

Women's needs and priorities must be better reflected and funded in Global Fund funding requests

1. Why communities of women should have more influence

In most countries, women in all their diversity have been disproportionately affected by the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has drawn into sharp focus existing inequities and vulnerabilities that affect the health and lives of women and girls— including in areas such as economic stability, food and nutrition security, overall health and security (including safety when faced with violence), self-determination, and agency to enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights and health.

Women and girls must have a stronger and more influential say in all policies and investments focused on COVID-19 and beyond. Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) advocates continue to witness a narrow perspective to how countries understand women's rights and their needs, including in the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM).

None of the issues we raise in this brief are new and as we move into a new allocation cycle in 2023 we call for important improvements as the Global Fund rolls out its new Strategy placing particular emphasis on “communities at its centre”.

2. Strengths and limitations of technical assistance opportunities

The Global Fund's Community, Rights and Gender Strategic Initiative (CRG SI) provides important technical assistance (TA) so that women can engage more directly in the preparation of countries' funding requests. A recent case study of short-term TA ([available in four languages](#)) provided to women in four countries¹ highlights important benefits and shortcomings of this type of TA.

It was clear that this TA influenced the content of C19RM funding requests but at the same time, even when women's priorities were specifically mentioned, it was evident that Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) did not consider many of the women's priorities as vital and essential. This was illustrated by two linked facts: (1) the small amounts of overall funding for interventions that aligned with TA participants' priorities; and (2) the key interventions relating to women were mostly included in 'above base' allocation requests and therefore considered less of an overall priority than those included in base allocation requests.

3. How the Global Fund can improve TA for communities of women in all their diversity

W4GF celebrates the Office of the Inspector General [Report Audit of the COVID-19 Response Mechanism 2021](#) which highlights the Global Fund Secretariat's significant efforts to enhance the inclusiveness of the C19RM 2021 process. At the same time we call on different arms of the Global Fund to ensure that women's priorities are more extensively reflected in future funding requests and funded to an adequate degree.

We call on the C19RM Investment Committee to:

- **Allocate more time to the overall process of developing funding requests:** The rapid and timebound nature of the short-term TA inevitably results in a process that cannot meet all demands or needs. More time in the overall process will allow TA to support the full engagement of communities, regardless of which window a country chooses to submit its C19RM funding request.

¹ In May and June 2021, W4GF provided short-term TA in two of four countries (Cameroon and Zambia), while the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) provided such TA in two others (Botswana and Tanzania)

We call on the CCM Hub to:

- **Ensure that all final documents associated with the TA process are accessible to all who engaged.** This is important for building and sustaining ownership, sharing of experiences across different contexts, and boosting ongoing interest and capacity among women and girls (including in terms of accountability for C19RM grant implementation). **All countries submitting funding requests must be reminded that, at minimum, they should share their final proposals with communities, including women's advocates.**
- **Explore ways to keep women informed and engaged.** This meant that even after the Global Fund had formally approved grants to all countries and notified them of what they would receive, many of the women were not aware of whether their 'asks' had gotten into the funding requests or what the progress was on the overall process. They therefore were not able to hold CCMs and other local and national stakeholders accountable for taking their priorities and the identified needs of women and girls seriously.

We call on the Community, Rights and Gender SI to:

- **Develop clear yet detailed costing guidance** specifically for communities that is publicly available and regularly updated. Among other key areas, this could include information and examples about how to cost community led monitoring activities and gender-responsive budgeting and costing.
- **Expand the scope and scale of the TA** so that the engagement of women is stronger and continuous, including by having the TA process cover a country's entire funding proposal drafting process, and not just stop with the identification and submission of priorities.
- **Ensure a key component of all related TA is to produce summary documents** by community representations in key local languages so that all communities are well informed and able to receive feedback on their engagement.
- **Invest in TA that enables women to engage throughout and beyond the funding request process,** including implementation, review and monitoring; and as part of this create a mechanism to keep communities of women informed of what happened and how they might engage in the future.

We call on the Global Fund Secretariat to:

- **Invest in global women's networks that focus on and routinely discuss Global Fund issues and developments.** A strong baseline of women's local capacity and interest in engaging with the Global Fund is essential. W4GF, ICWEA and similar groups continuously increase awareness and understanding of the Global Fund among women and girls in countries around the world. Helping to strengthen their ability to reach more women with vital information will help to make local women's work and engagement more effective during TA processes and more broadly in Global Fund activities in their countries.

W4GF is a dynamic global platform of women and gender equality advocates who share a deep commitment to ensuring that Global Fund programmes are gender-transformative to meet the rights and priorities of women and girls in all our diversity. For more information, please contact [Sophie Dilmitis](#) Global Coordinator, [WEB](#) | [FACEBOOK](#) | [TWITTER](#)