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MAIN DECISIONS AT THE GLOBAL FUND 44TH BOARD MEETING

The Global Fund Board held its 44th meeting virtually, on 11 and 12 November 2020. This is the second legally recognized Board meeting that has been held virtually due to COVID-19. This meeting was also held in the afternoon, Central European Time, and lasted for approximately ten hours altogether. There were two pre-Board sessions held on 10 November: a presentation and interactive discussion on the governance performance assessment for 2020, and a discussion for Board Members and Alternates on ethics matters, culture, and the governance officials' code of conduct. (The precise wording of the agreements made by the Board, is available at <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/board/meetings/44>. Background documentation will also, in time, be posted by the Global Fund at the same location.)

In this article, we summarize the main decisions taken at the virtual meeting and those taken through electronic voting prior to the meeting.

The Board tabled six decision points, which were all approved, including the meeting agenda and the appointment of a rapporteur. Three decision points were approved during the virtual meeting, while the remaining were approved prior to the meeting by electronic voting.

Apart from approving the revised meeting agenda (GF/B44/01) and the appointment of Robin Montgomery, board member from the Developed Country NGO constituency as rapporteur (GF/B44/DP01), the main decisions approved by the Board were:

2021 Work plan and Budget Narrative and 2021 Operating Expenses Budget

On Day 1 of the meeting, the Board approved the 2021 corporate work plan as well as the budget narrative as laid out in a paper submitted by the Audit and Finance Committee (AFC)(GF/B44/02A). It also approved the 2021 operating expense budget of \$315 million, which was above the board-approved

ceiling. It included \$14.9 million for the Office of the Inspector General's operating expenses, as specified in the "2021 OPEX Budget" (GF/B44/02B). This budget is 3.3 percent more than that of 2020 (\$305 million) due to the need to catch up with differing expenditure due to COVID-19 and the significant incremental costs related to the COVID-19 response. The budget will cover costs related to the COVID-19 response, investments in strategic capabilities, reinforcing financial performance, digital transformation, maintaining investments in organizational maturity, and strengthening risk and assurance management .

Some Board constituencies described the budget increase, beyond the board-approved ceiling, as appropriate due to heightened demands, which included the need to scale up the COVID-19 response and increase grant making activities. However, it was not clear to all how travel restrictions and working remotely, as measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, would affect the 2021 budget. Others expressed a need for the AFC to regularly measure budget utilization to ascertain its alignment with changing dynamics due to COVID-19. One of the constituencies expressed the need for the Secretariat to find efficiencies in its business practices. In addition, there is a need to instill a culture that emphasizes value for money within the Global Fund.

[see Decision Point GF/B44/DP03]

Electronic decision points confirmed before the 44th Board meeting

The Board had already approved three decision points by electronic vote prior to the meeting. These decision points were:

Extension of the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) and Operational Flexibilities for COVID-19

On 30 September 2020, the Board extended the approval period for C19RM funding requests by the Secretariat and agreed to the extension of the waiver of pre-shipment sampling and testing of some health products from 30 September 2020 to 15 April 2021. On 9 April 2020, the Board approved the establishment of C19RM to provide countries with additional resources for the COVID-19 response, after realizing the negative impact of the pandemic on country health systems and the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria. The extension of the waiver of pre-shipment sampling and testing of some health products is to mitigate the risk of disrupting their supply. A Board constituency commended the decision to extend the approval period for C19RM funding requests.

Expansion of the Global Fund procurement platform for COVID-19 products

The Board extended the period within which countries could procure COVID-19 products via the Global Fund procurement platform, wambo.org, from 31 December 2020 to 31 May 2021. In July 2020, the Board had allowed Global Fund eligible countries and those transitioning out of Global Fund support to use the procurement platform to procure COVID-19-related health products with other (non-Global Fund) funding (GF/B43/EDP07). Extending this timeline is beneficial since it provides countries with access to an additional international procurement platform from which to order COVID-19 related health products. However, the extension comes with little incremental cost to the Secretariat due to a marginal increase of staff time required to support the platform operations.

[see separate article in this issue on wambo.org]

Exceptional funding to Venezuela

The Board approved additional funding totaling \$6 million to address the health crisis in Venezuela. The funds will be used to procure HIV and TB health products to help the country address the health crisis in 2021. This is the third time the Global Fund has made an exception to fund the country. In the past, Venezuela was not eligible for Global Fund support due to its high-income status and low disease burden.

But an economic crisis exacerbated by a governance crisis has left people living with HIV vulnerable to stockouts of antiretroviral and other essential medicines, as well as a failing health system. The Board had previously approved grants worth \$5 million and \$6 million to Venezuela for 2019 (GF/B39/ED04) and 2020 (GF/B41/EDP14), respectively.

The official document containing the Decision Points from the Global Fund's 44th Board Meeting is available [on the Global Fund website](#).

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