



# Thomas Schwarz Medicus Mundi International Network

## Positioning the (technical) project of a WHO Civil Society Commission in the broader field of WHO governance

## Positioning the WHO-CS Commission project in the broader field of WHO governance

1. **Diverse realities** of WHO engagement with civil society:  
not easy to get an overall picture (and this picture cannot  
be painted black and white)
2. WHO governance and engagement with civil society:  
**A difficult overall context** and an “impossible” setup
3. **WHO governing bodies and member state processes:**  
An often unfriendly environment, with some progress...
4. **WHO Secretariat:** Ingredients for a more productive and  
sustainable engagement with civil society





## Diverse realities of WHO engagement with civil society

Not easy to get an overall picture

...and do not paint it black and white



Civil society representatives at the margins of the WHA

## Diverse realities of WHO engagement with civil society

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...and do not paint it black and white



WHO Civil Society Task Force on TB





## WHO governance and engagement with civil society: A difficult overall context and an “impossible” setup

- ❑ **Geopolitical context** with its implications for WHO / WHO governance
- ❑ **The (intentional) weakening of democratic governance** and multilateral system in times of SDG17 and the rise of multistakeholderism (join us on Friday for the policy debate organized by PHM and TNI)
- ❑ **Dual and perpetuated crisis/reform** of WHO governance and financing
- ❑ **Complicated WHO governance** (setup and implementation)
- ❑ **WHO and civil society:** Unique system of accreditation (“Official Relations”) Failed Civil Society Initiative (2005), Framework of engagement with Non-state actors (2016)
- ❑ **“Civil society”:** Diversity, issues of legitimacy, representation, governance Diverse realities and expectations at national, regional, global level

## WHO governing bodies and member state processes: An often unfriendly environment, and some progress...

- ❑ **“Involvement of non-state actors in governing bodies”:**  
Shrinking space and civil society fighting against the windmills of a “member state” process, with ambivalent role of Secretariat
- ❑ **Cold and abstract Zoom diplomacy** in times of the pandemic (but not everything is bad)
- ❑ **Member states working groups** and Intergovernmental Negotiating Body: Between hesitations and progress, with no “established modalities” to refer to
- ❑ **Step be step towards new modalities** (and setting new benchmarks) for engaging with civil society?





## Ingredients for a more productive and sustainable engagement of WHO (Secretariat) with civil society

- ❑ **Leadership** by the Director-General and key staff + informal/formal support by member states (?)
- ❑ **Institutional culture:** renewed attention to civil society (beyond “NSA”) “Social participation and accountability” applied to WHO
- ❑ **CSO focal points at all levels**  
Allocation, capacity, accessibility, guidance
- ❑ **New mechanisms and platforms:** From informal pilots to formal instruments - Legitimacy, operationality and effectiveness
- ❑ **Steady progress** and resulting dynamics and trust

The proposed WHO CS Commission is both an expression of some progress already achieved and might be key for sustaining and extending progress.





# CONSIDER OPTIMISM AS A PURPOSEFUL ACT OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE

People's Health Movement



Amit Sengupta +2018





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Thank you!

Presentation: <https://g2h2.org/posts/may2022/>

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