

IGHN Partnerships Programme

Strategy Paper 2025-2028

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our IGHN Partnerships Programme supports partnerships between Irish health institutions and their counterparts in low and middle-income countries, to improve health outcomes through long-term collaborations. The programme evolved from the ESTHER Ireland programme, a well-established partnerships programme that was an effective and cost-effective model of the institutional health partnership approach (Jones, 2023). This strategy was developed through a consultative process with key stakeholders in Ireland and in partner countries during 2024.

The programme provides a model of support and guidance for partnerships to improve their practice to achieve quality of partnership standards as outlined in the Principles of the IGHN Partnerships Programme below. These standards include mutual benefits, trust and equality, and adherence to national policies and strategies, and the resulting quality of partnership is considered as the foundation for all project objectives.

Principles of the IGHN Partnerships Programme

Adherence to National Policies and Strategies Formal Agreements Between Twinned Institutions Reciprocity: Partners equally involved in all project phases, with mutual benefits and aligned goals

Joint and Equal Responsibility & Accountability

Capability: Institutions have capacity for training, managing funds, andPsychology Practical Training Program sustainable exchanges and interventions

Equity and Respect:
Partnerships are founded on
trust and foster ethical
behaviour and inclusion

Ethics: Principles such as confidentiality, consent, and conflict of interest declarations are upheld

Transparency

Climate Change: Partnerships building climate resilience in health systems **Decolonisation**: Partnerships actively work to dismantle colonial power imbalances, promote local knowledge, and co-design initiatives.



Vision of the IGHN Partnerships Programme

Our vision for the programme is: "To foster sustainable, equitable, and innovative health partnerships that enhance global health outcomes by empowering institutions, building resilient health systems, and promoting the sharing of knowledge and resources across borders. We support partnerships at all stages of development, from newly formed collaborations to established alliances, ensuring comprehensive support and growth opportunities."

Strategic Priority 1: Strengthening Institutional Health Partnerships through Grants

We will provide grants aimed at facilitating the development of partnerships for health system strengthening. The grants programme will comprise of 2 grant types:

Grant Types	Purpose and focus of Grant	Individual grant amount
New partnerships	Seed funding for establishment of the partnership	8-10K
Established partnerships	Strengthen the quality of the partnership and capacity of the partnership to demonstrate impact	8-10K

These catalytic grants are designed to provide the initial momentum needed to spur collaboration and innovation, helping to accelerate the development and sustainability of partnerships.

Strategic Priority 2: Supporting Partnerships on Quality of Partnership, Impact Measurement and Sustaining Funding

Building on our established expertise, standards and tools, including the accreditation process, that have been instrumental in building quality partnerships, we will focus on equipping partnerships with the skills to quantify their impact and to source funding. This will ensure that new partnerships will demonstrate quality of partnership such as adherence to principles including reciprocity and equality and will also develop an evidence base for the work of the partnership that will emerge from this strong foundation. With the capacity to demonstrate their impact, and support in fundraising, partnerships will be better placed to source funding to support the long-term sustainability of the partnership.

Strategic Priority 3: Establishing New and Diversified Sources of Funding for the IGHN Partnership Programme

To sustain and to grow the programme, and to support mature partnerships with larger, multi-annual grants, a diversity of fundings sources will be required in addition to the annual Irish Aid grant that has supported the previous programme. New sources of funding will enable the programme to support the increasing number of mature partnerships that are poised for greater impact. In addition to identifying, and securing additional funding, the IGHN will work to build the robust systems and processes required to manage and report on larger and multiple funds.

In conclusion, the IGHN Partnerships Programme Strategy Paper for 2025-2030 outlines a clear commitment to supporting sustainable, impactful health partnerships between Irish institutions and their counterparts in low- and middle-income countries. By prioritising grants for partnership establishment and strengthening, ensuring partnership quality and measurable impact, and diversifying funding sources, the programme is poised to support long-term collaborations that deliver health systems strengthening. These strategic priorities are rooted in a shared vision of equity, reciprocity and long-term commitment aiming to bring about lasting change through this effective and resource efficient model.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE IGHN PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

The Irish Global Health Network (IGHN) is an independent network of people from different backgrounds, sectors and disciplines who are concerned with health inequalities and issues that impact on the health and development of populations at a global level. The IGHN is particularly committed to addressing the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations within low- and middle-income countries, recognising the social gradients and health disparities that exist within nations. First established in 2004, the IGHN has within its membership, health and development professionals with a keen interest in, and a commitment to influencing education, advocacy, policy and learning. Members come from Ireland and the Global South and span the NGO, health, UN, and academic sectors.

As a network, our primary role is to link organisations and individuals to enhance learning and collaboration. We seek to promote engagement in global health across disciplines. We collaborate with our core partners across the health and development sectors who are central to our ability to deliver value to our members.

Our IGHN Partnerships Programme supports partnerships between Irish health institutions and their counterparts in low and middle-income countries. The programme evolved from the ESTHER Ireland programme, a well-established partnerships programme that was formed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Irish Aid and the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2012. The Global Health Team within the HSE provided the strategic overview for the ESTHER Ireland Programme and the IGHN implemented the programme under a service level agreement with the HSE and funding from Irish Aid until 2024.

Evaluations of the ESTHER programme, as with evaluations of similar initiatives in other regions, consistently demonstrate the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the institutional health partnership approach (Jones, 2023; DFID, 2016). The Institutional Health Partnerships approach is aligned with the approach of the World Health Organisation Twinning Partnerships for Improvement strategy which has shown effective outcomes in improving healthcare systems globally. Additionally, ESTHER Ireland was an influential member of the European ESTHER Alliance, a network that promoted the exchange of best practices, knowledge, and resources among its members, enhancing the impact of health partnerships. The learning from the Alliance is embedded in the practices and tools that form the foundation of this programme.

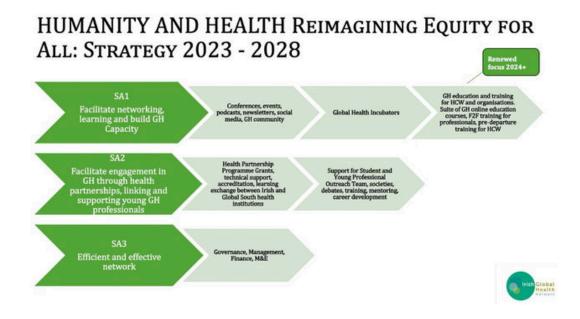
CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE NEW STRATEGY

A decision was reached in 2023, following discussions between Irish Aid, the HSE and the IGHN, for Irish Aid to directly fund the IGHN for the partnerships programme from 2024. This brought about an in-depth consultation process that led to this strategy paper. The process involved a desk review of ESTHER Ireland/ESTHER Alliance resources as well as other relevant literature. An in-person consultation with key stakeholders including partnerships, representatives of the Board, HSE, and IGHN staff was followed by an online consultation with 'Southern Partners' and other partners including an Irish Aid overseas health advisor and those partnerships that were unable to attend the in-person workshop. Irish Aid was additionally consulted as a key stakeholder. Following on from these consultations a draft strategy was shared with the IGHN Board and subsequently discussed. Draft versions were also shared with the HSE and Irish Aid for feedback. A final draft was approved by the IGHN Board in November 2024.

We are continuing the legacy of the ESTHER Ireland programme by taking ownership and setting a new strategic direction under the name of the IGHN Partnerships Programme. This initiative supports high-quality health partnerships aimed at delivering significant health outcomes in the Global South.

IGHN PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME WITHIN IGHN STRATEGY

The IGHN Partnerships Programme operates primarily within Strategic Focal Area 2: 'Facilitate Engagement in Global Health through health partnerships, linking and supporting young global health professionals' outlined in the revised IGHN Strategy, HUMANITY AND HEALTH Reimagining Equity for All: Strategy 2023 – 2028:



The programme promotes learning and networking, cultivating a community of partnerships that mirrors the *IGHN mission of facilitating learning, connection, influence, and engagement for individuals and institutions within the global health community, both in Ireland and worldwide.*

The Partnerships Programme package of support to partnerships include networking and learning, global health education, fundraising, communications and documentation, MEAL including project and budget management, standard setting for partnerships that includes an accreditation process for quality of partnerships, and a small grants programme. The IGHN experience, technical skills, network connections, institutional knowledge, and training and learning expertise complement and support delivery of the Partnerships Programme.

PARTNERSHIPS IN GLOBAL HEALTH

The significance of partnerships in global health has been underscored by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these goals, SDG 17 specifically focuses on fostering partnerships for development. Its' aim is to enhance cooperation between high-income countries and their counterparts in low and middle-income countries, narrowing the disparities through initiatives such as sharing knowledge, transferring technology, and creating research opportunities. Institutional Health Partnerships (IHPs) are an important contribution to this goal. The Irish Aid policy emphasises the importance of partnerships in reaching the poorest and most vulnerable communities, guided by the principle of "leaving no one behind" (Dept Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019)

The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights several critical global health issues, including the ongoing impact of infectious diseases like COVID-19, the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and the escalating threats from climate change, which intensify food insecurity and natural disasters. WHO also underscores the importance of strengthening health systems to achieve universal health coverage and effectively respond to health emergencies. Additionally, humanitarian challenges are increasingly complex, with conflicts, such as those in Sudan, Ethiopia, Palestine and Ukraine, complicating the delivery of impartial aid and leaving many vulnerable populations without adequate support. These issues align closely with Irish Aid's priorities, which emphasize climate action, reducing humanitarian need, and ensuring equitable access to health services, particularly in maternal and child health, to build resilient health systems capable of withstanding future challenges.

The IGHN Partnerships Programme is strategically positioned to contribute to addressing these global health challenges by fostering institutional health partnerships that strengthen health systems in low- and middle-income countries. Through collaborative efforts, the Programme supports the development of sustainable health services that are better equipped to manage both infectious and non-communicable diseases.

INSTITUTIONAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS APPROACH

Our IGHN Partnerships Programme fosters the institutional health partnership (IHP) approach. Partnerships are thus defined as *collaborative relationships* between at least two institutions based on trust, equality and mutual interest to work as peers towards common objectives. They contribute to the improvement of health services through reciprocal institutional strengthening, capacity building and health workforce development (ESTHER Alliance). The partnerships between institutions in Ireland and institutions in low- and middle-income countries aim to improve health outcomes in low- and middle- income countries through long-term collaborations, usually focused on capacity building, clinical service delivery, and operational research. A key feature of IHP's is the provision of sustained peer-to-peer support, with the overarching goal of strengthening the health workforce and its institutions.

Institutional Health Partnerships are collaborative relationships between at least two institutions based on trust, equality and mutual interest to work as peers towards common objectives. They contribute to the improvement of health services through reciprocal institutional strengthening, capacity building and health workforce development (ESTHER Alliance).

The approach is value-led and these values as outlined in the ESTHER Charter for Quality of Partnership are now updated within the Principles of the IGHN Partnerships Programme. These principles include locally led, mutual benefits, trust and equality, and long-term commitment, and the resulting quality of partnership is considered as the foundation for all project objectives.

The model upon which our IGHN Partnerships Programme operates provides support and guidance for partnerships to improve their practice to achieve quality of partnership standards. A range of tools have been specifically developed to support the achievement of these standards including the EFFECt Tool, that guides discussions about the quality of a partnership and identifies potential areas for improvement. An accreditation tool allows partners to self-assess their adherence to each key principles for quality of partnership (as contained within the Charter for Quality of Partnership) and awarding accreditation acknowledges and showcases partnerships that have demonstrated the highest quality of partnership and reciprocity.

This approach aims to make a significant contribution to health outcomes in the low-and middle-income countries by addressing inequities in access and coverage while improving the quality of services through capacity building and institutional development. Human resource capacity is strengthened through peer-to-peer relationships between personnel working in partner institutions. Accordingly, supported partnerships are "agents of change" in a multiplicity of intervention areas that focus on the creation of sustainable and resilient partnerships with positive changes at all stages of the results continuum.

Institutional health partnerships often focus on innovation to improve healthcare delivery, outcomes, and systems. Innovative models of healthcare delivery, such as value-based care or patient-centred care, are frequently explored through institutional partnerships. Through sharing technology these collaborations enable the development and implementation of solutions including digital health platforms and telemedicine. These technologies and practices are leveraged to address pressing healthcare challenges and empower both healthcare providers and patients. These models aim to improve patient outcomes and reduce costs by focusing on the quality and efficiency of care.

The effectiveness of the IHP approach, was examined in an evaluation of the ESTHER Grants programme in 2023 undertaken by an external consultant. The review found that IHPs by their ability to catalyse the expertise and motivation of committed professionals to create meaningful change through institutional partnerships, even with low levels of resource investment, achieves results equal to or better than those attained through more "traditional" development interventions (Jones, 2023).

Institutional health partnerships contribute to health systems strengthening by addressing the building blocks defined by the WHO. The areas they predominantly strengthen are; service delivery by improving the quality and accessibility of health services through training and infrastructure support, and; the health workforce by providing education and capacity-building initiatives that improve the skills and retention of healthcare professionals and through peer-to-peer relationships. In this way IHPs strengthen resources and build the capacity that then provides the services. This was demonstrated by an evaluation of the UK Health Partnership Scheme that employed the IHP approach and concluded that "Projects have contributed to Health Systems Strengthening by strengthening health worker capacity in terms of their skills, knowledge and confidence." (DFID, 2016)

PRINCIPLES OF THE IGHN PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

The Principles of the IGHN Partnerships Programme are based upon the ESTHER Charter for Quality of Partnership that sets out standards to ensure the quality of partnerships and increase the impact of interventions in partner countries. Additional principles relate to decolonisation and embedding climate change resilience within our approach. Recognising the interconnectedness of global health challenges, incorporating decolonisation as a guiding principle ensures that global health efforts are more just, equitable, and effective as well as being more culturally appropriate. Our health systems will be increasingly burdened by the health effects of climate change as well as the exacerbation of existing health inequalities. Building climate change resilience into the partnerships will help to mitigate these effects. The individual Principles are outlines in the illustration below:

Principles of the IGHN Partnerships Programme

Adherence to National Policies and Strategies

Formal Agreements Between Twinned Institutions Reciprocity: Partners equally involved in all project phases, with mutual benefits and aligned goals

Joint and Equal Responsibility & Accountability

Capability: Institutions have capacity for training, managing funds, andPsychology Practical Training Program sustainable exchanges and interventions

Equity and Respect: Partnerships are founded on trust and foster ethical behaviour and inclusion

Ethics: Principles such as confidentiality, consent, and conflict of interest declarations are upheld

Transparency

Climate Change: Partnerships building climate resilience in health systems **Decolonisation**: Partnerships actively work to dismantle colonial power imbalances, promote local knowledge, and co-design initiatives.

ROLE OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

The HSE Global Health Programme implements partnerships to improve health services and systems with five countries in Africa (Tanzania, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zambia) at a national level. The HSE also facilitates and supports strategic health partnerships at a service/institutional level in HSE partner countries that link with Irish institutions. They facilitate the donation of decommissioned medical equipment and surplus stocks for humanitarian crisis and other purposes.

The majority of Irish health Institutions within the IGHN Partnerships Programme are from, or linked to, the HSE and the experience of developing and overseeing the ESTHER Programme, has given the HSE Global Health Team a unique understanding of institutional health partnerships. The institutional linkages and health services expertise of the HSE, along with 'on the ground' knowledge in certain countries enables the HSE to play an ongoing role in facilitating connections and providing technical guidance to the IGHN Partnerships Programme. The relationship between the IGHN and the HSE is outlined in an MoU, signed annually.

Partnerships comprised of Irish Institutions and their partner institutions in lowerand middle-income countries remain at the heart of the IGHN Partnership Programme. The partnerships supported through the ESTHER Partnerships Programme are in 19 countries of the global South as per the table below.

Irish Aid has been the main funder of the programme to date, providing support and financial resources since the establishment of the ESTHER Programme in 2012. Irish Aid are working in many of the countries where the partnerships are operating.

The table below lists Irish Aid and HSE priority countries, and ESTHER grant recipient countries, highlights the four countries (*Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia*) where there is overlap of HSE and Irish Aid countries.

*ESTHER Partnerships are also operating in India (2), Bangladesh (1), Nepal (1), Togo (1), Nigeria (1), Ghana (1), Cambodia (1), South Sudan (1).

<u>Irish Aid and HSE priority countries</u>, and ESTHER grant recipient countries

Irish Aid Partner Countries	HSE Global Health Programme Partner Countries	ESTHER Grant Recipient Countries
Ethiopia (incl health focus)	Ethiopia	Ethiopia (partnership only as part of regional initiatives)
Mozambique (incl health focus)	Mozambique	Mozambique (partnership only as part of regional initiative)
Tanzania (incl health focus)	Tanzania	Tanzania 7 Partnerships
Zambia	Zambia	Zambia 4 Partnerships
Irish Aid Partner Countries	HSE Global Health Programme Partner Countries	ESTHER Grant Recipient Countries
Ethiopia (incl health focus)	Ethiopia	Ethiopia (partnership only as part of regional initiatives)
	Sudan	Sudan 5 Partnerships
Kenya		Kenya 2 Partnerships
Liberia (incl health focus)		Liberia 1 Partnership
Malawi		Malawi 6 partnerships
Palestine		
Sierra Leone (incl health focus)		Sierra Leone 1 Partnership
South Africa		
Uganda		Uganda 5 Partnerships
Vietnam		
Zimbabwe		Zimbabwe 1 Partnership
Small Island Developing States		

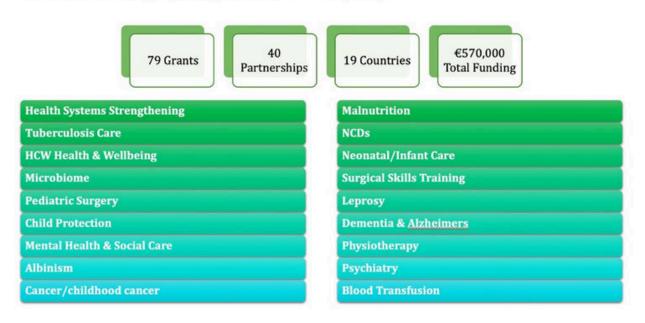
ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ESTHER PROGRAMME 2012-2023

An evaluation of the grants aspect of the ESTHER programme entitled *An Analysis of the Effectiveness of ESTHER Ireland Grants*, found that there were "a rich diversity of activities within partnership projects funded through ESTHER that have had an impact at a local, district or national level" (Jones, 2023). Given the very small amounts of funding "...many of the achievements under the ESTHER Ireland programme are outstanding" (Jones, 2023).

A key characteristic of all partnerships that received funding was their alignment with national priorities and capacity to strengthen health systems. Between 2014 and 2023, ESTHER Ireland supported health partnerships through 79 grants with total funds of over €570,000. The grants catalysed partnerships, 'allowing relationships to 'formalise' and mature, expanding activities beyond initial ambitions' (Jones, 2023). These partnerships have also been sustainable over time, remaining impactful way beyond the funding period.

ESTHER Grants 2014 - 2023





According to the findings of the above-mentioned evaluation, ESTHER support activities such as the Partnerships Forum, were deemed fundamental to the success of health partnerships (Jones, 2023). Tools such as the EFFECt tool, were also found to be an 'essential' resource to support and shape equitable partnerships that ultimately led to greater impacts. Findings also highlighted positive results associated with characteristics of quality partnerships that are contained within the ESTHER standards (ESTHER Charter for Quality of Partnership).

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME TO-DATE AND THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE OF THE IGHN PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

The current model has been successful in enabling the development of strong partnerships and instrumental in ensuring partnerships follow best practice from the initial planning stage. Once well established, the main limitation reported by partnerships is that they cannot access further and larger amounts of funding for capacity building initiatives and projects. This can be a lost opportunity at the point that the IHPs have established themselves and are poised to strengthen health services and systems at a national level. While the partnerships have been sustainable over time, even without additional funding from the programme in some instances, there is a missed opportunity to capitalise on their readiness to create meaningful change at a larger scale and depth.

By building on what has been achieved to-date, the IGHN Partnerships Programme can provide a platform to have a more impactful contribution to global health by supporting established partnerships to increase in scope and scale through larger, multi-annual grants. The programme will continue to provide the supportive context for new partnership to start up and to flourish. New and diversified sources of funding will be required by the IGHN to achieve this.

As an established network, the IGHN is strategically positioned to provide the partnerships programme with the enabling environment and support, particularly in networking and knowledge exchange, and by connecting to, and utilising, the resources of the wider global health community. The Training and Learning Unit within the IGHN will provide enhanced training and learning opportunities for partnerships. These key areas of networking, and training & learning support combine to offer the Partnerships Programme an enabling environment from which to expand its impact.

Original the 16th Partnerships Pragramme

Our vision for the programme is: "To foster sustainable, equitable, and innovative health partnerships that enhance global health outcomes by empowering institutions, building resilient health systems, and promoting the sharing of knowledge and resources across borders. We support partnerships at all stages of development, from newly formed collaborations to established alliances, ensuring comprehensive support and growth opportunities."



Strategic Priority 1: Strengthening Institutional Health Partnerships through Grants

We will provide two grant types aimed at facilitating the development of partnerships for health system strengthening for new and established partnerships.

Grant Types	Purpose and focus of Grant	Individual grant amount
New partnerships	Seed funding for establishment of the partnership	8-10K
Established partnerships	Strengthen the quality of the partnership and capacity of the partnership to demonstrate impact	8-10K

These catalytic grants are designed to provide the initial momentum needed to spur collaboration and innovation, helping to accelerate the development and sustainability of partnerships.

The grant type reflects the stage of development of the partnership seeking a grant. New partnerships are those that have recently started to work together or have taken preliminary steps. The purpose of the grant is seed funding for the establishment of the partnership to fund activities that facilitate the development of a new link or partnership with a counterpart organisation or institution in a low- or middle-income country. Partnerships should demonstrate a commitment to adhere to the Principles of Quality of Partnerships.

Established partnerships are those that are already working together for more than a year and has been formalised, such as through a Memorandum of Understanding. Partnerships must demonstrate clear evidence of quality of partnership, such as receiving Accreditation for Quality of Partnership. The purpose of these grants is to strengthen the quality and capacity of the partnership to demonstrate impact.

A rigorous reviewing of applications will ensure that partnerships selected for funding are committed to the development of a quality partnership, have potential for health systems strengthening and reach the furthest behind.



Strategic Priority 2: Supporting Partnerships on Quality of Partnership, Impact Measurement and Sustaining Funding

Building on our established expertise, standards and tools, including the accreditation process, that have been instrumental in building quality partnerships, we will focus on equipping partnerships with the skills to quantify their impact and to source funding. This will ensure that new partnerships will demonstrate quality of partnership such as adherence to principles including reciprocity and equality and will also develop an evidence base for the work of the partnership that will emerge from this strong foundation. With the capacity to demonstrate their impact, and support in fundraising, partnerships will be better placed to source funding to support the long-term sustainability of the partnership.

We are dedicated to enhancing the ability of our partnerships to measure and demonstrate their impact through comprehensive training and support. By equipping partners with the tools and skills necessary for effective monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, as well as guidance on fundraising through grants, philanthropy and private sector support, we will help ensure the sustainability and scalability of their initiatives.

Strategic Priority 3: Establishing New and Diversified Sources of Funding for the IGHN Partnership Programme

To sustain and to grow the programme, and to support mature partnerships with larger, multi-annual grants, a diversity of fundings sources will be required in addition to the annual Irish Aid grant that has supported the previous programme. New sources of funding will enable the programme to support the increasing number of mature partnerships that are poised for greater impact. In addition to identifying, and securing additional funding, the IGHN will work to build the robust systems and processes required to manage and report on larger and multiple funds.

The IGHN will explore engagement with domestic private sector actors, in line with safeguards as outlined in the IGHN policy. New sources of funding will also be sought through philanthropy, grants and IGHN fundraising streams. In addition to identifying, and securing additional funding, the IGHN will work to build the robust systems and processes required to manage and report on larger and multiple funds.

IGHN MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING APPROACH

The strategic focus on monitoring and evaluation is fundamental to the future of the IGHN Partnerships Programme both at the level of the partnerships and the IGHN. In addition to supporting our partnerships, we simultaneously commit to improving our own monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, by increasing our own skills and capacity.

In addition to supporting partnerships to improve quantitative data collection and analysis, we will support learning to improve qualitative data collection that captures the experience of service users and facilitates their voices being heard. This will be as a means of validating the quantitative data and providing a deeper understanding of the context and impact of interventions. We will in this way prioritise the lived experiences and insights of those directly affected, ensuring that their perspectives shape the development and delivery of services.

In conclusion, the IGHN Partnerships Programme Strategy Paper for 2025-2030 outlines a clear commitment to supporting sustainable, impactful health partnerships between Irish institutions and their counterparts in low- and middle-income countries. By prioritising grants for partnership establishment and strengthening, ensuring partnership quality and measurable impact, and diversifying funding sources, the programme is poised to support long-term collaborations that deliver health systems strengthening. These strategic priorities are rooted in a shared vision of equity, reciprocity and long-term commitment aiming to bring about lasting change through this effective and resource efficient model.

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