Appendix 6
Additional information on operational research protocols

To ensure quality Operational Research (OR), three main criteria must be respected:
Relevance, Quality, Implementation.

1. Relevance: The research project must address a clearly identified problem and be constructed in such a way that it provides evidence that helps to improve disease control programs. In the context of implementation and scaling up of tools, strategies and innovations, it is important that the specific topics selected for OR are relevant and appropriate to the epidemiological and public health context at the national and/or regional level, and are based on a faithful analysis of the situation. Finally, as part of this call, research must be relevant to Global Fund activities in the country or countries concerned.

2. Quality: The project must ensure quality in its methods, the way it is conducted and through data analysis to produce reliable, convincing and solid evidence.

3. Implementation: The project will need to be implemented and managed in a way that maximizes its effectiveness. Several stakeholders will need to be involved in developing the project to ensure a variety of viewpoints are reflected and a broad base of ownership, to maximize the anticipated interest in results, and to increase the likelihood that evidence will be used to inform programs and health policies in a relevant way. A multi-stakeholder group should be put in place and remain involved throughout the lifetime of the project.

It is therefore necessary to ensure that the following areas are taken into account:

1. A research team that comprises the following characteristics:

Multi-sectoral approach: ideally, the research team should have close links with the various actors working to combat the diseases (programs, public and private sectors, NGOs, CSOs). It is generally recommended to include representatives of local authorities, in particular the Ministry of Health, to increase the likelihood that research results will lead to recommendations that are reflected in national policies and programs.

Synergy of expertise: In addition to senior researchers that will garner national credibility and interest, the team will need to include junior members who can devote sufficient time to the project and will be able to provide valuable capacity building for countries. Training junior researchers is an essential component of the 5% Initiative call for projects.

Multidiscipline approach: As implementation of HIV, TB and malaria programs involves medical, economic, political and socio-cultural approaches, the team would benefit from including specialists from several scientific disciplines.

Responsibilities: Management of the team is particularly important when it includes people from different organizations and backgrounds. Roles and responsibilities need to be clarified from the start. The optimal size for the team will depend on the nature of the research.

Technical monitoring group / steering committee: Stakeholders from government, international organizations, academia, civil society and NGOs should be involved throughout the project to provide scientific, technical and ethical guidance and facilitate implementation. Where appropriate, key stakeholders should be invited to participate in a project advisory group. The group can be a formal committee or a working group. It will meet regularly, be kept informed of progress and provide advice at key points in the project.

2. Implementation:

Ethics committee: Before implementation begins, research must be validated by a national and/or institutional ethics committee and the team will have to obtain information on national criteria, procedures, application forms and evaluation committee meetings.
Approval from an ethics committee will be essential to obtain funding. In addition, approval must be co-signed by the CCM(s) and, where appropriate, by regional bodies for regional projects.

International standards: International standards must be respected including good clinical practice and monitoring negative effects when evaluating interventions.

Funding the project: While OR seeks to respond quickly to emerging issues during implementation, there may be a significant amount of time between the submission of the initial proposal and the receipt of funding. Such delays will need to be taken into account when planning activities and hiring team members. The proposal development team should also be clear whether the initial budget is maintained and is sufficient to carry out the project as presented, when and how the funds will be disbursed, which funds can be used and which financial reports will be required.

Fieldwork, data collection and data capture: It is important to obtain any necessary authorization to be able to work with the various bodies and institutions, and to keep them regularly informed of the different stages of the project. Prior communication with the planned research sites avoids potential inconvenience for respondents and facilitates preparations for those leading it.

In situations where new interventions are tested, an independent oversight and data monitoring committee should be set up to verify the integrity of data collected and, where appropriate, monitor potential adverse effects of the intervention being tested.

Finally, it is important to maintain communication with all stakeholders throughout the development, implementation and dissemination phases of the work. The monitoring group is essential and will need to meet regularly to provide updates to the project implementation team and the donor.

3. Dissemination of results: reports and distribution

The necessary reports must be specified at the outset and must include specific timelines for narrative and financial reporting. A detailed dissemination plan should also be developed at the beginning of the project, in particular to discuss results with policy makers, program managers and other stakeholders, presenting the results at national and international conferences and publishing in scientific journals and other media. A 'participatory evaluation' phase may be planned to share the results with those who provided the information, and engage participants in discussions on how to translate research findings into public health recommendations and improve service provision.

4. Ensuring gender equality

Promoting women's rights and equality between men and women **is a priority area of France's development aid policy**. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development has recently adopted the 3rd International Strategy for Gender Equality[1]; it makes equality between men and women an ethical and political imperative, not only a development goal in its own right but also a strategy applicable to all activity taking place outside of France. With regard to official development assistance, the objectives are: Increase financing for projects that aim primarily or significantly to reduce gender inequality; Ensure that our sectoral priorities are financed by means of CSOs and increase France's contributions to international organizations that champion gender equality; Improve gender-responsive budgeting.

In addition, gender equality is one of the four strategic objectives of the Global Fund Strategy 2017-2022: Promote and Protect Human Rights and Gender Equality. In this context, and in line with Expertise France and the 5% Initiative's approach, mainstreaming of gender is a priority issue in this call for projects.

1 "France's International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)", Directorate-General for Global Affairs, Culture, Education and International Development, 2018. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/meae_strategie_-__en_cle076525.pdf