



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

THE OUTGOING INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE GLOBAL FUND SPEAKS CANDIDLY ABOUT HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Mouhamadou Diagne (MD), the Inspector General of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, is leaving his position to become the Vice-President of Integrity at the World Bank, according to a [statement](#) released by the World Bank on 1 May 2020. MD, as he is often referred to, has led the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) since March 2015. A Global Fund [press release announcing his nomination](#) detailed his earlier career. He worked as a manager auditor in private audit firms, progressed to become Director of Internal Audit at the Federal National Mortgage Association, known as Fannie Mae (the leading provider of secondary-market mortgage finance in the United States), and then became Director of Strategy and Operations in the World Bank Group's Internal Audit team.

When we heard that MD is leaving, we asked him for an interview. Below are our questions and his answers. We lightly edited for clarity and background information.

GFO: Which OIG achievement are you proudest of from your tenure?

Mouhamadou Diagne [MD]: It's undoubtedly the significant impact that the OIG has had in maturing the Global Fund's core business processes and better positioning the organization to deliver on its mission. In the past five years, the quality of risk management processes, controls, and governance in the organization have all improved remarkably. Whilst the Secretariat and Board certainly deserve much credit, the OIG has been instrumental in driving many of those improvements through landmark work that identified the key issues and opportunities; constructive engagement with both the governance bodies and the Secretariat to tackle those issues; and persistent follow-up to create and sustain the momentum for

change, and the related accountability. Strategically, this is a critical achievement.

Culturally, we have also fundamentally shifted the engagement model with our key stakeholders. Whilst we have steadfastly maintained a high degree of independence, which is at the heart of both our credibility and our effectiveness, today we have a far more constructive and transparent engagement both internally with the Secretariat and externally with country stakeholders.

Lastly, on the operational front, while maintaining and even, in some cases, reducing the amount of resources allocated to the OIG, we have still managed to significantly raise productivity, reduce cycle times, and dramatically improve the quality of our products in form and substance.

GFO: Which ongoing work or project will remain close to your heart?

[MD]: I will continue following the maturity journey of the organization with interest, particularly in critical areas such as improving program quality or strengthening supply chain processes to ensure better access to services and health products for the communities we serve. Closer to the OIG mandate, I very much look forward to watching how the risk and assurance landscape evolves, particularly the much-needed improvements in programmatic evaluation.

This area requires a lot more attention from the organization if we are to effectively track progress towards ending the diseases, learn from what's working and what's not, course-correct on time, and ultimately deliver on our mission. Having an effective monitoring and evaluation framework will be key to our long-term success. Whilst there are different views and many alternatives on the table, I firmly believe that, to be credible and effective, such a framework needs to include a strong, independent, and adequately resourced evaluation function. I'll be very interested to see where the organization lands on that front.

GFO: What was your biggest challenge?

[MD]: My experience working for large and complex organizations across a broad range of industries is that process, structure, and systems are always the easy part. The hard part is always culture and people and you cannot solve the challenges they present with process solutions alone.

On the culture side, while our work continues to help the organization identify and address critical gaps in our programs, it's really difficult to make transformational and sustainable improvements unless the organization has a strong culture of learning and accountability. It's relatively easy to get agreement on sensible corrective actions to address issues in specific processes, programs, or operations. It's been a lot harder to build a culture in which we step back and celebrate our successes but also candidly evaluate our failures and weaknesses to hold ourselves accountable where we've failed and learn lessons to avoid repeating the same mistakes. As that culture is not yet fully embedded in the organization, it often feels as though we're playing whack-a-mole and, as a result, effecting real change that is both transformational and sustainable has been more challenging.

On the people side, we are fortunate to have attracted a team of incredibly talented and dedicated professionals. But limits in growth opportunities because of relatively small functions make it quite challenging to retain and develop top talent.

GFO: As the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. What would you have done differently knowing what you know now?

[MD]: I don't know if there is anything substantive that I would have done differently but, as my term started approaching its end, I realized that time would probably run out on fully completing some internal initiatives that I would have really loved to see through before I leave. So maybe I might have adjusted the sequencing or timing differently on some of those initiatives. Ultimately, though, process improvements in

any organization or function are always a continuous endeavor and never a done deal.

What gives me great confidence and no regret at all is that I'm leaving behind an incredibly talented team with an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement and a strong drive to always move the bar higher. They will continue the journey and, while they are already a best-in-class team, will keep getting even better and stronger.

GFO: Your office has collaborated with supreme audit institutions (SAIs) whenever possible when you audit the Global Fund grants in-country. [Note: Aidspan has collaborated with the OIG, the Secretariat and other partners on a project to support selected SAIs in Sub-Saharan Africa to audit Global Fund grants. The project was funded by the GIZ BACKUP Health, an agency of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.] Also, you have supported the project led by Aidspan, which aims to strengthen the capacity of some SAIs to audit the Global Fund grants. Why do you support collaboration with and capacity strengthening of SAIs?

[MD]: One of the core principles of the Global Fund is country ownership. This is true in all aspects of our programs, including risk management and assurance arrangements. SAIs are a cornerstone in the governance and oversight architecture of many countries. Clearly, we need to be careful because not all SAIs are at the same level of maturity, in terms of both capability and independence. But in countries where there are strong SAIs that are capable of providing robust, independent and reliable assurance, they should be leveraged to the extent possible in the risk management and assurance framework for our grant programs. Working with SAIs presents distinctive advantages in terms of in-depth knowledge of the local-country context, which assurance providers who are temporarily flying in may not always have.

In many countries, SAIs have a broader mandate across multiple programs and sources of funding that even the OIG may not have. Our mandate is strictly limited to Global Fund programs only, although sometimes risks can be systemic and span the boundaries of multiple programs, thus requiring a more holistic assurance approach. Lastly, SAIs in some countries have a significant level of access to key country decision-making bodies such as national parliaments, which could be helpful in cases when it may be appropriate to escalate certain systemic issues that require broader political will to drive action. For all these reasons, I have made it a priority during my tenure to build strong working relationships between the OIG and the SAIs, particularly in Anglophone Africa where a significant proportion of our grants are located and where we have enjoyed a very robust partnership with AFROSAI-E, the umbrella organization for SAIs in that part of the continent.

That's also why we have been very supportive of the Aidspan/GIZ project, which is a very promising initiative with a significant potential for capacity building. We have also been pushing hard to build bridges between the SAIs and the Secretariat. We hope that, aside from participating in OIG audits of their country programs, the SAIs can play a more active role in the routine assurance mechanisms for our grants, which makes sense in terms of capability and independence.

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