

Technical Guidance for Round 8 Global Fund Proposals	
Broad area	Health System Strengthening
Service Delivery Area	Information System and Operational Research

Information systems should be designed to support data for decision making and learning. Many donor driven information systems have been designed with the narrow objectives of a specific program in mind. The Global Fund has taken a leadership role in recognizing the importance of health information systems strengthening as part of its programs.

A. Elements concerning the service delivery area to be considered in the situation analysis (both the epidemic and response)

- The situation analysis should incorporate input from any national health systems development frameworks and plans. These include National Health Policy Frameworks, Health Sector Strategic Plans, Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp), etc. In particular, these documents usually have a section on health information system strengthening. The application should demonstrate knowledge of these documents and incorporate these national plans into the proposal.
- A key point to make is that the quality, timeliness, and use of information is improved when health information is collected as part of a national plan using national data standards to avoid duplication and 'stove-piping' information.

B. Rationale for including health information system strengthening in the proposal

- It is much better to invest resources in strengthening existing health information systems than in setting up parallel information systems that only deliver program-specific data.
- The GF focus on HIV, TB, and Malaria together address significant areas of morbidity and mortality and incorporate broad areas of health practice. HIV itself can manifest as a wide variety of medical conditions which require a comprehensive response from the health care system.
- In addition, HIV care, since it is a complex disease and requires coordinated treatment over many years, establishes the need for individual patient longitudinal medical records (LMR). The LMR itself naturally includes broad health information. Establishing individual patient LMRs is a challenge for all countries and is especially difficult in resource constrained settings. However, the LMR is required to properly treat patients with HIV infection. The LMR is best established within the context of health systems strengthening and health information systems strengthening.

C. Link between health information systems strengthening and the proposal objective.

- All proposal objectives require the use of timely, accurate information at various levels of the health system. At the patient contact level, decisions must be made about the best course of action taking into account the patients condition and current best practice. At the facility and district level, decisions must be made about resource management to efficiently address the proposal objectives. Monitoring and evaluation also requires accurate and timely information. Good information improves health and health system efficiency.

D. How to define and quantify the target populations(s)

- Almost all information is sourced at the community and facility level. This, of course, is also the level at which services are delivered. A major weakness of many health

information systems is that this information is not used effectively at these levels where it could do the most good. Health information systems strengthening should focus on the use of information at the point of care as well as monitoring and evaluation reporting. The district level is a good point to start strengthening since it is both the collection point for community and facility information and in most cases has a strong direct managerial link to facilities and community health workers. It is ideally positioned to collect information and use it to improve the management of care, quality of care and efficiency. From the district, information can flow up for national reporting.

E. Main (important) activities to be considered

- For health information system strengthening, one needs to do a careful assessment of existing health information systems (paper and electronic) including the data elements collected, the workflow of how these are used, and the decisions that are made. In addition, it is crucial to look at the human resource training that takes place around health information systems. An additional part of the assessment is the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure that exists.
- This assessment will highlight areas that need to be strengthened to improve the quality and timeliness of information. These strengthening activities can be considered in the categories of data elements, collection, communication, and use of information.
- The information system relies on people to enter, analyze, act on and learn from the data. Health system strengthening depends on these people and must include a comprehensive program of training to improve their skills.
- Many countries lack basic information and communications infrastructure. Provision of computers at the district level will go a long way to improve the technology infrastructure. Communications infrastructure is more difficult to establish and in many cases the health system will have to rely on the local telecommunications company to provide connectivity. Having computers at the district level will reduce the need for communications since there is usually a close physical relationship with local facilities and health workers. Communication of data to higher levels is less time sensitive and can be done by physically transporting data on discs or memory sticks if communication links are not available.

F. Approach to (or tools for) costing these activities.

- The assessment of the health information system is a fairly straightforward process of collecting information on data elements, forms, workflows, and uses of the information as well as existing ICT and human resources. Depending on the depth and detail, this can be done with 2 to 4 months of consultant time.
- Deciding on health system strengthening activities can be done as part of a workshop or can be a more involved process of consultations with all stakeholders.
- The individual strengthening activities, themselves, have a very wide range of costs depending on what is done.

G. Some key indicators

- Key indicators of health information system performance include the timeliness, accuracy, completeness of health information as well how well the information is used to make decisions.
- An important indicator that should be measured is the ability of the system to generate, communicate, and use standard indicators.

- Number of districts/facilities reporting on time
- Number of districts/facilities with trained data managers

H. Linkages with other SDAs/programmes

By its nature, health information system strengthening is a core function that should improve the functioning of all programmes. The key here is to ensure that the information collected can be communicated and used by other programs.

I. How gender, human rights and equity issues should be addressed in implementing this SDA

Health systems strengthening activities should be designed to collect information where appropriate on gender and equity issues. Transparent information is very effective in bringing these issues to the forefront.

J. Key implementing partners to be considered

- Since all partners should be collecting and should have an interest in using good information, they should all be aware of and participate in the discussion of health information systems assessment and strengthening. This is particularly important in the case where data standards are considered.
- When it comes to implementing health information systems strengthening, clearly programs which have the largest staff in the field (and this usually includes the ministry itself) should be key implementing partners.
- Consider development agencies and programs which might have their own parallel information systems should be incorporated into the strengthening effort so that their resources and information systems strengthening efforts can complement the national effort.
- The private sector can be an important partner depending on how well it is developed and the its role in providing health services in the country.

K. Type and sources of technical assistance which might be required during implementation

- Health information system professionals who have experience working in developing countries are key technical assistance resources. International consultants can often be supplemented by individuals living in country who have experience with the variety of systems in the country as well as individuals from the ministry and major programs.
- One should be cautious about using technical assistance from information system vendors or from people associated with a specific information system solution as they have an inherent bias and conflict of interest.

The KCS department can help provide assistance in formulating requests and finding resources.

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