

Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development

Pathways for Growth and Delivery in 2026

January 2026

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Executive Summary

Purpose: The Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development (GBEND) was founded to generate and share behavioral evidence that serves the global majority to advance shared development goals across contexts – Key areas covered in this announcement plan are:

February Launch: Annual Planning Meeting open to all members during February 2026, coinciding with the World Government Summit in Dubai.

Thought Leadership: A global speaker series and “Tech Frontiers” showcase.

Flagship Collaborative Projects: Collaborative trials focused on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and AI-enabled research.

Call to Action: We are inviting member proposals for the first year of GBEND collaborative projects, focusing on two high-impact areas: reducing Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) or AI-enabled research in development contexts (see “Call to Action” section for details). These focus areas were selected following a collaborative consultation with the network after the 2025 enrollments.

Purpose and Context

The Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development (GBEND) was founded in May 2025 to **generate and share behavioral evidence that serves the global majority to advance shared development goals across diverse contexts.**

Many of our global development challenges are rooted in human behavior, from the uptake of life-saving drugs to our shared responsibility for natural resources. Achieving visible change requires us to design innovative solutions that account for human psychology, values, and

culture and then to test them. This allows us to invest in solutions that work and to redirect efforts when interventions are ineffective. Much of the existing behavioral science evidence base is generated in “WEIRD” (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) countries, with limited input from or testing in the rest of the world’s population. As a result, core drivers of behavior in the global majority, which differ in important ways from WEIRD countries, are often absent from the evidence base, to the detriment of new development interventions.^{1,2}

¹ Thériault, R., & Forscher, P. The Missing Majority in Behavioral Science Dashboard.

² Ghai, S., Forscher, P. S. & Chuan-Peng, H. (2024). Big-team science does not guarantee generalizability. Nat. Hum. Behav. 8, 1053–1056

We are seeing a notable geographic transition: as historical institutional players partially withdraw, new actors from across the globe are stepping forward. Simultaneously, the profile of the “development actor” is diversifying.

However, this expansion brings a significant challenge: fragmentation. To move from a fragmented landscape toward an integrated, evidence-led future, GBEND is underpinned by three core pillars:

Generate
Thought Leadership
for Innovation

GBEND curates a thought leadership program to platform and discuss cutting-edge thinking and tools designed to innovate behavioral science and international development.

Collaborate
Catalyzing Action and
Evidence Creation

GBEND coordinates actors across academia, funding bodies, and government to address evidence gaps and co-develop innovative solutions.

Convene
Creating High
Impact Dialogue

Through annual meetings and global activations, GBEND creates opportunities for members to share, ideate, and co-create.

This document outlines the key delivery pathways across these pillars for 2026, detailing the network’s value proposition and key collaboration opportunities for its members.

GBEND’s Membership and Governance Structure

GBEND is the first global platform dedicated specifically to the intersection of behavioral science and international development. It is governed by a Tripartite Steering Committee, comprising:

- The Behavioral Science Group, based in the UAE’s Office of Development Affairs
- The World Bank’s Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBeD)
- The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)

Chairs



RABIH ABOUCHARRA
Executive Director, ODA



DAVID HALPERN
President Emeritus, BIT



RENOS VAKIS
Head of eMBeD, World Bank



RASHA ATTAR
Director, BSG



**Steering Committee
Chairs and Secretariat**

- The steering team contributes time and resources to the network activations and development. Their role is to set the agenda and define the strategic direction.
- At present, the steering team is composed of the Chairs and the Secretariat. This includes the World Bank, the Behavioural Insights Team, and the UAE’s Office of Development Affairs.

Members

- Senior representatives from authorities in behavioral science and development. Invited to join by Steering Committee.

They lead and contribute to the involvement of their organization in the network.

Network members may propose guest experts to participate in specific meetings or activities, subject to agreement by the Secretariat. Membership is intentionally cross-sector and multi-disciplinary, comprising:

- Behavioral science organizations
- Multilateral organizations
- Third sector organizations and philanthropies
- Academic institutions
- Governmental institutions

At the close of 2025, the network comprised some of the most prominent experts at the intersection of behavioral science and development. [Appendix 1](#) lists all members currently enrolled. The aim is to continue this growth by inviting member organizations to suggest potential contributors for formal review and invitation by the Steering Committee.³

3 All nominated individuals are subject to standard due-diligence and media screening prior to confirmation of membership.

2026 Delivery Plan

To deliver on its ambitious mission, GBEND organizes its operations and output around three core strategic pillars: **Generate, Convene, and Collaborate.**

1. GENERATE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP FOR INNOVATION

GBEND will offer a curated speaker series and thought leadership sessions designed to deepen members' technical capabilities, foster collaboration, and disseminate cutting-edge insights from across the behavioral science and development ecosystem.

GBEND Speakers Series



Speaker
PROFESSOR DAVID HALPERN
Behavioural Insights Team

Answering What Works Together: Rethinking Global Cooperation on Evidence

How can we build a global evidence ecosystem that ensures evidence meets policymakers' needs? Drawing on the Global Evidence Report, this session explores why fragmented research harms both policy and practice and how cross-national coordination on behavioral evidence can help ensure more consistent and cost-effective global outcomes.

Format
Hybrid in-person and online streaming,
as part of the first 2026 GBEND meeting

Date
3rd-5th February 2026



Speaker
RENOS VAKIS
World Bank eMBeD

Lessons from a Decade of Behavioral Science in the Global South

To mark 10 years since the World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior, the World Bank's new volume of Behavioral Science Around the World spotlights progress made in the Global South. This session highlights the challenges, successes, and growing institutional capacity of government units using behavioral science in emerging contexts, redefining where innovation comes from and how it is shared.

Format
Hybrid in-person and online streaming,
as part of the first 2026 GBEND meeting

Date
3rd-5th February 2026



Speakers
ZEINA AFIF AND RASHA ATTAR
World Bank eMBeD

Understanding How Norms Differ across the Global Majority

Social norms are among the most impactful tools available to behavioral scientists, but their dynamics vary widely across settings. Some societies have tighter, more constricted norms, while others are looser. Sharing insights from decades of work by the World Bank and a recent GBEND collaboration on norms in the Arab region, this session will explore how norms can be leveraged for the global majority across contexts.

Format
Online webinar

Date
TBD



Speaker
PROFESSOR DILIP SOMAN
Rotman School of Management

The Cartographer's Mindset: Tailoring Behavioral Interventions to Context

Why do we search for universal truths in behavioral science when we know context matters most? Professor Soman challenges the idea of average-effect solutions and introduces a new decision-making lens inspired by cartography.⁴ This lecture offers a roadmap to help policymakers choose the best intervention for their local terrain, turning behavioral science into precision tools for development.

Format
Online webinar

Date
TBD

Each member organization will be invited to nominate representatives to participate in high-level discussions and technical demonstrations,

Tech Frontiers Showcase

Demonstration sessions to showcase emerging AI-enabled tools designed to improve evidence synthesis and participatory research in low-resource settings. Participating tools showcased will include:

- **Nesta’s Policy Atlas** – An AI-powered platform helping policymakers simulate and navigate evidence-based policy design.
- **World Bank’s AVA** – A multilingual generative AI tool that synthesizes insights across global development publications and supports users in drafting and refining development content.
- **HumanTruths (incubated at Harvard Innovation Labs)** – An AI-based behavioral research platform capable of capturing voice, SMS, and WhatsApp interviews in 50+ languages, designed to scale emotional insight collection in hard-to-reach settings.

Format

Online webinar with technical demos from each partner

ensuring both senior leaders and technical staff can benefit from the network.

- **sistemaFutura** – sF has developed Flo, an AI-powered forecasting and system-mapping tool that integrates system dynamics and microsimulation to help teams understand how policy, context, and behavior interact over time—and where to intervene for maximum behavioral and systemic impact.
- **Electric Twin** – A tool to generate synthetic participants, which has been trialled in over 200 countries, simulating a range of populations around the globe.
- **The Atlas of Behavior Change in Development (ABCD)** is designed bottom-up for the social impact sector and supports organizations with behavioral research, risk assessment, program design, deployment of behavioral interventions, and partnerships. The tool is free to access online and offers multiple AI-enabled features to accelerate adoption.

Date

June 2026, exact date TBC.

Publications and Knowledge Sharing

GBEND is committed to equipping its members with practical, innovative, and rigorously tested approaches, ensuring behavioral science continues to deliver impact where it is most needed. It will produce the following publications in 2026:

- **Research agenda published in the BEGuide 2026.** The research intentions and methodologies guiding GBEND’s approach will be articulated in a rigorous research agenda published in the well-known publication Behavioral Economics Guide.⁵
- **Social norms in West Asia and North Africa.** A multi-country study by the World Bank (eMBED) and the Behavioral Science Group, exploring norm-based interventions for physical activity in West Asia and North Africa.

- **Tech Frontiers Handbook.** A practical guide on using AI-enabled tools which will be demonstrated to members as part of the tech frontier showcase series to scan, synthesize and apply behavioral evidence.
- **A research agenda on how behavior changes can keep antibiotics working.** This research agenda focuses on the role of behavior change in preventing antimicrobial resistance. It will explore cost-effective behavioral interventions across both health and food systems, including the role of public education in maintaining antibiotic efficacy in low-resource settings.

2. COLLABORATE
CATALYZING ACTION AND EVIDENCE CREATION

The network will engage various actors, including funders and the private sector, to address knowledge gaps and co-develop solutions. In 2025 GBEND consulted members on their priority areas, and two themes guiding plans for 2026 collaborations emerged: antimicrobial resistance, and AI-enabled research for development contexts. These themes are reflected in the call to action for members, who are invited to submit project concepts, and upon review from the Steering Committee (see more details in the call to action).

The network’s first collaboration is already underway, focused on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in Kenya. This project has brought together a coalition including the BSG, BIT, Busara, Stanford University, and Maisha Meds to address inappropriate antibiotic dispensing. By pooling resources to conduct a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), this project demonstrates that GBEND is already operational and capable of enabling complex, cross-organizational collaboration to tackle global problems.

3. CONVENE

CREATING HIGH-IMPACT DIALOGUE

GBEND will bring behavioral science into high-impact development conversations through planning meeting sessions embedded within

major global policy gatherings, and annual in-person convenings aligned with major international events.

2026 Planning Meeting and Panel Discussion

The first major GBEND activation of 2026 will take place on the sidelines of the **World Government Summit (WGS)** during February in **Dubai**. Highlights include:

- Network strategy launch where Network co-chair Rasha Attar will outline the purpose and primary objectives for 2026
- Plenary with co-chair Professor David Halpern on mechanisms for international evidence sharing
- Plenary with co-chair Renos Vakis on the growth of institutional capacity and behavioral science innovation within emerging contexts
- Project spotlight presenting GBEND's first collaboration to combat antimicrobial resistance in Kenya, and more details on the call for proposals to the network.

- Public panel discussion (open to non-members) on opportunities for behavioral science to have an outsized impact on development. Confirmed speakers include:

Iqbal Dhaliwal
Global Executive Director, J-PAL

Joseph Ssentongo
CEO, Global Innovation Fund

Dr. Farida Al Hosani
CEO, GLIDE

Renos Vakis
Director, eMBED, World Bank

Rasha Attar
Chair, GBEND; Director, Behavioral Science Group

Monica Wills-Silva
Director of International Development Programs, BIT

Format

Hybrid - accessible in person in Dubai, or online for all members

Date

3rd-5th of February
TBC

Time

TBC

Annual GBEND Meeting

The GBEND Network will also meet annually at the sidelines of a major global gathering to share updates and discuss future work.

The first annual meeting will take place later in 2026, pending steering committee approval.

Call to Action for Members

Based on consultations with the network, GBEND will focus its 2026 resources on two high-impact themes:

- Interventions to address Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
- AI-enabled research for development contexts

We invite members to submit concept notes for collaborative projects in these areas. Please submit a 3-slide PDF to the Secretariat by the **1st of March, 2026**.

Proposals should include the following:

- The concept: brief overview of the intervention
- The collaboration: which specific researchers or experts within the network do you propose working with?
- The ask: estimated budget and resource requirements

The Secretariat will review the proposals and invite selected applicants to present their concepts during a formal meeting.

For further information and queries please contact the Secretariat:

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Deelan Maru

GBEND Secretariat Member - Behavioural Insights Team
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Appendix 1: Members enrolled during 2025

Organization	Member	Sector
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	Dr. Ali Jadbabaie	Academia
University of Toronto, Rotman School of Management	Dr. Dilip Soman	Academia
Yale Research Initiative on Innovation and Scale (Y-RISE)	Dr. Neela Saldanha	Academia
Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)	Rachel Coyle, MBE	Behavioral Science
Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)	Monica Wills-Silva	Behavioral Science
Behavioural Insights Team Singapore (BIT Singapore)	Dr. Serene Koh	Behavioral Science
Busara	Francis Meyo	Behavioral Science
Save the Children (CUBIC)	Allison Zelkowitz	Behavioral Science
Think Test Do	Faisal Naru	Behavioral Science
Office of Development Affairs, UAE	Fahad Al Ameri	Governamental
Office of UAE Special Envoy for Business & Philanthropy (SEBP)	Nishant Singh	Governamental
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, Nudge Unit)	Cortney Price	Multilateral
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	Dr. Chiara Varazzani	Multilateral
The World Bank - Mind Behavior and Development Unit (eMBed)	Zeina Afif	Multilateral
United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF BIRD Lab)	Dr. Benjamin Hickler	Multilateral
Delterra	Dr. Shannon Bouton	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Ellen MacArthur Foundation	Jonquil Hackenberg	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Global Innovation Fund (GIF)	Joseph Ssentongo	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Global Institute for Disease Elimination (GLIDE)	Dr. Farida Al Hosani	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Malaria Consortium	Dr. James Kananura Tibenderana	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Mohamed bin Zayed Foundation for Humanity (MBZFH)	H.E. Dr. Shamma Khalifa Al Mazrouei	Third Sector and Philanthropy
Waste and Resource Action Programme (WRAP)	David Hall	Third Sector and Philanthropy

