

UNAIDS

Joint evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS's work on efficient and sustainable financing

Executive summary



Disclaimer

This brief has been authored by CEPA ([CEPA - economics matters](#)). The views expressed in this brief are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNAIDS Secretariat or of any of the individuals or organisations referred to in the report. This is an independent publication by the UNAIDS Evaluation Office, jointly developed with the UNFPA Evaluation Office. All UNAIDS Cosponsors participated in the evaluation.

Any enquiries about this evaluation should be addressed to: Evaluation Office, UNAIDS;
Email: evaluation@unaid.org

The report and related evaluation products are available at
<http://www.unaids.org/en/howweare/evaluation>

Copyright © 2022
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
All rights reserved.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNAIDS concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. UNAIDS does not warrant that the information published in this publication is complete and correct and shall not be liable for any damages incurred as a result of its use.

UNAIDS/JC2996

Executive summary

Background and Objectives of the Evaluation

Changes in the AIDS financing landscape, the fiscal implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new Global AIDS Strategy 2021-26 present an important opportunity to assess the achievements to date and priorities going forward for the UNAIDS Joint Programme's work on efficient and sustainable financing. Specifically, the evaluation had three objectives: (i) to assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the Joint Programme's contribution to financing for the AIDS response over the period 2018-21, (ii) draw conclusions on what is working well, what the Joint Programme should stop doing, and what the gaps are, and (iii) provide forward-looking and actionable recommendations to the Joint Programme for maximising the contributions to efficient and sustainable resourcing of the AIDS response.

Approach and Methodology

An evaluation framework was structured around three aspects of the Joint Programme's functioning (strategy and design, implementation, and results) covering all OECD DAC evaluation criteria. The evaluation employed a theory-based approach, grounded in a theory of change for the Joint Programme's work in efficient and sustainable financing that was developed by the evaluators during the inception period.

The evaluation followed a mixed methods approach to investigate the priority evaluation questions and triangulated evidence from multiple sources to formulate key findings, conclusions and generate recommendations. Methods consisted of review of key materials, data analysis, intervention mapping of the range of activities of the Joint Programme in financing, interviews and focus group discussions with key informants from the Joint Programme and its partners, alongside four country case studies. The four countries selected for the case studies: Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Viet Nam and Kazakhstan, represented diverse fiscal, epidemic and political contexts for the HIV response and thus a mix of priorities and opportunities to strengthen efficient and sustainable HIV financing. These provided key evidence particularly for questions on the Joint Programme's comparative advantage and results achieved. Most interviews were conducted virtually owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and to efficiently maximise the number of stakeholders consulted across global, regional, and country levels.

The evaluation was guided and informed by a small evaluation management group comprised of the UNAIDS Evaluation Office and Joint Programme agencies, and a larger evaluation reference group which included key stakeholders from outside the Joint Programme who provided feedback and contributed to its key findings and recommendations.

Evaluation Messages 'in Brief'

The Joint Programme has made important contributions to improving allocative and technical efficiency of the AIDS response, with support for Investment Cases, National Strategic Plans and Global Fund proposals having the most significant impact.

In countries, UNAIDS comparative advantage of convening power, political advocacy with governments and role as a neutral broker directly contribute to Global Fund and PEPFAR funding processes and domestic commitments to HIV.

The Joint Programme is not sufficiently engaging the financing expertise that exists within the Cosponsor agencies, in particular the World Bank at country level. The Joint Programme should define a coherent approach to efficient and sustainable financing that resonates with the Secretariat and Cosponsors and source the needed capacities, with a light touch coordination mechanism that engages with the Global Fund and PEPFAR on shared objectives.

The Joint Programme's inclusiveness of civil society, community-based organisations and key populations—ensuring their “seat at the table”—is regarded as central to its identity and has directly contributed to funding key population services and community-led responses. More is needed to strengthen their capacity to engage in the financing agenda for sustained community-led responses.

The Joint Programme should create a common vision and improve coordination with regard to the integration of HIV financing within the wider Health and UHC financing agenda, and the analytic products and strategic information that support this approach.

Allocative and technical efficiency, particularly focused on domestic financing, should be a priority for the Joint Programme given it is central to achieving the UNAIDS targets in the constrained funding landscape.

Key Findings

The UNAIDS Secretariat's comparative advantage in efficient and sustainable financing for the HIV response lies in its convening power and political advocacy role. As a “neutral arbiter” UNAIDS can engage key stakeholders in HIV financing discussions.

- With its country presence, UNAIDS has the mandate and has played a crucial coordinating role across governments, donors, civil society, communities, and Cosponsors of the Joint Programme. UNAIDS has played a critical role in increasing the political commitment for HIV in countries, with high-level engagements being a driving factor across multiple countries.

The Joint Programme as a whole makes key contributions to efficient and sustainable HIV financing through analytical work and strategic information, though some tools and data are viewed as more effective than others. Greater coordination between the Secretariat, Cosponsors, the Global Fund and other partners on HIV financing products and tools would bring efficiencies and increase effectiveness.

- The Joint Programme's role as a whole in the creation of analytic projects and strategic information is prime for funders and supports the funding allocations of the Global Fund in particular and also PEPFAR. UNAIDS is regarded as the gatekeeper of all data and information with regards to the AIDS epidemic, which is useful both for resource mobilisation, and for influencing how funders prioritise resources through increasing the visibility of the state of the epidemic amongst key populations (KP) and other gaps in the HIV response.
- While national strategic plans (NSPs), investment cases and sustainability plans are well regarded, there are mixed views on other tools and studies generated through the Joint Programme (e.g. criticisms of the National AIDS Spending Assessments (NASAs) being very resource intensive, and duplicative of other spending assessments). There is a core need for greater coordination amongst the UNAIDS Secretariat, Cosponsors, the Global Fund and other partners with regards to financing strategic information and tools.

The Joint Programme is not adequately engaging the financing expertise that exists within the Cosponsor agencies, undermining the ambition of efficient and sustainable financing for the AIDS response. Greater coherence amongst the Secretariat and Cosponsors is also needed for the financing workstream.

- Within the efficient and sustainable financing workstream, the UNAIDS division of labour which guides the effective leveraging of Cosponsor competencies is not functioning optimally at global nor country levels. There is insufficient engagement by Cosponsors and ad-hoc and haphazard coordination between the Secretariat and Cosponsors, with COVID-19 further impacting joint work. At country level, the division of labour does not reflect how the Secretariat and Cosponsors are operating; in particular, the World Bank's direct engagement with Ministries of Finance is not adequately harnessed for Joint Programme objectives and areas of work, with minimal coordination with other Joint Programme agencies.
- Within the Joint Programme agencies, the agenda for efficient and sustainable financing for the HIV response has lacked coherence. This is amplified by the challenge of the 'HIV focused' mandate of the Joint Programme and that of the Cosponsors which institutionally focus on financing for the SDGs and Health/UHC, with HIV as priority 'within' these. The lack of coherence has spill over effects in terms of the analytic products and strategic information supported by the Joint Programme.

The Joint Programme's inclusiveness of civil society, community-based organisations and key populations—ensuring their “seat at the table”—is regarded as central to its identity within the global AIDS response and has directly contributed to funding key population services and community-led responses. However there has been limited progress in strengthening their capacity to engage in the financing agenda over the long term, presenting a risk to sustainability.

- Joint Programme support to civil society, community-based organisations and key populations to engage in Global Fund processes is regarded as contributing to directing funding towards community responses. Progress on social contracting is viewed as an important contribution to efficiency and sustainability through directing public financing to the AIDS response and improving the effectiveness of community-led service provision, particularly in transition countries. While there are good examples of Joint Programme contribution to political commitment, political will to commit domestic resources to key aspects of the response: prevention, services for KP, community-based organisations (CBOs) and KP-led services remains a challenge. There is also less evidence on the extent the Joint Programme has strengthened civil society, CBO and KP-led organisations' capacity to engage with governments on efficient and sustainable financing.

An 'output-driven culture' in the measurement of the Joint Programme's contribution to efficient and sustainable financing undermines a focus on longer-term results. Investment in advocacy, dissemination, and integrated approaches to follow through Joint Programme-supported analytic products, sustainable financing and transition plans is needed.

- Joint Programme support for national strategic plans and investment cases used for Global Fund processes have directly contributed to increased and more efficient use of resources for the HIV response. However, the view is that the Joint Programme could do far more by leveraging the inclusive country NSP process and the Joint Programme's government relationships to influence policies, thus adding to the sustainability of the HIV response. Stakeholders view the activity and output-based reporting within the Joint Programme Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) prevents this needed focus on longer term outcomes, which would require investment in advocacy alongside the technical support for analytic products.

The Joint Programme has made important contributions to improving allocative and technical efficiency of the AIDS response, and but not enough progress on efficiencies within domestic financing.

- Many stakeholders emphasised that the work on allocative and technical efficiency needs to be a top priority in the HIV financing space given the plateauing of external HIV financing and increased pressure on domestic resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Advancing on allocative and technical efficiencies were considered by many as prerequisite to achieving the ambitious AIDS targets at global and national level and, thus, requires an increased focus on this topic across the Joint Programme. In particular, attention to improving allocative and technical efficiency within domestically financed HIV responses is needed.

In countries transitioning from donor funding, the Joint Programme holds a unique role in improving efficient and sustainable financing.

- In these contexts, there is less scope for donors to influence government through their more modest levels of funding, and so the Joint Programme is regarded as having a crucial role in supporting evidence-based national plans and dialogue with governments, including advocating for policy and programmatic support for KP services and supporting social contracting with governments.

The Joint Programme has supported a Universal Health Coverage (UHC) orientation in global-level strategies but not at the country-level, and there is a need to further define its approach to HIV within the UHC and multisectoral financing context

- Global strategies have embraced a UHC orientation, but the four country case studies in this evaluation found limited to no fundamental shift in financing flows and governance. Coordination within the Joint Programme on HIV and UHC is limited at global and country levels and the high levels of HIV financing compared to other health priorities and reduced UBRF funding are regarded as barriers. To achieve the ambition of the 2021-2026 Global AIDS Strategy, the Joint Programme needs to better define its focus and approach to HIV within the UHC and multisectoral financing context, and match this with appropriate technical expertise.

Recommendations

As the Joint Programme embarks on delivering the 2021-2026 Global AIDS Strategy, it needs to “re-boot” its capacities in HIV financing and leverage its comparative advantages, closely coordinating with PEPFAR and the Global Fund given their prominence in country HIV financing.

Recommendation 1: The Joint Programme should continue to focus and build upon its areas of comparative advantage in financing. Any changes in mandate for the work of the Secretariat should be carefully considered, with clarity on Secretariat roles in relation to its resources and alongside the mandate of the Cosponsors and other organisations.

- The UNAIDS Secretariat should continue to leverage its “neutral arbiter” convenor role and political advocacy for AIDS financing, in close partnership with the key international funders for AIDS including the Global Fund and PEPFAR, and with a renewed approach that reflects the evolving context for HIV within the wider UHC, SDG, and COVID-19 environment. The Joint Programme as a whole should emphasise the work on developing strategic information in support of efficient and sustainable financing, employing an “end-user” lens to ensure alignment of data and information, as well as relevance. The Joint Programme should build on its critical role with regards to engagement and capacity building of civil society, CBOs and KP-led organisations, by supporting their sustainable financing.

Recommendation 2: The Joint Programme should clearly define its approach to efficient and sustainable financing and related work plan for the Secretariat and Cosponsors.

- Based on the new Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026 and UBRAF, UNAIDS should develop a strategy/ concept note for efficient and sustainable financing, with clearly defined overall objectives, the key activities to be undertaken to support the achievement of these objectives and key results, and related resourcing. It should consider issues that reflect the Secretariat core areas of work and financing issues that resonate with the Cosponsor priorities.
- The Joint Programme should move beyond an activity and output-based reporting and measurement approach and focus more on the outcomes of its work in efficient and sustainable financing for the AIDS response.

Recommendation 3: The Joint Programme should leverage additional and the right capacities in support of its goals of efficient and sustainable financing.

- The Joint Programme should set up a coordinating mechanism or “light touch” working group for efficient and sustainable financing, led by co-convenors and the Secretariat, which also engages closely with PEPFAR and the Global Fund. The coordinating mechanism should build upon and leverage other coordinating mechanisms such as the SDG3 Global Action Plan Sustainable Financing Accelerator platform where the range of financing partners are actively engaging and discussions are framed in the context of integration, multisectoral financing and UHC.

Recommendation 4: UNAIDS should continue to evolve its partnership with the key international funders such as PEPFAR and the Global Fund to ensure relevance and added value, whilst continuing to leverage the Joint Programme’s comparative advantage at country level.

- The partnership with the Global Fund should seek to ensure better coordination of analytical products and strategic information and build on the country presence and convening role of the Secretariat and wider Joint Programme to support Global Fund and PEPFAR financing processes.

Recommendation 5: The Joint Programme should further strengthen the engagement and capacity building for civil society, community-based organisations and key population-led organisations to engage in domestic financing dialogues.

- The Joint Programme should continue to strengthen civil society (CSO), community and KP-led organisations’ capacity to engage in national plans and external funding processes. There should be more work to strengthen CSO and KP-led organisations to lobby for and receive funding from domestic sources, with social contracting in transitioning countries and sharing of best practices across countries to be strengthened.

Recommendation 6: The Joint Programme should improve coordination on its analytic work and strategic information on efficient and sustainable financing and develop a common vision around the role of future tools.

- The Joint Programme should develop a strategic vision for its key tools and increase transparency amongst partners by mapping planned and completed analytical products and making them widely available. There should be more processes to encourage and monitor the translation of strategic information into national policy.

Recommendation 7: The work on allocative and technical efficiency should be a priority for the Joint Programme, given plateauing funding for HIV.

- The Joint Programme should elevate its efforts to increase domestic resources to enable achieving the Global AIDS Targets and sustain the gains. There is a need to include quality sustainable financing plans, that include progressive integration, and support effective transition where donors have planned to exit.

Recommendation 8: The Joint Programme should create a common vision and improve coordination with regard to the integration of HIV financing within the wider UHC financing agenda.

- The Joint Programme should develop a clear and well-communicated approach to its work with regards to the integration of HIV within the wider financing agenda. This would entail a careful consideration of where the HIV agenda can inform and amplify the UHC financing agenda that has wide ranging benefits that also advance HIV outcomes. Similarly, it would also involve a careful consideration of the extent to which HIV-specific financing objectives and advocacy efforts increase cross-disease/UHC supportive inefficiencies, and where spill-overs, mutually supportive programme and system investments, integrated systems approach etc are overlooked.



20 Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

+41 22 791 3666
distribution@unaids.org

unaids.org

