



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

Casting a Vote Against (Some) Electronic Voting

The Global Fund Board meets in person usually twice a year. In between meetings, the Board uses an electronic voting system (i.e., voting by email) for decisions that can't wait until the next in-person meeting. That's fine for routine decisions where there is unlikely to be much discussion or opposition, such as extending the deadline for grant agreement signing for a few grants. However, it doesn't work very well for decisions that are more controversial or decisions that can have significant adverse effects on countries.

Twice in the last few months, the Global Fund Board has approved by electronic voting recommendations from the Secretariat not to approve Phase 2 funding – once for a TB grant in Sri Lanka (see [“Board Rejects Request for Phase 2 Funding from Sri Lanka”](#) in GFO 130) and more recently for an HIV grant in Zanzibar (see previous article). In both instances, the No-Go recommendations were opposed by some Board delegations, but not in sufficient numbers to block the recommendations.

When the Board votes electronically on a recommendation from the Secretariat, an email is sent out to all Board delegations. Votes on Phase 2 recommendations are on a “no objection” basis – i.e., only those delegations that object to the recommendation are required to vote; a delegation that does not cast a vote is considered to have “voted” in favour of the Secretariat's recommendation. Delegations opposed to the recommendation are asked to vote via reply email by a set deadline. These delegations have an opportunity in their reply email to comment on why they are opposed. The usual practice is for a delegation to copy other delegations when it votes.

The main problem lies in the fact that when a delegation is opposed to a No-Go recommendation from the Secretariat, its vote and the arguments it advances in support of its vote are all contained in the same email. There is no opportunity for discussion among Board delegations before the vote. For example, if Delegation A objects to the recommendation from the Secretariat, and attaches arguments in support of

its position, other delegations may see these arguments. But some or all of these delegations may have already determined how they will vote by the time they see what Delegation A said.

If this were an in-person Board meeting, before a vote is taken, Board members would get to hear the arguments on both sides. Plus, they would be able to ask questions of the Secretariat. Board members might be influenced by what they hear. The electronic voting process does not allow for that same dynamic.

One solution would be not to allow potentially controversial decisions (such as No-Go recommendations) to be made by electronic voting. But this may prove problematic, given the urgency of some of the decisions and the fact that the Board only meets in person twice a year.

Another solution would be to require potentially controversial decisions to be made by a Board teleconference (if they cannot be made at an in-person meeting).

Finally, if the electronic voting system is retained for such decisions, it should be modified to have the voting done in two stages – stage one, lasting, say, 6-8 days, would be for expressing opinions; stage two would be the actual vote.

At the very least, the Board should not make potentially controversial decisions like a No-Go on a “no objection” basis!

David Garmaise (david.garmaise@aidspan.org) is a senior analyst with Aidspace.

[Read More](#)
