



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

Prof. Michel Kazatchkine, Chair of the Technical Review Panel

The quality of proposals in Round 2 is considerably greater than in Round 1, primarily because applicants had more time to prepare them, said Professor Michel Kazatchkine, Chair of the Technical Review Panel (TRP). “This time, there were far fewer proposals that we had to assign to Category 4, the lowest category. We found the proposals to be much more relevant and structured.” However, he added, the percentage of proposals recommended by the TRP for approval in Round 2 is similar to that in Round 1, which makes it clear that the TRP’s standards for acceptance have gone up. And he assumes that this trend will continue.

The Global Fund’s Technical Review Panel is a group of 22 independent experts from 20 countries (Africa 6; Asia 4; Australasia 1; East Europe 1; North America 2; South America 3; West Europe 5) . They are not answerable to their governments. In Round 2 they received 111 proposals for review. (Additional proposals had previously been screened out by the Secretariat on the grounds that they did not meet the required criteria.) In two weeks of intensive meetings during November, the TRP divided these proposals into four categories, the first two of which were recommended for approval, and the other two of which were not.

“The TRP did not take the availability of funding into consideration” when deciding which grants or how many grants to recommend, said Prof. Kazatchkine in an hour-long interview with GFO. However, he did note (as reported elsewhere in this issue) that assuming the Board accepts the TRP’s recommendations, the cost of implementing the first two years of Round 1 and 2 grants will use up virtually every dollar that the Fund has received or has been promised for 2003.

The most common characteristic of proposals that were rejected is that although their “situation analysis” and their “assessment of needs” were usually fine, they were weak in the programmatic area, i.e. in the

workplan and the budget. The workplan is supposed to describe in some detail what the project would do over the first two years, and the budget needs to say how much each of these aspects of the project would cost. “We often found that the workplan was weak, or that the budget did not really correspond to the workplan,” Prof. Kazatchkine said.

The TRP noticed a wide range of quality in the actual writing of the proposals, he said. But that didn't necessarily influence the decision. A well-written proposal might have been written with outside professional assistance, yet might describe a project that is unlikely to be effectively implemented. Conversely, a less well-written proposal might be based on sincere and realistic plans. The TRP was very aware of such factors, and took into consideration considerable additional information it had access to, including the experience of its own members in the countries in question. “Overall I'm very confident about the judgment of our large group of experts in the TRP,” Prof. Kazatchkine said. Furthermore, the group was large enough and the members came to know each other well enough that no one member's support or criticism of a proposal would sway the whole group.

The TRP checked whether its balance of recommendations by disease, geography, or other factors changed measurably in the course of the two weeks that the work was conducted, but no such shift was found. “On the last day, we spent all morning going back over all the proposals we had assigned to Category 2 [the lower “approval” category] and Category 3 [the higher “rejection” category], and there were very few that we wanted to re-categorize.” The TRP found it did not need to take votes; all decisions were achieved by consensus.

Each day, TRP members read proposals from about 7 am to 12 noon. Then, from 1 to 5 pm, the TRP met in sub-groups that had been assigned particular proposals to focus on; then from 5 pm until late in the evening the entire group debated together. “Citizens of Geneva go to bed early,” said Prof. Kazatchkine. “Sometimes, by the time we were finished, it was hard to find anywhere to eat.”

“If we had had more time, I don't think we would have changed our recommendations,” said Prof. Kazatchkine. “If we had had more time, AND more information, we might have changed a few decisions on the borderline between Categories 2 and 3. And if we had done site visits, that might have made more of a difference. But that's against the philosophy of the Fund. The Global Fund has to take some risks; I don't think the Fund should in any way become like the World Bank, with its own experts who visit and work closely with the countries. The Global Fund is not a funding agency, it's a funding process. It has to be kept light.”

[The members of the TRP are listed at www.globalfundatm.org/trp.html. A detailed report by the TRP, together with an analysis by GFO of the TRP's recommendations, will be posted at www.aidspace.org/globalfund within a day or two of the Board meeting ending on 31 January.]

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