



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

ACTIVISTS URGE CONTINUATION OF SPECIAL INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNITY, RIGHTS AND GENDER

As the 2014-2016 grant cycle comes to a close, the Global Fund's [six Special Initiatives](#) are also winding down. The impact of the Community, Rights and Gender Special Initiative (CRG SI) is of particular importance, given the Fund's [elevated focus on rights and gender](#) in its new 2017-2022 strategy. The CRG SI has invested \$15 million in the provision of technical assistance, capacity building of key populations and the establishment of six regional communication and coordination platforms. GFO has been monitoring progress on the CRG SI throughout implementation (see GFO stories [here](#) and [here](#)).

CRG SI partners representing the Robert Carr civil society Network Fund (RCNF) Grantees and the Regional Communication and Coordination Platforms gathered in early October in Marrakech, Morocco to network and learn from each other. However, with the CRG SI slated to end in December 2016, whether or not the CRG SI would continue, and what it might look like, was a prominent subtext on a lot of people's minds. "I hope they don't cancel the CRG. It's needed now more than ever," said Olive Mumba, Executive Director of the Eastern Africa National Networks of AIDS Service Organizations (EANNASO). "We have just begun the process," Mumba noted, "it would be very unfortunate if the CRG SI didn't continue." EANNASO is the host of the [regional platform for Anglophone Africa](#).

There is a broad consensus that the initiative was successful in achieving its objectives, and that there is a lot of additional important work that needs to be done. Some notable successes include Angola, where the African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHer) provided short-term technical assistance to support to further the engagement of key populations affected by HIV in Global Fund processes. Quality assurance on the technical assistance provided through the CRG SI shows that the vast majority of assignments results in favourable reviews (Figure).

Figure: Quality assurance of CRG SI technical assistance provision

CRG SI technical assistance provider could be recommended for other similar assignments

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Other important results include the success of the RCNF grantees in increasing scale and quality of sex worker participation in country dialogues and concept notes of 27 countries. The Regional Platform for Asia Pacific, hosted by [Apcaso](#), undertook a nine-country needs assessment to determine the degree of community and civil society access to Global Fund-related process information – to later be linked to potential resources.

Regardless of the successes, participants at the meeting in Morocco lamented that they were just getting started.

Indeed, many participants were learning about the work of the other partners for the first time at this meeting, noted Anuar Luna Cadena, Technical Coordinator for the Regional Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, hosted by [Via Libre](#). He said that the short amount of time remaining in the CRG SI makes implementing changes in their organization difficult, and that there was a strong need for the initiative to continue. This sentiment was echoed by Sergey Votyagov, Director of the Robert Carr civil society Network Fund. “The reality is that now there is something concrete in place,” Votyagov said. “An investment has been made, and it should be continued.”

For the RCNF grantees and the Regional Platforms, work only began in earnest in June 2015, while two of the Regional Platforms did not sign their contracts until early 2016. The meeting in Morocco was the first time that many representatives were given the opportunity to learn about the other organizations and how they might work together. For example, it is outside of the mandate of the Regional Platforms to engage in advocacy – however, this is well within the mandate of RCNF grantees. Opportunities for more effective advocacy through partnerships between the Platforms and RCNF grantees may have gone unseized in some cases.

CRG stakeholders note that the initiative has not only performed the function it set out to, but has also filled an important gap in communication, coordination, and networking needs that was previously ignored. While the CRG SI had originally been put in place to assist civil society and community groups to adapt to the new funding model, CRG partners told Aidspan that the initiative is proving to have value beyond its intended purpose. For example, in advance of the third Global Fund Partnership Forum to develop the Fund’s new strategy for 2017-2022, which took place in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region, all regional key populations networks prepared and signed a joint position statement, unprecedentedly emphasizing the need to prioritize transgender communities in EECA’s regional AIDS response.

The good news is that the CRG SI has made it onto the Global Fund Agenda for their next Board Meeting in November. If the Board approves the continuation of the program, it will no longer be considered a “Special Initiative” but would be rebranded a “Strategic Initiative”, to be funded out of catalytic funding.

There’s no question that in the minds of partners and beneficiaries that the CRG SI is providing an important service which should be continued. However, there are questions around how it should continue, who should be involved, and how much money should be allocated. The formal review of the CRG SI that is currently underway will shed light on whether the CRG SI partners have the technical capacity to effectively operate, or if they could they benefit from additional human resources. In advance of the review and the November Board meeting, many CRG SI partners must wait in anticipation about the

future of the initiative.

GFO will continue to follow this story, publishing a follow up article on the results of the formal evaluation as well as the Board's decision regarding the CRG SI after the board meeting in November.

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