



Independent observer  
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## Improving Communications Between the FPM and the PR Would Strengthen Grant Performance

The Global Fund was set up to be fast and light, but over the years management of the Fund's grants has become more complicated. At the core of the Fund's model is the relationship between the fund portfolio manager (FPM) and the principal recipient (PR). As the Global Fund Secretariat and Board work on reforms, they should include a focus on improving the working relationship between FPMs and PRs.

FPMs have the most important – and possibly the hardest – job at the Secretariat. They are responsible for negotiating with other departments at the Secretariat and with all in-country partners. But, often, FPMs are undertrained and overworked. Many PRs are very frustrated by the long waits for FPMs to respond to emails and to approve key documents, and by the constant iterations of budgets and performance frameworks. It is common for a PR, or a proposed PR, to wait 6-8 weeks for a document to be reviewed, and then to receive from the FPM an updated draft with a request that feedback be provided within 48 hours. Even when major issues of stockouts, questionable expenditures or funding shortages emerge, often FPMs are slow to communicate with PRs or to respond to messages from PRs.

The Global Fund Secretariat should establish standard response times for emails and phone calls to FPMs from in-country stakeholders. The Secretariat should specify that FPMs should acknowledge receipt of all emails and phone messages within 48 hours, and should state by when a full response will be provided.

In addition, the Secretariat should set standards for review of key documents. For example, the Secretariat could decide that Progress Updates and Disbursement Requests (PU/DRs) should be reviewed within two weeks, and procurement and supply management plans within four weeks. Publishing these standards would clarify expectations for PRs and other key partners. Ideally, the FPM and PR would

also agree on a “grant signature calendar” that identifies all key grant documents and when they will be submitted, reviewed, and finalised. In a few countries, FPMs and PRs have developed such calendars in advance of grant signature, with good results.

FPMs should also be rewarded for working well with their countries. Many FPMs have excellent relationships with their implementers, but are not recognised for their efforts. Instead, they are measured only on signing grants and disbursing funds. The Secretariat should revise FPMs’ Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure their ability to work with in-country partners. This could be done many ways, including conducting satisfaction interviews with implementers and measuring response times for key deliverables.

The Global Fund’s reform efforts are an excellent opportunity to strengthen the working relationship between FPMs and PRs. The suggestions made here – measuring and rewarding relationship management, setting customer service expectations for FPMs and the Secretariat, and clarifying the time needed to review and approve key documents – are common practice in the private sector and would streamline procedures and reduce transaction costs, thus contributing to better grant performance.

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