GLOBAL FUND 51st BOARD MEETING

The Global Fund’s 51st Board meeting took place from the 22nd to the 24th of April 2024. This report will share highlights from the meeting. Rather than trying to capture in full the detailed level of rich, complex, and nuanced discussions that took place and developed throughout the meetings, this summary represents the GFAN Secretariat’s experience and interpretation of the meetings. It should not be considered an official or authorized accounting of events and positioning.

You can find the documents submitted to the board here. This link will also include the Vector Control Policy (GF/B51/05), Procurement Policy (GF/B51/20), Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) Annual Report (GF/B51/09), 2023 Annual Financial Report and External Audit Results (GF/BF51/14A & 14B) which were brought to the board for their input and decision.

We hosted a de-brief call with the Communities Delegation, Developed Countries NGO Delegation and the Developing Countries NGO and the recording for the call can be found here.

Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
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<td>ARVs</td>
<td>antiretroviral drugs</td>
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<td>C19RM</td>
<td>COVID-19 Response Mechanism</td>
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<td>CCM</td>
<td>Country Coordinating Mechanisms</td>
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<td>GC</td>
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<td>GFBM</td>
<td>Global Fund Board Meeting</td>
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<td>IEP</td>
<td>Independent Evaluation Panel</td>
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<td>LGBTQIA</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning/Queer Intersex Asexual</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<td>OIG</td>
<td>Office of the Inspector General</td>
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<td>RSSH</td>
<td>Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health</td>
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<td>SI</td>
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<td>UQD</td>
<td>Unfunded Quality Demand</td>
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KEY ISSUES AND TAKE AWAY

Human Rights Violations and Complex Environment {Pre-Meeting For-Information Session}

This section tries to capture the highlights from the Day 1 for-Information session on Human Rights and the overall take-aways from all the following sessions at the GFBM. The Global Fund faces intricate and interconnected challenges, including human rights issues, climate change impacts, growing hostility towards the LGBTQIA population, reduction of resources, and the simultaneous replenishments of other major organizations like Gavi and WHO. Additionally, the packed electoral calendar for 2024 adds further complexity, requiring strategic navigation and adaptation.

Human Rights: At the 51st Global Fund Board Meeting the Secretariat and the board members alike presented deep concerns over the human rights violations that are currently under way in multiple countries of the world and the growing threat to the LGBTQIA community through draconian legislation, with some delegations expressing more concerns than the others. The GFS, at multiple points and in various sessions, emphasized the vicious well-planned and well-funded backlash against the LGBTQIA community, which extends to women and girls in their diversity. This poses a threat to solidarity efforts, and the Global Fund plays a crucial role in combating it. There were many interventions which stressed building intentional alliances, ensuring continuity of services, and operating with the principle of “Do No Harm” as key to reclaiming lost ground, with a focus on supporting underfunded communities in various regions.

Flexibility and adaptability, such as reallocating funds to support on-the-ground interventions, were continuously highlighted are core to the work that the Global Fund does in more than one response provided by the GFS throughout the proceedings of the GFBM. The GFS also updated all present that diplomatic efforts, including engagement with legal authorities in countries like Uganda, are ongoing to address challenges. Additionally, the GFS made a note that they were focusing on program support initiatives to mitigate harm, providing flexibility and regional-level interventions to strengthen safety protocols for key populations.

Concerns were raised on:

- Methodology and efficiency in monitoring human rights violations
- Preventing organizations from misusing Global Fund money
- Importance of community-centred approaches to ensure continued access to services, especially in the face of criminalization.

However, no concrete solution was provided for this concern. Peter Sands, in one session noted that reprimanding organizations and/or countries who are engaging in these violations by curbing funding support will ultimately harm the very people that the Global Fund was constituted to serve.
The board was informed that revision of guidance to address adversity in different countries are being considered and that existing mechanisms, such as the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), can be strengthened to respond more effectively. For the Global Fund, balancing diplomatic efforts with reactive measures, remains a priority in addressing human rights challenges. The work that GFS is undertaking in collaboration and consultation with Global Fund Board Member (and GFAN International Steering Committee Chair) Cecila Senoo in Ghana in light of its recent legislative changes, was brought forward as an example of a good start to discussions with communities and civil society at early stages of working in and addressing human rights challenges. This was in-line with delegate interventions highlighting that engaging stakeholder beyond disease-oriented programs, particularly in countries like Ghana, is crucial for mobilizing support.

Overall, the discussion highlights the Global Fund's commitment to protecting human rights, supporting marginalized communities, and navigating complex challenges through strategic partnerships and adaptive approaches.

**Climate Change:** There was acknowledgment that climate change is and continues to be an issue of key concern to addressing health challenges as it poses a significant threat to both our collective futures, but often, the implementation and sustainability of Global Fund funded interventions. Peter Sands hinted on the need for increased human resources for the climate change portfolio within the Global Fund. Currently, the Global Fund has a single Climate Advisor. The board was informed that they will receive yearly updates from the GFS on climate change from the next board meeting from the Climate Advisor.

**Building Efficient Evaluations {Pre-Meeting For-Information Session}**

All evaluations conducted prior to 2023 were led by the Technical Evaluation Reference Group (TERG). Evaluations undertaken from 2023 onwards have been managed under the new independent evaluation and learning function. The new Evaluation & Learning Office has a dual reporting line to the Executive Director and the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) and reports through the IEP Chair to the Strategy Committee (SC) and the Board.

For 2024 the Independent Evaluation Panel is prioritizing stabilizing processes as it transitions to the new processes for evaluating the work of the Global Fund, increasing the use and influence of data being generated (by the IEP), and investing in partnerships and continue to grow as a provider of data and information. They will prioritize delivering high-quality evaluations that are impactful and readily usable by stakeholders.

One of the key questions raised by the Developing Country NGO delegation was around how the GFS would follow-up on recommendations the IEP makes. In response, the GFS indicated a design phase for evaluations conducted in the previous year and shared that they are currently focusing on sharing insights and will come up with a mechanism that is in tandem with the needs of the GFS, and it will not be just another simple audit process.

In response to questions about ensuring that local evaluators are used, while acknowledging challenges, the board was informed that efforts are made to engage
evaluators from the Global South. There was discussion about the evolution of the evaluation function to become more integrated with the Secretariat and the Board. And now, this hybrid system aims to enhance learning and responsiveness to the Global Fund's needs.

A board member emphasized the importance of integrating a gender lens and decolonization aspects into future evaluations, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and diversity and another expressed support for reaching out to the global south and emphasized the importance of working in consortia, recognizing the talent and potential contribution from these regions.

Overall, the discussion underscored the commitment to improving the evaluation function's effectiveness, inclusivity, and relevance, with an emphasis on partnerships, quality assurance, and responsiveness to diverse perspectives and needs.

Engaging CCMs

The RISE Study of the Community Engagement in the Country Coordinating Mechanisms was launched at a side event at the 51st Global Fund meeting. This seemed to inform many of the interventions made by the delegates, especially on day one of the board meeting. Delegates mentioned the need for more investments in communities to ensure stronger CCMs. The board was informed that all CCMs have an ethics support focal point and most of the CCMs also have dedicated officers now to ensure no malpractices are undertaken. Some board members were keen on understanding if GFS, especially the office of Ethics Officer, adopts a proactive approach in reaching out to the CCMs. In response it was highlighted that the Ethics Office expects CCMs to have their own ethics function but provides support when needed. The Office serves as an escalation point and aims to equip CCMs to handle issues independently. The board was informed that an increased number of people are reaching out to the Ethics Office, and this indicates growing comfort, trust, and engagement. The same is the case with reporting of frauds to the OIG. And in this instance as well, this was considered a positive marker – if at times, as has been reported previously by the OIG, challenging to meet the increased workload. Additionally, the EGC will evaluate CCM governance and are planning further engagements with CCMs to enhance governance practices. Peter Sands called upon the board members from the Implementers Group to support the GFS in ensuring that the gaps in their functioning are closed and CCMs can be more progressive.

Catalytic Investments and Country Funding {Pre-Meeting For-Information Session}

This session provided information and updates on Catalytic Investments and Country Funding. For the country funding section, it included information on Unfunded Quality Demand (UQD), Matching Funds, and Multicounty Funds. The UQD for GC7 and GC6,
along with the allocation amounts by TRP window, were highlighted. During the Q&A and clarification section of this session a few points were highlighted.

**High Quality Funding Requests**: The quality of funding requests from countries was notably high, with almost all countries requesting sufficient funding. This indicates a thorough and well-prepared approach to seeking financial support from the Global Fund.

**Reduction in Costs for HIV Treatment**: The changes in Unfunded Quality Demand (UQD) reflect a reduction in costs incurred for providing treatments, especially in the case of HIV treatment, primarily due to the decrease in costs for antiretroviral drugs (ARVs). This reduction in treatment costs likely contributes to more efficient use of funds allocated for HIV programs. However, the UQD still remains quite large and there are minimal prospects of securing funding for anything beyond minor portions of it.

**GC6 Strategic Initiatives (SIs) Report**: The Board’s Strategy Committee had asked to understand how the lessons learned or innovative approaches from the last cycle of SIs were being integrated into the current cycle. A brief update on each GC6 SI was provided with the overall take-away being that overall performance of the SIs was good, that most of the funding had been utilized (there had been concerns because of a slow start during COVID-19) but that it was often difficult to “isolate” and directly attribute uptake of SI contributions to grants. SIs are formally evaluated after the cycle ends (for example the Human Rights SI will only be formally evaluated in 2025); but the Board was assured that learning across cycles is possible as it found in its review that lessons are already universally known despite the lack of formal, final evaluations. An interesting example of this related to GC6 SIs on Technical Assistance were that better results were found when using local and country consultants and that longer-term TA was able to contribute in a more meaningful way and is in part why long-term TA planned for GC7 is 50% of technical assistance (TA), up from 30% in GC6.

**Decision Not to Apply for Pandemic Fund**: The decision has been made not to apply for funding from the pandemic fund. This is because similar priorities related to COVID-19 response and mitigation have already been funded through other channels, such as the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM).

**Report of the Executive Director (Board Meeting Session)**

In Peter Sands’ report to the Global Fund Board Meeting, he provided a comprehensive overview of the organization’s progress, challenges, and strategies for the future. One of the notable achievements highlighted was the allocation of $5.1 billion dollars, indicating significant financial support for global health initiatives. Additionally, Sands emphasized the strong start to the 7th Replenishment cycle (GC7), which signifies continued commitment from donors. The allocation of $2.2 billion dollars to the Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH) from the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) was particularly noteworthy, as it marked a record level of disbursement in this critical
sector. This funding injection was noted as vital for strengthening health systems and addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic.

However, amidst these achievements, Sands also candidly addressed the persistent challenges faced by the Global Fund. One of the primary concerns raised was the backlash in the HIV response and the slowing progress in gender equality efforts. According to Sands, these challenges underscore the need for continued innovation and adaptation in the face of evolving health landscapes. He also highlighted the success in tuberculosis (TB) control as a double-edged sword, raising questions about the sustainability of these gains given the available funding. Furthermore, the looming threats of malaria resistance, climate change, and conflict pose significant hurdles to overcome.

To address these challenges, Sands outlined various initiatives and efforts aimed at accelerating implementation and overcoming obstacles. Catering to specific technical assistance (TA) needs, such as medical oxygen supply and management support, were identified as critical areas requiring immediate attention. Moreover, efforts to streamline processes, reduce pricing, and localize production of essential tools demonstrate a commitment to maximizing impact and efficiency. Sands also emphasized the importance of investing in technology to enhance operational effectiveness and data-driven decision-making.

Beyond operational improvements, Sands discussed organizational developments and community engagement efforts. Progress in ethics management despite leadership changes was highlighted as a significant achievement, reflecting the Global Fund’s commitment to upholding integrity and accountability. Community engagement, particularly through the establishment of the Executive Directors Youth Council, underscores the importance of amplifying diverse voices and perspectives in decision-making processes.

During his address at the Board Meeting, Peter Sands also highlighted several key initiatives aimed at enhancing operational efficiency and effectiveness.

- Importance of automation in reporting processes, indicating a commitment to finding ways to streamline data collection and analysis.
- Implementation of a technology for auto-populating indicators, currently operational in seven countries with plans for expansion in 2024.
- Necessity of investing in technology, citing the existence of an IT centre within the organization.
- Ensuring the safe use of AI (Artificial Intelligence), highlighting the need for responsible implementation and development of AI-driven solutions.

This collective focus on leveraging technology to improve processes while maintaining ethical standards demonstrates the Global Fund’s commitment to innovation and efficiency in its mission to combat global health challenges.

Sustainability emerged as a central theme in Sands’ report, an issue raised by several Board constituencies at the Fall 2023 Board Meeting, with a focus on domestic resource
mobilization and financial resilience. Sands acknowledged the challenging economic landscape and the need to navigate geopolitical complexities that impact health interventions. Advocacy for accountability and the mitigation of backlash were identified as crucial strategies to safeguard progress and prevent regression.

In conclusion, Sands reiterated the Global Fund’s unwavering commitment to saving lives and advocating for the most marginalized communities worldwide. He emphasized the need for bold action, resilience, and risk-taking in the pursuit of the organization’s mission. Despite the myriad challenges faced, Sands expressed optimism about the Global Fund’s ability to shape the future of global health and continue making a tangible difference in the lives of millions.

Discussion

Following Peter Sands’ address, the following themes were discussed.

Human Rights and Accountability

- Human Rights issues were central to these discussions and there was a call for more capital and regular information dissemination on these issues.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of response to letters from civil society organizations, indicating a need for more responsive communication channels.
- There is a push for additional safeguard policies from the Global Fund (GF) to address criminalization issues.
- Board Members suggested that policy changes may be needed to address evolving Human Rights challenges, and updating existing policies was suggested.
- Human Rights was acknowledged as a political-will issue, indicating a commitment to addressing it despite geopolitical complexities.

Financial Challenges and Sustainability

- Shrinking Official Development Assistance (ODA) poses a significant challenge, leading to concerns.
- Questions were raised about how to boost local capacities for manufacturing in areas of focus, indicating a need for sustainable economic development strategies.

Innovation and Market Shaping

Despite the financial challenges made during the discussion and past Board discussions that specifically noted that in not reaching the minimum 18bn ask at the 7th replenishment there would have to be a trade-off between the ambition of building R&D and procurement capacities to more local/regional levels and the reality of what an under-funded GF could accomplish, there were again calls for the GF to do more in this area. There was a call for more partnerships and agreements like those seen in climate change initiatives to address gaps and drive innovation. Emphasis was placed on adaptation and local manufacturing to maximize impact and efficiency.
Collaboration between Global Fund - Gavi - Global Financing Facility (Board Meeting Session)

During this session at the Global Fund Board Meeting, key principles and approaches were underscored, emphasizing agility and inclusivity in collaborative efforts among the three major Global Health Initiatives (GHIs).

The board member interventions seemed to suggest that there was consensus on the need for a broader ambition beyond mere formalities, with a focus on addressing gaps in diseases like TB and malaria and welcoming technical advice, particularly from organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Developing Countries NGO Delegation emphasized that efficiency should not translate to reduced funding; instead, it should prompt donor countries to increase funding, highlighting the ongoing substantial needs in healthcare systems.

Collaboration was advocated to be inclusive of implementing countries, aligning with Universal Health Coverage (UHC) targets, and prioritizing effectiveness over optics. Suggestions included expanding collaborative efforts, providing granular guidance, and emphasizing the role of pathfinder countries. Inclusivity and representation from civil society and communities were deemed crucial, while concerns were raised about potential duplication of efforts, particularly regarding technical working groups between the three organizations citing the pre-existing technical working groups in other partner organizations that can probably be effectively engaged and utilized, at least in part.

Commitments were made to ensure inclusivity in the composition of joint committees, with a commitment to addressing representation concerns. Additionally, WHO expressed readiness to support collaborative efforts, particularly in areas like malaria, TB, and HIV, while clarifications were provided regarding the composition of the soon to be formed joint working group.

The Global Fund and the Lusaka Agenda (Board Meeting Session)

The session on the Global Fund and the Lusaka Agenda revealed there have been at various times, significant tension around how the Lusaka Agenda was developed and promoted at the Global Fund Board. Some Board Members expressed scepticism, viewing the Lusaka Agenda as primarily a government agenda that needs thorough discussion within the Global Fund governance structure. While some viewed the Lusaka Agenda positively, citing its answers to questions of sustainability for African countries, others criticized its lack of novelty and pragmatic support for equity. There were calls for better coordination between the Lusaka Agenda and GF goals to avoid duplicative efforts and ensure efficiency. Additionally, suggestions were made to enhance inclusivity, particularly involving civil society (CS) and communities in the Lusaka Agenda related processes. Many chose to address the five priority shifts instead of a "branded" Lusaka Agenda.
Outlined by Peter Sands and through various sessions, what became clearer at this Board Meeting compared to the past was that there was a governance response across the 3 committees of the Board to the Lusaka Agenda and other possible similar agendas in the future and how they should be incorporated in Global Fund discussions and secondly, that there was strong alignment on the 4 workstreams the Global Fund has been establishing with Gavi and the Global Financing Facility (GFF) - at times called “The 3 Gs”. Finally, there was significant clarity on how going forward, the Joint Working Group across the “3 G’s” is proposed to be representative of the existing Board structures and membership.

While not every element of the Five Priority Shifts outlined in the Lusaka Agenda will be adopted or operationalized by the Global Fund, significant work was already underway that is aligned and the Global Fund Secretariat has chosen a few key workstreams within which to continue to or begin operationalizing the five shifts and ensuring a properly governed and balanced approach to addressing the diverse perspectives within the Global Fund community.

**Allocation Methodology {Board Meeting Session}**

During the Allocation Methodology Session at the Global Fund Board Meeting, there were diverse perspectives and concerns raised regarding the allocation of funds to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and health system strengthening (RSSH). Here is a summary of interventions made by board members.

- Few Board Members emphasized the need for increased attention to catalytic investments, especially considering TB and human rights challenges.
- There were calls to rethink the disease split allocation to better address TB and malaria, considering the evolving landscape due to factors like climate change and multidrug-resistant TB.
- Some advocated for upfront disease splits, others stressed the importance of including RSSH investments in the allocation methodology.
- Few expressed the need for costed scenarios to understand the disease split better and requested that the Global Fund group all the policy decisions at upcoming Board Members together more so that all aspects of the Allocation Methodology (Global Disease Split, Eligibility, Allocation formula and Sustainability, Transition and Co-Financing policies) were looked at together and not in a staggered approach.
- Board Members from Communities Delegation, Developing Countries NGO Delegation and the Developed Countries NGO Delegation agreed on and highlighted the importance of collaboration among diseases, prioritizing community involvement, and ensuring a person-centred approach.
- Concerns about funding gaps in malaria and TB were highlighted, along with the need for increased domestic resources.
- Calls were raised for integrating human rights and gender considerations into country grants and emphasized the importance of agility in responding to emerging disease burdens.
In response, the Global Fund committed to considering various levers, reflecting on financial considerations and per capita income of countries within the context of allocation, and mitigating gaps with the preexisting mechanisms providing emergency allocations mid-cycle as needed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the discussions, and deliberations at the 51st Global Fund Board Meeting reflected a deep commitment to addressing complex global health challenges with resilience, innovation, and collaboration. Key themes that are core GFAN members issues such as human rights violations, climate change, efficient evaluations, engagement with Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs), catalytic investments, and the integration of the Lusaka Agenda was thoroughly examined and interrogated in the context of the Global Funds ambitious Strategy and the rapidly approaching 2030 deadlines. Despite differing perspectives and challenges, there seemed to be a shared dedication to protecting human rights, supporting marginalized communities, understanding, and elevating the role of civil society organizations and enhancing the effectiveness of global health interventions.

Moving forward, key upcoming discussions of interest to GFAN members will include discussions on all the policies that together determine the allocation of funds after the next Replenishment and GFAN will continue to provide platforms and tools for understanding, engaging, and advocating on key issues for communities and CSOs in these discussions.

Notes

- 51st Global Fund Board Meeting Developing Country NGO Delegation Report
- 51st Global Fund Board Meeting Developed Country NGO Delegation Brief