Aid investment organisations like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria have an important role in fighting deadly diseases and ending poverty in the most vulnerable communities in the world. In our Viewpoint,1 we critically appraised the Global Fund’s claim of “27 million lives saved”2 and suggested action points for improvement to help counter rising aid scepticism as the Global Fund approached its sixth replenishment conference on Oct 10, 2019.

The action points fall into three dimensions: enhancing transparency about methods and data used for impact assessment by making them publicly available and allowing for independent verification, replication and peer review; acknowledging estimate uncertainty in the absence of robust counterfactuals that risk overstating the Global Fund’s impact by discounting efforts made elsewhere (eg, domestic funding, economic development, or educational activity); and ensuring a clear distinction between the attributional impact of the Global Fund Partnership versus the Global Fund (a non-profit foundation), to build a compelling case for donors to invest into the Global Fund as a standalone instrument, which requires improvements into the rigour of its results measurement.

Timothy Hallett and Katharina Hauck disagree with two of our points. First, they state that any funder should be allowed to make their claim to the contribution of the improvement achieved in a given country in spite of the complexities resulting from multiple stakeholder activity. This is an unreasonable approach because it unacceptably claims impact on behalf of any external funder without an evaluation of the activities financed by the programme to back such claims. A multitude of activity is present in countries funded by the Global Fund, including economic growth, and increasing education levels, as well as several other development programmes. These activities have a role in risk behaviour and access to care and hence outcomes. An evaluation3 by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation and partners on Global Fund countries confirms our conclusion, showing there is little to no link between spending and impact and a dearth of outcome data in the countries evaluated.

The second point relates to the modelling as a means to estimate impact. We did not aim to criticise modelling per se but to highlight the lack of transparency around the modelling methods and data chosen by the Global Fund to make claims about the millions of lives saved. Unless this information becomes publicly available, any such claims remain unverifiable.
The Global Fund and other multi-national funding organisations are required to engage in an open and honest dialogue about the impact their investments are making to secure financial commitments by donors into the future.

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**References**