apcrg

The Asia-Pacific Platform on
Communities, Rights & Gender

Asia-Pacific Community, Rights, and Gender (APCRG) Platform

hosted by APCASO

Learning Document

2021-2023

Presented by

APCASO
Strengthening community systems.
Advancing human rights.

Contents

Executive Summary

APCASO is a regional civil society network organisation that serves as a catalytic platform for advocacy and community stems strengthening for health, social justice, and human rights for the most marginalised and vulnerable population in Asia and the Pacific. It is registered as a Thai Foundation, with its secretariat based in Bangkok, Thailand, with member organisations in 14 countries across the region. Since 2016, APCASO has been host to the Asia Pacific Community Rights and Gender (APCRG) Platform, which is part of the Community Engagement Strategic Initiative (CE SI) of the Global Fund for the Fight Against Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. It is one of six regional platforms around the world. As APCASO nears the end of its third three-year cycle of hosting the Platform, it is taking this opportunity to pause and reflect on what it has achieved and learned.

To do this, a desk review was completed, and key informant interviews were conducted with twelve people who have participated in at least one of the Platform's activities in recent years. The APCRG Platform consists of three key activity areas:

1. Increase access to **information and communication** to enhance community engagement in Global Fund processes;

2. Linking communities and civil society organisations and networks to short-term **technical assistance;** and

3. Providing **strategic funding** to help facilitate community engagement in Global Fund processes.

Overall, feedback and findings have been extremely positive, with clear examples of how the Platform has contributed to advancing community engagement in Global Fund processes. This includes making more organisations feel connected to the Platform, and their needs heard. There are also opportunities to improve aspects of the effectiveness of the Platform going forward, particularly as it evolves into a Learning Hub in the next cycle. APCASO has been recognised by its partners and the Global Fund secretariat for the effectiveness of its information and communication, particularly as a result of its attractive and informative website and newsletters, in addition to an active Facebook page. Some partner organisations also appreciate the regular informal communication, and efforts that APCASO makes to ensure that organisations are kept in the loop and have timely access to information. The webinars and in-person meetings are also valued opportunities to connect, and many organisations cited these as inspiring. The Platform has been less successful in generating demand for short-term technical assistance (TA). There are various reasons for this, yet there are opportunities to be seized. And while TA has not been a big part of the Platform's activities, it has invested more in strategic funding, which has yielded some powerful results.

Information & Communication

APCASO's approach to developing tailored, relevant, bite-size and attractive information to its partners makes it a stand-out regional platform, providing a service that is valued by its partners. Partners report using some of the tools produced by APCRG in a way that informs and empowers them, and enables them to be more heard and effective in their advocacy efforts. APCRG uses diverse communication methods to share information with its partners: a website, newsletter, Facebook page, webinars, and in-person meetings, complemented by informal communication through email and WhatsApp. This combination meets the needs of diverse partners, as each partner has its own communication preferences. While Facebook reaches the most people, more information appears to be transmitted through the newsletter, which leads people to the website. Webinars have potential to create engagement and exchange, but have been poorly attended, and there is potential to increase interest and value by organising them in coordination with other partners and networks, and creating more space for engagement. This engagement is already done well in APCRG's in-person meetings, which are organised in a way that brings diverse partners together to share experiences, expand knowledge, and find commonalities to increase the bonds between partners, and finding joint messages to collectively amplify.

Short-Term Technical Assistance

APCRG has had some positive outcomes, but overall, it has been less successful at generating demand for short-term technical assistance (TA), despite significant efforts to promote the opportunities available. APCASO's assessments and understanding from its observations was that partner needs were more for financial than technical assistance. It was therefore surprising that this review reveals that the interest for TA may be larger than expected, and understanding of it – at least among some of the partners interviewed – may be lower than assumed. While some successful TA has taken place, there appear to be other opportunities for APCRG to connect the dots between partner needs and the opportunities available – particularly during the implementation phases of the Global Fund grant cycle. Many partners do find the application process onerous, and APCRG may be able to provide tailored support to bridging the gap – as it does with strategic funding.

Strategic Funding

The use of strategic funding picked up in the last funding cycle as APCASO identified more need for direct assistance for activities than for TA. This – enabled by a simple application and approval process – has resulted in the design and implementation of some strategic interventions. These efforts have filled gaps or allowed important activities to take place, while demonstrating an effective use of resources by civil society organisations, particularly among key and vulnerable populations. This funding is also being used strategically to make or strengthen connections that have received insufficient support or attention through other mechanisms, including with TB and malaria, who have traditionally been less engaged in CE SI activities.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the APCRG Learning Hub Host

1. **Create more balanced engagement across the three-diseases:** Strengthen malaria and TB expertise of the Hub, and build on the growing momentum to engage the regional TB and malaria networks more regularly to ensure that information and communication is presented in a way that is more inclusive of all diseases. This is particularly important for malaria CSOs where CRG issues can be less well understood or integrated in general, and where there is also a need to strengthen awareness around these issues. Similarly, create spaces for malaria and TB partners to feel more directly heard and engaged, through dedicated meetings and webinars.

2. **Rethink TA demand generation:** Work with the Global Fund's Grant Management Department, Principal Recipients, and other networks in the region to identify opportunities for short-term TA, and adopt a more tailored and pro-active approach to working with individual organisations to identify strategic TA needs, and co-developing TA requests to support different stages of the funding cycle – particularly during grant implementation.

3. **Strategic Funding selection process communication:** Consider documenting the approach to formalise allocation of some available resources to "planned" support, which is prioritised through the needs assessment, and some resources to "spontaneous" support, to allow APCRG to respond to important emerging needs. In both cases, the criteria for selection should be transparent and the rationale for decisions documented.

4. **Relaunch a webinar series with more partners:** There is interest among partners to attend useful, engaging webinars, which can be co-designed with partners to ensure relevance, and organised with other networks to boost participation. Accompanied by a promotional program, these webinars could also explore some of the broader Global Fund issues to connect the dots between CE SI and other strategic initiatives, which APCRG members may be interested in, but have less exposure to, such as the Human Rights Strategic Initiative.

Recommendations to CRG Department

1. **More resources for translation:** Provide additional resources to support translation in regions that have multiple languages to manage. This gap is currently limiting the understanding and more active engagement of many community members.

2. **Simplify the TA request form:** Review APCASO's approach to receiving strategic funding requests to see if the TA application process can be similarly simplified.

3. **Expand strategic funding:** Allow higher proportions of learning hub budgets to be used with flexibility at the hub's discretion to ensure that the most strategic needs are being met – whether it is for short-term technical assistance, or otherwise.

Acronyms

APCRG	Asia Pacific Community Rights and Gender regional platform
C19RM	Covid-19 Response Mechanism
CCM	Country coordinating mechanism
CE SI	Community Engagement Strategic Initiative
CRG	Community Rights and Gender (department of the Global Fund)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
GC7	Grant cycle seven (of the Global Fund)
Global Fund	Global Fund for the Fight Against HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GMD	Grant Management Department (Global Fund)
PLHIV	People living with HIV
NSP	National strategic plan
RSSH	Resilient and sustainable systems for health
TA	Technical Assistance

Acknowledgements

1. Background

The Regional Platform

Community engagement is an important priority for the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria's, and critical to achieving its strategic plan. The Community Engagement Strategic Initiative (CE SI) is a key way that the Global Fund supports this commitment, which in the current funding cycle (2021-2023) consists of three components: short-term technical assistance, long-term capacity strengthening of key population groups, and Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Regional Platforms. There are six regional platforms around the world, APCASO has been hosting the Asia Pacific CRG Platform (APCRG) since 2016, and will soon be completing its third funding cycle host.

As host of a regional platform, APCASO is responsible for three main activity areas, represented by the following three objectives:

1. **Communication and information:** To enhance community knowledge of the Global Fund and its processes, through the regular bi-directional sharing of tailored and targeted information to a diverse audience

2. **Technical assistance:** To improve community access to technical assistance through information-sharing, linkage to appropriate providers, support developing requests, and strengthening TA provider capacity and coordination.

3. **Strategic funding:** To strengthen the capacity and coordination of communities to engage in national and regional Global Fund grants and related processes.

Report Rationale

As the end of the funding cycle draws near, APCASO is taking this opportunity to reflect on what it has achieved, and what lessons have been learned, particularly as CE SI transitions into the next funding cycle. Indeed, under the seventh grant cycle (GC7), the regional platforms will be replaced by regional learning hubs. This demonstrates a shift in focus, although there will be may lessons and best practices that can be integrated into the new approach. An independent review was therefore commissioned to solicit feedback, identify achievements, and draw out lessons learned for both the future host of the regional platform, and potentially for the CE SI itself.

After briefly presenting the methodology in section 2, section 3 reviews the work that APCRG did, including some of its successes under the three activity areas. Section 4 takes a more critical look at what worked, and what could be improved, and finally, section 5 draws out some recommendations as the CE SI transitions to its next funding cycle.

2. Methodology & Limitations

The methodology proposed in the original Terms of Reference was modified slightly during the course of the assignment as needs and realities became clearer. The following steps were undertaken to research and prepare this document.

2.1 Document Review

A number of documents were reviewed to inform this document, a list of which is presented in Annex 1. These included internal documents, grant documents, reports generated by APCASO and partners, as well as Global Fund reports. Results of the desk review were compiled in an analysis matrix, capturing results by key activity area: Communications and information sharing, Short-term TA, Strategic Funding, Management, and Other.

2.2 Key Informant Interviews

Twelve interviews were conducted with APCRG stakeholders, including APCASO staff, participating organisations (i.e. those receiving or benefitting from APCRG offerings), and the Global Fund CRG Department. A list of people interviewed appears in Annex 2. Interview results were also entered into the analysis matrix. All interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom, with detailed notes taken during discussions.

2.3 Analysis and Report Drafting

Analysis was conducted by reviewing the completed analysis matrix looking for frequency of themes and views, strength of themes and views, and specific examples of success or lessons learned. This was done for the three main components of the Platform's work, as well as any management or cross-cutting issues that emerged. This analysis was developed into a narrative draft, and shared with the APCASO team for review and feedback, discussion, and revision.

Limitations

The approach was generally considered appropriate for a lessons learned document, as this review was not intended to be an exhaustive evaluation of performance against objectives. The review would have benefited from broader discussions within APCASO, and between APCASO and its partners, however, this was not planned for and would have been more effective in person, which was not possible during this assignment. Similarly, it was not possible to conduct interviews with a suitably representative range of partners from the three diseases, which may also have skewed results.

Please note that as interviews were not recorded, the quotes presented may not be verbatim, and may have been edited for brevity or clarity.
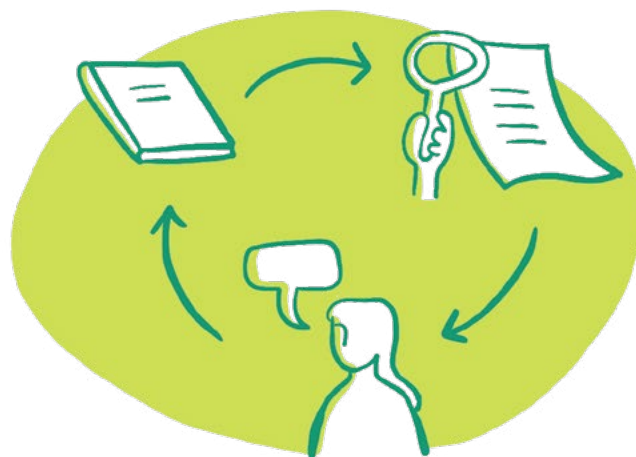
3. Key Achievements

3.1 Information and Communication

The Global Fund is a key donor for community and civil society in the fight against HIV, TB and malaria, and has always prioritised engagement with these groups. It is also a large and complex organisation, with high volumes of information, technical guidance, and detailed policies and processes to navigate. Both the quantity and technicality of these documents can be overwhelming for many partners – particularly at the community level, which can serve as an obstacle to engagement. A key role of the APCRG Platform is therefore to share information with communities and civil society regarding the Global Fund and its processes, and to communicate it in a way that will enable communities and civil society to engage effectively with it. This needs to be done in a user-friendly manner that is adapted to the needs, capacities, and interests of civil society and communities. This is something that the Global Fund secretariat itself struggles to do, and can also be challenging for the regional platforms.

It is therefore noteworthy that at a Global Fund partner meeting, APCASO was recognised for having the best communication among the regional platforms. This was largely attributable to the clean and clear presentation of information, and the fact that they take the time to tailor messages to the region and their communities. Interview respondents also confirmed that they find the information provided by APCRG accessible and useful, and most found that the information provided for GC7 was more practical and timelier than for GC6, indicating that the platform made efforts to improve its performance from one cycle to the next. The combination of using different ways of communicating is well adapted to the different needs of diverse stakeholders, and the fact that they are simplified and tailored is clearly highly appreciated. APCASO communicates and shares information in the following ways:

1. APCRG Website

The APCRG website is embedded within APCASO's website, aiming "to deliver timely and relevant information and tools to promote the inclusion of CRG interventions in HIV, TB, and malaria programs." The site includes links to tools, publications, more information about technical assistance, and Global Fund processes, including the funding request cycle, and the Covid-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM). Many partners commented that they appreciate how the site is presented, and the types of information available. Metrics show that there were 4,834 website subscribers as of the end of 2022.

"When we started the new grant cycle, [APCRG] had webinars, resources on website, and that was really helpful for us. The Global Fund shares things, but there was so much and we got lost. APCASO helped us to focus and narrow our scope."

2. APCRG [Information Sheet and Tools](#)

Many partners mentioned the usefulness of the tools that APCASO has produced. Simplifying large amounts of complex information into clear infographics has proven a powerful way to build understanding and engagement, and demystify Global Fund processes, which partners can be very intimidating. The shorter tools are also easier for countries to translate to share more widely with in-country stakeholders. Some partners gave examples of how they these tools strengthened their understanding of Global Fund processes, and their rights and space within those processes. This then gave them the confidence to go into meetings with government and other stakeholders knowing they had the right to ask for certain things, and being able to demonstrate this right using the tools. These tools have therefore not only built understanding, but also civil society and community confidence, which has in turn strengthened their advocacy efforts,

"The tools are like a weapon. Having information gives CSOs and communities confidence to advocate and we find that when we are referencing Global Fund processes and documents, that CCMs and national programs listen more."

Examples of Information Tools and Reports

APCRG has invested in producing strategic reports to generate evidence related to community engagement in Global Fund processes. These include:

- Global Fund New Funding Model: Civil society and Community Experiences in Four Countries of Asia Report, 2015

- Between the lines: Assessing the inclusion of CRG priorities in Global Fund concept notes in Asia and the Pacific, 2016

- CRG Needs Assessment Report, 2016

- From guidelines to the bottom line – Assessing the Inclusion of Community, Rights and Gender priorities in Global Fund concept notes in Asia and the Pacific, 2016 ([Report](#))

- Global Fund Realities on the Ground: A survey of civil society engagement in Global Fund-related processes in the Asia Pacific, 2018 ([Report](#))

- Lessons from the Asia Pacific Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Platform and CRG Technical Assistance Provision, 2018 ([Report](#))

- APCRG Scoping Exercise: Mapping partners, understanding the context, identifying CRG gaps Social Networking Mapping Tool, 2021 ([Report](#))

- APCRG Scoping Exercise, 2022 ([Report](#))

- Emerging Issues of HIV, TB, and Malaria Affected Communities and Civil Society in Asia-pacific during the COVID-19 Pandemic ([Report](#))

- Rain or Shine: Community engagement in the Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism in 2021 ([Slides](#))

3. Newsletter

A regular newsletter is shared with everyone on the APCRG mailing list, which includes updates of what's happening in the Global Fund cycle, links to available tools, invitations to events, reminders about the short-term TA available, and links to any other funding opportunities. There were 1,336 newsletter subscribers at the end of 2022. Most stakeholders interviewed reported receiving the newsletter, and most read it, or at least skim through it. Using the Mailchimp email platform, APCASO also measures metrics on its newsletters in terms of whether they are opened, and which links are clicked, which shows that the newsletter is achieving slightly above industry average. It also reveals that information about other funding opportunities attracts the most interest.

> *"It's attractive and translates into action for national stakeholders. There's a good variety of materials well adapted to the needs of communities."*
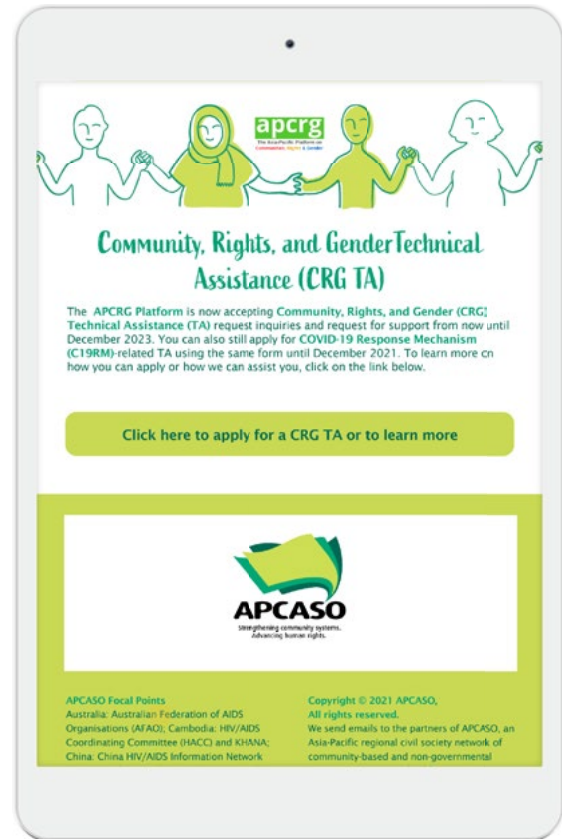
4. Facebook

APCRG messages are also shared through APCASO's Facebook page, which generally shares new content weekly. As of September 2023, the page has nearly 5,000 followers (and 4,600 likes), which is how APCASO/APCRG reaches a larger audience. Posts include information on events (including upcoming events, real-time updates), and post-event summaries), links to tools, news from APCASO/APCRG and its partners, and highlighted quotes or successes from partners on relevant issues. Most posts receive 5-10 likes, with some receiving over 20.

5. Webinars

Webinars are a way to bring organisations together to learn and share experiences, and many find these useful opportunities to know what is going on and to feel connected. The topics selected are generally of interest to a wide variety of partners, and the quality of presentations is high. Participation tends to be low however, so few partners are taking advantage of these opportunities.

"I attend all webinars and feel privileged to be invited to share. They are very inclusive and they help us to feel connected."
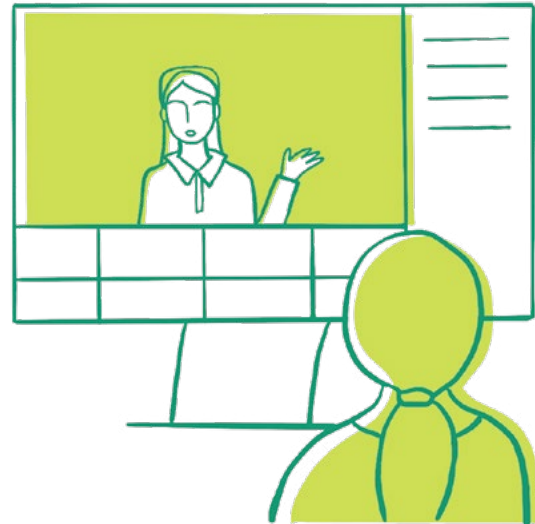
6. Meetings

In-person meetings are also organised, with a recent APCRG annual meeting held in Hanoi. This was an opportunity for partners to exchange experiences, learn about new topics (e.g., mental health), and work together to find common ground. Some partners spoke about how powerful it was to be able to have so many diverse organisations in the one place, and find common ground through a joint community statement. The last meeting included representatives of all three diseases, and both new and older members. New members in particular appreciated that the opportunity to connect

"When [the community statement] was read out, it gave me goosebumps. I feel seen, heard and represented, and that's the beauty of what they're doing. Not everyone can go to New York, but our voices can be carried there."

7. Informal Communication

Many partners, while appreciating APCASO's high quality communication tools, found the most helpful communication approach to be the informal channels. Reaching out through emails and WhatsApp was reported to be timely, and more personalised, and therefore more likely to result in action.

> "One of the qualities that the APCASO team, right from the ED down to any level, they are always very responsive on email. On WhatsApp, we receive responses in minutes. Regarding all developments on community around the world, it's immediately communicated through email, WhatsApp, Facebook. So that's their communication. If we ever need any explanations, we receive guidance within minutes."
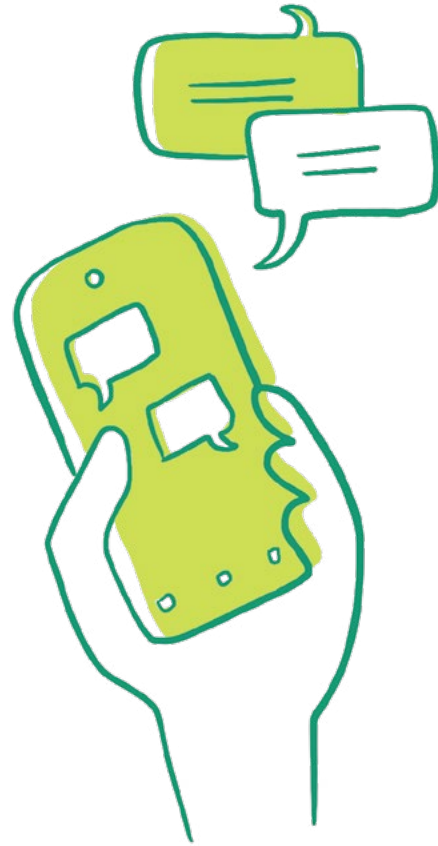
While the consultant originally tried to identify which form of communication worked more effectively, it soon became clear that it is the combination of approaches that is important. The mechanisms that some partners rely on are the same that others don't engage with at all, and vice versa. Maintaining multiple channels is clearly an effective approach for meeting diverse partners where they are.

3.2 Short-Term Technical Assistance

Generating demand for short-term technical assistance (TA) for approved technical assistance providers to help organisations prepare for and engage in Global Fund processes is a key function of the Platform. It is also the area with which APCASO is least satisfied with its performance, and it has been unable to meet its targets. Similarly, it is also under-performing and less cost-effective than other regions. This has not been due to lack of effort. TA is promoted through the newsletter and on the website, and APCRG has developed a TA information sheet available in six languages. According to the 2021 annual report, however, while the English version was downloaded 921 times, only 16 inquiries were received, and eight applications were submitted. In 2022, only three requests were received. In attempt to identify more opportunities for TA, APCASO conducted a scoping exercise in 2022 in twelve countries. The process engaged 156 civil society community representatives through online learning sessions and in-person sessions. This process not only increased requests, but proved useful to countries in itself to have a better understanding of gaps and needs. At least one country used the tools for other purposes, and leveraged the outputs to influence the funding request process and build in more CRG-focused activities, as having data at hand helped them to speak up during CCM meetings.

An example of a satisfied TA recipient is the ACT! Regional TB network, which requested and received TA support to prepare for the next funding request. This made it possible for the network to organise meetings to help partners understand (and translate) Global Fund documents, and prepare community priorities for inclusion in the funding request. This support benefited Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea.

In Cambodia, TA was received to conduct a CRG-focused review of the HIV National Strategic Plan (NSP), which was actually integrated into the government's official NSP review document. A separate TA mission supported community networks of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and tuberculosis to prepare for the country dialogue. This resulted in a community statement of priorities, which was then followed up to ensure that it was included – and costed – in the country's funding request.

3.3 Strategic Funding

With little demand generated for technical assistance, APCASO identified a bigger need for strategic funding in the region to support organisations implement small projects to fill gaps, generate needed documents, or directly support community engagement. This initiative is welcomed by the Global Fund, who is happy to see these activities moving forward. As of mid-July 2023, APCRG had concluded five strategic funding projects, with another seven ongoing. Two of these are regional in nature, and the other ten support activities in nine different countries. Recipients all appreciated the simple and quick application, review, and approval process. Examples of the projects supported include:

- In preparation for GC7, the regional TB network received resources to translate documents, organise meetings, conduct assessments, strengthen capacity, develop a community statement and policy briefs, organise press conferences, pre-country dialogue meetings, and bring in more key populations and PLHIV to country dialogue meetings.

- In Papua New Guinea, an organisation used the funding to collect and document stories of community mobilisation and response during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the representative of KPAC explained, "even though COVID was very depressing for people, we needed to boost people's morale. Health services closed down and it was the first time I saw community leaders and volunteers stand up for their peers. They went to clinics, they bought drugs, they broke rules to go to communities to give medication. They gave the extra effort. We really needed to document this and acknowledge those people who did that." This resulted in an advocacy document that honours the people who supported their community, which can serve as an inspiration for the power of community engagement during pandemics.

- A project in Sri Lanka strengthened community engagement in financing and sustainability dialogues within national, regional and global decision-making platforms. Two workshops were organised to help communities understand the HIV financing landscape and financing processes of government, and to review the HIV investment case. This led to the development of a community position paper, "Advocacy for increased HIV financing in Sri Lanka." This document emphasised the need for social contracting, CHWs and community clinics, and community system strengthening. This funding ultimately led to the establishment of the HIV/TB national CSO network, with 27 CSOs, and was able to support its initial meetings.

The Platform is funding three new initiatives this year, that address issues that have received insufficient funding and attention in the region: mental health support for sex workers, a malaria and gender assessment, and strengthening the capacity of young people to participate effectively in CCMs. A full list of all initiatives supported is presented in Annex 3.

3.4 Management and Other Considerations

APCASO is a well-regarded organisation in the region, and some believe that its hosting of the APCRG Platform has further helped APCASO to be well known. In particular, they are recognised for the inclusive approach they take of their partners, and their ability to develop a sense of family. And while APCASO has its traditional partners, rather than just focusing on these, there have been recent efforts to expand its family to include more organisations in more countries. This means that the APCASO team takes a personalised approach to their work with APCRG: how they communicate, and how they make effective use of strategic funding.

"Many countries have good experience with partnership with APCASO – they never act as a donor, we work as partners, and other regional and international donors lack this. They make us feel that we are part of APCRG, and that we are represented at regional and global level."

"I haven't seen something like this. For this platform, everyone can be an owner of the platform, and they listen to each other. Even though we are junior, we are supported, we are listened to. Even with language gap, everyone is on the same line, step by step."

"It has been such a professional, friendly environment, so positive and good feelings that we've never had with any other organisation. We've worked with 4-5 international organisations, but we've never been that close, comfortable and confident as we are with APCASO."

With this overview of what APCASO has done and achieved as the APCRG regional hub, the following section reviews these activities with a more critical eye in terms of what works, and where the opportunities are for improvement.

4. Key Learnings & Opportunities

4.1 Information and Communication

What Works

- **Clarity:** Creating simple, bite-sized information is an effective way to build understanding, which is necessary to build partner confidence to engage in Global Fund processes. Short information is easier both to digest, and translate.

- **Tailoring:** Tailoring information – particularly reducing complex information to the most relevant messages for civil society and communities in language that is more accessible to communities – has been very valuable.

- **Design:** Investing in beautiful graphic designs makes the information more appealing and is appreciated by partners. Attractive infographics are more likely to be shared and replicated by partners in their own work.

- **Timeliness:** Continuing to ensure that information is available in a timely manner, in that it allows people to think and prepare in advance of action being required, goes a long way to supporting effective engagement. Also ensuring appropriate follow up after event to maintain momentum has been noted by partners. As one partner stated, APCRG information allows them to "strike while the iron is hot".

- **Connecting:** Mapping out CCM members and different organisations working on different diseases has helped to expand outreach and create connections, as well as create transparency about who is in influential roles.

- **Diversity:** Using different communication channels (website, newsletter, Facebook, webinars, meetings) is an effective way of reaching partners with different needs and communication preferences. What works for some does not work for others, and vice versa.

- **Informality:** Maintaining a balance between formal and informal communication is appreciated, particularly as the informal contact helps make partners feel included and valued, strengthening relationships between partners and the regional platform.

- **Monitoring:** Tracking opening and clicks on newsletters and the website generates useful insights in terms of what attracts most (and least) interest.

Opportunities for Improvement

General

Disease balance: Ensure that information shared is well adapted to all three diseases, as much still has an HIV-focus, leaving malaria and TB feeling less heard or supported. Similarly, representatives from TB and malaria sometimes find it harder to engage in meetings when they are a minority of the participants, and much of the information is not adapted to their diseases – particularly as malaria, for example, is not one of APCASO's areas of expertise.

Bigger Global Fund picture: While APCRG consistently shares information on general Global Fund processes, some partners would like to see more updates in terms of what else is happening in the Global Fund that relates to partner interests. One example was to also share what is happening in other Strategic Initiatives (Breaking Down Barriers, CCM Evolution etc.), that could help inform the CG7 funding request process, to help partners make those links to partner needs, and create more synergies with the CE SI.

Adapting: Partners that have more experience – particularly with the Global Fund – have different information needs to those who are newer to the Global Fund world. It currently appears that those who are still trying to understand the Global Fund are feeling well served by APCRG, while those who are already actively engaged and experienced in the Global Fund universe feel that a higher level of information and connection is needed for the regional platform to add value.

Language: Continue seeking ways to ensure that more information is available in even more languages, both in written form and during webinars and meetings. This could include providing more resources to partners to support translation at the country level.

Preparation time: While information is provided in a timely manner, sometimes the need to prepare translations needs to be considered also, and some countries may require even earlier access information in order to translate it before it can be shared with members.

Opportunities for Improvement

Webinars

The use of webinars increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to keep members connected and to share important updates. These have decreased again as the pandemic has wound down. Many partners, however, would like to see regular webinars maintained in the post-COVID context, as a way to continue to exchange and feel connected. APCASO is concerned about the low participation in webinars, however – particularly as they do take time and effort to organise – and recognises that a different approach may be needed to boost participation. Many efforts have been made to increase participation, including conducting a survey on topics of interest to ensure that webinars would be of use to partners, scheduling to accommodate different time zones, and also offering translation support. Despite these efforts, attendance has remained lower than hoped, although some partners faithfully attend regularly. Some suggestions that emerged from this review include:

Co-create: Ask partners what topics they would like to discuss during webinars, and set up an annual program that is shared in advance to build anticipation around a longer-term conversation or learning program.

Partner: Consider organising webinars in partnership with other networks to attract larger audiences, and expand participation further.

Promote: Rather than just advertise webinars, share more information about the topics, what people can expect to learn, and their importance, to increase interest in attendance.

Balance content: Reduce the amount of information presented, and spend more time on exchanging and discussion to boost engagement. That is, ensure that webinars are a chance for different partners to present and be heard.

Translation: Provide more translation options during webinars to make the events more accessible to more people. This may include sharing multi-lingual versions of the presentations, and making live translation available.

Access: Particularly in settings where internet connection is weak or expensive, consider working with partners to organise in-person webinar participation at the country-level. Internet data could be provided to the partner, who could mobilise community members to come and participate in webinars together from a central location. This can also create the opportunity for in-person discussion in addition to remote regional engagement.

Opportunities for Improvement

Facebook

Tailor: Analyse likes, comments and shares on different types of posts to see what content attracts the most engagement. One suggestion was to share powerful quotes from partners as a way to share ideas, amplify partner voices, and to inspire others, which do appear on the feed from time to time.

Timing: APCASO does post in line with events and key dates, and it could also use analytics to better understand at what times the target audience is most active, and aim to post updates at those times to increase the chance that they will be seen.

Increase APCRG-specific content: It is likely that posting APCRG-related posts through APCASO's Facebook page allows posts to reach a larger audience, although it also blurs the distinction between APCASO and APCRG. There appears to be more APCRG-specific content available that could be shared on Facebook, including some of the infographics produced, reminders about TA, or even quotes from partners who have received TA or strategic funding.

4.2 Short-Term Technical Assistance

What Works

- **Information availability:** Information on the short-term TA program is available on the website, including clear infographics explaining how it works.

- **Partner autonomy:** Allowing TA recipients to select their own TA providers, so that there is already trust, and the community feels seen and understood.

- **Application support:** Some partners find the form to request TA to be too complicated, while others find it straightforward. All appreciate the APCRG Platform's support to review and improve the request form, which is also seen as a capacity strengthening opportunity.

- **Coordination:** Where TA requests have been done with the engagement of the Grant Management Department (GMD) of the Global Fund, they have been approved swiftly.

- **Referrals:** The APCRG Platform can also refer some partners to other TA providers (e.g., UNAIDS), if they can provide more appropriate support.

Opportunities for Improvement

The APCRG team's assessment is that many partners don't need TA, but additional direct support to implement activities. This resulted in a shift away from promoting TA, to investing more effort into strategic funding. This has produced powerful results using a user-friendly and efficient mechanism, but the review revealed more interest and need for TA than potentially expected.

TA clarification: Some partners spoken to were not clear on what short-term TA referred to, or what it could cover, suggesting that awareness is not as high as supposed. There is a need to clarify the difference between the TA provided by APCASO in general, and the short-term TA available by TA providers to support engagement in Global Fund processes.

More tailoring: Many stakeholders said that they either didn't know about, or didn't understand the short-term TA available, with many suggesting that they would or could be interested if they knew more about it. As they have done with the strategic funding, the APCRG hub could take a more personalised and pro-active approach to identifying opportunities and therefore generating demand for short-term TA, and working with the partner to develop proposals.

Pro-active planning: Working with partners pro-actively well in advance of anticipated needs may strengthen demand, approval rates, and result in more short-term TA being delivered in the region. While having to think so far ahead can sometimes be seen as a deterrent, the interviews suggested that it could also be welcome support to prepare for future challenges and needs.

Pro-active facilitation: While APCASO believes that many partners are deterred by the time needed to develop a request and the approval process, this process may be able to be facilitated in a way that strengthens partner capacity, and strengthens linkages with GMD, which can also help boost the partner's profile and exposure. This may require APCRG playing a more direct role in preparing some applications for/with some partners, which has happened to some extent in the past, and appears to still be needed.

Obligation clarification: There may also be misunderstandings by some partners in terms of what their obligations are, e.g., one partner mentioned not having the necessary financial systems in place to manage the funding to Global Fund standards, whereas there is actually little funding to manage and no financial requirements in place. Other partners were concerned they wouldn't receive any funding at all, whereas some overhead can be provided.

Improve efficiency: According to CE SI, APCRG is currently the least cost-effective regional platform in terms of generating TA demand. One way to address this could be to work more closely with the GMD to better forecast and coordinate TA needs and requests, or with the other regional networks who may be aware of needs among their members. These requests could therefore then complement other efforts, particularly when accompanied by more hands-on APCRG support for preparing requests.

Expand scope: While TA requests are often most common to support funding request development, there may be more interest in TA also to support during implementation, particularly for CRG-related innovations. Sharing examples of what other regions are doing could help inspire ideas.

4.3 Strategic Funding

What Works

- **Tailored approach:** APCASO's understanding of its partners, their needs, the context, and Global Fund processes has led to the powerful use of strategic funding. Constantly looking out for these opportunities to connect dots or fill gaps, helps partners to feel supported and to make progress in areas that may otherwise not move.

- **Pro-active opportunity seeking:** Conducting the needs assessment was a useful way to gauge needs in the region and to start identify needs. However, APCASO has also been able to be pro-active in providing support in response to arising needs and opportunities. For example, during the Hanoi annual meeting, one organisation raised a challenge they wanted to address but had no funding for. They were surprised when they were approached by the APCRG after the meeting to discuss how strategic funding could provide support, which resulted in a grant to support mental health for sex workers in Thailand. In addition to the financial support for an important activity, the partner felt heard and its concerns treated seriously.

- **Simple process:** The simple application, review and approval process is appreciated. It is user-friendly and fast, meaning that support can be provided while it is still relevant and needed.

- **Personal support:** Many partners mentioned APCRG/APCASO as a partner in their process, rather than a donor. They take a personal interest in ensuring that the goals of the funding are met, and provide additional technical guidance to help a partner achieve the best possible results with available resources.

Opportunities for Improvement

Process communication: This process is working well, and there are already examples of satisfied partners and positive outcomes, as presented in section 3.2 above. The only potential concern identified by the evaluator – noting that it was not raised by any interviewee – is that the selection process may not be sufficiently documented or communicated to ensure that it is fully transparent. While done with good intent and on solid ground, funding appears to be offered based on needs identified by APCRG – whether selecting items from the needs assessment or from other needs that arise – rather than a transparent process of prioritising needs. So far, however, all projects selected have been important and valuable, contributing to filling gaps and paying more attention to neglected area. That is, there have been no negative consequences of the current process, but it may be prudent to consider documenting the selection process going forward, including communication with successful and unsuccess applicants, particularly given that this funding is not widely advertised.

4.4 Management and Other Considerations

What Works

- **Partner approach:** Partners love feeling a part of the APCASO/APCRG family, where they are treated as equal partners, and form close bonds with members of the team. They feel respected, cared for, and a sense of belonging – which is particularly important for partners that can be otherwise isolated, or working in hostile environments.

- **Communication style:** The fact that the APCRG team members are always accessible and ready to communicate informally and through different channels is also appreciated. It makes partners feel that their time and needs are respected.

- **Pro-active approach:** As mentioned under Strategic Funding, the APCRG's pro-active approach to identifying opportunities to provide support and make connections with other things happening in the region is appreciated by partners, and contributes to moving initiatives forward.

Opportunities for Improvement

Broader health linkages: Similarly, looking to see how the Platform can support or strengthen linkages between the three diseases and other health areas – particularly resilient and sustainable systems for health and pandemic preparedness, would contribute to greater impact, no doubt through trying new innovations.

Broader Global Fund approach: Some partners would like to see even more tools and updates shared, including more information on advances in different health areas and the tools that different partners are using, as well as knowing who to contact for more information. This could be through promoting the (recently updated) Community Toolbox, and more technical information produced by the Global Fund.

Broader partner engagement: APCRG could share more information and engage more directly with other partners in the region, including other donors and technical partners, such as Expertise France, UNAIDS, as well as coordinating closely with the Global Fund Country Team. This could help identify opportunities and ensure that support for some actions, e.g., short-term TA moves swiftly.

Greater use of networks: In general, country partners feel more supported than the regional networks. More can be done to engage the networks, including having more regular meetings – particularly since most are based in headquarters. Some also mentioned that the networks would be willing to support the Platform by engaging more of its members, e.g., to disseminate information, invite to webinars, or share tools, etc., but that they are rarely asked to do so.

Advocacy: While out of the hands of the APCRG host, it should be noted that some partners would like to see the Global Fund provide more institutional support to CSOs to carry out their work – particularly as some of their advocacy efforts contribute directly to Global Fund replenishment. There is a hope that APCRG can use its position to advocate for more of this type of support, although it is understood that this is not a part of the Platform's work, and is less likely to be in future iterations, given that the platforms are moving to learning hubs. This need may therefore need to be addressed through a different Global Fund initiative.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations to the APCRG Learning Hub Host

1. **Create more balanced engagement across the three-diseases:** Strengthen malaria and TB expertise of the Hub, and build on the growing momentum to engage the regional TB and malaria networks more regularly to ensure that information and communication is presented in a way that is more inclusive of all diseases. This is particularly important for malaria CSOs where CRG issues can be less well understood or integrated in general, and where there is also a need to strengthen awareness around these issues. Similarly, create spaces for malaria and TB partners to feel more directly heard and engaged, through dedicated meetings and webinars.

2. **Rethink TA demand generation:** Work with the Global Fund's Grant Management Department, Principal Recipients, and other networks in the region to identify opportunities for short-term TA, and adopt a more tailored and pro-active approach to working with individual organisations to identify strategic TA needs, and co-developing TA requests to support different stages of the funding cycle – particularly during grant implementation.

3. **Strategic Funding selection process communication:** Consider documenting the approach to formalise allocation of some available resources to "planned" support, which is prioritised through the needs assessment, and some resources to "spontaneous" support, to allow APCRG to respond to important emerging needs. In both cases, the criteria for selection should be transparent and the rationale for decisions documented.

4. **Relaunch a webinar series with more partners:** There is interest among partners to attend useful, engaging webinars, which can be co-designed with partners to ensure relevance, and organised with other networks to boost participation. Accompanied by a promotional program, these webinars could also explore some of the broader Global Fund issues to connect the dots between CE SI and other strategic initiatives, which APCRG members may be interested in, but have less exposure to, such as the Human Rights Strategic Initiative.

Recommendations to CRG Department

1. **More resources for translation:** Provide additional resources to support translation in regions that have multiple languages to manage. This gap is currently limiting the understanding and more active engagement of many community members.

2. **Simplify the TA request form:** Review APCASO's approach to receiving strategic funding requests to see if the TA application process can be similarly simplified.

3. **Expand strategic funding:** Allow higher proportions of learning hub budgets to be used with flexibility at the hub's discretion to ensure that the most strategic needs are being met – whether it is for short-term technical assistance, or otherwise.

6. Annexes

Annex 1: List of Documents Reviewed

- APCASO, 2016, From Guidelines to the Bottomline: Assessing the Inclusion of Community, Rights and Gender priorities in Global Fund concept notes in Asia and the Pacific

- APCASO & ICASO, 2018, Lessons from the Asia Pacific Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Platform and Technical Assistance Provision

- APCASO, Global Fund Realities on the Ground: A survey of civil society engagement in Global Fund-related processes in the Asia Pacific

- APCASO, 2020, Application to Host the Asia-Pacific CRG Platform for Coordination and Communication

- APCASO, 2021, APCRG Platform Narrative Report 2021: CRG SI Component 3 Annual Outcomes Reporting

- APCASO, 2022, APCRG Platform Narrative Report 2021: CRG SI Component 3 Annual Outcomes Reporting

- APCASO website and Facebook page

- APCRG, Strategic Funding Overview (internal document)

- APCRG, 2022, Scoping exercise results

- DAST, Mobilizing Communities and Civil Society for Sustainability of the HIV Response in Sri Lanka (Strategic Funding report)

- HIV & AIDS Support House Inc., Increasing PLHIV Awareness and Understanding of the Philippine National AIDS Law (Strategic Funding report)

- KPAC, Sharing Covid-19 Pandemic Stories (Strategic Funding report)

- Spiritia Foundation, APCRG Strategic Support to Spiritia Foundation, Indonesia (Strategic Funding report)

- Global Fund, 2022, Community Engagement Strategic Initiative Update

- Global Fund, 2023, Community Engagement Strategic Initiative Update

- Global Fund Community TA Tracker (31 July, 2023)

Annex 2: List of People Interviewed

#	Name	Organisation	Role
1	Jeff Acaba	APCASO	Program Officer
2	Jen Ho	APCASO	Deputy Director
3	Asghar Satti	PLHIV Network	Network Coordinator
4	Chanthorn Phorng	KHANA	Senior Program Manager
5	Khun Surang & P'Tee	SWING	Director & Deputy
6	Lesley Bola	Key Population Advocacy Consortium (KPAC)	Coordinator
7	Harry Prabowo	Asia-Pacific Network of PLHIV	Program Manager
8	Ikka Noviyanti	Youth Lead	Regional Coordinator
9	Shree Acharya	Malaria CSO Platform	Project Manager
10	Yves Miel Zuniga	United for Global Mental Health	Program Officer
11	Gemma Oberth	CRG Department, GF	Coordinator
12	Chob Sok Chamreun	Regional TB network	ACT! AP Co-Chair

Annex 3: Strategic Funding Initiatives

As of July 2023

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
1.	Indonesia	Spiritia	5,000	01-31 July 2022 **(Completed)**	To improve the knowledge and ability of implementing programs (outreach workers, peer support and TB programmes) related to TB-HIV with a human rights perspective and SOGIESC. (Activity: community workshop on implementation of TB-HIV programmes with human rights perspective, inclusive of SOGIESC)
2.	The Philippines	HIV & AIDS Support House (HASH), Inc.	5,000	1 Jun - 31 July 2022 **(Completed)**	To (a) to capacitate different organizations in handling violations against people living with HIV; (b) train CSO representatives in RA11166 (Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act); and (c) orient trainees on the legal redress mechanism under the Global Fund.
3.	PNG	Key Population Advocacy Consortium (KPAC)	5,000	1 June - 31 December 2022 **(Completed)**	To document stories or events from individuals and groups in sharing experiences and stories during COVID-19
4.	Cambodia (part 1)	KHANA	5,000	1 October 2022 - 31 July 2023 **(Completed)**	1) To support HIV and TB community capacity building on GC7; 2) To support identifications of community priorities for GC7

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
5.	Sri Lanka	Diversity and Solidarity Trust (DAST)	5,000	1 Jun - 30 Nov 2022 **(Completed)**	Mobilising communities and civil society for sustainability of the HIV Response in Sri Lanka Strengthen the strategic engagement of communities and civil society in financing and sustainability related dialogues within national, regional and global HIV and TB decision making platforms Key Activities: 1. One full-day workshop – Understanding the current HIV financing landscape in Sri Lanka and national budget process 2. One full-day workshop – Understanding the "Towards 95-95-95 In Sri Lanka" Investment Case 3. One in-person consultation to develop a community position paper on the sustainability of HIV and TB responses in Sri Lanka 4. 3 HIV/TB financing and sustainability partnership meetings to facilitate the formation of a consortium 5. On-going technical support to KAP committee members and Civil Society CCM members to raise the financing and sustainability concerns at the KAP and CCM platforms

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
6.	Pakistan	APLHIV-Pakistan	4,000	1 August to 15 October 2023	To capacitate the HIV and TB Communities for their proactive engagement in Post GC7 FR submission processes (e.g., grant making process) Key Activities: 1. Translation of Global Fund Guidelines on engagement of communities in grant making titled as "Introduction to Grant-making Grant Cycle 7" into Urdu language. 2. Translation of GF Guidelines titled as "Quality and Timely Grant-making" into Urdu language. 3. One day national level workshop engaging 20-25 HIV and TB Communities leaders on their capacity building covering the guidelines mentioned in activity No. 1 and 2 above.

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
7.	India	National Coalition of People Living with HIV (NCPI+)	5,000		1. To mobilise CBO, Networks of HIV and KP communities' knowledge on the GF GC7 process, request, and programmatic guidance and relevant community. 2. To establish partnership with CCM members, NACO and other HIV, TB, Malaria stakeholders and ensure community engagement by role of PR and SR need to be very clear priorities and community needs inclusion in the GF HIV Funding Request. Key Activities: 1. Mobilise CBOs, Networks of HIV and KP communities' actions and increased knowledge on the community engagement with GF HIV partners and the GC7 processes, identifying and monitoring inclusion of relevant community priorities. 2. Conduct community consultation to assess level of community knowledge and engagement with GF HIV SR/SSR partners and on Global Fund GC7 processes. 3. Identification of community challenges to engage in and establish partnerships with, or to quality as SR/SSR, understand programmatic guidance relevant to India.

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
8.	Thailand	Service Workers in Group (SWING)	5,000	1 August - 15 December 2023	Needs assessment and translation of assessment findings into action-oriented tools to promote sex workers-led service provision and capacity building Key Activities: 1. **Needs Assessment:** Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment among sex workers to identify their mental health challenges, knowledge gaps regarding HIV/STI/TB prevention, and the impact of COVID-19 on their well-being and access to healthcare services. 2. Curriculum development 3. Development of mental health self-evaluation toolkit 4. Capacity Building: Organize training workshops and capacity-building programs for staff working with sex workers, healthcare workers, and outreach workers. These capacity-building activities should aim to enhance their understanding of the specific mental health needs of sex workers. Additionally, these activities should focus on building skills in identifying mental health issues, providing appropriate referrals, and delivering mental health support services to sex workers.

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
9.	Viet Nam	SCDI	5,000	1 August - 30 November 2023	At least 5 cases of TB patients are studied to understand the situation and causes of stigma and discrimination, thereby making recommendations for interventions and advocating for related policies to improve. Cases participating in the study will be selected at the implementation locations of the Global Fund project. The results will be used to design integrated interventions in the Global Fund project. In addition, the results and recommendations will also be shared with TB program partners in the provinces to call for actions from them to improve the problem.
10.	Bangladesh	Bandhu	5,000	1 July - 30 September 2023	Capacity building of health service providers and CBOs representatives on gender-based violations in HIV and TB healthcare settings. • To develop common understanding about Gender Based Violation (GBV), Gender Equality, and gender diversity and human rights of gender diverse population • To build the capacity of staff, CBOs and Community participants in responding to GBV issues and complement the ongoing the Global Fund Program Key Activity: • GBV training workshop for 50 service providers and CBO members

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
11.	Cambodia (part 2)	KHANA	4,000	1 August - 31 December 2023	Strengthening the voices of communities affected by TB in the GC7 grant negotiation and decision-making process.
					Key Activities:
					• Host a community and CSOs meeting to create a community engagement plan for the GC7 grant negotiation and making phases, including TA needs.
					• Provide ongoing TA to the TB community representatives of the CCC and the TBpeople Cambodia to ensure the advocacy efficacy of their involvement in the GC7 negotiation and decision-making phases.
					• Support to TB community representatives of the CCC and the people affected by TB communities to timely communicate and share the progress of the GC7 negotiation and decision-making process.
					• Provide technical and financial support to the TB community representatives of the CCC for hosting an online learning and sharing session on GC7 negotiation and making status amongst their community constituency's members.

#	Country	Partner	Amount	Implementation Period	Objectives/Key Activities
12.	Regional	Youth Lead	10,000	1 August to 30 October 2023	Based on the findings from the Youth Lead CCM assessment; with co-funding support from UNAIDS RST (10,000 USD) and Youth Lead (5,000 USD) for a regional capacity building training workshop for youth CCM representatives
13.	Regional	In collaboration with GMS Malaria CSOs Platform	10,000	1 August to 30 November 2023	Gender in malaria elimination country assessment based on data collection by Lao CSO; consultant hired to support data analysis and write-up of learning document.

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