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TIME FOR ACTION ON TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Many implementers of Global Fund grants are still not getting the technical assistance (TA) that they need – often because they are not requesting the TA in the first place. Accordingly, the Global Fund ought to require that each prospective principal recipient (PR) prepares a TA Plan prior to signing a Grant Agreement.

As things stand currently, a PR will only obtain adequate and appropriate TA if it goes through several steps, including listing all the tasks that grant implementation will involve; recognising which of these tasks the PR doesn't have the experience or skills or capacity to perform adequately; determining how TA can address those gaps; identifying potential providers of the TA; choosing the most qualified; and, after the work is done, evaluating whether the TA was in fact of any value. Only rarely are all these steps carried out. Being required to prepare a TA Plan will make this comprehensive approach much more likely.

Part of the problem is that there is a natural reluctance on the part of PRs, particularly when they are from government, to admit to any form of weakness. If they were asked "Do you need TA?", the chances are that they would reply "No". But if they were asked "If you were going to receive some TA, in what context would it be most useful?," they might be more candid.

The Global Fund already requires that prior to signing a grant agreement, PRs must prepare a Procurement and Supply Management (PSM) Plan and a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan. Given the importance of having a solid TA strategy for each grant, why not also require that PRs prepare a TA Plan?

The fact that a TA Plan is required might make it easier for implementers to turn to Global Fund partner organisations (UN agencies etc.) for assistance in developing the plan, and then in implementing it. The partners would also be helped because they would easily know what TA is needed, what parts have been

provided, and what parts still need to be provided.

The proposal form used for Round 9 already asks CCMs to provide information on what TA is planned; what process was used to identify needs; how the assistance will be obtained; and what process will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the TA. This is a good start. But our analysis of completed proposals shows that many CCMs do not provide everything the Fund asks for on the proposal form, or they only provide sketchy information. Furthermore, at the time that the CCM writes the proposal, it may not have much knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed PR(s). Accordingly, the information that PRs put in the TA Plan can and should be much more detailed than what the CCMs put in the original proposal.

Specifically, the TA Plan should include evidence, for each part of the workplan, that the PR has adequate capacity. When this is not the case, the Plan should specify who will provide the TA and when. This information ought to be provided for the first two years of the grant (Phase 1). Where it is not possible to provide the information for the full two years, the PR could be required to file a TA Plan for the first year, and then to file an updated TA Plan part way through Phase 1 covering both the first and second year. The TA Plan should also be updated prior to the beginning of Phase 2.

The Global Fund may be reluctant to impose more requirements on implementers. But there are times when imposing a requirement makes sense. This is one of those times.

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