DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

As the World Health Assembly (WHA) marking the 75th year of the World Health Organization has just come to its end, it seems hard for us as civil society to celebrate developments in the way global public health is being addressed after the three years of the pandemic that shook the world.

A sense of animated agitation can be perceived within the international health arena. Many more people attend the WHA, which may be regarded a positive indicator of attention to the essential domain for people’s lives and dignity that health is. Events are organized in numbers that are impossible to follow. New initiatives and entities are mushrooming all over to tackle health challenges that remain on the rise, well beyond the past pandemic shock. Yet, all this fervent activism does not really seem to lead to any sense of greater safety for the future of the right to health. The landscape of what could be defined “pop-politics” – inaugurated a few years ago by Dr Tedros and erupted in the 75th anniversary of the WHO, the one institution entitled to regulate international health – displays a blowing sense of fragmentation creeping in the organization. The contradictions between the official calls for solidarity and equity to ensure health for all, repeated by the WHO and world leaders, and the iteration of colonial market-driven policy decisions glaringly surface in the WHA rooms, ushering some sense of unpredictability on the WHO’s future identity. This is for example reflected in how the zero draft of the pandemic accord’s text has already been watered down, showing that little if any lesson has been learnt from the COVID-19 global health emergency.

WHO member states must make weighty decisions such as the creation of a new fully independent Global Health Threats Council to make sure pandemics remain high on the agenda with an approach overcoming WHO’s insufficient governing processes and authority, as proposed by the WHO Independent Panel in 2021.

The call for financial Justice was at the top of the G2H2 advocacy agenda in 2022. Photo: Alice Pasqual auf Unsplash
At the same time, the war in Ukraine magnifies the principles of international law being contested by Russia, but also the multilateral community’s double standards when failing to address Israel’s violations of international law via its historic occupation of Palestine. Hardly any heated reactions are to be seen in relation to the other wars violently raging in the world, including that in Tigray which has claimed over 600,000 lives. The health agenda is no easy game in the variable geometry of a world fractured by geopolitical tensions, deepening inequality, and global insecurity.

This scenario is, inevitably, very confusing for us as members of civil society – this very notion appears an expanding one in global health circles. We find ourselves squeezed in numberless consultations and decision-less Town Hall debates – more a pretense than the substance of political inclusion – while having to react to priorities set by global health players who often act in the name of their competitive national or corporate interests.

As G2H2, we have had to tailor our original and relevant positions as an independent CSO platform in the entanglements of the pandemic accord being negotiated at the WHO. We have not shied away from hard internal talks like the one on multistakeholderism, with the intent of engaging in a dialogue beyond easy polarizations among our members, to grasp the complexity of this unconvincing governance model.

Through policy dialogues, we have attempted to portray the hidden angles of health realities that affect the lives of million people and to connect the dots across health, finance, trade, environment, and the multiple dependencies of states.

But there is hardly any sense of accomplishment. Rather, the feeling that many knots remain untangled and that future years may loom far more challenging than today, as we must deal with the open-source anarchy of global health governance after Covid-19. G2H2 independence is our compass for the future, in the journey ahead.

Baba Aye and Nicoletta Dentico
G2H2 Co-Presidents, June 2023
G2H2 PROMOTING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INTEGRATED CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY AGENDA FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

G2H2 “FINANCIAL JUSTICE” REPORT

After the 2021 report “The Politics of a Pandemic Treaty”, a team of G2H2 members produced, in 2022, another strong input into the making of the new WHO international legal instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, this time embarking into the contentious relationship between the international financial architecture and current health financing models, towards highlighting the pitfalls the world must avoid to ensure a healthier post-COVID world.

What is the new report about? Its main message is that, while colossal wealth is potentially available to invest on global public health and managing any future pandemics, it is in the wrong hands. The pandemic emergency, with its associated socioeconomic and environmental crises, has revealed that the world is at a critical moment and that business as usual cannot be the way forward. The crisis has “opened a window for a radical redirection” (WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All) which may not be missed: The report by G2H2 proposes to rethink health through an economic and financial justice lens.

Financial Justice for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response

The first section of the G2H2 report scrutinizes the Pandemic Fund. Established at the initiative of the G20 in a rush to mobilize resources for PPR, its initial governance structure replicated the classical colonial paradigm. Low-income countries and civil society’s representation were allowed on its board only after strong and widespread criticism. With an outdated funding model dependent on colonial charity, the likely competition with other global health funds and very low expectations regarding its leverage on medical innovation, this cannot be the world’s solution to funding Pandemic PPR. Not even if its fundamental design flaws are repaired.
In its second section, the report demystifies two areas of financing solutions that have been implemented worldwide, pushed by the same neoliberal policy paradigm: fiscal consolidation and the commercialization of health services. Not only have the related policy measures failed to bring Health for All, in most cases they led to enhancing concentration of health and wealth in the hands of a few and a deterioration of health conditions for most of the population. A historical analysis of the International Financial Institutions’ engagement shows how their push for economic reforms and austerity measures have led to reductions in health spending from the 1980s onwards. Austerity goes hand in hand with commercialization and privatization of public services. Development actors’ promotion of privatization in low-income countries became stronger with the Washington Consensus in the 1990s and early 2000s. Yet, a solid body of evidence shows that public systems for healthcare delivery have overall been more efficient and effective, produce better healthcare outcomes, and perform better in terms of crisis prevention and preparedness.

“We need to highlight the historical context of false solutions which left us unprepared at the dawn of 2020. Fiscal consolidation and privatization embody the false gods that misshaped the world. They promote health and social inequalities within and between genders, countries and regions. They undermine universal access to quality healthcare, which is the bulwark for crisis preparedness. These false gods keep coming back, invoked now in the name of ‘building back better’. We need to shine a spotlight on them, so it is clear what they are. And create conditions so their dogmas are not repeated in the negotiations for a pandemic treaty”.

The third main part of this report leads the reader through the complex landscapes of debts and illicit financial flows. It is in these domains where a way out of the multiple crises must be sought. If the G20 and financial institutions had cancelled all external debts due in 2020 alone by the 76 lowest income countries, this would have liberated US$ 40 billion; US$ 300 billion if the cancellation had also included 2021. Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) are yet another drain on public resources that can only be tackled with radical action. At the UN General Assembly in 2022, the Africa Group tabled a draft resolution calling for negotiations towards a UN convention on tax cooperation, building on the long-standing call by G77 and China to establish an intergovernmental process at the UN to address global tax abuse. These are the kind of unmentioned issues that need to be debated among WHO delegates when PPR financing makes its way on the agenda.

In the emerging fragmented geopolitical landscape, WHO Member States – particularly from the global South – must find ways to converge on new essential instruments for financial justice such as stopping paying for a debt whose legitimacy must be questioned again, in view of global warming and climate change.
Launch of the report

G2H2 released its report "Financial Justice for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response" in a public event at the Geneva Press Club, on 15 November 2022. At the event, the authors of the report together with two invited speakers, Isabel Ortiz from Columbia University New York (joining via Zoom) and Owain Williams, University of Leeds, highlighted once more the urgent need to reshape and redirect financing towards prevention, preparedness and response to any future pandemics.

“There is certainly no shortage of money in this world but redirecting it to advance health after the pandemic requires bold action. The international community instead continues to pursue outdated and opaque models, as is the case of the recently established Pandemic Fund.” (Mariska Meurs)

“People suffered the most during COVID-19 where there was privatized healthcare or funding cuts. Evidence shows that public healthcare systems overall result in better health outcomes for societies, including in terms of crisis prevention, preparedness, and response.” (Baba Aye)

Debt is a virus, and debt cancellation is the vaccine the world needs before the debt crisis explodes. Wealthy industrialized countries should consider the ecological debt they have accumulated with developing countries in decades of environmental devastation and historical emissions of greenhouse gases, for which they should pay colossal reparations” (Nicoletta Dentico)
After a short media conference convened by the Press Club, the public launch event was skilfully moderated by Priti Patnaik, Editor Geneva Health Files, Geneva. The opportunity to “formally” attend the two meetings at the Press Club and via Zoom was complemented by easy access via live webcast. As a result, the report and its launch were featured in various media. The recordings of the press conference and launch event are still accessible via G2H2 website.

**Based on teamwork and support**

The project team for this G2H2 report included the co-authors Nicoletta Dentico, Baba Aye, Mariska Meurs together with the G2H2 secretariat and press officer. After the presentation of the plan and outline of this new project to G2H2 members at the Annual General Assembly in June, preliminary results were twice shared and discussed with G2H2 members during the making of the final report.

All in all, the second G2H2 report related to the pandemic treaty is again built on the leadership and great contributions by many. The financial support provided by the Geneva office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation allowed us to add some paid capacities to the work already offered by those engaged as their in-kind contributions to the project, and the smooth cooperation with the Geneva Press Club provided a good perspective for future similar events.

Ultimately, the research and advocacy project, with its ambitious task and time constraints proved again a good, but tough test of what is possible and achievable in the semi-formal G2H2 setup.

G2H2 INB

Based on the initiative of a G2H2 member, the WHO [Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB)] listed the Geneva Global Health Hub as “relevant stakeholder” invited to provide inputs to the negotiation of the WHO pandemic treaty (or, as they call it now, the “convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response”). On this ground, the G2H2 Steering Committee decided to mandate the secretariat with convening and managing a G2H2 Working Group on the pandemic treaty open to all members interested in this progress that will keep us busy and need civil society attention over the next two years.

The “G2H2 INB” working group shall allow its members

- to gather and share intelligence about the advancement of the INB process and opportunities to engage for civil society;
- to engage, as adequate, in the INB process based on the “other stakeholder” status of G2H2 (in particular: get access to INB meetings and briefings that are open to “other stakeholders”);
- to contribute to the INB process from within, by making statements at INB meetings in the name of G2H2, on topics commonly identified and agreed upon;
- to share and deepen the analysis of the INB process (thematic and process related);
- to set up ad hoc sub-teams to explore and implement the drafting and publication of joint civil society analysis or input;
- to be updated on the activities of group members and civil society teams and initiatives outside G2H2 in the same field.

New members are still welcome.
G2H2 (HOSTED) OPEN LETTERS

Related to the INB, and as a service to its members, the G2H2 secretariat facilitated, in 2022, the drafting, publication and dissemination of three open letters related to the pandemic treaty negotiations.

▪ “You have a great responsibility on your shoulders...” Open civil society letter on key issues to be addressed in the INB process, March 2022, with Society for International Development and Corporate Accountability in the lead, signed by over 120 civil society representatives)

▪ Measures to ensure that the Pandemic Treaty serves the purpose of protecting all people, especially including those in low-income countries with limited financial resources and fragile health care systems. Open civil society letter to the WHO INB, November 2022, with Centre for Health Science and Law in the lead, and over 100 civil society signatures

▪ Negotiating a WHO Pandemic Treaty by Taking a Public Private Partnership Approach? Open civil society letter to the WHO INB regarding the Pandemic Treaty: Urging Safeguards and Transparency, December 2022, with Society for International Development and Corporate Accountability in the lead, signed by over 50 civil society organizations

G2H2 AND “MULTISTAKEHOLDERISM”

We already reported that, in the second half of 2021, G2H2 started to engage in an intersectoral “People’s Working Group on Multistakeholderism”, based on a general assessment by the Steering Committee that such an engagement fits well with the G2H2 advocacy platform.

In 2022, G2H2 integrated the promotion of the working group’s event “Our future at stake: The corporate capture of multilateralism” in the series of G2H2 events ahead of the 150th session of the WHO Executive Board.
Later in the year, updates on the working group shared via the internal “G2H2-members” mailing list led to a lively discussion among members about the participation of G2H2 in the “People’s working group” and, more generally, about how to assess multistakeholder governance as such. This was taken up by the Steering Committee in a series of interactions with members that finally led to an internal G2H2 workshop on the matter in early January 2023, as an important reference for the making of a next G2H2 advocacy platform. We will report about this again next year.

**G2H2 AND ECOSOC**

Based on an enquiry by G2H2 members at the Annual General Meeting in June, the Steering Committee, with Silvia Barigazzi in the lead, also explored the relevance of applying, as G2H2 for UN ECOSOC status, and submitted to the membership a recommendation to do so, for consideration. Another story to be continued next year.
G2H2 AS CIVIL SOCIETY CONVENER

Facilitating civil society's capacity for strategizing and advocacy is a core task of G2H2. The two series of meetings hosted or co-hosted by G2H2 in 2022 show that we are on track. Our role as civil society convener is highly esteemed by our members and a wider audience. Mainly the public policy debates hosted by G2H2 have become more “political” and therefore maybe more relevant, as additional contributions by G2H2 and its members to debating and strategizing on key global health issues within and beyond the range of topics addressed by the WHO at its governing body meetings.

More to come...


The series of meetings organized by the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2) and its members in the week before the 150th Session of the WHO Executive Board WAS set up as a mix of public briefings and debates and closed civil society workshops including an intersectoral roundtable co-hosted by G2H2 as part of a civil society working group on multistakeholderism. All in all, the series meetings provided a space for sharing, assessing and debating health policy and governance challenges that go beyond the items covered by the formal agenda of WHO EB, bridging from health policies to people’s realities, addressing determinants of health and promoting democratic governance. Here the overview:

▪ Are global civil society organizations still relevant at the UN organizations?
  Monday, 17 January 2022, civil society workshop organized by IAHPC

▪ Back to Alma Ata: WHO, democratic space and citizens’ participation in shaping health policies
  Tuesday, 18 January 2022, civil society workshop organized by Viva Salud

▪ Our future at stake: The corporate capture of multilateralism
  Wednesday, 19 January 2022, intersectoral roundtable organized by the People’s Working Group on Multistakeholderism

▪ Health systems and pandemic response in Latin America: Lessons for the Pandemic Treaty debates
  Wednesday, 19 January 2022, public policy debate organized by PHM/ALAMES

▪ The “Universal Health and Preparedness Review”: Looking at the proposed new accountability mechanism from a civil society and global public health governance perspective
  Thursday, 20 January 2022, public policy debate organized by Save the Children

▪ Sustainable healthy diets: Why are they so crucial after COVID-19?
  Thursday, 20 January 2022, public policy debate organized by SID

▪ The pandemic treaty and the right to development: learning from COVID-19 lessons
  Friday, 21 January 2022, public policy debate organized by the G2H2 project team

The meeting documentation on the G2H2 website includes introductions to each session, a diversity of background information and references and recordings of all sessions.

At the 75th World Health Assembly (WHA75) in May 2022, the size of delegations allowed to attend the deliberations in-person at the Palais des Nations was strictly limited. This awkward setup was explained by the Secretariat of the World Health Organization with capacity issues (delayed renovation of the Palais des Nations), and it has found its way into the title of the May 2022 series of policy debates hosted by the Geneva Global Health Hub: “People’s realities, determinants of health, democratic governance: Connecting dots outside the doors of the World Health Assembly”. Outside the doors of the World Health Assembly – this is indeed where most of us stranded. But we made some sense out of it, with another series of G2H2 hosted meetings.

- **Realizing equity in health emergencies: The way forward**
  Monday, 16 May 2022, session organized by Third World Network

- **“Can we speak with the Secretariat of the World Health Assembly, please?” New perspectives for civil society interaction with WHO**
  Monday, 16 May 2022, session organized by PHM ESA and partners

- **The public health dimension of the world drug problem: Promoting evidence-based health responses to drugs**
  Wednesday 18 May 2022, session organized by Dianova and partners.

- **Antimicrobial Resistance: The dystopia of an unsustainable development model**
  Wednesday 18 May 2022, session organized by Society for International Development and AMR Think-Do-Tank

- **A “tobacco law” for the fossil fuel industry**
  Thursday 19 May 2022, session organized by Medicus Mundi International Network and partners.

- **Making the One Health approach socially sensitive**
  Thursday 19 May 2022, session organized by Third World Network

- **Undermining democratic and multilateral responses: Multistakeholderism in global health governance**
  Friday 20 May 2022, Session organized by People’s Health Movement and partners

Also for this series of meetings, the G2H2 website provides extensive documentation.
NETWORKING

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 the convening role of G2H2, and being based on activating synergies with the efforts undertaken by G2H2 members. In addition to the website and internal “g2h2-members” mailing list, G2H2 networking includes the Secretariat’s management of individual enquiries and calls, and, more recently, a new space created together with PHM and MMI.

WHATODAY: CIVIL SOCIETY LOUNGE CO-HOSTED BY G2H2

We reported last year how, when it became obvious that the expected “back to normal” was still not possible for WHO governing body meetings, we transformed “WHA Today” into the current format of a daily “civil society lounge” jointly co-hosted by Medicus Mundi international Network, People’s Health Movement and G2H2: an online meeting point for civil society representatives to come together during the World Health Assembly to share insights on modalities of the WHO governing body meetings, on elements on the agenda that need particular civil society attention, and to assess the outcome of the deliberations on the previous day.

After testing an “EB TODAY” meeting during the WHO Executive Board meeting in January 2022, we introduced an intersessional check-in to stay in touch and prepare civil society advocacy at the 75th World Health Assembly in May 2022.

And yes, it works. With over 300 registered participants who receive updates on next sessions, this nice little project is still getting lot of attention, and despite a (partial) return to in-person governing body meetings of the WHO, we decided to keep WHA TODAY fully “virtual”, to allow interaction between those who can make it to the WHA in Geneva despite rigid access restrictions and those who watch and comment these deliberations remotely.
GOVERNANCE

In 2022 G2H2 held the Annual General Assembly already on 4 April. Set up again as a Zoom meeting, the Assembly was attended by the formal representatives of 25 member organizations.

The participating members (here some of them in typical “Zoom quality”) approved the Annual and Financial Report and provided feedback to the perspectives for the continued work as shared by the Steering Committee. They welcomed the four new members that joined G2H2 over the previous year:

- Corporate Accountability
- Harm Reduction International
- Save the Children
- Third World Network

In 2022, the composition of the G2H2 Steering Committee remained the same:

- Ana Vračar, PHM
- Andreas Wulf, Medico International
- Armando Antônio De Negri Filho, WSFHSS
- Baba Aye, Public Services International, G2H2 Co-President
- Patrick Kadama, ACHEST
- Lorenzo De Min, saluteglobale.it
  (represented in most Steering Committee meetings by Silvia Barigazzi)
- Nicoletta Dentico, Society for International Development, G2H2 Co-President
- Virginie Lefevre, Amel Association International
- Thomas Schwarz, MMI Network, representing the G2H2 Secretariat
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 Thomas Schwarz, currently the only employed G2H2 staff, implements the mandate and leads the day-to-day management of the Hub including playing a strong role in the implementation of the G2H2 events such as the series of policy debates and the launch of the “Financial Justice” report (picture). At the Annual General Meeting, the Steering Committee and the members again expressed their appreciation for the contributions and engagement of the Secretariat.

For the “Pandemic Treaty” project, the contribution by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation allowed us to again extend the capacity of the G2H2 Secretariat by some days and to continue engaging Neha Gupta, a staff member of the Society for International Development (SID) as a Communication Officer.