

## Alignment Stocktaking

### OVERVIEW

The purpose of this paper is to take stock of the GFF's experience and value add in improving alignment of resources and programming toward country priorities and plans. The paper is informed by a review of the literature and landscape on development assistance alignment and effectiveness as well as by key informant interviews, to capture lessons from both the GFF and other global initiatives. The findings and recommendations in this paper, while not exhaustive, are intended to help define the GFF value add and way forward on alignment in the GFF's next five-year strategy period (2026-2030).

### ACTION REQUESTED

GFF Investors Group members are requested to provide guidance on the value add of the GFF in alignment and the next steps as outlined in this paper.

### CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

From its inception the GFF has aimed to incentivize shifts away from a fragmented approach to official development assistance (ODA) toward greater alignment of partners around country priorities and plans. The GFF model combines technical assistance and catalytic trust fund grants linked to larger World Bank (IDA and IBRD) financing and convenes development partners and country

*The term **alignment** in this document refers to stakeholders and partners better aligning behind country-level priorities and plans. This also includes alignment with government processes and systems.*

stakeholders in country-led platforms to foster alignment. This includes ensuring that domestic and external resources are used in synergistic ways to achieve better, more sustainable health results.

In 2021, the GFF's governing bodies re-emphasized that partner alignment around government-led plans was pivotal to realize the GFF's mission and that intensified focus in this area would be needed. In response, the GFF partnership launched the [Alignment Working Group \(AWG\)](#). Under the leadership of countries, the objective of the AWG was to accelerate the alignment agenda at the country level and strengthen the voices of governments on how external and domestic financiers can better align their support to country priorities and systems. The group developed a shared "Alignment Framework" and nine countries participated in the early phase<sup>1</sup> of this work, with four participating in the deeper 'pilot' initiative: Rwanda, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia (the findings and lessons from this work is discussed later in the paper).

At the same time since 2021, the alignment agenda has evolved significantly with concerted effort to align global health initiatives with national health priorities, fostering stronger partnerships and more sustainable health outcomes including through the Global Action Plan

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<sup>1</sup> Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Senegal

(GAP) and more recently through the Lusaka agenda. The evolution of the Global Health Architecture together with the kick off of the GFF strategy development marks a critical time to review and inform the GFF future role in supporting alignment, ensuring that it continues to contribute effectively to the global health agenda by leveraging its unique position and resources to support country-led health strategies and systems strengthening.

## LESSONS FROM ALIGNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS EFFORTS IN HEALTH

### Boosting health outcomes through aligned funding and strategies

Aligning funds and technical assistance from donors, private sector, civil society, and other external entities with a government's priorities and systems enables countries to take the lead and makes health spending and program implementation more efficient and effective. Yet, despite the long-standing global commitments to improve alignment in development assistance for health, a significant portion of ODA for health remains highly fragmented- with the share of recipient countries dealing with over 60 donor entities climbing from 55% in 2009 to 78% in 2019.<sup>i</sup> Fragmented, donor-sponsored projects can lead to an array of challenges, including a mismatch between total volumes of assistance and country needs, volatility and uncertainty of funding, and weak accountability<sup>ii</sup>. Fragmentation can also result in overstressing the limited 'bandwidth' of ministries of health that are consumed by coordination efforts and must respond to multiple donor reporting requirements. Fragmentation can also generate duplication and missed opportunities to support and strengthen the health system more holistically. Moreover, fragmentation can undermine domestic financing and policymaking processes and reduce local accountability and domestic resource allocations for health<sup>iii</sup>.

### Lessons learned from current and past efforts to improve alignment

- **Sector-wide approaches (SWAs) in health** were developed in the late 1990s with the aim to resolve the issue of highly fragmented support<sup>iv</sup>. The goal of SWAs has been to align donor spending with country priorities and improve accountability between donors and their partner governments. By 2009, health SWAs were underway in approximately 28 countries with financing from World Bank Group (WBG) operations. An evaluation at that time concluded that the presence of a SWAp was not sufficient to ensure improved sector performance and outcomes<sup>v</sup>, emphasizing the need for implementation plans to meet "minimum quality standards" such as building local implementation capacity and systems for monitoring and evaluation. A subsequent review in 2013 noted that the success of SWAs depended on strong country capacity and political leadership<sup>vi</sup>, and that they required stronger government-led strategies to address both the global need for targeted initiatives and sound health systems. Other country specific studies showed the highly variable experiences of health SWAs, both relatively positive (Bangladesh)<sup>vii</sup> and more challenging (Mozambique)<sup>viii</sup>. More recently, there has been renewed global attention on the potential for reviving and expanding the SWAs model to improve alignment and encourage donor pooling at the country-level. Examples of the GFF's role include supporting the SWAs in Bangladesh and Nigeria.
- **Budget support for health:** Closely related to SWAs is the use of budget support for health,<sup>ix</sup> which provides unearmarked contributions to a government's budget to support

policy reforms. The WBG has significant experience in this area,<sup>x</sup> and budget support is also a central element of the European Union's development assistance. A recent review showed positive experience with budget support, although it was not possible to identify any effect on the quality of services.<sup>xi</sup> Constraints of the budget support model include the limited ability of donors to direct and track investments. However, support to improve country health system resource and health outcome tracking could increase the availability of the outcome data desired by donors and partners.

- **Global development -effectiveness initiatives:** In 2005 the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* developed a set of shared global principles for aid,<sup>xii</sup> which were subsequently reinforced by the *Accra Agenda for Action*<sup>xiii</sup> in 2008 and the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation* in 2011<sup>xiv</sup>. In 2007 the *International Health Partnership+* (IHP+) was set up to take these principles forward in the health sector, and in 2012 the *Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC)* was set up for wider aid efforts<sup>xv</sup>. In 2019, the *Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (SDG3 GAP)*, was established, bringing together 13 multilateral health, development, and humanitarian agencies, including the GFF, to improve coordination and impact in countries. These initiatives have been important to raise visibility of development effectiveness challenges and have led to broad commitments and coordination mechanisms. There is some evidence of improved coordination and governance platforms for donors and governments especially on co-financing and primary health care. However, impact has been limited with many government counterparts and other stakeholders having little or no awareness of the initiative. Further analysis of the SDG3 GAP experience found limited engagement of civil society and communities and weak incentives for partners and governments to better align at the country-level that could drive greater impact.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **Lusaka and beyond.** The Future of Global Health Initiatives (FGHI) process was launched in 2022 to reinvigorate the global agenda on development effectiveness in health with a focus on ensuring that the global health initiatives (GHIs) leave a legacy of sustainable impact. The [Lusaka Agenda](#) adopted in December 2023 proposes five key shifts to improve development assistance for health: (1) Strengthening systems for health to make a stronger contribution to primary healthcare; (2) Playing a catalytic role towards sustainable, domestically-financed health services and public health functions; (3) Strengthening joint approaches for achieving equity in health outcomes; (4) Achieving strategic and operational coherence within the GHIs; and (5) Coordinating approaches to products, research and development (R&D), and regional manufacturing to address market and policy failures in global health.
- The GFF has engaged actively in the FGHI process and is seeking opportunities to build on its multi-stakeholder momentum<sup>xvii</sup> and implement the Lusaka Agenda in GFF operations. Alongside Gavi and the Global Fund, the GFF is supporting short term actions including i) establishing a joint committee mechanism between Gavi, the Global Fund, and GFF to guide cross-board collaboration and action; ii) developing a 24-month workplan and operationalizing it with the governing bodies; iii) engaging a set of lead collaboration countries for joint efforts to deliver on near-term priorities.
- Recognizing that improved GHI collaboration is only one aspect of the broader Lusaka Agenda, the GFF's support for the health Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp)<sup>xviii</sup> in Nigeria is one example of the additional efforts in support to this initiative. Further there is still much work

to be done<sup>xix</sup> to strengthen alignment, especially in fragile and conflict and violence-affected (FCV) country settings<sup>xx</sup>. The increasing number of aid entities in recent years underscores the urgent need for greater alignment<sup>xxi</sup> and collaboration across donors<sup>xxii</sup>.

## EVOLUTION OF GFF'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALIGNMENT

**As a country-led partnership, the GFF was launched to advance the health and rights of women, children, and adolescents by supporting country prioritized plans for RMNCAH-N and aligning financing against those plans.** Strong country leadership and vision are essential to promote successful country alignment. Several elements of the GFF model have evolved in support of advancing country alignment efforts:

- **Investment case:** The GFF's model has focused on providing support aligned around country-led plans or Country Investment Cases (ICs) to support improved prioritization, overcome fragmentation, and demonstrate a return on investment for RMNCAH-N. Based on a review of the first eight years of GFF engagement and stakeholder consultations, the GFF updated its [IC guidance in 2024](#) to reflect a more flexible and realistic approach to supporting these prioritized country plans. The new guidance emphasizes support for IC implementation and learning to enable course correction, and annual updates to the IC as part of governments' annual operational planning and budget cycles and as the operational arm of their national multi-year strategic plans. When functioning optimally, the process of developing and monitoring the IC brings together government with a set of stakeholders to iteratively examine service delivery and health financing data to improve alignment, planning and implementation of the prioritized interventions and reforms.
- **Country platforms:** The GFF also supports Multi-Stakeholder Country Platforms to develop, implement, coordinate, and monitor ICs. In most countries, these platforms build upon existing coordinating entities such as UHC coalitions, SWAPs or RMNCAH-N technical working groups. These platforms require strong government leadership to function well and typically need some support for effective organization of meetings, tracking of follow-up actions, etc. The GFF has been providing various forms of support to these platforms in GFF partnership countries.
- **Integration of youth and civil society:** The GFF has also championed integration of civil society and youth within the IC processes and country platforms to bring community preferences into program design and resource allocation decision-making; foster accountability of governance structures and donors; and promote more equitable, people-centered service delivery. The GFF has also championed inclusion of youth in RMNCAH-N policy development, leading to better social accountability in over 20 GFF countries. However, representation of youth and CSOs on the country platforms has been met with mixed results and levels of engagement. As part of the next phase of CSO and youth support, concerted efforts are being recommended to ensure more voice of youth, in particular, on platforms. In fact, as part of initial efforts to ensure greater voice for youth, a KPI is being tracked that looks at both the CSO and youth engagement in the platform separately. Further, to ensure that CSOs and youth are resourced for active participation, a next phase of GFF support for CSO/youth

engagement is being designed to ensure more participation on platforms and for coalition building.

- Resource mapping and expenditure tracking:** Country leadership alongside demand for the GFF country-support model has shown promise in increasing more prioritized, realistic, and aligned country plans. Thirty-one GFF partnership countries have conducted resource mapping of country plans, and twenty four have used these exercises to inform prioritization. For example, in Somalia the IC and RMET data were used to increase donor alignment around the essential package of health services, and to highlight the significant funding gap for implementation. Through the country platform, and with evidence generated through GFF support, government and key donors agreed to a sequential approach to ensure effective implementation and access to the essential package of services for women, children, and adolescents.
- GFF Liaison Officer (LO) role:** As part of the lessons and an evolution of alignment efforts, the GFF established the Liaison Officer (LO) role based in GFF partnership countries to support governments with the day-to-day responsibilities of IC development, implementation, and monitoring, and to support secretariat needs for the country platform. The LO tasks include support for IC preparation (stakeholder mapping, country communications, IC roadmap with partner commitments), and IC implementation (facilitation of country platform meetings, collation of data, preparation of reports, and updating of results frameworks). Over time, LOs' responsibilities have expanded to facilitate coordination of stakeholders engaged in RMNCAH-N programming and promote two-way communication and documentation. Moving forward, the GFF is focused on increasing the visibility and functionality of the LO towards a more targeted and standardized engagement in support of alignment and coordination for RMNCAH-N. The GFF will look for strategic opportunities to formally engage other partners and stakeholders with the LO role to improve coordination.
- Alignment Working Group:** In 2021 the AWG was created to optimize existing country-led processes to enhance alignment of external financing behind government priorities; measure country-level alignment; and increase the number of countries where the Global Fund, Gavi, GFF, the WBG and bilateral donors are co-financing operations and technical assistance. The AWG piloted a way to address bottlenecks by drawing on tools that promote the alignment of development assistance. This included development of an "Alignment Framework" consisting of a diagnostic exercise and maturity model that proposes phases or stages of system maturity along a *One Plan, One Budget, One Report* approach. Over the last three years, through the AWG, four countries have piloted such an approach: Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, resulting in a set of harmonized action plans that offer specific actions to address agreed upon bottlenecks. In Ethiopia, for example, the Ministry of Health's application of the Alignment Framework led to a harmonized plan of action and revitalization of the country platform as well as the adoption of a Harmonization Manual.

*The AWG Framework defines alignment as "the process of planning and implementing policies, strategies, and priorities with all stakeholders at global and country levels following the basic principle of one plan, one budget and one report."*

In Burkina Faso, the Alignment Framework identified major fragmentation, with over 100 overlapping action plans and coordination platforms existing in the country. In addition, the same alignment principles were used to consolidate over 50 plans in Malawi into one federal plan and budget (HSTP III), which partners have coordinated around under a country platform.

- Application of the framework tools, however, can be intensive and require multiple discussions between government and stakeholders. The GFF Secretariat can simplify and package the tools, synthesize the country experiences, and make the information available to global and country audiences. The GFF can also support dialogue with stakeholders on further application of the framework to operationalize the Lusaka Agenda. Given limited GFF capacity and resources, however, the GFF is aiming to collaborate with other agencies on this agenda. Platforms like the GFF Ministerial Network can help advocate for increased leadership among country governments to steward this work.
- **Leveraging IDA and IBRD Financing:** Finally, a key element and comparative advantage of the GFF is its ability to leverage and align IDA and IBRD financing, along with other donor financing, to country ICs by linking grant funding to WBG operations. Because of its position within the WBG, the GFF has leveraged significant additional funding to advance the rights and health of women, children, and adolescents. To date, the GFF has committed more than \$1.4 billion from its MDTF linked to more than \$10 billion in financing from the World Bank (IDA & IBRD). This financing is important for the alignment agenda because it ensures that the prioritized plans developed by governments reach a certain scale because they are financed at a minimum by the World Bank and GFF. The projects that are developed for financing by the World Bank and GFF offer a platform for other financiers to join to further increase the scale of implementation of the plan.

**Persistent challenges, however, remain and include limitations of both partners and governments.** Most GFF partner governments have limited infrastructure and capacity to manage programmatic and fiduciary processes for alignment, and weak public financial management systems to manage donor financing “on-budget”. There have also been limitations in the uptake of data and analytics which could inform better prioritization and help policymakers make difficult trade-offs. Additionally, some donors remain reluctant to provide financing through government systems, despite improving government capacity. Increasing donor funding through government systems will require different incentive structures within global agencies and more flexible processes. Furthermore, limitations persist in the representation of CSOs and communities in country platforms and in the dissemination and transparency of outcomes with the broader stakeholder community.

## OPTIMIZING GFF’S CONTRIBUTION TO COUNTRY-LED ALIGNMENT EFFORTS

This next section outlines potential opportunities for the GFF in future to optimize its contributions to alignment in pursuit of its ultimate goal to end preventable deaths of women, children, and adolescents, working alongside partners under the leadership of countries.

**Consistent with the Lusaka Agenda, the GFF, The Global Fund, and GAVI are taking steps to strengthen their collaboration in “Lead Collaboration Countries.”** The objective of this



collaboration is to better align support for improved service delivery, coverage, and impact in selected countries. The GFF has been actively engaged in the health system strengthening and country engagement workstreams and meets regularly with global and country technical teams to assess joint work, share knowledge, and identify opportunities for joint communications.

**Deepen country-support for prioritization and programming alignment for RMNCAH-N.**

Prioritization and alignment are country-led processes and health system functions that require government leadership, inclusive dialogue, use of evidence and data and identification of trade-offs. The GFF can sharpen its role in responding, alongside other partners, to country demand to build capacity for these processes by supporting the use and integration of evidence, analytics, and data. The GFF can leverage and deepen its existing investments around equity and targeting diagnostics, RMET exercises, and strengthening quality of health outcomes monitoring data to better inform prioritization and alignment. The GFF could also invest more in technical assistance, in collaboration with other partners, around the capacity building and use aspect of these analytics. The IC can serve as a mechanism to anchor this sharpened prioritization.

**Deepen country-support for channelling resources through government systems for**

**RMNCAH-N.** Recognizing that there are weak incentives for coordination and pooling donor resources to work through government systems (or at least going on-budget), the GFF can leverage its support for RMET and its position within the WBG to connect its support for alignment to broader systems reforms in support of better health outcomes for women, children and adolescents. This does not mean that the GFF must or should lead these broader health system reforms; rather, the GFF can deepen its work with the WBG to address alignment challenges and advocate for critical reforms outside the health sector, such as in public financial management systems. The GFF can also play a stronger role in aligning and working across the GFF partnership on advocacy and support for these reforms. One mechanism for facilitating this work is the **GFF Joint Financing Framework (JFF)**. The JFF was approved in November 2023 by the GFF Trust Fund Committee to enable other financiers, including other GHIs, to co-finance specific country WBG-GFF financed projects aligned with country ICs. The JFF can enable more partners to pool funding, provide funding on-budget and through government systems, and promote country leadership, ownership, systems strengthening, and sustainable financing for specific prioritized RMNCAHN outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

**Enhance CSO and community engagement for alignment.** Civic engagement and social accountability are central to ensuring that governments develop, budget for, implement, and spend on RMNCAH-N policies and programs that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities. Many CSOs and youth networks are already helping to facilitate this engagement with GFF support; however, limitations and unpredictability in resource allocation may hinder them from fulfilling this role. Through its forthcoming revised

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<sup>2</sup> The JFF is structured to allow individual donors to pool while maintaining visibility for their respective contributions to in-country RMNCAH-N programming; their specific financial contributions are outlined in the World Bank Project Appraisal Document and other project documents. The JFF can also act as a financing arm for the SWAp. While this tool has only recently been implemented, it has shown promising results for alignment. For example, in Nigeria it is being leveraged as a mechanism to align GFF and two other donor contributions through a World Bank recently approved operation to strengthen primary health care and crash maternal mortality in the country.

CSO and Youth Engagement Framework, GFF has an opportunity to bolster its engagement and support for CSOs, youth, and community-based organizations to work with target populations.

**Strengthen government capacity to steward alignment processes.** The GFF will continue to strengthen country platforms as well as continue support (through the LO function) to government counterparts to steward and facilitate these platforms. It may also be possible for governments and donors to better leverage and jointly support these platforms as a mechanism for coordination of the Lusaka Agenda.

**Engage GFF Investors Group members in promoting accountability for alignment at the country-level.** An important responsibility of the IG is to drive partner collaboration and alignment around country platforms and country-led ICs. The IG could play a more deliberate role in regularly reviewing data on progress toward improved country-led alignment. This could include reviewing progress towards AWG action plans, and/or commitments made as part of the Lusaka Agenda. The IG could also serve as a platform to explore solutions amongst countries and global partners. For example, the IG could facilitate discussions on how to jointly support improved country system capacity that would incentivize donor resource pooling and improved reporting on health system outcomes.

**Contribute to ongoing research, learning, and knowledge sharing on country-led alignment experiences, tools, and frameworks for systems change.** Alongside suggested work to better document the experiences and lessons of the AWG, the GFF could invest in implementation research and case study documentation of country experiences in promoting country-led alignment. The GFF can also better package and share technical briefs and documentation of tools that have been leveraged in support of alignment – including clearly describing work around alignment in the GFF Country Engagement Frameworks. The GFF can continue to support cross-country learning and advocacy opportunities on alignment, like the GFF multi-country dialogue<sup>xxiii</sup> in April 2024. The GFF, with the WBG and other global partners, could build on the AWG Alignment Framework and existing global knowledge about strengthening country public financial management systems<sup>xxiv</sup> and channelling global assistance through government systems<sup>xxv</sup> to share more how-to guidance on leadership, governance, and systems capacity that must be in place or strengthened to achieve improved alignment.

## NEXT STEPS

Based on the initial feedback received from the IG on this paper, the GFF Secretariat will embark on a deeper consultative process with IG members and GFF partner countries and will also collaborate with the Ministerial Network to define the value add, constraints, and opportunities that will guide the GFF's future work on alignment. This work will serve as a key input to the development of the next GFF strategy.



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