



Independent observer  
of the Global Fund

## The place of French in the Global Fund ecosystem

What role does French play in the Global Fund environment? The question is far from trivial if we consider the number of people for whom the English language is a real obstacle to getting the best from the documentation produced by the Global Fund. You can shrug your shoulders and say, “How can people not speak English in the 21st century?”, but that won’t fundamentally change the problem. Yes, there are a great many beneficiaries, implementers, community members or members of civil society organizations (CSOs) who do not speak English and probably never will, despite the efforts made. Among these people, there are some for whom French is the main, if not the only, means of working and interacting on a daily basis.

French: the poor relation of the Global Fund (?)

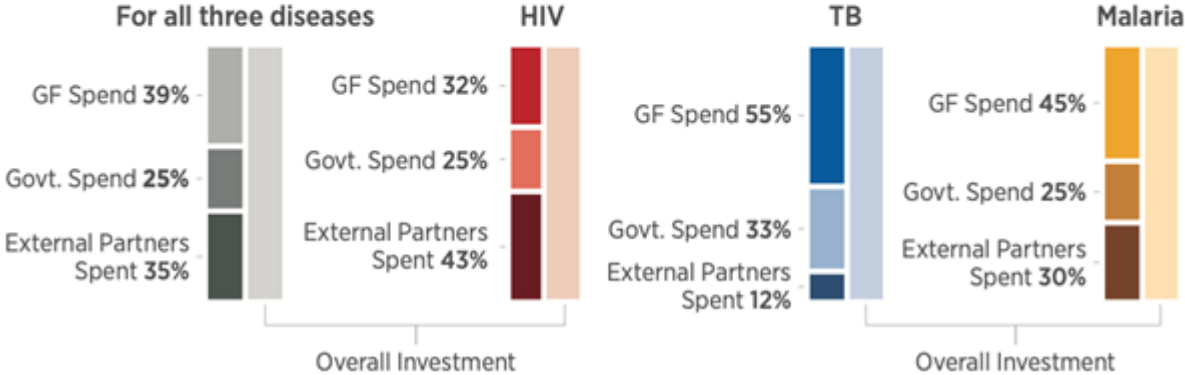
[Back](#) in 2019, [Aidspan asked about the Global Fund’s ‘policy’ on translating documents from English into French](#). The Global Fund’s response at the time was optimistic and proactive. So what about a few years later? Are we any further ahead? Have French-to-English translation and information-sharing in French improved significantly? We have our doubts.

Before going any further, let’s look at how much of the Global Fund’s resources actually go to countries

where French is the major business language and/or first official language (noting that in many countries neither French nor English is the first language!). Between 2002 and 2019, the Global Fund invested \$6.9 billion in West and Central Africa to combat the three diseases or 18% of all Global Fund investments over the period 2002-2019, with 39% representing the Global Fund’s share of all partner investments.

Investments to date in the WCA countries from the Global Fund total US\$6.9bn across all three diseases.

Between 2012–2017, Global Fund Investments in the region equated to US\$3.6bn (US\$6.9bn since 2002) which represented 39% of the total investment (Government, External Funding and Global Fund) in the three diseases. The Global Fund is the largest funder of the three diseases in the region with 55% in TB, 45% in Malaria and 32% in HIV.



Source:

[Consultative report. Implementation of subsidies in West and Central Africa \(WCA\)](#)

In other words, this region represents a major challenge for the Global Fund’s investments and, consequently, its results in the fight against disease.

Having said that, let’s get back again to 2019. Let’s take another look at the Global Fund’s library (excluding the funding request materials which are available in both languages) and the language of its main publications. To begin with, this library is rich and well-stocked, to say the least. At the time of publication of this article, here is an overview of publications and translations taken from the “Publications and resources” section of the Global Fund website.

Table 1. Global Fund publications by type and language

Document by Type	English	French
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Governance and institutional documents	18	10
Programmatic documents	11	7
Incorporating documents and mandates	16	11
Code of conduct	6	4
Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment and child protection	3	0
Ethics and conflicts of interest	4	3

Source: Table based on information available on the Global Fund website

It should be pointed out that the [COVID-19 Response Mechanism \(C19RM\) Modular Framework](#), an important document, is only available in English. This funding facility has to date had very poor results in absorption of funds; how much of this, we wonder, is due to the lack of the availability of guiding documents in French?

No doubt the most important documents will eventually be available in French. But when? Shouldn't they be available in English and French at the same time? And then, let's be serious: is it reasonable to think that the Global Fund lacks the resources to produce documents that are immediately available in several languages? A rhetorical question...

The Global Fund can do better when it comes to translating documents

That said, let's make no mistake. This is not about defending French simply as a language as opposed to English. Nor is it about denying English the place it occupies as the main vehicle for exchanges within the Global Fund. That would be absurd. It is even less a question of saying that nothing is being done. In fact, what we are trying to demonstrate is that there is room for improvement. And this 'room' is not something that can be treated as negligible to the point of (constantly) postponing its full occupation until tomorrow. We need to act now. It's not just a question of inclusion and fairness, but above all of efficiency. When we say that no one should be left behind, that's also what we're talking about.

This is also an opportunity to pay tribute to [L'Initiative/Expertise-France](#), which spares no effort to ensure

that Global Fund documents are constantly and consistently translated and made accessible to a French-speaking public. More efforts of this kind are needed within the Global Fund itself. The time that elapses between the publication in English of certain important Global Fund documents and their translation into French (if such a translation takes place) is too long. There is a two-speed approach in this respect, which has consequences for optimizing Global Fund investments in French-speaking countries, and in West and Central Africa in particular.

In short, the language barrier is undoubtedly an inhibiting factor for the optimal participation of CSOs and French-speaking communities in Global Fund initiatives and programmes. Contrary to the Italian adage *Traduttore, traditore* (in English: “Translator, traitor”), not all translation is treason. Quite the contrary: a more ambitious translation policy would significantly increase the impact of Global Fund publications and investments in the French-speaking countries of West and Central Africa.

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