted in it being referred back to the Strategy Committee](#)).

The Pandemic Fund [initiated its first funding round](#) on 31 January 2023, inviting eligible countries, regional entities, and implementing entities to submit project proposals. The Call for Proposals which was open from 3 March to 19 May received 179 applications from 129 countries, with a total funding request of \$2.5 billion. [According to the Pandemic Fund Secretariat](#), three-quarters of the applications were single-country proposals covering all three priority areas: disease surveillance, laboratory capacity, and the public health work force strengthening. More than half of the applications involved multiple approved implementing entities, such as the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Pandemic Fund evaluates and allocates funding for proposals in first funding round

After an eligibility screening by the Pandemic Fund Secretariat, 135 applications (nearly 75% of the total) from 123 countries, requesting over \$2.1 billion in grants, were considered eligible. Among the eligible proposals, over 80% were single-country projects, and 98 of them included a One Health component. One Health is an approach to health that recognizes the interconnectedness of human health, animal health, and the environment. Most of the proposals (about 75%) requested \$20 million or less in funding.

The eligible proposals were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) from May 19 to June 30 in Geneva. The TAP, consisting of pandemic preparedness and response experts, used a standardized scorecard with six unique elements (Table 1) to evaluate the proposals. To maintain transparency, the scoring criteria and essential application documents were made publicly available on [the Pandemic Fund website](#).

Table 1: The scoring card used by the TAP to evaluate the proposals;

Section	Total Score	% of Total
A. Context rationale, objectives & demonstrated need	25	20%
B. Scope, Priority areas/Core Capacities/Alignment with and contribution to the PF Results Framework/Monitoring and Evaluation	20	15%
C. Ownership, Commitment and Co-investment	20	15%
D. Co-financing and overall available funding	20	15%
E. Coordination, collaboration, and co-creation	20	15%

F. Implementation	25	20%
TOTAL	130	100%

The TAP categorized the proposals into three groups: highly recommended for funding, recommended for funding, and not recommended for funding. Out of the 135 eligible applications, 49 were rated as recommended or highly recommended for funding, while 86 were not recommended for funding. The TAP's recommendations were presented to the Governing Board. The Governing Board conducted a review of the eligible proposals from 1 July to 18 July. On 19 July 2023, they held a meeting and selected 19 proposals from the ones recommended by TAP to receive funding. All applicants have been notified about the outcome of the process and they will also receive detailed feedback on their submissions.

Selected proposals advance Pandemic Fund's objectives and foster multilateral collaboration

The selected proposals for the Pandemic Fund's mission demonstrate its commitment to catalyze funding, promote coordination, and advocate for the global fight against pandemics. The projects include at least two single-country proposals from each World Bank Group region, with over 75% of them focused on low and lower-middle income countries. The Fund's dedication to collaboration is evident through the involvement of diverse implementing entities.

By awarding \$338 million in grants, the Fund aims to mobilize over \$2 billion in additional resources, making a significant impact. Each dollar contributed by the Fund will leverage an additional \$6 from other sources. The chosen projects emphasize cross-border and regional collaboration, adopting a One Health approach that involves various sectors and stakeholders for a unified response. Furthermore, these initiatives prioritize gender and equity considerations, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and social impact.

The Pandemic Fund will use approved implementing entities to channel its financing and support project implementation. Currently, there are [thirteen approved implementing entities](#), including regional development banks, United Nations agencies, and global health organizations. Seven of these entities will be involved in providing implementation support for the funded projects, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and multilateral development banks. However, some entities, such as the European Investment Bank, African Development Bank, and Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, did not participate in this specific Call for Proposals.

Global Fund explore its engagement with the Pandemic Fund

The Global Fund's governing bodies have had multiple discussions concerning its engagement with the

Pandemic Fund. Recently, the Global Fund's Audit and Finance Committee (AFC) and Strategy Committee (SC) held meetings to discuss this engagement, including lessons learned from the first Call for Proposals. During the AFC meeting on 5 – 6 July and SC on 7 – 11 July, they explored the possibility of amending the [Policy on Restricted Financial Contributions \(PRFC\)](#) to include the Pandemic Fund as a public mechanism, allowing the Global Fund to receive funding from it. Such an approval is rare, with only two other mechanisms (UNITAID and Debt2Health) previously being approved.

The PRFC is guided by principles that prioritize recipient, implementer, and country-driven approaches, aiming to achieve cost efficiencies and avoid parallel investments. The Policy is designed to mitigate risks associated with contributions that are not aligned with in-country partners, including quality, timing, priority, influence, transaction costs, and sustainability risks.

For the Global Fund to receive funding from the Pandemic Fund, the Pandemic Fund must adhere to the PRFC's guiding principles, ensuring that transaction costs, system changes, and deviations from established rules and procedures are avoided. The funds should be used solely to support approved grants and activities in line with the Global Fund's recipient-driven and Board-approved priorities.

There were mixed sentiments among constituencies regarding the Global Fund's involvement with the Pandemic Fund. Some expressed gratitude and see potential in the partnership, while others were concerned about overlapping approaches. They emphasized the importance of alignment, complementarity, and clear roles to maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts and transaction costs. Effective program implementation and monitoring was highlighted as crucial for efficient fund utilization. Additionally, some constituencies called for a strategic paper from the Secretariat to outline its engagement in Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (PPPR) in line with the evolving objectives of the new Global Fund strategy.

Africa CDC urges inclusive approach in pandemic fund allocation for maximum impact

On 27 July 2023, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), a public health institution of the African Union (AU), released a [statement](#) on the Pandemic Fund's allocation of its first round of funding. It commended the Pandemic Fund for approving 19 grants in its first call for proposals but expressed concern about the limited impact due to the small size and lack of a regional approach. Africa CDC points out that only five out of 55 AU Member States, representing less than 5% of Africa's population, will benefit from this allocation. Other regions, such as the Caribbean, South America, and Central Asia, adopted a regional approach to maximize the fund's impact. The exclusion of Africa CDC as an Implementing Entity is seen as a significant oversight, leading to inadequate addressing of health security gaps in the continent. Africa CDC urges the Pandemic Fund for inclusion and emphasizes equitable representation of African countries and organizations in decision-making processes. Moving forward, Africa CDC advocates for an equity-based approach, supporting regional proposals aligned with its Strategic Plan.

The article has been updated to include the statement from the Africa CDC.

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