

SUMMARY REPORT

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Rapid External Independent
Review of Aidspace's Role as
Watchdog for The Global
Fund Fighting AIDS,
Tuberculosis and Malaria, with
Aidspace Board response.

12 Oct 2015

"Aidspace is the collective conscience of our movement."

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCMs	Country Coordinating Mechanisms
CRM	Contact Relationship Management
DFID	Department for International Development
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
GF/ Global Fund	The Global Fund Fighting AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GFO	The Global Fund Observer
ICAI	Independent Commission on Aid Effectiveness
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
KAP	Key Affected Population
MAR	Multilateral Aid Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OECD/ DAC	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
PR	Principal Recipient
SR	Secondary Recipient

INTRODUCTION

A rapid external independent review was commissioned by the Board of Aidspan in June 2015 to provide insights for a discussion of its future strategy. The review assessed current and potential future roles for Aidspan, taking into account new concepts and models for the watchdog function globally; the views of watchdog funders and Aidspan users, changes in the Global Fund itself and changes in the wider Global Fund environment. Having considered the findings, the Aidspan Board in its 29-30th August 2015 meeting resolved to reform Aidspan, remaining as a stand-alone organization but reshaping and refocusing to respond to external changes and anticipate new needs. This process has now begun, with a refresh of the current strategy to be finalized by end of December 2015.

The review focused on four main questions:

1. What are the effective watchdog/ monitoring approaches and institutional types which serve today to monitor health care and aid governance and/ or funding and/or delivery in middle and lower income countries?
2. To what extent are Aidspan's general aims of providing independent information and analysis of the Global Fund meeting a significant demand, and from which communities or audiences? What would or might happen if Aidspan didn't perform this role?
3. To what extent is Aidspan's interpretation and analysis meeting the needs of stakeholder, beneficiaries and professionals at country level?
4. Given the above what are the implications for Aidspan's current activities, future strategic direction, and structure?

The review was led by two experienced independent development consultants working directly with a Steering Committee of three Aidspan Board members¹. It comprised document review, web research and interviews with Key Informants (internal and external). Document and interviewee selections were compiled jointly by the consultants, Aidspan staff and the Steering Group.

Interviews and group discussions were conducted during one visit to Kenya² and by telephone or Skype interviews with individuals based in Canada, China, Rwanda, Switzerland, Thailand, Uganda, UK, USA and Vietnam. There were a total of 40 one-to-one interviews and two group discussions with the 11 Nairobi-based staff (overall 28 male and 23 female interviewees).

Limitations to the review included its timing during the holiday period July-August 2015. A limited range of country-level perspectives was achievable in the time available for the review and some desired key informants remained unavailable for interview. In addition to time constraint limitations the desired participatory approach brought some risk to impartiality by having interviewee selection heavily led by Aidspan. These limitations were addressed by:

- Pragmatic and flexible approach to timing and method for interviews
- Active pursuit of the views of some known critics of Aidspan and additional interviewees sourced by consultants - the high level of consistency in responses provided across the full spectrum of interviewees suggested results were not skewed.
- Recommendations were made on further research required on material issues.

¹ Ida Hakizinka, Fiona Napier & James Deutsch

² Field visit interviews took place from 3rd – 5th August 2015 in Kenya.

MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 To what extent are Aidsplan's general aims of providing independent information and analysis of the Global Fund meeting a significant demand, and from which communities or audiences? What would or might happen if Aidsplan didn't perform this role?

The current climate features calls for greater transparency and accountability, an economic climate which is driving value for money (VfM) agendas and calls to demonstrate greater effectiveness and reduce waste.

USAID funding will provide more than 30% of all pledges to the Global Fund between 2014-2016 with the UK (Department for International Development - DFID) and French contributions contributing almost 14% and 12% respectively. These three governments alone contribute almost 56% of Global Fund monies. It is important that Aidsplan remains alert to key trends for these big contributors to the Global Fund.

In a recent review by ICAI,³ on 'How DFID Works with Multilateral Agencies to Achieve Impact', DFID performed relatively well overall but was told that improvements should be made. One of the seven recommendations was to "continue to press for greater transparency and accountability of multilaterals."

DFID uses its own internal Multilateral Aid Review (MAR) to "assess the effectiveness and impact of the global funds, which we use to drive improvement." The 2013 MAR concluded that there was "still more to do on gender transparency, accountability, cost and value consciousness." The 2015 MAR review will focus on assessing Value for Money of DFID multilateral Aid Contributions.⁴ The ICAI review provides further good evidence for the need for more robust oversight of taxpayers' money.

The US government through USAID, one of the largest donors to the Global Fund, is similarly pursuing an agenda which seeks to strengthen the results of USAID work⁵ including "analyzing the design of a project so that it meets the needs of beneficiaries, figuring out the best way to work with other donors and the private sector, and identifying improvements to existing programs."

Funders are turning to mechanisms such as the Global Fund to channel their overseas development aid (almost two thirds of DFID's £10.1 billion total expenditure was through multilateral agencies in 2013-14 and 12% of this was to global health financing mechanisms - 7% of this funding was for the Global Fund and 5% for the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation).⁶ Another new global fund is being launched for reproductive, maternal and child health⁷ and has already attracted criticism from some who highlight the danger of funds simply being transferred from existing programmes to a new and as yet "untested" funding model⁸. Similarly the New Funding Model of the Global Fund is attracting criticism including concern for countries that are no longer eligible to apply.

³ Independent Commission for Aid Impact. (2015) How DFID Works with Multilateral Agencies to Achieve Impact. <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICAI-Report-How-DFID-works-with-multilateral-agencies-to-achieve-impact.pdf>

⁴ DFID. Multilateral Aid Review 2013. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multilateral-aid-review-update-2013>

⁵ USAID. Working more effectively and Efficiently through Cost Benefit Analysis. <https://www.usaid.gov/node/28721>

⁶ Independent Commission for Aid Impact. (2015) How DFID Works with Multilateral Agencies to Achieve Impact. <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICAI-Report-How-DFID-works-with-multilateral-agencies-to-achieve-impact.pdf>

⁷ New Global Financing Facility for Reproductive, Maternal and Child Health launched September 2014.

http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/news_events/news/2014/rmch-new-funding/en/

⁸ Bretton Woods: Critical Voices of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. (2012). Will the World Bank deliver? New fund for maternal and child health launched <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2014/11/will-world-bank-deliver-new-fund-maternal-child-health-launched/>

The recent report by the Open Society Foundations 'The Global Fund at a Crossroads'⁹ highlighted the "urgent need to revive and re-energize civil society advocacy to hold the Global Fund accountable to its origins and principles." These principles include country led approaches which many believe are no longer observed in the latest Global Fund funding model.

Aidspan's role as a watchdog thus remains highly relevant to the current international development agenda, but Aidspan could do more to respond to opportunities as it delivers its programme of work.

The main current sources of demand for Aidspan's outputs are:

1. The Global Fund itself – Secretariat, Office of the Inspector General (OIG), and Technical Partner interviewees all recognise the value of a quality, truly independent observer and place Aidspan in that category. The role is conceptualised at this level as that of respected, critical friend: a sounding board, sense-checker and commentator, sharing the vision of the Global Fund and helping it succeed.

"Aidspan is often an amplifier of GF - GF output is highly technical, opaque and full of jargon. Aidspan is useful to explain and amplify, contributing to the Fund's mission."
2. Technical and regional partners: these respondents valued Aidspan's work in championing transparency and the provision and use of Global Fund data. They also valued Aidspan's work in maintaining attention to the full spectrum of Global Fund disease issues.

"Aidspan goes deeper than a Publish What You Fund survey – knows where the lack of transparency is, e.g. in project budgets, so people can't really talk about Value for Money (VfM). Aidspan could promote informed debate about VfM."
3. Recipients of and applicants to the Global Fund – Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) Principal Recipients (PRs) and Secondary Recipients (SRs). For these stakeholders the explainer/analyst role was important and some at country level emphasised the need to amplify the whistle-blower role.

There was little evidence of current demand for Aidspan to expand or move beyond its watchdog role of the Global Fund itself. There was widespread comment that a focus on the Global Fund will continue to be required and even grow with specific high-level questions needing ongoing attention.

There were some calls for Aidspan to cover broader issues while staying within its remit as a Global Fund watchdog, notably the need for more improved coordination and more integrated working amongst multilateral institutions at country level. Aidspan could consider assessing a range of areas of overlap and interplay between Global Fund and other global health financing mechanisms such as GAVI which also works on health systems strengthening.

"The Global Fund does not operate as a stand alone organisation therefore Aidspan cannot operate as a watchdog that looks solely at the Global Fund."

Going forward Aidspan should explore other common areas of overlap. However, "Aidspan should remain focused principally on its own areas of expertise" as several key informants urged and these "...remain firmly on the ...systems of the Global Fund, and the trust that this has created among Global Fund stakeholders (especially the Secretariat). Where Aidspan has broadened its view over recent years this has led to a dilution of results for Aidspan."

Some respondents suggested that Aidspan could take on watchdog functions of other global health funding mechanisms but this should only be attempted as part of "a planned strategic and phased

⁹ Open Society Foundations (2015) The Global Fund at a crossroads: Informing advocacy on Global Fund efforts in human rights, support to middle-income countries and access to medicines

approach." The immediate focus is to "go deep with the GF" identifying the real areas of weakness and strength.

Other suggestions included strengthening civil society responses to Global Fund and sharing best practices of country level work to help continually improve country bids. These are not consistent with a watchdog role and fall more into the category of technical assistance and practice development, both of which are within the remit of the Global Fund itself and its partners including Friends of the Fund groups. Rather than Aidspan undertaking this work itself the focus should be on highlighting demand for the Global Fund and other partners to address these issues.

"The Global Fund is now doing Technical Assistance – Aidspan has succeeded!"

There is potential for Aidspan to use its key competence as a watchdog more widely in future and this would be in response to the clear demand for country-level Global Fund activity, specifically the work of CCMs, to be more transparent and accountable. There is a sense that Global Fund at Geneva level is "getting its house in order" in relation to many key issues but that CCMs and grant implementers are currently not ready or willing to embrace the same level of scrutiny. This is perceived as a main area of risk in the Global Fund system, making it a high priority for watchdog attention.

"Governments are not always comfortable... they feel nervous about watchdogs but they are getting better as the global movement grows. There's a growing understanding that it's not about attacking people, but clearing the Fund pipeline."

Fundamentally,

"OIG is the Global Fund's third line of defence in audit terms – Aidspan is the fourth and that's important. Even more are needed as billions are involved."

2.2 To what extent is Aidspan's interpretation and analysis meeting the needs of stakeholders, beneficiaries and professionals at country level?

Much of Aidspan's material is viewed as useful but there is limited evidence that materials are based on formal needs assessments or that their impact is fully tracked in formal evaluations. Ongoing rigorous evaluation of Aidspan products is required to ensure future products are tailored to meet specific user needs.

Users of Aidspan products were generally extremely positive about the products they had used. The Global Fund Observer (GFO) was the most frequently mentioned product, followed closely by the Guides especially the Global Fund's Approach to Risk Management and The New Funding Model Allocations. Grant analysis was seen as useful by some but others believed the Global Fund itself had improved considerably in providing this type of information, which is now available on the Global Fund website. Aidspan could add more value by sourcing complementary data to facilitate further analysis.

Respondents indicated that Aidspan has achieved:

- A reputation for accurate, readable "translation" of Global Fund documentation for a range of professional audiences including Global Fund staff, CCMs, PRs and SRs.
- A reputation for accurate, reliable and objective journalism in GFO's commentary and reportage, with widely appreciated care taken over fact-checking and objectivity.
- Increased demand for and use of Global Fund data among CCMs and grant implementers plus increased interest in the provision of further data sets to complement GF data.
- Improvements in GF's transparency practices, most recently on aspects of funding decisions.
- Sustained attention to all three of GF's diseases in a context in which HIV/AIDS tends to be the dominant issue.
- Awareness of GF among new potential applicants at country level and ability to make more

and better applications.

- Reputation within GF as a valuable and necessary element of GF oversight.
- Significant contributions to country level efforts to ensure that Global Fund resources are used effectively and efficiently. For example in Tanzania¹⁰ a local NGO supported by Aidsplan's outreach programme helped draw attention to nearly \$178 million which remained unspent in that country.

The independent nature of the organization is an important element of Aidsplan's credibility at all levels. The main expectation of independent status is the non-acceptance of moneys from the Global Fund.

There were some reports that the Aidsplan website was not user friendly and was to some extent *"preaching to the converted for those who know the Global Fund."* There were calls for shorter, more concise factsheets or how-to notes providing a quick overview of the key issues as well as the more in-depth reports. There were stronger criticisms from some senior communications and funding-oriented interviewees that Aidsplan's communication output, while high quality in terms of content, was presentationally poor, outdated and not fit for purpose.

"Aidsplan's communications suck! They have no visibility and are losing opportunities to grab our attention – you never see them on Twitter or in the media we look at."

There were mixed views on a perceived change of tone in GFO in recent years. Some considered that GFO has lost a bit of edge compared with its early days, too much "friend" and not enough "critic".

"It used to be a must-read as soon as it came out – now it's something we browse out of interest."

This type of comment may well be a result of there being less to criticize now that GF has matured. This would be consistent with other criticisms that Aidsplan needs to make better judgments about important themes to pursue. In general respondents felt that it was time to leave behind the role of explainer and actively push GF to improve its performance in this area as part of its own transparency agenda.

Overall, there is clearly a high-level conceptual demand for Aidsplan's watchdog in the sector, with a feeling that silent watchfulness has impact as well as active tackling of issues when they arise.

"We know they are always there in the background."

Aidsplan does not actively seek to serve the information needs of individuals, whether that is people affected by GF diseases or members of the general public and this is not seen as a gap as so many other organisations serve these needs.

2.3 What are the effective watchdog/ monitoring approaches and institutional types which serve today to monitor health care and aid governance and /or funding and /or delivery in Middle and Lower income Countries?

There are several dimensions to watchdog or monitoring activity and most watchdog bodies display a combination of characteristics. Some are ideologically or otherwise hostile to the entity being watched, others share the goals of the watched and seek the role of critical friend. Aidsplan is in this latter category. Watchdogs are typically concerned with results and processes – do the watched entities actually deliver what they are supposed to deliver, do they use resources appropriately, do they operate to the required principles, do they have any unintended consequences?

¹⁰ The support offered by Aidsplan included; (a) Induction training on GF – online and in person; (b) research and data analysis skills building, (c) on-the-job mentoring on accountability, transparency and watchdogging tactics/approaches (tailored to country context); (d) Link to a pool of technical and /or donor partners (e) Assessment by peers (in-person and online) (f) concepts/ proposals development support; (g) Training on results tracking and (h) Technical support.

Some watchdog organisations have a clear external mandate from at least one stakeholder group, but many evolve their own mandate by building stakeholder sets: self appointed to begin with, they go on to build constituencies by identifying potential stakeholders and targeting them with tailored information or programmes. Aidspan is in the self-appointed category and while it can identify broad target audiences and potential allies, it is not clearly segmenting its stakeholder set and targeting activities accordingly.

Some watchdogs have a regulatory element, which can be self-regulation or independent. The Global Fund OIG's role is in this territory.

Some watchdogs participate in advocacy or campaigning themselves, others provide the evidence base for others' advocacy efforts. Aidspan has traditionally positioned itself as a provider of impartial evidence but is being perceived as straying into advocacy in its own right from time to time.

"It's starting to express its own opinions, which is something it needs to watch."

Effectiveness criteria for watchdogs vary depending on the types of functions required and these in turn vary according to the perspectives of the main stakeholders involved. As watchdogs are in effect acting on behalf of these stakeholders, it is important that they fully understand the stakeholders' perspectives and pursue issues that matter to them. This is usually achieved through a combination of professional or sector expertise and stakeholder networks with a constant two-way flow of information and insight.

It is also important that the watchdog is recognised as legitimate and worthy of response by the watched entity. A watchdog can demonstrate its mandate through membership or subscriber lists, or credible formal reference and advisory panels. Aidspan needs to strengthen all of these and especially the last two.

Indicators of success used by watchdogs to evaluate their own activity are often indicators of change in the watched entity, but process indicators are used by some: growth in active participant networks, external citations, access gained to decision-makers and systems.

Several watchdog and campaigning organisations use the device of an index or ranking system. An important common feature is that the ranking criteria are usually derived by consensus among an expert reference group, lending weight and credibility. Aidspan could usefully draw on these methodological approaches to develop an appropriate index for Global Fund performance assessment that would provide a complement to the Fund's own performance ranking information.

2.4 Aidspan Programme and Organisational Architecture: Structure, Funding, Governance and M&E

Practical challenges affecting Aidspan's ability to be effective include:

- Securing core funds (unrestricted funding). This is however a normal challenge for most NGOs and many funders do explicitly address this need.
- Changes in the way major funders are engaging: most are moving to having fewer but substantially larger funding agreements requiring close collaboration with them during proposal development and implementation. Most are also increasingly seeking to fund consortia and partnerships and routinely expect organisations to be collaborating with others.
- Challenges of recruiting from a restricted talent pool in Kenya and attracting/ managing

international staff as part of a coherent team.

- Remoteness from Geneva was widely acknowledged as a downside of the otherwise positive, pioneering location in Kenya. This was seen as a hindrance to access and influence both by Aidspace staff and others. On the other hand the Nairobi base was seen as an advantage by Geneva-based GF stakeholders who are acutely conscious of their own remoteness from the GF “front lines”.
- Aidspace is not currently maximising the potential of its own networks – many interviewees commented that they do not have much contact with Aidspace.
- Instances of silo working, both internally and externally, which staff recognise. There is a will to develop more internal coherence e.g. working simultaneously on priority themes.
- Monitoring and Evaluation currently has too much focus on outputs rather than higher level outcomes and impacts. This could be improved through use of the criteria recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/ Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC)¹¹ for measuring development initiatives.
- The current Aidspace strategy has achieved limited buy-in from the board and staff.

¹¹Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC). Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for future strategic direction

Aidspan should:

- Retain and reinvigorate its “critical friend” relationship with GF Secretariat and OIG
- Increase focus on CCMs and grant implementers as the country-level presence of GF. They are part of the system and need to be observed in the same way as GF's Geneva-based activity.
- Promote attention to GF by other major watchdog organisations and think tanks from their various perspectives and provide the kind of insights that will interest them.
- Harness these as a strong network of collaborators.

Implications for current activities

- **Explainer role** – while this has been highly valued by many stakeholders including the GF itself, this should be wound down. GF's communication is a “watched” activity and Aidspan's goal must be to improve GF's performance in this area rather than undertake it on GF's behalf.
- **Research role** – while thematic reports have been of interest to many stakeholders, Aidspan's in-house capacity is severely stretched in this area. It would be more effective for Aidspan to work with technical partners who are experts in the various themes. Aidspan's role would involve retaining in-house insight into what themes matter, drawing on the insights of its reference groups, building relationships with key others in those thematic areas in order to embed “GF watching” in their work and collaborate on investigations.
- **Data analytics** – GF is now widely acknowledged to be providing good quality and increasingly accessible data, and is committed to IATI principles. Aidspan could add value to this by combining GF data with other relevant datasets such as disease outcomes and KAP data.
- **GFO** – this is Aidspan's main communication tool. Its effectiveness could be improved by an explicit communication strategy for its range of target reader groups and a tightened focus on priority themes, providing a balance of news and analytical content produced to high journalistic standards. More attention is needed to layout and online promotion strategy including the use of social media.
- **Outreach work** – the approach of this work should change, dropping the element of training and mentoring new watchdogs in favour of reaching out to mainstream, more strategically placed country-level watchdogs and other thematic watchdogs, to stimulate their interest and provide pointers to information they in turn can analyse and disseminate through their respective networks.

Implications for future structure and leadership

Aidspan's current structure comprises:

Board: Small but globally diverse.

Staff: Kenya-based team, 1 overseas-based consultant and a globally diverse set of writers for GFO.

Partners: Semi-formal programme links to participants in the grant-funded outreach programme.

There are no further committees or external reference groups. There are no formal relationships with user groups and no Contact Relationship Management (CRM) system in use. All services are provided free of charge to all users and there are no restrictions on access.

Some acknowledged challenges could be addressed through structural changes, leadership practices and management systems:

- Engagement – ongoing performance management and development strategies should be refreshed for both Board and Staff.
- Funding – a clear income generation strategy is required.
- Recruitment – different balances of skills are required as the organisation develops: networking and strategic communications, data analytics; policy environment analysis; strong knowledge of donors and trends in funding. These skills can be distributed across Board and staff members.
- Structure – a leaner organization and structure that can be continually alert and responsive to opportunities, threats, barriers and facilitators.

The opportunities now open include:

- Build a more formal network in which Aidspace has a leadership role
- Expand partnerships with academic institutes, media and other thought leaders
- Introduce new reference panels to invigorate and expand Aidspace's thought leadership and influence
- Expand the Board, re-fresh and implement its governance policies. A key challenge for Aidspace is remaining close to GF's Geneva personnel to gain access to data and have good engagement while remaining critical of GF when required. A combination of strategically selected and located Board members and senior staff could help Aidspace maintain this balance.
- Identify new key skill sets for staff and recruit accordingly, discontinuing functions that are no longer required
- Consider a segmented membership model to allow more tailoring of products and services
- Consider a pay-per-service model for some products, which can increase their perceived value and ensure better focus on customer needs.

NEXT STEPS

Five broad options were suggested for Aidspan to consider, with recommendations as follows:

OPTIONS		RECOMMENDATION
1: Change nothing	Pursue existing model with minor adjustments to structure	Not recommended
2: Close	Close down responsibly: seek others to absorb key functions, transfer intellectual properties as necessary sustaining gains achieved & developing clear exit strategies	Recommended for consideration
3: Reform as a stand alone organization	Adapt, refocus and restructure to meet the new environment within which Aidspan operates	Recommended for consideration
4: Transform into a different kind of organization	Relaunch as commercially viable technical support and information service provider to Global Fund implementers and potentially to the Global Fund itself	Recommended for consideration
5: Merge	Combination of Options 2 & 3: seek a single partner with a shared commitment to the core elements Aidspan wishes preserve and develop; with a considerably longer transition period required	Recommended for consideration

The Aidspan Board considered the strengths and weaknesses of these options at its meeting on 29-30 August 2015, and resolved to pursue **Option 3: Reform, remaining as a stand alone organization.**

This option involves continuing as an independent watchdog of the Global Fund, but reshaping and refocusing towards promoting wider scrutiny of the Global Fund and away from acting as a service-provider for fund applicants. This will require a smaller set of activity strands led by a smaller in-house staff but using a wider and more organised network of partners. The new Aidspan will focus on informed, evidence-based commentary to stimulate debate about the GF at global and country level, drawing on GF-provided data combined with data from other sources to produce high-level analysis. The Aidspan staff role will be to lead a network of global and country-level partners. Aidspan will require a reference panel of thematic, technical and sector experts to advise on a rolling programme of priority themes and issues to be observed, and achieve consensus on credible indicators and data sources. The main Aidspan products will be GFO, concise factsheets and how-to notes providing a quick overview of the key issues and in-depth reports.

This option builds on Aidspan's strongest-performing product (GFO); engages larger and more influential partners; reduces core costs; harnesses technical expertise and capacity and allows for rapid response to emerging issues. Some lead-time will be required to promote this concept and engage new partners.

Immediate next steps, the first of which is now under way, include:

1. Refresh current strategy through a consultative process to achieve wide buy-in
2. Develop sustainability plans and exit strategies for all activity strands
3. Board and staff performance review and skills audit
4. Fundraising strategy development and skill-building.