



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

Secretariat releases report on slow uptake of Global Fund's human rights complaints mechanism

In April 2015, the Global Fund's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) launched a human rights complaints mechanism through which anybody can report human rights violations in the context of a Global Fund-supported program. However, in over three years, not a single complaint has been received via the mechanism. A year after the mechanism went live, the Fund began wondering why. So it commissioned an [independent report](#) looking into the low uptake, which was completed in March, and [published online](#) in May 2018.

The report acknowledges that it is possible that no complaints were received because no violations were observed. But the existence of the mechanism, and the assessment of its non-use point to an expectation that there are in fact human-rights violations occurring in the context of Global Fund grants, or at least nearby.

The human rights complaints mechanism, or complaints procedure, is fairly straight-forward, and is available to anyone, regardless of their occupation, nationality, or association with a Global Fund-supported program. Aidspace reported on the mechanism when it was launched in 2015, in [GFO 265](#). The criteria and complaints procedure have not changed since then. Guidance on the criteria and on the process for making a complaint, as well as the online form to do so, can be found [here](#).

But despite the existence of the expectation of violations, a simple process to lodge a complaint, the ability to do so in confidence, and an extensive awareness-raising effort on the part of the Secretariat, there have been no complaints reported to date.

What the Fund has done to promote the mechanism

According to the report, the Global Fund Secretariat, primarily through the Community, Rights and Gender Department, has organized a range of activities to raise awareness about the complaints mechanism. These have included in-person trainings at regional and country levels, webinars, and “making information about the mechanism widely available in an easy-to-understand manner.” Trainings on the mechanism and affiliated topics have been provided for Secretariat staff and other Global Fund personnel such as CCM members. Additionally, conference calls and in-person trainings have been held targeting civil society and community groups in all regions. The OIG has also sought to raise awareness of the mechanism, at least in the context of the [I Speak Out Now!](#) campaign, which concerns fraud and wrongdoing of all sorts.

Missing from the uptake report is data on participation in the various fora organized by the Fund to promote the mechanism. This seems to be important, because while the report describes what sounds like an exhaustive public awareness effort, the primary limitation to uptake is reported to be a lack of awareness about the mechanism in the communities the Fund assumed would make use of it.

Lack of awareness and skepticism limit use

The assessment included interviews with 42 people, primarily from 37 civil society organizations, from each region in which the Fund has grants. Based on these interviews, a lack of awareness of the mechanism’s existence or its operation was found to be the primary barrier to use. More than 80% of organizations interviewed claimed to have no knowledge of the mechanism, or not to know how it worked. According to some interview participants, the lack of awareness extended to Global Fund staff and CCM members. And even for those who knew of the mechanism, they often misunderstood its operation, such as believing it was a process to be led by the CCM, which it is not.

Besides the mechanism itself, a lack of awareness about how the Global Fund works and what constitutes a human-rights violation were also found to be barriers to uptake. Some of the respondents indicated that they were unclear either about how the Fund worked, or which programs were funded by it. Others claimed that the OIG and other departments at the Fund had displayed low knowledge and support of human-rights concerns. The report noted: “According to informants, this gave them the sense that there was no point [in] complaining to the mechanism as the CCM, fund portfolio managers and the mechanism are all seen as part of the Global Fund, despite their being separate, independent entities.”

This lack of faith in the Fund also included the possible corrective actions to be taken based on the submission of a complaint. Some people felt that the possible remedies were insufficient and therefore a report was pointless. Others expressed concerns regarding threats to their own programs should they file a report, and that the Fund actually doesn’t have the right to do anything about such violations.

Recommendations and response

The report concludes with a set of recommendations, which are summarized below.

Recommendations to address the lack of awareness of the mechanism:

- The Global Fund should continue to raise awareness of the mechanism externally by working with civil society organizations to promote it, and internally by ensuring that country teams and CCMs are aware of it.
- CCMs and CRG Regional Platforms should be further mobilized to promote awareness and uptake of the mechanism.
- Expand reach of awareness efforts by holding more webinars and translating materials about the

mechanism into more local languages.

At the end of the report is a brief “response to the recommendations” prepared by the Secretariat and OIG. The writers “welcome the report and its recommendations,” and offer some proposed activities to operationalize them. Most notably, the CRG Department proposes to better leverage the CRG Regional Platforms to promote the mechanism (See GFO article on regional platforms [here](#)), and to use other existing platforms and activities to reinforce awareness. A webinar about the mechanism is promised for September 2018.

The response concludes with: “The complaints mechanism is a small, but important component of the Global Fund’s work on human rights, and we are committed to making sure the mechanism is well known and better understood.”

For information about the human rights complaints mechanism or the assessment of its under-utilization, please contact Etienne Michaud at Etienne.Michaud@theglobalfund.org or by phone at +41 (0)58 791 1087.

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