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BOARD APPROVES \$15 MILLION FOR CONTINUATION OF STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNITY, RIGHTS AND GENDER OVER 2017-2019

The Global Fund will invest \$15 million over the next three years (2017-2019) to bolster community responses, human rights and gender equality in its grants. The Board has approved this funding for a Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Strategic Initiative, building on progress made in strengthening engagement of civil society and community groups in Global Fund processes through the first CRG Special Initiative for 2014-2016 (see GFO articles [here](#) and [here](#)). The Global Fund's Special Initiatives have been rebranded as "Strategic Initiatives" for the coming grant cycle.

The anticipated impact for the CRG Strategic Initiative from 2017-2019 will be to:

- Strengthen the meaningful engagement of community and civil society in Global Fund processes across all stages in the grant cycle.
- Better reflect civil society and community priorities in concept notes, transition planning and related national strategies.
- Provide greater emphasis on evidence-informed and rights-based programming demonstrated in Global Fund grants.
- Identify the critical technical assistance needs of community and civil society key stakeholders.
- Strengthen community and civil society's capacity to design and deliver quality technical support.

The CRG Strategic Initiative for 2017-2019 will have the same three components as the 2014-2016 CRG Special Initiative: technical assistance (TA) programs, capacity-building of key population networks on Global Fund processes, and regional civil society and community communication and coordination

platforms. It is not yet known if the same technical assistance providers, regional platform hosts and key populations networks will continue on as partners for the new CRG Strategic Initiative.

Table: Components and levels of investment for CRG Special Initiative (2014-2016) and CRG Strategic Initiative (2017-2019)

| Component of CRG Strategic Initiative | Status of investments (as of end November 2016) from the 2014-2016 CRG Special Initiative | Estimated investments over 2017-2019 for the CRG Strategic Initiative |
|---|---|---|
| Technical assistance (TA) programs | \$4,650,000 | \$6,000,000 |
| Capacity-building of key population networks on Global Fund processes | \$5,950,000 | \$5,000,000 |
| Regional Civil Society and Community Communication and Coordination Platforms | \$4,400,000 | \$4,000,000 |
| TOTAL | \$15 million | \$15 million |

The approval of the \$15 million CRG Strategic Initiative for 2017-2019 comes on the back of the newly released formal evaluation of the 2014-2016 CRG Special Initiative.

The top-level recommendations from the 2014-2016 CRG Special Initiative evaluation report include:

- Allocate funding for at least three years (2017-2019) for continuation of the CRG Special Initiative.
- Expand the remit of the CRG Special Initiative to go beyond grant signing and offer TA and capacity building to communities/civil society for all stages in the Global Fund's Funding Model.
- Review the conceptual framework and implementation modalities of the CRG Special Initiative to ensure that it operates as a more connected and comprehensive model.
- Strengthen the CRG Special Initiative's efforts to mobilise and support the meaningful engagement of TB and Malaria-focused communities/civil society in Global Fund processes and the inclusion of CRG-related interventions in grants.
- Strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and administration of the CRG Special Initiative by the Global Fund Secretariat (this recommendation responds to a separate finding in the report which notes acute under-staffing in the CRG Special Initiative team).
- Develop and implement an M&E framework for each core Component of the CRG Special Initiative and for the Initiative as a whole.
- Develop and implement a knowledge management and communications strategy to document, analyse and systematise the key learning from the CRG Special Initiative.

While the new CRG Strategic Initiative (2017-2019) is largely similar to the previous CRG Special Initiative (2014-2016), the Board paper on catalytic funds (GF/B36/04) suggests there may be a few noteworthy changes.

Under the new CRG Strategic Initiative, the Global Fund aims to improve access to technical assistance. As before, the technical assistance will be south-to-south as well as peer-led and will be delivered through short-term assignments. However, the Board paper suggests that CRG technical assistance will now be available throughout the grant cycle, whereas it was previously only available up until the grant signing stage. This change would respond to the recommendation in the CRG Special Initiative evaluation which calls for the remit to be expanded and for TA and capacity building to be available for all stages of the funding model.

While the previous CRG Special Initiative delivered key population capacity building to eight HIV networks through a partnership with the Robert Carr civil society Network Fund, the new CRG Strategic Initiative is broadening this component to more effectively integrate TB and malaria community networks as well. The

Special Initiative piloted this expansion through a request for proposals that resulted in four malaria grantees (International Public Health Advisors, Réseau Accès aux Médicaments Essentiels, APCASO and The Kenya NGOs Alliance Against Malaria) and funds for the Global Coalition of TB Activists. This change would also address the findings of the CRG Special Initiative evaluation, which urges the renewed CRG Strategic Initiative to increase its support the meaningful engagement of TB and malaria-focused communities and civil society in Global Fund processes.

The Board paper also suggests there might be stronger links between the new CRG Strategic Initiative and other Strategic Initiatives (of which there are 14 in total- see [GFO article](#)). This link is made particularly explicit for the new Strategic Initiative to develop innovative approaches and accelerate progress on finding missing TB cases (building on the previous Special Initiative for WHO-Stop TB Partnership Agreements). The Strategic Initiative for finding missing TB cases includes a specific sub-component to provide support for CRG efforts. The CRG component will aim to tackle some of the specific barriers to TB case finding among key populations, as well as strengthen the integration of community-based TB activities into the work of existing civil society organizations.

In addition, there are potential linkages between the CRG Strategic Initiative and the new \$15 million Sustainability, Transition and Efficiency Strategic Initiative. The CRG Strategic Initiative will have a specific focus on contexts that are undergoing transition planning and where key and vulnerable population engagement remains particularly challenging. Similarly, the Sustainability, Transition and Efficiency Strategic Initiative includes support for civil society engagement in budget processes and domestic resource mobilization. This has also been piloted through the CRG Special Initiative technical assistance program, where \$500,000 was set-aside in 2016 for sustainability and transition TA in Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, South Africa and the Asia Pacific region.

Kate Thomson, Head of the Community, Rights and Gender Department at the Global Fund, emphasizes the importance of the continued investments in the CRG Strategic Initiative. “In all regions of the world, more extensive dialogue and participation in Global Fund processes are leading to HIV, TB and malaria programs that are more responsive to community needs and that will ultimately have greater impact,” Thomson told Aidspace.

Given the Fund’s elevated focus on community, rights and gender in its new Strategy for 2017-2022, the CRG Strategic Initiative is an important pillar for achieving results. The CRG Strategic Initiative will contribute important gains towards the Fund’s strategic objectives to maximize impact against the three diseases, build resilient and sustainable systems for health and promote and protect human rights and gender equality.

Information in this article comes from the Board paper GF/B36/04, presented at the 36th meeting of the Global Fund Board on 16-17 November 2016 in Montreux, Switzerland. All Board documents will be made public on the Global Fund’s website.

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