Operational research

INITIATIVE 5%
SIDA, TUBERCULOSE, PALUDISME

EXPERTISE FRANCE

THE 5% INITIATIVE

Since 2011, the 5% Initiative has been working to support countries - French-speaking countries in particular - to access to grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GF) and to support implementation and monitoring of GF-funded programs.
The mechanism is France's indirect contribution to the Global Fund and is governed by a steering committee, under the supervision of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE). It aims to increase the impact of Global Fund grants by providing short- to medium-term technical assistance to eligible countries and by funding 2- to 3-year development projects.
The 5% Initiative is managed by Expertise France, who have a dedicated team within their Health Department.

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7

projects evaluated

16

countries reached by the projects

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implementing partners

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Cross-cutting evaluation of long-term projects

Each year, the 5% Initiative launches two calls for proposals as part of its Projects Channel mechanism, from which around ten projects are selected. All funded projects are subject to an external final evaluation.

The 5% Initiative has put in place a thematic cross-cutting evaluation mechanism for projects, to capitalize on this comprehensive exercise. It enables both reporting on the use of MEAE funds, to highlight the 5% Initiative's interventions, and it draws out learning to improve interventions contributing to the fight against the three pandemics to guide future activities.

KEY INFORMATION
about "Operational research" evaluations

Total project budgets:

€ 5,770,267

THEMES EVALUATED:
- Malaria: **5** projects
- Tuberculosis: **1** project
- HIV/AIDS: **1** project

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Projects evaluated

Breakdown of projects by country and by project lead

INTERNATIONAL UNION AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS AND LUNG DISEASE
BENIN, BURKINA FASO, BURUNDI, CAMEROON, IVORY COAST, NIGER, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, RWANDA
2013-2016

Multicenter study of short-course treatment for patients with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis

PARTNERS
National tuberculosis programmes from the 9 countries, Institut Tropical d'Anvers, Fondation Damien

CECFOR/CECFA-CENTRE HOSPITALIER DE MONKOLE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
2013-2016

Surveillance of endemic malaria and evaluation of drug efficacy to update the DRC malaria control strategy

PARTNERS
Institut National de Recherche Biomédicale (INRB), UMR-MD3 - Infections Parasitaires (Transmission, Physiopathologie et Thérapeutique)

CENTRE RÉGIONAL DE RECHERCHE ET DE FORMATION À LA PRISE EN CHARGE CLINIQUE (CRCF)
SENEGAL
2015-2017

Evaluating the acceptability, feasibility and effectiveness of nutritional management protocols for children and adolescents living with HIV in Dakar: operational research SNAC'S (nutritional supplementation for children and adolescents with deficiencies in Senegal)

PARTNERS
Centre hospitalier National d'Enfants Albert Royer, Association Synergie pour l'enfance/Hôpital Roi Baudouin, Unité Mixte Internationale, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)

IRD - URMITE
MAURITANIA
2014-2017

Update of malaria data focusing on three epidemiological areas in Mauritania

PARTNERS
PNLP, Faculté de Mauritanie

FACULTY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE, MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY MORU / SMRU
THAILAND, CAMBODIA, LAOS, VIETNAM
2013-2016

Eliminating malaria or acting effectively to prevent the transmission of malaria parasites? Upcoming challenges for Southeast Asian countries

PARTNER
Institut Pasteur du Cambodge

INSTITUT PASTEUR IN LAOS
LAOS, THAILAND
2013-2016

Evaluation of insecticide resistance in malaria vectors in Laos and southern Thailand and capacity building in medical entomology (MALVEC)

PARTNERS
IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement), CMPE (Centre de Malariologie, Parasitologie et Entomologie du Laos)

INSTITUT PASTEUR OF MADAGASCAR
MADAGASCAR, BENIN, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON, NIGER
2013-2017

Operational evaluation of an integrated malaria response - PALEVALUT Project

PARTNERS
Centre Population Développement - CEPED (UMR 196-IRD-Univ. Paris Descartes-INED), Université Catholique de Madagascar – UCM
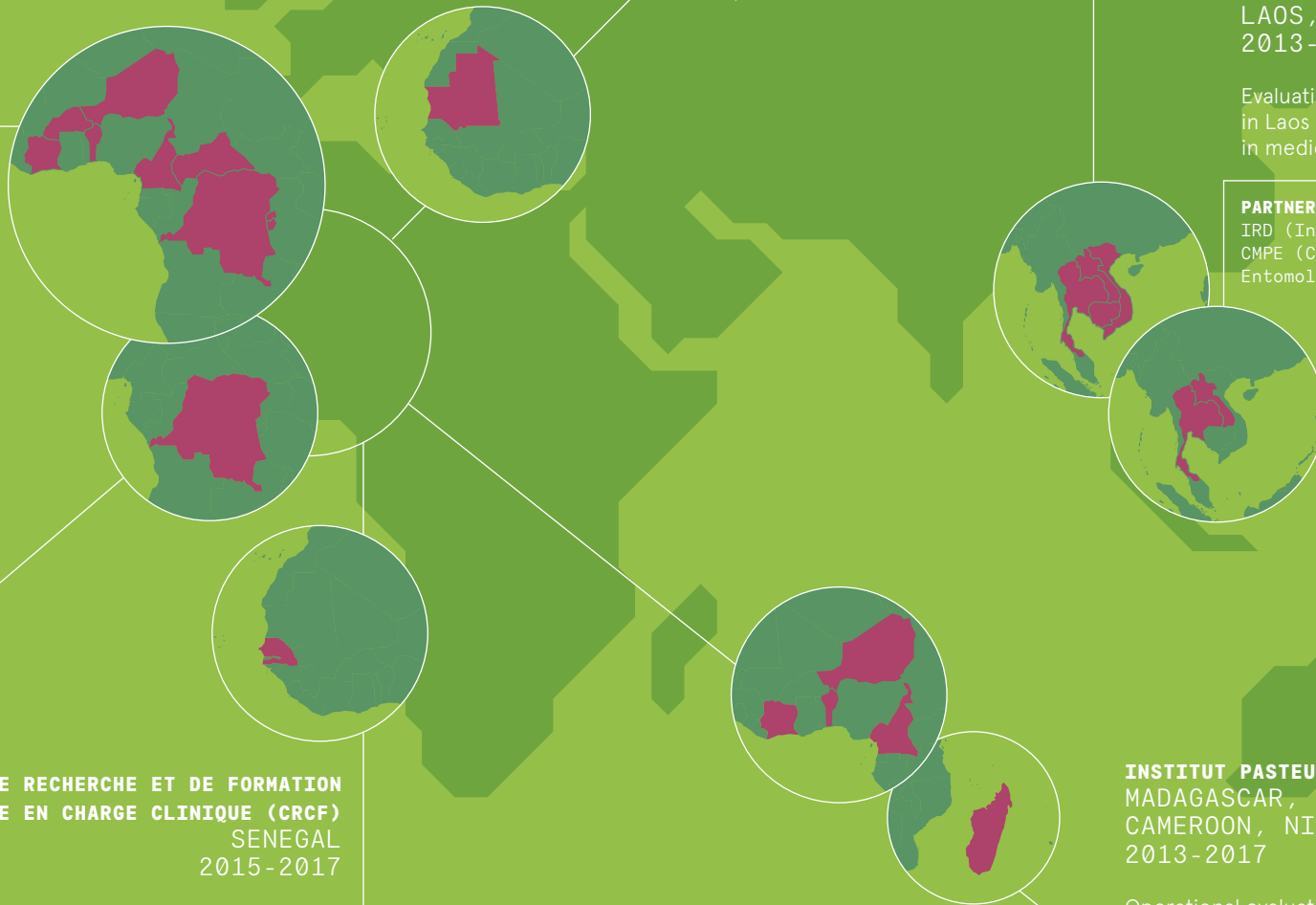
Introduction

This document presents a summary of results from the cross-cutting evaluation of seven operational research (OR) projects in the area of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria funded by the 5% Initiative.

Six of the projects evaluated were selected as part of the 5% Initiative's first call for projects launched in 2012, which focused on operational research and aimed to:

→ **Build the capacity of recipient countries and national strategies;**

→ **Develop national / regional recommendations based on documented studies, validate the effectiveness of interventions, improve their quality and efficiency, and ensure the dissemination and translation of research results.**

Glossary

Operational research is defined by the World Health Organization as "the use of systematic research techniques for program decision-making to achieve a specific outcome".

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was conducted between May and November 2017 by the firm Technopolis. The evaluation comprised a team of three international experts.

It involved:
→ **Evaluating each project on the ground individually to meet the 5% Initiative's accountability objectives;**
→ **Analyzing and drawing out cross-cutting knowledge from results, making it possible to draw lessons from the experience as a whole and to identify best practices in terms of operational research, with a view to improving learning and the quality of projects funded by the 5% Initiative.**

Cross-cutting evaluation methodology framework

Operational research in health aims to influence health policy. WHO states that it aims to "provide policy-makers and managers with evidence they can use to improve program operations". This definition links operational research with applied research and experimental development, which, unlike basic research, must discern potential application of research results or find new solutions to achieve a predetermined goal.

The cross-cutting evaluation was based on two conceptual frameworks. The first identified evaluation questions linked to OECD Development Assistance Committee criteria. The second comes from a foundational document: the World Health Organization and Global Fund Guide to Operational Research[1].

This guide presents a process for implementing OR projects, which provides useful guidance to assess the approach used and the effectiveness of projects funded by the 5% Initiative. In particular, the following points should be taken into account:

→ Inclusion of the project in the national context
→ Relevance to national priorities
→ Multidisciplinary approach
→ Multi-sectoral approach
→ Clear hierarchy of responsibilities
→ Advisory group
→ Ethical authorizations
→ Stakeholder communication
→ Disseminating results

Framework for Operational Research in Health

3 types of OR

	Diagnostic studies	Evaluative studies	Intervention studies
Purpose of study	Health of service delivery problem	Recent intervention innovations	Specific service delivery
Scientific objectives	To assess the nature and extent of the problem	To evaluate ongoing innovative health interventions	Assessing the effectiveness of service delivery interventions

Flowchart of common practice

Phase 1: Planning	Phase 2: Implementation	Phase 3: Follow-through
Organize the research group Determine issues or problems to study and frame research questions around these	Monitor project implementation and maintain quality	Develop a dissemination plan
Develop a research proposal to answer OR/IR questions	Pre-test all research procedures	Disseminate results and recommendations
Obtain ethical clearance	Establish and maintain data management and quality control	Document changes in policy and/or guidelines that resulted from the research
Identify funding sources and obtain support for OR/IR	Explore together with stakeholders interpretations and recommendations arising from the research findings	Monitor changes in the revised program
Establish a budget and financial management procedures		Consider ways of improving the program that can be tested through further research
Plan for capacity building and technical support		

Medium-term effects

Supporting policy decisions	Unbiased generalization of effective interventions	Developing practical implementation solutions	Adopting cost-effective implementation strategies

1. "Implementing operational research in Global Fund-supported disease control programs. Strategic and managerial guide for applicants", OMS/Fonds mondial, 2017.

Source: Framework for Operational and Applied Research in Health and Disease Programs, Global Fund; Technopolis; 2017

Area 1
Structuring operational research projects

The OR implementation framework advocated by WHO and the Global Fund has proven to be a fundamental tool that projects should use to ensure improved implementation.

Action plans and logical frameworks developed prior to project implementation were not always sufficient to meet the results expected by the 5% Initiative. While all projects aimed to help strengthen national pandemic strategies, the dissemination and translation of knowledge into policy recommendations was rarely a stated goal.

Reviewing how projects were structured in terms of size, duration, leadership and geographical field demonstrated the need for good coordination between these factors, as they contribute to the success of the project: it is necessary to combine flexibility, strong leadership of the project lead and adaptivity to the geographical context. Despite good analysis of national priorities and local contexts, adoption of multidisciplinary approaches and effective integration of national authorities in the projects, implementation of activities was limited due to the lack of external support (lack of an advisory group, involvement of community actors, integration of civil society…).

Using the logical framework

The project logical frameworks have been very important management tools. In order for them to be as useful as possible, it is important that they describe the intervention logic in a coherent and comprehensive way (up to the outcome indicators) and that they include the production of national recommendations and the validation of research results. It is also necessary to ensure that research teams have the necessary skills to carry out the various different components.

Capacity building

Most of the projects did not include capacity building on operational research for teams in the South. Although some had included a training component and had set up technical platforms. Cross-cutting evaluation emphasizes the need for project leads to identify skills building needs around operational research skills in advance.

Creation of an ad hoc advisory group

In addition to a project scientific committee, establishing an ad-hoc advisory group that includes all stakeholders at local, national and international levels, proved to be essential for research projects. Meeting during the project launch phase, then once a year, advisory groups allow for project monitoring with advice and views from experts external to the project, including WHO, NGOs and community actors.

Recommendations

→ Follow the operational research implementation framework advocated by WHO and the Global Fund.

→ Be vigilant about the robustness of teams and the coordination mechanism, especially in multi-country projects.

→ Systematize integrating a local research capacity building component.

GOOD PRACTICE

The IRD project in Mauritania and the Institut Pasteur project in Madagascar have integrated research capacity building. The former trained partners from the national malaria control program in operational research through training workshops and round tables. The latter unified and strengthened local capacity around operational research, enabled an evaluation of the impact of interventions implemented in the fight against malaria, and identified and measured factors affecting how effective they were.

Structuring operational
research projects | **Projects responding
to need** | Disseminating
results

Area 2
Projects responding to need

Project leads should pay particular attention to building strong dialogue with national control programs in order to facilitate subsequent ownership of research results.

The operational research projects evaluated were relatively well integrated into the network of stakeholders, including national authorities, the GF, WHO and other health research support programs. Activities carried out were relevant to the needs identified and have produced interesting outputs (epidemiological knowledge, mapping, care and support guide…). Project impact has been variable; some examples include the formation of a scientific knowledge base, improvements in stakeholder skills, the creation of networks of experts and strengthening research capacity.

Coherence between projects and national / international strategies

Although national health authorities have been systematically involved either in advance of projects or during implementation, this has not always been the case for the WHO or the Global Fund, especially when projects went against current health policies advocated by WHO. However, while the funded operational research did not directly complement Global Fund-financed activities, this link was established through national disease control programs. The evaluation recommends systematically involving them in any operational research project.

In general, projects should further explain the approach taken in terms of communicating and validating research results, specifying the targeted stakeholders, such as CCMs or WHO country offices.

Added value of projects to the pandemics response

Biomedical research project teams often seemed less prepared to produce national recommendations and make their results accessible. Most of the projects had not developed an effective approach to validating results and making them accessible - dissemination is often limited to the scientific community. Although, Mahidol University's project presented reports that were distributed and prefaced by WHO.

The challenge is to ensure that projects provide the necessary means to translate scientific results into policy decisions or developments to strengthen national strategies and / or improve the efficiency and quality of interventions. For biomedical research projects, producing clear recommendations and making research results accessible is essential.

Recommendation

→ Systematically involve national authorities, WHO and Global Fund governance bodies.

GOOD PRACTICE

DEVELOP INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS
Work carried out by the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease project to bring added value to their results and make them sustainable contributed to WHO guidelines on multidrug-resistant tuberculosis being revised, resulting in nearly 50 countries adopting shorter treatment regimens. In order to achieve this, the project: was delivered through national TB programs; was supported by a broad scientific committee; strengthened local capacity; was led by a results dissemination and advocacy strategy; regularly communicated with local WHO offices.

Area 3
Disseminating results

It is necessary to set aside budgets and have a dedicated strategy within projects to validate and disseminate the results of operational research.

Disseminating results is a fundamental area of operational research, as it enables ownership of results by all the partners involved (health authorities, NGOs, civil society, etc.). In this case, all the projects evaluated planned for dissemination and validation of results, but few specified who they were targeting or how they were going to do it. It is therefore necessary to better set out in advance how results will be disseminated and what advocacy approaches will be used. In order to do this, it is necessary to identify a dedicated budget (especially for biomedical research projects) to promote and communicate research results through: exchange of good practice between operational research projects on the same theme; participation in symposia and international conferences; support to draft documents disseminating results; organizing activities to involve CCMs, national control programs, other public authorities and civil society organizations in monitoring project achievements and results.

Projects had generally developed a results dissemination plan in advance and integrated it into their action plan. For example, the Institut Pasteur in Laos' (MALVEC) project action plan planned for six publications in peer-reviewed journals, supplemented by communications at international congresses or in the media. However, dissemination plans were often limited to scientific publications, while dissemination of results to public authorities, public health personnel and the communities concerned are important channels to ensure results are taken into account.

Validating and disseminating results

The majority of projects had not adequately developed their validation and dissemination plans for their research results. However, the MALVEC project's validation work warrants mentioning [see box], because it demonstrates that validation and dissemination can be carried out by the research teams. The Union project confirms this. In addition, a workshop on eliminating malaria organized by the 5% Initiative at the end of 2014 in Bangkok proved to be good practice to promote research results and to contribute to the visibility of French scientific diplomacy.

Recommendations

→ Expand action plans and logical frameworks for projects to include clear objectives and indicators on dissemination of knowledge (specifying target groups, methods, strategy).

→ Organize exchange workshops between OR projects to disseminate results and produce recommendations.

→ Incorporate scientific results into national or regional recommendations.

GOOD PRACTICE

DISSEMINATING AND VALIDATING RESULTS

The Institut Pasteur in Laos (MALVEC) has published a scientific report, prefaced by WHO, which is accessible reading for a non-scientific audience and is translated into national language. Results were also presented verbally.

← *The MALVEC project investigated insecticide resistance in malaria vectors in transmission areas in Laos and Thailand. Opposite: house used to catch mosquitoes in Bak La village, Khong Chiam district, Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand.*

Conclusion

The projects evaluated have all been innovative in their field, from a technological or methodological perspective, or in terms of their approach. Some have proposed alternative solutions to health policies in force, such as reintroducing Primaquine in South-East Asia in the Mahidol project or the short-course treatment of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis tested by the Union project. These innovations represent the 5% Initiative's added value in supporting operational research.

Although the achievements and results across the projects evaluated were mixed, their actual and potential impact on combatting the three pandemics confirms the benefits for the 5% Initiative to continue financing these types of projects. In addition, these interventions support the capacity building of researchers in countries affected by the three pandemics (which is something few donors do) as well strengthening the role of French researchers in the research community.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the results of the evaluation, the consultants recommended the 5% Initiative establishes a specific call for operational research projects.

This was put in place in 2018 under the theme 'improving testing, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis'.

In 2019, the call for projects focused on the theme "mothers, children, adolescents", with the aim of developing strategies to improve the integration of prevention, testing, care and support for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria within health systems.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCM	Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism
CFP	Call for proposals
CRCF	Centre de Recherche et de prise en charge clinique de Fann
GF	Global Fund
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
IP	Institut Pasteur
IRD	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement
MAHIDOL	Oxford-Mahidol University in Bangkok
MEAE	Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs
OR	Operational research
SC	Steering committee
UNION	Union for the Fight against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
UNITAID	International Drug Purchase Facility
WHO	World Health Organization

This cross-cutting evaluation was conducted by Francie Sadeski, Soheir Dani and Anne-Gaëlle Muths from Technopolis in 2017-2018.

It was led at Expertise France by Elsa Goujon-Migue, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer in the Health Department.

The analysis and conclusions presented in this document are the responsibility of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the official viewpoint of Expertise France.

The full cross-cutting evaluation report, as well as the evaluation reports of the projects concerned, are available from the 5% Initiative and are published on their website.

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EXPERTISE
FRANCE

Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
MINISTÈRE
DE L'EUROPE ET DES
AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES

Le Fonds mondial