



# REVIEW OF REGIONAL ASSOCIATIVE INITIATIVES

[JANUARY 2018]

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.

## DISCLAIMER

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

# CONTENTS

ACRONYMS.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	9
PROJECT BACKGROUND .....	9
EVALUATION SCOPE .....	9
METHODOLOGY .....	10
LIMITATIONS .....	10
FINDINGS.....	11
COMING ABOUT .....	11
1. DRIVING FACTOR 1: THE ASSOCIATIVE LIFE.....	11
2. DRIVING FACTOR 2: THE ASSOCIATIVE GOVERNANCE .....	13
3. DRIVING FACTOR 3: INDIRECT OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT.....	15
4. DRIVING FACTOR 4: OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT .....	16
5. DRIVING FACTOR 5: OPERATIONAL PROJECTS .....	17
6. SUMMARY OF DRIVING FACTORS.....	19
CURRENT FUNCTIONING .....	20
1. ASSOCIATIVE LIFE .....	20
2. ASSOCIATIVE GOVERNANCE .....	24
3. INDIRECT OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT, OPERATIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORT AND OPERATIONAL PROJECTS.....	27
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS.....	30
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	33
LIST OF ANNEXES.....	35

# ACRONYMS

AC	Association Coordinator
ALF	Associative Life in the Field
ASC	Associative Standing Committee
CoI	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 regionalistic 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**

- + keeps the number of Institutional Members down and as such contributes to keeping the international Associative Governance manageable
- + ensures sufficient critical mass per Association
- + allows to incorporate all associative interest in the South
- + promotes the development of a regional associative identity and unique voice

- may not be able to bring all added value from within the region to the surface
- may not be able to satisfy all institutional ambitions from within the region
- is not successful in countering overly nationalistic interests
- makes it challenging to achieve sufficient internal proximity to have constructive debate
- overestimates the relevance of cultural, linguistic and physical proximity over proximity in terms of expertise and experiences
- doesn't in itself guarantee a manageable international governance
- poses the risk of having introduced yet another layer in governance
- does not provide an answer to what the MSF of the future will look like
- contains rather than empowers new associative interest
- requires substantial investment needs whereas there may be more efficient and effective alternatives

## The expansion of Association opportunities to previously underrepresented areas

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <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.



Stockholm Evaluation Unit  
Médecins Sans Frontières  
[www.evaluation.msf.org](http://www.evaluation.msf.org)