

THE GLOBAL FUND'S POST 2022 STRATEGY

INPUT FROM THE FRONTLINE AIDS PARTNERSHIP IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA



KEY MESSAGES

Francophone countries in Africa are unable to fully absorb Global Fund investments due to weak health system infrastructure. Coordinated, localised and responsive technical support is critical to identify, design and then implement high-value and high-impact programming that is reflective of acute and chronic needs in the fight against AIDS, TB and malaria.

Key populations are frequently stigmatised, criminalised and discriminated against, creating barriers to access to quality services and optimal health outcomes. Global Fund investment must support programmes that address structural barriers, challenge stigma and ensure that no one is left behind in access to education, outreach, treatment and support.

Increased investment in community leadership and systems is needed, including strengthening the organisational and technical capacities of civil society organisations and communities.

The Global Fund and partners must collaborate with countries to build back better after COVID-19, and restore health system capacity to be inclusive, equitable and committed to health for all.

Francophone countries are a strategic area of focus for the Global Fund. The majority of Global Fund investments in Francophone countries are in West Africa, which carries a significant proportion of the world's malaria and HIV burdens and increasing rates of MDR TB in some countries.¹

Frontline AIDS' civil society and community partners in francophone Africa want to see the next Global Fund strategy:

DELIVERING AGAINST HIV, TB AND MALARIA

- Invest in community leadership and technical support for community-based organisations to meaningfully engage in the design and implementation of HIV and health activities.
- Require a more robust framework for community-led monitoring to ensure accountability, integrated into key performance indicators and future monitoring of Global Fund investment performance and impact.
- Commit to ring fencing budgets for community-led organisations to reduce the risk of cuts during grant negotiations and further budgetary adjustments. In addition, make clear to governments receiving funding that HIV prevention and harm reduction services are critical/essential and not an add-on.

In December 2020, Frontline AIDS Francophone Africa partners conducted an online survey to gather inputs on the 2023-2027 Global Fund strategy process. Respondents surveyed answered questions related to delivering on the Global Fund's core mandate, health system strengthening, global health security and human rights.

¹ https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/5959/publication_franconieregionalimpact_report_en.pdf

INTEGRATION AND SYSTEMS FOR HEALTH

The West and Central Africa region is characterised by weak and fragile health systems and low government health expenditure. Challenging operating environments in this region also contributes to programme bottlenecks. To counter these challenges, the Global Fund should:

- Invest in community systems strengthening including reinforcing the organisational and technical capacities of civil society organisations and communities.
- Ensure that investment in the region contributes to countries achieving universal health coverage and the creation of health insurance schemes and support the membership of key and vulnerable populations in health insurance schemes.
- Develop a rapid response mechanism that allows the Global Fund to pivot rapidly to respond to new epidemics that may imperil the gains made against HIV, TB and malaria.
- Provide technical assistance to countries for domestic resource mobilisation and incentivise them to increase co-financing to strengthen resilient and sustainable health systems.
- Develop a robust contingency plan to support countries to maintain their responses to the three diseases in the face of the rise of new epidemics that could imperil national gains. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how organisations and countries must be nimble and adapt to uncertainty and increased need.²

EQUITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

Key populations are frequently stigmatised, criminalised and discriminated against, creating barriers to access to quality services and optimal health outcomes. For young women and adolescent girls, entrenched gender norms and historical barriers to awareness, education and participation in society contribute to higher rates of new HIV infections than among their male counterparts. We

propose the following recommendations for scaling and enhancing efforts to integrate human rights and gender equality into HIV and TB responses:

- Prioritise and commit to stronger collaboration between community organisations that represent key populations and other institutional stakeholders within the Global Fund partnership to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Invest in capacity strengthening and awareness raising on gender-based violence.
- Take a holistic approach to supporting and funding for the protection of key and vulnerable populations, including legal assistance. This may require the Global Fund partnership to leverage its political and social capital to engage with religious and traditional leaders to counter institutionalised discrimination and criminalisation of people and behaviours.
- Demonstrate a measurable commitment to more deliberate investment in, and resourcing of, human rights and gender considerations by promoting and documenting case studies that illustrate the importance of human rights and gender equality in national and community programming.
- Do more to drive policy changes in countries that receive funding and push governments to repeal laws and policies that criminalise, stigmatise, discriminate or exclude people based on their identity or behaviour.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The Global Fund's innovative partnership model has been heralded as an area of strength. However, a number of challenges remain. Low absorption of funds has been a perennial issue marked by weak coordination among development partners leading to duplication of activities and compromising programme operationalisation. We propose the following recommendations in order to achieve greater impact in the next strategy:

² COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges to people with HIV going without antiretroviral therapy (ARV) treatment and at the same time, a surge in the level of interpersonal and gender-based violence and other human rights violations has contributed to rising risk and increased vulnerability to infection by HIV.

The lockdowns, curfews, reduction in work hours and shutting of public services have also compromised access to TB treatment and care. A survey conducted in 12 francophone African countries found that 71% of patients were unable to access treatment, putting them at greater risk for drug-resistant TB. Also of concern is the fact that frontline health workers, including those engaged in both TB and COVID-19 patient care, lacked personal protective equipment.

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- Continue to support innovation, collaboration and continuous improvement that builds on the strengths of the partnership model and overcomes its challenges, chief among them the low absorption of funds and poor coordination that results in duplication of some activities and gaps in services to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable populations in the region.
- Support, document, and disseminate best practices and innovative initiatives carried out by civil society and community organisations.
- Create mechanisms/platforms to ensure meaningful engagement, consultation and coordination among affected communities and with key stakeholders.
- Provide access to technical assistance that is contextual and relevant, and before the start of any grant application process, mobilise civil society and communities to engage in the Global Fund processes and ensure broad input, ownership and engagement.
- Embed greater flexibility into programme directives to allow for real-time approval of reprogramming requests and streamlined budgeting and grant reporting processes.
- Support the development of innovative digital applications in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.
- Develop a robust evaluation framework to accompany the end of a grant, to assess impact and ensure that lessons learned are shared widely.