



ANNUAL REPORT

2020



DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

The Covid-19 pandemic is still gripping the world, as we have entered the second year of this emergency. Decisive policy debates on ending the global health crisis – and the related economic and social “pandemics” in the wake of the virus – will be at the core of the global discourse in the coming months. Some of the major forums for this will be the G20 Global Health Summit in Rome and the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA) in May where a proposed “Pandemic treaty” will be discussed, among other things. As we write, heated debates are ongoing on the need to waive the patently unjustifiable WTO intellectual property monopoly rights for medicines, vaccines and medical technology. The main question is: how serious is the international community about truly stopping the contagion and overcoming Covid-19?

G2H2 has intensively participated in all these debates over the last year, while also having to adapt to the *new normal* of Zoom meetings and online debates since we cannot be physically together in Geneva. But we also took the opportunities of this increased virtualization of public space and reached out to more people. This contributed to more organisations and individuals joining G2H2 over the last year. And quite importantly, we were able to engage, despite travel lockdowns and the lack of physical meetings and exchange. We were visible as G2H2 in the debates on global health governance, most prominently during the US – WHO conflict around the handling of the pandemic in its first months in 2020.

We also had a productive year of strengthening and rejuvenating our Geneva Global Health Hub internally with a newly elected Steering Committee and a new Co-Presidency since November 2020. The Steering Committee is now more diverse than ever (Africa, Europe, Latin America, Middle East) and younger than before. We consider this an important collective achievement. This new dynamic has resulted in a strong push for a new work plan and an advocacy platform that we want to discuss and resolve on, during the Annual General Meeting in June 2021. And in a new structure called the “Bureau” of the ever dedicated and professional working Executive Secretary Thomas Schwarz together with the new two Co-Presidents Nicoletta Dentico and Baba Aye.

This increased teamwork of Bureau and Steering Committee already has led to new funding opportunities that make it possible for the first time to have multilingual policy dialogue events before the World Health Assembly in May, through the increased interest in critical debates in Global Health by the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and its new Geneva office. Our independence as a Hub that we gain and secure from our members’ contributions can now be amplified beyond our usual English only events, towards making us more truly *global*.

With all our members’ efforts, G2H2’s role as a competent, multidisciplinary space for information sharing, policy dialogue and technical reflection on global health will now be taken a step further. As the quest for a better and more just post-Covid-19 world continues, G2H2 will be a strong voice of civil society for the global realisation of the right to health in truth and deed.

10 May 2021

Andreas Wulf, President until November 2020

Nicoletta Dentico and Baba Aye, Co- Presidents since November 2020

...AND THEN CAME COVID-19

What a rupture it was. In early February 2020, at the G2H2 civil society meeting ahead of the 146th session of the WHO Executive Board, we sat together, in the crowded hall of the Ecumenical Centre, with WHO's great Mike Ryan, and we listened attentively to his assessment of what he expected to become a major global health emergency. Mike Ryan, in the informal space that the civil society meeting provided, was incredibly outspoken, he took his time for speaking with us, and dared to be explicit regarding what that newly discovered SARS-CoV-2 virus would mean as a challenge for the WHO and the World. And he was so right. Some weeks later, we were all "locked down"...

So 2020 started as a normal one for the G2H2 secretariat and membership. We did what the Geneva Global Health Hub was set up to do in 2016: We created spaces for civil society involved in global health policies and governance, we acted as a communication hub, and we convened and facilitated civil society advocacy. As you will see in the report, we had a really good two-day meeting in January, bridging from the WHO debates to a broader picture and to deeper challenges. And we continued reflecting about how to bring G2H2 to the next level, in a strategy dialogue led by the Steering Committee and involving all members.

Then, with Covid-19, both our environment and our work changed substantially. With the 73rd World Health Assembly that split into a "Covid-19 special" in May and an (almost) regular session in November, we had to abandon our routine for related civil society meetings and advocacy. We could not meet anymore in Geneva, at places that "smell" civil society such as the WCC's Ecumenical Centre or the Maison des Associations, and discuss, brainstorm, strategize and debate until midnight, have fun and reconfirm each other as we were used to.

In 2020, we discovered the cold and difficult space of Zoom meetings and webinars...

I have not been in our Geneva office since August...

I have not met any civil society colleague face-to-face, or mask-to-mask, since way too long...

At the same time, in times of Covid-19, times of exception that have become extended to a new reality, we realized that some of the "big" issues the Geneva Global Health Hub and its members focused on, such as the struggle for sustaining and safeguarding the space for civil society within the WHO governance and governing bodies, have become smaller, or at least different. And other issues, sometimes hidden behind a way too broad agenda, have become even more existential, more urgent, not allowing to deal with them anymore in a technical or routine way. Now, as I write this report, we hope for post-Covid-19 times. We long for a bit of normality, for a boring briefing in which the invited WHO Secretariat representative will speak way too long and the audience in the room will start checking incoming e-mails....

These are strange times, and we are torn between patience and ambitions, with a challenging reality and an uncertain future. But let us agree that returning back to normality is not an option. And I do not speak about the organizational or institutional "normal" of G2H2 meetings in Geneva, but mainly about our agenda, our way of working, our mandate.

Thanks to the Steering Committee for continued support and leadership, thanks to Andreas who handed over the Presidency to Nicoletta and Baba, and thanks to all members of our great small civil society hub. Good to work for and with you.

Thomas Schwarz
Executive Secretary

THE GENEVA GLOBAL HEALTH HUB IN 2020

The Geneva Global Health Hub's activities in the past year were based on a two-year work plan 2019-2020 adopted by the Annual General Meeting in May 2019. Our Annual Report follows the structure of the work plan which is the third formal G2H2 planning document.

FACILITATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

The Hub aims to provide a space for civil society to meet, share knowledge, develop proposals, and advocate for more democratic global health governance. In 2020, a great face-to-face on 31 January and 1 February was followed by two online events in May and November, related to the two sessions of the 73rd World Health Assembly.

Civil Society Workshop ahead of WHO EB146, 31 January 2020

Health heartbeats in the age of financial accumulation and digital technology

The workshop and brainstorming meeting was organized by the Society for International Development (SID) and convened by G2H2 to address the issues of health financialization (through the launch of the 2019 [Spotlight Report](#)) and health digitalization, as part of the civil society meeting ahead of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board. The programme was based on a call to G2H2 members to propose topics for a full or half day workshop.

The workshop referred to an agenda item of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board (Data and innovation: draft global strategy on digital health), and linked it with a policy field neglected in the public debate: the overexpansion of the finance industry into the health sector.

"The right to health is at a crossroad. The increasing pressure of financial arguments, financial actors and financial institutions in all aspects of the economy and society has produced a radical transformation in the way governments provide public services such as healthcare. Households have become increasingly reliant on financial products to meet their basic needs, in correlation with the varying withdrawal of state support in such domains as health, social security, pensions, education. While the stimulus to private financial capital into the healthcare sector is not new, healthcare markets are currently growing with very little concerns for their long-term effects on health and equity." (Announcement

The [documentation](#) of this brainstorming meeting is available on the G2H2 Website.





Series of public briefings and debates ahead of WHO EB146, 1 February 2020

Civil society perspectives on selected global health topics 146th session of the WHO Executive Board – and beyond

The Saturday programme of the civil society meeting ahead of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board provided a series of public sessions with civil society briefings and debates on selected health topics on the agenda of the WHO Executive Board and beyond the EB agenda.

Session 1: Primary Health Care and Universal Health Coverage

- PHM and UHC: How to “transform vision into action”?
 - Beyond the limits of proposed country categories for UHC implementation
- This session was dedicated to David Sanders, PHM (1945-2019)

Session 2: Access to Medicines and Vaccines

- After the debates at the WHA: Perspectives of civil society advocacy
- Restore access to internationally controlled medicines for palliative care!

Session 3: Public Health Emergencies

- Discussing health emergencies in times of an imminent emergency
 - Time for WHO to declare the climate crisis a public health emergency of international concern?
- This session was dedicated to Peter Salama, WHO (1969-2020)

Session 4: WHO and Global Health Governance

- Defending the space of civil society at the WHO

The programme of this last “face-to-face” meeting hosted by the Geneva Global Health Hub for a long time was based on a call to G2H2 members to propose and introduce such topics. Thanks to all who took the lead and contributed to an intensive day of briefings and debate. All sessions were open for G2H2 members and civil society colleagues, but also for WHO staff and delegates of member states.

Civil Society Meeting ahead of WHA73, 15 May 2020

A World Health Assembly in times of a dual crisis: Covid-19 and the collapse of multilateralism as we have known it

In May 2020, with the WHO at the heart of fierce geopolitical tensions between the US and China, and large in-person meetings banned in Geneva for the time due to the Coronavirus crisis, the WHO decided to first only hold a “de minimis” session of the World Health Assembly, entirely focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic and using video conference technology.

As civil society actors, G2H2 and its members adapted to the new Covid-19 realities. Since we could not meet in person for the traditional civil society meeting in Geneva, the G2H2 Steering Committee agreed to use this opportunity to also convene in the virtual space.

The online “civil society only” meeting on 15 May allowed members of the Geneva Global Health Hub and other colleagues to share their views of the World Health Assembly in the current crisis of multilateralism, further accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The discussion was structured along two (interrelated) thematic fields:

- Looking ahead to WHA73: Can the World Health Assembly uphold its status as the most relevant forum to negotiate global public health policy, particularly in a major global health crisis?
- Beyond the World Health Assembly: How successfully is WHO defending and shaping its role as the “leading and coordinating global health authority”? Or is the Covid19 pandemic the last straw for this multilateral institution in the middle of a wider crisis of multilateralism?

Each thematic field was introduced with initial inputs (G2H2 members and/or invited guests), followed by a moderated democratic discussion among all participants who wanted to contribute.

The meeting attracted more than 250 participants and allowed G2H2 to reach out to a broader civil society audience beyond those who can normally make it to the WHO Governing Body meetings in Geneva. Find the meeting documentation [here](#).



Covid-19, in a world that cannot breathe

And November came, with another “virtual” World Health Assembly, and another online G2H2 civil society meeting. Our invitation to this [brainstorming meeting](#) on 4 November expressed some of the frustration and desperation of a year (the first year, in fact) of Covid-19:

“When we’ll look back to 2020 in a generation from now, the year 2020 might actually appear the breakthrough moment when we realized that we had been slowly suffocating already:

We couldn’t breathe as the Covid-19 pandemic led to pulmonary infections and as we had to protect ourselves we needed to wear face masks.

We couldn’t breathe because of the soaring air pollution in dense urbanized areas and the blazing wildfires related to climate change.

We couldn’t breathe because we were starving, deprived of our daily means of life, packed in improbable “homes” and unable to move.

We couldn’t breathe as our voices were stifled by harsh regimes and surveillance systems that crushed legitimate political demonstrations and popular movements.

Social and environmental activists ushered their last breaths as extra-judicial bullets took their lives. People couldn’t breathe as centuries of oppression weighted upon them as a heavy load. Many animal species were long gone, their breathing a far memory from the past. People couldn’t breathe because the house that they were living in could not be afforded anymore and the precarious economic situation pushed them on the streets. The entire humankind couldn’t breathe, except for the bare minority of the 1% who have secured themselves off in this world, behind high walls in their digitally protected power bubbles and safe spaces. Is this the veil-tearing experience of the Covid19 year?”

With the civil society brainstorming meeting, G2H2 intended to create “a safe space and place to breathe”, and to allow participants to jointly look back at an exceptional year.

We started the meeting with the 10-min video [A Message From the Future II — The Years of Repair](#), and then asked two expert friends and colleagues, Anand Grover, former UN rapporteur on the Right to Health, and Emilia Reyes, co-convenor of the Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development, Mexico, to share some reflections, followed by an open discussion.

Another world is
not only possible,
she is on her way.
On a quiet day,
I can hear her
breathing.



FROM FACILITATING AND CONVENING CIVIL SOCIETY TO BECOMING A VOICE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

Even before Covid-19 arrived, the Steering Committee had engaged in internal reflections on the best strategy for G2H2 at a time of governance dispersion, and CSO irrelevance. Throughout 2020, the SC has advanced its dialogue with G2H2 members on how to more actively contribute to the voice of civil society in the field of global health governance and policies beyond the traditional role as facilitator and convener.

In 2020, G2H2 issued a statement of support for WHO in April and engaged in a series of “dialogue meetings” with the WHO Director General, as a co-convenor of a session that was aimed to embrace and bring to the fore some of G2H2 members’ experiences in the field of WHO governance and concerns about the shrinking civic space at the World Health Organization. Both processes were initiated by G2H2 members and taken up by the Steering Committee.

Civil society statement, April 2020

Time to rally behind the World Health Organization

In April 2021, the Steering Committee of G2H2 was in the lead of drafting, issuing and disseminating a [civil society statement](#) to express our institutional and governance concerns about the WHO being under the assaults by the Donald Trump administration. In the statement, we explicitly referred to the joint civil society message “[The WHO we want and the leadership WHO needs](#)” issued by G2H2 in 2017, during the election of a new WHO Director-General. Here some extracts:

“We are of the opinion that governments, including that of the United States, should be more concerned with ensuring that all health workers and others on the frontline delivering services to the public at these trying times are provided with personal protective equipment. The worrisome state of the public health system in the United States has absolutely nothing to do with the phantom allegations now being raised against the WHO by the country’s president.”

The WHO is not perfect, and its scientific, normative and policy-orientation functions need to be strengthened. Too often, geopolitical conflicts mute what should be a strong autonomous WHO denouncing failures of member states to follow its science based advice and recommendations. Since WHO relies on only “soft power” and diplomatic skills to bring member states to the table to share crucial information in epidemics and public health emergencies of international concern, cooperation is basically voluntary and unenforceable. The responsibilities and rights of national governments dealing with a public health emergency are outlined in the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005). Once the pandemic is over, the IHR may need revision based on the experience and evaluation of how WHO and its member states handled the Covid-19 public health emergency.

It is high time all WHO member states acknowledge and support the immense value of the organization in comprehensively tackling the health challenges ahead of us due to climate change, and other threats, instead of using their own mistakes as an excuse to further weaken the organization’s leading role in safeguarding global health.

This is the time to insist on multilateralism, solidarity, and science based health policy making at global and national level. This is the time to rally behind WHO.”



Civil society meeting with WHO DG Dr Tedros, Tuesday 13 October 2020
and (civil society only) follow-up meeting on Tuesday 27 October 2020

Social participation and accountability within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

In April, we stated that the “WHO is not perfect”, and we knew it only too well. G2H2 and its members have voiced strong criticism towards the World Health Organization, particularly for the mounting and common experience of the shrinking space for civil society in the WHO dynamics and governance, combined with the growing influence of the private corporate sector. The structural confusion on how to engage with “non-state actors” was certainly not repaired, but worsened in many ways, with the adoption of the WHO FENSA framework in 2016.

Against this backdrop, and responding to a call for topics for a series of [dialogue meetings](#) between WHO DG Dr Tedros and civil society, G2H2 submitted a proposal for a session on “Social participation and accountability”. G2H2 formulated its proposal as part of a broader consortium. The proposal was accepted. The [DG dialogue on Social participation and accountability within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic](#) took place on 13 October and was followed-up by civil society in a meeting on 27 October.

In all the steps and processes leading to this dialogue with the WHO Director-General, including the discussion paper shared with the WHO Secretariat ahead of the meeting, we applied our particular lens to “social participation and accountability” based on our experiences at the global (WHO) governance level. We requested the WHO to “consistently deal with civil society engagement as a matter of social participation and accountability” in its own fields of work and related institutional processes and arenas.

Despite the informal setup of this meeting, we have generally appreciated the openness of the WHO Director-General to engage in a politically sensitive debate, and to take our proposals. In particular, we are referring to the G2H2 recommendation to “establish a permanent mechanism for strategically dealing with issues related to WHO and social participation and accountability by setting up a permanent WHO Civil Society commission (...)”.

In the follow-up of the meeting, G2H2 remained engaged in a task group convened by the secretariat of Medicus Mundi International to elaborate an outline of a “WHO Civil Society Commission”. The proposal was submitted to the WHO Secretariat in early January 2021.



THIRD CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE WITH WHO DG

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

TUES, 13 OCTOBER
14:00-15:30 CEST

SAVE THE DATE

Committee of Participants on Accountability and Social Actors in Geneva
COPASAM

G2H2 GENEVA GLOBAL HEALTH HUB

csem
Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for UHC2030

World Health Organization

NETWORKING, COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Since the beginning of G2H2, networking, communication, and the promotion of collaboration have been part of the core functions of the Geneva Global Health Hub, complementing its initial core.

Following an initial phase of setting up basic communication platforms and tools provided and fed by the G2H2 secretariat, and after initial experiences with G2H2 working groups, the 2019-2020 work plan states that efforts shall focus on promoting and consolidating mutual, “horizontal” sharing and collaboration, further involving and engaging members in thematic and task related work.

In particular, G2H2 members are invited set up formal or informal working groups according to their needs and capacity. Working groups may be either thematic or process/task/action oriented. Although working groups and task teams are supported by the secretariat, they are expected to be member-driven. They can include both G2H2 members and non-members. In 2020, there was only one active thematic working group.

In 2020, the Geneva Global Health Hub continued to provide its members with concrete tools for information sharing, allowing them to strategize, communicate, and exchange information and experience throughout the year. The [G2H2 website](#) provides basic information on the Hub and its governance and membership, meetings and publications. In spring 2020, for obvious Covid-19 related reasons, we deactivated our online calendar of events for Geneva global health meetings.

Adapting our communication to the steadily growing number of online events and webinars on Covid-19 related issues, we recommended to G2H2 members to rather refer to our posts on [Twitter](#) and to the internal “G2H2-members” [mailing list](#) as a communication platform and amplifier for their announcements and updates. As a result of our growing visibility, the G2H2 Twitter account has now 5500 followers, and members have started to increasingly contribute to the community list.



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*We are building a strong
civil society space in
Geneva for more
democratic global health*



At the WHA73, there have been only a few formal or informal “World Health Assembly side events”, and, as a result of the newly shaping space of “Zoom diplomacy” there was considerably less attention by civil society audience to the governing body meetings of the World Health Organization than in former years, when 5000 people gathered in Geneva for the World Health Assembly. So civil society representatives attending the World Health Assemblies or the Special Session of the Executive Board in October on Zoom or via the livestreams provided by WHO sometimes at times felt somewhat alone.

In this environment, it did not make sense for G2H2 to publish its [WHA today](#) guide to World Health Assembly side events, as we have done in previous years. As an alternative, and to nevertheless attract some attention to civil society analysis and positions related to the debates and topics of the World Health Assembly, G2H2 issued, in a co-production with the secretariat of Medicus Mundi International, a [Civil society guide to the 73rd World Health Assembly](#) that was then updated in October for the WHO Executive Board and again in November for the resumed session of the World Health Assembly. In our analysis of World Health Assembly issues, debates and politics, we also featured the “Modalities of an almost impracticable World Health Assembly”.

GOVERNANCE

In 2020 G2H2 held two **statutory meetings**, an Extraordinary General Assembly in June and the regular Annual General Assembly in November. Both virtual assemblies were very well attended.

At the Extraordinary General Assembly, the participating members welcomed the new organizations that joined G2H2 over the previous year, bringing the total number of members to 40 (June 2020):

- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)
- Action against AIDS Germany
- Policies for Equitable Access to Health (PEAH).
- plan:g
- Queen Mary University of London, Global Public Health Unit
- Saluteglobale.it
- Sindh Community Foundation (SCF)

In November, the Assembly elected the new **G2H2 Steering Committee** as follows:

G2H2 Co-Presidents, 2020-2022

- Baba Aye, Public Services International
- Nicoletta Dentico, Society for International Development

G2H2 Steering Committee Members, 2020-2022

- Ana Vračar, PHM
- Andreas Wulf, medico international
- Armando Antônio De Negri Filho, WSFHSS
- Patrick Kadama, ACHEST
- Lorenzo De Min, saluteglobale.it
- Virginie Lefevre, Amel Association International
- Thomas Schwarz, MMI Network, representing the Secretariat

The G2H2 governance has therefore introduced some elements of novelty and diversity that have been broadly welcome by the members – the legacy of the 2020 reflections mentioned earlier.

The **G2H2 Secretariat** continues to be hosted by the Medicus Mundi International Network at its Geneva office, based on a Secretariat agreement defining its role and scope of work. The Executive Secretary, currently the only employed G2H2 staff, implements the mandate and leads the day-to-day management of the Hub. At the Annual General Meeting, the Steering Committee and the members again expressed their appreciation for the contributions and engagement of the Secretariat.





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