



Independent observer  
of the Global Fund

## 52nd Global Fund Board meeting in Malawi: Daring to ask the tough questions

As we approach the 52nd Board meeting of the Global Fund, to be held in Malawi from November 18 to 22, the stakes have never been higher. [The agenda](#), set against the backdrop of a world wrestling with lingering and emerging public health crises, reveals both an ambitious program and an urgent call for introspection. With its emphasis on sustainability, this meeting will have an impact not only on the future of the Global Fund, but also on millions of lives worldwide. Yet, as the Fund addresses these vital structural questions, we must ask: How prepared is it to confront the cracks emerging within its own walls, and how genuinely inclusive and responsive can its reforms be if it overlooks the wellbeing of its own employees and partners?

The Global Fund's agenda is sweeping and ambitious, but troubling signs within the organization itself require immediate attention. For instance, the critical issue of [employee mental health has surfaced as an area needing urgent scrutiny](#). Mental health in the workplace has gained visibility across the global landscape over the last decade, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Fund, however, seems to lag in fully addressing the psychological toll on its employees, who work under relentless pressure in one of the world's most challenging fields. This paradox is striking: an organization founded to tackle the world's most harrowing health challenges must now look inward, examining the health and culture within its own ranks. An environment that fails to support the mental well-being of its employees could ultimately undermine the Fund's wider mission.

Moreover, the Global Fund's recently launched protocols on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) are both timely and essential. The organization has indeed made strides, with the Ethics and Governance Committee allocating resources to reinforce these protocols and an internal audit to enhance its justice mechanisms. However, [reviews of cases at the ILO Tribunal, such as the Judgment No. 4579, underscore a need for transparency and accountability beyond procedural adjustments](#). The handling of SEAH incidents within the organization reflects on the Global Fund's commitment to ethical integrity and operational fairness. The Fund's own internal procedures need to robustly support justice for those affected, if it to assure accountability and protection for vulnerable populations worldwide.

In addition, [an analysis by Coalition PLUS/MENA Platform recently evaluated the Fund's management procedures in the Maghreb region, uncovering both operational successes and deeply concerning shortfalls](#). The study sheds light on how the Fund's centralized approach can inadvertently stymie the adaptability and responsiveness needed at local levels. It offers important recommendations, which, although tailored to a regional context, highlight issues that could erode the effectiveness of the Fund's programs elsewhere. Without a proactive approach to address these structural vulnerabilities, the Global Fund risks undermining the very health systems it strives to strengthen.

Adding to the urgency, [the Communities Delegation Constituency has called for a bold transformation, advocating for a "community at the center" approach that puts the power in the hands of local actors](#). Their demands—ranging from direct funding streams for community-led initiatives to decriminalization and human rights efforts—are a clarion call to reimagine how the Global Fund collaborates with those on the frontlines of health crises. This approach necessitates not just policy promises but a deep-seated shift in funding mechanisms, enabling communities and key populations to access the resources they need directly. By doing so, the Fund would affirm its commitment to community ownership, inclusivity, and the sustainability of its interventions.

[One beacon of hope in this complex landscape is the success of the Community-led Monitoring Project in Asia, a joint initiative that underscores the power of community-driven models](#). Launched by various grassroots organizations across India, Indonesia, and beyond, this initiative represents the profound impact of localized monitoring and intervention. Yet, such successes are sporadic; to create sustainable change, the Global Fund must embed this approach as a central tenet of its operations rather than a peripheral project.

Finally, the Global Fund's often strained relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs) points to a lingering dissonance. While the Fund has undeniably empowered CSOs through financial support, this has frequently been a transactional relationship, leveraging these organizations as tools rather than partners. [CSOs find themselves at a critical juncture where they must evolve structurally to meet escalating demands from vulnerable populations](#). However, without a recalibration of the Fund's approach—enabling flexible funding models, supporting structural autonomy, and fostering genuine partnerships—the very organizations it relies upon may falter. If the Fund is to sustain its fight against the major pandemics, it must prioritize the long-term viability of its civil society allies.

As global health crises become more frequent and complex, can the Global Fund rise to meet them not only with strategy, but also with humility and frank collaboration? This is one of the questions that the Board must address at its meeting in Malawi, and answer in the affirmative with sincere commitment.

And any thoughts about which aspect in the global health initiative sector you'd like to see covered in our newsletter are always welcome and we'd really appreciate suggestions on who can pen an article on it! Anyone who wishes to voluntarily contribute as a guest columnist and provide an incisive analysis or first-person account of what is happening at micro – or macro – levels in the field of global health interventions is also welcome. Any feedback and suggestions in French, Spanish, English can be sent to Ida Hakizinka [ida.hakizinka@aidspan.org](mailto:ida.hakizinka@aidspan.org) and/or in English to [madhuri@aidspan.org](mailto:madhuri@aidspan.org)

If you like what you read, do spread the word around and ask others to subscribe!

[Read More](#)

---