

Key L'Initiative data from the two three-year strategy periods (2017-2022)

- **Countries:** 40 eligible countries
- **Under supervision of:** Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
- **Budget:** €75.6 M over the 2017-2019 three-year period and €116.4 M over the 2020-2022 three-year period, i.e. €192 M between 2017-2022.
- **Start date:** 18/11/2011
- **Partners:** Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

/ Background

In the context of L'Initiative's new 2020-2022 strategic framework, and four years after its first evaluation, Expertise France commissioned an independent external evaluation in 2021 covering the period 2017-2021. The evaluation was carried out by consultancy firm Technopolis Group, with the aim of improving documentation of results and identifying relevant potential areas for development in the run-up to the 7th Global Fund replenishment. The evaluation covers an analysis of L'Initiative's portfolio of projects and technical assistance (TA), lessons learned since the first evaluation, and collective co-creation of innovative solutions for the 2023-2025 roadmap.



/ How L'Initiative operates

L'Initiative was launched at the end of 2011 and is France's mechanism to complement Global Fund interventions. L'Initiative provides technical assistance and innovation support in Global Fund recipient countries to improve the effectiveness of its grants and strengthen the health impact of funded programs. In this way, it contributes to ensuring the effectiveness of the response to pandemics.



Of the 40 countries eligible for L'Initiative support 19 are also priority countries for French official development assistance. L'Initiative's recent developments amplify its catalytic effect, through strengthening the capacity of health and civil society actors, improving institutional, political and social frameworks, and supporting innovative approaches to respond to pandemics.

L'Initiative is now a key Global Fund impact partner. L'Initiative's mandate is overseen by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the project is implemented by Expertise France, the French public agency for international technical cooperation.

SUMMARY OF L'INITIATIVE'S STRATEGIC AND FORMATIVE EVALUATION (2017-2021)

Strategic pillars

/ Mobilizing skills

L'Initiative provides technical assistance that promotes optimal access to Global Fund programs and contributes to improved efficiency of Global Fund grants, with an emphasis on gender mainstreaming.



/ Supporting catalytic projects

L'Initiative supports catalytic, medium-term programs to advance health practices and policies. L'Initiative supports the Global Fund ecosystem and the response to pandemics, with a particular focus on local and national actors.

/ Generating and sharing knowledge

L'Initiative gathers documentation, evaluations, audits and knowledge sharing materials with a view to producing analysis pieces, overview documents or guidance by country, region and theme, including genre.

/ Supporting the influence of French or French-speaking stakeholders

L'Initiative provides feedback and information to the Global Fund and contributes to French leadership of the Global Fund with regard to accountability and efficiency.

Evaluation results



1. Mobilizing experts through the Expertise Channel

The Expertise Channel's intervention portfolio is relevant overall. Generally, it responds well to country priorities (access to Global Fund funding, in particular) and to the focus on strengthening national health systems, while also being in line with the thematic and geographical priorities of French development assistance in the health sector and the fight against pandemics.

Both beneficiaries and experts attested to the Expertise Channel's capacity to meet their needs, either in full or in part. The 'on-demand' nature of the Expertise Channel and its responsiveness and flexibility were key factors that all stakeholders judged favorably. However, it would have been useful for even closer dialogue to have taken place between L'Initiative and recipients to improve the coordination of assignments at country level and in the long term.

The new pilot enhanced support mechanisms (DATP/DAT Long term support for Grant Management, and IPSA Presidential Initiative for Health in Africa) are particularly well adapted to fragile states. They provide long-term support, that is coordinated and planned with the counterpart, driven by residential TA. The main limitation is high turnover of staff within the beneficiary organizations, whose capacity they aim to strengthen.

Key features of L'Initiative's TA include the **speed with which it is mobilized**, the provision of French-speaking expertise and the **diverse range of subjects it covers**. Other TA providers talked positively about L'Initiative's unique communications approach with regard to its TA portfolio, which helps to contribute to interventions being consistent at country level.

L'Initiative expertise provision is generally considered to be effective by its beneficiaries, who are happy with the quality of the services provided and deliverables produced. **L'Initiative TA contributes to the quality of funding requests** submitted to the Global Fund. For accountability and management purposes, routinely implementing strengthened monitoring and evaluation mechanism for TA would contribute to being able to assess the effectiveness and quality of TA.

Gender mainstreaming in assignments remained an area for improvement at the time of the evaluation. The Expertise Channel is an 'on demand' service and integrating gender mainstreaming involves raising awareness of beneficiary organizations through enhanced dialogue.

The evaluation also indicated **a need to focus expertise more on skills transfer and capacity strengthening of beneficiary organizations**. One challenging area is consolidating the coordination of this pool of experts to ensure a transfer of knowledge related in particular to the changing environment of the Global Fund. Closer coordination of the pool should make it possible to continue efforts to attract more female experts and to train experts on issues related to gender equality and human rights.

The Expertise Channel has a high level of work, in terms of the number of assignments undertaken each year. The Channel's budgetary spend appears satisfactory and the management procedures for TA assignments are well established throughout the management cycle. L'Initiative partner consultancy firms and organizations have the capacity to mobilize a large number of experts with varied profiles.

2. Support for catalytic projects - Projects Channel and Pilot Channel

L'Initiative support to catalytic projects is **relevant to address programmatic needs and structural issues in target countries as well as challenges identified by the Global Fund or France**. Although terms of reference make it possible to ensure project relevance, calls for projects leave little room for innovation by lead applicants. The evaluation highlighted **the need for another mechanism to support projects from local civil society organizations (CSOs)**. CSOs play a key role in community health but often do not have the capacity to respond to L'Initiative calls for projects and/or manage projects of this size.

The Projects Channel is particularly well tailored to **vulnerable populations** (60% of funded projects are from the Vulnerable Populations call for projects). Project leads and national partners cited certain needs to be met in the future, including: consideration of the cost of supplies, including test kits, condoms, and drugs, as access to these is crucial to promote access to health services for the most vulnerable populations.

The evaluation noted real progress in coordinating AFD's activities with those of L'Initiative. However, visibility of L'Initiative's activities on the ground is low. Confusion around brand identity coupled with a lack of L'Initiative presence on the ground tends to limit the visibility of projects by other actors and more broadly the visibility of L'Initiative work at country level. Finally, it can be difficult, even within 'Team France', to identify L'Initiative's different intervention channels and understand how they work. In this regard, it would be worth clarifying the objectives and methods of identifying and monitoring Pilot Channel projects to foster a shared understanding.

The lack of a robust monitoring system for performance indicators and results to assess the achievement of objectives makes it difficult to undertake an overall assessment of the effectiveness of L'Initiative. Three quarters of the projects portfolio that was evaluated are still underway, it is therefore difficult to measure the outcomes and impacts of activities implemented at this stage. The evaluation shows, however, that **many of the projects supported are contributing to changes in health practices and policies, and are producing concrete results in terms of strengthening health systems, access to health services for vulnerable populations and linking scientific research to the implementation of innovative activities**. More efficient tools for monitoring data from these projects would make it possible to promote the value of results from catalytic projects more effectively. This is an activity that is already underway.

The efficiency of the Projects Channel is satisfactory: the L'Initiative team has effectively managed the increase in the number of projects over the period. The Projects Channel is well framed by a clear procedure around the various annual calls for projects, which project leads are happy with. However, certain project monitoring phases (the development and monitoring and evaluation phases of the project) are administratively heavy.

Evaluation results

3. Producing and sharing knowledge



Knowledge shared by L'Initiative comes from evaluation reports and knowledge sharing and learning work on funded projects. The evaluation reports and the information produced enable L'Initiative to develop thematic or cross-cutting analyses that provide useful lessons for its governance bodies, trustees and partners. Genuine progress has been observed in terms of sharing information about L'Initiative with the Global Fund Secretariat. Technical and financial partners (TFPs) also welcome L'Initiative's transparency and coordination efforts through the regular dissemination of information on its TA portfolio.

This work should continue in order to i) better disseminate externally information on the results and impacts of L'Initiative interventions and to promote the scale up of certain projects; (ii) disseminate internally lessons learned from evaluation and knowledge sharing and learning work; (iii) increase the visibility in partner countries of the results and knowledge resulting from L'Initiative interventions.

4. Supporting the influence of French and French-speaking actors

One of the areas of L'Initiative's 2020-2022 strategy is "Support the influence of French and French-speaking actors within the Global Fund", and more broadly in the response to the three pandemics. **L'Initiative contributes effectively to this influence, through feeding back information from its work on the ground, disseminating knowledge, and the active role it plays in developing French position statements to the Global Fund, which are championed by the Ambassador for Global Health.**

L'Initiative's information sharing, coordination on technical assistance, and strategic and operational dialogue with the Global Fund is much deeper, more open and transparent than it was previously. L'Initiative has invested in numerous forums for dialogue and consultation initiated by the Global Fund, bringing in other TFPs or actors, and consulting extensively with the Global Fund on its activities, particularly in terms of technical assistance. **This "activism" approach sets L'Initiative apart from other technical assistance funders backed by the Global Fund and contributes to L'Initiative's visibility** and a certain level of influence over positions taken on French-speaking Africa.

The Pilot Channel also contributes to building this influence of French and French-speaking stakeholders, through its projects by directly supporting the African Constituency Bureau (ACB) and AIDSPAN in their advocacy interventions with the Fund.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation results included a series of recommendations, two of which (the Pilot Channel and knowledge production) were worked on with L'Initiative teams during Design Sprint¹ workshops, inspired by the Design Thinking approach.

1. Strengthen dialogue with national authorities, CSOs and the Global Fund at the country level to improve planning and coordination of TA assignments and funded projects
2. Strengthen the consistency of L'Initiative interventions in partner countries
3. Better assess and consolidate the results and impact of the Expertise Channel in order to sustain the outcomes on beneficiary organizations and national policies
4. Clarify the objectives of the Pilot Channel and the project identification methods
5. Support knowledge generation and scale up
6. Review methods of support to CSO organizational strengthening
7. Improve coordination of the pool of experts

1. Design Sprint is a comprehensive, user-centric design method or process. The objective is to have ownership of design tools to solve problems (through convergence and divergence workshops) and co-create solutions together.



L'INITIATIVE
sida, tuberculose, paludisme

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