

GLOBAL FINANCING FACILITY TWENTIETH INVESTORS GROUP MEETING REPORT

The Investors Group (IG) of the Global Financing Facility (GFF) held a virtual meeting on June 4, 2025. The meeting (IG20) was chaired by Johanneke de Hoogh, Head of the Global Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, who represented Her Excellency Pascale Grotenhuis, Vice Minister for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, at this IG meeting. This report presents key points of discussion and outcomes.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The IG members approved the nineteenth Investors Group (IG19) meeting report.
- The Honorable Minister Demby, Minister of Health for Sierra Leone and Chair of the GFF Ministerial Network, provided an update of the recent meeting of the ministers in Geneva during the World Health Assembly (WHA78) in May 2025.
- The GFF Secretariat presented types of support available to assess disruptions in countries following the changing funding landscape, implications for service delivery, and approaches to prioritization.
- IG members provided feedback to the GFF Secretariat on a draft concept note on the GFF's next five-year strategy, which was informed by the Strategy Steering Group and widespread consultations. The full strategy paper will be drafted over the summer and revised on the basis of additional feedback, and the final strategy will be presented to the IG in fall 2025.

Opening Remarks

As Co-Chair of the IG, Ms. Johanneke de Hoogh opened the meeting with brief opening remarks and invited IG members to approve both the IG19 meeting report as well as the agenda for the IG20 meeting. Both items were approved.

Ministerial Network Update

The Honorable Dr. Austin Demby, Minister of Health for Sierra Leone and Chair of the GFF Ministerial Network, provided a readout of the key outcomes of the Ministerial Network meeting, which took place on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly.

He conveyed that the ministers shared a message of persistence in addressing global health challenges, urgency for systems responsive to the unique burden of disease of each country, and a call to accelerate progress toward sustainable financing and better health outcomes for women, children and adolescents. Minister Demby conveyed the opportunity for reduced reliance on external aid, and strengthening domestic health policies, governance

structures and financing mechanisms. He also relayed that collaboration is key and the GFF serves as an essential platform to achieve health sovereignty and self-reliance, ultimately improving health outcomes globally.

GFF Director's Remarks

Juan Pablo Uribe, Global Director for Health Nutrition and Population at the World Bank and Director of the GFF, highlighted the Bank's target of reaching 1.5 billion people with quality, affordable health services by 2030— noting the unique role GFF plays and that World Bank projects have already reached 198 million people. Juan Pablo underscored the need for IG members to help ensure the next GFF strategy is impactful and captures the areas where GFF is sits at the intersection of relevance and distinctiveness.

Secretariat Update

Luc Laviolette, Head of the GFF Secretariat, highlighted the secretariat's recent and upcoming activities, including visits to Canada and Norway marking 10 years of the GFF; participation in global events (Nutrition for Growth Summit, where the GFF signed the UK-led Compact on Nutrition Integration, the World Bank/International Monetary Fund Spring Meetings, and WHA78 as well as the upcoming Cervical Cancer Forum and Financing for Development Conference. He shared that the GFF is building on ongoing collaborations with Gavi, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNITAD, and the private sector, including Laerdal Global Health. He also underscored the GFF's unique comparative advantage in the operationalization of the World Bank gender strategy and International Development Association (IDA) policy targets.

On the Lusaka Agenda, he shared that the GFF is closely collaborating with Gavi and the Global Fund, including as part of the Joint Committee Working Group (JCWG). The GFF is active in the health systems strengthening and country engagement workstreams. He further highlighted the positive results of the impact evaluation of the Safer Births Bundle of Care (SBBC) program in Tanzania, a partnership between Laerdal Global Health, Norway, GFF, UNICEF and others. Results demonstrated a 75 percent reduction in maternal deaths and 40 percent reduction in early neonatal deaths, a major milestone for evidence-based investments in maternal and newborn health. Building from the last IG and discussions on civil society and youth engagement, Luc updated on the next phase of this work through a partnership with CIVIC, a World Bank program that works with civil society organizations (CSOs) to link grants closer to country operations and leverage GFF investment cases for deeper civil society engagement. Further details on the process will be shared in a webinar in July 2025 (invitation to be shared soon). Finally, on the effort to maximize the impact of the IG, there has been a shift to focus on in-depth interviews with stakeholders and a survey to all IG members (to be launched in the coming weeks), complemented by research into comparators on best practices. The objective remains to ensure the IG is fit-for-purpose to deliver on its mandate in today's complex global health context, while ensuring links to the strategy development process. Recommendations emerging from this initiative will be presented to the IG in the fall.

Disruption Analysis

Peter Hansen, Results and Learning Lead at the GFF, presented the GFF's support to partner countries to assess funding gaps, analyze disruptions in service delivery, and strengthen evidence-informed prioritization and adaptation, considering the financial disruptions countries are facing. This additional support aims to maximize positive health impacts and avoid backtracking in outcomes for women, children and adolescents. These efforts are evolving in a dynamic landscape; the IG meeting presented an opportunity to discuss key areas for alignment

and collaboration with partners, including complementing ongoing efforts by others. Country demand for this type of support continues to grow as initial efforts are underway. IG members were invited to provide feedback on how the GFF can most effectively support countries and to indicate key opportunities for collaboration to reduce fragmentation and strengthen alignment.

The IG expressed the following feedback:

- IG members welcomed GFF support in this area and confirmed the need to conduct rapid assessments in light of disruptions. They also highlighted the need for support to understand the implications of these disruptions in terms of decision making, and demand for GFF support at this stage as well.
- They commented on the importance of efficiency gains, and the risk of dependence on donors with the need for a broader outlook on global health funding support. Optimization of resources has become more pressing than ever, as has putting contingency plans in place.
- They asked about the role of the World Bank in this work as well as the involvement of other actors, for example, the private sector.
- Finally, they stressed the need to move intentionally from assessment to action.

GFF Secretariat response:

- The scope of this analysis needs to consider many different sources, including the GFF, World Bank, United Nations agencies, GAVI, Global Fund and other global health initiatives (GHIs), in addition to the feedback that is emerging from CSOs.
- The secretariat has a range of tools available, including frequent assessments and system tools for resilience (FASTR) and resource mapping and expenditure tracking (RMET), to support prioritization.
- With regards to addressing the funding gaps, the GFF is not considered a “gap filler,” but rather fulfills a significant catalytic function, including through IDA.
- Trade-offs can occur between rapid, agile approaches on the one hand, and longer-term institutionalization efforts on the other. The GFF follows the lead of countries in determining the optimal balance. The strategy development process also offers an opportunity to refine how the GFF model can strengthen country-led processes for conducting rapid assessments, to inform prioritization and adaptation while also enhancing systems improvements over time.
- The GFF can only pursue this work in close collaboration with partners and will continue to learn from experience and refine the approach.

Actions:

- The GFF will continue to engage with partner countries to confirm demand and align on concrete next steps responsive to what partner countries find most relevant and helpful, while building upon country processes that already exist.
- The GFF will complement existing partner initiatives and data to build a comprehensive picture of disruptions, to be able to address them through a joined-up approach in close collaboration with partners.

Strategy Update and Discussion

Christina Schrade, Managing Director of SEEK Development, updated the IG on the GFF strategy process, which is at a crucial juncture. Widespread global and country consultations have been underway since the end of March and are continuing into July. Feedback received thus far has informed development of a concept note

outlining a proposed set of objectives and priority areas for the strategy. Following completion of the consultations, comments will be reflected in the first draft of the full strategy, which will be prepared over the summer in consultation with the Strategy Steering Group and then revised and presented for endorsement by the IG in fall 2025. Key issues raised in the consultations include: the GFF's distinct role within the World Bank and the global health architecture; GFF's focus on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition (RMNCAH-N); health system strengthening; financial sustainability; and gender and sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

Luc presented the draft strategy concept note to the IG. He underscored that the concept note is premised on strong support for the GFF's country-led and country-driven results model; the need to safeguard progress on health outcomes for women, children, and adolescents, and to accelerate progress in certain areas; and the intent for the GFF to remain nimble during a period of major disruptions in global health and anticipating reforms in the global health architecture.

He shared that the first strategic objective proposed in the concept note is to bolster country-led financing for women's, children's, and adolescent health and nutrition, including maximizing IDA resources, increasing on-budget external financing and alignment with country government systems, and optimizing government budgeting and strategic purchasing. The second proposed strategic objective is to accelerate impact at scale, including by differentiating support to countries, scaling access to quality lifesaving commodities, and scaling proven service delivery innovations to drive efficiency gains and access to quality care. The third proposed strategic objective is to strengthen country leadership and capacity to protect investments in women's, children's, and adolescent health and nutrition and promote country adaptation and resilience, including helping countries respond to ongoing shifts in the global health ecosystem, bolstering resilience and sustainability of country systems to respond to future shocks, and investing in strong country leaders and locally sourced technical assistance and innovations.

The concept note also proposes four cross-cutting areas: integrating gender and equity across the GFF portfolio; maximizing the catalytic impact of the GFF-World Bank Group collaboration; strengthening results measurement and learning; and securing predictable funding over the next five years to deliver on the strategy.

Update from the Ministerial Network Strategy Consultation by Honorable Minister Demby, Minister of Health of Sierra Leone

A consultation on the strategy concept note was held with the Ministerial Network on the sidelines of the WHA78 in Geneva on 20 May 2025. Ministers of Health and representatives from 16 countries attended and expressed strong support for the GFF. As chair of the Ministerial Network, Minister Demby shared the following key messages from the ministers regarding the development of the new strategy:

- Ministers emphasized that they see the GFF as a trusted partner with a clear commitment to empowering country leadership and country leadership and ownership.
- Ministers strongly endorsed the GFF's role in driving alignment of external funding and coordination among development partners and stakeholders around country plans and priorities, and they requested that it ramp up its efforts on increasing alignment.
- Ministers highlighted the GFF's role as a catalyst to mobilize additional resources and achieve greater efficiency in utilization of funds.

- Ministers' priorities for increased GFF support in the next strategy period included digitalization of health systems; resource mapping; national data systems for decision making; and strengthening primary health care systems to improve outcomes for women, children and adolescents.
- Ministers also expressed interest in increased support for optimizing supply chains and scaling proven innovations as well as fostering South-South collaboration.

Feedback from IG members on the strategy concept note:

- IG members expressed broad support overall for the strategic objectives and priorities outlined in the concept note and recommended that the GFF stay focused on its core mandate for women's, children's, and adolescent health and nutrition, building on its ability to influence World Bank IDA financing as well as its systems approach as key strengths.
- They requested to more clearly articulate the "what" and the "how" of the GFF's impact, and to articulate the GFF's role and unique value-add vis-à-vis other global health initiatives (GHIs in the evolving global health architecture).
- They requested that the strategy be clear as to what the GFF will prioritize and deprioritize.
- They supported the proposal to mainstream gender and equity across the GFF portfolio but also emphasized the need for rigorous and ongoing measurement to ensure this is deliberate and to avoid dilution. The need for a strong focus on marginalized communities and clarity on how GFF will operate in fragile contexts and hard-to-reach areas was also raised.
- They requested that the strategy outline the GFF's commitment and approach to strengthening inclusion of civil society and youth.
- They stressed the importance of emphasizing SRH in the strategy as a continuing priority for the GFF, given the global funding and policy threats to SRH.
- They reinforced finding the right balance between protecting the core GFF financing and creating opportunities to accelerate progress in certain areas through creation of targeted new windows—while also ensuring that the GFF maintains its strong focus on country ownership.
- Given the fast-shifting global health and development landscape, they suggested that the strategy remain adaptable over time.
- They recognized the GFF's power in aligning stakeholders and recommended that the strategy articulate how the GFF will promote this going forward in line with the key shifts outlined in the Lusaka Agenda for the Future of Global Health Initiatives.
- They encouraged the GFF to be ambitious in the strategy and emphasized that the GFF has a clear opportunity to distinguish itself through its catalytic financing and country-led engagement model.
- They stressed that the strategy should prioritize support for domestic resource mobilization (DRM), with a specific focus on helping countries optimize their budget execution to unlock and prioritize more resources for women's, children's, and adolescent health and nutrition.
- They expressed support for the GFF to support scaling access to commodities but stressed that the GFF should clearly delineate its role and value-add vis-à-vis other global partners.
- IG members also appreciated the innovations to scale experience in Tanzania through the Safer Births Bundle of Care program as an encouraging example of impact, commenting that it "takes a system to save a life."

GFF Secretariat response:

- The GFF Secretariat confirmed that the predominant focus area of the new strategy will be around maximizing core financing for countries, and that support for accelerating progress in specific areas and scaling innovations through targeted funding windows is envisioned as an additional “layer” of potential funding beyond core grant support. It was noted that windows could be an opportunity for specific new non-traditional donors to contribute to select causes.
- On the GFF’s future role on scaling commodities, the GFF welcomed further suggestions on how it can delineate its role and comparative advantage vis-à-vis other global actors.
- The new strategy will emphasize the unique position of the GFF within the World Bank and the opportunity to leverage IDA, and the GFF’s ability to deliver expertise focused on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in the context of larger health operations.
- Gender and equity will remain core priorities for the GFF; the intent is to ensure that gender and equity are more consistently prioritized upfront in the design phase of operations and then tracked through a robust set of key performance indicators (KPIs).
- The secretariat will provide greater clarity on what it will deprioritize in the new strategy.
- On private sector engagement, the GFF has the potential to expand its existing engagement utilizing public-private partnership models in service delivery and supply chains. This will be further articulated in the strategy.
- On country engagement, the GFF is present in 12 of the 16 countries with the highest burdens of maternal and child mortality based on the latest analysis; this is informing the proposed approach to differentiating country support in the future and find ways to reach more high-burden countries not currently receiving GFF support.

Action: The GFF Secretariat will complete ongoing consultations and develop the first draft of the full strategy over the summer in consultation with the Strategy Steering Group. This will be followed by further revisions based on feedback and presentation of the final draft for endorsement by the IG in fall 2025.

Chair’s Closing Message

The chair closed the meeting by thanking all partners for their active participation, ending with a summary of the key outcomes from the IG meeting, as outlined in this report.

A statement was issued following the meeting, available online:

<https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/news/governance-announcement/gff-governing-bodies-convene-pivotal-moment-gff-develops-its-next-5>

All IG meeting materials including minutes are available in French and English on the GFF website:

<https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/resource/twentieth-investors-group-meeting>