



# REVIEW OF REGIONAL ASSOCIATIVE INITIATIVES

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This publication was produced at the request of the IB. It was prepared independently by *Kaat Boon*. Findings were obtained with support from *Rebecca Cederholm*, Association Coordinator MSF Sweden.

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The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Médecins sans Frontières or the Stockholm Evaluation Unit.

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# ACRONYMS

AC	Association Coordinator
ALF	Associative Life in the Field
ASC	Associative Standing Committee
Col	Conflict of Interest
EAA	East Africa Regional Association
FAD	Field Associative Debate
FP	Focal Point
GA	General Assembly
HoM	Head of Mission
IAC	International Association Coordinator
IB	International Board
IGA	International General Assembly
IO	International Office
LAT	Latin America Regional Association
MWA	Movement-Wide Association
SAA	Southern Africa Regional Association
SARA	South Asia Regional Association
ToR	Terms of Reference

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Associative Roadmap development, the IGA and IB commissioned a Review of Regional Associative Initiatives. The purpose of this Review ([see ToR](#)) is to “encapsulate how regionalisation is understood and enacted in MSF and provide clarity for dialogue on best practices and lessons learned”. The study was limited to the experiences with MSF SAA, SARA, LAT and EAA as Regional Associations; MWA; the ‘Nordic’; MSF Hong Kong; and the institutional thinking behind these Regional Associative Initiatives.

The Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) engaged a consultant, Kaat Boon, to work with support from the AC of MSF Sweden Rebecca Cederholm for fact finding, and under the guidance of Tim McCann, Evaluation Referent at the SEU. The methods applied are desk review (processed approx. 35 documents on the overarching and 35 on the individual Associations), in-depth key informant interviews (66 interviews held) and observation (GA EAA, GA SAA, SARA, OCB Gathering, IGA). Regular feed-back from the SEU and members of the ASC and the IB was incorporated.

Though the total amount of findings collected is substantial, this Review cannot be interpreted as a full-fledged analysis of each of the individual Associative Initiatives. Rather, individual Associative Initiatives have been studied to promote the overall understanding of regionalisation within the movement.

## FINDINGS

### Coming about of the Regional Associations

With the establishment of Regional Associations, MSF chose to organise new Associations on a regional rather than a national footing; to expand Association opportunities to previously underrepresented areas (in the South); and allow for Associations without a role in the Executive. These three approaches were expected to benefit the movement on several fronts of MSF’s functioning: in its Associative Life and Governance, and its Executive (Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects)<sup>1</sup>.

The specific ambitions of MSF associated with the establishment of Regional Associations are summarised below:

#### **Ambitions associated with establishing Associations on regional rather than national footing**

##### In terms of improving Associative Life:

- Create vibrant and engaged debate by pooling a sufficient critical mass, internal proximity and diversity
- Counter overly nationalistic interests

##### In terms of improving Associative Governance:

- Keep growth under control and international governance manageable, not undermine reactivity

#### **Ambitions associated with expanding Association opportunities to previously underrepresented areas**

##### In terms of improving Associative Life:

- Capture enthusiasm to contribute to MSF in underrepresented areas
- Integration of new volunteers, commitment to growth
- Incorporate new perspectives to strengthen Associative Life and inform delivery of the social mission
- Increase closeness to and understanding of operating environments
- Facilitate debate distant from Europe

##### In terms of improving Associative Governance:

- Evolve into a truly international movement, reinforcement of ‘without borders’ ideology; better incorporation of other parts of the world
- Better reflect internal diversity in governance, a lessening of Western identity and increase of dynamism

#### **Ambitions associated with establishing Associations without an Executive**

##### In terms of improving Associative Life:

- Contribute to the movement outside of vested institutional interests
- Affirm the importance of Associative Life independent from governance and roles in the Executive

##### In terms of improving Associative Governance:

- Incorporate all associative interest in governance,

<sup>1</sup> See full report for definition of these areas of activity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Viable Associations by tapping into sufficient critical mass and internal proximity</li> </ul>	<p><u>In terms of improving the Executive:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local associative underpinning for resource mobilisation – only applicable to SARA</li> <li>- Local associative underpinning for better tapping into local resources, greater local connectedness</li> <li>- Local associative underpinning for greater closeness to the field/ patients, greater agility and reactivity</li> <li>- Growth of OC groups</li> </ul>	<p>regardless of roles in the Executive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transcending the OC grouping structure</li> </ul>
<p><u>In terms of improving the Executive:</u> None</p>		<p><u>In terms of improving the Executive:</u> None</p>

Establishing Associations on regional rather than national footing and establishing Associations without an Executive were believed to bring benefits to the Associative Life and Governance of the movement. Expanding Association opportunities to areas that were previously underrepresented was believed to benefit all areas of activity of MSF, Associative and Executive.

#### Current functioning of the Regional Associations

Looking into the current level of development of the Regional Associations, it is clear that Regional Associations have made progress in their development, but are still young. They share common challenges, though these play out differently for each of the different Regional Associations individually.

#### **Main progress to date:**

##### In terms of developing their contribution to the Associative Life

Regional Associations have a growing, regional and active membership, with a prominent activist spirit, recent field experience and a substantial number of medical profiles. Many local associative groups bridge the distance between members and the central level of the Associations. Members are finding their role in the movement, and start to contribute to the movement's shared debate with a unique perspective. The capacity of the membership can however still be improved.

##### In terms of developing their contribution to the Associative Governance

All Regional Associations have the positions and processes in place consistent with the Statutes and Internal Rules of the movement. These are however not consolidated yet, and cannot yet guarantee a stable and consistent functioning of the Associations. ACs are engaged and their role has become clearer. GA's are happening, with an active engagement. Associations' Members and Representatives take part in international movement fora, such as in OC platforms, the ASC, and the IGA. Some Associations have made more progress than others in terms of contributing to the IGA.

##### In terms of developing their contribution to the Executive

LAT, EAA and SARA have taken on a role in Indirect Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support through collaboration with their nearest executive, and SAA actively provides oversight over its Executive. They are not active in Operational Projects, but are all present in an OC platform. The collaboration with the executive is not always smooth, but effort is evident on both sides.

#### **Main challenges faced:**

- Resources: people, skills, information, plans, approaches, time, money, access etc.
- Internal proximity challenged by vastness of the regions, insufficient internet access, cultural, linguistic divides etc.

- Consistency and reliability of Boards, related to mobilising the right capacities and lack of resources
- Capturing the associative interest from the whole region
- Connecting with the movement; having actual impact on the decision taking

- Regional Associations' ambitions are not sufficiently satisfied with the roles they currently play
- Lack of clarity in relation to interdependence in operating environment
- Developing a good relationship and sufficient

- External proximity to the social mission, and the global perspective under-developed
- Nationalistic interests within the Association, and regional interests within the movement
- Finding a good relationship to the nearest executive; insufficient overlap and coherence
- Connecting with the movement; working with the processes and positions, obtaining sufficient support
- Not all within the movement equally on board with the importance of Associative Life

- Overseeing an Executive (SAA): lack of overlap between interests of Executive and Associates
- Not overseeing an Executive (EAA, LAT and SARA): remaining well-connected to the movement
- Compatibility between Associative Life and Associative Governance
- Insufficient internal proximity impacting on coherence
- Having a real impact on decision making in the movement

- overlap with the nearest executive
- Distance to operational decision making

## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

### Question 1: Has the added value been provided?

Regional Associations are already bringing some distinct added value to MSF (see above). Their continued development is likely to reinforce and increase this added value.

However, the three approaches applied with the establishment of Regional Associations – regionalisation, expansion and de-linking from the executive – aren't by themselves sufficient to realise all of the institutional ambitions that have been associated with them. Regionalisation, expansion and de-linking from the executive only provide partial answers to questions the movement is struggling with: incorporating new perspectives, controlling growth, reactivity of the movement, interdependence in operational contexts, diversity etc.

In summary, Regional Associations are valid entities of MSF. But, the institutional challenges the movement faces aren't all resolved with their establishment – see below.

### Question 2: What has and has not worked?

#### **The establishment of Associations on regional rather than national footing**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ keeps the number of Institutional Members down and as such contributes to keeping the international Associative Governance manageable</li> <li>+ ensures sufficient critical mass per Association</li> <li>+ allows to incorporate all associative interest in the South</li> <li>+ promotes the development of a regional associative identity and unique voice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- may not be able to bring all added value from within the region to the surface</li> <li>- may not be able to satisfy all institutional ambitions from within the region</li> <li>- is not successful in countering overly nationalistic interests</li> <li>- makes it challenging to achieve sufficient internal proximity to have constructive debate</li> <li>- overestimates the relevance of cultural, linguistic and physical proximity over proximity in terms of expertise and experiences</li> <li>- doesn't in itself guarantee a manageable international governance</li> <li>- poses the risk of having introduced yet another layer in governance</li> <li>- does not provide an answer to what the MSF of the future will look like</li> <li>- contains rather than empowers new associative interest</li> <li>- requires substantial investment needs whereas there may be more efficient and effective alternatives</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## The expansion of Association opportunities to previously underrepresented areas

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ allows a better access to the movement for people physically removed from the traditional Associations</li><li>+ promotes a far wider participation in MSF</li><li>+ contributes to a lessening of the Western identity of MSF</li><li>+ contributes to increased diversity in the movement</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- provides only a partial answer to the opening up of MSF to other parts of the world</li><li>- doesn't guarantee that other parts of the world have an actual impact on decision making centred in Europe</li><li>- doesn't solve the lack of coherence in institutional presence in the South</li><li>- is insufficient to establish diversity across the movement</li></ul> |
|---|--|

## Establishing Associations without a role in the Executive

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ proves a viable option in terms of bringing unique perspectives into the movement</li><li>+ allows for a more independent voice</li><li>+ reinforces the importance of Associative Life and Governance alongside the Executive</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- poses challenges in terms of being well-connected to the movement</li><li>- creates a lack of clarity in terms of being 'mobilised to act'<sup>2</sup>, and as such creates a tendency back to the Section model</li><li>- makes the need for institutional coherence in the South more pressing</li></ul> |
|--|--|

### Question 3: How to maximise the potential of the MSF Associative in the mid to long term?

Regional Associations are legitimate entities; they originate from ambitions on all fronts of MSF's functioning. Most critical to their development is their commitment and capacity to be 'mobilised to act'. They have the potential to evolve into full-fledged MSF entities, with clear added value in the Associative and the Executive. It is imperative to separate issues of institutional development from the development of Regional Associations: their establishment does not solve all institutional issues of MSF, but can definitely provide a significant added value to the movement.

Regionalisation is insufficient to shape the MSF Associative of the future. It simply can't deliver on all the ambitions hoped for. Thereto, the movement needs a more encompassing strategy, inspired by the essence of MSF. In that, the meaning and importance of Associative Life is to be recognised much more than today.

Expanding Association to previously underrepresented areas is very much in line with the essence of MSF and can work. It is essential to fully embrace the concept of 'being mobilised to act', providing clear roles for new Associations in the Associative and the Executive.

De-linking Associations from an executive has proven difficult, as well as overseeing an executive that does not have sufficient overlap with the interests of the Associative members. Per region however, a process is already ongoing to seek a new coherence between Associative and Executive, in which both search for what is best for the delivery of the social mission at all times.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation 1: Support the development of Regional Associations more, and better**

#### 1.1 Resource Associative Life better

More resources need to be made available to the induction of members; the work of local Associative groupings; and maintaining a close link between the members, the local Associative groupings and the central level of the Regional Associations. Human resources, creative approaches and a dedicated budget are the priority here.

#### 1.2 Actively seek out and channel the unique contributions of the Regional Associations

A greater investment is needed to identify unique contributions that can positively impact the social mission delivery. Secondly, a greater investment in 'travel' and 'translation' is needed to ensure that these unique contributions

<sup>2</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.



crystallise and are brought up into the movement. Putting a dedicated team in place to develop suitable approaches is recommended, in a first phase. In a second phase, it is recommended to integrate such approaches into the regular set-up and way of working of Regional Associations.

### 1.3 Resource Associative Governance better

More resources need to be dedicated to guarantee the availability of Board members, and especially the President. In second instance, the Boards would benefit from a greater investment in capacity building.

### 1.4 Reinforce the strategic planning capacity of the Regional Associations

Pragmatic solutions are necessary to ensure all the capacities needed to develop the Regional Associations are actively engaged. A set of institutional representatives and experienced profiles can be engaged as a sort of 'advisory team' to think beyond the immediate concerns. The most prominent issues to tackle are the internal capacity building, the institutional coherence of the movement in the region, the relationship Associative – Executive, and realising the full potential of the Regional Associations as it was originally envisaged.

## **Recommendation 2: Think differently about institutional development**

### 2.1 Clarify how MSF entities are supposed to work

Re-direct focus from Regional Associations towards what MSF entities in general are supposed to be, in line with the Principles and ways of working of MSF. The roles all MSF entities take up need to be defined with more clarity, reflecting the spirit of being 'mobilised to act' around the social mission of MSF. It is, as such, recommended to seek institutional coherence bottom-up, starting from the actual and potential added values of all MSF entities, and have these inform overall institutional development strategies.

### 2.2 Develop the Associative Life more actively and creatively

Attribute more resources to the development of Associative Life across the movement. In first instance, the understanding of and appreciation for the Associative Life is to be consolidated into all aspects of the movement and functioning of its entities. In second instance, creative approaches are to be developed and deployed to reinforce what is essential to a healthy Associative Life. It is recommended to bring together, from across the movement, all existing ideas and experience, and consolidate that into a diverse set of tools, entities, projects and methods for use and application across the movement, or in specific pockets thereof.

### 2.3 Look for gains in efficiency and effectiveness in Associative Governance

It is recommended to review the methods and tools (Motions and Recommendations, GAs and IGAs, FADs etc.) currently used to crystallise the common debate of Associative Life into the formal decision making of the Associative Governance. In such a review, gains in efficiency and effectiveness need to be looked for, without putting in question the entire set-up. It is recommended to focus on methods and tools that incorporate a great diversity of perspectives while maintaining focus on the delivery of the social mission and the specific Principles and ways of working of MSF.

### 2.4 Change narrative on the relationship Associative - Executive

Move from a narrative of 'split' between the Associative and the Executive to a narrative that includes Associative Life, Associative Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support as 5 essential but distinct activities of MSF. Move away from equating Operational Projects to the delivery of the social mission, and letting Associative Governance overshadow Associative Life. Understand 'being mobilised to act' as taking on a clear role in one or more of these 5 activities, and ensure it is at all times clear, internally and externally, to individuals and MSF entities, how this role contributes to the delivery of the social mission.



# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

While Regional Associations are not a new phenomenon in MSF, in 2011 – post Governance Reform - MSF consciously chose them as a model for Associative development and diversification. In 2011, four new Associations were admitted as Institutional Members: MSF Brazil, South Africa (SAA), East Africa Association (EAA) and Latin America Association (LAT) of which SAA, EAA and LAT were established on a regional footing. In addition, the Movement-Wide Association (MWA) was set up, as an alternative expression of associating in a de-nationalised manner.

Later, in 2014, the South Asia Regional Association (SARA) became an Institutional Member, also identified as a ‘Regional Association’. Alongside, other Regional Associative Initiatives exist within MSF, such as MSF Hong Kong (in existence since 1994) and the ‘Nordic’ (first talk of merger in 2001 / 2002), and the emerging initiatives around the Mediterranean, in West Africa and in South East Asia and the Pacific.

In 2013, the IGA (International General Assembly) requested that the International Board (IB) lead a process to create an Associative roadmap for the further Associative development of MSF. As part of that, at the 2014 IGA, the ‘Three Pillars of Meaningful Membership’ (Inclusive and participatory membership, Operational connectedness and Added value) were approved. Subsequently at the 2015 IGA, 4 common expectations for Associative development that all would be working towards were approved, in ‘Setting our Common Expectations’.

These common expectations are:

- “1. The International Association will strengthen MSF’s social mission by reinforcing our Associative nature and constructively challenging, guiding and strategically directing the Executive;*
- 2. The International Association will foster a culture of accountability throughout the movement and hold the International Executive accountable;*
- 3. The MSF International Associative will ensure the development of a dynamic Associative in the field;*
- 4. Representation at the MSF International Associative level will be relevant to our social mission and reach beyond national identities.”*

At the 2015 IGA each expectation was assigned a working group made up of IGA representatives in charge of “(1) coordinating, supporting and monitoring the implementation of these priorities and (2) reporting back to the 2016 IGA on progress”. At the 2016 IGA, the working group in charge of developing expectation 4 identified “different ways to organise MSF Associations, including a denationalised approach” as a priority. After the IGA, there was a specific request from the IGA and the IB for the Regional Association set-up to be reviewed as part of a larger discussion on “new ways to associate”.

The Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) was engaged to take on such a Review. A consultant, Kaat Boon, was engaged to execute the assignment, with support from the Associative Coordinator of MSF Sweden Rebecca Cederholm for fact finding, and under the guidance of Tim McCann, Evaluation Referent at the SEU.

## EVALUATION SCOPE

The Terms of Reference (ToR) (in Annex 1) lays out the purpose of this review: “encapsulate how regionalisation is understood and enacted in MSF and provide clarity for dialogue on best practices and lessons learned”. The ToR further stipulates that “this Review is not an evaluation of the existing Regional Associations nor the regional model of associating but a learning process to give insight into the present situation, support good governance and ensure informed decisions as MSF continues to evolve”.

In addition, the ToR stipulates: “Given the present growth of MSF and the ongoing desire to promote the Associative nature of the organisation globally, it is necessary to understand:

- *Whether the recent tendency towards ‘regional’ and/or ‘trans-national’ Associations is providing the added value that was foreseen, or perceived, to bring to the movement;*
- *What has and has not worked, and why;*
- *The best way forward so that we are well positioned to maximise the potential of the MSF Associative in the mid to long term.”*

After discussion with the team overseeing the Review, it was decided to focus the Review on the following:

- MSF SAA, SARA, LAT and EAA as Regional Associations stemming from the 2011 Governance Reform;
- MWA as an alternative expression of a de-nationalised approach to associating stemming from the 2011 Governance Reform;
- The 'Nordic' as an attempt to regionalisation by 3 of the traditional 19 sections;
- MSF Hong Kong as an example of a traditional Section that on many ways operates in a regional manner;
- The overarching thinking on institutional and particularly associative development from which these Regional Associative Initiatives came about.

It was felt that this focus could bring forth a comprehensive understanding of the current state of play of regionalisation on the Associative level.

## METHODOLOGY

The methods applied in this Review are desk review, in-depth key informant interviews and observation (Please consult Annex 2 for the complete list of fact collection activities). In addition, regular feed-back moments with the SEU and members of the Associative Standing Committee (ASC) and the IB were incorporated.

- Approximately 70 documents were screened in-depth; half of which pertaining to a particular Regional Associative Initiative, and half to the larger institutional development in which the initiatives fit;
- 66 in-depth interviews were conducted, focusing on the following profiles:
  - People that played a critical role in the early development of particular Regional Associative Initiatives;
  - People currently playing a determining role in particular Regional Associative Initiatives, such as:
    - Presidents and other Board members
    - Focal Points (FP) of local Associative groupings
    - Association Coordinators (AC)
    - Directors of Executive entities close to the Regional Associative Initiatives;
  - People with a privileged view on the overarching thinking on Associative development throughout recent years;
- The General Assemblies (GAs) of EAA and SAA, the OCB Gathering and the IGA were attended, and the office of SARA was visited.

The Review started during the second half of March, and was extended to be completed before the IB meeting in November 2017.

## LIMITATIONS

- The scope entailed 7 different entities (EAA, SAA, SARA, LAT, Nordic, HK, MWA) and the overarching understanding. The number of documents screened and people interviewed is substantial in total, whereas, per entity, rationalisation was necessary to keep the review practically feasible.
- A substantial number of findings were collected whereas the space and time to report on them was limited.
- The Executive part of MSF's institutional development and the Associative functioning of the traditional Sections were not part of the scope of this assignment and the Review needs to be interpreted with this in mind.
- This report cannot be considered as a complete overview of each individual Regional Associative Initiative. Thereto, more findings collection per initiative would have been needed (interviews with members for example, or attending local Associative activities). The portraying of individual initiatives is to be understood as a basis for further reflection on these initiatives and as feeding into the overarching discussion on regionalisation.

# FINDINGS

## COMING ABOUT

Early in the Review it became clear that Regional Associative Initiatives are associated with a complex variety of aspirations and concerns. Looking into how they came about was considered an appropriate way to start untangling the knot. The institutional development of MSF was thus studied, with a focus on the introduction of the regional level in association; institutional expansion to previously underrepresented areas; and de-linking the Associative from the Executive. Please find the complete findings in Annex 3.

The findings pointed out that the institutional motivations behind the establishment of Regional Associations can be retraced to ambitions of MSF on 5 levels: the Associative Life, the Associative Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects. In each of these 5 areas, the movement saw possible benefits in establishing Regional Associations.

Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects are defined by the 2011 Governance Reform, and commonly referred to as 'the Executive'. Associative Life and Associative Governance are commonly referred to as the 'Associative'. Findings pointed out that this 'Associative' covers two distinct activities, of which Associative Life is mostly informal – debate, internal networking, sharing experiences etc., and Associative Governance mostly formal – governance structures, system of motions, voting etc. They are thus addressed separately.

The findings pointed out that the interplay of ambitions in these 5 areas of activity led to the establishment of the Regional Associations and other Regional Associative Initiatives.

Below, each of these 5 areas of activity are discussed. A brief definition is provided, followed by a retracing of the motivations behind the establishment of the Regional Associations and other Regional Associative Initiatives.

Note, this section is not intended as an exhaustive historical documentation of each regional initiative. Findings per regional Associative can be found in the annexes.

### 1. DRIVING FACTOR 1: THE ASSOCIATIVE LIFE

Based on a reading of the institutional history of the movement, the Associative Life can be understood as an informal or organic system of accountability and decision making, playing a crucial role in the governance of the movement. It is most commonly referred to as 'debate' but stretches beyond that. The intention is that debate is fuelled by the field and the operating environment and keeps the movement in sync with a changing reality.

It is intrinsic to the establishment of MSF and quite unique in the humanitarian world. It is at the forefront of the delivery of the social mission, alongside and on par with Operational Projects, informing the values and motivations MSF'ers uphold when delivering the social mission. It permits an understanding of MSF as a 'personality based' organisation, valuing the individual as much as the institutional; an organisation in which specific personal views, debated collectively, inform the direction of the movement. A base line of common thought and understanding (the MSF charter) is supposed to be shared by all and forms the basis for inclusion.

#### Regional Associations

The Associative Life lays at the foundation of MSF and explains much of its growth. Like-minded individuals associated, inspired to contribute to MSF beyond specific missions. People motivated by MSF are associated in the sense of being 'mobilised to act'<sup>3</sup>, which goes beyond debate for its own sake, but is a strong commitment to what is best for MSF's social mission and the people it aims to benefit. Many of the current entities within MSF originate from this dynamic, including the Regional Associations. Enthusiasm for MSF's way of working and principles - among organically formed groups of internationally experienced MSF'ers and numerous National Staff – is the foundation of Regional Associations.

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<sup>3</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.

The Chantilly Principles commit MSF to “endeavour to constantly integrate new volunteers to maintain spontaneity and a spirit of innovation ... permitting an openness towards our societies and a capacity for questioning ourselves.” La Mancha stated that the movement should consider “new avenues for Associative participation, giving priority to regions where MSF is underrepresented”. Both reinforce the importance of new voices to strengthen the Associative Life.

The Associative Life is closely linked to how MSF perceives its people and the role they are given in shaping MSF through internal debate and decision making. This has changed considerably over the years, which contributed to the establishment of Regional Associations. Towards La Mancha, the attitude towards National Staff started to shift across the movement (some entities already had strong National Staff inclusion). National Staff were seen more and more as essential players in the delivery of MSF’s social mission, upholding the principles of MSF just the same as volunteers.

After La Mancha, the concept of ‘meaningful membership’ gained importance and new entities had to demonstrate a potential added value to the movement. Bringing in new voices was as such an added value, and was one of the driving factors for the establishment of Regional Associations. Regional Associations were therefore convinced that their specific perspective, culture of associating and debate, could constructively inform the delivery of the social mission of MSF.

Being able to draw from a sufficient critical mass to guarantee valuable debate (lively, considered, relevant) became a factor in the discussion on accepting new Institutional Members. So, over the years, a clear preference for regional or trans-national Associations was expressed. This was also intended to help counter the nationalistic interests that were considered to dominate the debate too often.

Also, there was a growing recognition in the movement of the importance of local connectedness (strengthening the field perspective in terms of engagement with patients and their communities). Closeness (linguistic, cultural etc.) to the operational context was an additional motivation for the establishment of Regional Associations.

Linked to this, the distance to the Europe-based Associations and related OC debate platforms was felt to be too big for many members to meaningfully contribute.

Overall, the recognition of the importance of the Associative Life is one of the main reason why Regional Associations – not directly linked to an Executive – became an acceptable idea in MSF. Whereas, from the perspective of the Regional Associations, it was an aspiration to contribute to the movement outside of the established centres of power.

### Other Regional Associative Initiatives

In the regionalisation of MSF Hong Kong, the Associative Life played a minor role. It was mostly motivated by ambitions on the level of the Executive. Until now, little emphasis has been put on the development of the Associative Life in the region.

Considerations in relation to the Associative Life were prominent in the Nordic merger, for example the belief that a greater and more diverse membership would lead to a more engaged and interesting debate, better reflecting what the Nordic region has to contribute to MSF.

The importance of the Associative Life is prominent in the establishment of MWA. The MWA is an expression of the belief in the importance of debate and thought, independent from territories and established institutional interests.

### **IN SUMMARY**

- The enthusiasm to contribute to MSF (bottom-up) precedes all other motivations to establish Regional Associations.
- The other main ambitions behind the establishment of the Regional Associations were the incorporation of new perspectives into the movement; a commitment to growth; counter overly nationalistic interests; an increased understanding of operating environments and openness to other societies; and facilitating debate distant from Europe and the OC platforms.
- Particular to the introduction of a regional perspective - over the national - was the motivation to create vibrant Associations by pooling a sufficient critical mass, profiting from both the commonalities and diversities across a region; and countering overly nationalistic interests. This dynamic was evident in the Nordic merger for example.
- Overall, Regional Associations truly do originate from the realm of the Associative Life, even if other ambitions later manifested and impacted heavily on their current shape – discussed below.

## 2. DRIVING FACTOR 2: THE ASSOCIATIVE GOVERNANCE

Associative Governance is the more classic structure of governance of the movement. The movement and its component parts are organised as Associations. The Associative Governance holds the formal decision taking power, within the movement as well as towards authorities, through the IGA and the IB. The Executive is held accountable for and given direction by elected and selected individuals and bodies that are not part of that Executive.

Associative Governance draws from the Associative Life, channelling its contributions through to formal decision taking forums and processes. The Associative Life informs and at times makes the decisions, while the Associative Governance takes the decisions. The Associative Governance is deliberately distant from the Executive, whereas the Associative Life pervades the entire movement, with essential decision making done across.

Associative Governance is but a means to an end, allowing the movement to work on a global level. It is one step removed from the delivery of the social mission itself.

The difference between Associative Life and the Associative Governance is only highlighted in conversations, not in official documents. Research into the institutional development of MSF as well as into each of the Regional Associative Initiatives part of this Review pointed out that they cannot be dealt with as one and the same.

### Regional Associations

The concern with being a truly international movement, in the formal sense, also underpins the establishment of the Regional Associations. By 1999, MSF had, for a moment, consolidated into 19 Sections, in resource-rich countries, either Western or close to the West; and 5 Operational Centres all based in Europe. Leading up to the 2011 Governance Reform, this was considered internally untenable, as well as towards the outside world. Expansion in previously underrepresented areas was de facto taking place, yet not translated into the formal governance of MSF. This led to a growing acceptance that the non-Northern / Western needed to be consolidated into the formal decision-making of MSF. Linked with that was the general ambition to reinforce the 'without borders' ideology. This was also fundamental to the establishment of the Movement-Wide Association.

Subsequent movement-wide moratoria were installed to keep growth under control. This held back the formalisation of some Associative initiatives existing at the time, but didn't succeed in holding back growth in operational support. By 2002, the growth in operational support activities had become as disconcerting to the movement as the growth of the Associative. Still, emphasis remained on controlling growth on the level of the Associative. Considerations about MSF's Associative Life were - by themselves - not considered a valid reason to open new entities. Motivated to keep Associative growth under control, the message was that 'the movement's governance needs to be improved before any new Section is created'.

Related to this, there was a perceived bureaucratic burden and loss of dynamism due to institutional growth in HQs and the movement overall. It was felt Associations in new contexts could breathe fresh air into the movement. In practise, it was hoped that investing in new Associations in previously underrepresented areas would, in time, create diversity in the movement's leadership. Similar motivations catalysed the inception of MSF SAA in 2007.

In parallel, the need for a stronger international architecture was repeatedly raised even though MSF had always been wary of an overly rigid structure that limits reactivity and risks OC (Operational Centre) operational autonomy. Under these conditions, the Associative Governance was assigned the role of imagining its governance, but struggled and was often considered to be insufficiently pro-active and/or visionary in doing so. It took from 2006 (with La Mancha favouring new Associations in territories so far underrepresented) until 2011 before a mechanism was in place to incorporate new Associations. With the 2011 Governance Reform, a way to incorporate new voices and emerging initiatives into the movement was finally realised.

With the 2011 Governance Reform, the Associative Governance opted for a regional / de-nationalised approach to the Association. This was intended to balance the fear of an overly large international governance system, whilst proactively opening a channel for new interest in associating.

Little preparatory work had been done as to how Regional Associations should be developed and eventually operate (emphasising the importance of a review). For those in favour of institutional expansion to previously underrepresented areas, the option to establish new Associations on a regional footing was welcomed; with more enthusiasm for the opportunities than consideration for the challenges it could present. MSF SAA for example was already admitted as an Institutional Member when its regional membership chose to define SAA as regional.

The acceptance of new Associations was initially tied to the willingness of existing Associations to regionalise. Traditional Associations would make space for new Associations, so that the total number of Institutional Members could stay the same. This gained some traction: some traditional Associations looked into merging. But none of these mergers materialised. The acceptance of new members was subsequently de-linked from the merging of traditional members.

Immediately after the 2011 Governance Reform finalisation, SAA, EAA and LAT were admitted into MSF. 'SA' becomes regional - 'SAA' - in 2013. And in 2014, SARA was admitted into MSF. Over time, the leadership of the Regional Associations was formalised into Boards of elected members, consistent with the international Associative Governance and stipulations of the 2011 Governance Reform.

Another significant dynamic was the link of the new Regional Initiatives to an Executive office. Because all Regional Associations had traditionally experienced field project realities of OC differences and lack of coordination, they all sought to contribute to transcending the OC logic. For EAA and LAT, this led to an establishment without an Executive. SAA and SARA are still finding their way in providing oversight over their Executives. By permitting the existence of Associations not linked directly to an Executive, the Associative Governance built on the debate around the limitations of the MSF grouping structure. In doing so, the Associative Governance also reinforced the importance of the Associative Life alongside Associative Governance and the Executive.

In 2013, an Associative Roadmap development process was triggered by continued concerns about managing growth. As part of this process, Meaningful Membership is defined, and the expectations in relation to the International Associative formulated.

From: "MSF. Three Pillars of Meaningful Membership" (2014):

1. *"Inclusive and participatory membership: Local membership / Local board and GA / IGA representatives"*
2. *Operational connectedness: allowing field realities to be the primary fuel for discussions that influence Associative decision-making at institutional level*
3. *Added value: bring a new perspective or added value that will enrich the guidance of the social mission"*

The common expectations set out that *"The MSF International Associative will ensure the development of a dynamic Associative in the field"* and *"Representation at the MSF International Associative level will be relevant to our social mission and reach beyond national identities"*.<sup>4</sup> It is within this framework for Associative development that the Regional Associations are today expected to function.

### Other Regional Associative Initiatives

MSF Hong Kong's regionalisation was motivated primarily from an Executive perspective, and instigated from within MSF Hong Kong. However, regionalisation of recruitment quickly led to a regional representation on the Associative Governance level, and was embraced across the movement. Over the years, this regional representation was reinforced and actively safeguarded. MSF Hong Kong, at a certain moment in time, did consider to formally become a Regional Association, but decided against it once it became aware of the effort required for approval.

Once the Executive merger deemed undesired by at least 2 of the 3 involved Sections, the Nordic merger aligned primarily with Associative Governance ambitions on the international level. The Nordic merger was a means to make space for new Institutional Members and as such contribute to a broader movement without bloating its governance. Later, the merging of Associations in the North was delinked from acceptance of new Institutional Members.

From the perspective of the Formal Governance, MWA was conceived as an alternative way to channel Associative interest; reducing the need to establish new Associations. MWA was given the perspective to hold 2 votes on the IGA, same as all other Institutional Members of the movement.

### IN SUMMARY

- The main ambition on the level of Associative Governance that led to the establishment of Regional Associations was a better incorporation of other parts of the world where MSF had field operations; a lessening of its Western identity and an inclusion of new perspective' and fresh air in governance, better reflecting the internal diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> Core Associative Roadmap Steering Committee (Goriely, Stéphane, Kiddell-Monroe, Rachel, Kreuzen, Theo, Lampard, Bruce, Varthaman, Shobha, Gill, Ruby). "Setting our Common Expectations: An Associative Paper" (2015)



- This ambition was competing with another one: keeping the institutional growth under control and the movement dynamic and reactive.
- As a consequence, the coming about of Regional Associations as Associative Governance entities wasn't smooth. For years, a fear for uncontrolled growth, and a loss of reactivity associated with it, held back the incorporation of new Associative interest – mainly in the South - into the movement.
- Finally, two main novelties were introduced as middle-ground: Association on the regional level – rather than the national, and Association without oversight over an Executive entity.
- Acceptance as an Institutional Member in the movement was welcomed by the Regional Associations because it turned them into formal players within the movement. The regional idea was an exciting challenge that could help them become strong Associations: based on sufficient critical mass and internal proximity, shying away from overly nationalistic interests.
- Regional Association was put forward as a model for traditional Associations to work towards, but this gained little traction. The Nordic got the furthest, but so far didn't materialise. MSF Hong Kong considered formal recognition as Regional Association, but backed down after understanding the procedural implications.
- Not overseeing an Executive was essentially a rejection of the OC grouping system. It also reaffirms that the Associative is important by itself, independent from the role of oversight over an Executive.

### 3. DRIVING FACTOR 3: INDIRECT OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT

The MSF Statutes define Indirect Operational Projects Support as: *“Indirect Operational Project Support means activities and administration related to non-operational representation, generating resources (human and financial) and communication, as approved by the IB.”*

Part of the Executive, Indirect Operational Projects Support is considered the ‘fuel of the MSF machine’. It is furthest removed from the delivery of the social mission, but essential to it.

#### Regional Associations

Mobilising resources is considered one of the most important catalysts of MSF's institutional expansion of MSF. With the Plan for New Entities in 2008, fundraising and representation were confirmed as the sole stand-alone reasons for opening new entities. In the past, other entities had been established for more than just fundraising, representation or recruitment purposes. But, this happened in resource-rich countries with potential in terms of fundraising and recruitment. The countries identified for regional association did not have this profile – except for SARA (A fundraising scoping study pointed out that the growing middle-class of India, massive in numbers, could present fundraising opportunities).

Concerns about growth delayed the establishment of Regional Associations. Starting from the 90's, MSF became concerned with HQs growing disproportionately to growth in the field, with specific fears around a distancing from the field; a reduction of the medical nature of the organisation; an excessive focus on fundraising, recruitment and lobbying in the home society context; and an expression of unhealthy nationalistic and power politics. It was therefore considered that growth linked to Indirect Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support needed to be controlled before the Associative Governance could consider allowing new entities; that could increase this growth further.

Quite naturally, a broader recruitment base spread the interest to associate with MSF, therefore Indirect Operational Projects Support stimulated the establishment of new MSF entities.

Though this was not a prime motivation with the initiative takers behind the Regional Associations, members in the region played a role in Indirect Operational Projects Support from the beginning. By means of their mere existence they increased the visibility of MSF in new contexts and as such lay a basis for fundraising, networking and recruitment.



### Other Regional Associative Initiatives

MSF Hong Kong's first and main motivation to regionalise was to expand its recruitment base beyond the limited borders of Hong Kong. This wasn't immediately welcomed by the rest of the movement, but soon proved valuable.

The Nordic initiative initially included an Executive merger, aiming to increase the efficiency of Executive services.

The establishment of the MWA was set up completely disconnected from any Executive activity.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

- Indirect Operational Projects Support was not a significant driver for Regional Associations. The locations where the Regional Associations were to be established were generally not considered prime locations for resource mobilisation. The regionalisation of Hong Kong is an exception to this and, to lesser extent, SARA.
- Because excessive growth on the level of Indirect Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support was considered unhealthy, the movement shied away from incorporating new Associations.
- On the other hand, recruitment outside of home countries of existing Associations often led to an interest in associating outside of these existing Associations. Indirect Operational Projects Support can thus generally be understood as a strong but indirect driver to the coming about of Regional Associations.
- Conversely, Regional Associations are a natural enabler of Indirect Operational Projects. A local presence quasi automatically contributes to the recruitment, fundraising and networking capacity of the movement.

## **4. DRIVING FACTOR 4: OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT**

The MSF Statutes define Operational Projects Support as: *“Operational Project Support means the infrastructure and technical expertise /activities required to manage the content and supervise the implementation of Operational Projects, including, but not limited to logistical, medical, human resource, financial advice/management necessary for managing Operational Projects; it does not include activities part of Indirect Operational Project Support.”*

Also part of the Executive, Operational Projects Support entails a wide range of activities, such as medical research. It is one step removed from the delivery of the social mission itself, aimed at guaranteeing that the social mission delivery is done in a high-quality and professional manner.

### Regional Associations

Leading up to La Mancha and the 2011 Governance Reform, there was a growing recognition that institutional expansion in previously underrepresented areas could be useful to Operational Projects Support. Some advantages mentioned are, for example, better local representation, linking up with local medical knowledge and networks, delocalisation of Operational Projects Support services, tapping into resource-poor medical practices, saving cost, and stimulating innovation.

New entities had indeed sprung up to reinforce Operational Projects Support closer to the field – regardless of subsequent moratoria. They remained with the Associative underpinning of the respective OC, and are at times interpreted as mere ‘territorial expansion drift’. On the other hand, there were ambitions early on to turn some of these Operational Projects Support hubs into full-fledged Sections, under the auspices of a local Association. It had been considered that executive entities are likely/inevitably going to raise the interest in developing an Associative: a replication of the successful formula that is MSF.

In 1997 the Associative Governance decided that all Sections were to be organised as an Association, with an Associative power holding accountable and giving guidance to an Executive. For some Branch Offices with ambitions to evolve into a Section, Regional Associations in previously underrepresented areas were seen as a potentially viable vehicle.

Something frequently mentioned by the initiative takers behind Regional Associations was their interest in contributing to Operational Projects Support. Ambitions in this area were most explicit in the establishment of SAA and SARA. Under the influence of the strict split between the Executive and the Associative, this ambition was moved to the side. As a result, Executive and Associative activities in the same territory developed quite independently.

### Other Regional Associative Initiatives

The fact finding did not reveal any ambitions in Operational Projects Support in the regionalisation of MSF Hong Kong.

The Nordic merger initially conceived an increased efficiency and rationalisation of the Executive, including activities in the area of Operational Projects Support.

The establishment of the MWA was de-linked from any Executive ambitions.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

- On the level of Operational Projects Support, there was a clear recognition that institutional expansion in previously underrepresented areas could be beneficial for tapping into local resources and bringing operational support closer to the field. In fact, this type of institutional expansion had been happening over the last decades, regardless of subsequent moratoria.
- This institutional expansion in previously underrepresented areas existed within the OC Associative framework. Over time, the ambition to have a local Association grew.
- Associating regionally rather than nationally was not the prime interest for Operational Projects Support.
- The initiative takers behind the Regional Associations were keen to take on a role in Operational Projects Support. Due to developmental challenges of both the Executives and the Associations, and issues between the two, this ambition was difficult to realise. Most of the focus was diverted to the role of the Regional Associations in the Informal and Associative Governance.

## **5. DRIVING FACTOR 5: OPERATIONAL PROJECTS**

According to the MSF Statutes *“Operational Projects means activities involving the direct provision of assistance to beneficiaries under the Name of MSF including, but not limited to, advocacy, representation, legal registration and the making of contracts in countries where projects are being implemented.”*

Operational Projects are the third distinctive part of the Executive. Operational projects are at times seen as one and the same as the delivery of the social mission. The delivery of the social mission can however not be seen as a mere practical act. It is an expression of the Principles of MSF, and as such cannot be dissociated from the Associative Life.

### Regional Associations

As part of La Mancha, it was recognised that a greater closeness to patients would be beneficial to the social mission. Specifically mentioned was better information sharing with patients; access; medical practices adapted to the locality; expertise on location specific pathologies, etc.

Over the years, attempts had been made to increase agility and reactivity through decentralising or delocalising operational capacity closer to the field (with mixed success).

Most of the initiative takers behind the Regional Associations had an ambition of becoming operational (not necessarily as an OC), but this was curtailed by the Associative Governance and under the influence of the consolidation of operations with the 5 OCs. It was recognised that there was a risk in allowing new entities to take on operational activities - towards the authorities and for the delivery of the social mission itself. From another perspective, it was considered that the investment to set up a new well-functioning OC (or another operational model) would be massive, while many were comfortable with the existing OCs.

Part of the establishment of Regional Associations was driven by OCs envisioning them as integral parts of their group. For SAA and SARA, the interest of respectively OCB and OCA in institutional expansion were factors for their establishment. Both OC's supported these new entities with the explicit intention to develop them over time into Sections. For OCB, the initial interest was mostly in the Associative Life and Operational Projects Support, whereas for OCA it was rather focused on Indirect Operational Projects Support.

OCB set up an SAA board for the Associative and Executive as one, but largely under its control, and let it evolve over time towards more independence. Established a couple of years later, SARA's board was supported by OCA and

intended to take on an Executive oversight role. This has so far not materialised. The link to the Executive of SARA can be considered much more loose, and rather on par with LAT and EAA than with SAA.

Having Regional Associations not linked to an Executive goes against the understanding of being associated around the operational plan of a specific OC. The OC model, with the inclusion of various Partner Sections, was considered a motor for diversity; and the OC model provides associates with an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the social mission of MSF. From the operational side, there is great insistence that being associated is 'being mobilised to act'<sup>5</sup>. This is an issue that is vigorously debated still today, and not resolved with the establishment of Regional Associations.

LAT and EAA lacked a clear institutional backing from an OC and / or opted not to have one. Both however established links with their nearest Executives, respectively OCBA in Argentina and OCG in Mexico; and OCBA in Nairobi. OCBA has taken on the channelling of International Office (IO) funds to both Regional Associations. All three entities have come to seek and make use of the membership of the Regional Associations, so far primarily in Indirect Operational Projects Support.

Since its establishment, SAA has a voting right on the operational plan of OCB. LAT and EAA, though not formally linked to OCBA, have a voting seat with OCBA. In addition, LAT has a voting presence in OCG; and EAA and SARA a non-voting presence in OCA. Furthermore, they contribute – indirectly – to the operations of the movement through their voting rights in the IGA.

Still, the Regional Associations feel at times overly distant from MSF operations, and are often perceived as such. This is striking given that their membership is generally closer to the areas where MSF operations take place.

Linked to that, it is important to highlight the perspective of the people living in territories where MSF projects are implemented. The difference between OCs is of lesser relevance to them; in fact, the lack of collaboration / coherence between them is considered undesirable. All Regional Associations, from their establishment, have indicated their preference to be at the service of all OCs, as opposed to just one.

#### Other Regional Associative Initiatives

Regionalisation did not impact MSF Hong Kong or the Nordic's involvement with Operational Projects, nor was this a driver for their inception. MSF Hong Kong, organised regionally or not, contributes to Operational Projects through its presence in OCB.

The three Sections involved in the Nordic merger would / could have continued their role in OCB, be it as one big or as three smaller entities. Some involved in the Nordic merger identified having one collective voice in the OCB as a potential benefit. Others didn't see it and/or didn't believe a collective voice could be found.

MWA was established without ambitions on the Executive level, except via - potential - voting at the IGA level.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

- An expanded institutional presence in previously underrepresented areas was of interest – Executive and Associative – for Operational Projects. A greater closeness to the field was a means to improve the quality of the social mission, and the agility and reactivity of the movement.
- The introduction of the regional level was not specifically targeted.
- Many initiative takers behind the Regional Associations had hoped for an Operational Projects capacity of their own. This was curtailed, with OCs driving a development in which new entities took up a role in Operational Projects through the OC platforms only. OCB took up a central role in the establishment of SAA, and OCA in SARA.
- Regardless of Operational Projects capacity, the Regional Associations all expressed a preference to contribute to the movement beyond the specific OC they were linked to. For EAA and LAT, this materialised in not being linked to any specific OC. Still, EAA was initially supported by OCA and both are now supported by OCBA.

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<sup>5</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.

## 6. SUMMARY OF DRIVING FACTORS

Please find below a summary of the ambitions associated with the establishment of Regional Associations:

	<b>Regionalisation</b> (Establishing Associations on regional rather than national footing)	<b>Expansion to previously underrepresented areas</b> (Formal incorporation of new associative interest in Associations)	<b>Associations without Executive</b> (Incorporate associative interest without role in Executive – only applicable to LAT and EAA)
<b>Contributing to Associative Life:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create vibrant and engaged debate by pooling a sufficient critical mass, internal proximity and diversity</li> <li>• Counter overly nationalistic interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture enthusiasm to contribute to MSF in underrepresented areas</li> <li>• Integration of new volunteers, commitment to growth</li> <li>• Incorporate new perspectives to strengthen Associative Life and inform delivery of the social mission</li> <li>• Increase closeness to and understanding of operating environments</li> <li>• Facilitate debate distant from Europe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to the movement outside of vested institutional interests</li> <li>• Affirm the importance of Associative Life independent from governance and roles in the Executive</li> </ul>
<b>Contributing to Associative Governance:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep growth under control and international governance manageable, not undermine reactivity</li> <li>• Viable Associations by tapping into sufficient critical mass and internal proximity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolve into a truly international movement, reinforcement of ‘without borders’ ideology; better incorporation of other parts of the world</li> <li>• Better reflect internal diversity in governance, a lessening of Western identity and increase of dynamism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate all associative interest in governance, regardless of roles in the Executive</li> <li>• Transcending the OC grouping structure</li> </ul>
<b>Contributing to Indirect Operational Projects Support:</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local associative underpinning for resource mobilisation – only applicable to SARA</li> </ul>	None
<b>Contributing to Operational Projects Support:</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local associative underpinning for better tapping into local resources, greater local connectedness</li> </ul>	None
<b>Contributing to Operational Projects:</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local associative underpinning for greater closeness to the field/ patients, greater agility and reactivity</li> <li>• Growth of OC groups</li> </ul>	None

# CURRENT FUNCTIONING

Regional Associations were meant to play a certain role in Associative Life, Associative Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects. About 6 years into their development, this section highlights the progress that has been made. It aims to outline which added value has been provided, what has worked and what has not, and thereby respond to the second question of the ToR.

Focus is on Associative Life and Associative Governance. Delving deep into the contributions of the Regional Associations to the Executive fell outside of the remit of this Review. Moreover, Associative Life and Governance are currently central to the debate around the development of Regional Associations.

Please find in the annexes a more detailed stock-taking of each of the Regional Associations and Regional Associative Initiatives. Please keep in mind this Review does not present a full analysis of the Initiatives; it is limited to what pertains to increasing the overall understanding.

Lastly, the issues at play in the development of the Regional Associations are largely common to all four. However, not all issues are equally critical to each Regional Association. All four are unique in their history and current functioning.

## 1. ASSOCIATIVE LIFE

### Geographical and political context

- A challenge prominent with all four Regional Association is the vastness of the territory. This impacts on travel (time, distance, cost) and thus opportunities to meet face-to-face. It is by all considered a critical challenge, but not exclusive to Regional Associations. It is recognised that similar challenges can be / are faced within one and the same country, or in smaller regions.
- All four to some extent are challenged by how their location of establishment is perceived by members residing in other countries in the region. Also here, SARA arguably faces the greatest challenge, as perceptions are compounded by substantial geo-political divides.
- In addition, SARA faces the challenge of travel restrictions for some nationals in the region it covers. Only the representatives of local Associative groupings attend the GA (also because of travel cost), which reduces the GA's functioning as a platform for informal exchanges and debate.
- Political awareness is differently developed and expressed in different cultures. Freedom of speech, debate culture, attitudes towards 'bodies and people of authority' etc. play out differently in the regions, or parts thereof, where the Regional Associations are based.
- The long-standing operational presence of MSF in the regions where the Regional Associations are established was by all highlighted as conducive to MSF's acceptance in the region.

### Membership

- The Regional Associations have an inclusive and participatory membership from across the region. The membership is often close to the operational environments of MSF and many members have recent experience working with MSF in operations. But, as with all Associations, not all members are equally active and engaged. The membership is in many respects not a homogeneous whole.
- All four Associations, on a balance, consider their level of internal cultural coherence sufficient to formulate common perspectives. The internal diversity is considered an asset to allow for ideas to crystallise. Most still stand behind Regional Associations to have stronger and more viable Associations, based on sufficient critical mass of commonality and diversity.
- All Regional Associations insist that building the membership takes time. They all feel progress is being made, but it is too early to judge the added value on the basis of what they have succeeded to accomplish so far. For this, they refer to how long it took before the membership of other Associations became fully capacitated. They also stress that improving membership requires increasing awareness on how MSF works. This is considered a priority by all.

- It is at times difficult to keep the membership engaged, linked to the limited possibilities to engage and a lack of awareness about / appreciation for their role within the movement. However, all Regional Associations exhibit an engaged activist spirit, be it at times not well coordinated with other parts of the movement.
- More prominent in some than other Regional Associations is the issue of membership not being accustomed to debate as MSF practices it. Linked to that, it was expressed that some members struggle dissociating hierarchical working relationships from debate on a footing of equality.
- Access to members is challenging due to internet coverage, diversity of languages and impediments to travel. SARA, SAA and EAA experience issues with language diversity. EAA has as common language (English) as does SAA, but this disregards local languages, and respectively Djibouti, Burundi and Rwanda (French) and Mozambique (Portuguese). SARA also has English as a common language, but it could be said that the challenge of local languages is greatest in SARA. All four face varying levels and types of capacity across the region: different levels of access to internet, different levels of education etc.
- Input and interest from expats has been considered insufficient overall, with exception of LAT. Having more input from members with international experience is considered to bring a wider understanding of MSF into the Associations.
- There is a continued feeling that Regional Associations have significant new or unique contributions to offer on the Associative Life level, because of their alternative point of view on their regions and the world, a greater closeness to areas of operation and a greater distance to the centre of decision making of MSF in Europe.

#### Local Associative groupings

- All Regional Associations work through local Associative groupings to make the Associative Life function, and see this critical to overcome the vastness of the region and create actual internal proximity. It is often through the local Associative groupings that the central level is connected to the members, and the connection with the Field Associative Debates (FADs) are also made through these.
- These local Associative groupings generally have a representative selected or elected, often named a 'Focal Point (FP)'. Some local Associative groupings are structured mirroring the set-up of the Regional Associations, with a full-fledged elected Board of their own.
- All express that the capacity and engagement of local Associative groupings varies from location to location, but all Regional Associations have pockets of well-functioning and engaged local Associative groupings within their membership. Some close-knit local Associative groupings sustain in countries where MSF has closed down its missions. It was highlighted in interviews that local Associative groupings require a tailored approach.
- Local Associative groupings are considered more naturally close to each other, which is seen as a strength in terms of formulating an own voice and some of them seem to have already developed distinctive Associative cultures and approaches. Local Associative groupings are at times also biased by their particular shared experiences.
- Financial means dedicated to the building membership are considered insufficient. All state that it is difficult to dedicate sufficient time and resources to their internal development. But regardless, many local Associative groupings make it work, consistent with the volunteering spirit of MSF.
- Local Associative groupings are at times supported by the missions they are close to, be it financially or through allowing staff members time to engage in the Associative Life of the Regional Associations. This is person-dependent and reduces the capacity of local Associative groupings to develop independently and with consistency.

#### Board and Association Coordination

- The Boards and Association Coordinators all express to have limited time, resources and capacity to engage with the membership and build its capacity. Board members in many instances are assigned to maintain connection with specific local Associative groupings, but the success of this system varies, depending on the Board member. The Association Coordinators engage primarily through the local Associative groupings and the representatives they have selected or elected.



- GA debates are lively and considered to be improving continuously. It was regularly mentioned that, in terms of engagement and enthusiasm of members, Regional Associations could stand the test of comparison with GAs of traditional Associations. It has however been mentioned that GAs should be more a process than an event.
- There is agreement that the Associative Life should be focused on the delivery of the social mission. There is however also agreement that it is at times challenging to know exactly what this is, considering the expectations and levels of awareness of the membership in relation to the expectations of the movement.
- All recognise that alternative and innovative approaches are necessary to establish and maintain the internal proximity needed for realising added value. In addition, the importance to let ideas travel and be strengthened through confrontation with other points of view, was mentioned.

### Institutional connectedness

- Often, Regional Associations participate actively in the FAD system and Associative activities of the Regional Associations, co-existing well in the missions (healthy multiplicity). They however acknowledge some challenges such as missions expected to fund Associative activities, unavailability of mission staff to partake in activities of the Regional Associations, lack of coordination, lack of induction of national staff (possible future members of the Regional Associations) and Heads of Missions (HoMs) lacking an interest in the Associative Life. FADs are furthermore appreciated, but considered insufficient.
- Regional Associations regret that the support received from other entities is not consistent. Many missions and other Executive entities have supported the development of the Associative Life, but there is still a part that is negatively inclined towards the Associative Life. At times, Operational Projects are seen as one and the same as the delivery of the social mission, with a disregard for the role of the Associative Life in it. This is problematic for the Regional Associations as its membership has a substantial portion of active MSF staff and their development is currently very much focused on the Associative Life.
- Regional Associations feel it would be beneficial to have more - and a more direct - engagement with other entities and people from across the movement to build their capacity in the Associative Life.
- Finding an entrance into the movement is considered difficult. There is a feeling that not enough effort is put in collecting contributions from the members and channelling them into the movement. Added value remains a vague concept that is used at will. There is an impatience as to what added value exactly is, and an overly controlling reflex in terms of what it can and cannot be. Difficulty of contributing meaningfully is linked to a lack of means and clarity on the role of the Association in debate relevant to the entire movement.
- It is felt that there is, within the movement, a lack of conceptualisation of the Associative Life, and thus very little practical guidance on how to develop it better. The development of the Regional Associations focuses too much on them as single power-holding entities within a vertical system of representation (actors in the Associative Governance), and not as enablers of multiple, fluid, horizontal and informal debate (actors in the Associative Life).
- The limited scrutiny the traditional Associations are under in comparison to the scrutiny put on the Regional Associations - in terms of providing added value in the Associative Life - is questioned by many.

## CONCLUSION

Several barriers need to be addressed to maximise the potential added value of Regional Associations in the realm of the Associative Life, namely:

- The resources (people, skills, information, plans, approaches, time, money, access etc.) available to build capacity in the Associative Life are currently limited. There is a discrepancy with the resources put into some other Associations, certainly when considering the scale and complexity of the challenges Regional Associations face.
- ‘Internal proximity<sup>6</sup>’ in Regional Associations is challenged by their vastness, insufficient internet access, cultural and linguistic divides etc. People feel that pragmatism should prevail in this, even if that entails reconsidering

<sup>6</sup> ‘Internal proximity’ can be understood as: ‘people within MSF need to be able to ‘reach each other’ in debate – linked to language, shared experiences, distances etc.’ It is considered critical to constructive and relevant debate.



geographic delineations. Local Associative groupings are potentially strong, and it is not guaranteed that the regional level will succeed in satisfying or valorising all of them.

- Regional Associations have a large ‘external proximity’<sup>7</sup> to the social mission. The global perspective is however often less strong. They struggle to find the middle-ground between their contextual experiences and what the movement needs as a whole.
- Vested interests: Establishing Associations on regional footing did not overcome territoriality in debate. Regional Associations delinked from an executive do feel a greater liberty in forming their own voice and institutional links. On the other hand, Regional Associations are developing their own institutional interests within the movement. And, not being linked to an Executive poses challenges to remaining well-connected to the rest of the movement.
- Finding entrance into the movement: The Regional Associations are expected to harvest an internal ‘view’; this view needs to be an added value based on a contextually unique perspective; relevant for the global movement; and it should not enter the domain of operations. It needs to be brought up through the Associative Governance channels of recommendations and motions, correctly phrased, timed and lobbied for, somewhat distant to the members. It is a thin line that Regional Associations are expected to walk on.
- There appears a lack of investment at the movement level to pro-actively engage and capitalise on the ongoing debates within the Regional Associations.

A note on the other Regional Associative Initiatives

MSF Hong Kong	The Nordic	MSF MWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The regionalisation of Hong Kong stems from a pragmatic approach to growth, much less focused on providing a new perspective through the Associative Life. Not all members participate in the Associative, also due to cultural conceptions on positions of authority, and ways of being politically vocal.</li> <li>• Also MSF Hong Kong faces the challenge of covering a vast territory, with internal commonalities and diversities. This materialises in a bit of a disconnection between the Associative Governance in which the regional has the upper-hand, and Associative Life mainly functioning on locally.</li> <li>• HK feels at times removed from the Europe-centred debates that go on in the movement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It took several years and intense support to develop the separate entities of MSF Denmark, Norway and Sweden. As a result they now each have a unique identity, similar as to what each of the Regional Associations is seeking to achieve. A merger would not mean the summing up of parts, but the development of a new entity. The prospect of the merger leading to a new collective identity is one of the biggest reasons for hesitance.</li> <li>• In the Nordic, cultural diversity in the region (internal and external to MSF) was an impediment to merging. And, even if the territory it covers is comparatively small, distances were mentioned as an impediment to its potential functioning as one, as this was already prominent within each individual Nordic Section (time, cost of travel – Associative Life city-based).</li> <li>• The materialisation of added value to the movement is central to the merger as well as to Regional Associations. The question of what version of the Nordic institutional presence to MSF would present the greatest added value to the movement was never resolved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Movement-Wide Association is primarily a confirmation that many MSF’ers believe in the importance of collective reflection to keep the movement on its toes. The MWA is moreover not linked to an Executive. It seeks to contribute to the movement beyond the realm of the Executive, as do the members of the Regional Associations (even the ones linked to an Executive).</li> <li>• What it has in common with the Regional Associations as well, is the challenge to develop the Associative Life. Not even having a territory to delineate its membership, it actively seeks approaches and resources to create sufficient internal proximity. MWA moreover attempts to function mainly through the internet, which reduces the need for travel but excludes people that have insufficient access to internet.</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> ‘External proximity’ can be defined as: ‘one needs to form a point of view in relation to a subject one is somehow close to’. Also this is considered critical to constructive debate and formulating a unique perspective.

## 2. ASSOCIATIVE GOVERNANCE

### Legal

- SAA, LAT and EAA are all three formally established MSF Associations in conformity with MSF Statutes. All three have or are in the process of coming to grips with their fiduciary responsibilities.
- SARA's formal establishment is pending; running into complications with regards to fitting in Indian law (no nationals from Bangladesh and Pakistan allowed to sit on the Board); governmental policies in regards to humanitarian work; and identifying the appropriate establishment form. Some see this as a real impediment to its functioning as a formal Association, whereas others consider it not critical.

### Board

- All Regional Associations hold Board elections as per the MSF Statutes. All Boards are elected by the local membership, and have or are close to having a Board composition conforming to the Statutes. Some of the local Associative groupings have formalised their governance, by electing representatives and deputies. And some mirror the set-up of the regional level with President, Vice-President etc.
- However, all express to have or have had problems with leadership, and none of the four estimates that their Association can confidently guarantee a suitable Board composition in the years to come. At this current time, there is however, with the membership, at least a reasonable level of satisfaction with the Boards in place. This level varies per Regional Association. Presence in other decision-making forums of MSF and trainings has been greatly appreciated as a learning opportunity. All are in favour of more coaching and other types of capacity support. It has also been pointed out that many challenges faced in terms of Board composition are alike the challenges faced in other Associations.
- All Regional Associations have expressed concerns with the Board election process. They consider that the Board elections are too much of a popularity contest and struggle for national representation, and doesn't sufficiently guarantee that the Board has all the capacities it needs. Board candidates overall are perceived to not be sufficiently informed or aware of what their role in Boards will entail, and, linked to that, exhibit different levels of understanding of, and engagement with MSF. Representation of different countries on the Board is however considered beneficial in terms of remaining well-connected with the membership across the region, and for legitimacy across the region.
- In addition, the Regional Associations state it is difficult to engage the right people to sit on the Board – linked to the volunteer nature of the role, the perception that Regional Associations are just for National Staff, travel distances and the Conflict of Interests (CoI) principle. Over the years, the engagement of internationally experienced MSF'ers dwindled for several reasons (except for LAT). This is by many considered to impact negatively on their development, and is taken up as a priority for change. Some Boards have co-opted members. The Associations are positively inclined towards co-optation, be it that they prefer more independence in deciding on co-optation.
- All insisted that a lot of progress has been made on the level of formalising the Regional Associations. Still all also feel that more time is needed to make the Associative Governance work smoothly. They refer to how long it took before some of the traditional Associations were fully up and running. Interviewees state that developing a governance structure takes up a lot of energy. People get lost in it, impacting negatively on their motivation.
- All Boards express concerns about the volume of their work and the difficulty of adequately functioning on a volunteering basis. The limited financial support is also said to impact on the functioning of the Associative Governance. Especially the position of the President would require a full-time and paid commitment. There is however also agreement across Regional Associations that financial investment has to be matched with an outcome, and that spending is to be done strategically and prudently.
- SAA actively provides oversight over its Executive. The focus of the Executive is primarily on the national level and not always at the centre of interest to the membership. The Board is at times caught between the interests of their membership on the one hand, and the Executive on the other. LAT, SARA and EAA are working closely with their nearest Executive. These Executives have been / are being established quite independently from the interests of the membership – rather reflecting the interests of OCs and their membership. All are however looking for a greater and better collaboration.

- All Regional Associations have an Association Coordinator (with or without Assistant) in place, and indicate that the role of the Association Coordinator has become more clear and strong over time. The role of the AC is considered very demanding. It is considered a double role: towards the Board and towards the membership. It requires a constant juggling of competing priorities. AC's express not being able to attend to all their responsibilities all the time.

### Institutional Connectedness

- All Regional Associations now hold annual GAs, in conformity with the Statutes, and with a substantial buy-in from across the region. Attending the GA is challenged by the vastness of the territory. LAT, EAA and SAA aim to have as many members present as possible. LAT and SAA in addition rotate the location where they hold their GA. SARA has only the representatives of the local Associative groupings attending the GA. Many stated that the quality of their GAs has improved over the years.
- All Regional Associations appoint 2 members, of which one is the President, to attend and vote on the IGA. They however feel somewhat distant to the international Associative Governance level and Europe-centred decision making (OC GAs, IGAs etc.). There is varying capacity to engage in Motions and Recommendations. They state the system is not up to date with current communication possibilities; too distant from the membership; dilutes rather than strengthens opinions, and provides insufficient return to the membership. SAA and LAT have been active in formulating / promoting Motion formulation, and EAA and SARA more hesitant towards it.
- The Regional Associations have so far succeeded to channel most associative interest in their region into the movement. So far, no groups have stood up to claim an independent Association. However, talks about reconsidering some territorial delineations (contraction, expansion and split-offs) do take place in some cases. Making the Associations work and finding a better connection to the rest of the Movement are the two main motivations behind that. There is a general feeling that Associative delineations could / should be reshaped.
- Overall, perhaps for LAT and SARA a bit less in comparison to the other two, there is appreciation for the support received from IB, International Association Coordinator (IAC) and IO. The direct interaction with the dedicated IB member and the IAC are considered beneficial to their development. All question to certain extents whether the movement as a whole should/ could support the development of the Regional Associations better; rallying collectively behind the development of these new Associations, helping them to find their place in the movement to the benefit of the movement as a whole.

### Recurring perspectives on the regional level

Below are some of the recurring ideas in MSF specifically attached to Regional Associations. They are not necessarily majority opinions; however, they were expressed by a significant number of interviewees and are therefore worth recording:

- Regionalisation is by some seen as a containment strategy; not allowing new Members to take up too much space in the decision making of MSF. This is linked to questions about equitable representation. Linked to this, many feel a deep disappointment about the non-merging of existing Associations. Many feel the level of scrutiny on new Institutional Members is disproportionate to that placed on existing Associations.
- Many question the regionalisation strategy as being overly reactive not sufficiently motivated by a clear vision of what type of governance MSF needs, now and going into the future. Neither can the loss of reactivity of MSF – or the risk thereto – be solely attributed to the international governance level. Interviewees retrace it additionally to a disproportionate growth of office-based functions, a change in profile of MSF'ers etc. Nor does reactivity on the international level always coincide with reactivity further down.
- There is also some fear that regionalisation will lead to 'yet another layer', reinforcing a bureaucratic and hierarchical system of decision making. Also, regionalisation is again territory related, by which the national identity is simply replaced by a regional identity. There is no reason to believe that overly nationalistic interests will not be copied / continued as overly regionalist interests.

## CONCLUSION

Central challenges are faced in realising the full potential added value of the Regional Associations in the Associative Governance, namely:

- The Associations struggle to ensure stable internal governance. It was pointed out that it takes time to develop a strong organisational culture, and traditional Associations at times also struggle to compose suitable Boards.
- The capacity of Regional Associations to absorb the Associative interest from a vast region is partially questioned, leading to talks about reconsidering the reach of the regions.
- Regional Associations perceive a disconnectedness in the ‘chain of Formal Governance’. FAD’s, GA’s, Motions and Recommendations don’t succeed sufficiently in allowing ideas to travel within the movement and impact on decision making, Their impact on decision making is still quite limited.
- Overseeing an Executive (applies only to SAA) has proven challenging because of the lack of overlap between the interests of the Executive and the members. The Board finds itself, at times, torn between its responsibilities towards the Executive and its membership.
- Not being linked to an Executive (applies to LAT, EAA and SARA) challenges the connectedness with the movement as a whole. In fact, all Regional Associations have sought and established links with Executives, partially to counter this challenge.
- The clarity of processes and positions in governance are easy to cling to in comparison to the lack of clarity around the Associative Life. This risks the Associative Governance to overshadow the Associative Life. The most prominent example is the ‘Conflict of Interest’ clause. The Regional Associations hope for pragmatic solutions to have more Executive and internationally experienced input into their development.
- The reactivity of the movement is attributed to many more factors than just the number of Institutional members. And, insufficient internal proximity in some regions, and of some countries within regions, undermines the viability of Associations, and increases the risk that certain entities will ask for individual membership.
- Regional Associations increase the diversity in governance, on the institutional level. Their establishment does not provide an answer to questions about equity in the movement, nor does it guarantee diversity across the movement.

### A note on the other Regional Associative Initiatives

The three Regional Associative Initiatives taken up in the review don’t experience any major contextual impediments to their functioning on the Associative Governance level.

MSF Hong Kong	The Nordic	MSF MWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSF Hong Kong has a stable Board. Finding interested candidates however remains a challenge.</li> <li>• It actively seeks representation from across the region, to connect better with the membership. In this, it doesn’t experience the same nationalistic politics as the Regional Associations do. In addition, HK is not perceived as the ‘Big Brother’ in the region, and the membership has a different outlook on the position of Board member.</li> <li>• HK is proof that associating on a regional footing can work in terms of Formal Governance, as it did provide a suitable platform for its members without having to further expand the institutional presence of MSF. But, in terms of providing added value to the movement, the path carved out for HK, as a Partner Section of OCB, was clearer than it is for the Regional Associations. Also, its regionalisation wasn’t under much scrutiny from the movement.</li> <li>• HK is active in terms of defining the movement’s set-up. HK looks into increasing its emergency response capacity in a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlike the Regional Associations, the Nordic built on a long individual and collective institutional history. Rethinking its Associative Governance set-up and contribution to the movement was a central challenge in the merger. The three Sections involved could fall back on their well-established role of Partner Section with OCB.</li> <li>• The Nordic felt at times that the International Associative could have</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MWA actively sought to shy away from vested institutional interests. In its disinterest in voting right in the IGA, it seeks to build up its relevance beyond the institutional.</li> <li>• The MWA dodged the pressure from the movement because many people simply</li> </ul>

<p>collaboration with MSF Japan and Australia; it seeks to overcome the differences between OCs; and it engages in discussions on further institutional expansion in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HK also feels at times a distance to decision making in Europe.</li> </ul>	<p>supported them better to realise the merger.</p>	<p>didn't believe in it at all.</p>
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### 3. INDIRECT OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT, OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT AND OPERATIONAL PROJECTS

#### Membership and Board

- Ambitions on the level of the Executive were quite prominent in the lead up to the establishment of the Regional Associations, but have now been reduced. The focus has since shifted to their development on the level of the Associative. Members still consider themselves 'being mobilised to act'<sup>8</sup>. As a sort of global workforce, they want to remain available to MSF. Regional Associations provide this opportunity on the level of the Associative, but their commitment goes beyond that.
- Members of Regional Associations are often perceived as representatives of the movement by their communities, including officials. When not informed about operational activities, this puts them – and possibly MSF – in an awkward position.
- The members of Regional Associations find it difficult to rally behind Executive activities that take place in only limited parts of their region. The members are not that interested in taking on an oversight role if that doesn't bring them closer to tangible Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects activities.
- The communities the Regional Associations originate from have mostly been at the receiving end of international humanitarian aid and as a result have less exposure to and appreciation of inter-OC headquarter dynamics.

#### Institutional Connectedness

- All Regional Associations are developing their role in Indirect Operational Projects Support, by supporting the nearest Executive. The intensity and success of this differs per Regional Association. Activities include supporting visibility of and awareness raising about MSF, recruitment, fundraising, networking and communication not linked to operations. To a lesser extend Regional Associations also contribute to Operational Projects Support, with the minimum version supporting trainings or engaging with local medical or humanitarian networks, again mainly through their nearest Executive. Regional Associations don't engage in Operational Projects. Most Regional Associations however see a role for them in increasing the coherence between the activities of OCs in their region.
- Dynamics between the Association and its nearest Executive vary substantially between the Regional Associations, influenced by historical reasons, differences in organisational cultures and current and planned areas of engagement between the two:
  - SAA provides oversight over its Executive. The other three Regional Associations are actively working towards taking on oversight over an Executive.
  - SARA was intended to take on the oversight over the Executive in Delhi, but so far this has not materialised. Challenges on the Executive and Associative were encountered, and between the two. The Executive is mostly focused on the national level, and its interests don't always collide with those of the regional membership
  - LAT is in discussion with OCG and OCBA to see whether and how it could take on oversight over the Executives currently overseen by them in the region. This discussion profits from an ongoing positive collaboration between the three entities in the region.
  - EAA's is slowly growing closer to its nearest Executive – OCBA Nairobi Office – that has expressed ambitions to become a Branch, and later on evolve into a Section. Because of this, providing oversight over an Executive also shows up in EAA's future.

<sup>8</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.

- All see the connection with their nearest Executive at the same time as helpful, limiting and of relative importance. It helps to be better connected to the movement; and have more access to information, support for offices and administration etc. It is seen as limiting in terms of independence to contribute to the entire movement; and, for SAA, in overshadowing the development of the Associative. It is also seen as of relative importance: not solving the fundamental issue of their development in terms of wanting to contribute to the movement as a whole. Regional Associations don't necessarily see linking up with their nearest Executive as the perfect solution, it is believed to be the best option currently available to them to realise their ambition of being full-fledged MSF entities and truly 'mobilised to act'. A Section is seen as the perfect example of such an entity, and has become the ultimate ambition for some. In that, it is not the establishment on national footing that appeals most.
- The Associative underpinning of many Executives in the South is most often still with the traditional Associations; and many are working towards changing that. Realising the full potential of this expansion of MSF into previously underrepresented areas is for many still the ultimate goal.
- SAA has a voting right on the operational plan of OCB. LAT has a voting presence in OCG, LAT and EAA have a voting seat with OCBA, and SARA and EAA a non-voting seat in OCA. They thus all formally contribute to the operational plan of an OC. However, Regional Associations feel a great distance to MSF operations. Though Operational Centers have a global outlook, their decisions are considered tainted by their location (for example in terms of identifying need). Operational connectedness through Operational Directors is often perceived as too distant to the membership.
- Many believe that giving Regional Associations a greater role in Indirect Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support would be a means to integrate them better into MSF, also on the level of the Informal and Associative Governance. Many feel the split between the Executive and the Associative that is dominating the current thinking about institutional development of the movement is overly artificial. The concept of 'being mobilised to act' which was the main motivation for people to associate in the first place, is being disintegrated.
- Operational Projects is looked at differently. Responsibility for Operational Projects lays with OCs, and Regional Associations are kept at a distance even if many operational activities take place within their region. This sets them apart from the traditional Associations that generally do not have OCs operating in their reach. There is logic in this in terms of maintaining the high standards MSF sets for itself and the high risk it takes on in certain contexts. Many however believe that MSF could and should take on more risk. Some examples can be interpreted as rethinking the role of the members in operational activities. Members of MSF HK shared information with the general public on SARS, moved into China after the Szechuan earthquake before China closed its borders, and were among the first responders to typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Members of MSF Italy tracked refugees in the response to the migration crisis in Europe, and OCB seeks the Indonesian Associative grouping's input for determining and underpinning its mission.

## CONCLUSIONS

Engaging with the following dynamics will be critical in achieving the most out of the Regional Associations:

- The roles and responsibilities attributed to Regional Associations have not sufficiently satisfied their ambition of 'being mobilised to act'. This is due to the fact that both are not developed sufficiently well yet, but also points at a need to clarify the role of Regional Associations in Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects.
- Members of Regional Associations are de facto representatives of the movement in their region. The interdependence of MSF entities has an additional player to deal with. The risk in that has been recognised, and in some instances the benefits of it harvested. Still, a lack of clarity persists.
- Formally / completely linking up Regional Associations to Executive entities is proving difficult. There is insufficient overlap between the interest of the members and the Executives - developing largely independent from the expectations of the members, and what they have to offer. At the same time, many of these nearest Executives have also been established quite recently and have experienced substantial challenges in their first years of establishment. The specific dynamics are different for every Regional Association.
- Regional Associations feel far removed from the operational decision making in Europe, even if they are all involved in the operational planning of an OC. Without collective ownership Operational Centres are seen merely as foreign visitors, and not the operational arm of an organisation that is supported locally and globally.



A note on the other Regional Associative Initiatives

MSF Hong Kong	The 'Nordic'	MSF MWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The regionalisation of MSF Hong Kong was motivated by expansion beyond the border of Hong Kong in the area of Indirect Operational Projects Support. It did not impact on its role in Operational Projects as long-standing member of the OCB group.</li><li>• MSF Hong Kong does seek a greater role in Operational Projects Support, within the confines of its region and its role in OCB. It however strives to be more and more at the service of the movement just as the Regional Associations. With for example MSF Japan and MSF Australia, they are discussing the establishment a new Regional Association, SEEAP, or other form of increased regional collaboration.</li></ul>	<p>The Nordic merger was initially also meant to rationalise activities in the area of Indirect Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support. With at least 2 of the 3 initiative takers hesitant towards this, this ambition moved to the background. Also, the initiative takers of the Nordic had an established role in OCB as Partner Section.</p>	<p>The MWA has no ambitions on the level of the Executive. It seeks impact merely through its role in the Associative Life.</p>



# OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

## Question 1: Has the added value been provided?

Regional Associations are already bringing some distinct added value to MSF (see above). Their continued development is likely to reinforce and increase this added value.

However, the three approaches applied with the establishment of Regional Associations - regionalisation, expansion and de-linking from the executive - aren't by themselves sufficient to realise all of the institutional ambitions that have been associated with them. Regionalisation, expansion and de-linking from the executive only provide partial answers to questions the movement is struggling with: incorporating new perspectives, controlling growth, reactivity of the movement, interdependence in operational contexts, diversity etc.

In summary, Regional Associations are valid entities of MSF. But, the institutional challenges the movement faces aren't all resolved with their establishment – see below.

## Question 2: What has and has not worked?

### **Regionalisation**

The introduction of the regional level in associating was a deliberate strategy to keep the international Associative Governance manageable, and was believed to improve the quality of the Associative Life. The development of Regional Associations has contributed to both ambitions, except for when physically crossing borders is challenging.

The number of Institutional Members has been kept down – for now, without the movement missing out on Associative interest. And, the Regional Associations are developing a regional associative identity. MSF Hong Kong proves that Associative Governance can be successfully organised on regional footing. And, more and more, the Regional Associations are confirming this. The GAs and some Motions presented at the 2017 IGA prove that Regional Associations are - to certain extent - finding their voice.

There is however a clear risk in seeing the Regional Associations as the unique channel of all the Associative interest and added value present in the regions where they are established. It is not certain whether the current Regional Associations will satisfy all institutional ambitions from within. And, striving for a common voice can be to the detriment of valorising the full reach and diversity of added value from within regions.

The Review also pointed out that associating on regional footing does not deliver on all the ambitions that were intended with it, and even exacerbates some.

It has not proven successful in countering overly nationalistic interests. It is a model linked to territory, and based on institutions holding power (as opposed to a network of MSF'ers, for example). As such, the model reinforces a debate tainted by institutional and territorial interests.

With the establishment of Regional Associations, the relevance of internal proximity on the basis of nationality, culture etc. has been overestimated in comparison to other very relevant internal proximities such as a shared medical expertise, a privileged view on certain politics or other. Geographic coherence is too easily equated with 'internal proximity'. More emphasis is to be put on actively seeking out added value wherever it is – with Regional Associations; with specific members; with local Associative groupings; between members of different Regional Associations or other.

In attempting to overcome territoriality and established institutional interests, the MWA has a much stronger profile. It seeks to contribute to the movement only (for now at least) on the level of the Associative Life. Its debates can essentially be based on any type of internal or external proximity that brings added value to MSF.

The regional level also offers no guarantee for keeping the international Associative Governance manageable. It is an overly re-active strategy that contains new Associative interest rather than promoting it, and risks simply to introduce yet another layer in governance. It doesn't provide a satisfactory answer to what type of governance the movement needs, and what the MSF of the future will look like.

In addition, making Associations work on a large scale comes with substantial investment needs. It is possible though – except for when crossing borders is challenging. The vastness of the territory and the internal diversity are not unique to the Regional Associations. Still, there is a call and need for greater pragmatism, even if that includes reconsidering the territorial reach of the regions or other aspects of their current set-up.

The halt of the Nordic merger can be interpreted along the same lines. Many believed in a regional merger to build a stronger Association and have a more balanced representation at the International Associative Governance level. On the other hand, many simply didn't see enough added value in regionalisation.

### **Expansion to previously underrepresented areas**

With the establishment of Regional Associations, the type of access to the movement for people physically removed from the traditional Associations has changed. Members can now associate locally. This promotes a far wider participation in MSF (though many are still not well integrated because of travel and communication challenges). It also undoubtedly contributes to a lessening of the Western identity of MSF; in these countries and across the globe.

But, Regional Associations are only a partial answer to the ambition to open up MSF to other parts in the world. The concept of debate for example, or 'being mobilised to act'<sup>9</sup> is differently interpreted in different cultures. Even in Europe, the concept of 'association' has a very different meaning in different cultures / communities. Tailor-made approaches are necessary to establish a truly integrated debate within the movement.

Also, it is not because previously underrepresented areas have a formal voice that they have a significant impact on decision making. The central question is not simply whether the Regional Associations exist, but the extent to which they are allowed to influence the movement. Decision making remains centralised in Europe, and even the long-established Association of Hong Kong feels at times distant to it.

OCs are still often perceived as foreign visitors, and not the operational arm of a movement supported locally. With the establishment of the Regional Associations, the interdependence between different MSF entities active in the same territory has increased. Coherence in terms of institutional presence in the South as it exists in the North is yet to be found.

And, the Regional Associations come with their own risk to diversity and the 'without borders' principle. The existence of Regional Associations isn't sufficient to establish diversity across the movement. A disproportionate focus on physical, cultural and linguistic coherence in association goes against the 'without borders' principle. Certainly, the diversity within OC platforms is critical to counter an overly Western outlook.

Moreover, when discussing diversity in the movement, the exclusionary nature of MSF is not to be forgotten. Inclusion in MSF is steered and limited by entrenchment in its principles and way of working – on the level of the individual as well as the institution.

### **Associations de-linked from the Executive**

To bring their unique perspective to the movement, the Regional Associations don't need to be linked to an Executive. This is clear when looking at the development of LAT and EAA so far. The well-functioning of some groups far removed from the central level of Regional Associations and in countries where MSF's missions have closed are also exemplary.

Collaborating with the nearest Executive brings some practical benefits. It allows Regional Associations to be better informed about what goes on in the movement, comes with some administrative and logistic support and is a means to build capacity. And, as the collaboration with the nearest Executive progresses, the added value Regional Associations bring in the realm of the Executive becomes clearer.

On the other hand, working with the nearest Executive doesn't imply much substance yet in terms of 'being mobilised to act'. The Executives' activities are not the result of the capacities and ambitions of the local membership, but of the OCs they were set up by. The activities of the nearest Executives are often too far removed from the interests of the members, and the original ambitions of the Regional Associations.

This causes a tendency back to the 'Section model', as the perfect example of a full-fledged MSF entity. In that, it is not the national level of the Section that appeals most. Sections are perceived as independent entities, more than Regional Associations entitled to shape their contribution to the movement in all of areas of activity.

Working with the nearest Executive is seen as the best option currently available to Regional Associations to realise their ambitions of 'being mobilised to act'. Regional Associations lack clarity in terms of what their role is in the

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<sup>9</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.

Executive. The distance to the original ambitions of each Regional Association is great. It is uncertain that collaborating closely with the nearest Executive is going to lead to the realisation of these original ambitions.

### Question 3: How to maximise the potential of the MSF Associative in the mid to long term?

#### **Maximise the potential of the Regional Associations**

Regional Associations are an expression of the belief in the value of associative expansion to previously underrepresented areas, in terms of Associative Life, Associative Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects. They can thus be seen as legitimate entities, widely motivated across the movement, be it in their current form or other.

This review addresses, under 'Current functioning', how far Regional Associations have come in realising added value and what can be done to support their further development. This pointed out that being regional, based in previously underrepresented areas or loosely linked to an Executive are neither stringent obstacles to, nor guarantees for bringing added value to the movement. What is most critical is the commitment and capacity of Regional Associations to be 'mobilised to act'<sup>10</sup>, both in terms of the space provided, but responsibility taken.

If Regional Associations follow a development trajectory tailored to their specificities; an open mind is kept to reconsider fundamental aspects as needed; and adequate resources are mobilised; they can contribute much more significantly towards realising the ambitions that were originally associated with their establishment<sup>11</sup>. They have the capacity to evolve into full-fledged MSF entities.

It is imperative to separate issues of institutional development from the development of Regional Associations. Their establishment does not solve all institutional issues of MSF, but can provide significant added value to the movement.

#### **Maximise the potential of the Associative overall**

Regionalisation is not irrelevant, but contributes in itself less to improving the Associative than hoped for. Capturing unique perspectives is only guaranteed when Associative Life is well-developed, and not by establishing it on regional rather than national footing. The reactivity of the movement is linked to how different entities within MSF operate and engage with each other, and not solely to the number of Institutional Members. Recurrent is that MSF needs to figure out what / how it will be in the future. Keeping regionalisation as prime strategy is simply insufficient in that. Returning to an encompassing strategy, much more inspired by the essence of MSF, is needed.

In that, Associative Life is essential to the delivery of the social mission, on par with Operational Projects. Associative Governance is a mere means to an end. This recognition is not wide-spread across the movement, which hampers the development of the Associative. A myriad of ideas exists, across the movement, to strengthen the Associative Life. Associative Governance is more contentious, as so much effort has already been put into in over the last years. Since there is still much that can be gained in Associative Life, it is appropriate to invest in that first, while ideas for Associative Governance improvements can brew.

Expanding Association opportunities to previously underrepresented areas is very much in line with the essence of MSF. How such new associative entities are supported and organised determines how much added value they can bring to the movement. The main issue is not whether they are regional or national, nor whether or not they oversee an executive, but to develop them into full-fledged MSF entities, 'mobilised to act', with clear roles in the Associative and the Executive.

Organising Associations without a role in the Executive has proven difficult, whereas linking up Associations with existing Executives has also proven difficult. The Review points out that each situation is different. Per region, a new coherence between Associative and Executive can be found through a process in which both search for what is best for the delivery of the social mission at all times. This process has already started, per individual region.

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<sup>10</sup> Being 'mobilised to act' refers to the nature of MSF as an organization that enables people to make their skills and experience available to locations in the world where, and at times when, these skills and experiences are in critical shortage with an impact on people's health unacceptable from a humanitarian point of view.

<sup>11</sup> Please consult the conclusion boxes under 'Current functioning' for critical issues to be addressed in the further development of the Regional Associations

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation 1: Support the development of Regional Associations more, and better**

### 1.1 Resource Associative Life better

More resources need to be made available to the induction of members; the work of local Associative groupings; and maintaining a close link between the members, the local Associative groupings and the central level of the Regional Associations. Human resources, creative approaches (roaming ACs, innovative capacity building methods, alternative communication tools etc.) and a dedicated budget are the priority here.

### 1.2 Actively seek out and channel the unique contributions of the Regional Associations

A greater investment is needed to identify unique contributions that can positively impact the social mission delivery. This entails actively seeking out which concrete challenges are faced in the delivery of the social mission, and match these with concrete close-to-the-field experiences and expertise that can help to overcome these challenges. Secondly, a greater investment in 'travel' and 'translation' is needed to ensure that these unique contributions crystallise and are brought up into the movement. Putting a dedicated team in place (or assigning) to develop suitable approaches (methods, deliver proof of concept) is recommended, in a first phase. In a second phase, it is recommended to integrate such approaches into the regular set-up and way of working of Regional Associations.

### 1.3 Resource Associative Governance better

More resources need to be dedicated to guarantee the availability of Board members, and especially the President. In second instance, the Boards would benefit from a greater investment in capacity building (exposure to other Associations within the movement, trainings, temporary technical reinforcements etc.).

### 1.4 Reinforce the strategic planning capacity of the Regional Associations

Pragmatic solutions are necessary to ensure all the capacities needed to develop the Regional Associations are actively engaged: Executives of all OCs in the region, internationally experienced MSF'ers from or with affinity for the region, members of other Regional or National Associations etc. This set of institutional representatives and experienced profiles can be engaged as a sort of 'advisory team' (with differentiation of roles possibly) to think beyond the immediate concerns towards realising their full potential. The most prominent issues to tackle are the internal capacity building, the institutional coherence of the movement in the region, the relationship Associative – Executive, and realising the full potential of the Regional Associations as it was originally envisaged. The relationship between such a team and the Regional Association is to be crafted carefully, with respect for the Board as formal representatives, and the members as associates.

## **Recommendation 2: Think differently about institutional development**

### 2.1 Clarify how MSF entities are supposed to work

Re-direct focus, on the level of international governance, from Regional Associations towards what MSF entities in general are supposed to be, in line with the Principles and ways of working of MSF. The roles all MSF entities take up in Associative Life and Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects need to be defined with more clarity, reflecting the spirit of being 'mobilised to act' around the social mission of MSF. It is, as such, recommended to seek institutional coherence bottom-up, starting from the actual and potential added values of all MSF entities, and have these inform overall institutional development strategies.

### 2.2 Develop the Associative Life more actively and creatively

In a similar fashion as what has been recommended for the Regional Associations, it is recommended to attribute more resources to the development of Associative Life across the movement. In first instance, the understanding of and appreciation for the Associative Life is to be consolidated into all aspects of the movement and functioning of its entities (in Job Descriptions, on IGA/ GA agendas, in staff induction etc.). In second instance, creative approaches (for example: new types of AC and Association collaborations, alternative debate fora, attributing a greater role to MWA to seek out alternative proximities, facilitate direct exchange between members and local Associative groupings across institutional borders, confront 'hot' and 'cold' membership, and 'global' and 'local' perspectives, seek a productive co-existence of FADs and other associative activities etc.) are to be developed and deployed to reinforce

what is essential to a healthy Associative Life: horizontal travelling and consolidation of ideas, multiplicity, diversity, and internal and external proximity. It is recommended to bring together, from across the movement, all existing ideas and experience, and consolidate that into a diverse set of tools, entities, projects and methods for use and application across the movement, or in specific pockets thereof.

### 2.3 Look for gains in efficiency and effectiveness in Associative Governance

It is recommended to review the methods and tools (Motions and Recommendations, GAs and IGAs, FADs, Annual Report etc.) currently used to crystallise the common debate of Associative Life into the formal decision making of the Associative Governance, without putting in question its entire set-up. This Review didn't specifically focus on the 'chain of governance', but quite some suggestions for improvement were made, such as: approaching the GAs and IGAs more as a process than an event (shortcutting shared views across Associations earlier on; giving more feedback to members etc.); giving a more prominent place to learnings and needs from the field (for example including elected individual Executive representation – thematic or for a period in time); or stimulate a closer collaboration between Boards of different Associations. In such a review, gains in efficiency and effectiveness need to be looked for. It is recommended to focus on methods and tools that incorporate a great diversity of perspectives while maintaining focus on the delivery of the social mission and the specific Principles and ways of working of MSF.

### 2.4 Change narrative on the relationship Associative - Executive

Move from a narrative of 'split' between the Associative and the Executive to a narrative that includes Associative Life, Associative Governance, Indirect Operational Projects Support, Operational Projects Support and Operational Projects Support as 5 essential but distinct activities of MSF. Move away from equating Operational Projects to the delivery of the social mission, and letting Associative Governance overshadow Associative Life. Understand 'being mobilised to act' as taking on a clear role in one or more of these 5 activities, and ensure it is at all times clear, internally and externally, to individuals and MSF entities, how this role contributes to the delivery of the social mission.

# LIST OF ANNEXES

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[ANNEX II: COLLECTIONS OF FINDINGS](#)

[ANNEX III: FINDINGS OVERARCHING](#)

[ANNEX IV: FINDINGS MSF EAA](#)

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(Please find the Annexes in separate documents)

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