



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

Three Months, and Rising

by Kate Macintyre

Close readers of Global Fund Observer (GFO) will know that I took over from Bernard Rivers as Executive Director of Aidspace just over three months ago. It was a smooth transition. On a nearly hourly basis, I am impressed by the way the staff have continued to run the systems that Bernard founded and ran for ten years. He created a remarkable organisation. I knew this from watching GFO over the years; now I am beginning to know it from the inside of the organisation that houses the newsletter.

Today I live in Nairobi, and this has been my home for the last six years, but Kenya has been my intellectual home since I first came here in 1984 after finishing a university degree in modern history. After a stint as a journalist and as a director of a health-focused NGO, I then moved my career towards infectious disease evaluation, using my training in demography and health policy to understand how people responded to the diseases and how we (as scientists and managers) measure those responses. I held a tenured research and teaching position at Tulane University in the US until the end of August this year.

I have lost friends to all three epidemics, but I also now have many friends who are alive because of the actions of the global community towards rolling out treatment and prevention. In 1997, when my work as a researcher began, there was no talk or idea of the Global Fund. There was no Roll Back Malaria, no Stop TB, no UNAIDS; PEPFAR was very far away; and countries heavily affected were in crisis. My first years as an infectious disease evaluation specialist were cautious ones, even depressing. What an incredible 15 years it has been, and the future is now more exciting than even the early 21st century years were for these infectious diseases.

In South Africa, in 2000, I remember a conversation about stigma and disclosure that was so traumatic

that even now I find it hard to believe the kind of fear that people lived under. A diagnosis literally seemed worse than death. My training in history means I often look to the past for lessons, and to know where we've come from. This recent history of stigma and discrimination is important. The fight is not over, indeed for many it may only have just begun. But I am conscious of being a part of that fight, whether as a researcher or, now, a commentator and observer: always, a witness.

In the past three months I have attended two Global Fund Board meetings, two pre-meetings, a replenishment review meeting, and an Aidspan Board meeting. I have co-written an Annual Plan for 2013. But beyond the "meetings and greetings," above all I have been learning. Learning about people, systems, publishing, global reforms, country-level problems and acronyms.

The acronym soup that is the Global Fund (and of course much else in the global health world), and the jargon it generates and illustrates, needs deconstruction and explanation. Clearly, one of the legacies of Bernard Rivers and David Garmaise is the clarity they force upon this obscure world of global health. GFO has always explained difficult, complex things carefully and clearly, and unpacked the jargon and overuse of words. It has punctured the pompous or unintelligible and maintained the highest standards of reporting and commentary as a small newsletter run by a very small team. I will try to keep this tradition of high quality reporting during my tenure as director.

But GFO will change and it will grow. The first change will be following up on Aidspan's commitment to communicate to a broad audience. In early 2013, we plan to launch Aidspan's website in French, Spanish and Russian. Soon after this we plan to start editions of the GFO Newsletter in those same languages.

GFO is also reaching out to more local correspondents to diversify the voices of those most directly affected by the programmes and to generate more stories from more regions. While observing global level policies and programmes emanating from Geneva remains a vital role for GFO, there is much to be watched and learned from how those policies affect implementation at the country and even the community level. GFO will try to increase the reportage from those levels, aware always that we have limits, and that with 151 countries receiving support from the Fund, we can't hope to speak for all of those voices.

We will also generate more commentary from our use of social media and through our main website. Finally, we continue to develop our outreach programmes which include efforts to encourage more "local watchdogging," as we call it, by individuals and organisations best placed to do it.

Next year, Aidspan will develop a new Strategic Plan (2014–2016). This is a great opportunity for a new Director to build her team and to strengthen the direction of Aidspan as a focused think tank. Our efforts will build on the past using high quality, evidence-based reporting and analysis to continue to observe the Global Fund and those who implement with its funds. We will continue to speak truth to those in power, and continue to broaden and deepen the communication tools we have created.

I believe we at Aidspan are privileged to be able to watch and critique an organisation like the Global Fund. We witness rapid, sometimes chaotic, always interesting changes. Our job is to be, as someone at the Secretariat once called us, the "Explainers." While this sounds like an aging rock band from the 20th Century, I'll take the tag and run with it.

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