



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

AN INTERVIEW WITH IDA HAKIZINKA

1. Tell our readers a little bit about yourself and your background

I was born in the Congo (DRC) within the Kinyarwanda-speaking community. I started my first degree in Kinshasa and Bukavu but my studies were interrupted in 1994 due to insecurity in the eastern DRC and we moved to Rwanda in 1995. I then attended the National University of Rwanda where I gained a degree in Development Economics. Many years later, after I started working in the health field, I returned to university to study for my Master's in Public Health.

As a young woman economist, I never thought I would end up working in health! How did it happen? Well, when I left university, I joined UNDP's Young Professionals' Program and was seconded to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. My main responsibilities included collecting and analyzing social sector data and supporting UNDP in conducting surveys (such as the Household Living Conditions Survey). I stayed on at the Ministry as an Economist, in charge of the Social Sector for the World Bank-funded National Poverty Reduction Program (PRSP implementation). So, I participated in the drafting and costing of the national poverty reduction strategy, with a focus on social sector issues, which involved identifying, compiling, analyzing and updating poverty data, setting social sector priorities, and reviewing other ministries' social sector activities.

I also worked on the Public Expenditure Tracking survey, mainly in education and health. I became the social sector (education, family and gender, health and HIV/AIDS) focal point in the Ministry and my role became increasingly health- and HIV-related:

- I participated as an expert in the social impact assessment of policies contained in the PRSP;

- I was a member of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health of Rwanda;
- I was a member of the task force for the Clinton Foundation's Action Plan for the treatment of HIV/AIDS; and
- I was still at the Ministry when the Global Fund came into being and participated in the development of Rwanda's first Global Fund project under Round 1, sitting on the newly constituted Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) in 2002 as an expert and then its second Vice Chair as the Ministry's representative.

2. So this is how you became involved with the Global Fund ? you were there at its birth!

This was a really exciting time for both the Global Fund and for Rwanda. The Global Fund was still such a young organization and its boundaries seemed limitless. For Rwanda, it was literally a breath of life: we could see that people were dying of HIV/AIDS and we had such passion and ambition for the projects we proposed for funding under Round 1. We tried to put 1,000 patients onto ART. We could see, and we tried to address, the prevailing stigma and discrimination. Our creativity and innovation resulted in going from a modest Round 1 proposal of \$14 million to one of \$320 million by Round 9. And my career path became clear.

I became the acting coordinator of the Ministry of Health Global Fund Principal Recipient Project Management Unit for two HIV, two tuberculosis and two malaria grants. However, my main role between 2004 and 2016 was as Permanent Secretary, Country Coordinating Office for the Global Fund in Rwanda. I saw the Global Fund move from the Rounds-based approach to the New Funding Mechanism which was so much more sensible, as it put a stop to over-ambitious proposals for huge amounts of money but instead provided countries with a funding envelope that the Global Fund itself decided, based on a country's technical and programmatic capability as well as resource absorption capacity.

My main responsibilities were to manage the CCM Secretariat, oversee the preparation of funding applications and monitor grant implementation.

?3.How did you become involved with Aidspace?

Between 2009 and 2012 I served as Aidspace's Board member, and then as the Board Chair up to 2016. This was also an exciting time for Aidspace, an international non-government organization which had been set up very soon after the Global Fund's launch as an independent watchdog on how the Global Fund operated and to ensure transparency and accountability in its workings, seeking to monitor, explain and critique the Global Fund with the objective of increasing the effectiveness of the Fund and of the implementers of its grants. I met Aidspace's founder, Bernard Rivers, who was also its first Executive Director between 2002 and 2012, at the Global board meetings which I used to attend as an Eastern and Southern Africa Constituency delegation member and, later, as the Southern and East Africa Communication focal point: and it is Bernard who persuaded me to join Aidspace's Board. During this time period, Aidspace moved from New York to Nairobi in 2007.

After Bernard retired in 2012, Aidspace had two Executive Directors over the four-year period while I was Board Chair. We tried to recruit and retain the right person until eventually I was told – "Ida! Resign from the Board and come back to us as Executive Director". And this is what I did. And here I am, six happy years later.

4. What are you most proud of in your time with Aidspace?

Aidspace has become a kind of 'mentor' for many through the Global Fund Observer (GFO) and our policy and strategy documents. We were the first to publish a paper for stakeholders and applicants on how to understand and navigate the convoluted Global Fund application process. This was downloaded by thousands of people, both proposal writers and would-be implementers. We undertake very specific analysis; for example, after Round 7 which the Global Fund designated as focusing on better integration of HIV and sexual and reproductive health ? two vertical programs which in theory should be linked by their complementarity and overlap ? we published an analysis of seven proposals and how (if) they had proposed to achieve such integration. Aidspace is also supporting several Supreme Audit Institutions in French West Africa in their role of auditing governments' utilization of Global Fund funds; hence, we also build capacity through training workshops

Our 'babies' have been a huge success. The GFO today has more than 15,000 subscribers and its success led us to develop its French sister, the Observateur du Fonds Mondial with more than 3,000 subscribers, and for this we were successful in attracting funding from the French L'Initiative. No longer do we merely translate a few articles from the GFO into French, we have dedicated funding for developing specific articles related to Francophone countries-interest issues in West and Central Africa.

So, when strangers come up to me at meetings and tell me that one of our articles has helped them to 'fix' something that they were struggling with or provided them with some missing information, or that we 'make them understand the Global Fund much better', I am proud. It is difficult to quantify the impact that we have: but we know it is there.

Aidspace is also widely read by Global Fund employees themselves. We have an excellent working relationship with the Global Fund but there is no conflict of interest: if we want to say something, we say it. We are truly independent. To keep our independence vis-à-vis the Global Fund, we cannot apply or receive Global Fund funding. We see ourselves as a part of civil society and are happy to be part of the solution, raising the voice of civil society as an advocate for the same.

5. And your vision for the future of Aidspace?

What COVID-19 has shown us is that we have to be open to covering other health issues as they arise and this, in turn, makes me realize that we need to look into how we can perform the same role as an independent Observer for other global health institutions. So much donor money goes into health and the Global Fund's portion is actually only a modest share of this. At the country level, the Global Fund is not alone ? we must also consider the reach and scope of other donors' programs, starting where other donors' funding is invested in programs aiming to achieve the same 'Strategic Objectives' as those the Global Fund.

So yes, I am proud of who we are and what we are doing: but there is always room for improvement!

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