South-to-South Learning: Lessons Learnt from Virtual Country Dialogues for Global Fund Funding Request Development in the Asia-Pacific

Organised by The Asia-Pacific Platform on Community, Right & Gender (APCRG) and Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific (GFAN AP)

19th August 2020 (Wed), 14:00 – 16:00 BKK / 12:30 – 14:30 IST / 09:00 – 11:00 CEST

With the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2, countries have started implementing various restrictions to contain the COVID-19 pandemic with various forms of lockdowns, mobility restrictions, curfews in Q1 and Q2 of 2020. This has presented a set of challenges for country dialogues which have been conducted through in-person consultations and meetings.

Recognising the disruptions that COVID-19 would have – including preparations for the funding request, as well as on implementation – the Global Fund has responded accordingly. To ensure inclusive, comprehensive, transparent country dialogue processes in eligible countries, the Global Fund issued a Guidance Note on Virtual Inclusive Dialogues which included tips and tools for a virtual country dialogue, points to consider when choosing tools and platforms, guidance on repurposing CCM funds for supporting virtual country dialogues and a case study on virtual consultations conducted well.

The virtual south-to-south learning webinar was organised to:

- Facilitate south-to-south learning to share lessons learnt, challenges faced, and solutions adopted from the implementation of virtual country dialogues by communities and civil society; and
- Create synergies and support exchanges between communities and civil society in Asia-Pacific Global Fund eligible countries to strengthen community engagement in Global Fund country processes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agenda

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
Moderated by RD Marte, Executive Director, APCASO, host of APCRG Platform		
10 min	Welcome and Introductions to Webinar	RD Marte, APCASO & Host of APCRG Rachel Ong, GFAN AP Kate Thomson, CRG Department, Global Fund
5 min	Participant Polling	Rachel Ong
15 min	Global Fund Virtual Country Dialogues	Hyeyoung Lim, CRG Department, Global Fund
10 min	Moderated Q & A	Moderated by RD Marte
5 min	Participant Polling	Rachel Ong
30 min	Experiences from the ground • Experiences of Nepal (10 min) • Experiences of Indonesia (10 min) • Experiences of Vietnam (10 min)	Achut Sitaula, CCM Vice-Chair, Nepal Mei Sebayang, CCM Member, Chair of HIV National Technical Working Group of the CCM, Indonesia Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, SCDI Vietnam, SR for HIV and Malaria
20 min	Moderated Q & A	Moderated by RD Marte
10 min	APCRG-led initiatives: • Information Dissemination • Technical Assistance Support • COVID-19 Alert System	Jennifer Ho, APCRG
10 min	Moderated Q & A	Moderated by RD Marte
5 min	Closing Remarks	RD Marte, APCASO & Host of APCRG Rachel Ong, GFAN AP

Summary of Presentations and Discussions

The following provides an overview of the main points from the Webinar from both the presenters as well as participants in the chat box.

The full webinar is available online here; while the full set of presentations is available here.

Global Fund Virtual Country Dialogues

Presentation by Hyeyoung Lim, Human Rights Adviser, CRG Department, Global Fund

- Global Fund strategic commitment on meaningful community engagement
  - Transparent, inclusive and meaningful community engagement in the Country Dialogue process and across all relevant Global Fund-related processes is a strategic commitment ingrained in the Global Fund and a collective responsibility of the Global Fund partnership to ensure meaningful community engagement across its processes.
  - Engagement of key and vulnerable communities including key populations in the Country Dialogues is critical as they are experts in effective interventions for their respective communities, are aware of existing barriers and can guide the development of programs that are truly effective.
  - In addition, right to participation on decision-making processes that affect the lives of communities living with and affected by the three diseases is a fundamental human right.
- Eligibility requirements for a funding request to be considered by the Global Fund
  - The Global Fund requires a transparent and inclusive consultation process to develop a funding request and an open, transparent and documented Principal Recipient (PR) selection process as eligibility criteria for funding request submission.
- Country Dialogue
  - The Country Dialogue is a continuous process that is expected to bring the voices of all stakeholders whose input is relevant to the three responses. The Country Dialogue for the funding request development is an opportunity to ensure that the interventions proposed are people centred, human rights based, gender responsive, community led, community based and can address existing access barriers.
  - The Country Dialogue process expands beyond funding request development to include the stages of grant making and oversight of grant implementation.
- Conducting transparent and inclusive Country Dialogues in the context of travel restrictions and lockdowns
  - The Global Fund issued a Guidance Note on Virtual Inclusive Dialogues when national governments imposed travel restrictions, lockdowns and/or curfews in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Fund believes, given the fundamental importance of transparent and inclusive Country Dialogue processes for funding request development, all efforts should be made to conduct transparent and inclusive country dialogue process despite the COVID-19 context and confirms that CCM eligibility criteria are still in force.
  - The guidance provide tips and tools and case studies on how virtual dialogues could be conducted effectively in the context of lockdowns to ensure meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in the funding request development process. The guidance note also provides information on available resources to conduct virtual inclusive dialogues.
  - The CCM through its funds can support all virtual activities for virtual inclusive dialogues including supporting IT solutions and webinar platforms, providing extra broadband capacities and mobile solutions to meet the specific needs of the civil society which includes mobile data, sim cards and also purchase of the devices such as laptops and smartphones for the CCM secretariat or the civil society representatives to ensure quality, meaningful and remote engagement.
- The Global Fund conducted a survey to gather information on the experiences of Global Fund applicants in submitting funding requests in the COVID-19 context

- The survey data from windows 1 & 2 show that the overall engagement of communities and civil society in the funding request development processes in Asia-Pacific has been positive and that the majority of the respondents from Asia-Pacific have recognized that the CCMs have proactively reached to key and vulnerable populations; and communities have been able to fully express themselves.
- However, in the context of virtual inclusive dialogues access to technology, connectivity, and language barriers have been identified as key challenges.
- The respondents have also recognized that despite the opportunities to engage in the country dialogue processes, the reflection of community input in the funding request or in interventions is much limited. Clear lack of key and vulnerable population representation in the writing teams and being pressured to endorse funding requests in the context of COVID-19 without comprehensive endorsement processes have also been identified as challenges.

For more information:

- Strategic Considerations for Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Key-Population-Focused HIV Programs published 15th ay 2020 - download in English
- COVID-19 Guidance Note: Community, Rights and Gender issued on 15th May 2020 - download in English
- Global Fund COVID-19 Guidance Note: Human Rights in the Times of COVID-19 – issued 14th April 2020 - download in English
- Regional Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group on COVID-19 Preparedness and Response in Asia and Pacific – COVID-19: How to include marginalised and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement - download in English

Experiences from Ground

Experiences from Nepal

Presentation by Achut Sitaula, Executive Director, Trisuli Plus and CCM Vice-Chair, Nepal

- Having received the Global Fund allocation letter for the 2020-2022 allocation cycle in December 2019, the CCM executive committee – comprised of PLHIV and key population representatives met and agreed on the disease split and initiated devising country dialogue plans. The CCM also met with the key affected population networks and briefed them on the allocation letter and the disease split.
- The Nepal CCM formed a task force to lead the country dialogue process again comprised with representatives from people living with diseases and key populations. With the support of APCASO, community capacity building sessions were organized, and community consultation plan was devised for the country dialogue process.
- The nine key affected population networks of Nepal have been engaged in implementing the community consultations at the district and provincial level. However, with community lockdown imposed by the government of Nepal to control the spread of COVID-19 in March, the Nepal country dialogue consultation plans had to be adopted. A virtual consultation guideline was developed and was endorsed by the communities and civil society.
- All virtual community consultations on HIV for the country dialogue were led by community representatives. In each district, seven consultations were held totalling to 63 consultations. In addition, seven provincial consultations and nine thematic consultations were also conducted including on community systems strengthening; and 23 consultations were conducted for TB and 26 consultations were conducted for malaria.
- Lessons learnt:
  - The CCM Nepal should have developed emergency plans or had them in place given that Nepal is prone natural disasters.
  - Virtual inclusive dialogues are as effective as any other consultation and cost effective as long as communities are leading and owning the process.

Experience from Indonesia

Presentation by Meirinda Sebayang, Chair – Indonesia Positive Network; CCM Member; Chair of HIV National Technical Working Group of the CCM, Indonesia

- In preparation for the country dialogue, the Indonesia CCM established 10 sub-working groups in line with modular template guideline handbook (MSM-TG, PWID, Sex Workers, PMTCT, TB/HIV, RSSH, CSS, Human Rights, TCS, PSCM). Each sub-committee has been consisted of government representatives, representatives of PLWD and key affected populations and development partners. Most of the sub working groups have been led by the community representatives.
- The Indonesia CCM employed both online and offline methods to gather community inputs in the country dialogue process. While some consultations were held in west and east regions of Indonesia, opportunities were provided to the communities to provide input through online means.
- As a strategy, the Indonesia CCM has taken ample time in order to conduct comprehensive discussions with relevant stakeholder during the funding request development and drafting period to ensure that as much as possible concerns are resolved prior to submitting the funding request to the Global Fund.
- Challenges:
  - The data gaps at the country level remains a major challenge as data from development partners (UNAIDS) were not accepted by the Ministry of Health. It is critical that data generation, analysis and publishing is done in collaboration with government authorities to ensure validity and acceptance of data.
  - The innovative approaches in terms of conducting virtual dialogues are challenging as communities affected by the three diseases have limited access to technology.
- It is crucial that the communities build stronger alliances not only among the communities but also with other stakeholders including the government to ensure that the community concerns are prioritized in the three responses.

Experience from Vietnam

Presentation by Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, Executive Director, Center for Community Development Initiatives (SCDI) – SR for HIV and Malaria

- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly limited the opportunities in Vietnam to conduct the Country Dialogue for the Global Fund funding request development in a traditional sense. Between January when the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Vietnam and April when the first lockdown was imposed, meetings were limited to small meetings or virtual consultations.
- However, availability of a strong and effective community mobilization system at the country level particularly for HIV communities was critical not only to ensure a transparent and inclusive Country Dialogue process but also to guarantee the continuation of the dialogue despite a challenge such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been an investment of the Global Fund.
- In the case of Vietnam, collaborations among the HIV-focused civil society organizations were already existing and they were already in dialogue among themselves and therefore the Country Dialogue process for the funding request development for the HIV component continued effectively. However, the situation was not the same for the TB community as the TB community was not mobilized and did not have the same level of experience.
- The community systems that contributed to the effective engagement of HIV communities and civil society in the Country Dialogue process is a result of Global Fund investments in strengthening the civil society systems for the HIV response over the years which has not happened with the TB or malaria communities.
- The implications of not investing in the community system for the malaria response as for HIV response is also apparent in weaker community systems for malaria which also impacted the meaningful engagement of malaria communities for a meaningful and transparent Country Dialogue process in Vietnam.
- The Country Dialogue process is not just few meetings or few months of engagement. It is a continuous process and it requires a strong civil society system to ensure transparency and inclusiveness of the

country dialogue process. It is therefore crucial that adequate investments are made to build community and civil society systems across the three diseases.

APCRG-led initiatives to support Inclusive Country Dialogues

Presentation by Jennifer Ho, Deputy Director, APCASO; Manager APCRG

- The APCRG Platform hosted by APCSO aims to facilitate bi-directional communication and provide accurate and accessible information to further the meaningful engagement of communities and civil society in Global Fund processes; strengthen engagement of communities affected by HIV, TB and malaria to improve overall impact of Global Fund programmes and interventions; expand access to technical assistance for communities and civil society; and foster spaces for engagement and collective participation.
- The rapid assessment conducted by APCRG together with APCASO and GFAN AP to gather information on the impact of COVID-19 on communities living with and affected by HIV, TB and malaria and on HIV, TB and malaria responses confirms significant impact on the communities and responses including severe disruption to services, service points being closed down or operate with shorter service hours, increase of gender-based violence among key population groups particularly among sex workers and economic loss specifically among migrant workers.
- Given these challenges it is crucial that Global Fund and funding partners provide specific allocations to support CS and KP to augment immediate, medium and long-term COVID-19 community-led responses specially including CRG-related issues; CCMs and Global Fund country teams should immediately rollout GF Funding requests, grant implementation and grant flexibilities guidance and policies in coordination with CS ad KP led organizations; and technical partners should develop further modelling exercises and situation reports on the regional and country level impact of COVID-19.
- In the context of COVID-19, CS and KP-led organizations should be supported to work closely with the CCMs. All stakeholders, particularly CS and KP-led organizations need to develop risk mitigation measures that would help sustain ongoing work in emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments should explore inclusion of COVID-19 and possible future pandemic with the UHC framework.
- APCRG has developed number of info guides to support communities to strategize their engagement in the country dialogue processes and in Global Fund related process and are available on the APCASO website.

Discussion and Comments from Participants

- For a country like Sri Lanka which is transitioning from Global Fund funding, the country dialogue processes for the 2020-2022 allocation need to focus on the sustainability of the current programs and on sustaining interventions for key and vulnerable populations including community systems.
- The transparency and inclusiveness of the country dialogue processes at country level has been a challenge over the years. Communities should first reach out to the CCM secretariat directly and through elected CCM members to call for a comprehensive, transparent and inclusive country dialogue. Communities could also reach out to respective FPMs if there are concerns of transparency and inclusiveness of country dialogue processes. Communities can reach out to CRG Platform in Asia-Pacific and to the Global Fund CRG department to request for technical assistance to support the country to ensure a transparent and inclusive country dialogue process.
- The Country Dialogue process during the COVID-19 pandemic has not only been affected by government-imposed lockdowns, it has also been affected as a result of communities and civil society including key populations being infected or affected by the COVID-19 pandemic itself. To support communities, the savings from the current grants have been utilized by the PRs in countries like Indonesia to provide support to SSR, SR organizations under the Global Fund 5% Operational Flexibilities initiative and some countries have applied for the C19RM mechanism.
- Developing community systems for malaria is challenging due to many reasons including the fact that those who are infected with malaria could be cured and no longer consider them to be affected by the disease, unlike the case of HIV in which case an individual continues to live with HIV. However,

malaria community systems could be developed focusing on populations and geographies where there is an increase vulnerability to malaria infection.

- There were concerns that post COVID-19, countries would have challenges in meeting co-financing targets, and requested for information from the Global Fund. The Global Fund Secretariat would revert on this inquiry and concern.
- There was emphasis that many human rights and gender-related issues have surfaced with the COVID-19 pandemic, and more is needed to understand through the applicant survey conducted by the Global Fund to understand how reflections are translated into concrete investments on human rights and key populations programmes.
- In the coming months, more information will be made available regarding the CCM Evolution project which will be rolling out to more countries after the pilot phase concluded in 2019.
- There was overall recognition of the investments of the Global Fund that have strengthened community systems in being able to react to COVID-19 and much more needs to be done in this area, as community systems strengthening require long-term sustained support, as well as for advocacy, and programmes that can address access barriers.
- Discussions around 'human rights' and community systems strengthening are still challenging for malaria, and to a large extent for TB. The Technical Review Panel (TRP) has been increasing recommending applicants to better identify human rights and gender-related barriers through different assessments; and develop costed plans to address those barriers and also for community systems strengthening. The Global Fund CRG TA is mobilised to respond to such TRP comments in the malaria context.
- A question was raised by a participant regarding the use of multi-country grants to support country dialogue processes. The Global Fund is contextualising the next multi-country grant for the Asia-Pacific region, and while country-level activities are not encouraged, how community engagement in the GF processes in the applicable countries could be explore. Under the Global Fund CRG Strategic Initiatives (SIs), the selected networks and consortium have supported network strengthening and engagement in the Global Fund processes. Participants were reminded of the 15% set-aside for community and CS representation strengthening through the CCM budget.

The Asia-Pacific Platform on Communities, Rights, and Gender (APCRG), hosted by APCASO, is a communications and coordination platform for civil society groups, key population networks, non-governmental and community-based organisations that are involved in the response to fight HIV, TB, and malaria. It is one of the six regional platforms that were established with the support of the Global Fund under the Community, Rights, and Gender Special Initiative (CRG SI). For more information, please visit www.apcaso.org/apcrg/

Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific (GFAN AP) is a platform of community and civil society advocates for a fully resourced Global Fund. It supports community and civil society mobilisation in the areas of increased domestic financing for HIV, TB and malaria responses; increased donor contributions towards the Global Fund; and ensuring that policy frameworks on health financing take into account community, rights and gender issues. For more information, please visit www.gfanasiapcific.org