Basel/Harare, 29 August 2019

Call to join a working group in view of the Geneva Health Forum 2020

From “learning from the field” to addressing power imbalances and jointly driving change

What is a GHF workshop (working group)

According to the Forum organizers, the Geneva Health Forum 2020 (GHF) that will take place in March 2020 organizes about ten workshops in global health during the event, prepared in advance by a multidisciplinary working group of ten to twelve members, and co-chaired by two people.

The objective of a GHF workshop is “to propose innovative solutions for a precise global health issue, leading to changes in accessible and sustainable practices.”

Working groups are expected to meet during 3 to 4 videoconferences between October 2019 and March and to synthesize their reflections in a White Paper that will be released in March 2020 in preparation for the GHF and presented during the GHF in a 90 Minutes session (more detailed information is available at MMI).

Our workshop topic: From “learning from the field” to addressing power imbalances and jointly driving change

Our workshop and its title refer to the thematic of GHF2020 as defined by the organizers: “Improving access to Health – Learning from the Field”. See here. In particular, we refer to the following statement: “It is important that health systems are better organised to become learning systems, can study their own practices to learn lessons that will inform their practices and improve their ability to adapt rapidly to the evolution of health needs.”

The workshop organizers assess the notion of „field“ with its background in research and aid (in the old sense) as ambivalent and outdated, as it restricts “those in the field” (the people, patients, communities, health workers etc.) to the role of objects or task group/beneficiaries of research or services provided. Even if the health system is considered to by a “learning one”, the learning/knowledge and related action and change will remain with a “superior” actor (health authority, service provider, aid agency, research institution), and not with the people.
With our workshop, we want to provide an opportunity to **address the related questions of power, rights, and ownership** in an explicit way.

We refer to the concept of Primary Health Care (PHC) that found renewed attention in 2018 with the anniversary of the Alma-Ata Declaration (see [here](#)). In our understanding of PHC, **action and ownership in a health system are with the people and communities**.

But this is easily stated and difficult to be properly done. Everyone is talking about participation or community engagement, often without being specific or giving much attention on how to address the structural and political determinants of health and health policies.

### Specific questions to be addressed in the workshop

As a starting point, our list of specific questions includes the following:

- **How to overcome the power imbalance** in the relationship between health authorities, service providers, research institutions and the people, communities, and patients they are expected to serve?

- **How to address the role and influence of international actors** (e.g. aid agencies) in this imbalance (contributing to the imbalance or contributing to overcoming it?)?

- **In the political field: How can people, patients, communities effectively claim their rights** and become part of a political movement for equitable access to health and health care beyond their location, targeting the upstream factors and contributing to national, even international change?

- **In the field of health research: How can people, patients, communities effectively claim their rights and ownership in the research process**? We propose to refer to concepts such as Community-based participatory research and Participatory Action Research.

This provisional list will be reviewed and complemented in early October 2019, based on feedback received from confirmed working group participants. The workshop aims at provide guidance (or at least to promote success stories and good practice) in view of what needs to be done to address these questions.

### Join our working group

Based on the provisional outline, the workshop co-chairs herewith call interested colleagues to join the working group. According to the GHF organizers, a working group should include:

- A diversity of experiences between the members of the workshop coming from the academia, private/public sectors and Non-Governmental Organizations in healthcare (policy and decision-makers);

- Members from different set of countries (developed and developing countries including LMICS).

Participants are expected to be available for the “working group” phase (3 to 4 videoconferences between October 2019 and March and related work including the drafting of a “white paper”). Your participation in the Geneva Health Forum in March is not a condition for joining the group.

Please send your expression of interest to join the working group to Thomas Schwarz by 20 September 2019. The two co-chairs will select the working group members based on the guidance received from the GHF organizers and their own assessment. The group composition will be confirmed to all who flagged their interest by 30 September.

### Contact: Co-chairs

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*Our call is based on the provisional outline of a workshop/working group in view of the Geneva Health Forum, 24-26 March 2020, submitted by MMI Network to the Forum organizers, and in the meantime confirmed.*