



# **SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN TO INFLUENCE C19RM FUNDING REQUESTS: CASE STUDY ON SHORT-TERM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN FOUR COUNTRIES**

This case study discusses short-term technical assistance provided by Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) and the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) to women, including adolescent girls and young women, to enable them to articulate key priorities for inclusion in C19RM funding requests in four countries in 2021: Botswana, Cameroon, Tanzania and Zambia.

W4GF provided three days of virtual TA support in Cameroon and Zambia and ICWEA provided more in-depth and in-person TA (12 days per country) in Botswana and Tanzania. This support was funded by the Global Fund's Community, Rights and Gender Strategic Initiative (CRG SI).

The case study aims to explore the TA provided and highlight key impacts, benefits, challenges and lessons learned. It also includes recommendations for the Global Fund, based on the research findings. The analysis and observations will contribute to a growing body of knowledge on how to best support women and other marginalised communities to engage with the Global Fund in their countries, including ensuring that their needs and priorities are recognised and met by the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developed and implemented by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) has provided additional funding at country and regional levels (through multi-country grants) to address challenges in the delivery of HIV, TB and malaria services that are caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and country responses. To address existing gaps in influence and involvement, the Global Fund's Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Strategic Initiative (CRG SI) supports a range of technical assistance (TA) opportunities for communities and marginalised groups to ensure meaningful engagement in the C19RM initiative.

Women4Global Fund (W4GF) and the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) were requested by the Global Fund's CRG SI to provide short-term TA to women's health and rights advocates and service providers in the context of the C19RM. In May and June 2021, W4GF provided remote and virtual TA, spread over three days, in five countries: Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Venezuela and Zambia. Over the same period, ICWEA provided short-term peer-to-peer TA in four countries (12 days per country): Botswana, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania. This case study discusses the TA process and results in four of those countries: Cameroon and Zambia (provided by W4GF) and Botswana and Tanzania (provided by ICWEA).

**The principal objective of the TA was to support women's health and rights advocates and service providers to develop a list of priority areas and interventions to be included in their country's 2021 C19RM funding request.** This list of priorities was then turned into a detailed document of five pages which included evidence and analyses to support the requested interventions and focus areas.

The priorities documents emerging from all four TA processes had some key similarities. All requests included language and interventions to enhance and ensure women's engagement in providing, leading and monitoring the delivery of services, with the aim of reducing the vulnerability of women in all their diversity to HIV, TB and malaria and key impacts of COVID-19, such as increased violence against women.

### RECEPTION AND IMPACT OF THE TA

Research that informed this case study suggests that most TA participants and providers viewed the overall TA process positively, both in terms of how the TA was delivered and what they learned. Some respondents also noted some challenges and shortcomings regarding the TA process in one or more of the four countries. Nearly all respondents noted the limited time available to prepare and provide the TA.

Impact of varying degree can be seen in the language and content of the funding requests. **There are clear signs that the women's priorities documents have directly and indirectly influenced decisions in the drafting of C19RM funding requests.** In all countries, there was substantial evidence of language in funding requests that was copied verbatim from the priorities document or that recognisably reflected what was requested.

Beyond funding request inclusion, the TA also had the following impacts:

- › Built the capacity of women in the four countries to meaningfully engage in important Global Fund processes. Through this empowering exercise, the women gained knowledge and skills to better advocate for increased and sustained services that are vital for women living with and vulnerable to HIV, TB, malaria, COVID-19 and other health and well-being concerns.
- › Bolstered the quality of C19RM grant implementation because it laid the groundwork for communities of women to hold their Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) accountable for ensuring that the C19RM funds have the intended effect spelled out in the funding requests.
- › Brought communities of women together who had rarely or ever before engaged in such work, including representatives of diverse groups, such as transgender women, women living with disabilities and young women living with HIV or TB. Their voices and input are essential to ensure that no one is left behind or further marginalised and hopefully their participation in these targeted C19RM TA processes will set a precedent for continued engagement in the future.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A top-level lesson learned is that **short-term TA, such as that provided by W4GF and ICWEA, can influence the content of C19RM funding requests.**

However, one inescapable take-home message is that **the CCMs did not consider many of the women's priorities as vital and essential despite the fact that** the Global Fund has stressed the importance of activities benefiting and led by communities and vulnerable populations. It was clear in the funding requests that the above base allocation requests appear to include disproportionately larger numbers of and funding for key activities and interventions from the women's perspective. This is a concern because above-allocation activities are considered less of a priority than those included in base allocation requests and funding is far less likely to be made available for them.

Some additional lessons learned include:

- › The rapid and timebound nature of the short-term TA inevitably results in a process that cannot meet all demands or needs.

- › Having relevant evidence available prior to the TA process (e.g., data on the impact of COVID-19 on women) can help accelerate prioritisation and strengthen output.
- › Having ‘champions’ on writing teams and CCMs often makes the process smoother and opens important doors; in Cameroon, the head of the local civil society group that formally requested the TA was the vice-chair of the CCM; in Botswana, the local expert who oversaw the TA was a member of the CCM as well as a member of the writing team; in Zambia, the head of the civil society (secular) writing team not only participated in the initial TA consultation but also supported the drafting and finalisation of the priorities document.
- › Collaborations with grassroots networks and using existing platforms enhances engagement with women in all their diversity, including adolescent girls and young women and key and vulnerable populations.
- › Ensuring that all participants have adequate knowledge about the C19RM and the Global Fund more generally can prove to be essential for the full participation of women in all their diversity.
- › Costing is difficult and complex; greater support is required for communities of women to identify key costing variables and inputs and to enable them to access existing Global Fund costing guidelines and templates.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Listed below are recommendations for the Global Fund based on the findings of this research, including the detailed lessons learned (which also include suggestions), as follows:

- › **Ensure that additional time is available in TA processes** to allow the full engagement of communities, regardless of which window<sup>1</sup> a country chooses. A potential approach would be to **expand the scope and scale of the TA so that engagement is stronger and continuous**. This could include supporting extra days of TA even in shorter and virtual TA provision; mandating or strongly encouraging local physical meetings (provided local conditions allow during the pandemic); and 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 that all final documents associated with the TA process are easily and regularly accessible to all who engaged**. This is important for building and sustaining ownership, sharing experiences across different contexts and boosting ongoing interest and capacity among women and girls (including accountability for C19RM grant implementation). As part of this effort, the Global Fund should remind all countries that submit C19RM funding requests that minimum, they should share their final proposals with communities, including women’s advocates.

<sup>1</sup> Window 1: 14 May 2021; Window 2: 31 May 2021; Window 3: 15 June 2021; Window 4: 30 June 2021; Window 5: 16 July 2021; Window 6: 17 September 2021

- › **Develop clear and detailed costing guidance specifically for communities: this should be publicly available and regularly updated.** Among other key areas, this could include information and examples on how to cost community-led monitoring activities and gender-responsive budgeting and costing.
- › **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.
- › **Explore ways to keep women informed and engaged.** There was very little follow-up with participants after the priorities documents were submitted. This meant that in December 2021, several months after the TA ended – and 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 requests had been included in the funding requests or what progress had been achieved.

One solution proposed by research respondents to this case study is for the Global Fund and partners to invest in three complementary areas aimed at TA participants' more extensive and ongoing involvement, as follows:

- 1 Ensure that at least some TA participants can engage throughout the C19RM process, including implementation, review and monitoring;
- 2 create a mechanism to inform communities of women of what has occurred and how they might engage in the future; and
- 3 assess the impact of this type of TA in a timely and detailed manner.