



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

GLOBAL FUND VOWS TO STAY COMMITTED TO CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT AFTER RESTRUCTURING

CSOs write to Jaramillo about their concerns

The Global Fund will uphold its crucial relationship with civil society organisations (CSOs) even after the dismantling of the Civil Society (CS) Team at its Secretariat, the Director of Resource Mobilisation and Donor Relations, Christoph Benn, told GFO in a telephone interview. “Civil society engagement has made the Fund what it is today. We cannot afford to lose this element,” Mr Benn said.

With the restructuring of the Global Fund’s Secretariat, a team of six officers that handled civil society issues was dissolved. The tasks have been divided up between three different divisions: Resource Mobilisation and Donor Relations; Strategy, Investment and Impact; and Grant Management. CSOs have expressed concern about the changes (see below).

Mr Benn explained that under the new structure, the fund portfolio managers (FPMs) in the Secretariat will also become civil society and partnership managers for the countries they are responsible for. “This implies that every FPM has some knowledge of the partnership environment, has the willingness to work with them, and recognises the importance of civil society and other partners, he said.” In addition, Mr Benn said, a political and civil society advocacy team in the Resource Mobilisation and Donor Relations Division will be dealing with advocacy globally. “Only if civil society at all levels, from the Board to the implementers and beneficiaries, feels that its voice is being heard, and that it is taken seriously as a very important partner, can we ask it to do advocacy for the Global Fund,” Mr Benn said.

Further, Mr Benn said, there will now be a senior officer in charge of community systems strengthening, one aspect of civil society involvement at country level. This position has been created in the Department

for Strategic Investment and Partnerships, which falls under the Strategy, Investment and Impact Division. As previously, there will also be officers in the Governance Department liaising with the CSO delegations to the Global Fund Board.

Letter from CSOs

The Civil Society Action Team (CSAT) for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), which provides technical assistance to Global Fund-financed programmes, voiced its concerns about the restructuring in a letter to General Manager Gabriel Jaramillo. CSAT warned that the changes “could weaken civil society communication and cooperation with the Secretariat and thereby will hinder the effectiveness, risk management and sustainability of programs supported by the Fund.”

CSAT asked Mr Jaramillo to consider re-instituting the CS Team. It also asked him to explain how civil society involvement – as well as the issues of sexual orientation, gender, most-at-risk populations and human rights – will be addressed within the new structure. In addition, CSAT asked for clarification about how civil society will be involved in the grant processes and CCMS.

Secretariat wants feedback from partners

Mr Benn conceded that CSOs in donor countries, some of whom are also implementers of Global Fund grants, have expressed concern that the entry point for civil society to the Secretariat may be lost without a civil society team. “But this is not the case. With the new structure, civil society has many entry points to the Global Fund.”

Mr Benn said that although FPMs have to focus on grant management, they will have sufficient time to also deal with civil society matters. “All of the major implementing countries now have one FPM. By improving the ratio of FPMs to countries, the Secretariat is freeing up their time so that they can spend much more time at country level and engage much more with the partners in the country. Also, each of the FPMs will have a bigger country team (seven people instead of five).” Mr Benn said that he believes the restructuring at the Secretariat has opened up a lot of opportunities for civil society. “We will have to explain the changes to stakeholders at country level and get their feedback. This feedback will be important and will tell us if the changes have worked as planned. If not, we can review and make changes if needed.”

See also the commentary by Angela Kageni (next article).

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