



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

Observations on the Global Fund by a Retiring Board Member

Alvaro Bermejo, Executive Director of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, recently stepped down (at the end of his two-year term) as a member of the Global Fund Board representing Developed Country NGOs. In an interview in the Alliance newsletter, Mr Bermejo reflected on the events of the past few years and on his experience as a Board member. This article contains excerpts from the interview.

On how the Global Fund has changed...

“I would challenge anybody to name a multi-lateral organisation that has changed faster than the Global Fund has in the last two years. There are certainly none in global health. It has overhauled its governance system, introduced a new funding model (NFM), hired a new management team, and restructured its Secretariat so it is better focused on the fund’s core business (grant management). All of this while continuing to support grants that have turned around the epidemics in country after country. No wonder stakeholder confidence has soared from a low point in late 2011.

“I won’t say it’s been simple, or that it hasn’t been painful. Of course it has, and I’m still convinced that some of that pain – the cancellation of Round 11 – could and should have been avoided. But the change was clearly necessary and it was done with courage.

“While it was a huge effort that many of us contributed to, three people deserve, in my view, special credit: Simon Bland and Mphu Ramatlapeng, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board (up until June 2013), and Gabriel Jaramillo, member of the High Level Panel turned Global Fund General Manager (until January 2013) for much of the transition.”

On the way forward...

“Looking forward, Mark Dybul, the Global Fund’s new Executive Director, couldn’t have made a better start. He’s working tirelessly and strategically to turn the emerging scientific developments into high impact interventions and translating the recovered donor confidence into actual pledges.”

On the new funding model...

“In my day-to-day work I get to see, to feel, the Global Fund from the ground up. Alliance linking organisations are principal recipients for seven grants and sub recipients for many more. The initial feedback from the transition phase of the NFM has been encouraging and grant management has improved, particularly for the 20 high-impact countries, but we’ve got more work to do. The application process needs to become simpler and easier for the country stakeholders that in the end ‘own’ the programmes and determine their success or failure.

“That’s why the Alliance is concerned about the downsizing of the civil society team within the Global Fund Secretariat.”

On his Board member experience...

“It’s been a roller coaster, with many tense moments. The Board meeting in Ghana in November 2011 – just after the cancellation of Round 11 – was probably an all-time low. A time when it looked like the world had changed so much that the spirit of solidarity, activism and social justice that had created the Global Fund had all but disappeared in the face of the crisis created by our financial systems. Fortunately, it has not.”

The full interview with Alvaro Bermejo is available [here](#).

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