



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

DROPPING THE BALL

If you stopped an ordinary man in the street here in Kenya and told him that there is a Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria which gives money to help Kenya fight the three diseases, he would probably be pleasantly surprised. For not many people here have any idea that such a fund exists.

And if you then told him that at present, Kenya is only receiving about half of the money it could receive from this fund – not because the money is being diverted to private bank accounts or any of the usual reasons why Kenya fails to get money from global funding institutions, but because the people charged with preparing proposals and submitting them to the Fund have been unable to come up with proposals which are acceptable to those who control these funds, despite the enormous need – the likely response would be one of outrage.

For if you live in a country which is always seeking financial assistance from “Western donor organisations”, you will assume that if there is one thing that the government is obliged to do well, it is securing ever increasing funds from such sources.

And in a country where far too many people die of the diseases which this money is intended to fight, anything less than a perfect proposal prepared well in advance would seem like criminal negligence.

For each of Rounds 1 through 6, the Global Fund’s announcing of its “Call for Proposals” led to a flurry of activity in most developing countries: CCMs met, task teams were put together, consultants were sought, and in some cases it seemed that the entire Ministry of Health ground to a halt. As the deadline for proposal submission got closer, people got more and more frantic, and CCM members were often given minutes rather than days to review the completed proposal before signing.

It was largely because of this “controlled chaos” that the Fund agreed two years ago that the Call for

Proposals will always be on March 1. Thus, people know months beforehand when the Call will be issued and when the proposal forms will become available. The idea is to enable CCMs to spend those extra months planning what their forthcoming proposals will focus on, and, when necessary, seeking technical support.

And even if the CCMs are still not as organized as they should be, you would at least expect the relevant multilateral agencies to be well prepared.

So it came as a real surprise when one month AFTER this year's Call for Proposals, rather than two months BEFORE it, UNAIDS headquarters sent out an email to UNAIDS offices around the world, instructing them to take action supporting CCMs as they prepare their proposals and seek technical support.

This was in response to a statement signed by over seventy civil society organisations from around the world, challenging UNAIDS to set a goal of “an acceptance level of 70 percent for HIV/AIDS applications to the Global Fund for Round 8”, rather than the 40 percent that has occurred in the past.

This challenge received a positive response from Michel Sidibe, the Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS, who not only accepted this “ambitious goal” as being “doable”, but went on to state that he was “personally monitoring” the support that is being provided by UNAIDS.

This is all very good, but it does not address the fundamental question here: How can it possibly be justified that this great effort is being made this late in the day??

This was not some unexpected deadline which was arbitrarily imposed on the CCMs. It is a deadline that comes around every year, on a date that is known well in advance.

Everybody dropped the ball here – the civil society groups that pressured UNAIDS to take action, but didn't do so until well after the Call for Proposals; UNAIDS itself, for not getting moving on this until it was pushed by the civil society groups; and those many CCMs that delayed strategizing regarding their Global Fund applications until months later than they should.

[Note: This is the third of a number of GFO Commentaries by Wycliffe Muga (muga@aidspan.org). Wycliffe, a Kenyan journalist, is the BBC World Service's “Letter from Africa” correspondent, and last year served as the BBC's “Letter from the United States” correspondent during a fellowship at MIT. He has also been a columnist for Kenya's Daily Nation and Standard newspapers, and is currently a columnist for the Nairobi Star. The views expressed here are his own.]

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