Audit Report

Review of the Independent Evaluation Function

GF-OIG-26-003
6 March 2026
Geneva, Switzerland

THE GLOBAL FUND
Office of the Inspector General

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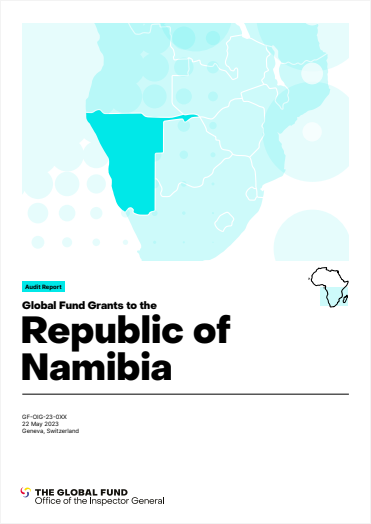






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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Opinion

A strong Evaluation Function is an important component of the Global Fund model.[1] In 2019, an assessment of the prior Technical Evaluation Reference Group (TERG) evaluation function highlighted limited quality and usefulness of past evaluations due to their lack of familiarity with the Global Fund model, and a lack of learning from evaluation findings.[2] Subsequently, a new function was established in 2021, with an Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) positioned in the Office of the Executive Director (OED), and an Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) accountable to the Global Fund Board through the Strategy Committee.

The function was designed to maintain independence while remaining closely connected to the Secretariat, allowing evaluations to be informed by a deep understanding of the Global Fund's operating context, while being free from internal bias. The intention was to evolve the previous TERG model to deliver quality, relevant and useful evaluations, which would help to support organizational learning, provide support for strategic decisions, and improve accountability.[3]

The Function made considerable efforts to establish and implement new ways of working. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), guidelines and templates were created to support evaluation delivery and safeguard independence. Some activities to promote learning were delivered included preliminary findings and recommendation workshops. In addition, evaluation outcomes were communicated to the governance bodies alongside operational updates and the timely approval of workplans and budgets. However, despite the efforts put in to establish the Independent Evaluation Function, and continued investment of US$9m across the last 3 years, it has not achieved its main objectives.

Continuing to outsource evaluations to external teams, without appropriate oversight, has hindered the function's ability to improve the relevance, quality, and utility of evaluations.

With all evaluations being outsourced, ELO's oversight of external evaluators is insufficient to guarantee report quality. While ELO contributes to evaluation design, its involvement during execution is inconsistent, limiting its ability to influence outputs. ELO does not participate in discussions with key informants[4] or accompany evaluators during country missions. Furthermore, ELO has not established requirements for external evaluators to share working papers, interim analyses, or emerging observations during the execution phase, limiting opportunities for early validation and quality checks.

The technical review of evaluation reports occurs simultaneously across stakeholders, diluting ELO's accountability for report quality, and its responsibility to identify inaccuracies in evaluators' interpretation of Global Fund operations. Additionally, ELO does not conduct an overall performance assessment of external evaluators, nor provide feedback to suppliers on individual evaluations on their overall performance on an assignment.

1 Independent Evaluation Function GF/B46/05 revision 1 (last accessed on 01 October 2025) and OIG survey in which 96% of Governance and 57% of Secretariat stakeholders agreed that Evaluations are critical to Global Fund operating model.
2 Internal documents presented to the Board Committees on assessment of TERG in 2019 and on focus of the Global Fund's Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) approach in 2020.
3 This would be achieved by combining external subject matter expertise with an in-house understanding of Global Fund operations as well as having technical experts providing quality and independent assurance to the Board.
4 Key Informants are individuals with specialized knowledge and experience who can provide insights, context and perspectives on the subject matter.

Consequently, evaluation quality depends heavily on the expertise of selected external evaluators. Only 50% of surveyed Secretariat stakeholders agreed that ELO-hired evaluators demonstrate sufficient expertise. This has led to inconsistency in report quality, with assignment reports such as Imbizo and Sub-national tailoring of Malaria Interventions deemed suboptimal by key stakeholders.

The cost of external evaluators is US$1.4million annually, whereas the cost for the inhouse teams providing oversight of this work (the ELO and IEP) is US$2.2 million. This high ratio of delivery versus oversight cost cost raises concerns about the cost-effectiveness of the current model, given the variable quality and lack of quality assurance safeguards for evaluations during the execution phase.[5]

Delays in learning activities, lack of structured monitoring of management responses, and lengthy delivery timelines reduce the function's effectiveness in promoting learning, informing decisions, and strengthening accountability.

Facilitating organizational learning was meant to be a core tenet of the new function, and a key argument for positioning the ELO within the Secretariat. However, progress in strengthening learning from evaluations has been limited. The function's learning approach was only completed in September 2025, after two years of development, and most learning and dissemination activities have either been delayed or not initiated. There were also instances of limited engagement with senior management in the evaluation process, and lack of adequate representation of key departments in user groups.

No processes are in place to track, monitor and report on management responses, and inconsistencies in reporting have constrained the organization's ability to learn and to maintain accountability. Lengthy timelines (averaging 80 weeks) to complete evaluations significantly reduce their relevance for decision-making in a fast-moving environment.[6]

Role misalignments between ELO and IEP, the prioritization of independence over quality assurance, and limited strategic oversight hinder the function from achieving its objectives.

The complex structure of the new Evaluation Function reflects an effort to balance independence with the effective delivery of high-quality, relevant, and useful evaluations, while also ensuring accountability and fostering learning. To meet these diverse expectations, a dual structure comprising the ELO and the IEP was established, supported by reporting lines involving multiple stakeholders, including Governance bodies, ELO, IEP, and the OED.

Although this intent was clearly articulated in the Board Decision Paper, the principle-based approach was not followed by a detailed analysis of the new function's optimal operating modalities, potential implementation challenges, or the necessary mitigation measures. There is a misalignment between ELO and IEP regarding their respective roles in safeguarding independence while maintaining quality. This imbalance has led to independence being prioritized at the expense of quality, undermining the anticipated benefits of ELO's positioning within the Secretariat - namely, the delivery of relevant, quality-assured and timely evaluations, and the promotion of organizational learning.

While the Board, Strategy Committee, and Executive Director were aware of the complexity of the model, implementation was largely delegated to the Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer (CELO)

5 The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), developed by IEP with support from ELO, is a tool used to assess the quality of an evaluation. This assessment is conducted after the evaluation report has been finalized. The framework is shared with external evaluators but not consistently used.

6 This includes all stages between scoping (stage 1) and reporting (stage 6) and considers time taken by the IEP and Secretariat to complete their commentary and management response.

and IEP, with limited accompanying oversight. The absence of performance frameworks and clear accountability mechanisms has weakened governance oversight, and hindered objective assessment of whether ELO and IEP are fulfilling their respective mandates. Furthermore, limited collaboration and strategic oversight from the Global Fund Secretariat have hindered the Evaluation Function's ability to fulfil its mandate.

Thus, the roles and responsibilities, governance, oversight and performance management of the Evaluation Function, as well as its processes, tools and systems to support effective and efficient delivery of the function's mandate, are rated as **Ineffective**.

Following the outcomes of this audit, the OIG has identified critical success factors for the Evaluation Function, as well as considerations to evolve the function going forward (**see Annexes B and C**).

1.2 Objectives, Ratings and Scope

When the Independent Evaluation Function was established, the Board and Strategy Committee requested that the OIG audit its adequacy and effectiveness after a reasonable period. The audit was delayed twice, due to various delays in operationalizing the function.

The overall objective of the audit is to provide reasonable assurance to the Global Fund Board and the Strategy Committee on the adequacy and effectiveness of the ELO & the IEP, with particular focus on the measures to safeguard independence (as specified in the Board Decision Paper).

Specifically, the audit assessed the:

Objectives	Rating	Scope
Objective 1 Roles and responsibilities, governance, oversight and performance management to support effective and efficient delivery of the function's mandate and to safeguard independence.	**Ineffective**	**Audit period** January 2023 to September 2025 **Scope**[7] The audit included a review of: • The roles and responsibilities of the ELO and IEP as designed and implemented for ensuring effective, efficient and independent delivery of their mandate. • Governance, oversight and performance management of the function. • The existence and effectiveness of safeguards to independence in the evaluation processes. • Progress on dissemination and learning activities from evaluations. • The processes to conduct and manage evaluations[8] and develop an annual evaluation workplan.
Objective 2 Processes, tools and systems to support effective and efficient delivery of the function's mandate.	**Ineffective**	

The OIG team engaged with key stakeholders including the current and former Strategy Committee Leadership and members, the Executive Director, members of the IEP (including the Chair, Vice-Chair, Interim Chair and voting and ex officio members), the CELO, the ELO team and key Secretariat stakeholders. The OIG also surveyed key stakeholders, obtaining a 62% response rate from 53 governance officials, and a 64% response rate from 61 Secretariat staff.

Details about the general audit rating classification can be found in **Annex A** of this report.

7 Although the audit reviewed the mechanisms for ensuring quality evaluations, the audit does not opine on the accuracy, strength of evidence, or impact of the individual evaluation reports.

8 Sampled evaluations and assignments included 1) Evaluation of GF Funding Request and Grant-making stages of the funding cycle (FR/GM), 2) Capacity, Quality and Decision-making in Sub-national Tailoring of Malaria Interventions (SNT Malaria), 3) Evaluation of Community Engagement in the Global Fund Grant Cycle (CE), 4) Evaluation of Community Responses and Systems Strengthening (CRSS) and 5) Imbizo: Learning from Country Stakeholder Feedback.

2. Background

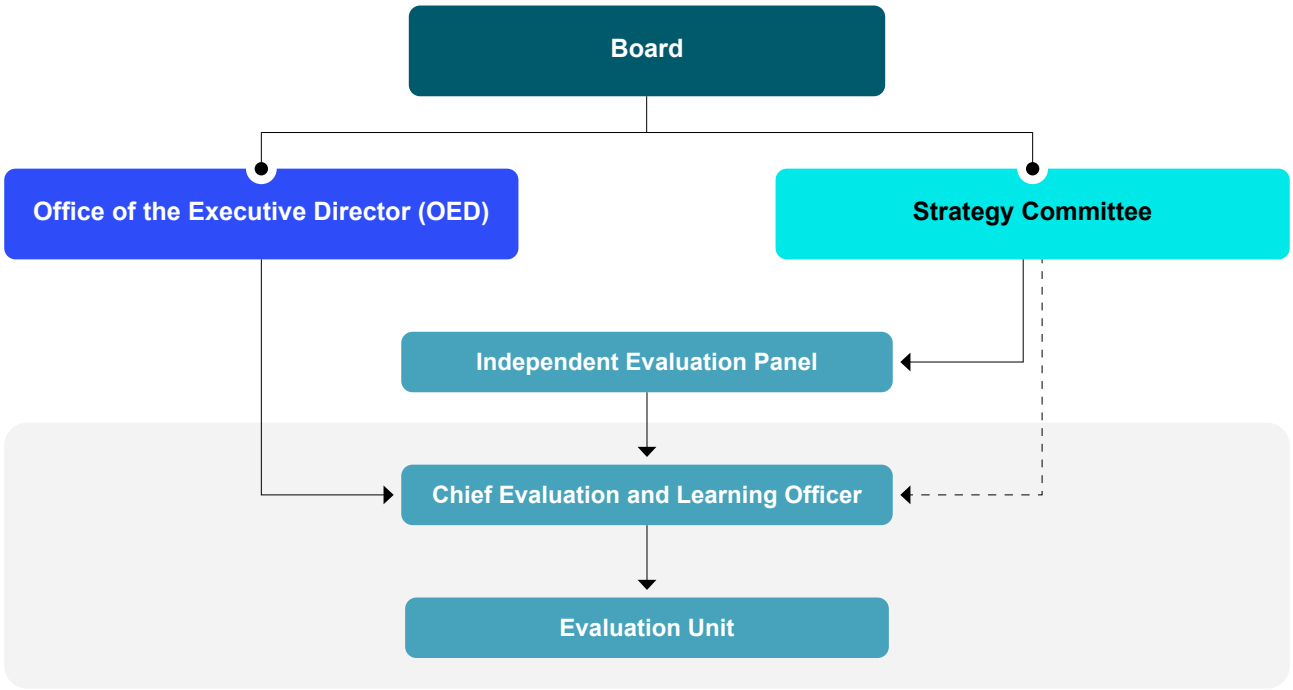
2.1 Establishment of the Independent Evaluation Function

The current Independent Evaluation Function[9] was established in 2021 through Board decision GF/B46/DP06.[10] It was established in response to several challenges with the previous Technical Evaluation Reference Group (TERG) evaluation model, and following a broader review of the Global Fund's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) approach.[11] These challenges included the limited usefulness of evaluations due to unfamiliarity with the Global Fund model, and a general lack of an embedded learning function (see section 2.2).

The new function is a shared responsibility between the Global Fund governance bodies and Secretariat. It operates through two structures: an Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) positioned in the OED, and an Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP). The IEP serves as an advisory and oversight body, independent from the Secretariat and accountable to the Board through the Strategy Committee.

CELO reports jointly to the Office of the Executive Director and to the IEP, with a dotted line to the Strategy Committee. The performance assessment of the Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer is designed to be conducted by the OED and IEP, with input from the Strategy Committee.

Figure 1: Independent Evaluation Function



9 The governance documents define the function as the "Independent Evaluation Function", however, the Global Fund's website and various other documents refer to it as the "Evaluation and Learning Function." Both terms denote the same function and have been used interchangeably.
10 Board decision on Independent Evaluation Function (last accessed on 01 October 2025).
11 Global Fund's M&E framework (approved in November 2022) comprises of four interrelated components which the evaluations are part of, fulfilling evidence gap on strategic monitoring of Global Fund Key Performance Indicators.

2.2 The case for change - transition from the TERG

The independent assessment of TERG (2019)[12] and review of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) functions (2020)[13] identified the following areas as requiring improvement:

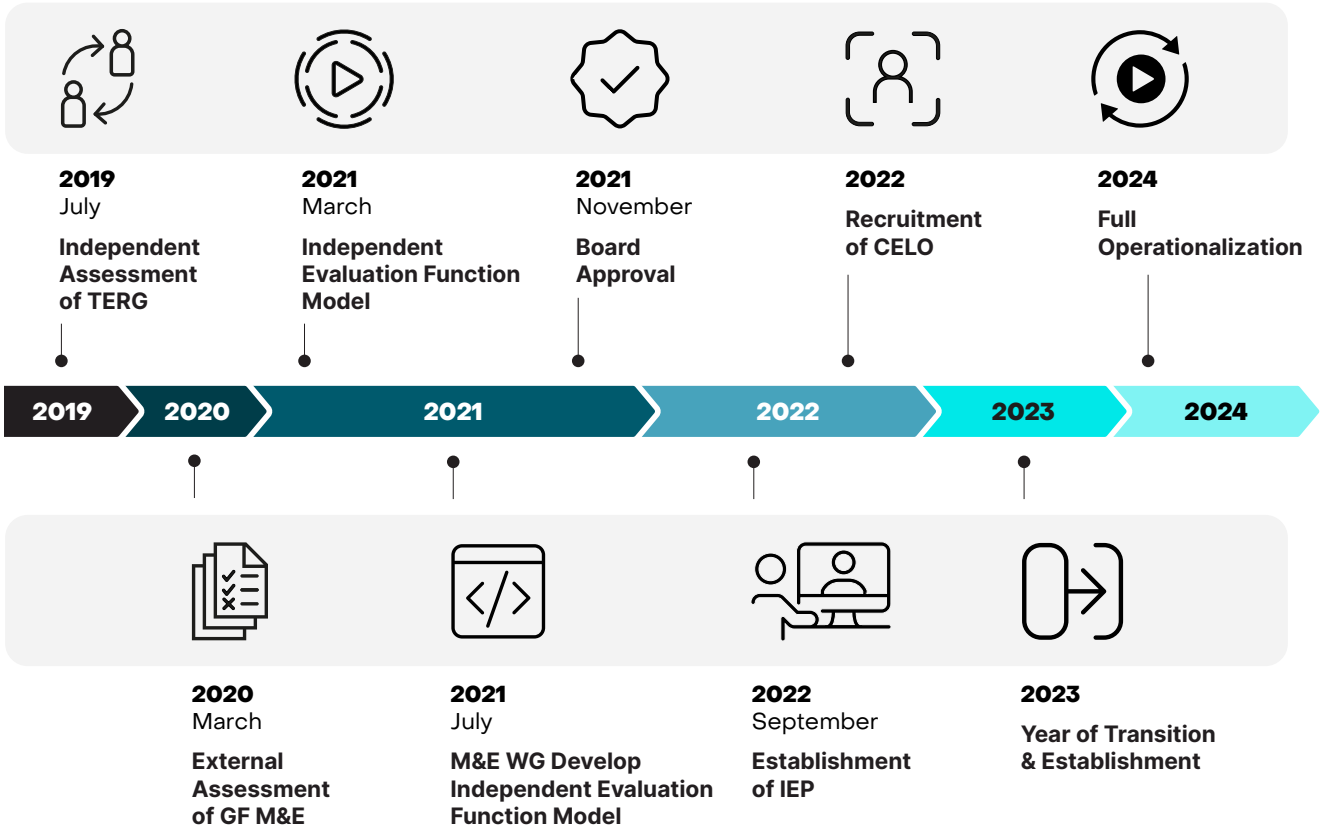
Absence of an overarching M&E framework: the lack of a unified M&E framework or evaluation policy had led to fragmentation and overlaps, as no single entity coordinated evaluation activities. The TERG's broad mandate, combined with limited capacity, and unclear distinctions between internally managed evaluations and those requiring independent oversight, further exacerbated this gap.

Challenges in relevance, quality, and usability of evaluations: several TERG evaluations were perceived as having limited value and relevance, due to a misalignment with Global Fund cycles and an insufficient focus on Secretariat learning needs. Additionally, evaluators' limited understanding of the Global Fund model, and the lack of actionable recommendations, reduced the impact of these evaluations.

Weak processes around management actions and learning: Collectively, the TERG and the Secretariat did not translate completed evaluations into actions. There was no formal system to develop management responses, and no accountability over implementing recommendations. In addition, there were no processes for implementing learning and dissemination from evaluations.

The Strategy Committee Monitoring and Evaluation working group made recommendations to address weaknesses and challenges in the Global Fund's approach to evaluation, including changes to TERG's role and improvements in how the Independent Evaluation Function was structured, managed, and coordinated. These recommendations ultimately led to a series of approvals to operationalize the new ELO/IEP model (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of the establishment of the Independent Evaluation Function



12 Internal document presented to the Board Committees.
13 Idem.

2.3 Evaluation and Learning Office mandate and structure

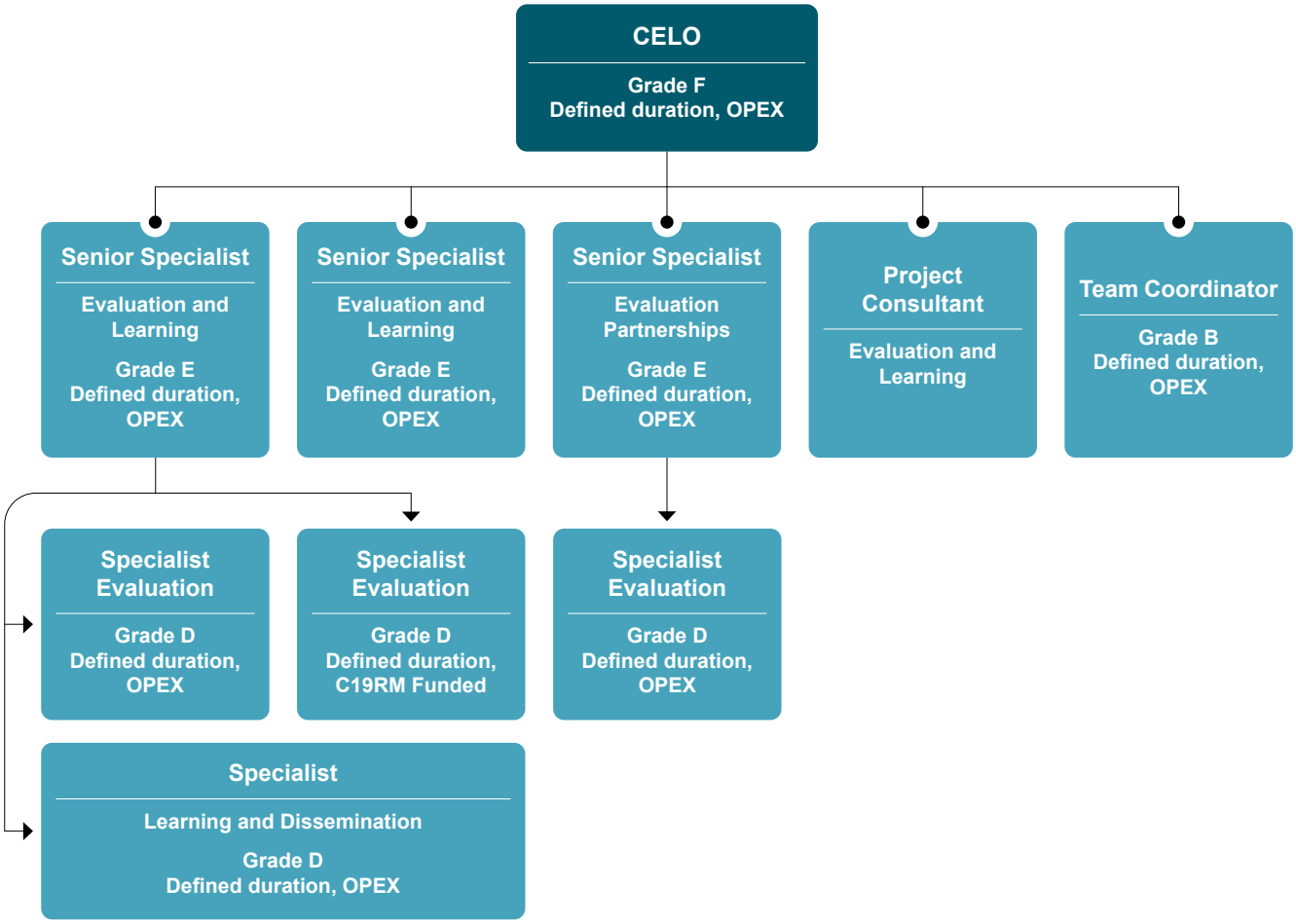
Mandate

The ELO's mandate is to execute all independent evaluations and to deliver on learning from them.[14] All independent evaluations commissioned by the Global Fund are conducted by third parties but overseen by the ELO. The evaluation types include any Strategic, Thematic, Programmatic or Country program area.[15]

Structure – Roles within the Evaluation and Learning Office

The ELO is headed by the Chief Evaluation and Learning Officer (CELO), who is accountable for ensuring the effective operation of the unit. The team also includes several evaluation specialists who are tasked with managing evaluations, overseeing collaborations with partners, leading learning and dissemination efforts, and supporting individual evaluations.

Figure 3: Organizational structure of the Evaluation and Learning Office



14 The main responsibility of the Evaluation Function is to execute all Global Fund independent evaluations in line with a Board-approved multi-year evaluation calendar, engage with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, and provide administrative support to the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) to ensure its effective functioning. The new model is designed to deliver on learning from evaluations.

15 As per the Board Decision Paper on Independent Evaluation Function - **a) Strategic evaluations**: Focus on the Global Fund's work and strategy implementation, including Strategic Reviews (e.g., SR2020) that assess overall progress toward strategic goals and objectives, as well as the operationalization of the Strategy; **b) Thematic and programmatic evaluations**: Focus on strategically significant issues that support achieving Global Fund objectives related to development effectiveness and organizational performance; and **c) Country program evaluations**: Conducted on an exceptional, case-by-case basis to assess progress of entire or specific areas of national disease programs, typically when no recent country-led review exists, no current plans or budget are available, or when recommended by prior reviews, OIG audits, or donor/partner requests.

2.4 Independent Evaluation Panel mandate and composition

Mandate

The Independent Evaluation Panel is an advisory body that operates independently from the Global Fund Secretariat, and which reports to the Board through the Strategy Committee. It provides assurance on the quality and independence of evaluation activities, and advises the Strategy Committee and Secretariat on enhancing evaluation methodologies, procedures, and quality assurance. The IEP's mandate as approved by the Board is as follows:[16]

- **Policy and procedural oversight** of the Secretariat's evaluation framework, including evaluator selection, management of evaluator pools, and adherence to standard operating procedures, norms, and quality standards.
- **Quality assurance for individual evaluations** at key stages—advising on scope and questions, approving terms of reference, reviewing inception and draft reports for quality and independence, and endorsing final reports.
- **Evaluation commentary** for each completed evaluation, assessing quality and independence, analyzing implications of findings, and publishing commentaries alongside reports and management responses.
- **Coordination and review** of the multi-year evaluation calendar and annual work plan, ensuring alignment with learning and accountability needs, and prioritization of evaluable topics.
- **Ongoing oversight** of implementation of evaluation plans.
- **Annual reporting** to the Board on independence, quality, capacity, and recommendations for improvement.
- **Advisory role** on dissemination, communication, stakeholder engagement, and input on synthesis reports.

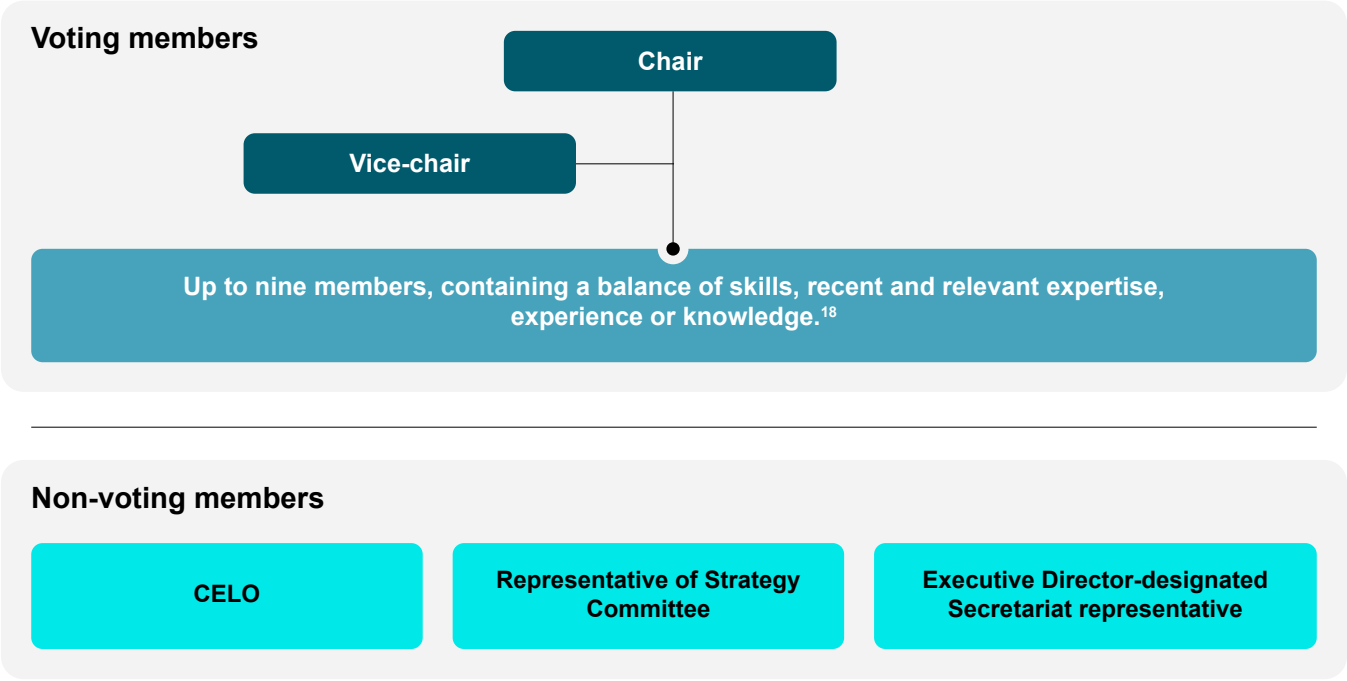
Composition

Membership: The IEP should be composed of no less than seven but no more than 11 voting members, including the Chair. As of March 2025, the IEP Panel consisted of nine voting members (including the Chair and Vice Chair), and three ex-officio members.

Ex-officio members: There are three ex-officio members: a representative of the Strategy Committee, the CELO, and the Executive Director, or their representatives. They participate in IEP meetings as non-voting members, and are required to engage with a view to informing deliberations with their perspectives and knowledge.

16 Refer to Global Fund Board Decision on Independent Evaluation Function (last accessed on 01 October 2025) for IEP's mandate. The mandate has been extracted and rephrased from the board decision paper for conciseness.

Figure 4: Structure of the Independent Evaluation Panel[17]



17 The IEP Chair self-selects one of its members to serve as Vice-Chair to assist the Chair and serve in the Chair's absence.

18 At a minimum in international development systems and functions: development of theories of change; HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; gender; health systems in low and middle-income countries; procurement and supply chain management; community systems, human rights, political economy analysis and social determinants of health;understanding of the Global Fund's mission and strategy and how evaluations can help achieve them; and ability to work in a team and reach a compromise to support IEP decisions and recommendations.

2.5 The End-to-end Evaluation Process

The end-to-end evaluation process consists of eight phases. It involves several stakeholders (ELO, CELO, IEP, Independent Evaluator, Secretariat and Strategy Committee), whose roles and responsibilities are detailed in the Function's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The total target time defined for each evaluation is between 46 to 62 weeks, as per the table below.

Process	Activity	Duration	Deliverable
PHASE 1 Scoping	Developing the evaluation ToR in consultations with stakeholders and the evaluation timeline	8 weeks	• Evaluation ToR • Evaluation Management Plan
PHASE 2 Contracting	Development, launch and wide dissemination of the RfP in consultation with the Sourcing Department, under the applicable procurement rules and regulations	6 – 10 weeks	• Final RfP published on GF website • Confidentiality Agreement and Declaration of interests for IEP • TEC report and Redacted report for IEP • Signed contract with service provider and signed evaluation ethics pledge and NDAs by individual evaluators
PHASE 3 Inception	Comprehensive onboarding of evaluators to the Global Fund and evaluation elements Development of Inception Report by evaluators, guided by inception report template	4 – 6 weeks	• Onboarding information sheet • Matrix of inputs and responses following review of draft IR • Draft and final Inception Reports by the Evaluators • User Group TOR
PHASE 4 Data Collection & Analysis	Independent collection and analysis of data, and discussion of preliminary findings and draft recommendations with key stakeholders	8 – 14 weeks	• Progress update deliverable by evaluators • Presentation of preliminary findings and draft recommendations
PHASE 5 Reporting	Drafting and finalizing high-quality evaluation report	4 – 8 weeks	• Draft final evaluation report • Final evaluation report
PHASE 6 Response	Development of IEP commentary and a comprehensive Secretariat management response	Upto 3 months	• Quality assessment by QAX IEP • IEP Commentary and Management Response from Secretariat • Package of evaluation documents submitted to SC/Board
PHASE 7 Dissemination	Publication of the final evaluation report on the GF website	Upto 4 weeks of SC discussion	• Dissemination plan • Published final evaluation report • Additional learning products for target audience
PHASE 8 Follow-up	Routine and systematic follow-up and report on progress made against the Management Response. Monitoring of how and what extent the evaluation has been used and been influential.	Period of 2-3 years per evaluation	• Progress updates on Management Response presented to IEP • Summary of follow-up to be included in ELO Synthesis Report to SC and Board • IEP observations on follow-up to evaluations in IEP Report

3. Findings

3.1 The Evaluation Function's effectiveness is undermined by limited oversight and a misaligned understanding of roles and responsibilities

3.1.1 Misalignments in roles and responsibilities between the IEP and ELO, along with unclear accountabilities for evaluation quality, have led to an overemphasis on independence at the expense of quality assurance, ultimately undermining the function's effectiveness.

Established in 2021, the Independent Evaluation Function is a shared responsibility of the Global Fund Governance Bodies and the Secretariat. It operates through two entities: the Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) within the Office of the Executive Director (OED), and the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP), which reports to the Strategy Committee and functions independently of the Secretariat.

The function established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Annual Evaluation Plan and the end-to-end evaluation process, creating for the first time a structured approach for the annual planning and conduct of evaluations. These SOPs defined the processes, timelines, and roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder at each phase of the evaluation process. A comprehensive suite of templates and guidelines was also developed to support the delivery of evaluations. Safeguards to strengthen independence in the evaluation process were also put in place, with the ELO and IEP agreeing to a process to assess the quality and independence of evaluations, with two types of IEP Focal Points assigned to each evaluation. This allowed consistent IEP input into the evaluation process, the monitoring of independence in conducting evaluations, and the objective assessment of the quality of the final evaluation report. These methodological and process enhancements were done at the same time as delivering on the evaluation workplans and establishing the new structure, e.g. recruiting staff.

However, collaboration and efficient engagement between IEP and the ELO have been hindered by misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the original Board Decision Paper, the complex structural design of the Evaluation Function, limited ongoing oversight, and the lack of a formal conflict resolution mechanism. This ineffective collaboration, influenced by both the complexity of the model and previous challenges in how earlier IEP Chairs engaged with the ELO, has contributed to delays in the Function's evolution.

Board Decision Paper was not translated into a clear operational framework

The principles noted in the Board Decision paper were not fully translated into clear operational practices. The definition of the IEP as both an advisory and oversight body has created ambiguity and blurred lines of authority, due to the absence of a clearly defined mandate:[19]

- **Operational management**: The boundaries of IEP's involvement in management decisions remain unclear, leading to potential duplication of activities: for instance, the IEP is involved as a silent observer in selection panels for contracting evaluators, and seeks an active role in

19 This was further compounded by changes in IEP leadership, with three IEP Chairs appointed over a two-year period, each bringing their own perspectives and interpretations of the IEP's mandate.

evaluator engagement and performance assessments – despite these responsibilities being formally assigned to ELO.

- **Binding nature of IEP input**: IEP is mandated to approve evaluation Terms of Reference (TORs), review the quality of reports, endorse the final evaluation report, and provide recommendations for improvements in its annual reports. However, it is unclear whether these inputs are directive or advisory in nature. For example, IEP gave input on improvements needed in learning and dissemination, monitoring impact of evaluations, and the performance framework for CELO.
- **Budget oversight**: the CELO is the budget holder for the entire Independent Evaluation Function, including the IEPs operating budget,[20] which creates a potential conflict of interest.

While some historical tensions have been eased through improved ELO and IEP collaboration, or by interventions from Strategy Committee leadership, many persist. Suboptimal engagement delayed the function's establishment, with standard operating procedures taking 12 months to finalize, impacting the evaluations commissioned during that period. These challenges have hindered the function's effectiveness, as detailed in section 3.2.

The misalignments between ELO and IEP are due to the following drivers:

The challenges and the complexity of the new structure were not fully analysed and mitigated: the Evaluation Function was designed to balance independence, quality, assurance, and learning, resulting in a structurally complex model with inherent trade-offs. While the Board Decision Paper acknowledged this complexity, the implications of multiple layers of oversight and assurance were not fully mapped or analysed, and mitigation measures were not developed to manage these trade-offs.

Insufficient sustained oversight from all stakeholders during implementation: while extensive deliberations occurred when the Independent Evaluation Function was established, including the formation of a Strategy Committee M&E Working Group, follow-up during implementation was limited. While the OED and Strategy Committee Leadership were engaged during the design phase, sustained support during implementation was limited, resulting in CELO and IEP managing several challenges without structured guidance or direction. The function was also launched without a clear, shared understanding of the OED and Strategy Committee's oversight role in its implementation.

Absence of a structured conflict resolution mechanism between IEP and ELO: despite the need for a conflict resolution mechanism being recognized early, no structured protocols were established. As a result, disagreements between the IEP and ELO over roles, responsibilities, and operational involvement remained unresolved, even after the revision of the relevant TORs and SOPs.

20 IEP's budget is US$0.3m per annum with actual costs averaging US$0.27m per annum. This cost includes honorarium for IEP members, travel and meeting related expenses.

3.1.2 Strategic oversight of the Independent Evaluation Function has not been sufficient to ensure strong accountability, and to support the effective delivery of its mandate.

Performance management processes for the function are insufficient: the Board Decision Paper did not define performance frameworks or guidelines for the ELO and the IEP to assess progress and delivery, and limited work has been conducted subsequently to strengthen this area. Although the Decision assigns joint responsibility to the IEP and OED for assessing CELO and ELO performance, significant gaps persist:

- **Underdeveloped performance framework and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the ELO**: No performance assessment framework or KPIs have been established by the Strategy Committee or the IEP for ELO. Metrics set by the Secretariat are frequently changed and poorly measurable, limiting accountability.
- **Limitations in IEP performance assessment**: IEP annual self-assessments lack qualitative KPIs for its oversight role. These are informed by IEP member feedback only, excluding key stakeholders such as the ELO, Strategy Committee, and the Secretariat. An externally facilitated assessment was introduced in 2024, however its findings were not discussed with the Strategy Committee, and recommendations not followed up.[21] No formal mechanism is in place for the CELO to provide feedback to IEP leadership or members.
- **No feedback mechanism for individual evaluations**: There is no formal mechanism (e.g. post-evaluation feedback surveys) for stakeholders to give evaluation-specific feedback to the ELO on individual evaluation reports.

This weakens accountability, and hinders continuous improvement, professional development, and organizational learning. It also increases the risk that performance issues go unidentified and tackled. These gaps, together with misaligned mandates between the IEP and the ELO, have ultimately prevented the ELO from fulfilling two of its key objectives:[22] enhancing evaluation quality and relevance, and facilitating organizational learning (see findings 3.2 and 3.3).

Management and oversight the function have not been consistently prioritized: key stakeholders - including the Strategy Committee, ELO, IEP, and the Secretariat – have not adequately addressed gaps in performance management, limiting progress on holistic assessment and feedback.

Governance bodies and senior management have provided limited structured feedback on the function's performance, and the ELO did not proactively propose a framework to evaluate its work. While governance bodies have focused on individual evaluation terms of reference and outputs, comparable attention has not been given to strengthening oversight and providing strategic direction.

Agreed Management Action

Refer to Agreed Management Action 1 under Finding 3.3

21 The assessment was supposed to be discussed at 26th Strategy Committee meeting, but due to scheduling constraints could not be taken up for discussion, nor was it subsequently included in later Strategy Committee meetings.

22 Objective 1. Ensure consistent relevance, quality, utility and impact of evaluations through an operating model that combines subject-matter expertise of the independent experts with good understanding of the operating model form in-house evaluators. Objective 2. Facilitate the learning and dissemination of evaluation evidence and strengthen the accountability over evaluation insights.

3.2 Continuing to outsource evaluations with limited oversight over their relevance, quality, and utility has not addressed the key rationale for moving away from the previous TERG model

3.2.1 The Evaluation Function's delivery model involves fully outsourcing evaluations to external providers. This approach has not fully addressed earlier challenges, such as ensuring evaluation quality, relevance, and familiarity with the Global Fund model.

The Evaluation and Learning Office (ELO) continues to rely exclusively on outsourcing the implementation of evaluations to external providers, a practice that was followed under the previous TERG model. This approach was intended to safeguard independence and bring in external expertise, but it has not resolved persistent challenges related to evaluation quality, relevance, and contextual understanding of the Global Fund's operations. The Board's original rationale for transitioning from TERG to ELO was to combine subject-matter expertise with in-house knowledge, thereby improving the utility and impact of evaluations. However, in practice, both the ELO and the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) have placed disproportionate emphasis on independence, often at the expense of robust quality assurance and effective oversight.

The ELO does not exercise sufficient oversight over the work of external evaluators, due to concerns that such actions could be perceived as compromising their independence: the ELO team provides comprehensive onboarding to the external evaluators to ensure they understand the Global Fund context, and several guidelines and templates have been developed to guide their work. Concerted efforts have also been made by the function to increase the pool of evaluators. However, ELO oversight during the evaluation delivery phase is not sufficient to ensure the quality and contextualization of the deliverable:

- **Limited involvement of the ELO during critical phases**: the ELO team does not participate in discussions with Key Informants (KIs) nor accompany the external evaluator during country deep-dives, reducing opportunities for technical oversight. Additionally, there is no requirement for the external evaluator to share detailed working papers, ongoing analyses, or emerging observations during data collection and analysis with the ELO. This lack of visibility restricts the ELO's ability to validate observations, and to address issues in a timely manner.
- **The review process is limited, inconsistent and fragmented**: ELO review of preliminary findings and inception reports is limited and fragmented, and technical reviews are conducted concurrently by the Secretariat, ELO, and IEP. This concurrent approach dilutes ELO's responsibility to identify inaccuracies, gaps in understanding, or misalignment with Global Fund policies at an early stage, leading to inefficiencies, stakeholder frustration, and unnecessary duplication of effort.
- **Absence of a Performance Assessment for External Evaluators**: there is no formal mechanism to capture feedback on the performance of external consultants, limiting opportunities to provide structured input for continuous improvement.

As a result, these gaps lead to inconsistent quality in evaluation reports, and increase the risk of poor value for money. Ultimately, this undermines accountability and diminishes the function's overall value and return on investment:

- **Evaluation quality is highly dependent on the expertise, experience and effectiveness of the selected external evaluators**: without clearly defined quality standards and a structured

feedback mechanism from key stakeholders, the OIG could not fully assess the quality, relevance, and utility of evaluations. However, evaluation quality is considered inconsistent by respondents, with 50% of Secretariat respondents expressing concerns about the adequacy of the external evaluators' expertise in the relevant areas. Indicators of variable quality of evaluation and learning assignments exist. For example, *Imbizo (Country Feedback Mechanism)*[23] costing US$205,000, was not finalized nor approved by CELO as significant issues were acknowledged regarding the quality of the evaluators' proficiency and subject-matter knowledge. Consequently, the Imbizo assignment was discontinued due to these quality concerns.[24] In another example, the Evaluation on *Quality, Capacity and Decision-making on SNT of Malaria interventions,* costing US$342,000, stakeholders raised significant concerns during a meeting of the Strategy Committee regarding the lack of a long-term strategic perspective, and the failure to provide actionable recommendations. Additional Secretariat stakeholders noted that the evaluation's scope was overly broad, and its recommendations were largely directed at partners, rather than offering practical guidance and learning for the Secretariat.

- **Limited Return on Investment for the Independent Evaluation Function**: evaluations are typically outsourced to teams of 7-15 evaluators and cost on average US$350,000, with the End-term Strategic Review of the Global Fund's 2017-2022 strategy costing US$961,000. Annual expenditures reach US$1.4 million for delivery, and US$2.2 million for oversight[25] provided by the ELO and the IEP. This creates a high-cost ratio between oversight and delivery, raising concerns about cost-effectiveness given the variable quality of outputs.

The above issues have been caused by the following drivers:

The **ELO has not yet realized the intended benefits of its positioning within the Secretariat**: The Board Decision sought to balance independence with enhanced quality, by positioning ELO within the Secretariat and establishing a direct reporting line to the IEP. ELO's placement within the Secretariat, alongside a lack of clarity in understanding the roles of ELO and IEP in safeguarding independence, has created a barrier to ELO's ability to provide technical oversight over the work of the external evaluator. This is to avoid any perceived or actual undue influence from those placed within the Secretariat that could compromise the objectivity, analytical integrity, or independence of the evaluators, their findings, and resulting recommendations. Thus, while embedding the ELO within the Secretariat was meant to enhance the framing and contextualization of evaluation evidence, this advantage has not materialized, due to continued reliance on external teams for generating findings and recommendations without sufficient oversight of their work. The CELO's non-inclusion in key management forums further limits ELO's visibility into organizational developments, hindering alignment with strategic priorities.

No assessment of the core operating model was undertaken: Although considerable attention was given to defining the function's structure at inception, the core operating model, particularly the heavy reliance on external evaluators, has persisted, without a critical review of past challenges or the implementation of necessary mitigations.

23 Imbizo: Learnings from the implementation of an independent country stakeholder feedback mechanism (GF/SC28/05).
24 Stakeholders at the 28th SC meeting noted that, "the evaluation failed to strike a balance between independence and institutional knowledge, resulting in limited insights and strategic value. Procurement and oversight processes were inadequate for managing such a complex initiative, and the timing of feedback collection was not aligned with key decision-making milestones, reducing its utility."
25 IEP costs US$0.27 million and ELO costs US$1.9 million average per annum.

Quality assurance responsibilities remain fragmented across stakeholders, resulting in inconsistent standards and accountability: quality assurance responsibilities are dispersed across multiple stakeholders, including external evaluators, the ELO, the IEP, and user groups. This fragmentation leads to inconsistent quality and accountability, with reports stating clearly that the Global Fund does not assume responsibility for the accuracy or quality of final evaluation findings.[26] Gaps in standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines compound this issue, and create further ambiguity around ELO's oversight role. This lack of clarity leads to uneven reviews and challenge of outputs by external evaluators, undermining both the consistency and credibility of evaluation findings.

3.2.2 Delays in completion of evaluations and poor alignment with key milestones for strategic decisions hinder the utility and timeliness of findings.

Although the standard timeframe for completing an evaluation is set at 58 weeks, all five sampled evaluations substantially exceeded this benchmark,[27] averaging 80 weeks per review. OIG analysis revealed that delays occurred at all stages, with the contracting phase consistently being the most prolonged.

This inefficiency stems largely from the operating model's dependence on large teams of independent evaluators, which limits flexibility and responsiveness to changing organizational needs. On average, contracting evaluators takes four months, followed by an average of nine months to conduct the evaluations. The extended timelines reflect the complexity of the broad scope of the evaluations, with no alternative rapid evaluations offered for fast-moving areas.[28] This also highlights the need to diversify the evaluation approaches, streamline processes to improve efficiency, and build capacity for quicker execution.

Compounding this issue, key management decision milestones that should be informed by evaluation outcomes are not always clearly identified at inception. This omission increases the likelihood that findings are communicated too late to influence strategic or operational decisions. The root cause for this is the absence of a formal requirement to establish these milestones upfront. Stakeholder feedback reinforces these concerns: over a quarter of Governance officials, and over 60% of Secretariat stakeholders surveyed, expressed concerns due to the misalignment between evaluation timelines and key decisions.

Without these improvements, there is a risk that evaluations miss critical decision-making windows, reducing their utility and strategic impact.

26 On the advice of the Legal and Governance Department, all evaluation reports include a disclaimer stating that the report is based on work done by an Independent Evaluator and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Fund, and that it accepts no responsibility for errors.

27 Assignment timelines: FR/GM – 62 weeks; CRSS – 75 weeks; SNT Malaria – 83 weeks; CE – 90 weeks and Imbizo – 91 weeks.

28 Evaluation Function has proposed Rapid Assessments with shorter timelines for the 2026 workplan for which the methodology is being developed.

3.2.3 Opportunities exist to enhance stakeholder engagement for greater ownership and utility of evaluations.

Robust stakeholder engagement is critical to ensuring evaluations are relevant, widely owned, and effectively used for learning and decision-making. However, Secretariat leadership is not consistently engaged during the evaluation process, and not routinely debriefed on findings or recommendations. Key Global Fund departments are often underrepresented among primary stakeholders and user groups. For example, in four out of five evaluations reviewed, critical teams such as Grant Management, Technical Advice and Partnerships, the Risk Department, and relevant Country Teams were excluded, limiting the breadth and relevance of stakeholder input.

These gaps significantly undermine ownership, relevance, utility and uptake of evaluation findings, reducing their potential for learning and strategic application.

This has been caused by the lack of a requirement in the SOPs to engage senior management at critical stages of the process, and the lack of formal guidelines to ensure comprehensive and inclusive identification of Primary Stakeholders and User Group members. Notably, the ToRs for Primary Stakeholders were only finalized in early 2025, after several evaluations had already commenced or concluded.

Agreed Management Action

Refer to Agreed Management Action 1 under Finding 3.3

3.3 Limited learning and dissemination practices, inconsistent reporting and weak monitoring undermine the organization's ability to leverage evaluations

3.3.1 Insufficient progress in establishing learning and dissemination (L&D) activities limits the Evaluation Function's ability to deliver on this important part of its core mandate.

Prior governance papers cite the primary objective of an evaluation function to be learning. L&D activities are critical to complement evaluation findings and ensure their usability and impact. The ELO was positioned under the Office of the Executive Director (OED) to ensure learning is driven from the top of the organization.

While steps have been taken, such as creating a dedicated L&D staff position and implementing several learning and dissemination activities,[29] overall progress has been limited. In 2024, 81% of planned L&D activities were either delayed or not started. Such activities include real-time updates from Imbizo, the development of cross-cutting findings from published reports, and summaries of evaluation reports to aid learning. In addition, the ELO's Learning approach, which defines key learning activities, follow-up processes, and dissemination of products was only finalized in September 2025, after two years in development.

As a result, the Global Fund Partnership risks missing a critical opportunity to effectively learn from evaluations and to strengthen its operating model. Survey results show that 32% of Governance officials and 55% of Secretariat stakeholders identified challenges with the ELOs implementation of learning and dissemination activities. This lack of progress stems from three key root causes:

- **Lack of clarity of the Evaluation Function's mandate for learning has led to misalignment of stakeholders' expectations**: there is no formal definition of "learning", or clarity on what the Evaluation Function is expected to deliver. The Board Decision Paper was expressed in terms of broad principles, and neither the ELO nor the Secretariat clarified expectations or sought governance-level input. In addition, roles and responsibilities for learning between the ELO and the Secretariat remain undefined.
- **Finalizing the approach for L&D was deprioritized in favour of delivering evaluations**: the L&D Specialist, who was intended to advance learning activities, was re-assigned for 18 months to support the delivery of the Imbizo assignment. This reduced the ELO's capacity to advance its learning activities, despite repeated IEP recommendations to prioritize this area.[30]
- **The ELO has not developed systems, tools or processes to monitor and report on L&D activities**: no processes exist to monitor or report on learning activities, and tools such as evaluation briefs and evaluation-specific learning plans are still in pilot stage, and have not been implemented.

29 Examples of Learning and Dissemination activities implemented by ELO: a) Integrated learning activities conducted during an evaluation, such as preliminary findings workshop and recommendations workshops; b) Publication of two evaluation briefs, release of five evaluation reports together with IEP commentary and management responses; c) internal communication promoting three evaluation reports; d) two brownbag sessions; e) CELO Learning and Synthesis report; and f) launch of the ELO's dissemination site and ELO's intranet page.

30 IEP Annual reports for 2023 and 2024.

3.3.2 Lack of structured action plans, specific deadlines and clear accountability undermines the impact of evaluation recommendations.

The OED is responsible for ensuring a management response, which should include specific, time-bound action plans with clear assigned responsibilities for implementation. The ELO is responsible for consolidating progress updates on actions against management responses, and for reporting to the Board and the Strategy Committee through its annual report. However, the ELO does not track the status of management responses, and there are no established processes or tools to monitor progress, resulting in limited visibility on whether recommendations are being implemented.[31] In addition, neither the OED nor the ELO consistently develop structured action plans with specific deadlines and clearly defined responsibilities.

This lack of structured process increases the risk of reduced accountability within the Secretariat, and weakens the follow-up of evaluation findings. Consequently, evaluations are failing to drive organizational learning and continuous improvement.

The main drivers for the above issues are:

- **Inconsistent application of Board Decision Paper requirements**: the requirement for the development of Secretariat action plans to respond to evaluation findings has not consistently been followed. Instead, ELO guidelines require the Secretariat to provide an annual progress update against the intended impact of recommendations, rather than detailed, time-bound action plans.
- **Lack of agreement on underlying issue, resulting in the overuse of partial acceptance in management responses**: 'partial acceptance' has been used in 61% of responses across the last five reports, despite its intended limited use. Partial acceptance often signals general agreement, but includes significant caveats such as resource constraints or limited mandate, which reduces the actionability of recommendations, and frequently results in minimal or no concrete actions.
- **A lack of processes, systems and tools for tracking**: accountability for management responses within the Secretariat remained undefined until June 2025. No processes, systems or tools have been set up within the ELO to regularly track and monitor implementation status. Work to address these gaps is currently in progress.

3.3.3 Lack of standardized reporting reduces usability, and limits stakeholders' ability to understand and contextualize findings effectively.

Evaluation reports lack a consistent structure, format, writing style, visual presentation, and overall flow. Reports tend to be lengthy, often exceeding 200 pages with annexes (including the IEP commentary and management response), with long executive summaries.[32] Final outputs are also split into three separate yet interrelated documents: the Evaluation report, the IEP commentary report, and the Secretariat management response report, leaving it to the reader to piece together

31 The CELO Annual Learning and Synthesis Report for 2025 presented follow-up from published evaluations, however, it contained only a limited number of selective examples illustrating learning, use, and influence from the Strategic Review 2023 and Allocation Methodology evaluations.

32 Average length of executive summaries is 9 pages.

the main messages from the evaluation. There is also no consistency across reports to rate the strength of evaluation evidence on a unified rating scale, making comparisons difficult.

These issues with report length, inconsistent style, and fragmentation hinder the ability of key stakeholders to effectively extract actionable insights and use the reports for decision making and learning. Survey feedback reinforces this concern: 65% of Secretariat stakeholders reported that report format and length negatively impact their use for decision making, although only a minority (27%) of Governance officials reported the same concerns. The lack of a standardized reporting template, non-adherence to ELO's reporting guidelines, and reliance on the reporting preferences of the different external evaluators, results in inconsistent reports of suboptimal utility.

Agreed Management Action 1

The Secretariat thanks the OIG for conducting this audit and acknowledges the findings. The Secretariat recognizes both the need for a strong and useful evaluation and learning function and the seriousness of the issues identified regarding the effectiveness, governance, and operating model of the Independent Evaluation Function. The Secretariat agrees that incremental or short-term mitigations would not sufficiently address the underlying challenges highlighted in this report. Accordingly, the Strategy Committee and the Secretariat will work together to reflect on the audit findings and develop a comprehensive approach fully considering the mandate, positioning, governance, and operating model of the future evaluation function. This work will be done under the direction of the Strategy Committee and will include engagement with the Board. A comprehensive action plan will be developed starting in March, with regular Board progress updates over the course of 2026.

OWNER: Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive Director, GF Secretariat

DUE DATE: 31-December-2026

Annex A. Audit Rating Classification and Methodology

Rating	Definition
Effective	No issues or few minor issues noted. Internal controls, governance and risk management processes are adequately designed, consistently well implemented, and effective to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives will be met.
Partially Effective	Moderate issues noted. Internal controls, governance and risk management practices are adequately designed, generally well implemented, but one or a limited number of issues were identified that may present a moderate risk to the achievement of the objectives.
Needs significant improvement	One or few significant issues noted. Internal controls, governance and risk management practices have some weaknesses in design or operating effectiveness such that, until they are addressed, there is not yet reasonable assurance that the objectives are likely to be met.
Ineffective	Multiple significant and/or (a) material issue(s) noted. Internal controls, governance and risk management processes are not adequately designed and/or are not generally effective. The nature of these issues is such that the achievement of objectives is seriously compromised.

The OIG audits in accordance with the Global Institute of Internal Auditors' definition of internal auditing, international standards for the professional practice of internal auditing and code of ethics. These standards help ensure the quality and professionalism of the OIG's work. The principles and details of the OIG's audit approach are described in its Charter, Audit Manual, Code of Conduct, and specific terms of reference for each engagement. These documents help safeguard the independence of the OIG's auditors and the integrity of its work.

The scope of OIG audits may be specific or broad, depending on the context, and covers risk management, governance, and internal controls. Audits test and evaluate supervisory and control systems to determine whether risk is managed appropriately. Detailed testing is used to provide specific assessments of these different areas. Other sources of evidence, such as the work of other auditors/assurance providers, are also used to support the conclusions.

OIG audits typically involve an examination of programs, operations, management systems and procedures of bodies and institutions that manage Global Fund funds, to assess whether they are achieving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of those resources. They may include a review of inputs (financial, human, material, organizational or regulatory means needed for the implementation of the program), outputs (deliverables of the program), results (immediate effects of the program on beneficiaries) and impacts (long-term changes in society that are attributable to Global Fund support).

Audits cover a wide range of topics with a particular focus on issues related to the Impact of Global Fund investments, procurement, and supply chain management, change management, and key financial and fiduciary controls.

Annex B. Critical Success Factors for an Evaluation Function

Given funding pressures and the need to maximize value for money, the Global Fund needs an Evaluation Function that can deliver its mandate in an effective and efficient manner to drive strategic learning and positive change. This requires careful consideration of the optimal structure and positioning within the broader Global Fund ecosystem. Regardless of structure, three critical success factors are essential:

First

A clear mandate is essential. The function must articulate its value proposition relative to other assurance and learning providers, with well-defined roles and responsibilities for both the Evaluation and Learning Office and relevant Secretariat stakeholders.

Clear boundaries should be established to distinguish evaluation activities from other risk, learning, and assurance functions within the Global Fund architecture.

Second

A robust operating model is needed - one that is flexible, cost-effective, and ensures quality products and added value. This model should leverage the function's deep contextual knowledge of Global Fund policies and processes, while drawing on external subject matter expertise where appropriate.

It should balance different resourcing approaches, such as internal staffing, co-sourcing, and outsourcing.

Strong stakeholder engagement will be critical to ensure clarity in planning, execution, and dissemination of findings.

Finally, evaluation reports should be presented in a way that is understandable and actionable for decision-makers.

Third

An appropriate oversight framework is essential to enable effective oversight and ensure accountability.

The function's performance and use of resources must be regularly monitored and measured to maintain transparency and accountability. This means defining specific, measurable KPIs for all elements of the mandate, and instituting regular reporting mechanisms to track progress at all levels, including to governance bodies.

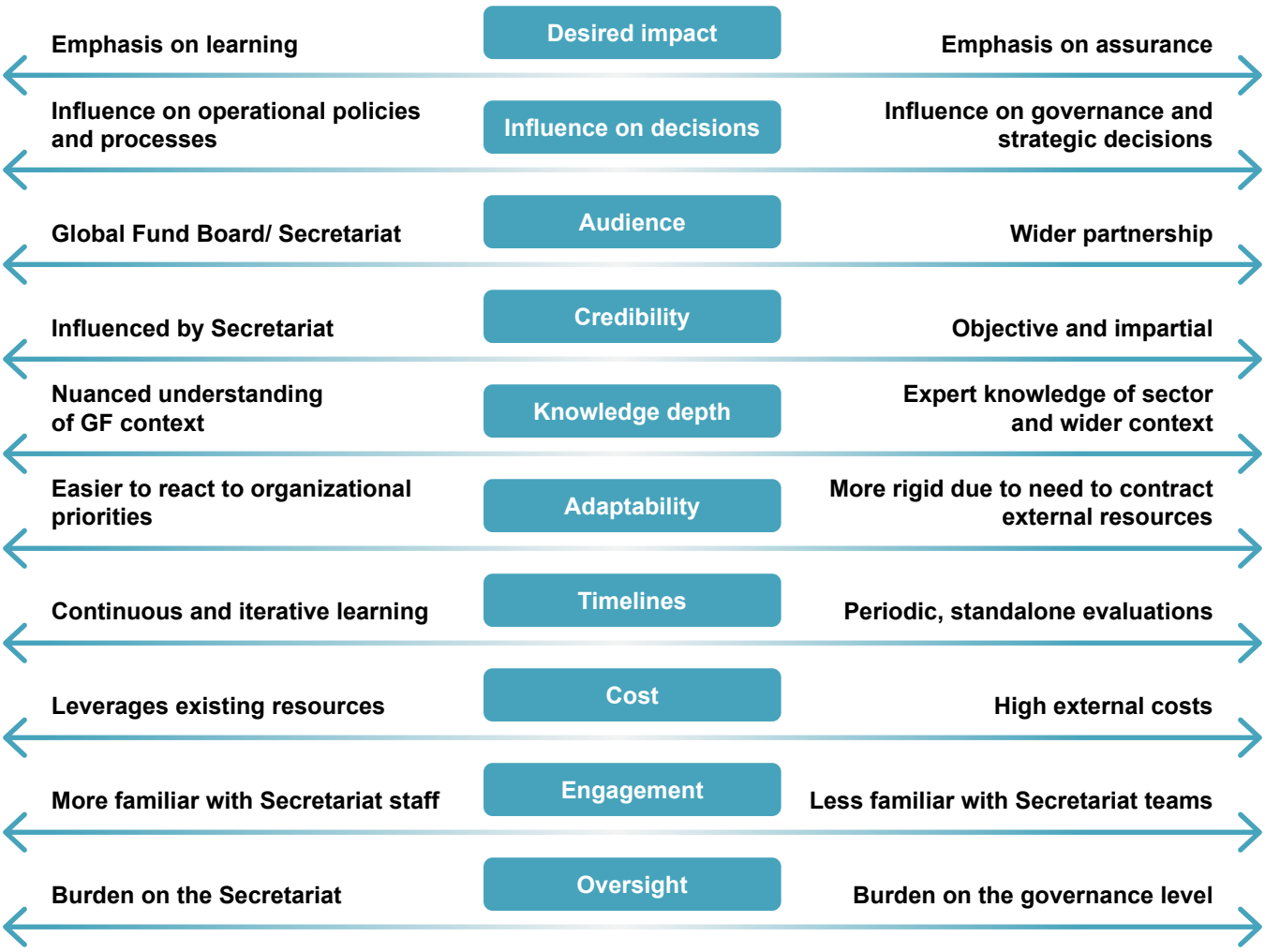
Based on the findings of this review, several options could be considered in terms of addressing some of root causes identified around structure and positioning. These options are presented in Annex C.

Annex C. Considerations for evolving the Independent Evaluation Function

When addressing the root causes of issues identified in this report, there are a number of considerations and trade-offs (see figure 5).

Importantly, and regardless of the trade-offs made, the critical success factors identified in Annex B, must be implemented and well executed to support and effective function.

Figure 5: Considerations for future structure & positioning



N.B. These dimensions are not inherently mutually exclusive. Outcomes depend on execution rather than structure alone. For example, an embedded function can still shape strategy, while an independent one may influence operations. Similarly, a joint external function might deliver efficiencies, yet an in-house model could entail significant operational costs.
Therefore, these elements should be viewed as guiding considerations - helping to clarify priorities and weigh the relative strengths and trade-offs of each option, rather than as fixed outcomes.