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First Ever Partnership Forum Issues Strong Recommendations

Two strong recommendations emerged from the Global Fund's first Partnership Forum, which was attended over the past two days in Bangkok by more than 400 participants ranging from donor governments to NGOs that have been excluded from CCM membership. The Forum's purpose was to discuss the effectiveness of Global Fund policies and practices and to consider how they can improve.

The first recommendation was that the Global Fund board must launch the Fund's fifth round of grants by early 2005. The second was that several of the "recommendations" that the board passed last month regarding CCM structure and methods must be strengthened to being "requirements."

For the Fund to stay on pace with its current momentum of approving three rounds every two years, Fund executive director Richard Feachem said in an address to Forum participants, Round 5 will have to be launched within days of the Board's next meeting in November.

The challenges in meeting this objective were spelled out by the board's vice-chair, Helene Rossert, in an interview today. "Civil society and the recipient governments want Round 5 to be launched soon, but some of the donor governments do not," she said. "Those donors are not yet convinced that the Global Fund should be the main financial vehicle to fight AIDS. But I and many others are convinced that it is."

"For the Fund to launch and approve Round 5 in 2005, two things have to happen," Rossert added. "First, donors must increase their pledges. Second, the Fund must make its Comprehensive Funding Policy less strict." This policy, established by the board before plans were put in place for a long-term "replenishment mechanism," requires the Fund to believe it will receive during the current year enough money to cover anticipated grant expenditure over the next two or three years, and to have that money in the bank before the grant agreements can be signed.

Feachem, in his closing remarks to the Partnership Forum, strongly endorsed maintaining momentum for Round 5. He pointed out that, according to a new UNAIDS analysis to be released this weekend at the International AIDS Conference, the financial cost of fighting the global AIDS pandemic will increase to roughly \$12 billion by 2005, and could rise to \$20 billion by 2007. If TB and malaria are added to this need, Feachem said, the total need for 2005 will be \$15 billion, rising to \$24 billion in 2007. Even if the Fund maintains its current pace of approving three \$1 billion rounds every two years, Fund spending will plateau at around \$3 billion a year – not enough, Feachem said, to fill the needs gap that remains after spending from other sources is taken into account. “The Global Fund was created to fill that gap. That was the vision, the *raison d’être*. Those who doubt that should ask, If not the Global Fund, then which source? If not us, then who?”

The issue of CCMs was the Partnership Forum’s most contentious. Despite a strong case being made by the board’s Governance and Partnership Committee at the June Board meeting that CCMs should be “required” to meet certain standards regarding transparency, diversity, and conflict of interest, these were downgraded at that meeting to “recommendations.” (Civil society delegations argued passionately that these should be “requirements,” but recipient governments were opposed, and donor governments went with the recipient governments.)

All four working groups at the Partnership Forum asked the Board to reconsider this decision, three calling for measures regarding diversity and transparency to be made requirements, and a fourth urging the board to “incentivize” CCMs to conform to the board recommendations. “Hopefully, at the November board meeting, the recipient governments on the board will listen to the Partnership Forum,” said Rossert. “If not, the donor governments will have to decide which voice to listen to. But I am confident that some kind of compromise will be agreed to.”

The Partnership Forum also issued a strong call for the board and the secretariat to engage in a more ambitious and thoughtful resource mobilization strategy. And the working groups produced a wide variety of other recommendations regarding technical assistance and capacity building; how Principal Recipients and Local Fund Agents can better function; how the Global Fund can more comprehensively measure outcomes; how to reduce delays in fund disbursement; and more.

The board will decide at its November meeting how to respond to the recommendations from the Partnership Forum.

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