

*These are the key lessons of the Review of Regional Associative Initiatives as identified by the MSF Associative Standing Committee in its meeting on January 10, 2018.*

## KEY LESSONS FROM THE ASSOCIATIVE REGIONAL REVIEW

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The Review of Regional Associative Initiatives was commissioned to better define what it means to be regional and to further contemplate what MSF is trying to achieve with regionalization.

The Associative Standing Committee (ASC) met on January 10, 2018. Representatives from MSF EEA, MSF Hong Kong, MSF Lat, MSF SARA, MSF SAA, and MSF Sweden participated in the discussion as well. The following are the key lessons of the report as identified by the ASC. These key lessons will help articulate the Movement-wide discussion on evolution, and to help guide the IB discussion on January 16, 2018.

### KEY LESSONS

The understanding or use of the term regionalization in MSF today stems from the governance reform concluding in December 2011, with the expectation that such a dynamic would help fulfill some organizational aspirations and respond to core elements of La Mancha. At that time the purpose of regionalization was described as a means to respond to concerns around growth, inclusion and, de-westernization; explore new ways to associate; and most importantly, to bring MSF closer to populations we aim to serve.

There is not one regional experience in MSF, rather different regional associations have independent paths and different experiences. Direct comparison neither desirable nor necessary between associations, however lessons can be drawn from these different experiences that can serve MSF as it moves forward.

This review has identified a set of challenges that regional associations face within the Movement today which require more reflection in terms of what this means for the association and which can be instrumental in informing next steps of the Movement-wide discussion on evolution.

These key lessons can be grouped into the following pragmatic and development dimensions:

- Regional associations are an integral part of the MSF Movement and are demonstrating innovative ways in which to associate from which the entire Movement can benefit.
- De-westernisation is a global MSF problem and cannot be delegated to 'some' associative sections nor the association alone. Real de-westernisation will require courageous decisions from the entire Movement – both executive and associative.
- De-westernisation is integrally linked if not synonymous with the present discourse on inclusion, diversity and zero tolerance for discrimination. Again, real inclusion will require clear-cut decisions, resulting in actions that succeed in allowing the voice of those closest to the populations-in-need to feed into processes that support decision making better representing field reality.
- No one size fits all; Regional associations that exist today or will be created in the future have no single model of development. They are providing multiple models and valuable lessons on how to make an association live in support of the MSF social mission. As such they are great for associative development and while contributing to Movement evolution they are not the solution to manage the Movement growth.
- MSF governance and associating requires more ambitious investment (not only financial, but also financial) to enable Regional Associations to overcome challenges that disproportionately affect them, due to their specific constituencies.

- Trending towards the 'norm': Regional Associations while created with the purpose to forge new links and different ways of working through all OCs are both being pushed and pushing for oversight over an executive as the 'easiest' way to have a voice at the decision-making table. This requires reflection from both executive management and the associative governance on why this is so and if this is the optimal model for MSF growth and evolution?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Many of the recommendations touches upon the "Four Common Expectations" and should be taken up as next steps in the development of the Associative Roadmap.

### Specific to the Regional Associations:

1. The Regional Associations are meaningful and here to stay, and we should not be pitting the national associations vs. The Regional Associations.
2. We need to challenge the existing MSF decision making structures to make sure that new approaches work (such as power sharing and operational support)
3. We need to continue to explore new approaches
4. There need to be guidance on how to think outside of the box, including how to navigate the international governance system in new ways
5. There need to be a significant investment in Boards and Board functioning
6. We need to prioritize goals for the Regional Associations and not expect them to solve all problems on their own.

### General recommendations:

1. Review that report perpetuates classic western-centric methodology
2. Tailor made-support to Regional Associations is necessary
3. The Executive – Associative divide discourse needs to be replaced by that of the Executive – Associative continuum.

## **REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS: AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE MSF MOVEMENT**

This review demonstrates that Regional associations are an integral part of the MSF Movement. Despite hurdles including vast geographical distances, language barriers, cultural differences, geo-political complexities, mass membership and lack of proximity to MSF centers of power; Regional Associations have forged forward, exploring and creating new ways to associate in keeping with the spirit of the Movement.

Aspirations on de-westernization and improved proximity of decision making to the field have not been realized and will not be realized through Regional associations or associative action alone.

This review has demonstrated that no 'one size fits all'. Regional associations are each evolving based on their specific associative trajectory (membership, geo-political reality, etc), which in some cases may result in more, not less associations. If present posturing towards diversity and inclusion and past aspirations towards ensuring better proximity between decision making and populations are to be realized, the 'optimisation' of growth or 'intentional' evolution of the Movement needs to make clear decisions that allow for associative growth that achieves these goals, rather than hinders them. This includes apt and adapted investment (and not just of the financial kind) to nurture new

initiatives and provide guidance and support which allow associations to flourish and succeed in utilizing MSF governance to ensure the best possible outcomes for populations with whom we work.

While the purpose of this review was in no way to evaluate Regional Associations nor compare them with the national associations, reflections on the process and output of the review have fueled critique from associative members that the review itself is a comparative study between newer and older associations, with the emphasis being very much on a Eurocentric methodology and output. This in itself is demonstrative of how far MSF still has to go to achieve de-westernization and properly value and include all associative members within the Movement.

### ***REGIONALIZATION DOES NOT EQUAL A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION***

Regionalization in MSF was strongly related to the fear of becoming institutionally bloated, overly westernized and the progressively increasing distance between decision-making and projects. However, Regional Associations alone does not make MSF a global organization, and care must be taken to ensure that regional associations are not seen as a panacea to westernization, rather, if our aim is to de-westernize we need to urgently and proactively instate movement wide policies.

To fulfill the expectations described by La Mancha, regional associations must be developed as realistic associative nodes with achievable expectations (in terms of geography, language, finances, etc.) rather than as geographic empires. Additional ways to “mutualize” MSF in the “western” or more traditional sections have to be explored or abandoned, but openly, and in a manner that does not shift the burden of fear of institutional growth onto new associations.

If geographic closeness is the only criteria for regionalization, should MSF not also look into a European Regional Association? There should be other criteria to take into consideration beyond geographical.

### ***LACK OF VOICE***

Though there is a general frustration in the movement of individual members feeling as if their voice is not heard and that their opinions are not taken into account, these frustrations are compounded in the Regional Associations by the lack of formal ties to OCs.

The original idea of the Regional Associations, which has been somewhat lost, was to be original and innovative, to provide a narrative outside of the Eurocentric and with links to all the OCs. Over time however, it has become clear that the only way to be connected is through being formally linked with a European OC. Though all Regional Associations have a formalized relationship with at least one OC, there is a lack of avenues of bringing relevant information to the right platforms outside of the partner section realm, be it for the whole movement or for one or several OCs.

This problem is compounded for the Regional Association without an executive counterparts, thus lacking the natural link between a partner section and an OC. In feeling isolated from the decision-making center, it exacerbates the risk that regional associations focus too much on their own local or regional issues.

In addition, each OC has a different relationship when it comes to headquarters and the field, which results in situations where there is competition between OCs, and between the Regional Associations and the OCs. As such, inter-OC competition should be addressed during the next steps of Expectation Three: *The MSF International Associative will ensure the development of a dynamic associative in the field.*

In the drive for having more entities located outside of the traditional power centers of MSF, section-hood has become the gold standard and symbol of legitimacy in MSF, as it's seen as the only way to have real influence and access to the OCs. The Regional Associations were created outside of the usual OC / partner section paradigm, and we need to find ways to facilitate the existence of entities that are outside of the status quo. Without collective

ownership the Operational Centers risk being reduced to foreign visitors in the countries where MSF has regional associations, rather than being recognized as a critical part of a global organization.

### ***MSFs TENDENCY FOR STRIVING TOWARDS THE "NORM"***

Though the governance reform opened the door for different types of Associations, some without executive counterparts, there is a tendency in MSF to strive towards what we perceive as the "norm". In this case, the norm equates to the commonly understood concept of what it is to associate, as multiplied by MSF European associations. This review points to the complexities caused by the combination of the movement being slow to accommodate new ways to associate, while Regional Associations struggle to adapt to a traditional Western associative practices. To fully embrace our global nature, we need to have a better understanding of what it means to associate in other parts of the world. Pragmatic approaches to Regional Associations which allow them govern as part of the MSF association network in support of the MSF charter (and social mission) around the world should be encouraged not challenged. Ultimately, we need to accept that there are divergences in how associations function around the world.

MSF needs to find ways to break the norm and to "think outside of the box", both in terms of the future of the movement, but also to allow for different types of associations to have a meaningful place within MSF. To be truly inclusive, however, means that the movement in general must be open to change as well. It needs to be a give and take relationship. With some older associations struggling to maintain a vibrant associative life, why consider that what is seen as the 'norm' is the only or most valid way forward?

### **Added value is a lonely place**

Regional Associations share a common sense of having been left to their own devices (sink or swim), while simultaneously due to their 'new-ness' being held to a higher standard, particularly in having to show "added value" to the Movement, while being deprived of classical communication lines, decision making access and apt investment.

Given that these regional associations were purposefully designed to break from the more traditional model of MSF association, MSF needs to reflect on the coherence between our stated original ambitions and the realistic development that we see today. Additionally, added value to the Movement, needs to be understood in the same way across the Movement, including a common understanding of what this means and how it is measured. This maybe a better way to support associative growth and evolution, rather than geography.

### ***KEEP STIMULATING AND CREATING MEANINGFUL MEMBERSHIP***

One of the main challenges for all associations is how to stimulate and create meaningful membership within the movement. There is no lack of initiatives, but these initiatives tend to look alike and suffer from a lack of creativity. As an organization we are conservative, and have difficulties being visionary and enthusiastic about new ways to associate. If operational connectedness is going to remain one of the three pillars of meaningful membership, we need to completely rethink our way of associating in MSF and create more space for our members closest to field.

### ***THE ASSOCIATIVE/EXECUTIVE CONTINUUM***

The tendency to discuss the association and executive in MSF as if they are two separate entities has grown, almost as rapidly as the OC HQs. The relentless growth of field operations and consequentially of OCs and the sections, supported by massive financial investment and professionalization of the Movement at large has created a constant growing asymmetry between the management and governance of the organization.

The association is the governance of MSF and as such is the guardian of the Charter and the social mission. As the only formal accountability mechanism built into the Movement, reputational, ethical and institutional risk as reside within the MSF associative governance. Additionally, it is the mechanism that allows voices from the field to influence and guide the Movement based on the realities experienced on the field by the members.

The intensity of our growth has concentrated the Movements attention on executive growth to the detriment of the associative. While often referred to as two sides of the same coin the Movement should be conceptualized as a continuum constituted by both the executive and associative.

The governance reform in December 2010 went a long way to addressing this mismatch but many of the frustrations highlighted in this review are demonstrative of a need to further enact MSF governance by ensuring that all those within the continuum know, understand and enact their responsibility to enable the Movement to continue to flourish. This may mean using lessons learnt to associate in new ways and possibly through new group logic.

### ***EVOLUTION RATHER THAN ORGANIC GROWTH***

One of the challenges for the regional associations is to catch up with the more established entities to be able to contribute, and call to account on equal footing. The relative homogeneity of at least 18 of the MSF sections is surpassed by the heterogeneous nature of any one of the new MSF regions in terms of geographic spread, linguistic requirements and cultural diversity.

The notion that the Regional Association have to somehow catch-up on other associations is a fallacy. As part of the evolution of MSF, all associations have to catch up. The movement will only benefit from the full participation of associations that are grounded in proximity to the patients and communities we serve, and it would be in the best interest of the movement to support Regional Associations with an accelerated path of development that helps us achieve this.

Currently, MSF's financial investment in regional associations is paltry with that of other associations. In 2016 there were only 6 FTEs association staff (not counting Presidents) in the regional associations versus 33.4 FTEs for the rest of the movement. Of the total of 14 MSF presidents who receive remuneration (equivalent of 7.4 FTEs), only one president of the regional associations is remunerated (equivalent of 0.2 FTE)<sup>1</sup>. If MSF is committed to regional associations, the balance of financial investment needs to be developed to reflect our intentions.

Induction into the association and the development of board members needs to be a priority for all associations, not just the regional associations. However, achieving our stated goals will be acquired more quickly if Regional boards are enabled in terms of their fiduciary responsibility vis-à-vis the membership and home association sooner rather than later. They also need mentoring and guidance to support their interaction and working relationship within the greater MSF governance system.

### ***CHANGE THE POWER DYNAMICS AND THE EXISTING DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES***

When the present model of regional associations was instigated, there was a direct connection between the development of new associations and the merger of existing associations as well as a connection through the MWA. The logic of the new associations to be transnational/regional in scope was linked to the willingness of the established sections to provide space by merging. That contract was not upheld, having widely been ignored or forgotten with a progressive disconnect between the two.

Per the international statutes, all existing and aspiring IMs must fulfill the minimum common criteria (participatory and inclusive membership, added value and maturity, and operational connectedness). However, only the newly established associations have been asked to demonstrate their added value to the Movement. While the “Three Pillars of Meaningful Membership” notes that added value can come through an association’s maturity, this extra level of scrutiny puts an additional barrier on the perceived success of a new association. Combined with unrealistic expectations, this sets regional associations up to fail, while established associations can carry on business as usual unchallenged.

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Structural Analysis

Apart from the unsuccessful Nordic merger, no attempts have been made to reduce the number of established associations. If MSF is not committed to mergers, what does that mean for the size of the IGA? How much should we worry about the "UN-ification" of MSF? Does MSF need to change the discussion?

This brings us to the question of equity and equality. Giving each association two votes at the IGA ensures equality but does it ensure equitable representation for the people living and working in countries where most of our missions are based? The answer depends on the metrics MSF chooses to use to define and guide our associative distribution. If votes are related to pure numbers of members, the distribution of votes is equitable. Regional associations account for 16% of MSF's membership, which translates exactly into the 8 votes out of 492 that regional associations hold.

However, if MSF considers equity from the perspective of its social mission, then the picture looks quite different. In terms of population, proximity and number of countries represented, the distribution is disproportionately skewed in favor of Europe. Of 49 total IGA votes, the 14 national associations of Western Europe hold 28 votes (57 %); Western Europe plus Australia, Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, and USA (20 countries) hold 40 votes (82%); and the four regional associations, representing over 40 countries, 35% of world's population, hold 8 votes (16%). In other words, 1/3 of the countries represented in the IGA (all without projects) hold 4/5 of the votes, while 2/3 of the countries (largely with projects) hold only 1/5 of the votes.

This shows that associations furthest from our social mission hold the majority of votes and therefore governance power. As a result, MSF today is overwhelmingly governed by non-project countries based in the that raise the bulk of MSF's funds but are only home to a small minority of our staff and operations. Additionally, the three regional associations with the heaviest presence in project countries rely on the interest and financial support of the mission to carry out their activities.

Clearly, providing regional associations with voting seats at IGA alone does not ensure meaningful engagement, participation and inclusion, nor does it automatically support good governance for a global organization. Yet, it is true that providing equitable voting rights related to the social mission is not possible or even desirable if the regional associations are not capable of fulfilling their role in the governance system.

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<sup>2</sup> One vote is held by International President