



Independent observer  
of the Global Fund

## Former Director of External Relations reflects on 15 years of resource mobilization at the Global Fund

Dr. Christoph Benn was the Director of External Relations for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria from 2003 to 2018, and was a member of the founding Board of the Global Fund in 2002. In his role as Director of External Relations, he was responsible for mobilizing financial resources for the Fund from public, private, and philanthropic donors, including establishing the Fund's Replenishment mechanism, and pioneering approaches to global health and development resource mobilization through private sector and innovative financing initiatives. Under Dr. Benn's leadership, the Global Fund has mobilized pledges and contributions of more than \$50 billion.

GFO: Your completion of 15 years at the Global Fund marks the end of an era – for you in that role, and for the Fund. How do you feel about your term as Director of External Relations?

Christoph Benn: First, I've always felt extremely privileged that I have had this opportunity in my life, to be engaged with the Global Fund from its creation, and that I was given this task as Director of External Relations from the beginning – because for me the Global Fund was always more than an organization you happened to work for. The Global Fund was, for me, the fulfilment of some dreams that for many years we thought would be absolutely impossible.

I had worked in Africa during the early days of the devastating AIDS epidemic in the late 80s and early 90s when so many people were dying while we had so little to offer to prevent this tragedy. When then the first [antiretroviral] treatment became available after 1996, my first question – and that of my colleagues, of the whole NGO community – was: could we possibly make that available – comprehensive treatment, prevention and care – to all people in need but particularly in Africa? The answer could only be an instrument like the Global Fund.

That's why the Global Fund was the answer to these dreams. Finally there was global solidarity, there was this strong sense of equity, the sharing of people who can afford with those who, without that solidarity, would simply die. Throughout those 15 years there was hardly a day that I wasn't aware that it was a privilege to work for this organization. Furthermore I was fortunate enough to work with an amazing team in External Relations over all the years. Whatever we achieved together was due to their incredible commitment, professionalism, creativity and strong sense of community at work.

Of course nobody could have predicted how it went – because the Global Fund at the beginning was just an experiment, it was a disruption of the system. And we were supposed to raise billions of dollars. Nobody knew exactly how much but it was clear that it had to be billions. But there was no blueprint, there was no model – the only model out there was maybe the World Bank. But it was completely different, we knew we couldn't copy the World Bank. But apart from that it was like a blank sheet. How would we address that? That was both a challenge and an opportunity, to create something from scratch – including the Resource Mobilization function.

Obviously we started first with a more conventional approach, called 'ad hoc' resource mobilization. It was not very systematic, and much more opportunistic. Then, over time, we created the Replenishment mechanism for the Global Fund, to make [the] approach more systematic and predictable – we needed not only a lot of money, but also predictability so that the Global Fund was able to support people and programs for years to come.

GFO: What do you consider have been your and your team's greatest achievements at the Global Fund?

Christoph Benn: I think the greatest achievement is not so much the amount of money we raised but the fact that as the Global Fund partnership we've been able to maintain the confidence of our donors and partners over a long period of time. Resource mobilization is basically all about confidence and trust. Unless your donors trust the organization and feel this is a good investment of their money, they will not provide you with their money. That's the capital we had to have; the challenge was to maintain that over a long period – by and large one can say the trust hasn't changed much. Donors have almost without exception continued to support the Global Fund and usually have increased their support. The trajectory has been going up from the beginning. It's relatively easy to score a short-term goal but to maintain that over a long period is much more difficult. I always described resource mobilization at the Global Fund as a marathon and not a sprint. Not only [in terms of] the support of donors but to maintain a very high level of support from our advocates and the civil society community. So much has depended on very strong advocacy from CS around the world. That it has been possible to keep this level of support and trust of the civil society community would count as one of the major achievements of [our] work.

It evolved also from a few NGOs that helped us in the early years to the creation of GFAN [the Global Fund Advocates Network] – with dedicated advocates in more than 80 countries around the world. It's a major benefit to have lots of civil society leaders on all continents making the case for the Fund.

The governance model, with 3 NGO delegations having full voting rights, always meant that there was a high degree of ownership within the NGO community – it wasn't just temporary support. It was their instrument, they could shape decisions – not that there's been a lack of criticism from civil society!

Regardless of any of their positions and often frustrations – they would never question that this was their instrument. This unwavering support has never changed, exactly because of the model of inclusiveness and transparency at global and at country level.

GFO: Can you describe the evolution in the Fund’s approach to resource mobilization since the very early days, before there even was a ‘Replenishment’?

Christoph Benn: In the very early days we had an opportunistic approach – to try to convince major donors to give generously to the Global Fund – in the first two years mainly through G7 processes, ever since [the G7 meeting in] Genoa in 2001. The G7 provided the essential support to the Global Fund – but it was clearly not enough. That’s why as early as November 2003, which was my first Board meeting as Director of External Relations, the Board instructed me to develop a Replenishment mechanism for the Global Fund.

It was a really big challenge because we were a young organization, I had a very small team at that time, and I had basically no experience with organizing replenishments. Other institutions had a machinery, they knew how that worked. I was asked specifically by the Board not to copy the model of development banks – they said ‘develop a specific replenishment for the Global Fund, Replenishment ‘lite,’ with less meetings, less documentation. and a different style.

So we started to develop a model that would be specific to the Global Fund. In the end, it turned out to be a model that was indeed heavily driven by effective advocacy – built on the strong support of advocates from civil society but also of advocates in donor capitals at the political level: business leaders, UN leaders.

Kofi Annan became the first Chair of the Replenishment; as then-Secretary General of the UN with his stature and reputation. To have him as our first chair was huge for us. He chaired the first two Replenishments very successfully – and we got a very senior person, Sven Sandstrom, one of the Managing Directors of the World Bank, who became the vice chair of our first Replenishment. We worked on a daily basis with him, benefitting from his huge experience of what other organizations had been doing while we were about to do it in a different way. These were outstanding leaders who offered their support to the Global Fund, and that enabled us to launch the first rounds of Replenishment.

GFO: Do the five Replenishments so far serve as ‘defining moments’ in how you think about the Global Fund’s changes in its approach to resource mobilization, and have there been other major influences?

Christoph Benn: I could easily go through the history of [the Global Fund’s] resource mobilization quoting the Replenishments because they were all unique. The [Replenishment became the key mechanism](#). At the beginning of each Replenishment we asked ourselves who might be the most influential leader who could help us drive that process. The first Replenishment, scheduled for 2005, was the year of broad political support for development with the slogan of “make poverty history” at the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, and we presented the Global Fund as one of the instruments in this very important development. So the UK government, under Tony Blair, hosted our first Replenishment in 2005, and that was basis for the following Replenishments.

The first [Replenishment period] was only scheduled for two years as it was still an experiment. Already two years later we had to organise another one. In 2005, Angela Merkela was elected as Chancellor of Germany, and we knew she’d be president of the G8 in 2007, so it was natural that we approached her and her minister for development Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, and asked them if they were ready to be our champions. It was not a given at all as Chancellor Merkel was new. She had never really been involved in global development and health. But she did host the Second Replenishment meeting, which became a huge success – in 2007 we saw the biggest jump in our resources we’d ever had. [From \$3.7 billion in pledges for two years in the first Replenishment, to \$9.7 billion in pledges for three years for the

second.]

The Third Replenishment was in 2010, when we had changed to a 3-year cycle, and this was probably the most difficult of all. It was the first Replenishment after the major financial and economic crisis of 2008. There were many who predicted at that time that we should give up on our Replenishments. Countries were struggling, budgets everywhere were under huge pressure, major donor countries like Italy and Spain dropped out because they simply didn't have a development budget anymore, all countries were looking at their own deficits and prioritizing that over global solidarity. Preparing for this was the most challenging of all. Nevertheless, as Kofi Annan had stepped down as UN Secretary General, we convinced [the next Secretary General] Ban Ki-Moon to host the next Replenishment.

We didn't get the same type of increase as we'd achieved before but still, we managed to get more resources than in 2007 – and I consider that, in a different way, to be a huge success. To achieve an increase in that situation was quite significant.

Next was in 2013, hosted by President Obama and his team in the US. At that time, the economic situation had improved somewhat so that we could get to the next step in funding levels, and we achieved yet another increase in this Replenishment, with \$12 billion. For the Fifth Replenishment we approached [Canadian Prime Minister] Trudeau. We were fortunate to have this dynamic young leader who with his team, helped us enormously to drive that process – and the [Fifth Replenishment raised \\$12.9 billion for the Fund](#).

Now, looking into the future at [the Sixth Replenishment](#) – we did succeed again to get the G7 President of next year (2019), [French President] Emmanuel Macron, fully in line with that kind of tradition: Whenever possible, get the G7/G8 President of that year to host and be the champion. That was one of key elements of our strategy from the beginning: to always identify the best possible champion for the Global Fund.

It's quite amazing that this still seems to work – even after 15 years of Global Fund, that there is still sufficient enthusiasm and interest at a political level so that the model still works. In many cases, including Canada [as host] and coming up in France, it never would have been possible without the support of national NGOs. It's a key success factor – strong support of NGOs in that country. It reduces their [governments'] risk, if you like. They don't have to be concerned that [their decision to fund the Global Fund] would not be supported, that they would be criticised. They can be pretty sure they would be praised. You have to create a 'win-win' because [you generate] positive publicity by doing that, and it's positive for the Global Fund because you have the most influential leaders on your side.

GFO: After the 'boom' years of the early- to mid-2000s came the 2008 crash, and a change in the donor environment – how would you describe this and what effect did it have on your approach to resource mobilizations (both with public and private sector)?

Christoph Benn: Apart from the economic crisis in 2008, the Global Fund faced a crisis of confidence after negative media reports in early 2011. It became clearer at that time that we had to improve risk and financial management but also to adjust our messages. The Secretariat and Board established a High-level Panel (HLP) in 2011 to review our process and they came up with a report called 'From emergency to sustainability'. This was a welcome move. We had driven resource mobilization on the basis of an emergency response – it was all about speed. There was a clear choice, whether we emphasized speed or accountability, and in the first years we went for speed. But you cannot maintain that indefinitely, you need to adapt the message. The crisis taught us that our emphasis on 'lives saved' had to be complemented by a strong focus on impact and the longer-term perspective of how to make our investments more sustainable. The Global Fund deserves credit for having always remained agile enough to respond to these kinds of challenges.

Being a public-private partnership, the private sector has always played a very important role in the Global Fund. Some people assumed that the main role of the private sector is to compensate for shortfalls in public-sector financing – but we knew from the beginning that this would not work. The private sector was very important in its own right. The private sector cannot contribute to the Global Fund on the same scale as the public sector, but this does not mean that [private sector contributions are] are not important. Having strong private sector partners has helped us also to remain a nimble, 21st-century model, influenced by principles of effectiveness, accountability and quick decision making.

The private sector has also contributed significantly in financial terms particularly through our unique partnership with Product (RED). Building on the original ideas of Bono and Bobby Shriver, Product (RED) has pioneered consumer-based fundraising. Until now, (RED) has contributed cumulatively more than \$500 million to the Fund. This is completely unprecedented in development finance, and Product (RED) is still going from strength to strength.

The Gates Foundation has obviously been an amazing partner as well, providing a very significant level of resources, and supporting very strongly our advocacy campaigns.

[Editor's note: see the Global Fund's [Private & NGO Partners page](#) for a full list of private sector partners.]

GFO: How do you (or do you?) see the role of the private sector and innovative financing changing, ie. do you think a 'step-change' is possible in order to substantially shift the proportions of funding that come from public and private/philanthropic sources, towards more of the latter?

Christoph Benn: I don't think that the shares of public and private funding are set to change significantly in development finance over the next few years. It is my impression that many people have unrealistic expectations when it comes to Innovative Finance. It's very important to have a clear understanding of what innovative financing is and what it is not. Many people treat it as if that was the solution to any potential shortfalls in development finance.

Without any doubt the world needs to make a huge investment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, not only in health. But this investment can only come from three sources: the most important is obviously domestic funding. Particularly in high and middle-income countries, almost all the investment is already coming from domestic sources and this has to increase further. However, there are many countries where domestic funding needs to be complemented by international solidarity. This applies particularly to the low-income countries but also to interventions in middle-income countries that for a variety of reasons are not sufficiently supported by national governments. International support can basically come from two sources: governments, largely through Official Development Assistance (ODA) and private sources.

Innovative finance is not a different source of funding but can be a creative combination of these three. It can provide incentives, and can sometimes leverage further funding. However, its most important role is to create new models that make implementation of programs more efficient and effective.

In health, we have to challenge the assumption that Development Assistance for Health will necessarily remain flat in the future. The need is still huge and health remains an excellent investment for national governments, international public donors, and the private sector.

GFO: What do you see as the most challenging issue(s) ahead for the Global Fund's resource mobilization?

Christoph Benn: The greatest challenge for the Global Fund will be to maintain the high level of confidence and support from the political level to civil servants, from civil society to the private sector. But I am fairly optimistic that the Global Fund will continue to maintain this level of support. I am also optimistic because Peter Sands has appointed, in Francoise Vanni, a wonderful colleague to lead the great team in External Relations, and I am asking all our partners and friends to extend the same kind of support and friendship to her as they have done to me over so many years.

All indications are that the Global Fund is well prepared for the Sixth Replenishment. Having India and France as respective hosts for the preparatory and pledging conferences is a wonderful expression of support from two major G20 and G7 countries.

But we are all aware that one of the inherent challenges, not just for the Global Fund, is that AIDS, TB and malaria will not necessarily remain as high on the political agenda as they used to be. The mission of the Global Fund is part of the broader SDG 2030 agenda, moving to achieve healthy lives for all, at all ages. We have just seen the launch of the [SDG 3 Action Plan](#) which the Global Fund has strongly supported. The Global Fund will be and has to be part of this agenda. We do experience also a broadening civil-society global movement towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Global Fund should welcome this development. We still need political leaders who are inspired by the progress we have seen in global health and by the prospect of achieving even more amazing goals in the future.

As long as global health will remain high on the political agenda I am not worried about the role of the Global Fund. It is and will be an important part of the global health architecture and will inspire political and civil society leaders to support its mission.

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Editor's Note: Dr. Christoph Benn has been appointed as the Director for Global Health Diplomacy at the Joep Lange Institute. The Global Fund's [new Head of External Relations, Francoise Vanni](#), joined the Fund in September 2018.

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