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Lessons learned from the C19RM process in Francophone Africa

A panel discussion through a webinar organized by the Global Fund's Francophone Africa Regional Platform (PRF) has provided valuable lessons learned from country experiences in applying for COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) grants. In this article, we describe the experiences of Burkina Faso in developing their C19RM Funding Request (FR), and this will be followed by subsequent articles in the Global Fund Observer on the experiences of Benin, Burundi, and Gabon.

C19RM background

In April 2020, the Global Fund developed the C19RM to help countries respond to COVID-19 by mitigating its impact on national AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB) programs and strengthening health and community systems.

In April 2021, the Global Fund launched its second phase (C19RM 2021). All countries receiving Global Fund support were eligible to apply for this funding. Ineligible countries facing a major social security and/or humanitarian crisis, including those most severely affected by COVID-19 and countries facing significant disruption, were also allowed to apply.

The C19RM guidelines specifically recommend that consultations take place with 'civil society, key and vulnerable populations (KVPs) and communities', reflecting the importance placed by the Global Fund on those groups.

Within this context, the Global Fund Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) department allocated additional funds to regional CRG platforms to recruit a C19RM focal point and to develop tools and disseminate information on C19RM.

Francophone African countries benefitted from an earmarked allocation from the CRG to provide support to civil society, KVPs, and communities to participate in C19RM FR development between 13 April and 30 September 2021.

Burkina Faso's experience

Burkina Faso's grant from the CRG department enabled it to conduct various activities to strengthen its C19RM FR development, namely: (i) hold workshops to identify priority needs, (ii) facilitate community consultations, (iii) support civil society's participation in the C19RM FR writing process and country dialogue, and (iv) organize focus groups and capacity building for C19RM FR development. Seven other countries (Benin, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Senegal) also received Global Fund CRG funding for their C19RM development.

The COVID-19 context in Burkina Faso

Since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed up to 24 September 2021, there have been 14,092 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 178 deaths reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). The main epicenters are the Centre and Hauts Bassins regions.

Despite the resurgence of the pandemic in December 2020, the country did not adopt preventive measures against COVID-19. Since the election campaign in November 2020, the Burkinabè government had continued to call upon the population as a whole to take responsibility but had not outlined concrete measures against COVID-19. However, the borders between Burkina Faso and other countries remained closed.

Burkina Faso received a total allocation amount of €30,223,883 for C19RM activities, including community needs. Nevertheless, so many community interventions were developed that they exceeded the total amount available. Accordingly, community activities only received 14% of the total C19RM 2021 allocation.

Civil society involvement in preparing the 2021 C19RM funding request in Burkina Faso

Strengths

Initially, the development of the country's C19RM 2021 request did not include many beneficiaries because there had been no analysis of priority target groups and the FR writing team had not been established.

As a result, the National Network for the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV in the Fight against HIV/AIDS in Burkina Faso (REGIPIV), together with the SYNERGIE Burkina and Vision Plurielle consortium, requested the CRG for support to identify the priority needs of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and KVPs in the context of COVID-19. A consultant was recruited to identify and discuss potential involvement and interventions with target groups through face-to-face and telephone interviews and focus group discussions, to collect data and establish priorities.

A consultation workshop made it possible to complete the consultation process and provide the FR writing team with a deliverable on priority community activities that was shared with the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM).

Weaknesses

As the identified needs exceeded the total of the FR approved amount, the number of activities that had been previously selected was revised downwards, including important activities such as (i) sponsorship for

orphans and vulnerable children who had lost their original sponsors from Western countries due to COVID-19; (ii) income-generating activities to provide financial support to PLHIV impacted by the situation; and (iii) the cost of legal aid for PLHIV and KVPs affected by gender-based violence (GBV).

The PLHIV network and two of its partners requested technical support to enable them to participate in the FR writing team because, initially, they felt that they had not been given the opportunity to play a major role in drafting the funding application. It should be noted that, due to COVID-19, many of the activities planned as part of the FR writing process took place via conference calls.

Quality of civil society organization mobilization and supervision

The high quality of CSO mobilization and supervision facilitated the implementation of an information and communication mechanism for the C19RM process. Following the technical support received, the consortium of PLHIV and KVPs was able to play a central role throughout the process, which led to the budgeting of priority community activities based on a deliverable that was shared with the CCM for inclusion in the FR. The FR development process was carried out by a writing committee led by the CCM and national consultants. The involvement of the national consultant funded by the Global Fund's CRG department resulted in a better process for prioritizing the needs of PLHIV and KVPs and a workshop that brought these groups together to finalize their contributions for inclusion in the final application. This support met the expectations of the various stakeholders insofar as more than 80% of the activities designed for the community component were included in the FR sent to the Global Fund on 15 June 2021.

Key recommendations

To improve the quality of mobilizing and supervising CSOs in the C19RM processes, the Burkina Faso team made some recommendations:

- Improve communication and information-sharing to improve stakeholders.
- Allow for the participation of constituency groups in the leadership process and in proposal writing teams.
- Ensure their continued involvement and contribution to requests for clarifications from the Global Fund to the CCM.
- Provide updates to constituency groups and priority populations on the progress of the FR.

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