

# UNF-WHO COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund (SRF) Joint Evaluation

## Evaluation brief – December 2021

### Context of the evaluation

The SRF, jointly launched on 13 March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Foundation (UNF) and Swiss Philanthropy Foundation (SPF), was intended to facilitate direct financial contributions from companies, organizations and individuals to the COVID-19 response efforts of WHO and its partners in alignment with the three pillars of the 2020 WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for COVID-19. Between March 2020 and June 2021 (the period covered by the evaluation), the SRF raised over US\$ 256 million from 675,700 donors. The SRF was created as an innovative resource mobilization mechanism, grounded on solidarity principles, that needed to respond very quickly to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.

### Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The overarching objective of this formative evaluation, designed to strengthen accountability and learning, was to assess the architecture, functioning and results of the SRF. It examined the SRF's set-up, management, administration and overall functioning in order to assess what has been achieved, how efficiently the SRF has been operating in pursuit of its objectives and to inform the ongoing administration of the SRF, and WHO and UNF's future fundraising efforts, respectively. It documented key achievements, best practices, challenges, gaps and areas for improvement in the set-up and administration of the SRF; assessed key factors responsible for the achievements and gaps; identified key lessons of use by the WHO Foundation (WHOF) and for future similar mechanisms; and made recommendations for WHO, UNF and partners to consider.

### Key findings, conclusions and lessons

The evaluation found that the SRF was: A) highly relevant in responding to the needs at hand in the response to COVID-19, primarily evidenced by its alignment to the WHO COVID-19 SPRP; B) highly effective in terms of the Fund's overall resource mobilization, and effective in delivery against its Key Performance Indicators, with evidence of effective contribution to the achievements in each of the three SPRP pillars; and C) highly efficient in terms of its management and function. Its set-up and implementation were enacted with speed, purpose and diligence. WHO, UNF and SPF, as primary fiduciary partners, leveraged their respective operational capacity and readiness, pre-existing strategic partnerships, trusted working relationships and adopted a 'minimal regrets' approach to balance the speed needed for an emergency fund with sufficient attention to due diligence and fiduciary considerations. This was complemented by other fiduciary partners, including the China Population Welfare Fund, Japan Center for International Exchange, WHOF, King Baudouin Foundation of Canada and members of Transnational Giving Europe. The innovation inside the philanthropic space, with a diverse network of independent philanthropic organisations

working together across geographies, in a coherent network with the same principles across the fiduciary network contributed to efficiency. Fast action by senior management in WHO, UNF and SPF allowed the Fund to benefit from many 'first mover' advantages.

Gender, equity and human rights (GER) considerations were found to have been implicitly rather than explicitly embedded in the design of the Fund from the outset.

The evaluation identified factors affecting the results of the SRF. Enabling internal and external factors involved in the Fund's set up and implementation were sufficiently strong to ensure the SRF achieved its intended results. Internal enablers within the fiduciary partners contributed to the Fund's success, such as senior sponsorship, clear planning and strategic instruments, redeploying internal capacity, and the speed and agility involved in expediting due diligence processes. External factors enhanced the SRF's achievements, such as the unique emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic as a globally dominant issue, the associated shared experience of being in a crisis environment, and the availability of private sector disaster funds.

Whilst not sufficient to prevent the SRF achieving its intended results, some barriers to the SRF achieving further success were also identified in this evaluation. These included key internal challenges such as the perceived inconsistencies around donor/donation visibility (specifically between corporate donors and celebrities regarding the level of acknowledgement donors received) in public communications and briefings and a perceived reduction in engagement between the SRF and its partners over time. Whilst relatively minor, these internal challenges were compounded by external factors, such as the evolving nature of the pandemic, the shift in attention away from COVID-19 onto mainstream political issues, and existing practices around earmarking. There is a perception from some stakeholders that the totality of these constraining factors may have hindered the SRF's ability to sustain the momentum of funds received.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that the SRF was highly successful in meeting the moment early and positioning itself effectively to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The considerable good-will, trust and professional expertise deployed was instrumental in facilitating the SRF's achievement of results, which are a testament to the considerable efforts and hard work of UNF, WHO and SPF staff, management, partners and donors.

The COVID-19 response proved that actively working in partnership is essential to tackle global issues. Applying the principle of solidarity as a foundation for the SRF and its contribution to the focused global COVID-19 response was highly effective. It drew on long-standing development experiences of collective effort and joint working and should be continuously enacted in future similar Funds.

The SRF provided robust evidence for the difference that flexible funding sources can have in terms of implementation agility, efficiency and effectiveness, and the benefits to securing flexible financing driven by demand rather than 'earmarked' funding around specific themes and geographic contexts when trying to mobilize resources. In addition, the SRF demonstrated that defined and targeted fundraising strategies can reach and mobilize non-traditional donors/contributors raising significant amounts of money, whilst ensuring due diligence.

The careful planning and execution of adaptive management and ensuring that surge capacity was made available early in the emergency funding cycle enhanced the ability of all participating stakeholders to rapidly engage with donors broadly, secure high-quality funding, and implement quickly. The SRF's 'minimal regrets' approach to due diligence worked effectively in balancing the need for speed and agility, characteristic of an emergency fund such as this, with the need for compliance with financial and administrative rules and regulations to maintain and protect the integrity of WHO, UNF and partners. The streamlining of standard operating procedures and the conduct and completion of these in parallel, for example due diligence processes running alongside and issuance of letters of intent, allowed the Fund to scale up quickly, efficiently, and reliably whilst managing conflicts of interest effectively.

Recognizing the many successes of the SRF, two areas could be strengthened, equally relevant to any future similar Fund. First, there is a need to ensure the integration of a GER lens into programme and grant design from the outset. This is critical to ensure funds can reach vulnerable populations and to meet international commitments as codified in UNSWAP and related global compacts. Second, is a need to further refine expected results (whether output, intermediate outcome, outcome or impact) and related indicators, as well as to develop a Fund-relevant theory of change /results framework to further measure and demonstrate results. It is recognized that outcome-level reporting can take time, sometimes beyond the life cycle of the fund itself.

### **Learning**

Alongside the evaluative findings and conclusions, the evaluation generated several lessons to help guide the set-up and administration of similarly unconventional funds. These lessons relate to: i) the enabling environment; ii) design principles; and iii) implementation practices.

**On the enabling environment:** 1) establish senior sponsorship; 2) preparedness is critical; 3) reinforce WHO's coordinating role and aligning to global strategic plans; 4) speed trumps perfection; 5) work with trusted partners and partnerships; 6) work by the principle of 'trusted to do' and without ego; and 7) leverage, replicate and amplify what works.

**On design:** 8) use clear principles; 9) establish a senior steering and decision-making body; 10) make donating easy across many countries and contexts; 11) ensure donations are flexible; 12) embrace digital tools and partners; 13) embed GER considerations from the outset; and 14) ensure the financial instruments provide maximum impact.

**On implementation:** 15) be ready to receive; 16) be ready to leverage, allocate and distribute funds quickly; 17) ensure the letter and spirit of legal agreements are fully understood and expectations jointly agreed; 18) use multi-pronged and diverse resource mobilization strategies to respond to the needs of the emergency as they emerge; 19) communicate early, often and with creativity to partners, donors and stakeholders; 20) use adaptive management and fit-for-purpose governance; 21) use real-time information to inform decision-making; 22) ensure reporting systems are proportionate; and 23) the risks attached to mobilization of private sector resources can be mitigated.

## **Recommendations**

**Using the SRF as a clear proof of concept, WHO and UNF should actively apply lessons and experiences when launching similar funding mechanisms in response to future emergencies, ensuring operational readiness for when the next global crisis emerges.**

**WHO and UNF should consider:**

**Recommendation 1:** Developing respective organizational plans for managing surge capacity in emergency response situations, particularly in launching new Fund appeals and mechanisms.

**Recommendation 2:** Enhancing partnership and engagement strategies drawing lessons from the SRF -- particularly applying the principles of solidarity, collective action and shared risk, and building on trust, established operating capacities and organizational comparative advantages.

**Recommendation 3:** Defining and implementing more structured outcome-level measurement and results reporting, based on a clearly-defined results framework and accompanying M&E framework.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensuring clarity and alignment of expectations for all potential beneficiaries regarding financial award thresholds, allocation processes and release triggers in case of future expanded resources.

**Recommendation 5:** Developing effective communications with SRF fiduciary and beneficiary partners and donors upon sunset of the Fund, including on final implementation status, resource flows, and acknowledgements.

**WHO should consider:**

**Recommendation 6:** Adapting and using creative and innovative resource mobilization strategies, funding instruments, implementation mechanisms, and operational approaches as demonstrated by the SRF. In this regard to:

- a. Develop business cases, fundraising strategies and resource mobilization targets for similar non-traditional funding mechanisms.

**Recommendation 7:** Ensuring gender, equity and human rights considerations are integrated from the outset into the design, set-up, implementation and reporting of future similar funds.

## **Contacts**

For further information please contact the WHO Evaluation Office at [evaluation@who.int](mailto:evaluation@who.int) and UNF at [colleen.teixeiramoffat@unfoundation.org](mailto:colleen.teixeiramoffat@unfoundation.org).

Hyperlinks: [Evaluation Report](#) on [WHO site](#) and on [UNF site](#)