Independent observer of the
Global Fund

AIDSPAN STRATEGY
2023 - 2028

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aidspan exists to improve the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) and other global health initiatives (GHIs). We achieve this through independent observations, convening, and building the capacity of in-country accountability mechanisms and stakeholders. Aidspan has proved to be a reliable and independent watchdog of the Global Fund for over 20 years.

This Strategy 2023–2028 presents the vision, mission, goal, four strategic pillars and core values that will guide Aidspan's work to build global health equality over the next five years. It provides a foundation for our diverse international team, current and future donors and partners in their work towards transparent, accountable and effective implementation of Global Fund and other GHIs.

Building on the success of the 2018–2022 Strategy, this new Strategy responds to the evolving global health context in which Aidspan operates, where (a) the mandate of the Global Fund is evolving to encompass pandemic preparedness and response, and health systems more broadly, and (2) there is increasing interdependence between the Global Fund and other GHIs to secure resilient and sustainable systems for universal health coverage. Responding to this and recognising that accountability must be the driving force of effective services, Aidspan will refine and strengthen its existing services to Global Fund stakeholders and expand these to other GHIs.

To implement this Strategy, Aidspan is committed to (a) **Independently observing the Global Fund and other GHIs.** We will comprehensively observe and evaluate Global Fund implementa-tion and its impact on communities and beneficiaries. This entails ensuring its presence at relevant stakeholder meetings; reviewing and synthesising strategic plans and reports; and observing country-level partnerships or engagements between the Global Fund, other GHIs, and implementers. (b) **Increase transparency, accountability and effectiveness** (internally, within Aidspan, and externally, across the Global Fund, other GHIs, and implementers). Aidspan will engage with stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness, coordination and accountability of GHIs at the country level. This is enabled by strengthening in-country capacity to monitor accountability for donor-funded programmes and assessing the implementation of the programmes to enhance their effectiveness. (c) **Communicate for change and influence.** Aidspan's communication is intentional. It affects change and influences better outcomes. This is achieved through advocacy and the use of simplified and accessible English and French language and distilling the jargon often used in key documents and reports. (d) **Build and strengthen strategic partnerships**. Aidspan will expand its current networks to build and enhance collaborative partnerships for accountability, transparency and effectiveness of the Global Fund, other GHIs and implementers. Aidspan will leverage technology and internal processes to enhance these partnerships.

Implementing this Strategy means ensuring that countries are meaningfully engaged in the effectiveness and accountability of donor grants and the sustainability of health systems beyond donor timelines. Aidspan is committed to this Strategy and will work closely with other stakeholders to enable its successful implementation.

ABOUT AIDSPAN

We are a non-profit organisation based in Kenya with a reputation for **independently observing the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria** (the Global Fund) **since 2002.** This has enabled us to enhance the effectiveness and accountability of Global Fund initiatives. We have engaged in responsible reporting and analysis and are recognised as a credible source of information for the Global Fund ecology. We provide in-depth analysis of Global Fund policies and processes and are referred to by stakeholders as 'explainers of the Fund'.

Our Board of Directors has vast experience from across the globe and demonstrates strong leadership in driving the organisation's mandate. Aidspan has a diverse team of monitoring and evaluation experts, policy analysts, knowledge management specialists, and engagement experts, and regularly engages with a global network of partners and service users. We have honed critical skills and services that continue to contribute to the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria-related programmes funded by the Global Fund.

VISION, MISSION AND GOAL

Transparent, accountable and effective implementation by the Global Fund and other global health initiatives as a foundation of global health equity.

To improve the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the Global Fund and other global health initiatives through independent observation, convening, and building the capacity of in-country stakeholders and accountability mechanisms.

VISION

MISSION

GOAL

Refine and strengthen the existing services Aidspan provides to Global Fund stakeholders and expand these services to other global health initiatives.

www.aidspan.org

CORE VALUES

TRANSPARENCY
Aidspan promotes and advocates for **open and inclusive deliberations and decision-making** in the governance and operations of the Global Fund and other GHIs and their grants; Aidspan commits to the same in its own work.
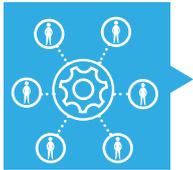
ACCOUNTABILITY
Aidspan promotes full **accountability of the Global Fund and other GHI resources** at the global and country levels. Aidspan takes full **responsibility for the content it publishes**, paying close attention to its sources and listening to its audience to respond as best as it can to questions or criticism, including correcting errors or mistakes should they occur.

COLLABORATION
Aidspan values **stakeholder engagement,** leading to grant ownership and improved results. Aidspan embraces **cooperation** in its work, valuing an **integrated, interdisciplinary approach** to research, analysis, and publication.

INTEGRITY
Aidspan promotes and holds itself to the **highest standards** of honesty, accuracy, truthfulness and ethical conduct.

TIMELINESS
Aidspan aims to deliver the most pertinent **content when it is most beneficial** to its audiences, through proactive research, prospective analysis, and prompt reporting.

EFFECTIVENESS
Aidspan optimises the **use of resources for results** through a proactive and thoughtful approach to events and stakeholders.

INDEPENDENCE & IMPARTIALITY
Aidspan's independence and impartiality are central to the utility of the analysis and capacity building it provides. Aidspan serves all stakeholders of the Global Fund and GHIs equally, without conflict of interest, and strives for accountability as a building block of health equity.

ACCESSIBILITY (of information and language)
Aidspan ensures that information and language are accessible and purposeful (efficient, useful) in its own publications and for the GHIs it observes.

KEY SUCCESSES

Aidspan's key successes to date include:

Enhanced effectiveness of the Global Fund

- Conducted observations of Global Fund processes and functions
- Conducted and disseminated in-depth analyses of Global Fund policies and processes. Published 469 articles — news, analysis, commentary, opinion and features

Increased accountability and effectiveness of Global Fund grants

- Advocated for utilization of in-country institutions to enhance the transparency and accountability of donor-funded programmes
- Convened governance workshops aimed at strengthening accountability for integrated people-centred health systems

Strengthened engagement with Global Fund stakeholders and implementers

- Facilitated and convened various stakeholder learning and knowledge-sharing dialogues
- Participated in implementers' meetings to amplify the voices of stakeholders.

Enhanced effectiveness of the Global Fund
Aidspan has built credibility as an independent and relevant observer of the Global Fund, demonstrated through its continued role as a trusted observer of Global Fund processes and policies. Aidspan is invited to key strategic meetings, such as Global Fund Board meetings and the Replenishment processes and maintains a constructive feedback dialogue with the Global Fund Secretariat and Country Coordinating Mechanisms. Critical stakeholders in the Global Fund ecology, including implementers, the Global Fund Secretariat, the Office of the Inspector General and Local Fund Agents continue to rely on Aidspan as a credible source of information and analysis of grant implementation.

This is reflected through the responsiveness and traction of the **469 articles** Aidspan has published to date, including news, analysis, commentary, opinion, and features. The organisation's flagship newsletters — the Global Fund Observer (GFO) and Francophone equivalent, the Observateur du Fonds Mondial (OFM) — continue to publish timely news, analysis, commentary, opinion, and features to improve the effectiveness of the Global Fund. These newsletters serve both English (GFO) and French (OFM) speaking constituencies and, as of November 2022, boasted a readership of approximately 12,533 and 3,520, respectively. The OFM serves a critical function for Francophone stakeholders, supporting their engagement with the predominantly English publications and dialogue of the Global Fund.

Increased accountability and effectiveness of Global Fund grants
Aidspan recognises the need for country ownership and grant implementation accountability. Therefore, Aidspan **advocates for effective country-specific accountability mechanisms** and **conducts governance workshops to strengthen accountability for integrated people-centred health systems.**

Since 2018, Aidspan has been engaging with Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) to facilitate high-quality, efficient, financial, compliance and programmatic audit processes. Following Aidspan's successful advocacy, the Global Fund now engages SAIs in auditing grants. The Global Fund has changed its audit guidelines to recommend SAIs as preferred auditors for Global Fund grants managed by a government Principal Recipient. The new Global Fund Strategy, 2023–2028[1] acknowledges this change. This strengthening of SAIs results from Aidspan's numerous efforts, including developing an audit toolkit for SAIs and internal auditors that incorporates financial, compliance and programmatic audits; and a curriculum for training SAIs and internal auditors to conduct programmatic and financial audits of Global Fund grants. These activities have increased the capacity for financial, compliance, and programmatic audits across 13 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and have shifted SAIs' focus from financial outcomes to programmatic outcomes.

To facilitate learning and sharing among implementers and partners, Aidspan convenes roundtable discussions and workshops for SAIs to share experiences of conducting audits, and for grant implementers on the collection and use of data, as well as encouraging collaborations in implementation. Following these workshops, the number of in-country stakeholders now involved in assuring the use of donor funds has increased. Moreover, stakeholders have a greater understanding of programmatic audits and their role in ensuring the public benefit of donor-funded programmes. Complementary to this growing capacity and awareness of in-country institutions, there is increasing support among the donor community for in-country institutions to ensure the accountable and transparent use of their funds.

Strengthened engagement with Global Fund stakeholders and implementers

Aidspan prioritises strategic and technical partnerships with implementers who support mutually reinforcing enabling factors. These include the African Organisation of English-speaking Supreme Audit Institutions, Conseil Regional de Formation des Institutions Superieures de Contrôle des Finances Publiques D'Afrique Francophone Subsaharienne, the African Constituency Bureau (ACB), and other Global Fund constituencies, including Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Eastern and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, and South East Asia. These partners and grant implementers benefit from Aidspan's interpretation and technical translation of Global Fund policies. This is particularly important as key, informative documents from the Global Fund often include complex language and data not easily understood by target audiences. Aidspan develops practical resources to address this challenge, such as its simplified Beginners' Guide to the Global Fund, which is now in its fourth edition,[2] and various explainers and analyses of critical documents to enable stakeholders to understand the content and implication of Global Fund outputs easily.

As a result of this consistent function within the Global Fund ecosystem, Aidspan partners recognise it as a trusted and impartial voice central to advancing a transformational agenda towards inclusive and transparent programme implementation. The organisation engages with constituencies committed to the same agenda, including the **ACB** and the Global Fund Advocates Network.

---

1   The Global Fund (2022) Modular Framework Handbook, p. 18. (https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4309/fundingmodel_modularframework_handbook_en.pdf)

2   https://webapi.aidspan.org/api/v1/fileget/Aidspan_Beginners-Guide-FOURTH-edition_final.pdf

THE GLOBAL HEALTH RESPONSE — CONTEXT AND EMERGING ISSUES

Aidspan's expertise in ensuring the accountability and quality of global health spending is more relevant now than ever. Recent events draw attention to the impact of global dynamics on health outcomes at the local level and highlight the need for accountability mechanisms that can ensure the effectiveness of health spending at times of flux and uncertainty. There has rarely been a time of greater uncertainty than the one in which GHIs operate today.

Inequitable access to vaccines and other commodities required to manage the COVID-19 pandemic was a reminder of the need for a transformational, decolonised, equitable, people-centred and sustainable approach to health responses globally. To an extent, a shift in donor priorities and a call for countries to take ownership and invest in sustainable and resilient health systems (RSSH) is now providing for this. In less than three years, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the agenda to end AIDS by 2030 drastically reversed.[3] In 2020, the Global Fund reported a marked decline in services and treatment across the three diseases, including a 19% drop in people treated for drug-resistant TB, a 37% decline in people treated for extensively drug-resistant TB, an 11% decline in HIV prevention programmes and services, and a 22% decline in HIV testing. While programmes for malaria have been less affected, malaria service provision has plateaued, breaking from a reliable historical trend.[4] This is against the economic backdrop wherein the 2021 SDG Report reveals that COVID-19 contributed to the first increase in extreme poverty recorded in over 20 years,[5] and, in 2022, global food and oil shortages resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine catalysed fierce inflation.

Taken together, and as was seen in the early days of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, marginalised and vulnerable populations are bearing the brunt of global challenges, which are increasingly exacerbated by pandemics, conflict, and climate change.

19% DROP
people treated for drug-resistant TB

37% DECLINE
people treated for extensively drug-resistant TB

11% DECLINE
HIV prevention programmes and services

22% DECLINE
HIV testing
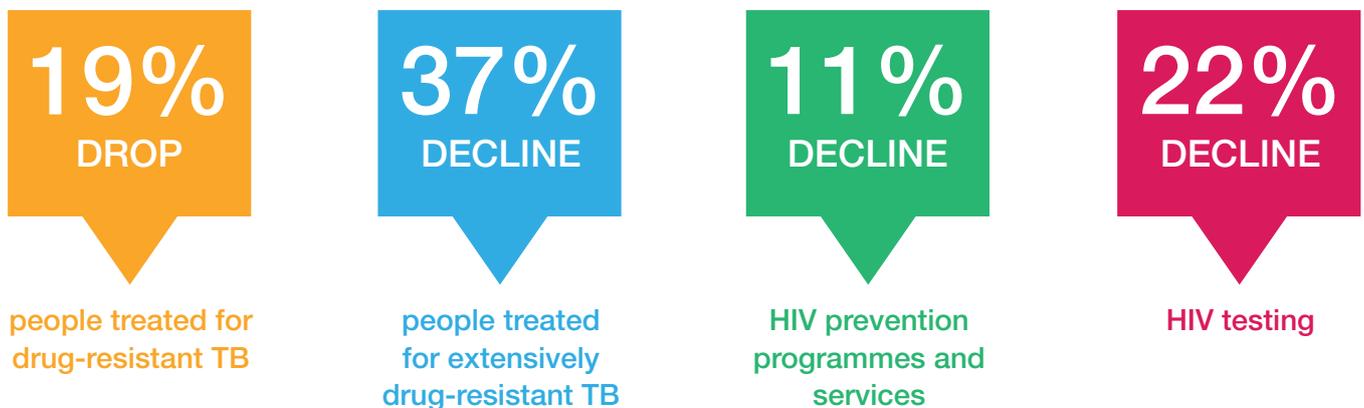
3 Aidspan. August 2020. Covid-19 Further Impedes Progress Towards Meeting The Sustainable Development Goal 3. Retrieved from: https://www.aidspan.org/en/c/article/5182

4 The Global Fund. Global Fund Results Report Reveals COVID-19 Devastating Impact on HIV, TB and Malaria Programs. September 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/news/2021/2021-09-08-global-fund-results-report-reveals-covid-19-devastating-impact-on-hiv-tb-and-malaria-programs/

5 The Sustainable Development Goals Report. 2021. Retrieved from: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/

AIDSPAN'S ADDED VALUE

Aidspan fulfils an essential function in the global health landscape: supporting the work of all stakeholders as we seek to collectively address and remain responsive to the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations. Aidspan works to ensure investments in social goods yield the highest possible returns on investments and is an ally in preventing corruption within governments, funding mechanisms, and programme implementers. Underlying this is Aidspan's commitment to the participation of all stakeholders in actively building and strengthening resilient and sustainable health systems.

Twenty years on, we remain committed to the vision of a world without the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Our experience and successes since 2002 position us as an independent, credible watchdog, indispensable to the transparent and effective responses of the Global Fund and other GHIs.

While our mandate remains to be an independent observer of the Global Fund, it is clear that Aidspan's expertise and approach are scalable and relevant to other GHIs, including Gavi, the Global Financing Facility, UNITAID, and the World Bank's Pandemic Fund. By consolidating and expanding our mandate, Aidspan can help to more broadly ensure the accountability, effectiveness and coherence of global health financing.

Table 1: Aidspan's expertise and approach

Area of Expertise	Approach	Results
Independent watchdog	• Holds an observer role on the Global Fund Board • Critical analysis of complex data and policies • A trusted neutral observer with unique access and constructive dialogue	• Timely access to information relevant to implementers • Relevant information is accessible to all
Enhancing effectiveness of grant implementation	• Critical reflection on the role of country accountability structures and direct support to in-country institutional capacity — SAIs • Explains and simplifies complex data and information	• Improved country ownership of programmes • Improved transparency and accountability over grant implementation • Inclusive ownership of programmes beyond health leadership
Convening power	• Neutral, legitimate and trusted convenor of multiple sectors • Facilitates roundtable discussions for knowledge and strategy sharing • Engages across language barriers (English & French) • Intentional diverse team representative of implementing-country programmes	• Neutralises spaces of engagement between civil society, implementers, governments, and donors • Enhanced inclusivity in grant implementation — implementers, policy-makers, donors • Contextual legitimacy — rapport among diverse stakeholders • Network of over 16,000 individuals engaged through multiple media
Resource centre for reliable and timely information	• Newsletters (GFO & OFM) • Website with analysis, explainers and data analytics.	• Critical analysis of grant implementation, donor processes and policies • Timely updates on crucial information from donors to implementers • Open-access resources in English & French.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

Over the next five years (2023–2028), we will continue to hone our unique role as an independent watchdog of the Global Fund and evolve to apply our specialised accountability function and expertise to complementary GHIs. We will know we have achieved this when there is:

- **Effectiveness of grant implementation**
  - Elimination of implementation barriers
  - Enhanced GHI efficacy to reduce inequities
  - Accessible, relevant and up-to-date information and data on GHIs for implementers and beneficiaries
  - Accessible information that supports decision-making for the effectiveness of GHIs.

- **Sustainability of funded programmes**
  - Greater focus on resilient and sustainable systems for RSSH
  - Increased reliance on in-country institutions to ensure the accountable use of donor resources.

- **Improved accountability of GHI grants and country initiatives**
  - Engagement with implementing partners who support mutually-reinforcing enabling factors
  - Increased involvement of key in-country institutions, including parliament, judiciary and SAIs in enhancing transparency and accountability of donor-funded programmes.

To achieve this, we are committed to the following strategic pillars:

PILLAR **1** **Independent observer of the Global Fund and other global health initiatives**

We will build on our successful track record to comprehensively observe and evaluate the implementation of the Global Fund and other GHIs and their impact on communities and beneficiaries by:

- Tracking the rapidly evolving role of the Global Fund and linkages to other GHIs.

- Deepening Aidspan's independent observer role at all levels, from Board through to country implementation.

- Enhancing a better understanding and use of partnerships between national structures and GHIs.

PILLAR **2** Increase transparency, accountability and effectiveness

We are committed to saving lives and improving health outcomes for populations affected by HIV, TB and malaria and to broader health equity. Our work with countries, implementers, the Global Fund and other GHIs will enhance grant implementation's effectiveness, coordination and accountability. We will achieve this by:

- Building and strengthening the capacity of country structures to enhance the effectiveness of processes for programme planning and implementation.
- Facilitating and improving alignment, coordination and accountability among the Global Fund and other development partners at the country level.
- Comprehensively evaluating programme implementation and impact on communities and beneficiaries.

PILLAR **3** Communicate for change & influence

Our communication is intentional. All our communications aim to effect change and influence better outcomes. We empower countries, implementers and communities by:

- Analysing and explaining complex global health initiative issues.
- Convening key constituencies from national to global levels to support information sharing, collaboration and decision-making.
- Developing and facilitating feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement of programme implementation and accountability.

PILLAR **4** Build and strengthen strategic partnerships

Accountability, transparency and effectiveness of grant implementation require collaboration. We will grow our current network of partners across different levels and for different objectives.

This includes:

- Building and strengthening partnerships with those interested in GHI governance, transparency, and accountability.
- Leveraging technologies for communication and collaboration to build and strengthen partnerships.
- Developing partnerships with the secretariats of GHIs other than the Global Fund.

Aidspan finances its work through grants from foundations and bilateral donors and does not receive money from The Global Fund.

ANNEX: AIDSPAN 2023–2028 STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Pillar (Objective)	Sub-objective	Activities
P1: Independent observer of the Global Fund and other global health initiatives (GHIs) Comprehensively observe and evaluate the implementation of the Global Fund and its impact on communities and beneficiaries	SO1.1: Track the rapidly evolving role of the Global Fund and linkages to other GHIs.	a) Observe Global Fund and GHI processes at global, regional and national levels b) Use diverse and exclusive information sources to conduct evaluations on the effectiveness of the Global Fund and other GHIs
	SO1.2: Deepen Aidspan's independent observer role at all levels, from Board through to country implementation	a) Facilitate information sharing between stakeholders by observing relevant meetings, convening stakeholder dialogue sessions, and publishing the GFO OFM b) Strengthen Aidspan's internal capacity as an observer c) Utilise feedback from stakeholders to continuously improve
	SO1.3: Enhance a better understanding and and use of partnerships between national structures and GHIs.	a) Collect and disseminate information on GHI's engagement with and utilisation of in-country accountability and implementation structures
P2: Increase transparency, accountability, and effectiveness (of GHIs and Aidspan) Strengthen effectiveness, coordination and accountability of grant implementation among GHIs, including the Global Fund at the country level.	SO2.1: Build and strengthen the capacity of country structures to enhance the effectiveness of processes for programme planning and implementation	a) Build the capacity of national governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) to strengthen their audit and accountability efforts b) Build community capacity to ensure grant effectiveness c) Contribute to professional development and in-country capacity for enhancing grant accountability by providing a platform to host local and international internships and fellowships
	SO2.2: Facilitate and improve alignment, coordination and accountability among the Global Fund and other development partners at the country level	a) Develop and implement joint accountability projects with strategic government partners b) Evaluate GHI's efforts to enhance alignment with country systems and influencing reforms c) Advocate for the alignment and coordination of GHIs at the country level
	SO2.3: Evaluate programme implementation and impact on communities and beneficiaries.	a) Evaluate GHI programmes, e.g. process, grant effectiveness (equity, factors influencing performance) and cost-effectiveness studies b) Observe and assess the effectiveness of grant-implementing organisations before, during, and at the end of programmes c) Evaluate Aidspan's own effectiveness

P3: Communicate for change and influence Communicate to influence the effectiveness of grant implementation and accountability for GHIs.	**SO3.1:** Analyse and explain complex GHI issues	a) Develop simplified guides for implementers, e.g. for funding applications, stakeholder engagement, procurement and supply chain management policies b) Enhance access to data on Aidspan's website to aid decision-making by grant implementers c) Capture and (re)package information to meet internal and external needs through multiple mediums, including GFO/OFM, website, social media and presentations d) Develop and operationalise Aidspan's editorial policy to ensure all products advance the organisational mission and core values
	SO3.2: Convene key constituencies from national to global levels to support information sharing, collaboration and decision-making	a) Convene multistakeholder dialogues to facilitate the use of evidence and learning in GHI policies and implementation b) Collaborate and form partnerships with networks, alliances, forums, and platforms that seek to influence GHI policies
	SO3.3: Develop and facilitate feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement of programme implementation and accountability.	a) Convene dialogues and workshops with CSOs to strengthen their engagement with GHI programmes b) Assess the meaningful engagement of communities in the implementation of GHIs in-country, and communicate the findings
P4: Build and strengthen strategic partnerships Expand current networks to build and strengthen collaborative partnerships for accountability, transparency and effectiveness of GHIs	**SO4.1:** Build and strengthen partnerships with those interested in GHI governance, transparency, and accountability.	a) Partner with CSOs engaging in similar processes b) Collaborate with think tanks, governments, CSOs and institutions to improve knowledge, monitoring and implementation of GHIs c) Deepen partnerships with existing funders and develop partnerships with new funders to progress common missions by strengthening the accountability of investments d) Generate sufficient resources for the growth and continuity of Aidspan's operations e) Identify and manage potential conflicts of interest at the inception of new projects/programmes/interventions to ensure independence and impartiality
	SO4.2: Leverage technologies for communication and collaboration to build and strengthen partnerships	a) Utilise technology and digital systems to improve partner engagement in monitoring and evaluation processes. b) Optimise the use of technology for internal and external partner communication, coordination and knowledge management
	SO4.3: Develop partnerships with the secretariats of GHIs other than the Global Fund.	a) Strengthen relationships and partnerships with the Global Fund Secretariat and develop new relationships with other GHI secretariats b) Partner with GHI secretariats, e.g., capacity-building projects to strengthen country systems for accountability and generation of country-specific data.