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GLOBAL FUND LAUNCHES "FIRST LEARNING WAVE" OF NATIONAL STRATEGY APPLICATIONS

The Global Fund Secretariat has invited 22 CCMs to take part in the “first learning wave” of national strategy applications (NSAs). NSAs are a new way to apply for Global Fund money. NSAs involve submitting a national disease strategy itself – rather than a Global Fund-specific proposal form – as the primary basis of the application for Global Fund financing. NSAs are part of the Fund's effort to streamline its applications and funding processes.

The decision to establish NSAs was taken by the Global Fund Board in April 2007. At its most recent meeting, in November 2008, the Board approved the launch of the first learning wave. (For details, see GFO Issue #99, available at www.aidspan.org/gfo.) This wave is called “first learning” because NSAs are still a relatively new concept and involve developing a new set of policies and procedures. The Global Fund plans to refine these policies and procedures based on its experience with the first learning wave, and to then do a broader roll-out of NSAs, probably starting in 2010.

The Global Fund has identified the following anticipated benefits from NSAs:

- improved alignment of Global Fund financing with country priorities, and with national programmatic and budgetary timeframes;
- reduced transaction costs and paperwork for countries;
- improved harmonisation with other donors that have agreed to use the same criteria for reviewing national strategies;
- a focus on managing for results and accountability within national strategies; and
- in the longer term, improved quality, consistency and credibility of national strategic frameworks.

The first learning wave focuses on national HIV, TB and malaria strategies only. National health strategies may be included at a later stage. Nine CCMs have been invited to consider submitting NSAs for HIV, six for TB and eight for malaria. (The Rwanda CCM was invited to consider an NSA for both HIV and TB.) The list of CCMs, by disease, is as follows.

Table: Countries that have been invited to consider NSA applications to the Global Fund

HIV	TB	Malaria
Algeria	El Salvador	Azerbaijan
Cambodia	Ghana	Bhutan
Cuba	Morocco	China
Djibouti	Mozambique	Ethiopia
Kenya	Nepal	Gambia
Malawi	Rwanda	Guyana
Nigeria		Madagascar
Rwanda		Viet Nam
Swaziland		

The 22 CCMs were asked to respond by 13 March 2009 concerning whether they want to take part in the first learning wave. GFO is not aware which CCMs responded or what they said.

The 22 CCMs were selected based on a range of factors, including that their countries:

- have a well articulated and documented national strategy, developed through an inclusive process that runs through to at least to the end of 2012;
- have a strong partnership with bilateral donors and technical agencies in the country to support them in the application process (where necessary) and in grant implementation; and
- were not successful in Round 8 for the disease in question.

The reason why countries that were successful for a particular disease component in Round 8 have not been invited to submit first learning wave NSAs for that disease is that the Global Fund wants to enable national programme staff in these countries to focus on negotiations for the Round 8 grants.

The first learning wave entails a two-stage process. The first stage involves a desk review of the national strategy and accompanying documentation (such as an operational plan) to ensure that they contain enough information to be considered as the basis of a funding application. The review will be done by a Strategy Review Team made up of members of the Global Fund's Technical Review Panel (TRP). If the outcome of this desk review is favourable, the Review Team will make a country visit to seek clarifications and collect additional information. More importantly, a favourable desk review also means that the CCM can proceed to the second stage, which involves the CCM submitting the actual NSA, which will consist of a short application focusing on the financial request, and which will be reviewed by the TRP.

The NSAs can request funding for the remaining time frame of their national strategies, up to a maximum duration of five years. To ensure parity with the rounds-based channel of funding, initial funding

commitments will be for two years, and funding for the balance of the term will be dependent on satisfactory performance. As with rounds-based proposals, NSAs will be screened by the Global Fund Secretariat to ensure that the applicant CCM has met the minimum requirements for CCMs.

The CCMs who have been invited to take part in the first learning wave have been told that they cannot also submit an application for the same disease in Round 9, unless the desk review of their NSA turns out to be unfavourable. In the event of an unfavourable desk review, any CCM that wants to apply for Round 9 will be given an extension to the 1 June 2009 deadline for Round 9 applications. The extension will be until 8 July 2009.

The Global Fund Board has decided that the NSA first learning wave applications will have the same priority for resource allocation as Round 9 applications.

The following timelines for the first learning wave have been established (all dates are in 2009):

13 March: Deadline for the 22 CCMs to indicate whether they expect to apply

3 April: Deadline (for those CCMs who responded positively by the March 13 deadline) to provide national strategy documents

4 May: Completion of the desk reviews, and decision on which CCMs will be invited to submit an NSA

25 May to 4 July: Country visits by the Strategy Review Team

31 August: Deadline for submission of NSAs by CCMs that pass the desk review

First week of November (tentative date): Board decision on NSAs

Some time between 31 August and the first week of November, the TRP will review the NSAs and provide a recommendation to the Board concerning which ones should be funded.

In addition to the letter of invitation, the 22 CCMs invited to take part in the first learning wave have received three documents:

- “Global Fund Financing Through ‘National Strategy Applications’: Basic Information for Potential Applicants to the ‘First Learning Wave’ “
- “Global Fund Financing Through ‘National Strategy Applications’: Practical Information for Potential Applicants to the ‘First Learning Wave’ “
- “Attributes for a Sound National Strategy”(prepared by the International Health Partnership Working Group on National Strategies)

These documents have not yet been posted on the Global Fund website. However, they are available on the website of the China CCM at www.chinaccm.org.cn/en/node/227.

Although 22 CCMs have been invited to take part in the first learning wave, the final number of CCMs submitting NSAs will likely be much smaller because (a) some CCMs will decide not to take part; and (b) some CCMs will not receive a favourable desk review. And the number of NSAs recommended by the TRP for board approval will presumably be smaller still.

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