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Global Fund Board approves \$100m for special initiatives and \$200m for regional programs

DECISION POINT: GF/B31/DP06 and GF/B31/DP07

The Global Fund Board on 6 March approved some \$300 million in funding to be set aside for special initiatives and regional programs for 2014-2016, in excess of the \$10.22 billion that will be allocated to countries during the same period.

The decisions made during the 31st Board meeting in Jakarta should provide a sufficient evidence base for support of these special programs in subsequent allocation periods, Aidspan understands from Board sources.

Special initiatives are those projects that are cross-cutting and add value not just for an individual country's programs and operations but for the Fund as a whole. By investing in special initiatives, the Secretariat has maintained, resources allocated at the country level will have an added impact.

The breakdown for special initiatives approved by the Board included some \$79 million in immediately approved initial investments:

- \$30 million for a humanitarian emergency fund
- \$17 million for improving in-country data systems
- \$29 million for technical assistance to support the development of concept notes
- \$15 million for technical assistance on community, rights and gender
- \$ 9 million to enhance value for money and financial sustainability of Global Fund-supported programs

The remainder (worth an estimated \$9 million) will be spent over the period on enhancing value for money and financial sustainability at the country level for Global Fund-supported programs and work to improve the skill sets and capacity within the principal recipients of various grants.

Aidspan understands from the Secretariat that the humanitarian emergency fund will not be used to support programs that are better-served by humanitarian actors already used to working in emergency settings; rather, the fund will be used to improve flexibility within existing activities already underway in fragile states that receive Global Fund money. So, for example, if a conflict in a country where the Fund is supporting a commodities distribution program makes the cost of moving commodities more expensive, resources from the humanitarian emergency fund would cover the additional distribution costs.

The Secretariat has also acknowledged the need for a more strategic framework with guidelines for use of funds in humanitarian settings and emergencies, and has solicited input and guidance from humanitarian actors. These guidelines will be at the core of a review of the Fund's activity in fragile states by the Technical Evaluation Reference Group, expected by mid-2014.

Improving country-level data systems has been highlighted as a priority emergent need for grant-making, as too many countries have poor data collection and analysis capacity. As the Fund moves towards a more evidence-based approach to measuring its impact as well as the value for money of its programs, better data will be critical.

Regional programs will be allocated an additional \$200 million with the expectation that, should there be other quality regional programs proposed, and further resources available through efficiency cost savings or future donor commitments, high quality regional proposals will be considered.

The \$200 million for regional programs does not account for the \$116 million in funds already committed to regional programs that were early applicants under the new funding model (NFM). Already, \$100 million has been approved for a program in the Mekong region to avert the spread of artemisinin resistance; another \$10 million has been allocated to Meso-Hispaniola for a regional malaria program and the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network will receive a total of \$6 million for work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

There are two opportunities for regional initiatives to apply for a share of the \$200 million in funding: by end of March 2014 and a year later. It is anticipated that the March 2014 deadline will be extended by at least a month to accommodate proposals.

Board delegations in remarks to Aidspan separately expressed concerns that the regional program set-asides would become slush funds to enhance country-level programs or pay for workshops and conferences that ultimately would have minimal programmatic impact.

The Secretariat has, however, emphasized that regional programs are less about service delivery than they are about cohesion, cross-border promotion of behavior change and integration. Equally, the outcome indicators – assessing program impact instead of money spent – that will be applied to country-specific programs will also be applied to regional initiatives.

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