

Quality Assurance of Investment Cases

1. Background

The Investment Case is at the heart of the GFF approach to smart financing, as it identifies the “best buys” in each country and facilitates channeling financing to them, including by supporting the prioritization of approaches in view of the resources available. Ensuring that Investment Cases are high quality is therefore critical to the overall success of the GFF.*

There are three key elements to this:

- Guidance on the process, content, and methodologies for the development of Investment Cases;
- Technical assistance to ensure that countries are supported in the development of Investment Cases;
- A quality assurance (QA) process.

On the first, the GFF Business Plan defines the overall approach for the development of Investment Cases, which is handled by national stakeholders led by the government. At the request of countries, further details about the process, contents, and methodology for the Investment Case are being developed. This guidance will be an important starting point for the QA process, but is not the focus of this note and so is not addressed further herein.

The second is the subject of a separate background paper to the GFF Investors Group, so is also not addressed herein, although it is important to note that there will need to be close coordination between technical assistance providers and the QA mechanism described in this paper.

As outlined in the Business Plan based on discussions in the Oversight Group, the Investment Case is subject to a QA process that is intended to help improve the quality of the document and thereby build confidence among potential investors (domestic as well as international) in financing the Investment Cases.† The experience of the frontrunner countries has also highlighted some challenges (such as around the difficulty of prioritizing) that a more structured approach to QA could have assisted with.

* This note focuses solely on Investment Cases and does not address health financing strategies, as the technical requirements for health financing strategies are considerably different and so will likely require a different process. This will be addressed in a separate note for a subsequent meeting of the Investors Group.

† The value of an impartial assessment is not limited solely to the development of Investment Cases: continued assessment can be important as investments are made and countries proceed with the process of implementation. This ties directly into the approaches taken for monitoring and evaluating progress, and so links to existing

2. Objective of the Quality Assurance Process

Ideally, the QA process for the GFF would fulfill two distinct objectives:

- 1) To support countries to improve the quality of their Investment Cases;
- 2) To provide assurance to potential financiers of an Investment Case (both ministries of finance and international partners) that it represents a technically sound approach and is in line with international standards.

The challenge that the GFF faces is that recent experience has shown that it is not easy to simultaneously achieve both of these objectives. For example, the Joint Assessment of National Strategies (JANS) organized by the International Health Partnership+ (IHP+) has essentially the same two objectives, but its own review of the use of JANS revealed that it was more successful at the former than the latter.[‡] In contrast, the QA processes employed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, have been more removed from the development of the materials being assessed and so generally are perceived as focusing primarily on the second objective.

This experience suggests that it would be easier operationally to prioritize one of these objectives over the other. However, both of the objectives relate directly to core principles of the GFF. Country ownership is at the heart of the GFF approach, which highlights the importance of ensuring that the QA process is meaningful for countries themselves. The second objective is tied to the broader aim of the GFF to act as a facility that improves alignment of financing for RMNCAH. Ideally, a broad set of partners would rely on the GFF QA process to feel comfortable financing an Investment Case without needing to undertake a set of parallel assessments that create significant burdens for countries. Achieving this will require further discussions with individual financiers and so is likely to be a progressive shift rather than an immediate sea change (and it is recognized that some partners will need to continue with their existing internal QA processes regardless of the GFF approach).

The approach described in this paper is aimed at establishing a QA process that fulfills both objectives. At the heart of the approach is an effort to shift QA away from being a one-off exercise that passes judgment on an Investment Case at the end of a planning process, to instead focus on challenging countries to refine their thinking by asking constructive questions at several key checkpoints in the process. This is accomplished through a process that is “close to the ground”, rather than relying on the submission of documents to a global structure. The QA process must also bring an objective perspective to the process.

3. Principles Guiding Quality Assurance of Investment Cases

A set of principles have been developed to guide the QA process, which should:

mechanisms such as IHP+ and the role of partners such as H4+. As it is a broader and more heterogeneous issue it will not be covered in this note.

[‡] “Early evidence suggests that use of the JANS as a developmental tool for sector strategies has been broadly successful, resulting in stronger or more complete national health sector strategies. There is less evidence of its impact on funding decisions and transaction costs.” World Health Organization, “How to conduct a joint assessment of a national health strategy (JANS), based on country experience”, August 2013.

- Be conducted in a manner that is flexible, relevant to the specific country context, and coordinated through the country platform;
- Provide timely and regular feedback to the country team over the course of the development of the Investment Case, rather than simply passing judgment at the end of the process;
- Be oriented to finding solutions rather than simply critiquing;
- Have an independent element;
- Bring external credibility to the process;
- Uphold the highest quality standards by being conducted by teams of experts that are familiar with both the latest technical knowledge globally and the national context;
- Contribute to the general learning and capacity building of country stakeholders.

4. Elements of the QA Process

The QA process should help ensure that Investment Cases are in line with the GFF guidance on Investment Cases, by:

- 1) Assessing the analytical work that underpins the Investment Case to ensure that it has rigorously assessed the current situation of women, adolescents, and children and the determinants of this, with a particular emphasis on equity;
- 2) Reviewing the theory of change set out in the Investment Case to confirm that the approach described will put the country on a trajectory to achieve its longer term (2030) vision;
- 3) Confirming that selected interventions and strategies address the continuum of care, are based on evidence, are accepted as high impact and cost-effective, and respond to the country's epidemiological pattern, identified implementation bottlenecks and key opportunities within the national context;
- 4) Ensuring that gender, equity, and rights underpin the Investment Case, in particular by focusing on whether under-funded issues such as family planning or nutrition, or neglected groups such as adolescents and populations that are disadvantaged economically, socially, and/or geographically are appropriately reflected in the Investment Case;
- 5) Confirming that the Investment Case includes clear prioritization of strategies, interventions, target populations, and geographies that is based on a realistic assessment of resource availability (or scenarios for different levels of resource availability) and the GFF principles (e.g., equity), including by confirming that:
 - a. Modeling or other analytical approaches have been appropriately used to compare between different options for intervention mix, service delivery approaches, etc.;
 - b. Appropriate shifts in service delivery are proposed to address the obstacles that have been identified, including the modes of delivery (public, private, not for profit) and the location of delivery (facility, household, community);
 - c. Health system constraints (e.g., on human resources for health, supply chain management, regulatory barriers) and the challenges related to demand for services are adequately addressed;
 - d. Complementary activities (e.g., community engagement, advocacy) are incorporated;
 - e. Multisectoral determinants of the health of women, adolescents, and children (e.g., related to sectors such as WASH, nutrition, education, social protection, and gender)

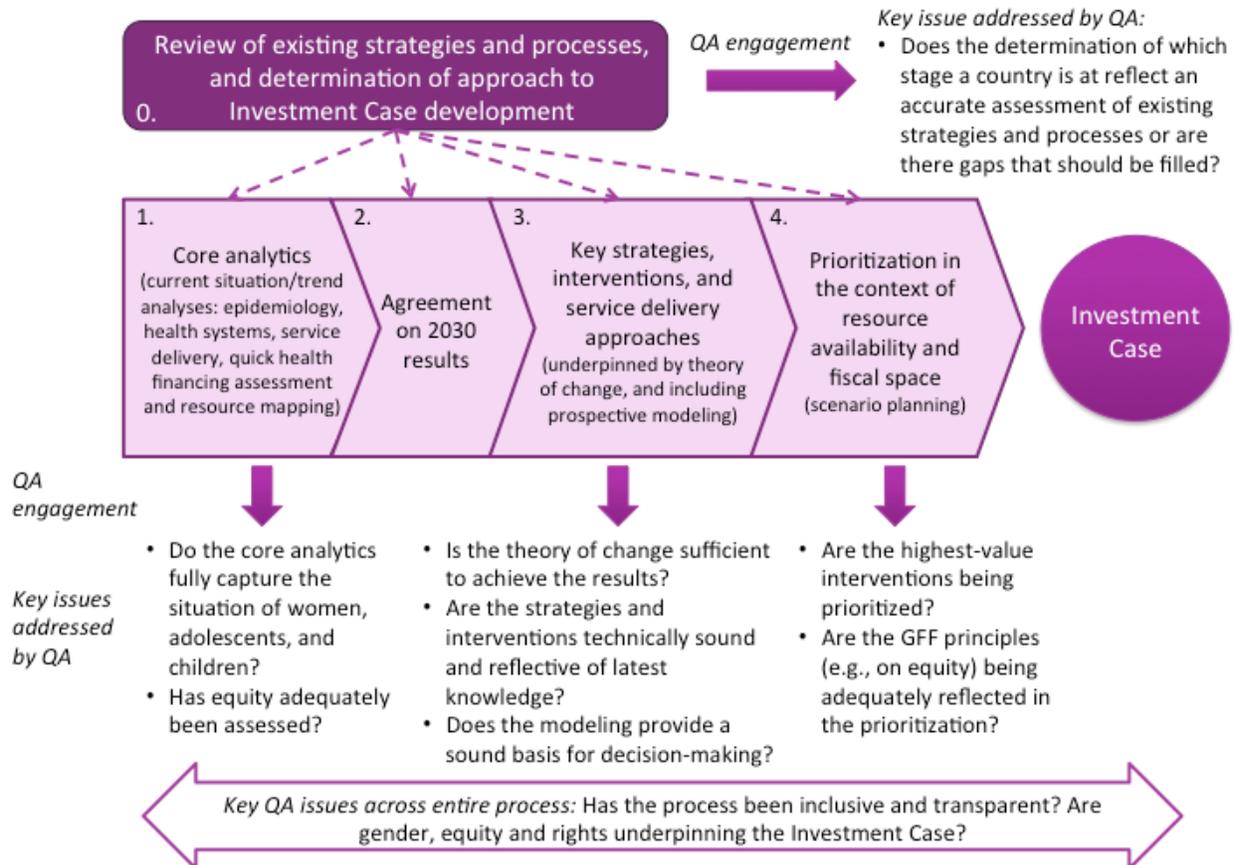
have been assessed and considered for inclusion in the Investment Case, reviewing associated strategies/plans/cases in these sectors as necessary;

- 6) Checking that CRVS and the health financing strategy are closely linked to the Investment Case;
- 7) Assessing the reasonableness of the cost estimates;
- 8) Assessing inclusivity and transparency during the development of the Investment Case.

5. Operational approach

As noted above, the QA process will be “close to the ground” and is aimed at challenging the thinking underlying the Investment Case rather than imposing external ideas of what should be in it.

The development of an Investment Case has multiple steps, as set out at a high level in the figure below. QA should come in at multiple points throughout this process. This requires the QA approach to be modular, such that it can focus on different elements at different points in the process of developing an Investment Case. As suggested in the figure below, the issues that are addressed vary across the stages of Investment Case development.⁵



⁵ This also enables a flexible approach to be taken depending on how a country is approaching the Investment Case process and whether existing materials already cover portions of the Investment Case process or whether the country is engaging in the entire process. This diversity has already been seen among the frontrunner countries, with, for example, Tanzania having conducted a significant amount of analytical work and identification of

The implication of this approach is that the QA requires an institutional arrangement that can engage regularly throughout the Investment Case process. In most of the countries in which the GFF operates, there are local academic institutions that are the most likely candidates to play this role (although a country-by-country assessment has not been completed to identify institutions). In the event that no suitable local institution can be identified, there are academic institutions in each region in which the GFF operates that could play this role.

The experience of the JANS process has identified three primary ways in which a country can engage with a QA mechanism, as shown in the following table:

| Who does the JANS | Pros | Cons |
|--|---|---|
| In country partner reviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know the country context well. Opportunity for non-government partners to provide inputs to the strategy in a structured and comprehensive way. Can build on existing working arrangements such as technical working groups. Can engage new stakeholders to bring in an independent element e.g. academics. Creates common ownership of the Strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In some contexts it may be difficult for stakeholders to be critical of government documents. Opens up to lobbying from particular interest groups and pressure to take on board every partner's issues. Possibly a challenge to ensure the full range of skills. Will need to demonstrate how there is some independence built into the team. |
| Fully independent team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly independent, which should enhance credibility of JANS findings to funding partners who use the JANS in making funding decisions. May give the assessment higher profile and make it easier to engage top level staff and ministers and facilitate dialogue between levels and across partners. Provides fresh and neutral perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If independent team members are not familiar with the country (e.g. international experts), their lack of knowledge of context could make assessing feasibility more difficult. However this can be addressed by including team members who know the country context well. If there are assessors from outside the country this can be costly. However, the costs may be lower overall if the JANS replaces multiple separate assessments by different partners. |
| Combination of fully independent experts and less independent assessors or facilitators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a clear independent element to the team. Provides detailed knowledge and understanding of the strategy. Including people involved in strategy development could help to ensure JANS recommendations are relevant, understood and adopted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team can get quite large, with associated transaction costs, if there are both independent assessors and facilitators. |

Source: JANS, "How to conduct a Joint Assessment of a National Health Strategy (JANS), based on country experience" (p. 11)

The first approach of in-country partner reviews does not conform to the principles of the GFF process and so is not a good model for the QA mechanism (and in practice was not as common in the JANS experience as the other options). However, both the independent team and the combination approach

interventions prior to the start of the Investment Case process, whereas Kenya decided to undertake a more comprehensive process.

are in line with the GFF principles, so countries have the option of which approach they employ. In the fully independent model, a team from the local institution that played no part in developing the Investment Case (or the particular element of it that is being examined) reviews the materials produced and engages in a dialogue with the team that led the development of the work (typically in a review workshop that enables a productive dialogue and question-asking, but the particularities are determined by each country). In the combination model, a team is set out consisting of both independent experts from the local institution who were not involved and some members of the team that has led the development of the Investment Case, and they collectively review the progress and challenge the thinking in the Investment Case.

In either model, the local institution is responsible for producing a series of reports throughout the process that highlight key issues and questions that the country should consider in the preparation of the Investment Case. These reports would be available to potential financiers of the Investment Case.

6. Management of the QA mechanism

The model of using local institutions to provide QA has considerable benefits in terms of local ownership, capacity building, and the ability to engage regularly throughout the Investment Case process. However, it does require a global structure to identify the local institutions, contract them, and ensure that the feedback they provide to countries is technically sound and conforms to the GFF guidance on the Investment Cases.

The Technical Working Group considered four options for a structure that could play this role:

- An academic institution;
- The Countdown to 2015 initiative;
- The IHP+ Secretariat;
- A private sector firm (e.g., a firm that specializes in quality assurance).

The Technical Working Group did not reach a conclusion on which option would be best, in part because further discussions are needed with these different actors, including on the cost implications of each of them and how QA would be financed. Additionally, further engagement is needed with key financiers so as to understand more about the aspects of QA that are particularly important for each of them to feel confident financing a quality assured Investment Case, which is critical because one of the objectives of the entire process is to support the aim of GFF to act as a facility that improves alignment of financing for RMNCAH.

This further work is intended to result in agreement on a mechanism that can work across the entire set of countries involved in the GFF as a facility (i.e., 63 high burden, low- or lower-middle income countries). In the short term, however, the four frontrunner countries and eight second wave countries are moving more rapidly because of financing from the GFF Trust Fund. For these countries, the costs for the QA process will be borne by the GFF Trust Fund. This means that the GFF Secretariat at the World Bank is responsible for the use of these funds and so will handle the contracting associated with the process. The Secretariat is examining the practical implications of this, and will direct contract local institutions and/or will hire one of the entities listed above (an academic institution, the Countdown to

2015 initiative, the IHP+ Secretariat, or a private sector firm) for the process of conducting quality assurance in the short-term.

In addition, it will be important to support the local institutions to learn from each other through South-South exchanges.

7. Elements for Investors Group consideration and proposed next steps

The Technical Working Group reached agreement on the objectives, principles, key elements, and operational approach of the quality assurance approach as outlined in this background paper, and so asks the Investors Group to consider the following questions:

- Does the Investors Group agree with the proposed objectives, principles, and key elements? Are there others that should be added?
- Does the Investors Group agree with an operational approach that is based on repeated engagement throughout the process of developing an Investment Case and is typically led by a local institution?

If the Investors Group is comfortable with the approach, the next step is to engage with the entities that could manage the local institutions and to assess the cost implications of the possible management approaches outlined above. Additionally, key potential financiers of Investment Cases will be approached to understand more about the aspects of QA that are particularly important for them. These discussions will occur in the next several months, with an aim of identifying the most suitable management approach by the end of the year.

In parallel, the guidance on the process, content, and methodologies for the development of Investment Cases will continue to be developed, so that they can serve as key starting points for the QA process.